

Focus Group Discussion

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Outlines

- Introduction
 - Focus Group Discussion
 - Overview of Qualitative Research
- FGD Steps:
 1. Research Design
 2. Data Collection
 3. Data Analysis
 4. Reporting Results
- Pros and Cons of FGD

Expected outcomes

- Understand the context of focus group discussion within a qualitative research
- Able to differentiate between qualitative and quantitative methods
- Understand the basic steps of a focus group discussion

Introduction

Focus Group Discussion

“a technique where a researcher assembles a group of individuals to discuss a specific topic, aiming to draw from the complex personal experiences, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of the participants through a moderated interaction” (Nyumba et al. 2018)

a form of qualitative research method in which the moderator asks participants specific questions about a topic in a group discussion to obtain knowledge, perspectives and attitudes and seek explanations for behaviours about the topic (Wong, 2008)

Qualitative Research

“a method of research that produces descriptive (non-numerical) data, such as observations of behavior or personal accounts of experiences” ... “to examine how individuals can perceive the world from different vantage points” (American Psychological Association, 2023)

“an investigation into how members of the discussion perceive a particular social issue” ... “generate(s) non-numeric results” ... “focuses on understanding complex human issues” (Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021)

Qualitative vs Quantitative

Aspect	Qualitative	Quantitative
<i>Data</i>	Non-numerical (text, audio, video etc)	Numerical
<i>Information</i>	Subjective	Objective
<i>Question</i>	Why	How many
<i>Approach</i>	Naturalistic	Contrived
<i>Coverage</i>	Holistic	Reductionist
<i>Theory</i>	Generate	Test
<i>Sample Size</i>	Small	Large
<i>Analysis</i>	Descriptive, interpretative	Statistical

*Mcleod (2023), Stevenson University Library (2022), Safi (2013)

Study Designs

Design	Description
<i>Phenomenology</i>	“examine human experiences through the descriptions provided by the people involved”
<i>Ethnography</i>	“collection and analysis of data about cultural groups”
<i>Grounded Theory</i>	“data are collected and analyzed and then a theory is developed that is grounded in the data”
<i>Historical Study</i>	“identification, location, evaluation, and synthesis of data from the past”
<i>Case Study</i>	“in-depth examination of people or groups of people”
<i>Action Research</i>	“seeks action to improve practice and study the effects of the action that was taken”

*Nieswiadomy (2001)

Data Collection Methods

- Interviews
- Focus Group Discussion (FGD) → This lecture
- Observation
- Documented materials e.g. letters, diaries, photos
- Narrative
- Open ended questions in questionnaires

*Hancock et al. (2009)

FGD Steps

1. Research Design
2. Data Collection
3. Data Analysis
4. Reporting Results

*Hancock et al. (2009)

Step 1: Research Design

Formulate Research Questions

- Clear, specific objective
- Important to elicit best information from discussion
- FGD is to explore narrowly-focused topic
- Examples:

“To assess the impact of long-COVID on individuals’ lives at work and home”

“To identify the social supports required by parents of children hospitalized for COVID-19”

Prepare Discussion Guide

- Guide for moderator
- Issues to be covered
- Probing questions – promote discussion
- Not in order / detail, allows flexibility
- General → Specific
- Open-ended, unbiased, non-threatening
- Pre-testing the guide by mock FGD prior to real FGD

Recruiting Participants

- Experience / involvement related to research topic
- From the group of people, e.g.
 - People with disease of interest
 - Caretakers of patients
- Expected to make interesting contributions to the discussion
- Purposive / Snowball sampling

Group Composition

- Homogenous vs Heterogenous
- Depends on research objective
- Ideal – strikes a balance

Homogenous	Heterogenous
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sensitive issues, e.g. sexual behavior• Everyone in the same boat• Facilitates disclosure, sharing experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve quality of discussions• Unfamiliar faces – honest and spontaneous view

Group Size

- Typically 6 to 12 participants
- Some suggested from a minimum of 4 to maximum of 15 participants
- Over-sample by 10-25% to account for dropout

Small	Large
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of coverage of issues• Can be dominated by few members	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Better coverage• Could be fragmented into small groups, lack cohesion• Difficult to handle• Taking time to take turn

Number of Sessions

- Depends on
 - Research objective
 - Time, cost, availability of participants
- Minimum 3 to 4 FGD sessions for simple issue
- Complex issue, more FGD sessions
- Principle of theoretical saturation, continue until saturation point
 - Clear pattern emerges, repeated themes
 - No more new information

Venue Settings

- Comfortable
- Good access
- Less distractions
- Quiet – quality audio recording
- Normal, familiar setting
- Sufficient space
- Enough seating
- Typically seated around a table
- Clear view of each other and facilitators

Venue Settings

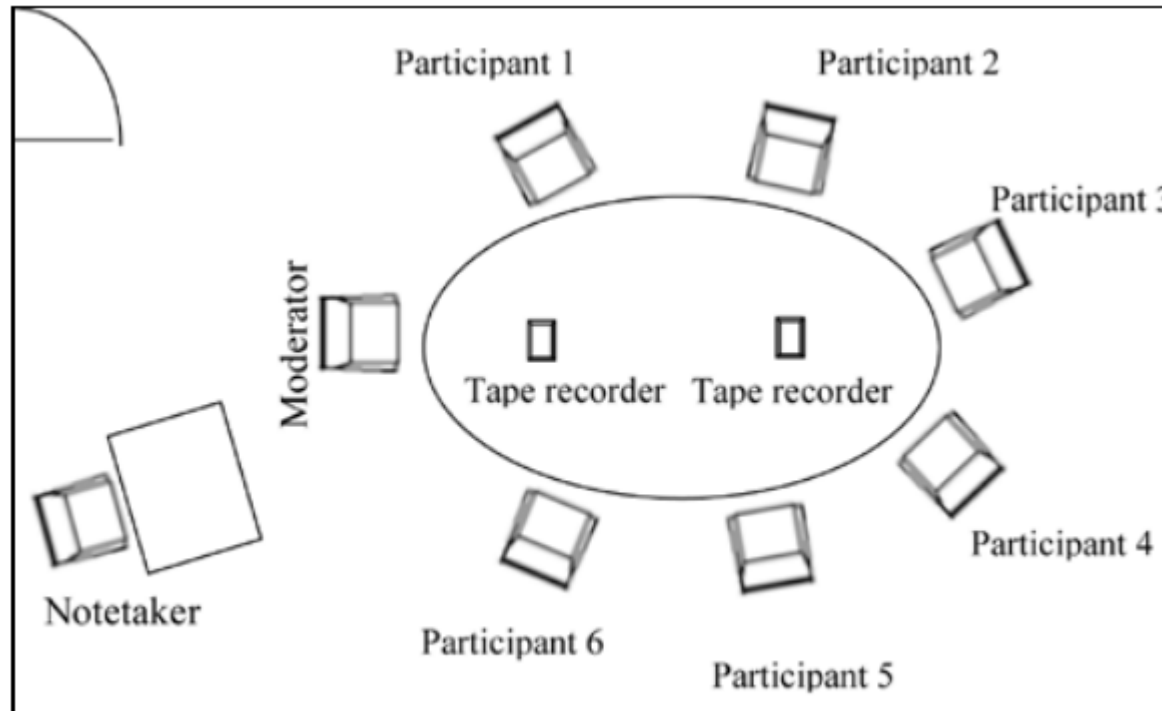


Fig. 1 Sketch of a focus group seating plan.

*Figure from Wong (2008)

Step 2: Data Collection

Recording

- Audio recording
- Note-taking
- Participant observation
- Photo
- Video recording
- Virtual meeting recording

Moderator

- Guides participants through the discussion
- Facilitates, moderates the discussion
- Follow roughly discussion guide
- Ensures all participants join the discussion
- Balances participation between the participants, no one dominates

Note-taker

- Assists moderator
- Captures, takes note of
 - What is said and expressed
 - General content of the discussion
 - Seating arrangement
 - Order in which people speak
 - Tone of discussion
 - Non-verbal expressions, pre-, during and post-FGD
- All these information are meant to help in transcribing the discussion accurately, provides supplementary data

Facilitation 1

- Moderator begins with a welcome
- Introduces him/herself and note-taker
- Brief overview of the topic, research objective
- Explains ground rules, expected duration (45 minutes to 2 hours)
- Session is being recorded
- Expects everyone contributes to the discussion
- All contributions are valued, no right or wrong answers
- All information are confidential, anonymous, only accessible to researchers

Facilitation 2

- FGD members introduce themselves
- Pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality
- Each member speaks in turn

Facilitation 3

- Moderator probes for additional information:

“Could you elaborate?”

“Can you give an example?”

- Probing provides participants with ideas, to encourage in-depth exploration of an issue
- Follows the discussion guide for probing questions
- Moderator summarizes points for a topic before moving from one topic to another
- May need to control dominant participant, encourage quiet participant

Facilitation 4

- Moderator must be unbiased, respectful, be a good listener
- Must not judge
- Should not get actively involved in the discussion, except to guide and keep the discussion focused
- Must not say biased responses, e.g. “That’s a good point!”, “That’s correct!”, “That’s not right...” etc.

Facilitation 5

- At the end of FGD, moderator wraps up the discussion
- Gives overall summary of important points
- Gives chance for participants to verify the points
- Allows participants to elaborate some points if any are left out

Facilitation 6

Conducting a Focus Group (UBC Learn)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Auf9pkuCc8k>

Step 3: Data Analysis

Data Analysis 1

- Verbatim transcript of entire discussion
 - Actual words + Behaviors
- Coding the information in transcript – sort & categorize
- Stages:
 1. Initial coding – list ideas, identify keywords representing themes, links between themes, relationship diagrams
 2. Focused coding – eliminates / combines / subdivides initial coding, identify recurring ideas, wider themes
- Software – Atlas.ti, NVIVO, RQDA

Data Analysis 2

Levels of analysis:

1. Descriptive

- What was said exactly, direct quotes
- No assumption / interpretation

2. Interpretative

- Themes / patterns / perspectives
- Model relationship between themes
- How themes emerge
- Theory grounded in data

Step 4: Reporting Results

Reporting

- Consolidate results into coherent report
- Narrative / point-wise statements
- Impressionistic manners – “Most of them agree ...”, “Most patients mentioned ...”, “Almost none ever had ...”
- Support points by direct quotes
- Participant information – gender, age, education level
- Shared with FGD participants for validation – *Participant validation*

Reporting

- Can include quantitative reporting
- Repeated theme, quantify how often it appears – simple frequencies
- Generalization is not possible!
 - Purposive sampling
 - Small sample
 - May not be representative of population
 - Not the main aim of qualitative approach

Pros and Cons of FGD

Pros and Cons

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excellent qualitative data collection method as participants <u>build upon</u> each others' comments, stimulate thinking and discussion• High quality data as moderator can respond to questions, <u>probe</u> to clarify points and encourage in-depth discussion• Aid in <u>conceptualization</u> and <u>hypothesis</u> generation• Information obtained can be used to <u>develop questions</u> for use in <u>surveys</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Susceptible to bias</u>, as information can be biased due to dominant participants and moderator• Can be <u>difficult to control</u> FGD – requires skilled moderator• Discussion <u>time</u> can be lost on out-of-topic, <u>irrelevant discussion</u> – generates <u>messy data</u>• <u>Difficult to recruit</u> enough FGD members• <u>Response rate</u> can be problematic, e.g. FGD may require many sessions and some may skip sessions

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