



# ***Interviewing***

***ScWk 242 – Session 3 Slides***

# ***Interviews as a Data Collection Tool***

- **Interviewing is a form of questioning characterized by the fact that it employs verbal questioning as its principal technique of data collection.**
- **Interviews are employed by people in everyday life, but as a scientific tool of social research, or better as a method of data collection, interviewing is different with regard to its preparation, construction, and execution in that it is prepared and executed in a systematic way.**
- **Interviews basically consist of asking questions, listening to individuals and recording their responses.**
- **Interviews allow participants to provide rich, contextual descriptions of events. Interviews are a systematic way of talking and listening to respondents and are another way to collect data from individuals through conversations.**
- **Kvale (1996) regarded interviews as “an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasizes the *social situatedness* of research data.”**

# *Why Interview?*

The most obvious way of finding the information is to ask someone who may be able to help. Interviews also have a large number of potential advantages for a qualitative researcher. Specifically, in an information setting some of the advantages are especially significant. There are many reasons to use interviews for collecting data and using it as a research instrument. Gray (2004) provided the following reasons

- There is a need to attain highly personalized data.
- There are opportunities required for probing.
- A good return rate is important (speed).
- When respondents are not fluent in the native language of the country, or where they have difficulties with written language.
- Immediacy

## *Types & Styles of Interviews*

- Interviewing as a research method typically involves you, as researcher, asking questions and, hopefully, receiving answers from the people you are interviewing. It is very widely used in social research and there are many different types.
- A commonly used typology distinguishes among structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. The different types can link to some extent to the 'depth' of response sought (Robson 2002, 269).

# *Interview Types*

- ***Fully structured interview:*** Has predetermined questions with fixed wording, usually in a pre-set order. The use of mainly open-response questions is the only essential difference from an interview-based survey questionnaire.
- ***Semi-structured interview:*** Has predetermined questions, but the order can be modified based upon the interviewer's perception of what seems most appropriate. Question wording can be changed and explanations given; particular questions which seem inappropriate with a particular interviewee can be omitted, or additional ones included.
- ***Unstructured interviews:*** The interviewer has a general area of interest and concern, but lets the conversation develop within this area. It can be completely informal.

# Interviewing Tips



Your task as interviewer is to try to get interviewees to talk freely and openly. Your own behavior has a major influence on their willingness to do this. To this end you should:

- **Listen more than you speak** Most interviewers talk too much. The interview is not a platform for the interviewer's personal experiences and opinions.
- **Put questions in a straightforward, clear and non-threatening way** If people are confused or defensive, you will not get the information you seek.
- **Eliminate cues** which lead interviewees to respond in a particular way Many interviewees will seek to please the interviewer by giving 'correct' responses ('Are you against sin?').
- **Enjoy it (or at least look as though you do)** Don't give the message that you are bored or scared. Vary your voice and facial expression.

It is also essential that **you take a full record of the interview.** This can be from notes made at the time and/or from a recording of the interview.



# *More Interviewing Tips*

- Try to be **interactive and sensitive to the language and concepts used by the interviewee**
- Try to keep the **agenda flexible**
- Aim to **go below the surface** of the topic being discussed
- Explore **what people say in detail**
- Check you have **understood respondents' meanings**
- Try to discover the **interviewee's own framework of meanings**
- **Avoid imposing own structures and assumptions**
- Need to consider **how perceived by interviewees** and the effects of characteristics such as **class, race, sex, and social distance on the interview**

# *Interview Guides*

A guide is not a rigidly structured set of questions to be asked verbatim as written, accompanied by an associated range of preworded likely answers. Rather, it is **a list of items to be sure to ask about when talking to the person being interviewed.** You want interviewees to speak freely in their own terms about a set of concerns you bring to the interaction, plus whatever else they might introduce.

# *Steps to Develop the Guide*

**WHO (the World Health Organization) suggested six steps to devise an interview guide. These include**

- **Identify appropriate topics and questions**
- **Decide on the level of detail**
- **Draft the questions**
- **Order the questions.**
- **List any probes or prompts and**
- **Pilot the questions. Have the informant identify the problems during the pilot.**

# *Preparing for Interviews*

It is necessary for the researcher to prepare before the actual interview. The interview prep should start well before the interview actually begins. Once the interview is conducted the researcher needs to make sure that the respondents have:

- A clear idea of why *they* have been approached
- Basic information about the purpose of the interview and the research project of which it is a part
- Some idea of the probable length of the interview and that you would like to record it (explaining why and getting permission)
- A clear idea of precisely where and when the interview will take place

(Gillham, 2000).

# Questions to Avoid In Interviews

- **Long questions** The interviewee may remember only part of the question, and respond to that part.
- **Double-barrelled (or multiple-barrelled) questions**, e.g. 'What do you feel about current video game content compared with that of five years ago?' The solution is to break it down into simpler questions ('What do you feel about current video games?'; 'Can you recall any video games from five years ago?'; 'How do you feel they compare?').
- **Questions involving jargon** Generally you should avoid questions containing words likely to be unfamiliar to the target audience. Keep things simple to avoid disturbing interviewees; it is in your own interest as well.
- **Leading questions**, e.g. 'Why do you like the concept of welfare reform?' It is usually better to modify such questions, to make them less leading and more objective.
- **Biased questions** Provided you are alert to the possibility of bias, it is not difficult to write unbiased questions. What is more difficult, however, is not (perhaps unwittingly) to lead the interviewee by the manner in which the question is asked, or the way in which you receive the response. Neutrality is called for, and in seeking to be welcoming and reinforcing to the interviewee, you should try to avoid appearing to share or welcome their views. (Robson 2002, 275)

# *Introduction Strategies*

- Explain purpose and nature of the study to the respondent, telling how, or through, whom she or he came to be selected.
- Give assurance that the respondent will remain anonymous in any written reports growing out of the study, and that his or her responses will be treated in strictest confidence.
- Indicate that s/he may find some of the questions far-fetched, silly or difficult to answer, for the reason that questions that are appropriate for one person are not always appropriate for another. Since there are no right or wrong answers, s/he is not to worry about these but to do as best he can with them. We are only interested in his/her opinions and personal experiences.
- S/He is to feel perfectly free to interrupt, ask clarification of the interviewer, criticize a line of questioning, etc.
- Interviewer will tell respondent something about herself or himself – his/her back-ground, training, and interest in the area of enquiry.
- Interviewer is to ask permission to tape-record the interview, explaining why s/he wishes to do this.

# *Types of Questions to Ask*

There is an almost unlimited range of items that can be addressed during an interview. These can include content related to the respondent's:

- **Behavior and experiences**
- **Opinions and beliefs**
- **Feelings**
- **Knowledge**
- **Sensory and non-verbal descriptions**
- **Background and demographic information**

# ***Maintaining Control of the Interview***

- **Know what it is you want to find out**
- **Ask the right questions to get the information you need**
- **Give appropriate verbal and non-verbal feedback**
- **Good feedback vs. bad feedback**
- **Avoid bias whenever possible**

# ***Controlling Your Biases***

- ***List ways in which your characteristics might bias you in your efforts at research interviewing.***
- ***Then write how you might counteract these biases.***
- ***And then write how these efforts to counteract your biases might themselves lead to other biases.***

# *Comment on These Images:*



What would you say  
was your biggest  
strength?

