Interviewing Techniques: An Interactive Workshop

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Structured Interviews

• Pre-determined questions with forced choice answers
• Appropriate for:
  – Large amounts of data that must be quantified
  – Large scale telephone surveys
  – Surveying people who are unable to utilize a written survey (young children; people with cognitive difficulties)
• Many semi-structured interviews may have some structured items
Semi-Structured Interviews

- A general framework of open-ended questions, with room for follow-up questions
- Most formal interviews follow this
- Appropriate when:
  - Gathering qualitative information on specific topics
  - Want to stick with main topic, but can be open to new themes
Unstructured Interviews

• Very loose framework, if any
• Appropriate in:
  – Brainstorming sessions
  – Participant observation
  – Spontaneous conversations that wind up being informative
    • “This is a very interesting topic. Would you mind if I took some notes (w/o your name…) for our report?”
Important in ALL Interviews

- Establish rapport
- Clarify expectations
- Avoid leading questions
- Body language
- Facial expressions
- Tone of voice
- Member checking
Put Yourself in Their Shoes

Interviewees may be:

- Anxious about how data may be used
- Eager to have opinions heard
- Annoyed about “Waste of time”
Clarifying Expectations

- Purposes of interview
- Time commitment
- What types of questions you’ll be asking
- Confidentiality
  - Who will have access to their interview data?
- Informed consent
- Voluntary participation
Member Checking

• Repeating sections of interview back to interviewees for clarification
• Promotes authenticity of data
• Gives stakeholders some “ownership” of evaluation
Interview Challenges

Interviewees may:

• Ask you personal questions
• Withhold or distort information
• Change topics; ramble
• Become emotional
Recommended Reading