

Recruiting Hard-to-Reach Respondents with Complex Characteristics for Qualitative Interviews

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Overview

- Background
 - Participant point of view
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BACKGROUND

The Problem

- Recruiting purposive (non-probability) samples of hard-to-reach respondents for different types of qualitative interviews can be a challenge.
 - These studies often require participants with very specific characteristics.
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Examples of recent challenging studies

- Cognitive Testing of Food for Babies and Mothers' Health Questions on the NHANES B24 Month Questionnaire
 - Testing questions with monolingual Spanish speakers including mothers, fathers and other caretakers who are the person primarily responsible for feeding the child.
 - Household Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses (HSOII) Spanish Language Testing
 - Testing questions with monolingual Spanish speakers who had a workplace injury or illness in the previous 12 months.
 - Census QRML (Qualitative Research-Multilingual Project)
 - Project with extremely specific "cells", for example a Russian speaking monolingual man from a former Soviet country in a same-sex relationship.
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Strategies for Recruiting

- Some organizations keep databases of volunteer participants... We chose not to.
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Our Strategies for Recruiting

- Create relationships with key stakeholders in the community
 - Could be a person working at a community based organizations (CBOs), or a grocery store owner particularly plugged into a community.
 - If the population you are recruiting requires related services, you can connect with organizations that provide those services.
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Variety is key

- There is no magic bullet
 - Don't put all eggs in one basket
 - Flyers AND community organizations AND related offices AND social media.
 - Every study and every population is different. Important not to assume any strategy will work because it has worked before.
 - Can't recruit far enough in advance to experiment
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DEBRIEFING OF COGNITIVE TESTING PARTICIPANTS

Debriefing of cognitive testing participants

- To better understand how respondents are making the choice to participate, we asked 16 respondents a set of debriefing questions
 - Questions were asked after cognitive testing of a Spanish questionnaire.
 - Interviews were conducted in Spanish.
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Debriefing Questions

- Where did you see our ad/flyer?
 - What made you want to call?
 - What was the experience like when you called?
 - Do you remember what they asked you?
 - Did they ask you any question that stood out or worried you?
 - What made you decide that you wanted to participate in the interview? Did you have any doubts?
 - Was the interview how you imagined it would be?
 - Would you participate in an interview like this again?
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Recognition of yourself in the flyer

- Several respondents spoke about seeing the flyer online or in person and thinking that it was looking for people like themselves.

“It’s that they said they needed families or something for an interview. That people who had children who were zero to 24 months, and well, I have my two kids.”

Flyer came from trusted source

- Respondents reported having either found out about the study through a Facebook post or through a friend or family member (word of mouth).
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Experienced Family or Friends

- Multiple respondents also mentioned speaking to family members or friends who had volunteered for research before, and the role their reassurance had in legitimizing the idea of participation.

“Yes, because my sister has told me they do this at her clinic. She said that some guys asked her things and she said they gave her \$40.”

Influence of Family or Friends

“Because I told my wife...[it’s a] half hour, they want to give you \$40 here at home? And she told me ‘Well, yes.’ Because she also has [participated] when she goes to the WIC office or the doctor...so she said ‘Yes, they are asking questions...there is nothing bad. And I said ‘the police aren’t going to come get me or anything?’ And she said ‘No, no’.”

Other Reasons for participation

- Several respondents mentioned the incentive (\$40) as their primary motivation for participation

“Well, I am out of work and the \$40 will do me some good.”

- Others simply said it sounded interesting, or that they thought there was a possibility of learning something new about the study topic.
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The Screening Process

- Respondents described the recruiter as friendly.
 - Respondents found these interactions both pleasant and reassuring.
 - Respondents valued continuity in pre-interview contacts.
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Respondents concerns before participation

- Worries about participation fell into three distinct categories
 - Worries about difficult questions or answering "correctly"
 - Worries about privacy
 - Worries about study legitimacy
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Worries about difficult questions or answering "correctly"

"Yes, I was a little worried because I said, 'I don't really know what they will ask. And also I was worried because I said 'what if I put my foot in my mouth and answer wrong!'"

- Respondents with these sorts of worries reported being reassured during screening.
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Worries about study legitimacy

- In one case questioning the legitimacy of the study actually became a motivation for participation.

“I saw it [the ad], but also my sister-in-law mentioned it. I told her ‘Oh no! it might be a lie’... I told her ‘I’ll see’ and she said ‘do it.’”

- At screening this respondent was comforted to be speaking with the same person she had seen posted the Facebook post flyer.
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Interviewer Flexibility

- When asked about why they decided to participate, several respondents spoke about the flexibility in terms of location and scheduling.

“They accommodated me by being able to do it here [in the respondents home] because going around with a baby can be hard.”

CONCLUSION

Findings

- Trust in the source
 - Word of mouth, existing online groups or networks.
- Importance of the screening experience
 - A polite, professional Spanish speaker who can answer questions. The same person calls them back to schedule the appointment.
- Ads that they recognize themselves in.
- Flexibility when scheduling and interviewing
- Family and friends play a role in decision making

Limitations of debriefing questions

- Questions were only asked of those who chose to participate.
 - Further research with non-participants would be challenging, but potentially quite illuminating.
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What does this all tell us?

- When recruiting a purposive sample
 - Develop recruiting material respondents will identify with.
 - Take advantage of existing networks and relationships.
 - Strive for continuity and cultural competency in the outreach, screening and scheduling.
 - If possible, be flexible with time and location.
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Thank you!

Questions?

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