



Interviewing the Interviewers (The Healing Journey)

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The Healing Journey

“An unique study & research experience”

- Need to retain a “hard to reach” target group over a number of years.
- Challenges: recruitment, retention, confidentiality, coping with trauma
- Our interviewers amassed a great deal of knowledge about conducting research with vulnerable populations while maintaining safety & respect for respondents

Interviewing the Interviewers

- **Dean's Research Award to explore our interviewer's experiences/gain knowledge**
- **13 in-depth interviews conducted in Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.**
- **Questions were asked about negotiating boundaries, challenges faced, handling personal reactions, cultural sensitivities, ethics, strategies for interviewing, retention, growing as an interviewer, changes that could be made etc.**

Cultural Sensitivities

- Trust, relationship building and understanding the diversity of Aboriginal people were key themes

“The woman that I had dealt with residential schools and things like that. I felt it probably would have been better had she had an Aboriginal interviewer because, she, would go on a tirade, justly, about these white people and I thought, you know, I felt bad for her to have to, that maybe myself as a white woman interviewing her may have felt manipulative or coercive, or in that case, I thought I recognize that, you know, as a white person, we have so much, I have so much privilege that in her case perhaps my being white, which I often take for granted was a detriment to her. That was a really good experience for me, but I’m not sure for her”.

Cultural Sensitivities

“Flexibility is key. You know, being I guess open to understanding the way they do things with regard to tobacco giving. It’s not necessarily a Cree tradition, I mean it’s not just tobacco, it could be cookies or in some cases you ask the person what they would like and it could be a chicken dinner, you know what I mean? We are so hung up on these types of things, right, but it is basically dependant upon the woman”.

Ethics

- One strong theme that emerged was ensuring the women had access to services. It became an ethical dilemma when the lack of services was very apparent to the interviewer(s).

“Like in terms of ethics and you know doing the right thing for people”.

“I know the women’s centre, the sexual assault line, they have the 24 hour and they focus on sexual assault, so I have referenced that to people but that was something that I heard. I think with the new bereavement centre, the grief counselling seems to be something that really needs to be available”.

Boundaries

- While interviewers were able to set and maintain boundaries, many struggled being “counsellor” vs. “interviewer”. In addition, many felt a close bond with their participants and while they maintained the boundary, it was difficult in many instances to do so.
- “We were told as interviewers we had to remain neutral. I found that sometimes cold – you know normally if you are a person and you are talking to somebody and they are having a hard time, you know, you can pat their shoulder and you can say something to them to kind of reassure them, but we were cautioned to not get too close or get too wrapped up to allow ourselves to do that. So for myself, you know, I would just offer them a break or I would say take your time, don’t worry about it, it’s ok”.*

Boundaries

"I think somebody for sure who is, you have to be, actually you have to be a strong person because the stories you hear are difficult. And it was like I would think that I had heard probably the worst story that I could hear and then I would do another interview and I would hear something worse. You know? And so it just made me realize how resilient these women are and how strong because sometimes, and of course I couldn't say anything but I mean you know in my mind I was thinking to myself, I don't even know how you can be sitting there talking to me when you have been through all of this and you know I think in my mind I'm wondering how I would be, could I do this? Could I be you?"

Interviewer experience

- **Theme: Experience that will linger with interviewers**

Grief

“unstable, severely depressed and sitting at her kitchen table with her sobbing about how she feels like killing herself and, you know, you can't remain neutral in that moment, like you absolutely can't.”

“I didn't have any counselling experience yet at that point either when I would say definitely that would have been an example of some vicarious trauma. When I got home from that interview I just burst into tears because the feelings that I had were mostly were of guilt”

Theme: Experience that will linger with interviewers

Hope

“The desire of the women to really see change, that is so heartening, that is something that I will continue to look back on and admire.”

“I just wanted to weep for her it's just like, why wouldn't you give up, why wouldn't, of course you want to give up, of course you just want to throw in the towel? That's one thing, I still think about it actually but the thing that was good about it was that the next time that I talked to her there had been some movement and she was hopeful and even by the end of that interview I felt like I did help her in some way, you know”

Theme: Experience that will linger with interviewers

- Humour

“I asked, how is your life as a whole? I just read the question and there was no answer and so I looked up and I waited and she was just kind of glaring at me, you know, kind of upset with me. All of a sudden she started laughing and she said to me, oh my goodness you know what I thought you said, I thought you said how is your life as a whore?”

Interviewer bias

- **Theme: Strong views**
- *“Personally I find the interviewers who have come onto the project for career building and then left after they got tired of it or whatever, need a spanking because you know, that has caused a lot of I guess, not animosity, but when I run into people who have had one interviewer here, another interviewer here, and been passed around from interviewer to interviewer because interviewers keep leaving...”*
- *“I just think that that could be pretty critical as well because if somebody is going through a lot and then this preppy person comes into the room and it is like, who the hell are you and what do you know about anything?”*

Interviewer development and knowledge gained

- **Theme: Growth**

- *“Well I am much more aware of the issues of domestic and family and intimate partner violence. I really wasn’t familiar with it before. I mean I always had these preconceived notions of “why don’t you just leave?” You know, it was a very simple statement to make, you know and I have made it so many times before I am almost ashamed to admit that I did because it is so complex”*
- *“I think when I first started I was absolutely shocked by some of the life experiences of some of the participants”*

Theme: Growth

- *“So there's one particular participant, I read the question to her and said I'm going to read this list to you and I will read it over first and then I will ask you to put them in order of what you do most in one day.... so I read the whole list and she never said anything....So I read them again and again she didn't say anything. And then she said to me, “I am a drug addict. I spend my life, my days looking for my next fix. I don't clean house, I don't look after kids, I don't shop, sometimes I don't eat, I spend my days wondering where my next fix is going to come from and how I'm going to get it. 24/7 that's what I do.” So that really, it really puts a perspective on a person's life living on the street or living that kind of life.”*

Retention of participants

- Long lasting positive relationship crucial between interviewer & participant for retention: trust, rapport, feeling comfortable, caring, non-judgmental, staying connected.
“...keeping in communication between interviews, asking them if they have concerns along the way or just thanking them for participating....caring”
- Monetary payment important/acknowledgment of time
“I think acknowledgement of their time is a big one...financial compensation, I think that is huge”

Retention of participants

- Being flexible and accommodating: work around what works for the women (breaking it up, time, ways things were done).

“The parameters around the study have to be flexible, I remember on a couple occasions having to scramble for time to get the interviews done because in some cases the women are transient, they are mobile...”

Retention of participants

Participants stayed in the study because they wanted to help other women, wanted their voices to be heard, wanted to help inform the services needed

“...staying in, a lot of the women feel that they can help someone else, to inform services for women who might be going through the same thing or they are giving back or helping in some way, they really stick with it because of that”.

Retention of Interviewers

(Why do you remain an interviewer?)

- Stressful, but we had support/receiving feedback is important
- I'm committed to the participants to have their voice heard/sense of responsibility to my participants/I've had exceptional participants
- Personal growth/honour to be involved/helps me learn/ I like research/I want to be involved
- Recognize the need for this kind of data to be collected/want to see it through and make sure we have good data
- The desire of the women to really see change
- Because it is my job/only source of income/ not the money

Motivation (Interviewer Motivation)

It's about relationships

"I continue because I feel like I would be letting my participants down if I left them mid because we have developed relationships."

"I like phoning them and hearing.....I like reconnecting with her and finding out, so what has happened now? I am interested."

Participant Motivation

Participants stuck with it because they want to see change for other women.

“They are doing it because they want to see changes for women that are in violent relationships and so they really feel like they are contributing to something.”

“Many of the women are staying in this study because they do strongly feel like their voices will potentially be heard.”

Support for Interviewers

Ongoing support from interviewer coordinator valuable – mentorship, debriefing, organizing folders. Overall, interviewers felt supported. Self-care must be built in somehow.

“The mentorship of Meghan...Meghan was always available and that really helped because there were scenarios where [agency] was closed or this girl....or I would just have questions and I could go to her and call her and she was always available or by e-mail and really provided time for debriefing if I needed it, the folders were always just so well put together.”

Feedback on the Study

- Very large category. Interviewers had a lot to say about this.

Negatives: questions difficult to answer, boring repetitions, interviews got longer as time went on, parenting and labour market questionnaires difficult (more difficult than sexual health), wording of questions difficult, sometimes harsh, need more feedback on results of study for participant on ongoing basis (localized information more than demographics).

Feedback on the study

Positives: financial compensation for participants, support for interviewers (i.e., organizing folders, debriefing, mentoring), women/participants having a voice, interviewers learned a lot, information gathered will be useful for changing policy.

“I like this project a lot. I feel just an innate connection with the project itself and with what is being done, like the research and what is going to come out of it....just a personal interest and a professional interest in it. Anything to me that is done by women for women just needs to happen and that is something that I want to be personally a part of. I don't do it for the money at all, although it is great, it's nice that you are being paid for the work that you do but it's not....I forget that we are even....I think that if we got \$50 to do all the interviews I would still do it.”

Future Research

- More open-ended questions – ask women what “work”, etc. means to them. More qualitative information.
- Information on rural, northern women and women who are in the justice system in some way.
- Buddy system for interviewers.

Interviewing the interviewers

We would very much like to thank ALL our interviewers for all their amazing work on the Healing Journey and for participating in our “Interviewing the interviewer” project.

Thank-you !