

Comparing Individual Interviews and Focus Groups as Qualitative Data Collection Methods

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Background

- Individual interviews and focus groups are two common data collection methods to identify barriers and facilitators for practice change.
- Interviews are used to explore the views, experiences, and beliefs of a phenomenon of interest to participants¹. They vary along a continuum from unstructured to structured².
- Focus groups are group discussions on a topic between multiple participants and the researcher that provide a deep understanding of participants’ views, experiences, and beliefs. They delve into how and why people think the way they do.³
- There is a paucity of literature to assist qualitative researchers in deciding when the use focus groups or interviews is most appropriate for a given research study.

Research Question

How do individual interviews compare with focus group interviews as data collection methods for identifying barriers and facilitators for practice change?

Methods

- Individual telephone interviews and focus groups using identical interview guide
- We explored clinicians’ beliefs and attitudes towards the use of the CATCH decision rule in pediatric emergency care context
- We recruited emergency clinicians (physicians and nurses) to participate in both an individual interview and a focus group
- Half of the participants completed an individual interview first and the other half participated in a focus group first
- 2 reviewers independently coded both data sets

Type	Setting	Participants
Individual Interviews	2 Acad Peds 1 Acad Mixed 4 Community	17 physicians 6 nurses
Focus groups	2 Acad Peds 1 Acad Mixed 2 Community	12 physicians 5 nurses

Analysis

Content and thematic analyses were used to identify important themes in each method. We also compared

- Impact on resources
- Order of participation

Results

- The same important barriers and facilitators were identified in both data collection methods.
- Focus groups resulted in a more in-depth examination of each theme
- Interviews produced a greater number of individual experiences

1. Comparison of Resources

Resource	Individual Interview	Focus Group
Number of Participants	23	17
Total hours of interview time (average minutes per interview)	10 hours (26 minutes)	5.5 hours (60 min)
Correspondence (average number of email contacts to organize)	4 per individual	3 per site
Transcription Cost	\$600	\$330
Total hours of coding	30 minutes/interview	65 minutes/focus group
Volume of Data (number of pages of transcript data)	229 pages	123 pages

2. Order of Participation

Both data collection methods resulted identifying the same important barriers and facilitators. However, individual interviews resulted in richer descriptions when focus groups were conducted first.

3. Comparison of Thematic Results

Individual Interview	Focus Group
Greater number of individual experiences (greater breadth)	More in depth examination of each theme
Short answers	Some responses tended to deviate from questions
Followed interview guide	More difficult to code
Easier to code	Greater variety of experiences and beliefs, rich discussion

Discussion

Considerations for Use

Individual Interview	Focus Group
Looking to obtain experiences/beliefs from a high-level clinician and/or specific type of clinician	Looking to obtain insight from a diverse group
Need in depth personal experiences/stories	Broad perspective
Looking to obtain an abundance of data	Not aimed at reaching consensus
	Limited time resources
	Limited financial resources

Conclusion

When identifying barriers and facilitators for practice change focus groups might be more suitable if time and financial resources are limited. The following aspects of the research study need to be taken into consideration before making regarding data collection methods:

- Aim of the Research*
- Sensitivity of the topic*
- Time and Resource Implications*
- Prioritization of Depth or Breadth of Themes*

References

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