

NED 2024



SPRING FORWARD: Strengthening Skills and Engaging with Colleagues

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TELL ME MORE ABOUT THAT...
IDENTIFYING BEST PRACTICES IN
CONDUCTING RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

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Learning Objectives

- 1 Define at least 2 types of research interviews.
- 2 Identify at least 5 best practices in conducting research interviews.
- 3 Describe relevant resources and additional training on conducting research interviews.

Highlighting Two Types of Interviews

Semi-structured interview: relies on an interview guide (*not a script*) and, although there is room for deviation from the guide, it is important to cover most of guide, for comparative purposes. *As a best practice, interview guides are focused tested with members of the population prior to implementation.*

Structured interview: relies on a detailed script that is prepared and usually piloted before the interview. *It can resemble a spoken questionnaire; it is imperative that research interviewers follow the script and deliver interview questions verbatim.* Piloting the tool allows for needed revisions. The goal is to ensure the script is usable by more than one researcher.

Protocol Matters!

- Face-to-Face **vs** virtual interviews.
- Interview guide and length developed and piloted w/target audience.
- Anonymous vs confidential.
- Consent or permissions forms available and thoroughly reviewed w/participants.
- Realtime / onsite participant and interviewer safety plans in place.
- Mental, sexual and other health resources built-in (*e.g., during or post interview*).
- Identify resources for interviewer staff who may experience secondary trauma from interviews.
- Refreshments available, *if possible*.
- Interviewee preferences considered, *if possible*.

Interviewing Tips From Two Protocols

- Protocol 1: Male Relationship Study. Repeat face-to-face semi-structured qualitative interviews (N=160) conducted with natal male adolescents in Baltimore, MD aged 15-19 years about early same-sex sexual experiences.
- Interviews were confidential, lasted 60-90 mins, recorded and transcribed; participants paid \$40 cash + refreshments. Team of 3 interviewers.
- Protocol 2: Project NEXUS. One-time virtual structured interviews with people who use drugs (~2500) accessing syringe services programs (SSP) across nine states. Interviewer team of up to 17 remote interviewers.
- Interviews are anonymous, last ~40 minutes are not recorded, participants paid \$20 onsite.

Male Relationship Study

Goal was to elicit in-depth descriptions of early same-sex sexual experiences from participants.

Sample interview question and probes:

Tell me the story of the first time you were attracted to another male.

Probes:

- Describe how you felt (probe for more than “good”)*
- How old were you when you felt this attraction?*
- Describe where you were when you felt this attraction.*
- Was there a particular person that you were attracted to?*
- What attracted you to them?*
- Describe their ethnicity.*
- Describe their sexuality.*
- How did you know him?*
- How did you show your attraction to him?*

Research Interviewer Techniques

- **Building rapport matters.** Be mindful to thank participant, eye contact, body language, distance, dress. Depending on protocol ask questions.
- **Bring your social skills.** Exhibit warmth, empathy, consideration, and humor.
- **Be an active listener.** Let the participant know you are engaged e.g., repeat response, paraphrase – this will help with their engagement!
- **Suspend all judgements. Participants experience what you bring into the room.**
- **Plan for how to handle discomfort** during an interview.
- **Be aware of your physical responses.** Avoid expressions of being shock, surprise, disappointment or praise.
- **Silence can be useful in an interview.** Opportunity to check-in w/participant about question or probe comprehension.

Research Interviewer Techniques

Be knowledgeable: in subject matter and focus of the interview.

Add structure: clear start, transitions throughout and clear wind down/close.

Clear questions: simple, easy, short w/no jargon.

Respect: give participants space to finish answering questions; think about responses and allow pauses.

Display empathy! Listen attentively to what is said and how it is being said.

Be Open: responds to what is important to interviewee and is flexible.

Steering: stay focused on what interview is aiming to glean.

Remembering: how does what has been said relate to what has previously been said.

Interpreting: clarify meanings of interviewees' statements, but without imposing your own meaning on them.

Balance: the interview is not about us. Rather we want to give participants ample space to describe experiences and answer questions.

Ethically sensitive: ensure interviewees understand what the research is about, its purposes, and level of confidentiality or anonymity offered.

Project NEXUS

Goal was to elicit detailed accounts of drug use patterns. Cross-sectional structured interview tool. RedCap was used to house the interview tool questions and document participant responses.

Sample interview questions and probes:

- *Have you ever in your life injected any drugs?*
- *Which of these drugs have you used in the past (x) months*
- *When was the last time you injected any drugs?*
- *What drugs did you inject the last time you injected any drug?*
- *On a day when you inject, about how often do you inject any drug?*
- *Have you ever had vaginal or anal sex?*

Project NEXUS Remote Interviews



UW Interviewers Station:

- Laptop w/Zoom App + UW Background
- Survey Flashcards
- Tablet:
 - REDCap participant tracker open monitoring status (*e.g. registered*)
 - REDCap Core/Local Survey
 - Slack open to comm. w/site

Interview Monitor Station:

- Laptop w/Slack open for communication w/UW
- REDCap participant tracker monitoring participant status (*e.g., eligible, permission for testing, finished survey*)
- UW interviewer Zoom IDs

Participant Survey Station:

- Charged tablet w/Hotspot enabled (or on WIFI)
- Noise cancellation headphones
- Zoom App open awaiting UW interviewer Zoom ID
- Monitor hand-off to participant for NEXUS screen

Connecting to UW NEXUS Interviewer

Step 1:



Interview monitor communicates potential participant + Confirms the UW interviewer

Step 2:



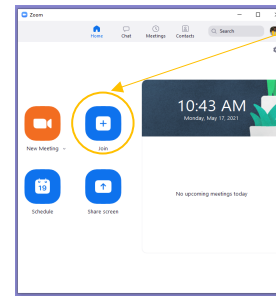
Interview monitor engages NEXUS tablet @ interview station

Step 3:



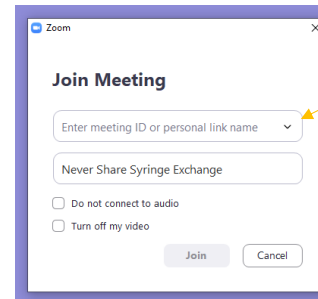
Launch the Zoom icon pinned to task bar

Step 4:



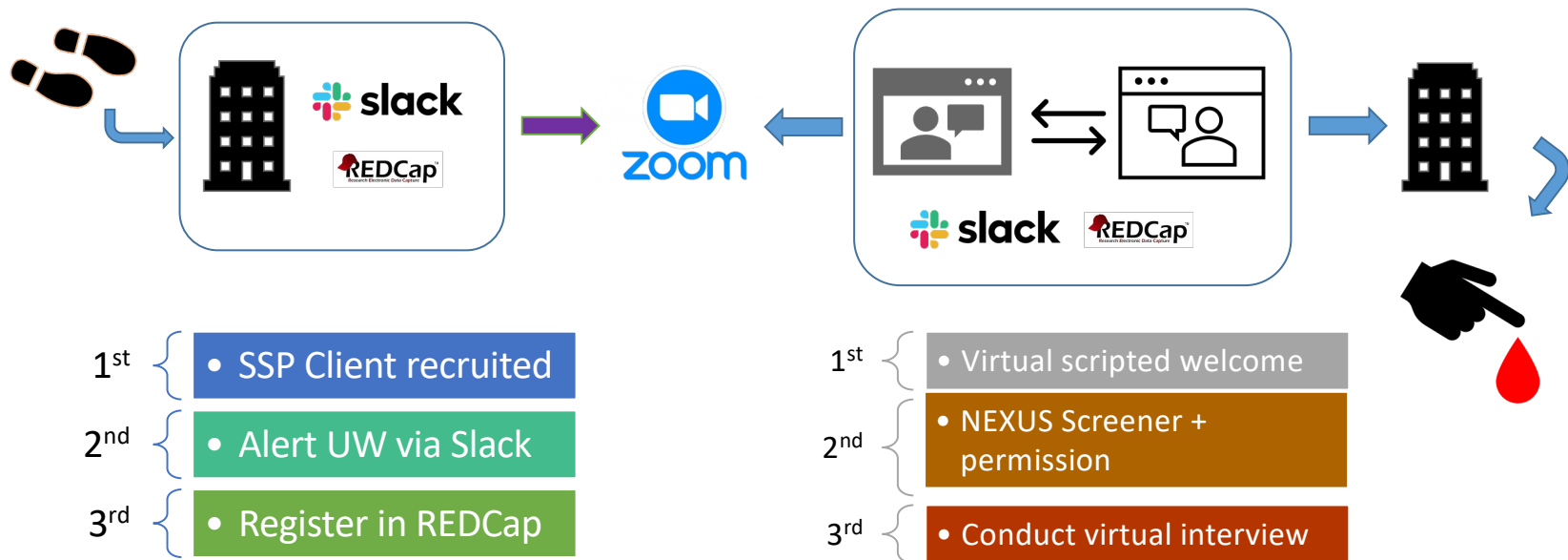
Clicks Join Meeting Icon

Step 5:



Enters Interviewer 10-digit Zoom ID to be let into waiting room

NEXUS Remote Process



Initial Interviewer Training

Key Training elements:

- ~2 weeks prior to conducting their first interview
- Overview of required core competencies in working with vulnerable populations in the research interview context
- Review of hallmarks of cultural humility, gender and racial equality
- Overview of the overall research question and relevance to interview population
- Close review of research interview tool
- Review of common research interview challenges
- Series of recorded mock interviews w/staff and other interviewers
- Targeted mock interview feedback
- Identification of additional resources to support interviewers during enrollment
- Ongoing interviewer group discussion re: interview tool and participant feedback

Interviewer Skills

Establish Rapport Quickly

Welcome virtual participant in a sincere manner. If needed, allow some silence after greeting the participant before moving on to give the participant a chance to respond. Thank the participant for agreeing and taking the time to learn more about the interview. Given the nature of the interview questions remind participant the interview is anonymous or confidential, being conducted in a private space and not being recorded.

Be an Active Listener

While engaged in a Zoom session interviewers, should avoid distractions, and use active listening skills to determine if the participant is engaged and following along. Active listening involves paying close attention to verbal and physical response to questions and acknowledging that you have captured their responses. This information can help the interviewer decide the pace of survey questions.

Be comfortable asking Survey Questions

The NEXUS survey captures sensitive information related to drug use, sexual behaviors, and experiences with law enforcement. Interviewers should read and re-read all survey questions and ensure they are comfortable asking the question, and repeating when necessary, the survey questions.

Interviewer Skills

Read Questions Verbatim

All NEXUS core and local survey questions should be read exactly as written. Interviewers may be tempted to re-word/phrase questions to aide in participant comprehension. This is highly discouraged, if an interviewer senses a participant does not understand the question, the interviewer should ask the participant if they would like the question to re-read. Interviewers should document issues related to question comprehension in the interviewers notes section of the survey.

Speak Clearly

Interviewers should pay attention to the pace at which introductions, transitions, and questions are read. If participants cannot hear the question clearly this presents data quality issues. Given the NEXUS survey interviews are being conducted via Zoom platform interviewers should anticipate potential questions-response issues and find a pace that works for each participant.

Neutrality

Interviewers should refrain from providing or appearing to provide approving or disapproving reactions to participant question responses. Interviewers should employ a consistent neutral transition to the next question.

Remote Interview Challenges

Participant emergency or other immediate safety concerns.	Use interviewers Slack channel to communicate emergencies or immediate concerns to the group
Participant falls asleep.	Access Slack to contact the interview monitor to intervene. If able, participant can continue the interview. Ensure to offer water or coffee is possible.
Participant keep going off-topic.	Don't ignore the participant; acknowledge. Gently redirect participant with reminder of time boundary in place, current progress and your awareness of their time.
Participant in emotional distress.	Pause the interview session. Check-in with participant, ask if they would like to stop or continue. Ask if they would like to have the interview monitor return to the interview room.
Participant makes inappropriate comment about interviewer's appearance, voice, or asks personal questions.	Pause the interview session. Alert issue to UW team who will work with site monitors. Redirect participant to purpose of the interview and current progress. If the issue persists, remind the participant that their participation is voluntary and if interview is ended due to inability to complete they will not be eligible for compensation.
Participant turns off video.	Pause interview; Remind participant video should remain on during interview; Send Slack IM for site assistance. If issue is due to wireless connection, UW will work w/site to rectify . If not possible, continue the interview without video, site interview monitor will increase attention.



Remote Interview Tech Issues



Interviewer Equipment:

- Chromebook CPU usage issues, e.g., unable to run Zoom + share flash cards w/out crashing
- Chromebook OS unable to support all Zoom features (e.g. virtual background)

Zoom

- Participant unable to enter interviewer waiting room; Site gets “waiting” error message for multiple minutes
- UW interviewer unable to share screen

Interviewer Equipment

- ▶ Switched to Dell laptops w/higher OS
- ▶ Solved both CPU and Zoom issues

Zoom

- ▶ Check the format of Zoom ID, no spaces
- ▶ Reset hotspot or WIFI and restart tablet, relaunch Zoom
- ▶ Sign out of Zoom and relaunch
- ▶ If screen share is enabled in Zoom, issue has been resolved by updating privacy setting on the laptop

Some Practices to Avoid

- Closed ended questions – those which elicit a ‘yes/no’ responses (*dependent on protocol*).
- Judgment – *“that sounds very risky, you should stop doing that?”*
- Preaching – *“What I think you should do or what you need is...”*.
- Long winded questions – questions/probes should be succinct and clear.
- Double-barreled questions – *“how would you rate the staff and services at the clinic?”*
- Leading questions – *“do you think you should avoid this behavior in the future?”*

Interviewer Tips

- Consider multiple research interview methods when attempting to answer research questions.
- Prepare yourself as an interviewer
- Construct an interview guide and test your questions.
- Consider cultural and power dimensions of the interview situation.
- Build rapport with your respondents.
- Remain mindful of your roll in the creation of the data.
- Talk less and listen more.
- Allow yourself to adjust the interview guide.
- Be prepared to handle unanticipated emotions.
- Transcribe the interviews ASAP.
- Check the data among target audience.

Questions?



THANK YOU!