Qualitative Data Toolkit: Key Informant Interview Process

Introduction to Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews are in-depth, structured discussions with people who have their finger on the pulse of the community. The purpose of key informant interviews is to collect information from a diverse group of people — including community leaders, health professionals, patients, survivors and co-survivors, who have firsthand knowledge of the community. These community experts, with their specific knowledge and understanding, can provide insight about the breast health/cancer problems (e.g. access, utilization and quality) and give recommendations for solutions.

Why Conduct Key Informant Interviews?

- Get breast health information from within a specified geographic region from a limited number of well connected and informed community leaders and health professionals
- Understand the attitudes and beliefs of survivors and co-survivors on breast cancer issues
- Get information from people with diverse backgrounds and opinions and be able to ask in-depth and probing questions
- Get respondents’ to openly discuss a topic
- Obtain a better understanding of breast cancer statistics and how they translate in the community
- Gathering information when cultural barriers make surveys or focus groups difficult.
- Examining specialized systems or processes

Advantages of Using Key Informant Interviews:

- Detailed data can be gathered in a relatively easy and inexpensive way
- Allows the interviewer to clarify questions
- If an Affiliate staff member, Board member or volunteer is conducting the interview, it provides an opportunity to build or strengthen relationships with important community informants and stakeholders;
- Can raise awareness, interest, and enthusiasm around an issue

Disadvantages of Using Key Informant Interviews:

- Selecting the “right” key informants to represent diverse backgrounds and viewpoints may be difficult
- May be challenging to reach and schedule interviews with busy and/or hard-to-reach key informants
- Difficult to generalize results to the larger population unless interviewing larger numbers of key informants

Planning and Conducting Key Informant Interviews

Prior to selecting key informant interviews as a data collection method, the Community Profile Team should have reviewed the data, determined the questions to be answered and defined the target population(s). The demographic and statistical data helped narrow the focus areas within the Affiliate’s service area. The health systems analysis review informed the Community Profile Team on potential key informants who are knowledgeable and closely linked to the community.
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Develop Data Collection Tools:
Prior to developing the data collection tools, the Community Profile Team will need to decide how the key informant interviews will be conducted. Telephone and face-to-face structured interviews are two of the best practices in gathering information from key informants. The technique used will depend on the availability and preference of the key informant, as well as the time and resources of the Community Profile Team.

- **Telephone Interviews:** Telephone interviews may be the easiest way to interview busy key informants. The major limitation of this approach is not having the personal interaction that is otherwise possible through a face-to-face interview. However, by using a prepared questionnaire, the telephone interview may provide all the information necessary.

Once the team has determined who will be interviewed, each team member can identify those individuals they know. The Community Profile Team can help recruit informants by personally contacting them and encouraging them to participate. The designated interviewer would then contact the informant to schedule a convenient time to conduct the interview.

When contacting key informants, stress the importance of their input and let them know in advance about the time commitment. Telephone interviews should last no more than 20-30 minutes, as it is difficult to schedule longer periods with busy people. However, once engaged, informants may be willing to speak longer. It is always a good idea for the interviewer to set aside at least one hour to allow for longer interviews.

- **Face-to-Face Interviews:** A face to face interview is the preferred method of collecting key informant data. Personal meetings are more time consuming because they involve more scheduling and planning. But, the format allows for a free-exchange of ideas, and lends itself to asking more complex questions and therefore gets more in-depth answers. Face-to-face interviews typically last 30 minutes to an hour; however, if a conversation is very productive, it could last longer.

Important things to remember when scheduling face-to-face interviews:
- Make sure the time and location are convenient for the person being interviewed
- Don’t schedule too many interviews in one single day
- After each interview take some time to make additional notes and organize initial findings or impressions

An interview tool or structured questionnaire to guide the discussion is needed in order to keep the interview focused and ensure that all the questions are being answered. Before starting the actual interviews, the Community Profile Team must develop a questionnaire specific to the information they need to gather. It might be tempting to use a generic questionnaire for the key informant interviews. However, to ensure that the data collected is focused and specific, the questions must reflect current issues in the target area and/or population. Information already collected will help the team decide where the data gaps still exist. For example, is more information needed on community opinions, existing services or use of existing services to help
achieve a better understanding of the data? The type of data needed helps identify the specific informants needed and will guide the Community Profile Team as they develop the questionnaire.

The final interview tool typically contains an outlined script and a list of open-ended questions. Start with the most factual and easy-to-answer questions, and then follow those with questions that ask informant's opinions and beliefs. End with questions that ask for general recommendations. Don’t be afraid to ask probing questions during the interview, as these help clarify informant’s comments and get detailed information.

The following are the main components of the interview tool:

- **Introduction:** This is a script that introduces the interviewer and the project. As a general rule, the introduction should:
  - Help establish the purpose for the interview
  - Explain who is involved in the process (Community Profile Team)
  - Establish credibility for the interview and the interviewer
  - Explain why their cooperation is important in collecting the information needed
  - Explain what will happen with the collected information and how the community will benefit

- **Key Questions:** The key questions are five to ten scripted questions that get at the issues being studied. The key questions deliberately draw out more in-depth information.

- **Probing Questions:** Probing questions are questions that are not part of the original script but encourage informants to reflect more deeply on the meaning of their comments. Probing questions draw on the informants’ expertise and unique viewpoint and are useful at getting people to think about the cause or root of the problem.

- **Closing Question:** This scripted question gives the informant an opportunity to add information or make comments. The question can ask key informants to make recommendations or identify solutions for their community.

- **Summary:** This script provides an opportunity to thank the informant for their time and contribution to the Community Profile. The closing script should include a summary of the major themes to verify accuracy. Before ending the session, offer the informant the chance to ask questions, make comments or learn more about the Community Profile.

In addition, it is best-practice to have the key informant read and sign a consent form, or give verbal consent that is documented in the notes. A sample consent form is available in the Qualitative Data Toolkit on myKomen.

**Select Sampling Technique:**
Key informants have first-hand knowledge about the community, its residents, and the impact of cancer. Examples of key informants include: hospital or clinic staff, non-profit staff, church leaders, community residents (survivors and co-survivors) and state organizations (e.g., department of public health).
Qualitative Data Toolkit: Key Informant Interview Process

One sampling technique that can be used is to develop a comprehensive list of key informants. In creating this list, try to be diverse and include people with different backgrounds and from different groups or sectors. A diverse list will provide a broad range of perspectives. Refer to the information collected during the Health System Analysis and as a Team brainstorm to find out who knows who. Include anyone who would be ideal regardless of how likely or unlikely it would be to interview them.

If the list is less than 20, it would be best practice to interview all of the informants on the list. As the number reaches past 20, then the Community Profile Team could use one of the following sampling techniques until the sample size is reached:

- Simple Random: Use a computer program or randomized table to select the informants.
- Systematic Random: From the list, select every second person until a set number is reached.
- Quota: Starting at the top of a list, each informant is interviewed until a specified number are completed. The names on the list should in a random order and not sorted by any specific characteristic.

If the Team has limited knowledge about the community, whom would be key informants to interview, or the team has specific qualifications for the key informant, they may choose one of the following sampling techniques:

- Snowball: Start with one key informant identified by the Community Profile Team, complete interview and at the end ask them if they could refer anyone else that would be helpful in answering the Team’s questions. Continue to do this until a specific number is reached.
- Convenience: Select informants that are easily accessible (e.g. grantees, Board member affiliations)
- Purposive: Informants are selected based on specific characteristics that the team feels is necessary in providing the needed information.

Determine Sample Size:
The number of people to interview largely depends on data needs, available time, and resources. It is best practice to conduct at least 12 interviews per topic area. For example, if the team needs more information about access to screening mammography in County X for women 40 and older and information regarding access to survivorship services, the team would have two sets of interviews: (1) at least 12 key informant interviews on the topic about access to screening mammography in County X for women 40, and (2) at least 12 key informant interviews about access to survivorship services.

Using Incentives to Increase Participation:
The Community Profile Team may want to consider using incentives for key informants to participate in the interviews, especially if they are community members providing their time. However, professionals participating in the interview on work time may not need an incentive as they are already being compensated by their employer.
Collecting the Data:
Prior to beginning any interviews the Community Profile Team will need to determine how the information gathered is going to be documented. Each interview must be formally recorded to ensure data quality and accuracy. Documenting the interviews once completed may result in “lost” information that is necessary in answering the reasons why the breast health/cancer problem exits or its solution. Interviews can be recorded by note-taking or tape recording.

- **Note-Taking:** Interviewers should plan to take notes during the interview as well as directly after the interview. It is useful to type up and print the five to ten key questions drafted leaving enough space between each question to manually write the key informant’s comments while conducting the interview.

  Taking notes while interviewing someone could be quite a balancing act! Interviewers may find themselves engaged in the conversation and not taking notes. Good advice is to plan to take notes during the interview but not allow note-taking to disrupt the flow of the conversation. It may be more productive to have a note-taker accompany you to record the session.

  Immediately after each interview the interviewer must take time to review the notes and fill in any details, expand on any comments, or add important points made during the interview. It is a good idea to do this immediately after the interview when things are still fresh.

- **Tape or Digitally Voice Recording:** Interviewers can also use a tape or digital voice recorder to document interviews with key informants. This approach allows the interviewer to freely engage in the conversation without worrying about note-taking. The interviewer may take brief notes during the interview and can use the recording to fill in information gaps or details.

  It is good practice to document informed consent from the key informant to voice record the interview. Discuss voice recording with the informant when scheduling the interview and get verbal consent at that time.

  When discussing recording the interview, it is important to emphasize that:
  - The interview will be recorded so that no important information is lost
  - The interview will not be recorded if they prefer it not be
  - The tapes will be kept in a secure location
  - All personal information will be kept confidential

The Community Profile Team will also need to determine who will be the designated interviewer(s). A Community Profile Team member, an intern or a volunteer can be a designated interviewer. Interviewers should be good listeners, have strong communication
skills, be able to take detailed notes, be detail-oriented, and comfortable meeting and talking to new people. For consistency, it is wise to only have one or two designated interviewers.

The interview tool the Community Profile Team develops will help structure the discussion. Interviewers must practice and familiarize themselves with the script and questions before meeting the key informants. After completing the interviews it is a good idea to send follow up “Thank You” notes to all participants.

While conducting the interviews remember the following:
- Do not influence or bias respondents’ answers
- Listen carefully for recurring and new opinions or beliefs
- Pace the interview
- Try to get answers to all questions
- At the end let the informants know what will happen with the information they provided

When collecting data from individuals, the following are a few important rules to consider when handling their responses:
- Keep identifying information, interview notes and printed documents in a locked place. This can be simply a locked filing cabinet drawer or password protected computer.
- Keep identifying information in one place. This ensures that fewer people have access to private information.
- Once the data is compiled, remove any identifying information that is associated with it.
- When typing up recorded key informant interviews, assign each respondent in the typed document a unique number. Start with “1” and just assign a different number to each key informant entered.

Analyzing and Drawing Conclusions About the Data:
Qualitative data analysis involves the coding, analysis and interpretation of themes/categories and descriptions in textual data and determines how they help answer the question(s) identified at the beginning of the process. This part of the qualitative data collection process is highly dependent upon the skills of the Community Profile Team’s qualitative resource. Please refer to Module 4 of the Community Profile Guidebook or Module 4 Toolkit: Data Analysis and Interpretation Section of the Qualitative Toolkit on myKomen.org for additional information on analysis and interpretation.

Sources: