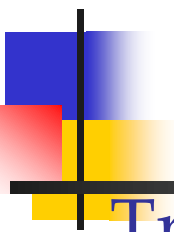


# Focus Group Discussions



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# FGD

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- How many have participated in FGD?  
(participant, notetaker/recorder,  
moderator, observer)
- Reflections, comments



# FGD

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- Qualitative method
  - Results are in words not numbers
  - No numerical generalisations
- Purpose to obtain in-depth information on concepts, perceptions and ideas of a group



# History

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- During World War II, discussions with students in US on war morale, social scientists
- Origin in market research (e.g. new products, medicinal drugs) and communication research
- Common in public health and social sciences



# Use of FGD in Public Health

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- To focus research
  - a broad research idea needs to be focused
- To formulate appropriate questions for structured (quantitative) studies
- To assist in understanding problems in and results from interventions
- Develop appropriate messages for health education programmes
- Explore controversial topics



# FGD in brief

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- FGD around pre-defined topics
  - Discussions among participants encouraged, not group interviews
- Led by moderator
- Note taker, tape-recorder
- Transcription
- Analysis
- Writing-up

# FGD in practice I



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- Determine the purpose: Clear objectives
- Situation analysis: Good knowledge of local conditions or start with interviews with key informants
- Preparation of a discussion guide:
  - Written guide
  - What kinds of questions?
    - Open ended questions
    - Avoid dichotomous questions
    - Avoid Why-questions
    - Logical order
    - From general to more specific
    - From factual to more sensitive



# FGD in practice II

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- Recruitment of participants
  - Heterogenous or homogenous groups
    - Homogenous groups often preferred, similar age, sex, socio-economic background, often facilitate free discussions
    - Need several different categories of participants regarding age, sex, urban/rural, poor/not poor
    - e.g. young unmarried/married men, older married men, young unmarried/married women, older married women





# FGD in practice III

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- Selection of participants
  - Likely to express a range of views
  - Purposeful, to get the variation
  - Can be random from a group, if there is no good way of finding out suitable persons
  - Should not be a convenience sample (eg., people easily accessible)



# FGD in practice IV

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- Physical arrangements
  - Should encourage communication and interaction
  - Chose a “neutral” easily accessible place, e.g., temple
  - Avoid disturbances from other people, adequate light, sufficient silence
  - Seating in circle, provide drinks, snacks (not noisy)



# FGD in practice V

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- Conducting the session
  - One moderator
    - Should not act as an expert, but stimulate and support discussions
    - If the moderator is an “expert”, questions may be answered after the session
  - One note taker/recorder
    - Notes what is happening in the group, reactions, feelings and comments from participants
    - Handles the tape-recorder



# FGD in practice VI

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- Consent from participants, after information on topic and procedure
  - May be given in the beginning of the session
- Introduction
  - Of the moderator, note taker/recorder, participants
  - Permission for use of tape-recorder



# FGD in practice VII

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- Encourage discussion
  - Create an unthreatening environment
  - Moderate, listen, observing, analysing
  - Show interest
  - Careful not to make judgements, no right or wrong answers
- Encourage involvement
  - Avoid question and answer session
  - Use, “Can you tell me more about...”, “What about you?”, “What is your view..?”
  - Deal with “Dominating” and “Reluctant” persons



## FGD in practice VIII

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- Build rapport empathise
  - Observe non-verbal communication
  - Handle sensitive issues (write down anonymously)
- Control the timing, but in a subtle way
  - Time allocated to various topics, maintain interest
- At the end, summarise, check for agreement and ask for additional comments



# Number and duration of sessions

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- Duration
  - Typically 1 – 1.5 h
  - Often, the first in each sub-group longer than subsequent
- Number, depends on
  - Project needs, different types of groups, generally at least two groups per sub-group
  - Resources
  - If new information is coming



# Practical session

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- Discussion guide
  - Objective “To explore how people manage (health seeking behaviour, home treatment etc) children under 5 with fever”
- Practice of a FGD
  - Moderator, 1
  - Note taker, 1
  - Tape-recorder, 1
  - Group members, 8
  - Observers, the rest





# Comments on practical session

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- What was easy?
- What was difficult?
- Comments from those with previous experience on



# Brief on analysis

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Time consuming

- Transcribe and check
- Summarise for different topics
  - Code
  - Categories
  - Themes



# Theoretical and philosophical perspectives in analyses

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Examples:

- Grounded theory (Sociology)
- Phenomenology (Philosophy)
- Phenomenography (Pedagogy)
- Ethnography (Anthropology)
- ect



# Brief on Qualitative Content Analysis

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- Read through the transcripts of the discussions several times to obtain the sense of the whole
- Identify meaning units
- Condensed meaning units
- Assign codes
- Identify emerging categories and themes



## Example of meaning units, condensed meaning units and codes

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Meaning unit

*... It is more unpredictable so to say,  
you can never be sure about anything..*

Condensed meaning unit

*An unpredictable and unsure situation*

Code

*Uncertainty*



# Specific issues related to FGD:

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## Consensus and dissent

- What were the contradictions in the discussion?
- What common experiences were expressed?
- What topics produced consensus?
- What statements seemed to evoke conflict?



# Strengths of FGD

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- Can produce much information quickly
- Good for exploring beliefs, attitude, behaviour and concepts in a population
- Can indicate the range of beliefs, attitude, behaviour and concepts in a community
- Useful for identifying relevant and appropriate questions, ideas for individual interviews or questionnaires
- People usually feel comfortable in a FGD



# Weaknesses of FGD

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- The researcher has less control over the flow of discussion as compared to individual interviews
- Hard to analyse
- Because of the discussion, fewer questions can be handled per time unit (on the other it is easier to access more people's views)
- Considerable skill required from the moderator
- Taking notes is difficult and transcribing is difficult and takes time