



<https://ijohs.com/article/doi/10.54531/YAMJ2519>



KEY CONCEPTS
FOCUS GROUPS IN HEALTHCARE SIMULATION

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WHAT

Focus groups are "...group discussions organized to explore a specific set of issues ... The group is focused in the sense that it involves some kind of collective activity... crucially, focus groups are distinguished from the broader category of group interview by the explicit use of the group interaction as research data." [1]



WHY

Focus groups are an increasingly popular method within healthcare simulation for exploring a range of topics including quality assurance & safety within simulation design, clinical skills learning, SP recruitment, training, scenario development and briefing and debriefing [2,3]. Participant interaction and group dynamics contribute to enriching your understanding of a topic.



WHEN

- To explore, understand and explain the meaning making of participants
- To understand the opinions, behaviors, attitudes and perceptions of a participant group
- To apprehend from group discussion 'how' ideas are used, how opinions are formed and how meaning is negotiated in interactions



HOW

DECISIONS

1. Number of participants (between 6- 10). Always invite more attendees than you need because there are always participants who are unable to show up.
2. Group make up (heterogeneous or homogeneous depending on your focus group objective). Consider socio-economic profile, age, education, gender, language...
3. Duration of group; ideally between 1-1.5 hours.
4. Research assistant or second person to take observational notes.
5. Use COREQ Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research [4] as a quality check.



STRATEGIES FOR FOCUS GROUP LEADERS

Introduction: Share the purpose for the focus group, describe procedures. Provide relevant explanations (audio and video recording, presence of research assistant).

Emphasize all opinions are welcome and that there are no good or bad answers. Include follow-up information (Payment? Will they have access to the transcript?). Move from general to specific questions as the focus group progresses.

Probe for reasons for attitudes or ideas and ask them if they can estimate how strongly they feel
Dominating/quiet participants. [5]

Make sure everyone has an opportunity to share their thoughts. Repeat what the one person has said and ask for others' views about the statement.

A questioning approach by the moderator is important to the process of making participants feel valued.



Received: 19 April 2021; Accepted: 19 May 2021; Published: February 2022

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