IMPROVING PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT IN RESEARCH INTERVIEWS: LESSONS FROM THE CONTINUE STUDY

Maureen Shields, MPH1,2; Veronica Fitzpatrick, DrPH, MPH1,2; Anne Rivelli, MPH, MA1,2

1Advocate Aurora Research Institute; 2Advocate Aurora Health

PROBLEM
Interviewing is a common qualitative data collection method that allows in-depth information to be captured. However, logistical challenges such as clinic restrictions, technological barriers due to remote work, or even inclement weather may hinder interview plans for both researchers and subjects.

BACKGROUND
The CONTINUE (cost conversations in routine prenatal care) study, which piloted and documented the effects of implementing a pregnancy support tool in routine OB care, utilized human-centered design (HCD) methods in interviews to enhance participant engagement.

Two of the 3 parts of the CONTINUE study required HCD interviews with pregnant patients. Part 1 focused on tailoring the tool to meet the needs of patients and providers at each site, while Part 3 was the implementation of the intervention.

The original study plan, which was prepared prior to COVID-19, included in-person interactive interviews to obtain qualitative data. The research team encountered many barriers to conducting HCD-centered interviews during the 2-year study including COVID-19, clinic restrictions, and inclement weather.

Keeping the integrity of the HCD methods and continuing to conduct interactive interviews was of utmost importance. These research team implemented workarounds to successfully employ interactive interview methods while still engaging participants.

OBJECTIVE
To describe HCD interview techniques and necessary adaptations to improve participant engagement during research interviews.

METHODS
Semi-structured interviews used during the CONTINUE study employed:
1) A projective activity, which was used to understand how participants were feeling in the moment
2) A pregnancy journey mapping activity, in which participants were asked to document costs and social supports throughout their pregnancy
3) A review of the tool to gauge how it was utilized
4) A benefit card sorting activity, which was an exploration of experiences using the tool

The tool was implemented in 3 clinics, all of which had different rules and restrictions for in-person interviews. The research team adapted these semi-structured interviews to meet the needs of the clinics, but also encountered barriers related to COVID-19 and weather. Participants' comfort levels were also taken into consideration, as pregnant patients are a vulnerable population and we wanted to be especially mindful of that during a pandemic. The following interview options were made available to participants:
• Indoor in-person (only available at Clinic 2),
• Outdoor in-person
• In respective vehicles
• Virtual platforms (Teams, Zoom)

RESULTS
A total of 58 interviews were conducted during parts 1 and 3 of the study. A breakdown of the interview types, number of interviews, and the clinic(s) at which each interview type was available is below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Type</th>
<th>Number of Interviews</th>
<th>Clinic(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indoor in-person (standard)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Clinic 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor in-person</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Clinic 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-car</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Clinic 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Clinics 1, 2, 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Summary of interviews conducted

While most of our interviews (55.2%) did take place in a standard indoor setting, 26 (44.8%) were completed using an alternative method. Adapting to weather, clinic restrictions, and other barriers was crucial.

CONCLUSIONS
Although interactive interview methods are not traditionally applied in medical research, they are effective in improving participant engagement without compromising data quality. When presented with challenges, adaptations to these methods are available as long as researchers are willing to be flexible and creative. The concept of meeting people where they are should be considered when designing prospective studies that include in-person data collection procedures.

Focusing on interactive design principles in research interviews can stimulate and engage participants, providing an opportunity for more compelling findings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
This project is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

The research team would also like to thank our participants for their willingness to participate in these sometimes-unconventional interviews and share with us their experiences of using the pregnancy support tool.

To retain the integrity of the HCD activities, interview packets were created and distributed to participants. All interview activities plus 2 copies of the consent form were included in the packet, which would be dropped off/picked up before and after the interview at a time and place convenient to the participant.

Fig 1. Conducting an outdoor interview at Clinic 1

Fig 2. Conducting an in-car interview at Clinic 1

Fig 3. Interview packet components

Fig 4. Conducting a virtual interview

Fig 5. Card sorting activity during in-person interview