Editorial

Use of activity-oriented questions in qualitative focus group discussions to explore youth violence in Sindh, Pakistan

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Origin of focus group discussions

Focus group discussions are a traditional method of qualitative information collection in a variety of disciplines. By nature, human beings interact in groups with each other on various topics and discuss the topic to share individual opinions on a given topic. Historically, focus group discussions have been used in market research and latter adapted by sociologists as they found great advantage in information from group interactions. Additionally, the focus group discussions yielded more popularity as social scientists doubted individual interviews. Merton and Lazarsfield used focused group discussions in the early 1940s in the Office of Radio Research to conduct researches on mass communication. Until the late 1980s, the method of focus group discussion did not appeal to international researchers as the priority method of data collection for qualitative research (1). However, Morgan and Spanish wrote research papers using focus group discussions which garnered the attention of researchers toward the focus group discussion method of data collection (2). Later focus group discussion was used by many fields outside sociology, including

market research. Despite the popularity of focus group discussions as a data collection method, researchers have not maximized benefit from the method that she reports "being in a group" could make. Focus group discussions are usually conducted in a non-engaging manner, such that a question or probe is asked to a group of participants and the participants respond to the question (3). It is proposed that this process could be changed to better engage the participants with enjoyable activities (3).

Activities to engage participants in focus group discussions

Various activities can make focused group discussions enjoyable for participants as well as facilitators. Moreover, increasing participants' interest in the discussion can enhance the depth and quality of the data. Some of the strategies the authors used were free-listing, ranking, role-playing, drawing, and storytelling (4).

Free-listing

Free-listing is defined as: "A brief, paper-and-pencil technique in which participants make lists of items that they believe belong in a particular domain" (5, 6). We used free-listing to explore perceptions of youth violence among grade 6 to 8 students in Hyderabad and Thatta Pakistan.

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Students were asked to enlist violence-related problems they face while coming to school, during the school day, and in the community. All responses from students were listed on chart paper and helped the researchers form a link between causes, sites, and consequences of youth violence. Figure 1 is an example of free-listing done on a chart paper by participants.
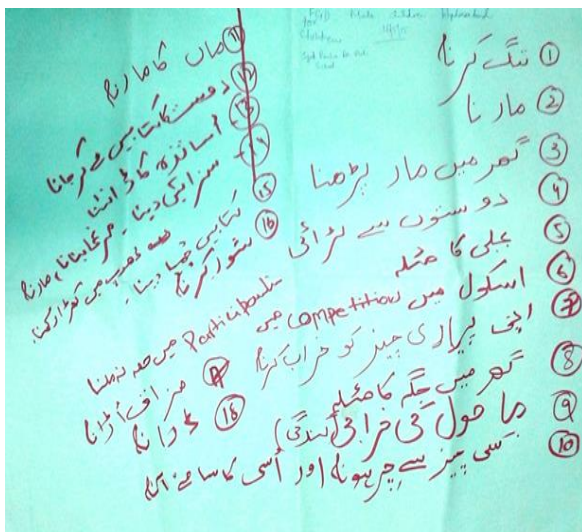

Figure 1. An example of free-listing done on a chart paper by participants

Translation of free listing exercise done with participants when asked about the problems they face

1. Teasing
2. Beating
3. Punishments at home
4. Fight with others
5. Electricity problems
6. Lack of opportunity to participate in school competition
7. Seeing your precious thing spoiled by others
8. Space issue at home
9. Environmental pollution
10. Being annoyed by something and the same thing appearing in front of you again
11. Punishment by mother
12. Friends lending notebooks
13. Being scolded by teachers
14. Punishment to stand under the sun
15. Hiding notebooks of students
16. Noise pollution
17. Making fun of others
18. Making others afraid

Ranking

This activity, as the name suggests, asks participants to hierarchically rank comments of the participants (6). In our qualitative study on youth experiences with violence, we asked youth to rank their responses.

For examples, as the free-listing exercise was completed and youth listed the sites of violence they experienced, such as home, school, the streets, so they were also asked to share which were the most common sites of violence. In this way, priority sites of violence were selected by the youth participants. A similar exercise was done with teachers when their perspectives on youth violence were explored. When the teachers were asked to share causes of youth violence, they were asked to enlist the causes and then rank the causes hierarchically according to which they think are the most important causes of youth violence.

Drawing

To use drawings, participants are asked to sketch a violent situation. For example, in our study to explore youth violence, students were asked to make a drawing that depicts a violence problem they have experienced as students. Students made a variety of different drawings about violence. This drawing exercise may not give 100% focused responses and may need to be combined with another activity. Drawing is an activity that can engage adolescents in a non-verbal arts-based method (7). Figure 2 is an example of a diagram drawn by the participant, depicting youth violence.
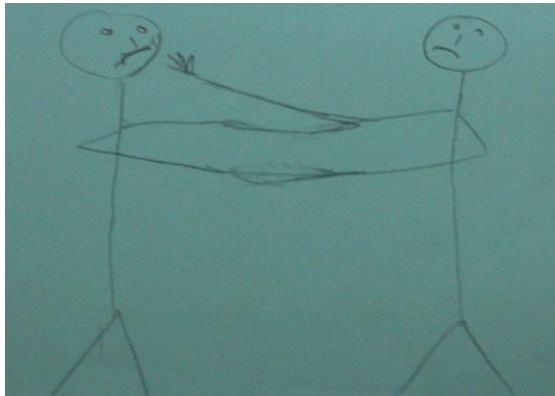
Figure 2. A drawing by a female student depicting youth violence

Story-telling

For storytelling, participants are asked to share an incident or a story about their experiences with violence (8, 9). Storytelling was followed by the drawing activity in our study to enable group discussion of youth violence. For example, one student drew two siblings fighting at home. The drawing was shown to all the focus group participants, and then students were asked to express their opinions and feelings about the drawing. When one student pointed out that the two siblings in the drawing are fighting, the facilitator then asked the participants to share their stories about experiencing violence in a similar situation. This discussion became rich as different participants raised their hands to share their experiences of violence by siblings. Students shared similar stories about harassment on the way to school, peer-victimization at school, and corporal punishment.

Role-playing

Role-playing offers participants to express their experiences about the incidence, for instance: violence without saying a lot of words (10). In our study, male students appeared more comfortable in role-playing to show how older boys or boys from superior class display violence, such as violence, younger boys. Roleplay was

enjoyed by all participants of focus group discussion and youth acted out different types of violence that occur at school. The following is an example of a student's role play in which a boy acted as he belongs to a superior caste and he can perpetrate violence on others, narrated as verbatim:

"Boy 1: Will you beat me? You come outside; I will show you who I am. You are nothing in front of me. You know how many friends I have. All those sitting here are mine [my friends]. I am a comrade and you cannot do anything to me. I will beat you; my punch is such that you will fly. (Boys laughing).

Boy 2: I will tell to the teacher.

Boy 1: Teacher will also not do anything to me. Come, go tell Sir.

Boy 2: Sir, he is beating me.

Boy 1: Sir, will you beat me?

Sir: Why do you harass him?

Boy 1: Sir, he is trying to be superior to me, Sir. Sir, let him come outside. I will show him.

Sir: Are you elder or younger? You should respect it.

Boy 1: Sir, it is not a matter of elder or younger. It is not because of height/tallness. We are [superior] due to our caste (zaat). Brohi caste is superior to others. I am much superior to him (bahut bara hoon).

Sir: Now what do we do with him? (All laughed). You both hug each other.

Boy 1: I hug him? He does not even wash his clothes. Why should I hug him?"

Analysis of data from activities-oriented group discussions

From free-listing of responses, all charts were transcribed and entered in the analysis software of NVio version 10. Similarly, NVivo allows extracting codes from images, so all drawings drawn by boys and girls were coded in the software. All the pictures

drawn from the group activities were scanned and put in analysis software. The discussions of the participants describing the pictures were transcribed as verbatim. Role-plays and stories were also coded as verbatim. The voices of youth about types of violence, sites of violence, causes of violence, and consequences of violence were then coded. These codes were generated from different sources such as codes from images, codes from free listing exercise, codes from ranking exercise, codes from role-play verbatim, and codes from storytelling. When all open codes were formed, these codes were merged into categories and themes were extracted. Lastly, models were generated by using parent and child codes in NVivo. Figure 3 is an example of illustrations extracted from NVivo, which links all codes related to problems faced by children. Figure 4 is an example if illustration extracted from NVivo, which enlists all causes of violence started by children.
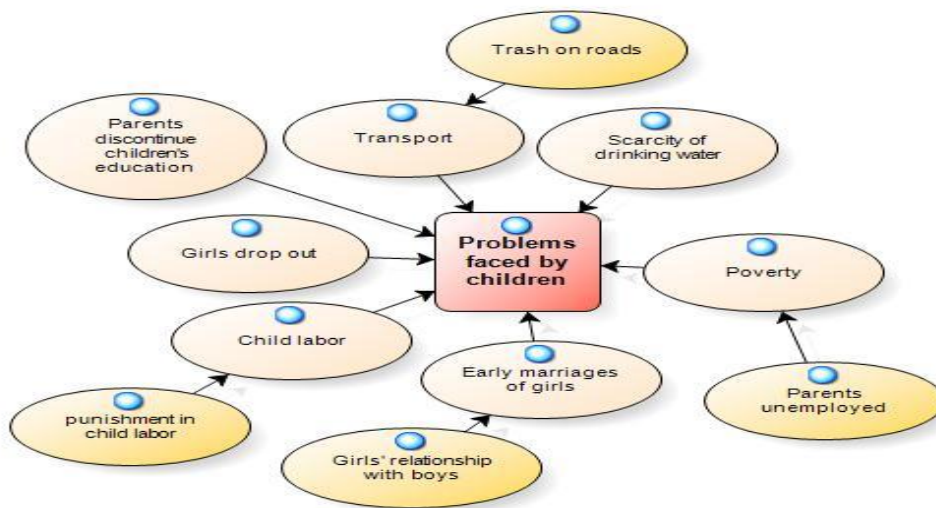

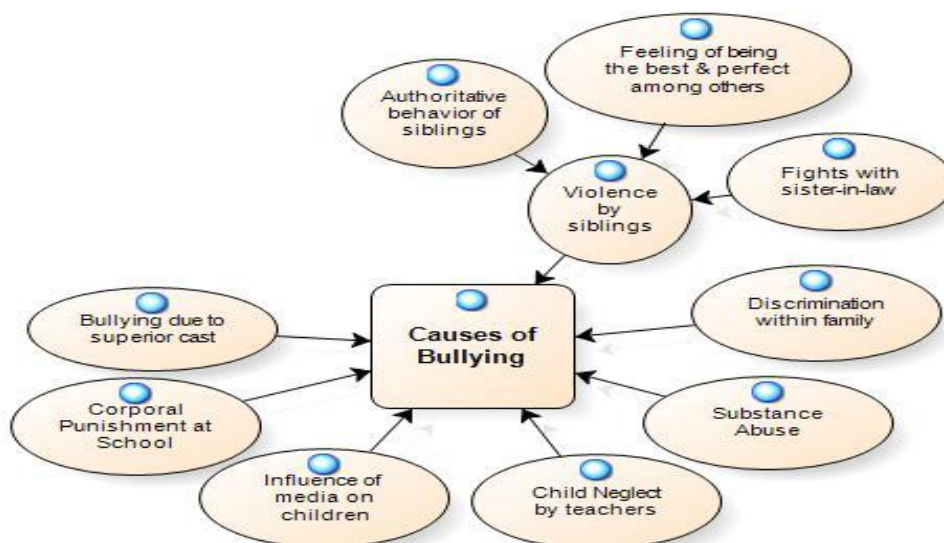**Figure 3.** Problems stated by children in Hyderabad and Thatta

Figure 4. Causes of violence as stated by children in Hyderabad and Thatta

Conclusion

This paper highlights the significance of engaging participants in focus group discussions through additional engaging activities. The data collected through these activity-oriented questions may generate more data than the conventional way of asking questions from participants. These activities merit further testing and consideration of use.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interest

None of the authors have a conflict of interest regarding any financial and personal relationships with other people or organizations that could inappropriately influence (bias) their work.

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