

FOCAL GROUP UTILIZATION AS DATA GATHERING TECHNIC TO RESEARCHES: EXPERIENCE REPORT¹

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ABSTRACT

The focus group constitutes one important technique of data collection in qualitative research. It aims to report the experience of using focus group as a technique for data collection on the issue of sexuality, with students from the undergraduate nursing course. It is a qualitative research. The subjects were 14 students an undergraduate nursing course at a public university of Rio Grande do Sul. Data were collected through focus group technique and interpretation with thematic analysis. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee in Research. Using focus groups as a technique for data collection to address the issue of sexuality, constituted itself as a challenging experience. This technique enabled instill new knowledge on the topic of sexuality in the academic education of nurses and rethink attitudes, perceptions and practices of care. From the establishment of an enabling environment and not embarrassing, it is believed that it was possible to express the perceptions, values, beliefs and attitudes about sexuality culturally constructed.

Keywords: Sexuality. Nursing Students. Nursing. Focus Groups.

INTRODUCTION

It is presented in this article the data collection method used in a dissertation that aimed to understand how sexuality, culturally conditioned, is understood and experienced by nursing students. The technique used was the focus group, which finds resonance in studies that propose to investigate a topic in depth through a collective approach, providing opportunities for moments of interaction and debate on a specific group⁽¹⁾.

This technique values the group interaction to generate data in order that people are encouraged to talk about experiences and views on a given theme⁽²⁾. Group discussions allow participants to exchange, agree or disagree about opinions, attitudes and experiences, thus becoming a valuable resource to explore some issues investigated or sensitive topics⁽³⁾.

Focus groups can offer several possibilities that go beyond the condition of strategy to only collect data, constituting real intervention devices because they enable discussions and preparation of group strategies to solve problems

and transform realities, and they are based on learning and exchange experience on a matter under study⁽¹⁾.

It is emphasized that the development of the focus group technique requires knowledge of various aspects, among which the subject domain discussed, the clarity of the research subjects and the focus group technique, and concern for the environment and organization of critical and reflective capacity of the moderator and observer. It is considered that this data collection technique contributes to the growth of the emotional members, especially with respect to reasoning capabilities theory, creation and production staff⁽⁴⁾.

The decision to dispose this technique with the nursing students is justified by the understanding that it favors, by valuing the group interaction, think collectively about the topic under study and generate original ideas for care. It is noteworthy that, in most cases, there are no spaces for reflection dealing with the sexuality of the students, the subjects cared and professors⁽⁵⁾. So, the study⁽⁶⁾ recommends that undergraduate courses address in more depth and detail the contents involving the theme, with

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a view that is noticeable its superficiality.

Thus, this article aims at describing the use of focus group as data collection technique on the issue of sexuality, along with students from an undergraduate degree in nursing.

METHODOLOGY

The study consists of an experience report on the use of focus group as data collection technique on the issue of sexuality. The research⁽⁴⁾ which gave rise to this article opted for qualitative approach, descriptive type.

. The subjects were 14 students of both genders, male and female, aged between 19 and 23 years-old, and an undergraduate course in Nursing at a public university, in Rio Grande do Sul. The inclusion criteria were used: students of nursing at the institution where the study was conducted, who were attending in the period of data collection, from the third to the eighth semester. The academic period chosen is justified according to the integration of academics in practical activities of this course. Nursing students who were not included in the semesters mentioned above, during that period, were excluded from the study.

The group composition considered common traits (nursing students from the same educational institution, and to experience practical lessons in the course) that united the participants, but with enough variation between them (11 women and three men) to allow different and divergent views on the theme⁽²⁾.

Data were collected in 2009 through the focus group technique. Three meetings with focus groups were developed and attended by the study subjects, a moderator and an observer. It is noteworthy that the moderator needs to be a facilitator of debate; to conduct the opening up of the focus group; to provide information about the meeting; to promote the introduction of the participants; to clarify the discussion dynamics; to encourage different opinions; to clarify the ethical aspects of research; to propose questions for debate and drive it; to synthesize the previous times and ending the session⁽⁷⁾. The observer records what happens in the group; assists in driving

session; collaborates with the moderator to control the time and monitoring of the recording equipment; and at the end of the session, contributes with his opinion⁽⁷⁾.

In order to implement the dynamics of meetings or group sessions (in this article they will be used synonymously) guides themes have been elaborated, according to the research purposes. Themes guides are in a script that contains a brief list of guiding and motivating questions to provoke group discussion⁽⁸⁾.

The place of the sessions was a room, courtesy of Department of Nursing, which included the arrangement of seats in circular form, in order to promote participation and provide a good interaction face to face. It is important that the environment where the group develops is welcoming and ensure privacy and security for the participants, so that the good performance of the discussions is valued⁽⁹⁾. In view of this, the moderator and observer occupied places that enabled the non-verbal communication, and avoided seats that attribute idea of control or prestige of the group.

The meetings lasted on average two hours to avoid damages due to fatigue and mental strain. It should be noted that at the end of each meeting, the moderator and observer were gathered in order to carry out an assessment on how the meeting went. This allowed the exchange of views on the performance of both and the group.

The ethical principles of Resolution 196/96, applied during the period of conducting the research, of the National Health Council, were observed. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the institution which was bound under the Protocol 23081.018415/2008-48, and the Presentation Certificate Assessment Ethics CAAE 0024.0.243.000-08. The insertion of research participants occurred by signing the Terms of Free and Informed Consent.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The focus group is appropriate for qualitative researches which aim at exploring a focus, i. e., a point in special⁽¹⁰⁾. In this sense, each meeting should have a specific purpose, i. e., to focus in an idea about the studied theme, by using guiding questions and techniques of stimulus

appropriate for talking about each objective, as described next.

The first focus group session aimed to investigate the meanings and perceptions of sexuality and discuss the cultural construction of sexuality of each student. At that time, it was possible to encounter several new elements related to the group, the recording, the roles of moderator and observer, and the environment, aspects that generated anxieties, but which are common in the initial moment of a group. That day was attended by all the participants, 14 students. This meeting was organized in four stages.

Initially, we welcomed them, and presentations between students and researchers have been made; we distributed badges and identification cards for the participants; it was explained about the objectives and aims of the research and focus group technique; we read the Terms of Consent and they signed it, and then it was allowed the record with digital recorder. Basic rules of group living were established, such as punctuality and attendance at meetings, respect for the other's speech and confidentiality of information brought by the group. It is considered that this mutual commitment was essential for a good interactive process in the meetings. It was explained that the personal experience of each person was important that there were no right or wrong ideas about the subject and we were not seeking consensus, therefore there is a significant contribution of students in discussions. It was agreed that each one should speak each time, for proper recording.

In continuation of this meeting, it was investigated meanings and perceptions of sexuality, and, for this, the brainstorming technique was used which is suitable to the field of social research because it allows discussing new concepts⁽¹¹⁾. In this technique, the session begins when each participant write their idea, with few words, and presents it to the group; and it ends when everyone, together, analyzes and assesses the collective production⁽¹¹⁾. Therefore, we applied the following question: "What is the first idea that comes to mind when we talk about sexuality?" To clarify the ideas and deepen the discussions

launched by the group, key questions were used, namely: "What for?" "What?", "Why?", "How?", by asking to students for exemplifying their ideas. The brainstorming technique was suitable for this moment since it promoted critical thinking and the emergence of new and original ideas, stimulating group discussion.

After this time, there was a discussion about how sexuality was culturally constructed in the students' lives. We used the following question: "How have you seen your family background influencing the conception of sexuality you have presented?". It was used also, to deepen and clarify the lines, the following issues of support: "How were issues related to sexuality in family life treated on your childhood and adolescence?"; "How were the conduct, guidelines and controls for males and for females on issues related to sexuality in your family?"; "Were they conducted in the same way or there were differences?"; and "Did ethnic origin and religion exercise some influence on these pipes, guidance and control?".

To end the first focus group session, there was a synthesis of the meeting by the moderator; participants expressed or explained any more idea in the discussion; a self-assessment was carried out about the feelings and sensations promoted in this session. Finally, it was planned the next meeting; final thanks and a fellowship were made. This fourth moment was repeated in all group sessions.

It was noticed at the end of the first session of the focus group that an intragroup interaction process already have established, in which comments were emerging about the opinion of others. The focus group is subject to social interaction and should be used with awareness of their advantages and limitations⁽¹¹⁾. This interaction process in this meeting has been provided by quiet and pleasant environment in which the participants ended up at the same time talking about their opinions. It was observed committed participation and a productive group discussion, which led to the revelation of meaning culturally constructed on the theme,

acceptance and negotiation of different ideas, and the search for a group tone, exercising living with cultural diversity.

The second focus group session aimed to reveal the feelings and identify the coping attitudes of students in relation to this theme in nursing care. During that occasion, 13 students attended, and the fault was justified by the researcher. This meeting took place in three group sessions, as described below.

It began with a brief presentation of previous session results of focus group, it allowed the participants clarify positions and foregoing ideas; and explained to the objectives and the dynamics to be used at this meeting.

Following, as a strategy to generate discussion, three vignettes were used to reveal the feelings and identify students' coping attitudes in each situation presented. They were prepared according to situations experienced in practical classes of nursing students. The vignettes were the following questions: "How would you feel (emotions, prejudices, taboos) in this situation?"; "How would you react in this situation?"; "In what situations/moments do you realize that sexuality is revealed in your daily live as a nursing student?". These questions have provided the revelation of different feelings, emotions, taboos, prejudices and attitudes inherent in everyday situations involving sexuality in nursing care.

To end this meeting, a summary of the meeting was made by the moderator; a moment for students add and clarify their ideas was provided. It was also held an assessment about the feelings and sensations promoted in this session, planned the following meeting, and then the final thanks and fraternization happened.

During the second focal meeting it was realized a better relationship among the participants and less anxiety, which favored for a less individual embarrassment and more respect to the other's speech. The experience of articulation of differences, misunderstandings, disagreements and difficulties of mutual understanding with respect to what was said were present at this

meeting, in which the moderator encouraged students to theorize about these differences.

The third focus group session aimed to discuss how the issues of sexuality have been conducted in the nursing course, seeking to propose strategies that promote this course continuing. Another purpose of the meeting was to collectively build a concept of sexuality. In this group session, there was an absence justified for the researcher. This meeting included four stages which will be described below.

First, the results were taken from the previous focal session and explained the objectives and the stimulation technique to be used for discussion at the meeting. And then, it was discussed how the issue of sexuality has been conducted in the nursing course. For this, some questions reinforced the debate, for example: "In nursing course have you received guidance on issues related to sexuality?"; "How are the issues of sexuality conducted in theoretical and practical classes of this course?"; "At what times of the academic formation are such issues addressed?"; and "What is the best way to approach sexuality in the nursing course?".

Following the meeting, we sought the collective construction of the concept of sexuality, using the modeling technique in clay, for participants to represent their perceptions. Participants were divided into two groups consisting of distinct semesters, so that together to prepare and submit their construct the group. This technique was motivated by the question: "From the reflections that emerged in meetings, what is the meaning of sexuality to the group?". It is believed that this space enables the relaxation and interaction of the group, it was also indicative of the creativity and the ability of participants to negotiate ideas and build a collective work.

As this is the last meeting, the closing was made an assessment of the meetings and the contributions of this study to better understand sexuality in academic nursing education and nursing care.

Students considered important this experience to broaden discussions about sexuality in academic nursing education, the

opportunity to exchange ideas and know the technique of the focus group. In addition, they said it was possible to establish moments of trust among the group, whereby to socialize their experiences which provided a pleasant environment for discussions.

It should be noted, among the difficulties in implementing this technique at the time of the first focus group, the presence of silent and timid postures. This initial attitude of silence came even for fear of negative judgment by other students. After clarifying that the personal experience of each member of the group is important and unique, that there are not right or wrong ideas on the subject and there was not search for consensus, there was a significant contribution of students until those ones who were in silence.

In sequent meetings, from the approach of experience and the establishment of group interaction, enabled by the first meeting, it was observed that the students interacted with spontaneity. It is still perceived an environment of respect, trust, sharing ideas and opinions, expression of own experiences, understanding, relaxation and committed participation of everyone.

With regard to the factors that favored the creation of the focus group, the preparation of each meeting, in accordance with the purpose and the methodology that would be used, was very important. It took some care that permeated all sessions, as previously scheduled of the place, room preparation, burner maintenance, selection and advance preparation of the specific material for each meeting, and organization of the environment. Another important factor concerns the formation of a circle, allowing the face to face interactions, good eye contact, and also to maintain equal distances between all participants.

Besides these aspects, the room location allowed the meetings to develop without outside interference. It is essential the care to predict the physical space to carry out the group, as it facilitated the debate, assured privacy, comfort, easy access and neutral environment. Moreover, although the groups were focused on the subject of sexuality, each

meeting had a specific goal, that is, focused on a perspective on the theme. Therefore, we chose to employ techniques commonly used in educational workshops, including the explosion of ideas, vignettes and clay modeling. We used these funds seeking to encourage the development of the theme, which is veiled; it is difficult to be expressed verbally.

Based on these, it is agreed in the study⁽¹²⁾ that the focus group needs organization and planning, since it has a direct impact on the results of the collected data, because when the method is used appropriately to obtain the data, it will have greater reliability.

CONCLUSION

This experience with the technique of focus group has confirmed the need for careful planning for its optimization in building research data. The researcher needs to engage thoroughly at every stage of operation of the focus group, and to be very attentive to the discussions and debates undertaken in group sessions.

This data collection technique consisted of a challenging experience, in that it led us to unknown ways, because despite the readings that provided the theoretical subsidy about it, we faced unique situations. Participants imposed their rhythms and their psychological and intellectual characteristics, which required ability to create and implement what is written in the literature.

As the meetings progressed, from the establishment of an enabling environment and not embarrassing, it is believed that it was possible the expression of perceptions, values, beliefs and attitudes about sexuality culturally constructed, and a more critical experience and innovative and less repetitive participants.

Furthermore, it did not aim with this study to exhaust the topic being considered important new perspectives on it. Among the challenges of this technique, there is the maintenance of discussion on the subject in focus, requiring skill and attention to revisit the issue. This is a risk that can happen in this technique, because the control of the focus

group is shared between the researcher (moderator) and participants. It is believed that the focus group is a driving strategy for

building data in qualitative research in nursing, involving the issue of sexuality in different care settings.

UTILIZAÇÃO DO GRUPO FOCAL COMO TÉCNICA DE COLETA DE DADOS EM PESQUISAS: RELATO DE EXPERIÊNCIA

RESUMO

O grupo focal se constitui em uma importante técnica de coleta de dados em pesquisas qualitativas. Objetiva-se relatar a experiência da utilização do grupo focal como técnica de coleta de dados acerca da questão da sexualidade, junto a estudantes de um curso de graduação em enfermagem. Trata-se de uma pesquisa qualitativa. O estudo foi realizado com 14 estudantes de um Curso de Graduação em Enfermagem de uma universidade pública do Rio Grande do Sul. Os dados foram coletados pela técnica do grupo focal e para interpretação foi aplicada a análise temática. A pesquisa foi aprovada pelo Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa da instituição a qual estava vinculada. A utilização de grupos focais como técnica de coleta de dados para tratar da questão da sexualidade se constituiu em uma experiência desafiadora. Esta técnica possibilitou instigar novos saberes sobre o tema da sexualidade na formação acadêmica do enfermeiro e repensar atitudes, concepções e práticas de cuidado. A partir do estabelecimento de um ambiente permissivo e não constrangedor, acredita-se que tenha sido possível a expressão das percepções, valores, crenças e atitudes construídas culturalmente acerca da sexualidade.

Palavras-chave: Sexualidade. Estudantes de Enfermagem. Enfermagem. Grupos Focais.

EL USO DEL GRUPO FOCAL COMO TECNICA DE RECOLECTA DE DATOS EN INVESTIGACIONES: RELATO DE EXPERIENCIA

RESUMEN

El grupo focal se constituye en una técnica importante de la recopilación de datos en investigaciones cualitativas. Tiene el objetivo de relatar la experiencia de la utilización del grupo focal como técnica de recolección de datos acerca de la cuestión de la sexualidad, junto a estudiantes de un curso de pregrado de enfermería. Se trata de una investigación cualitativa. El estudio fue realizado con 14 estudiantes de un Curso de Pregrado en Enfermería de una universidad pública de Rio Grande do Sul. Los datos fueron recolectados a través de la técnica de grupo focal y para la interpretación fue aplicado el análisis temático. La investigación fue aprobada por el Comité de Ética en Investigación de la institución a la cual está vinculada. El uso de grupos focales como técnica de recopilación de datos para enfocar el tema de la sexualidad se constituyó en una experiencia desafiadora. Esta técnica permitió infundir nuevos conocimientos sobre el tema de la sexualidad en la educación académica de los enfermeros y repensar actitudes, percepciones y prácticas de cuidado. Desde el establecimiento de un entorno tolerante y no constrictivo, se cree que haya sido posible expresar las percepciones, valores, creencias y actitudes construidas culturalmente sobre la sexualidad.

Palabras clave: Sexualidad. Estudiantes de Enfermería. Enfermería. Grupos Focales.

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