



Journal of Nursing

Revista de Enfermagem

UFPE On Line

ISSN: 1981-8963

CASE REPORT ARTICLE

CAPACITATION OF INTERVIEWERS FOR DATA PRODUCTION: CASE STUDIES WITH COMMUNITY HEALTH AGENTS

CAPACITAÇÃO DE ENTREVISTADORES NA PRODUÇÃO DE DADOS: RELATO DE EXPERIÊNCIA COM AGENTES COMUNITÁRIOS DE SAÚDE

CAPACITACIÓN DE ENTREVISTADORES EN LA PRODUCCIÓN DE DATOS: RELATO DE EXPERIENCIA CON AGENTES COMUNITARIOS DE SALUD

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to report the experience about the training of Community Health Agents (ACSs) as interviewers in a research project conducted at Salto da Divisa/MG to meet the requirements of an academic master degree program. **Method:** this was a descriptive case report study based on the use of strategic and educational resources targeting the addressed issues involved in data production. **Results:** the training proposed allowed assessing and intervening in the conduct of interviewers as efficient interviewers for the generated data. The cross-sectional contents were worked in two steps, interspersed by moments of discussion and practice about the theme. **Conclusion:** the relevance of the used strategy was observed through the notorious evolution of ACSs' behaviors as interviewers in a research project considering the limitations observed initially, which resulted in the optimization of time and data production with increased rigor and quality. In addition, the training contributed to the qualification of these health workers. **Descriptors:** Community Health Agents; Research on Health Services; Public Health; On the job training.

RESUMO

Objetivo: relatar a experiência acerca do treinamento de Agentes Comunitários de Saúde (ACS) como entrevistadores de um projeto de pesquisa realizado em Salto da Divisa/MG, atendendo as exigências de um programa de mestrado acadêmico. **Método:** estudo descritivo, tipo relato de experiência, calcado no uso de recursos estratégicos e pedagógicos voltados para a problematização das questões abordadas para produção de dados. **Resultados:** a proposta de treinamento permitiu avaliar e intervir na conduta desses enquanto entrevistadores eficientes para os dados gerados. Trabalharam-se conteúdos transversalmente em duas etapas, intercalados por momentos de discussão e prática acerca da temática. **Conclusão:** foi observada a relevância da estratégia utilizada, vez que foi notória a evolução do comportamento dos ACS enquanto entrevistadores de projeto de pesquisa, a considerar as limitações encontradas inicialmente observadas, o que proporcionou a otimização do tempo de produção dos dados, bem como maior rigor, qualidade na obtenção dos dados, além da contribuição para a qualificação desses trabalhadores de saúde. **Descritores:** Agentes Comunitários de Saúde; Pesquisa sobre Serviços de Saúde; Saúde Pública; Capacitação em Serviço.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: relatar la experiencia acerca del entrenamiento de Agentes Comunitarios de Salud (ACS) como entrevistadores de un proyecto de investigación realizado en Salto de la Divisa/MG, atendiendo las exigencias de un programa de maestría académica. **Método:** estudio descriptivo, tipo relato de experiencia, utilizado en recursos estratégicos y pedagógicos dirigidos para la problematización de cuestiones abordadas para la producción de datos. **Resultados:** la propuesta del entrenamiento permitió evaluar e intervenir en la conducta de éstos como entrevistadores eficientes para los datos generados. Se trabajaron contenidos transversalmente en dos etapas, intercaladas por momentos de discusión y práctica acerca de la temática. **Conclusión:** fue observada la relevancia de la estrategia utilizada, una vez que fue notoria la evolución del comportamiento de los ACS como entrevistadores del proyecto de investigación, considerando las limitaciones encontradas inicialmente observadas, lo que proporcionó la optimización del tiempo de producción de los datos, además de contribuir para la calificación de esos trabajadores de salud.

Descriptores: Agentes Comunitarios de Salud; investigación sobre Servicios de Salud; Salud Pública; Capacitación en Servicio.

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INTRODUCTION

Every person who teaches has a learning theory that can be based on others or his own beliefs and values; all actions of an educator are oriented according to his worldview, goals to be achieved, and conception of education. Thus, when obtaining knowledge about the various pedagogical and evaluative existing trends, the educator may choose one that effectively fit his intentions, and better contribute to learning.¹

The scientific research plays a role of basic function in the production of information and formation of knowledge, however, to have useful and significant elements in order to contribute to the investigated object, it requires specific planning and complex approaches to strategies for its implementation.

Data generation is a basic and vital step for any scientific research project. A solid and accurate production of data allows exposing results that support relevant discussions, allowing significant actions in scientific and social fields. From this perspective, it is possible to affirm that data production is the *research* itself, consists in the process of surveying the necessary information for the resolution of a pointed problem(s), and indication of the means to achieve the proposed objectives and validation of hypotheses.²

The basement on good pedagogical strategies is key to achieving the proposed investigative action in the search for better strategies to improve the process of subject/object interaction. Based on these resources, capacitation building is an interesting didactic strategy that aims to allow the construction of knowledge through the contextualization of individuals about a particular subject, being increasingly applied to produce specific information regarding the limitations and challenges in research, in particular those population-based studies that have specific groups and require particular approaches for a productive interview.³

From the perspective that the training and standardization of researchers is necessary for obtaining data from population-based studies, this study aims to relate the strategies and experiments experienced by one graduate student during the qualification and training of Community Health Agents (ACSs) to become interviewers for data collection in a population-based scientific research.

MÉTHOD

This was a descriptive case report study about the training of 18 ACSs to act as interviewers for the production of data in a research project that generated a dissertation for the Nursing and Health Graduate Program at the Southwestern Bahia State University (UESB). The training of ACSs occurred in the first half of 2013, and the research project that was the basis for this proposal was entitled *Population-based study between social conditions and self-esteem in co-residing mining elderly*.⁴

The minimum inclusion criteria to participate in the training were being registered in the scope of the municipality; being familiar with their respective micro-areas of work; and being available for at least 8 hours per week for data production.

The research project was planned so that data production occurred during the period from February to March of 2013. During this period, ACSs should identify and interview all elderly people residing in rural and urban zones, in domiciles linked to (3) three Family Health Strategies (ESF) existing in Salto da Divisa, which is a small municipality located in the extreme north of Minas Gerais State.

The basis of the most adequate Brazilian pedagogical trends was used in the development of the training workshops, such as *Non-directive renewal*, *Social-Critique of contents*, and *Progressive Renewal* to ensure increased quality and confidence of interviewers for the process of data production.⁵⁻⁶ Another used resource was based on the publication 'Techniques for the evaluation of Efficiency, Efficacy, and Effectiveness, the 3 "Es" as proposed by Sano and Montenegro Filho.⁷

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The project executing team and collaborators faced a variety of challenges in the proposal to host a scientific research in the selected municipality, whether with regard to the number of subjects who would be interviewed, the heterogeneity of the socio-demographic and cultural characteristics of the elderlies, structural problems in the basic attention services, and perhaps one of the most ambitious goals in the research that was based on the training of interviewers who had been selected in their own municipality. These individuals should be carefully trained to minimize operational, intellectual, and financial resources without losing the project's effectiveness.

After sensitizing municipal managers (Mayor and Secretaries of Health and Social Services) about the relevance of the development of this scientific research at the local level, a partnership was proposed between the institutions to recruit ACSs as interviewers among those who have already acted in all existing ESFs. The researchers chose these health workers from Salto da Divisa-MG because they carry out, among other functions, the close and continued follow-up with families acting as an important source of data collection at the municipal level.

According to Silva and Rodrigues⁸, the ACS is the health worker who most closely deals with the social problems that affect health; the authors add that this worker "is regarded as the key element of the system in primary health care, a link between the community and the services". This established behavior towards the community promoted a sense of confidence in the approach of the participant during the interviews, allowing both optimization of time and greater information accuracy.

All ACSs from the municipality had up to high school level of education, which could undermine the applicability of the proposed research instruments since these are used by institutions of higher education. Although these workers adopt an investigative conduct during their activities, they lacked the scientific parameters such as behavioral strategies inherent in the interview process. Therefore, training was proposed for all ACSs, performed in a space offered by the city of Salto da Divisa - Minas Gerais in which theoretical and practical tools necessary for execution of the proposed project could be addressed.

In order to encourage participation and involvement of ACSs, a formal invitation was placed in the three (3) ESFs that compose the municipality in which the research was identified and exposed briefly, emphasizing the originality of this type of study in the region as well as the responsibility involved and the schedule of the proposed training.

The meetings were divided into two phases; the first advocated the preparation for application of a *Pilot Study* defined by Mackey and Glass⁹ as:

[...] a small scale test of procedures, materials, and methods proposed for a particular research, i.e., it is a mini version of the complete study, which involves the completion of all procedures predicted in the methodology in order to allow change/improvement of the instruments in the phase that precedes the investigation itself.

It is possible to affirm that this test is of fundamental importance to the establishment of population-based research in order to obtain increased study reliability and minimize common errors during the process of data collection (Figure 1).

The pilot study was conducted with six (6) ACSs from one of the ESFs. Previously, theoretical-practical workshops were performed to empower them through hierarchical thematic approaches that departed from the general aspects of aging. Thus, the purposes of the study and instruments to be employed were presented to these ACSs emphasizing their relevance to meet the objectives proposed in the study. A total of 12 hours were required in the process of training, eight (8) hours for the theoretical basis and four (4) hours for the simulation of interviews.

During the interviews in the pilot study, the responsible researcher recorded in a field journal all observations about the process of data collection. The information contained in the field journal and data obtained in the interviews were subsequently analyzed, presented, and discussed in the research group. At the end of this stage, the need to rethink the proposed strategies for the training of ACSs and the data collection instruments were identified in order to elevate the standard of quality of the project.



Figure 1. Interviewer after training, performing a *pilot test* for further data collection in the community of Salto da Divisa, MG - 2013.

In this first theoretical/practical moment, we could predict the challenge of involving and even arousing interest on the part of ACSs in performing a research project of scientific proportionality based on level of education, lack of experience, and issues related to low returns from previous research projects conducted in the community that hampered the understanding and commitment to the scientific research.

Important limitations were pointed out after the test phase, which included the non-recognition by the interviewer as co-responsible for the good conduct of the project, their conduct when facing unexpected behavior in participants, such as refusal or not-understanding the goals of the project, unwanted participation of relatives during the approaches, and the length and other factors related to the interview dynamics. These factors were linked to immaturity and lack of confidence in the interviewers, behaviors that needed to be reviewed because they could put the quality and accuracy of the information at risk.

Necessary adjustments for the production of research data were proposed based on evaluative strategic resources such as using the 3 *Es* (Efficiency, Efficacy, and Effectiveness) because according to Frey,¹⁰ evaluation is indispensable for the development and continuous adaptation of forms and instruments of action. In addition, in order to restructure the entire training process, we sought to substantiate didactic-pedagogical principles based on the following theories: Non-directive renewal, Social-Critique of contents, and Progressive Renewal, which were more suitable for the achievement of the goal established for training.¹¹

To readjust the training process, the proposal was revised to include greater

workload and the provision of more time for training with instruments. The training was extended to 24 hours including 50% of this time for the theoretical approach and 50% for the practical training.

Learning through the production of knowledge was based on the following pedagogical trends:

The non-directive renewal approach (or New School)-The focus in the workshop was advocated in this approach, during the entire execution, in the figure of the ACS and its nuances such as his role as a vital agent for community relations/health services. The training went on to present the formation of attitudes based on the work already developed by them, as proposed, focusing more on the psychological dimension because the learning was significantly linked to their perceptions, in order to clear them.

Critical-social contents approach - This approach was concerned on accentuating the priority to focus on contents and confronting them with the social realities of aging in the researched municipality, in the Jequitinhonha Valley regions in Minas Gerais and Brazil; therefore it is necessary to emphasize the historical knowledge and biological aspects of the elderly. In addition, we were concerned about preparing ACSs to act as interviewers in the community, through an organized and active participation in the implementation of the research project, through the acquisition of knowledge and autonomy of their tasks, allowing the construction of knowledge through personal and subjective experience.

Progressive Renewal Approach - This approach was characterized by the centralization in benefitted subjects, considering them as active and curious beings and based on the idea that he will only learn by doing, valuing experimental attempts, research, and the discovery in the study of the

natural and social environment. This moment was destined to practice using the research instruments that could simulate the reality to be investigated.

The points that were indispensable for the contextualization of the interviewers about the theme of the research project were exposed in the theoretical approach. These points were: *The process of aging: Challenges and perspectives for society; The demographic Panorama of the aging population; The importance of sociodemographic indicators for actions in the health of the elderly; The role of the scientific research, planning strategies; Presentation of the research project: Factors associated with self-esteem among elderly who co-reside in the municipality of Salto da Divisa/MG*, totaling 8 hours.

On the second day of training, the presentation in an operational sense of the following key themes was conducted: *The conduct of the interviewer in addressing the elderly person; Reports of the experiences of ACSs' who had participated in the pilot study; Presentation of the instruments: Volunteer Informed Consent Form (TCLE)/Rosenberg self-esteem scale/Mini Mental State Examination (MMSE)/Brazil Old Age Schedule (good)*, totaling 4 hours. It is noteworthy that time for discussions about points raised was reserved between each exhibition, thus allowing the participation and discussions about the subject.

Subsequently, a practical training was conducted (simulation of interviews) to experience the use of instruments to be employed in the research so that this procedure could be better seized and redirected. A total of 12 hours were assigned for this activity. The facilitator, with the help of a trainee (previously selected and trained), simulated a common situation in which respondents would be exposed from approaching the interviewee, unexpected behaviors, refusal to participate, and unsolicited responses from other relatives. In addition, the importance of a standardization by the interviewer, zeal with the information about the project during the approach to the elderly person recognizing insecurity and physical, mental, and social limitations of the elderly, and the interview time that allows optimization of generated information and minimization of mistakes were also observed.

After the simulated interviews and in continuing the training practice, a dynamic exercise was proposed where the interviewers were paired to act as one "participant" and one "interviewer", taking turns in these roles (Figure 2). It is important to note that, in the interview simulations, each pair was monitored by a third person timing the interview, pointing out biases, and clarifying questions at the end of each interview.



Figure 2. Practical moment between interviewers using the instruments for the scientific research conducted at Salto da Divisa, MG - 2013.

A total of 5 (five) workshops were conducted comprising a work load of 24 hours. In the last workshop, each participant

received an interviewer kit that contained a vest and identifying badge, one clipboard, questionnaires, pen, pencil, classifier, a

folder containing the days and times at which each would perform the data survey, and a list of the elderlies whom the ACS was intended to interview (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Interviewer's kit for the research conducted in Salto da Divisa-MG - 2013.

The result of the training was noticeable from the early stages because it was based on the chosen pedagogical strategies and provided behavioral changes that evolved from a timid and passive conduct to a critical behavior, essential for the execution of scientific studies regarding attitudes and conducts.¹²The training gave voice to the subjects by enhancing their practices and reaching their confidence because the discussion of the stages of the proposed project became an open space allowing the establishment of a network of connections within the practice of the ACS and the academic universe, enabling the establishment of consistent and well-reasoned dialogues (Figure 4).



Figure 4. ACSs from the municipality of Salto da Divisa after training to perform as interviewers in a scientific research project developed by the Nursing and Health Graduate Program (PPGES), Salto da Divisa-MG - 2013.

The execution of the data production stage in this scientific research was stable throughout the proposed schedule, even during imposed adverse geographic and operationally issues, which were only possible to be overcome because of a strategically designed team that was prepared to deal with these situations.

There was caution on the part of the executing team in not only use the technical work of ACSs but also contribute to their intellectual and professional qualification. On this concern, the proposal overreached in enabling a real process of training of these workers using mechanisms to stimulate interest and involvement on the absence of research funding, such as emphasis in the workload and in the relevance of this action (participation in the dissemination and discussion at the municipal level with managers through an assembly on the City Council that was open to the public) about the project that they helped to develop (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Assembly promoted at the City Hall Council to disseminate the results of the scientific research that sought, with the aid of ACSs, to investigate the living conditions of the elderly who co-reside in Salto da Divisa-MG, 2013.

After this enriching experience, it is important to highlight the shortcoming resources for the basic strategic preparation to improve the quality of scientific research carried out in Brazil. The establishment of increasingly specific and reasoned methods becomes essential; methods able to guarantee the reliability of information from research studies in Brazil awakening to greater responsibility of executing teams from constructing the proposed pre-project, passing through the stage of data production and analysis, to reaching the social prestige and effectiveness of the resulting actions.

CONCLUSION

The execution of a training in data production resulted in an enriching experience because it allowed not only mutual learning, achieved through the actuation of knowledge, but the development of behavioral skills such as independence and confidence during the data generation phase provided by the correlation between theory and practice. The development of capacity-building was critical to ensure generating the research data in a shorter time and enhancing the performance of the interviewers during this activity.

For the training of these interviewers to reach these results, the use of three pedagogical trends enabled the teaching-learning process to happen more efficiently. The facilitator used the knowledge on how to use each of these trends, recognizing the moment for changing strategy with the purpose to achieve a successful training activity. Furthermore, knowing and applying the resource evaluation became fundamental for the proper use of public resources and quality of the generated information.

FINANCING AGENCY

Coordination for the Improvement of Personnel with Higher Level Education - CAPES.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are thankful to the city of Salto da Divisa/MG, in particular to the Community Health Agents (ACSs) for their commitment and seriousness with which they participated and led the data production stage.

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Submission: 2014/07/23

Accepted: 2015/03/10

Publishing: 2015/04/01

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