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Progress Together

Data Collection during COVID-19

Tools and tips from the field

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Adapted from blog co-authored with Kristen Velyvis, PhD

Equipment

- **Remote data collection may require different equipment (and $)**
  - For phone interviews: cell phones, dedicated SIM cards, headsets with microphones.
  - Reliable internet (4G adapter or a hotspot data plan) to transmit data.
  - Quiet space at home, electricity to charge phones and tablets.
  - Case-tracking forms in Google Docs or a short, separate self-administered survey that interviewers complete and upload daily to track cases.
  - Use "listen-in" platform from mobile provider or record interviews for later review.

Instruments

- **Adapt your questionnaire**
  - Create concise opening for interviewers to clearly introduce themselves, state the purpose of the call, and describe why the respondent should participate.
  - Create an oral consent process (including information on the study).
  - Drop nonessential questions.
  - Add scripts for the transition between modules and questions.
  - Phone interviews best at 10-20 minutes.
  - End the survey with a thank you, but say that a supervisor might call back for quality.
  - Create status codes for number not in service, no answer, busy, appointment, breakoffs. Use Google docs or notepad to capture appointments and new contact information.
  - **Submit all protocol and survey changes to your ethics committee or institutional review board (IRB) and request speedy review.**

Training

- **Gain cooperation with a quick introduction**
  - Practice the new concise opening and responses to questions from hesitant respondents.
  - Create Frequently Asked Questions scripts to use with reluctant respondents, for messages left with family members, etc. Make data collectors practice scripts.
  - Conduct Zoom or Skype sessions to retrain data collectors. Practice and role-play repeatedly.
  - Test interviewers' skills to select correct responses and to speak clearly in each language they will be using for the survey.
  - Create practice interviews, have interviewers upload responses and check for anomalies. Retrain and retest as needed.
  - Provide one-on-one feedback to interviewers as needed; daily, if possible.
  - Create supervisor-moderated groups in WhatsApp for peer learning and group training.

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Testing

- **Ensure all technology works for each step of the data collection process**
  - Upload test data, send data to remote data collectors. Test each part of the survey, from the introduction and consent to the questionnaire modules, closing, case status and tracking, and survey synchronization.
  - Pilot the survey with co-workers and family to make sure staff use the technology correctly and are comfortable with it. Test the question wording, case management protocols, interviewers' abilities to conduct the survey, and supervisors' abilities to provide monitoring and feedback.
  - Drop or readjust questions that don't work, adapt scripts and protocols, and retest.

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Monitoring

- **Increase monitoring for remote data collection**
  - Create a back-check interview for supervisors to verify that the survey took place with the correct respondent.
    - Call at least 20% of cases per interviewer. Quickly compare the data between the original survey and the back-check survey and decide how to handle discrepancies.
  - Ask mobile provider for options to listen in or record interviews. Add this to consent script and seek IRB approval. Create procedure for saving, uploading, handling, and reviewing audio files. Audio files are large; transmitting and reviewing them takes considerable time.
  - Review the response data daily. Look for expected and unexpected patterns by variable. Check durations and “filter variables” quickly and often. Look for patterns of selecting no at filters before lengthy modules. Plan extra back-checks when suspicious patterns arise.

Ensuring data quality

- **Maintain high response rates**
  - Allow multiple sessions to complete the survey.
  - Plan multiple attempts on each valid number: minimum 5 on different days and times.
  - Consider an SMS or WhatsApp message to respondents before the interview. Include a phone-in number to a supervisor to set appointments or complete the survey on the spot.
  - For incentives such as phone credit, plan who will receive these, such as only reluctant respondents or particularly high-value respondents. Work with mobile providers to arrange and track credit. Keep careful records of who receives credit, how much they receive, and the results.
  - Depending on the sample, send radio announcements and messages to WhatsApp groups about the survey. Provide a number, Facebook page, or website for respondents to check the validity of the survey, including a link to the official permission letter.

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Questions?

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