

Sinovuyo Teen Parent Programme: Qualitative study 2015 – 2016

Brief personal account of the experiences of conducting participant interviews

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Conducting interviews with the participants of the Sinovuyo Teen parenting programme was a continuous learning process for me. My interview skills improved from one interview to the other. This was possible because I constantly reflected on my action and that of the participants. In using reflection as a constant I was able to capture the participant experiences, think about them and evaluate them during the interview process. This enabled me to identify emerging issues that necessitated further probing. My interview technique was something that I always reflected on after each and every interview. This was because the participants I dealt with had very significant differences. Therefore no single technique worked for all of them. I had to be very alert and attentive to the way participants responded to my interview technique and style of questioning.

In some cases, some participants were very old and had difficulties in hearing. In such cases I had to repeat the questions several times in very conversational way. In some instances some elderly caregivers had problems with memories. In such cases, I had to remind them about the Sinovuyo programme, what it is, when it was held and so forth. This was very helpful in triggering their memory before going into the interview content. With regards to adolescents, the majority (approx 40%) were very young between 10-12 years of age. This was not a very easy group to interview. I had to stretch the limits of my interview skills. The main challenge was that these children were shy and needed assurance that the answers they were giving were acceptable. I had to constantly remind them that the interview was confidential and their caregivers were not going to know about what they told me. In addition, in some cases my interview technique was framed in a way that seemed as if it was leading. This was done to break the ice and then once they start speaking I move back and forth in order to try and validate their responses to ensure they reflected what they wanted to say. I had to also praise them and re-assure them that their responses were good and thus imply that they are acceptable.

My race, gender and ability to speak the local language were also important in the interview process. The fact that I was black and able to speak IsiXhosa meant that I was accepted as an insider. Participants felt comfortable talking to me. For most of the caregivers I was seen as a son and a brother to most of the teens. Participants were thus able to tell me about their material expectations and expected me to give them clarity as one of their own. I was seen as someone who had come to help and homes were freely opened to me. However, being an insider also meant that there were assumptions that I was aware of the plight of most participants. As a result, participants found it odd when I asked some of the things they considered obvious to one of their own. I had to stress that all questions were important and that I did not know what seemed to be the obvious. In addition, caregivers often wanted me to give them feedback on their adolescents after interviewing them. I always found a way to brush them off politely and

remind them of the confidentiality of the interviews. As a male, choosing a position to interview teenage girls was also important. I had to balance between confidentiality and being in an easily accessible environment in order to assure the safety of the teens. Being in a place where the caregiver could have sight of us was important to assure the caregiver that their child was safe.

Lastly, the choice of clothes was very important when going to the interviews. Most of these interviews were conducted in rural areas with members of poor households. I had to ensure that my clothes blended in with the community and had some level of informality. This helped put participants at ease because it reduced the power distance between the interviewer and the participants. In addition, no matter how poor the family was it was important that as a researcher I did not show emotions. This ensured that I remained unjudgemental and did not make participant feel uncomfortable in their homes.