

Focus Group Research

Botswana

Purpose: To assess and describe the perceptions of mental health workers in Botswana, concerning their role as counselors for HIV/AIDS clients.

General Guidelines for focus groups:

- Ideally each group should be composed of 6-10 participants
- Groups should be approximately 1 ½ - 2 hours in duration
- Participants in a given group should be of approximately equal status so all feel free to talk openly (for example, avoid placing novice counselors and their supervisor in the same group)

Focus Group Questions:

- What specific counseling interventions/approaches do you believe to be most successful in helping HIV/AIDS clients? Least successful?
- How do you know when you have been successful in counseling an HIV/AIDS client; what positive behaviors do you expect to see?
- How do you believe people generally view counselors who work in the HIV/AIDS field? How do their views impact you?
- What positive/good feelings do you get as a result of counseling HIV/AIDS clients? Negative/bad feelings?
- What types of additional training or supervision would be most helpful in increasing your effectiveness as an HIV/AIDS counselor?
- What barriers to effective HIV/AIDS counseling do you see at your counseling site? What resources could help you overcome those barriers?
- What other comments would you like to offer in order to help us better understand HIV/AIDS counselors in Botswana?

Focus Group Monitor Guidelines:

- The role of the monitor is to promote interaction among participants, probe for details when necessary, and ensure that the discussion remains focused on the topic of interest (remain as unobtrusive as possible so participants speak to one another rather than just to you)
- The monitor (as well as other research team observers) should keep notes describing the themes that emerge from the group discussion (if the group interaction is audio or video recorded these notes can be less detailed)
- The group monitor should introduce him/herself and address his/her past or potential future relationship with focus group members (be sensitive and respond to any ethical issues raised by participants)
- Discuss the issue of confidentiality as it applies to the responsibilities of participants in a group setting
- The monitor should then provide a general description of the purpose of the focus groups and request that participants read and sign all required human subjects forms
- Participants should be asked to briefly introduce themselves (name tags or cards may be used if group members do not all know one another)
- Pose open-ended questions to the group participants (see list of questions above) to initiate the discussion and to guide participants to new topics as the discussion progresses
- When important points have been made by the group and fully discussed, the monitor should restate the group consensus (or differing viewpoints in some cases) on that topic to check for accuracy of understanding
- The monitor should take care to be non-directive and non-judgmental at all times
- When the focus group is approximately 15 minutes from the end, ask participants if there are any other comments they wish to voice concerning their role as an HIV/AIDS counselor
- When the discussion has ended, thank the participants for their contributions and invite them to write out any additional points they wish to make and to give these comments to you before leaving
- As soon as possible following the group discussion, please “flesh out” your notes to provide as much detail as possible concerning the themes that emerged