

FEASIBILITY AND ACCEPTABILITY OF USING VIDEOCONFERENCING FOCUS GROUPS IN SEXUAL HEALTH RESEARCH WITH CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE COMMUNITIES AUSTRALIA

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Background: While videoconferencing focus groups (VFGs) have emerged as a popular data collection method during the pandemic, the literature on the use of VFGs to collect sexual health data is still very much in its infancy. It is unclear from the limited literature whether this method is considered acceptable by people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds for research exploring “sensitive” issues, such as sexual and reproductive health.

Methods: As a part of a larger sexual health study, VFGs were conducted with a total of 39 Mandarin-speaking migrants recruited from six Australian cities. Discussions covered various issues pertaining to sexual and reproductive health which were relevant to the Australian Chinese community. Participants were asked to comment on their experience of VFGs to discuss sexual health. The analysis focused on describing participants’ experiences and reflecting on the contributions in planning and facilitating future videoconferencing focus groups.

Results: Feedback on the VFGs was overwhelmingly positive. Participants felt more comfortable disclosing and discussing sexual experiences with strangers in a virtual setting, especially when they could turn off their cameras during discussions. Nevertheless, some non-verbal data were sacrificed, and new concerns regarding facilitation and research ethics were introduced. There was also a gender-based difference throughout the research process. Women appeared to be less willing to turn on their cameras, but their discussions tended to be more engaging and dynamic. Heterosexual men and non-heterosexual women also appeared to be less responsive to recruitment messages.

Conclusion: VFGs appeared to be a highly feasible and acceptable way to collect “sensitive” sexual health data with the Australian Chinese community. Whether participants should be allowed to turn off their cameras is an important decision that researchers have to make when planning VFGs. Researchers also need to be aware of the potential differences in relation to participants’ gender and sexuality throughout the research process.

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