



An Effective Strategy for Community Education

Mrs. L Lidziisa Mao, Associate Professor, Community Health Nursing Department;
College of Nursing, CIHSR, Dimapur, Nagaland

Abstract:

The health of the Nation is the wealth of the Nation. A healthy community is needed to make the Nation powerful in all aspects of its development. Healthcare personnel working at the community level plays the pivotal role of promoting the health of people in the community. Health education is undoubtedly one of the most important weapons for spreading health awareness and now it's becoming even more difficult as people are informed through social media. Therefore, in order to make the learning experience more effective newer strategies must be used for addressing the problems. Based on our experience we found focus group discussion with debriefing and reflective learning is an effective tool for helping community people better understand the problem.

Keywords: Community, Focus group discussion, Debriefing, and reflective learning

Introduction:

The health of the Nation is the Wealth of the Nation. Communities of the country make a strong Nation. A healthy community is needed to make the Nation powerful in all aspects of its development.

Healthcare personnel working at the community level plays the pivotal role of promoting the health of people in the community. Healthy living brings the greatest health benefits to a paramount number of people. Health education is undoubtedly one of the most important weapons for spreading health awareness, which has been used for generations.

We are living in a generation of abundant information and a world of social media overload. Where, if we want to know about a particular disease or topic of interest, we only need to type the word or speak to google search, or any social media and get all the information we are looking for, but alarmingly 88% of the people in India undergo stress due to information overload as per survey of Aug. 2022.¹ Many times the information is irrelevant and may have a negative effect on the people.² Unfortunately many people in the community do not get the opportunity to validate the information they receive. Hence in some situation people may are misled with wrong information. For this reasons health personnel getting into the grassroots level to spread health information is very much needed. As with the knowledge they received through their training they are more well-equipped with knowledge relating to health and diseases. There are many methods or ways community health personnel can spreading awareness to people in the community, but all the methods may not be able to create the impact desired.

In my experience as a Community Health Nurse, I found group discussion, or focus group discussion with debriefing, in particular, is an effective tool in solving problems and issues related to health. Focus group discussion as we all are familiar with is used for qualitative research purposes. But community health personnel have been using this for social mobilizing purposes. In a focus group discussion, the leader is able to encourage the participants to share their pre-existing knowledge of the topic in discussion. This type of discussion is considered an excellent way as it allows all the participants to get involved in the discussion and share their views which will help one another. Combining the debriefing technique to focus group discussion before ending the session is effective as it gives the participants an opportunity to reflect back on the topic of discussion and the moderator also gets to clarify any misconception about the issue. During debriefing, the moderator can also bring out important points that were missed out during the time of discussion.

Definition: “A focus group discussion involves gathering people from similar backgrounds or experiences together to discuss a specific topic of interest.”³

Purposes of conducting focus group discussion:

1. To involve the community people in discussions related to their problems and issues.
2. To explore the depth of information the community people have on a particular topic or issue.
3. To identify the community needs to conduct various health-related projects and programs

Number of participants required for focus group discussion:

Focus group discussion requires about 8 to 10 participants in a group. As too many participants will be time-consuming, there may be an overloading of opinions and suggestions and sometimes a clash of opinions and ideas may happen which can lead to a diversion of the discussion and we will not be able to focus on the topic or issue we intended to discuss.

Important points to consider for Focus Group discussion?

To make the focus group discussion effective we need a moderator or a leader who acts as the steering wheel and directs the group in the direction it should go. We also need a note-taker whose responsibility is to take notes on the things that is been discussed. This helps during the process of reflection and debriefing. The moderator and note-taker must not be from the group of people who are selected for the discussion.

Sitting Arrangement for Focus Group Discussion:

The most appropriate way to conduct focus group discussion is by making the participant sit in a circle and the leader can also sit with them to make them feel comfortable. A suitable position is shown in the diagram below.

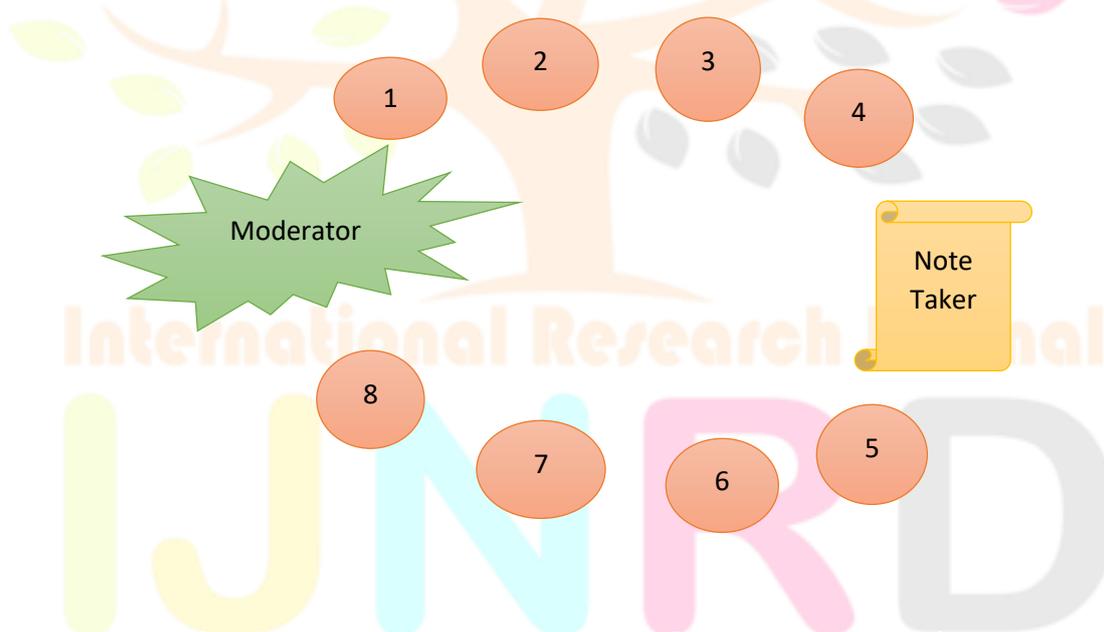


Fig 1: Seating arrangement for excellent focus group discussion

Duration of Focus Group Discussion:

It is best to keep the discussion to just 15 to 20 min, as prolonging the time of discussion will divert the interest of the participants also we should keep in mind that everyone is engaged in some way or the other.

Case Scenario of a Focus Group Discussion:

As Community health nurses, we wanted to understand the knowledge and practices of women on menstrual hygiene in rural communities, for which we organized a focus group discussion so the participants will be more comfortable sharing what they know and practice in small groups, so we invited eight (8) women between the age group of 18 years to 25 years, with similar socioeconomic background.

When all the women were gathered we started by giving a brief instruction about how the discussion would go on and after which questions were asked to the participants like; When they got their first menstruation, how they reacted to it, what is their opinion about menstruation and how do they take care of themselves during the time of menstruation.

Altogether we spent about 15 minutes, and after the discussion, we had a time of reflection and debriefing which is the key element in this type of education, this time is utilized to clear the misconception and we also used the opportunity to relearn the disease or issues. Based on our experience it was observed that it was very helpful, as most of the participants verbalized that they were able to have a better understanding of the topic like, what causes menstruation, the cycle and they were also able to identify their wrong beliefs and practices regarding menstruation. One of the participant who said that menstruation was a curse to women during the focus group discussion, expressed her happiness learning that it is normal physiology of every woman, she further commented that stated that it is a blessing to women. Other participants from the group also stated that they were able to learn about the benefits of menstruation. Some participants said that they also learn many things from the group members especially about the disposal of used sanitary pads and their practices during menstruation which was very helpful. They also said that they were more relaxed and comfortable discussing the matter as everyone knew each other and they said that they will share the knowledge they gain with their family members.

Conclusion:

Focus group discussion with reflection is an effective tool for health personnel as well as social workers who work with the people in the community. As it allows us to know and understand the people we are working with closely and also learn their perceptions and beliefs about certain issues or problems in the community. This type of discussion provides equal opportunity for every participant to get involved and share their thoughts. By doing a debriefing or reflection after the discussion we can clarify their misbelief and false perception.

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