



Question 3

How Do We Identify Our Research Audience(s) Based on the Health Problem that We Want to Address?

Effective health communication interventions reach audiences who have the greatest potential for being responsive to the intervention, as well as those for whom the need is most pressing. In this question, you will learn ways to identify these audiences.

Skills/Knowledge

By the end of this question, you will have accomplished the following:

1. Determined how to focus and segment your potential research audiences
2. Examined the importance of using all existing resources to focus and segment your research audiences
3. Identified the primary and secondary audiences with whom to conduct your research (Worksheet 3)

Introductory Note

A primary research audience is defined as (1) those people who are most affected by the problem, (2) those who are most responsive to behavior change, and (3) those who are most reachable. Because these groups of people often are not the same, you may want to conduct research with more than one group. Secondary research audiences include (1) others who can help identify ways to influence the primary audience and (2) allies such as decision-makers, community leaders, and health authorities.

Reflecting on Field Experience

Exercise 1. Narrowing the Research Audience

Materials

Copies of Example 1, Immunizing Children (Primary Audience)

Instructions

Give a copy of the example to each team member to read. Discuss it together. Conclude the session by discussing the advantages for your team in applying the same segmentation criteria listed at the end of Exercise 2 to the process of identifying research needs.

Example 1. Immunizing Children (Primary Audience)

The health ministry of an African country undertook an intervention to increase the number of fully immunized children. The original research audience for the intervention was the following:

Mothers with children under five years of age

When the team asked themselves who was *most affected* by the problem of nonvaccination, they realized that infants under age one were most vulnerable. In particular, the danger of measles—the most fatal of the diseases for which vaccine exists—is greatest in the first year, between the time the maternal protection wears off and the time in which child is old enough to survive a bout of the disease. The team therefore decided that the age group in which completion of the series would have the most impact on public health was children under age one. Their narrowed target audience became the following:

Mothers with children under one year of age

Team members then asked who was likely to be most responsive to the intervention they were planning. Coverage data showed that about 80 percent of children had received at least one vaccination from the health system, yet only 17 percent of infants completed the series by age one and only 30 percent of children ever completed the series. Furthermore, a qualitative study carried out by researchers at a local university reported that the mothers of these children were aware of the value of vaccination, knew where and when to come for service, and were confident enough of the outcome to have tried the behavior once. This information helped them to decide to focus on the following:

Mothers with children under age one who had received at least one vaccination

If they succeeded in encouraging just half the mothers who had already begun the series to complete the series, they could double their coverage. With the research audience more narrowly focused and limited in size, the following research questions became simpler for the team to formulate:

- Why do mothers who take their children to the health center for one vaccination not return to complete the series?
- What barriers prevent them from returning to the health center?
- What benefits would influence them to return to the health center?
- What would be the best way to pass along information about benefits to those mothers?

Team members further examined available information to segment their audience for research regarding immunization of children under age one. They were able to identify the following four major groups of mothers:

- Unaware Nonusers.** Mothers who are not aware of vaccinations and who never had their children immunized
- Aware Nonusers.** Mothers who are aware of vaccinations, but who never had their children immunized
- Trial Users.** Mothers who had their children vaccinated once before age one, but who did not complete the first-year vaccination series
- Continuing Users.** Mothers who had their children vaccinated before age one and who completed the entire vaccination series

Team members thought they needed to understand more clearly the differences between continuing users and the other users and nonusers. To accomplish this, they further clarified their research questions as follows:

- What influences the women in the continuing users group to complete the vaccination series?
- What information do those mothers have or think they need? How do they get the information?
- What exists for those mothers that does not exist for mothers who have their children vaccinated only once before age one?

Note: Such research on differences among groups is key to understanding which factors influence your audience's behavior to adopt a new practice. You may find, for example, that people who use condoms to prevent sexually transmittable diseases are more confident and also talk to their sex partners about protection more often than those who do not use condoms. You may find that mothers who use oral rehydration therapy (ORT) regularly are those who attend health center sessions or are more likely

to know the dangers of dehydration. Mothers who complete the vaccination series may be more likely to know about side effects and how to treat them than other mothers do. Identifying these "differences that make a difference" in behavior will help you direct your intervention. For example, you may want to encourage sex partners to talk to each other and show them ways to do so without self-consciousness, or you may want to encourage mothers to attend health centers as a step toward influencing them to use ORT.

Exercise 2. Identifying Secondary Audiences

Materials

Copies of the example, *Immunizing Children (Secondary Audiences)*

Paper and pens

Instructions

Have team members read the information in this example on research audience segmentation and write a summary of the ideas presented.

Conclude the exercise with a discussion of the steps your team needs to take to define the research audiences for your health problem.

Example 2. Immunizing Children (Secondary Audiences)

Team members who wanted to increase the number of children immunized thought they also should examine possible allies in solving their health problem. An anthropological study on women and health practices conducted by researchers at a local university reported that although women are the primary caretakers, they generally do not take health actions, unless it is an emergency, without first consulting with their husbands. Additionally, the study showed that women would consider trying a new health practice if it was recommended by someone they trusted and respected. It identified health workers and respected mothers as the most trusted sources of information on health concerns.

Using this information, team members added the following two secondary research audiences:

- Fathers/husbands who influence decision-making within the family
- Health workers who recommend vaccinations
- Mothers who have completed their children's series

The following additional research questions took shape:

- Do fathers support vaccination? Why? Why not?
- What can be done to encourage them to support vaccinations?

- What is the best way to get the messages to them?
- Do health workers inspire trust and respect? Why? Why not?
- What can health workers do to motivate mothers to continue the vaccination series?
- How do mothers who complete the series differ from those who do not?

After examining relevant literature, reports, studies, and surveys, team members identified the following audiences for their research efforts:

Primary:

Mothers who had their children vaccinated once before age one but who did not complete the first-year vaccination series

Secondary:

Mothers who had their children vaccinated before age one and who completed the entire vaccination series

Fathers and husbands who influence decision-making within the family

Health workers who vaccinate children

Background Information

Research Audience Segmentation

In the example above, team members used previously conducted research to narrow the focus of their research to smaller, more-specific behaviors and more-specific audiences. Narrowing the audience even before conducting the research helped team members make better use of their resources and focus their research questions more clearly.

The three major functions of research audience segmentation are as follows:

- Decide resource allocation
- Devise communication strategies
- Develop targeted messages

To make research and programs more effective, think carefully about the feasibility of segments you choose. This approach has several advantages, as follows:

- Choosing feasible interventions and audiences, which helps focus your activities on behaviors that can be done
- Increasing the confidence and credibility of your health education staff
- Helping to demonstrate the effectiveness of a research-based communication methodology

It is not always possible or desirable, however, to focus all of your efforts on one or two segments of the population. Reasons of politics or equality of service may suggest you pay attention to audiences who are less likely to respond to your intervention. In such situations, you can use the following criteria to decide what portion of your resources should be spent on different segments. In the beginning, you may decide to spend more money on the segment that is most at risk from the health problem and will respond most easily and quickly. You could plan to provide programs for the hard-to-reach populations later, after you have had an impact on the first segment. When it is seen that a portion of the population has adopted the new behavior, it often makes it easier to reach the more difficult audience.

Segmentation Criteria

Useful criteria for choosing audience segments on which the intervention will focus include the following:

Segments most affected by the health problem

- Size of the segment
- Frequency with which the problem occurs in this segment
- Seriousness of the problem among this segment
- Resources the segment has to deal with the problem
- Ability of the segment to cope with the problem without outside help

Those most likely to respond to behavior change

- Accessibility, availability, and approachability of the research audience

Other Possible Sources of Information

- Key informants can provide insight into the audience. Such individuals are those within a particular community or population who can help researchers design and implement health interventions by supplying information about the community and its members. Those sources include village leaders or anthropologists.

Allies can help solve the problem and provide support to the primary audience. They might include fathers, other family members, and health workers.

Exercise 3. Applying Research Criteria to a Problem Statement

Materials

Copies of the Example 3, Identifying the Audience

Instructions

Distribute copies of the example.

Have the team re-examine the problem statement used as an example in Question 2 and discuss whether they think the Jordanian health team identified the most appropriate research audiences for their intervention.

Example 3. Identifying the Audience

The health team in Jordan developed the following problem statement:

Although it appears that mothers accept the value of breast-feeding, they are not breast-feeding their infants frequently enough or for a long enough period to ensure stable growth. Existing university research shows that most mothers nationwide do attempt breast-feeding within the first three days following birth, but that they have problems continuing breast-feeding for as long as they would like. The small number of mothers (seven percent) who do not initiate breast-feeding are primarily urban, more affluent, and educated. Their children are not malnourished and, therefore, are not priority audience for the intervention. Refugee mothers tend to breast-feed longer than other mothers, so they are not considered part of the target audience. Mothers with less access to health care are more likely to breast-feed.

A higher incidence of diarrhea and malnutrition exists among children of low-income, less-educated, rural mothers. Possible causes of reduced breast-feeding could include the following:

1. Insufficient motivation to continue breast-feeding
2. Lack of family support
3. Belief that formula is better than breast milk
4. Poor breast-feeding practices, such as late initiation and early supplementation
5. Lack of confidence in the ability to breast-feed

The health team identified the following audiences for their research:

Primary:

Lower-income, less-educated, rural mothers with children under age two

Secondary:

Fully breast-feeding rural mothers with children under age two, fathers, and health workers

Synthesis

Research shows that when the initial research audience is carefully identified at the start of a program, the end result is much more cost-effective and the intervention is more successful. After the initial problem has been described, it is necessary to identify the primary and secondary audiences involved in the problem and consider how to learn more about their behavior through research. Such identification and selection are necessary to gather the most useful information from the right audiences to plan for the intervention.

The following five questions will help you identify your research audiences:

Primary Research Audience

1. Who is most affected by the identified problem?
2. Who might be most responsive to behavior change?
3. Who can be reached?

Secondary Research Audiences

4. Who might provide some idea of what might influence your primary audience to change behavior?
5. Who are the allies who can help solve the problem?

Good! You Are Ready To Make Your Research Audience Segmentation!

Application

1. Go to Worksheet 3, Research Audience Identification. Distribute copies of the worksheet. Review the problem statement you developed for your intervention in Question 2, Worksheet 2-1. Keeping in mind the five research audience segmentation questions, determine the audiences with which you should conduct your research and state why you selected them.

Research Audience Identification

Carefully review your problem statement before segmenting your audiences for research.

Primary Audience for Your Research

Who is most affected by the identified problem?

2. Who might be most responsive to behavior change?

3. Who can be reached?

Secondary Audience for Your Research

4. Who might provide some idea of what might influence your primary audience to adopt behavior?

5. Who are the allies who can help solve the problem?