Lessons Learned From Conducting Cognitive Interviews with Youth

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Westat
## Recent Cognitive Testing with Youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDY 1</th>
<th>STUDY 2</th>
<th>STUDY 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey of physical activity and diet</td>
<td>Survey of tobacco use</td>
<td>Tobacco use items included in youth health study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 11-18</td>
<td>Ages 12-17</td>
<td>Ages 14-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruited parent/teen dyads</td>
<td>Recruited parent/teen dyads; all parents used tobacco</td>
<td>Recruited teens who use tobacco</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What was (or should have been) different for youth?

- Timing of the interview
- Motivation
- Conducting the interview
Timing of the interview

- **Time of day**
  - Earlier may be better
- **Length of interview**
  - Shorter is better
- **Seasonal schedules (school year vs summer)**
  - More availability in summer
  - Answers to lifestyle questions may vary with season
Motivation

- Youth motivation may differ from adults
  - Parent may have decided youth’s participation
    Does youth actually want to be at the interview?
  - Incentive may not be youth’s to keep
  - Youth, accustomed to following directions from adults, may not feel comfortable giving negative feedback
  - For adults, a cognitive interview is often a change from typical day-to-day activities
    For youth, a cognitive interview may mimic experience during the school day
Conducting the interview

- Establishing rapport
  - May require more effort
  - Needs to happen earlier in interview

- Information provided about the task
  - Manage shorter attention spans by being more explicit about what to expect and the different components of the task
  - Stress differences of cognitive interview from school day by emphasizing it is not a test
  - Counter adult-youth power imbalance by emphasizing that youth are “experts” and it’s really okay to say negative things about the survey

- Probing
  - Set an engaging tone to keep youth attention
  - Ensure probes are developmentally appropriate
  - Craft probes so that interview is less cognitively burdensome
    - Use fewer open-ended probes and more direct ones
### Probes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Probes</th>
<th>Youth Probes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tell me more about your answer.</td>
<td>What made you pick strongly agree?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell me in your own words what a serving is.</td>
<td>What do you picture when you think about a serving?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What reaction do you have to this question?</td>
<td>Did you like or dislike answering this question? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What other kinds of processed meat, if any, were you thinking of when you answered this question?</td>
<td>What do you think of when you hear “processed meat”?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our Ah-ha Moment:
Youth have limited autonomy

- **Life in general**
  - Youth have limited control over personal schedules, which are largely determined by the school day and parents’ calendars
  - As kids, they are expected to follow directions from an adult in most areas of their lives

- **Cognitive interview setting**
  - We recruit teens by contacting parents first
  - Parents decide whether teen will participate
  - Often, parents must bring them to interview
  - Youth may have no control over what happens to incentive
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