Qualitative research – example interview guide

Semi-structured telephone interviews – Topic guide

This topic guide is slightly shortened version of semi-structured interview guide used in Anderson, W. , White, V. & Finney, A., 2010, 'You Just Have to Get By: Coping with Low Incomes and Cold Homes' CSE, Bristol.

Introduction

I'm calling from a charity called the Centre for Sustainable Energy. You took part in a survey a few weeks ago and kindly agreed that we could contact you again to take part in a follow-up telephone interview (that's how we got your telephone number). Are you still happy to do this?

The interview will explore your experience of managing money at home and in particular coping with energy costs. The interview will last 20-30 minutes. Everything we discuss during the interview will be confidential, so that what you say cannot be traced back to you, and your name will not be revealed to anyone else. So please be assured that you can be honest and open in talking about your views and experiences.

As a thank-you, you will receive £25 in shopping vouchers [1]

Consent

Do you understand that any information you share will be treated as confidential? Can you confirm you are happy to go ahead? YES / NO [If 'no', ask reasons and if not willing to proceed for whatever reason, end call]

I'd like to make an audio recording of this conversation to use in the research. It will mean I won't have to write down your responses as we talk and should make the call a bit quicker. Are you happy for me to record the conversation? YES / NO

1. Personal circumstances

May I begin by just asking a few questions about you and your household?

Age / Household / Tenure /Employment

2. Paying for electricity and heating

How do you pay for your electricity?

3. Household income (and coping strategies)

Over the last 12 months, have there been any changes in your household income? Or your regular costs?

Have you found it difficult to make ends meet at any time over the past 12 months?

How do you cope at these times?

> Explore spending priorities and management of bills, borrowing, savings, extra earning
>
> Explore budgeting and financial planning

4. Keeping warm in winter

Thinking back to last winter, when the weather was cold, did you feel your house was warm enough?

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[1] The payment of incentives is a decision to be made at project design stage.

Is your house difficult to keep warm even with the heating on?

Did you have the heating on as much as you wanted? Why not? (self-disconnection may not be deliberate)

Did you cut back on other things in order to keep warm? Or borrow money? Or do anything else? (e.g. switch supplier, install energy efficiency measures)

How did any difficulties experienced affect your health?

How did any difficulties experienced affect your family's health?

5. Energy efficiency improvements

Have you ever had energy efficiency improvements done to your house, such as improvements in insulation, draught-proofing, windows or your heating system?

If yes: Did you do these yourself or were they done professionally?

If professionally, explore who bore the cost (including landlords, grants/schemes), satisfaction

Have you felt any benefits from these improvements (warmth, comfort, money?)

If no:

Why not?

6. Energy advice follow-up

If you like, we can pass your name and contact details on to an energy advisor who can give you advice about the grants you could get to improve the warmth of your home. Would you like us to do this?

7. Thank you and [optional] incentive and address details

Thank you very much for your time in taking the time to answer these questions.

Would you like an ASDA or an M&S shopping card as a 'thank you'?

May I take your address to send it to? Your address details will be stored separately from your responses and will only be used to send you the voucher.