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SOME PRACTICAL HINTS FOR SOCIAL INTERVIEWERS  
- guidelines for interviewing

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

These guidelines are based on many years of experience with interviewing in the fields of marketing and low-cost housing. It has been my experience that the interviewer may face similar difficulties, no matter what the particular subjects of the interviews are. The following pages contain just guidelines for interviewing, not very hard and fast rules.

In most social surveys the respondents are selected beforehand by an objective method (sampling). The sociologists select the respondents without knowing them personally. He gives a list of houses or persons to the interviewer. For scientific purposes it is important that the interviewer interviews only the selected persons. It is up to the interviewer to persuade the respondents to be interviewed when he meets them in the field. I will tell you more about this procedure in the few pages of my guidelines.

## 2. PREPARING YOURSELF FOR THE INTERVIEW

### 2.1. Types of areas and respondents

You will find that in every town in Kenya, there are three types of residential areas:

1. Low-income areas;
2. Middle income areas;
3. High income areas.

The first and second groups are found mixed in estates in some towns. But there are areas which are not mixed in terms of income and groups such as Mathare Valley and Jericho in Nairobi. When you go interviewing in low income areas like Mathare Valley, you should not look like an official or an important person. People will fear you and feel shy. Best thing is to show a demonstrative manner that you are just like any of them and not very different from them. You should show this by sitting where you find them sitting. It is suggested that you remind them that they are people who can give the information you are looking for better than anyone in any other place. They live there and they know everything more than anybody else about that place. This would make them confident with you and you can get the necessary information from them.

As for the people who are in the middle income areas, you have to be tactful with them. They are the most difficult group to interview. Some of them have only little education but want to be seen as more educated and more rich than they are.

When interviewing at their houses, tell them that you are sorry to have come to his house without an appointment, and at a time like that, you know the husband has been very busy in the office, and that this is the only time that you could see him. Now ask him whether you should interview him now or make an appointment to come when he wants you to come. Make him look important by saying: "Sir, you know we are sorry to bother you at your free time but your house has been selected in a 'scientific way', you are the only one who can supply the information we require." He will feel very happy and might say: Ok, go on now, or come at such and such a time.

When you have an appointment with them, you must be there in time. Sometimes, however they do not keep their appointments. If he is not there leave a message saying that you will check again tomorrow at the same time. When you go the second time and he is not there, ask where he works and try to visit him at the place of work. If you cannot find him there, you must treat him as one of the non-respondents.

## 2.2. What to wear

When you go out for interviewing, you must not wear your best suit. Many people mistakes people if they see them in suit. They think most people in suits are the people who matter. If you look a VIP, people will take you for an official. So you have to wear clean clothes which are normally worn by ordinary people. An ordinary pair of trousers, shirt and a jacket will do. Just be simply dressed, and they will not look at you as a new comer in their society. You should wear the same type of clothes while interviewing in both the low and middle income areas. For female interviewers' dress, a normal skirt to knee-length is adequate. Never wear a mini or maxi or fancy dresses. Just look like any ordinary woman. The female interviewer, like the male interviewer, has to avoid getting too friendly with the respondents in order to avoid any embarrassing situations.

## 2.3. General Conduct in the Field

It is normal thing to meet "Good" and "Bad" people while interviewing. Try not to get too friendly with the respondents, especially the opposite sex. This tends to spoil the image of your organization and yourself.

The word will often spread in the village that your group is involved in other activities and that might lead you to be expelled from the village by the police or elders of that village. In some of the areas, the prostitutes can create difficulties if you are not careful in handling the situation.

#### 2.4. Translations of the questionnaire

One important aspect of the questionnaire is that of translations from one language to another. This must be done before going to the field. Otherwise wrong translations can make people give wrong answers. Say, if you are asking for a panga, "How many pangas do you have?" If wrongly translated to 'kiskus' (knives), you may get the wrong information.

### 3. HOW TO GET THE APPOINTMENT

#### 3.1. Difficulties in finding people at home

When interviewing, you will find there are some people who are difficult to find at home. When you have called at the house and left a message with neighbours that he should be at home after work the following day, you should call again at least two times. If he is not at home, you must find out where he works and try to visit the place of work. It is not a bad idea to visit people at their place of work. You find that employers are very kind to you, and you will enjoy interviewing people at their place of work. This will also speed up the field work. The problem here is when you are not mobile. Some offices are situated far away from housing areas and at a distance from each other, and often you only have a few people to interview at their place of work.

#### 3.2. Inconvenient times for interviewing

Sometimes when you go to a house for an interview, the owner of the house has not been waiting or expecting you, so he is not ready to receive a visitor. You may find sometimes that the house is in a mess, the utensils thrown all over, floor sometimes wet and all chairs in a disorderly manner. When the situation is like that, say that you are sorry to have come when things were in that order, and say you do not mind to ask your questions outside the house or in the verandah.