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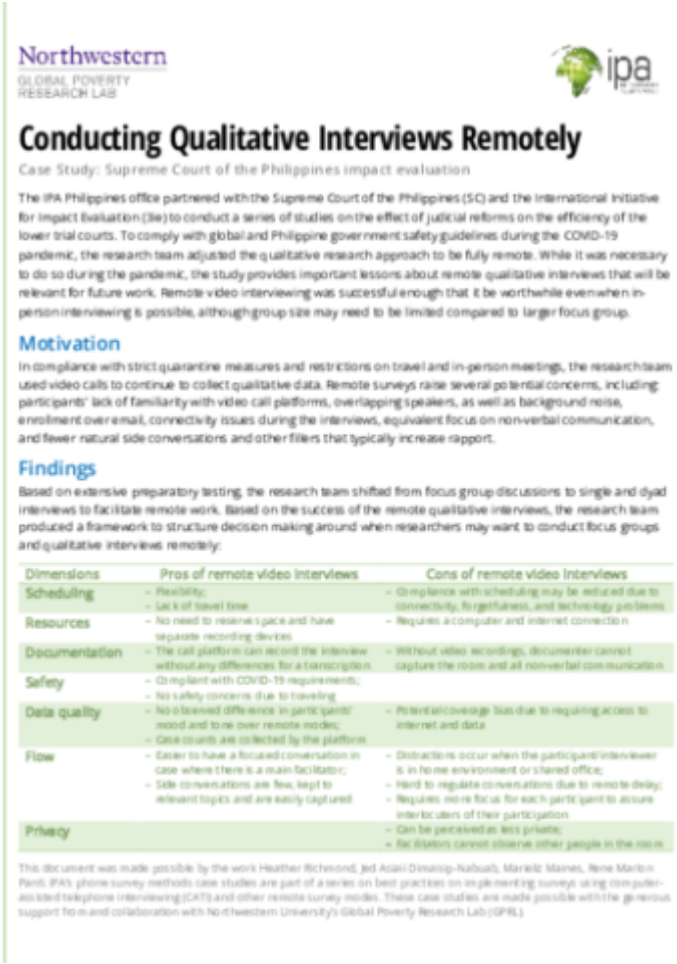

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Conducting Qualitative Interviews Remotely

Case Study: Supreme Court of the Philippines impact evaluation

The IPA Philippines office partnered with the Supreme Court of the Philippines (SC) and the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) to conduct a series of studies on the effect of judicial reforms on the efficiency of the lower trial courts. To comply with global and Philippine government safety guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic, the research team adjusted the qualitative research approach to be fully remote. While it was necessary to do so during the pandemic, the study provides important lessons about remote qualitative interviews that will be relevant for future work. Remote video interviewing was successful enough that it be worthwhile even when in-person interviewing is possible, although group size may need to be limited compared to larger focus group.

Motivation

In compliance with strict quarantine measures and restrictions on travel and in-person meetings, the research team used video calls to continue to collect qualitative data. Remote surveys raise several potential concerns, including participants' lack of familiarity with video call platforms, overlapping speakers, as well as background noise, enrollment over email, connectivity issues during the interviews, equivalent focus on non-verbal communication, and fewer natural side conversations and other fillers that typically increase rapport.

Findings

Based on extensive preparatory testing, the research team shifted from focus group discussions to single and dyad interviews to facilitate remote work. Based on the success of the remote qualitative interviews, the research team produced a framework to structure decision making around when researchers may want to conduct focus groups and qualitative interviews remotely:

Dimensions	Pros of remote video interviews	Cons of remote video interviews
Scheduling	– Flexibility; – Lack of travel time	– Compliance with scheduling may be reduced due to connectivity, forgetfulness, and technology problems
Resources	– No need to reserve space and have separate recording devices	– Requires a computer and internet connection
Documentation	– The call platform can record the interview without any differences for a transcription	– Without video recordings, documenter cannot capture the room and all non-verbal communication
Safety	– Compliant with COVID-19 requirements; – No safety concerns due to traveling	
Data quality	– No observed difference in participants' mood and tone over remote modes; – Case counts are collected by the platform	– Potential coverage bias due to requiring access to internet and data
Flow	– Easier to have a focused conversation in case where there is a main facilitator; – Side conversations are few, kept to relevant topics and are easily captured	– Distractions occur when the participant/interviewer is in home environment or shared office; – Hard to regulate conversations due to remote delay; – Requires more focus for each participant to assure interlocutors of their participation
Privacy		– Can be perceived as less private; – Facilitators cannot observe other people in the room

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Case Study: Conducting Qualitative Interviews Remotely in the Philippines

The IPA Philippines office partnered with the Supreme Court of the Philippines (SC) and the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) to conduct a series of studies on the effect of judicial reforms on the efficiency of the lower trial courts. To comply with global and Philippine government safety guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic, the research team adjusted the qualitative research approach to be fully remote. While it was necessary to do so during the pandemic, the study provides important lessons about remote qualitative

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