



FOCUS on Field Epidemiology

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Rapid Needs Assessments and GIS

1. Rapid needs assessments are most commonly conducted in the form of face-to-face interviews. Discuss some of the advantages and disadvantages of face-to-face interviews in the context of rapid needs assessments. Would another interview technique be feasible and or preferable? Consider costs involved with conducting these interviews, accessibility in the wake of a disaster, efficiency of types of interviews, etc.
2. The concluding remarks of this FOCUS issue note that the rapid needs assessment method can be used for other public health functions where surveys are implemented. Discuss potential applications of rapid survey methodology in your organization.

Hint: It may be helpful to refer back to FOCUS Volume 2, Issue 3: Interviewing Techniques.

Depending on the severity of the disaster, face-to-face interviews are often the only option for obtaining timely data if Internet and phone lines are not in service. Even so, it may not be possible for interview teams to respond immediately if flooding, debris, and other obstacles inhibit access to a particular area.

Also, people may be under duress due to the effects of the disaster (e.g., worry about family members, damage to property, lack of electricity or clean water). Interviewers should be aware that answering questions about the disaster may be stressful for some persons.

Rapid surveys may be used with any type of community health assessment to look at trends in a population. This method has been used in both industrial and developing countries to look at topics as wide-ranging as estimation of leprosy prevalence (Myanmar); risk factors for hypertension (Philippines); immunization coverage (Egypt, Italy, South Africa, the United States, and other countries); and HIV seroprevalence (Cote D'Ivoire, Niger, and other countries). Other topics include use of antimicrobials (Bolivia) and burden of anemia (Tanzania).

More information about these and other uses of rapid survey methodology can be found at the Rapid Surveys Web site hosted by the Department of Epidemiology at the University of California Los Angeles:
http://www.ph.ucla.edu/epi/rapidsurveys/rs_topic.html.



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