

Whose Voices? Whose Knowledge? A Feminist Analysis of the Value of Key Informant Interviews

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Abstract

Key informant interviews are a stalwart of qualitative research, particularly policy-focused research. So ubiquitous is this research method that it is sometimes taken for granted that key informants indeed have important knowledge and value. This commentary interrogates the emphasis that is sometimes placed on key informant interviews over other qualitative research methods, asking important questions including: why are these informants “key,” and who says they are “key”? This article uses a feminist lens to analyze key informant interviews, suggesting that the power and privilege surrounding key informants might inadvertently lead to key informant interviews being less participatory and more infused with vested interests than researchers might admit. Within the hierarchy of research methods, key informant interviews may be positioned as producing more valuable knowledge because of the status and expertise of the person being interviewed. Their “expert” status may lead to assumptions that key informants understand and represent their communities. This article draws attention to the gendered consequences of prioritizing the knowledge of key informants, contrasting this with feminist perspectives on knowledge production which value the voices and perspectives of “ordinary” community members. This article also points to the methodological advantages which power-holders benefit from when they participate in key informant interviews compared to focus group discussions or surveys, advocating for greater community voice (especially women’s voice) through in-depth interviews with “ordinary” women and increased critical analysis of the limits of key informant interviews.

Keywords

feminist research, community based research, methods in qualitative inquiry, PAR—participatory action research, critical feminist theory

Introduction

Key informant interviews (KIIs) have long been considered a vital part of qualitative research. Particularly within policy-related research, KIIs are often infused with specific value. KIIs often supplement other research methods such as focus group discussions (FGDs) and surveys. Within the hierarchy of research methods, KIIs may be inadvertently positioned as producing more valuable knowledge because of the status and expertise of the key informant. Key informants are perceived as providing important knowledge—more knowledge than might be contributed by interviews with “ordinary” people.

This commentary questions the rationale of the value attributed to KIIs. It asks: why are particular informants viewed as “key,” and who says they are “key”? These questions themselves reveal problematic assumptions about whose voices and whose knowledge is important—and whose is not. Taking a feminist approach to understanding the gender and power

relations involved in KIIs, this article will explore the consequences of over-reliance on key informants, pointing to the need to return to considerations of power and participation in developing research designs.

This article is based on a review of literature on research methods. It draws on feminist scholarship and social science literature focused on qualitative methods. It begins by providing an overview of feminist research methods. The next section details the rationale and background of KIIs, drawing on literature largely from the 1970s to 1990s due to the lack of more

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recent literature on the KII method. This is followed by a feminist comparison of KIIs with other research methods, and a section reflecting on the value of KIIs for research.

Feminist Research Methods

Feminist research has the overarching goal of seeking to improve women's lives (Letherby, 2003, p. 4). Feminist thinking (itself diverse and variant depending on the various strands of feminism) is grounded in the notion that oppression based on gender—the social and cultural meaning attributed to women and men—disproportionately affects women. This framing of gender recognizes that while in many contexts, influenced by post-structuralism, the category of “women” is itself fluid and variable (Budgeon, 2014, p. 25), in other contexts, especially many low- and middle-income settings, gender may be constructed in a binary way that assigns different status to women and men by virtue of sex. This paper acknowledges the importance of gender identity and sexuality discourses, while resisting denial of the pervasive realities of gendered power relations that are based on sex in many contexts (Baden & Goetz, 1997, p. 20).

Feminist research acknowledges that societal power hierarchies result in women's voices often being hidden during traditional research processes (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007, p. 200). Feminist research involves particular consideration and response to the power hierarchies shaping the research process, from the outset of developing a research question, through to the data collection process itself and the dissemination of research findings. Importantly, feminist research is inductive, such that people's experiences inform theory rather than theory or a hypothesis being the starting point of research (Letherby, 2003, p. 67). This is a particularly relevant, as the ways in which knowledge is produced affects how research is positioned and which methods are valued or not valued. For example, even when explicitly trying to be “participatory,” policy-related research may frame questions in limiting ways (Cornwall & Fujita, 2012, p. 1755), or even ask the question with the answer in mind (Comes, 2016).

Feminist conceptualizations of knowledge production recognize that “no point of view is “neutral” because no one exists unembedded in the world” (Narayan, 2004, p. 218). This notion is not unique to feminist thinking, but is also part of the postmodernist recognition of multiple truths rather than a single truth, which have influenced more recent approaches to qualitative methods. Contrary to positivist approaches to research, the notion of an objective observer is anathema in feminist research; rather voice and positionality are vital components that profoundly shape research (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991). In this conceptualization, the knowledge of the researcher is recognized as infusing the research, for example, my own experience conducting policy-related research in humanitarian and development contexts shapes my perspectives on the value attributed to KIIs.

Further, feminists recognize that “authorized knowledge”—knowledge which is perceived as legitimate and which

represents the official story—is often men's knowledge, while women's knowledge is cast as “experiential” knowledge and is positioned as holding less value (Letherby, 2003, p. 22). This conceptualization of knowledge becomes important in this paper, because of how these assumptions—themselves a manifestation of gender inequality and the subordination of women in society—persist and translate across different research methods. In contrast, feminist approaches recognize that knowledge is not only produced by dominant and ruling classes—who themselves seek to maintain their power and status—but the knowledge of oppressed groups, such as women, is also valuable (Brooks, 2006, p. 68). Feminists focus on women's lived experiences as a starting point, with some feminist scholars arguing that women's subordinate position in fact uniquely positions them to provide a “less partial and distorted” perspective compared to research that starts from the perspective of men (Harding, 1991, p. 185). Feminists urge that analysis should not homogenize the experiences of “women,” rather should recognize the way intersecting power hierarchies and identities like race, age, geographical location and economic status contextualize the experiences of women (Crenshaw, 1991).

Important also to the notion of research being feminist are the types of methodologies used to conduct research; using multiple, flexible and participatory methodologies can help ensure that research is feminist (Liamputtong, 2007, p. 13). Participatory research can be an important way of untangling complex power hierarchies, allowing research participants to engage with research processes on an equal footing. For example, FGDs are sometimes referred to as feminist because they offer the opportunity for more egalitarian discussions and the generation of new knowledge to help women understand their oppression (Montell, 1999, p. 44). While quantitative methods such as surveys have traditionally had an “uneasy” relationship with feminist thought (Harnois, 2013, p. 1), recent evolutions in qualitative research methods, including the “intersectionality turn” enable a situated understanding of women's experiences despite the survey method itself not necessarily being participatory (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013). This example of surveys highlights that the use of participatory methodologies does not mean that research is automatically “empowering” (Doná, 2007, p. 212). Power hierarchies still shape research processes, requiring intentional engagement of the researcher to address these imbalances throughout the research process. The use of open-ended questioning approaches, in-depth rather than rushed interviews and encouraging participants to share their views are all important strategies that seek to address the unequal power between a researcher and a research participant (Devault, 1990). Indeed, every stage of the research process, irrespective of method, may benefit from a feminist lens (Harnois, 2013, pp. 2–3).

Who Says They are “Key” and Why are They “Key”?

With this broad framing of feminist research, we turn now to KIIs. The KII originally emerged as a qualitative method

associated with anthropological research. In its ethnographic use, a researcher would develop a relationship with a key informant over a long period, conducting multiple interviews to understand an issue. This original use of KIIs is important because of how KIIs were grounded in community perspectives and based on long-term relationships. Today, while the ethnographic use of KIIs tends to maintain this positioning of KIIs as part of an embedded way of understanding communities, policy-related research often uses KIIs differently. The shift in use of KIIs from a long-term method to a short-term “reconnaissance technique” for quickly gathering data (Poggie, 1972, p. 24) is perhaps symptomatic of other ways ethnographic approaches have been mutated for faster research, e.g. “rapid ethnographies” (Vindrola-Padros & Vindrola-Padros, 2018). In this modern policy-related research framing, KIIs may be used as pragmatic and efficient methods for gathering information in a cost-effective manner (Gilchrist & Williams, 1999, p. 74). This shift in emphasis from longer-term to efficient research is important because of anthropological thinking which suggests that at the first meeting, key informants are concerned with “impression management” but that over time as trust is built, the “inside story” can emerge (Poggie, 1972, p. 29). The reliability and precision of key informants may thus vary in the current shorter-term use of KIIs.

Key informants are often identified because they hold “special or expert knowledge” on a topic (Taylor & Blake, 2015, p. 153). They are “regarded as extraordinary” compared to others in the community and often occupy positions of power (Marshall, 1996, p. 92). Key informants may be “elites,” maintaining high social position in a particular context (Morse, 2019). They may be community leaders or experts on an issue who act as “owners” of important contextual knowledge (Sharrock, 1974). Engaging with key informants is particularly important for gaining “insider” knowledge, including on sensitive topics where an FGD might not offer the same freedom to share knowledge (McKenna et al., 2011, p. 118). A well as being insiders, key informants may be viewed as representatives or “surrogates” for a broader group (Bogner et al., 2009, p. 2). Key informants are said to be different to others in a community “by the nature of their position in a culture, their information-rich connection to the research topic, and by their relationship to the researcher” (Tremblay, 1982, p. 73). Key informants may enable researchers to obtain greater access to communities, helping to identify additional research participants (Bogner et al., 2009, p. 2). The very fact that these individuals are identified as having specific knowledge reflects the fact that “[d]ifferences in the distribution of knowledge are a source of power, and power may be used to generate and maintain differences in the distribution of knowledge” (Hunter, 1993, p. 36). Knowledge is thus an important part of the power of key informants.

The question of who identifies a person as a “key informant” is sometimes difficult to answer because the process of recruiting “key informants” for research is not usually detailed (Kristensen & Ravn, 2015). While inclusion criteria may be detailed for FGD and survey participants, for KIIs this is somewhat

murkier with vague references to “purposive sampling,” leading to the question of how a person may be deemed a “key informant.” In contrast, sampling strategies for surveys are often very specific, which seems to suggest a different level of transparency. Tremblay’s (1982) oft-cited guidance on field research suggests that an “ideal” key informant has five key characteristics: a role in the community, knowledge, willingness, communicability and impartiality (p. 155). On the last point he suggests key informants need to be objective and without bias. In contrast to this, feminist research stresses how the researcher’s positionality shapes the research, influencing the choices made throughout the research process (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998, p. 121). This includes during the recruitment process for KIIs, which could benefit from greater clarity and transparency. For example, the situatedness of the researcher may influence the choices made about who is deemed a key informant. In certain contexts, it may be essential to interview particular people merely because of their position in the context—for political reasons—rather than whether this person can actually contribute valuable knowledge to support the research process. Key informants may be “gatekeepers” whose inclusion may lead to greater access for the rest of the fieldwork, requiring them to be interviewed (McKenna et al., 2011, p. 118). In other cases, key informants may be identified by others, including gate-keepers, research supervisors, field coordinators or others in similar roles. The rationale for each choice of a key informant may be difficult to articulate; rather the choice of key informants may emerge out of a general sense that this person should be interviewed.

This knowledge that key informants are presumed to hold enables their more fluid participation within interviews. Tremblay (1982) writes: “the informant is allowed considerable leeway in regard to the content of his answers . . . He is encouraged to follow, by associative processes, from one thought to the other with relative freedom” (p. 153). Knowledge inevitably affects the power hierarchies within interviews because “[t]heir authority to speak is a manifestation of their cultural capital” (Soucy, 2000, p. 182). While much has been written by feminist scholars on the importance of addressing power hierarchies between researchers and research participants (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007; Davis & Craven, 2016; Doucet & Mauthner, 2008; Hesse-Biber & Leckenby, 2004; Letherby, 2003; Liamputtong, 2007; Wickramasinghe, 2010), few have focused on the particular power dynamics involved when interviewing power-holders (Morris, 2009; Morse, 2019).

While key informants provide “insider knowledge” to a community (Bogner et al., 2009, p. 2), in contrast, an “ordinary” community member is viewed as not having such specialized knowledge. However, in their comparison between key informant and community member perspectives, McKenna et al. (2011) found that the priorities of key informants may differ from the communities they are seen to represent. They attribute this to the status of key informants compared to communities, and suggest that the knowledge acquired through key informants and community members must be situated within the socio-economic positions they hold (p. 396).

The importance of recognizing the knowledge of “ordinary” community members is not new, or solely feminist. The growth of “participatory action research” in the 1970s demonstrates the focus on “grassroots knowledge” (Rahnema, 1992b, p. 174) that emerged out of a recognition that the “pernicious monopoly of the dominant paradigm” needed to be dismantled through participatory approaches (Rahnema, 1992a, p. 122). Through this movement, the voices and perspectives of the “ordinary” were recognized as vital to solving complex issues. As a result of the innovative work on participatory methods for generating knowledge by Robert Chambers and others, research methods began to incorporate alternative ways of understanding community perspectives (Chambers, 1997, 2009; Cornwall & Fujita, 2012; Mayoux & Chambers, 2005). While the growth of “participatory research” continues, it is important to recognize that this does not preclude the inclusion of KIIs into community-based research. Indeed, key informants may be explicitly included within “participatory” research based on the assumption that key informants are part of the community (McKenna et al., 2011, p. 117).

Research Method Hierarchies

This article suggests that methodological differences between KIIs and other research methods reinforce a hierarchy that often places more value on KIIs. This results in “frequent and heavy reliance” on KIIs (McKenna et al., 2011, p. 116). This may be a particular problem in policy-related research, which is often driven by other imperatives including the need to be responsive to emerging issues and quickly present policy asks. Time and resource constraints may also result in the voices of experts being privileged over the more difficult, time-consuming and costly work of conducting research in communities using other research methods. For example, a recent research report (George Washington University, CARE International UK and International Rescue Committee, 2018) on violence against women in conflict and post-conflict settings involved primary data collection, however only one focus group discussion was held with community members across three countries (p. 49). Instead, data collection focused on interviews with legal authorities, community leaders, government representatives, United Nations representatives, service providers and staff in humanitarian organizations—all selected because they held “relevant local knowledge” (p. 48). The front cover of the report documenting these findings, which depicts a woman of African origin carrying a heavy bag on her head, seems to suggest the voices of such women are reflected in the report, yet instead experts are the ones who speak for them (Merry, 2016, p. 7). This practice of relying on KIIs, which may be more of a challenge in policy-related research rather than ethnographic research, may be attributed to the methodological ease of the KII compared to the effort required for other methods like FGDs.

The methodological issues that result in KIIs being higher on the research method hierarchy extend beyond the resourcing and logistical challenges of other methods, but relate to the

nature of KIIs themselves. For example, interviews with key informants are most often one-on-one, offering the key informant freedom and space to share their views, and perhaps even to expand the remit of the conversation beyond the researcher’s intent. In this way, KIIs can be said to be more participatory and less rigid than other methods. In contrast, FGDs—most often used to reach “ordinary” community members—are much more tightly facilitated, with limited opportunities for one person to share their perspectives freely or to divert the conversation too far beyond the bounds set by the researcher who facilitates the discussion. FGDs are perhaps less “natural” a setting (Smithson, 2000, p. 105), rather are “performances” within which varying interests are at play (Smithson, 2008, p. 363). The aspect of interaction is critical to FGDs (Smithson, 2008, p. 359), but may also be problematic, allowing particular individuals to dominate, or resulting in only normative views being vocalized (Smithson, 2000, p. 116). Similarly, surveys also face methodological constraints compared to KIIs. While a survey may be administered in a one-on-one manner, surveys are often multiple choice, offering little opportunity for participants to expand and explain their answers, or contextualize their reactions to questions. Even if participants do engage in explanations of their survey responses in-between questions, it is rare that these inputs are noted. In this way, a KII is perhaps the most flexible of typical research methods, offering participants the space to share their perspectives and providing the key informant with the sole attention of the researcher. In a KII, as opposed to a survey, a participant is expected to expand on their responses, to share examples and to contextualize their reactions. Their knowledge is allowed to emerge in a more natural way than other research methods, which may inadvertently result in this kind of knowledge being privileged over other knowledge.

The knowledge that emerges from KIIs compared to FGDs may also be positioned differently because of who key informants are; their power, status and influence in a particular context may lead to their knowledge being over-emphasized. The very fact that these participants are not “ordinary” means that they may be viewed as holding more important, accurate or objective knowledge than “ordinary” community members. A level of objectivity may indeed be superimposed over key informant contributions compared to the accounts provided by “ordinary” community members. Brun and Lund (2010), in their research in Sri Lanka, which was conducted for an NGO, share how the NGO leaders did not consider experiences of the community to be valuable knowledge, rather placed value on the “real facts” of country’s post-war recovery process (p. 822). The focus of this NGO on changing their organizational approach to post-war recovery programs, caused them to devalue the lived experiences of community members and instead search for objective knowledge to help them make tangible changes. In policy-related research, it is important to acknowledge that the need to articulate concrete actions may thus perpetuate a focus on certain kinds of knowledge over others. In contrast, feminist researchers Hesse-Biber and Leckeny (2004) emphasize the need for research to start “from the

Table 1. Key differences between KIIs, FGDs and surveys.

Feminist perspective	KIIs	FGDs	Surveys
Responding to power hierarchies	May reinforce power hierarchies through selection of power-holders as KIIs	Facilitated discussion rather than “question and answer” style enables opportunities for participant discussion, however composition of group may reinforce existing power hierarchies and some may dominate discussion	Limited opportunities to address power hierarchies between researchers and participants while administering survey, unless opportunities are provided for participants’ additional inputs to be noted and for participants to interact more fluidly with the researcher
Inductive	Open-ended questions allow new ideas to emerge	Open-ended questions allow new ideas to emerge	Survey structure may result in deductive research instead—proving a hypothesis
All types of knowledge valued equally	Expert (likely male) perspectives from KIIs may be valued over other research methods; researchers may use their position to limit opportunities for key informants to share their views	Group discussion helps to place participants on equal footing, however consensus views may be upheld or researchers may influence the conversation and limit participant contributions	Knowledge is more strictly structured according to set questions
Enables intersectional analysis	May occur if diverse KIIs are identified or if KIIs themselves present intersectional analysis of the communities they represent	May occur depending on the type/ number of FGDs and the extent to which different groups are represented, as well as their ability to reflect on the experiences of others	Collection of data on race, disability, age, economic status and other hierarchies and identities may enable intersectional analysis
Participatory	Some opportunities for dialogue and interaction between researcher and participant	Opportunities for wide participation, if facilitated well	Limited opportunities for participation

standpoint of the oppressed” in order to make visible complex issues (p. 16). Scott (1991) takes a different approach, suggesting that any account is contested: “What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, and always therefore political” (p. 797). In Scott’s view, both a key informant and FGD participant carry their own values, perspectives and politics that influences their accounts; objectivity is thus a myth according to his approach.

The following Table 1 contrasts the key differences between KIIs, FGDs and surveys from a feminist research perspective, emphasizing both methodological differences as well as the way the methods might be used. The key feminist research principles listed below do not necessarily apply universally to the many strands of feminist thinking, but represent the key concepts often used in feminist research:

The gendered consequences of KIIs are also significant. Unless intentional effort is made to equally interview women, it is possible that research results in disproportionately higher male “key informants” than female key informants. Meuser and Nagel (2009), for example, show how power hierarchies result in men being acknowledged as experts over women (p. 35). Feminist scholars have also drawn attention to how powerful men shape paradigms and ways of thinking (Devault, 1990, p. 96). Soucy (2000) observes how the opinions of largely male experts “eclipsed the opinions of others” (p. 184). This does not mean that women are uninfluential, rather it reflects that “women speak in ways that are limited and shaped by men’s greater social power and control”

(Devault, 1990, p. 98). Thus, “men’s monopoly of authorized knowledge” leads to women’s voices and perspectives being muted (Letherby, 2003, p. 32). When this factor is combined with the methodological differences between a KII and FGD, it reveals the possibility that KIIs may in fact offer more opportunities for male voices to be heard in this one-on-one context, than a separate FGD with women or a multiple-choice survey offers women. Dominant narratives may be reproduced (Armstrong, 2008, p. 63) by overemphasizing the value of KII data, allowing those with power and status to shape the trajectory of decisions for communities (Marshall, 1996, p. 93). From a feminist perspective, this results in men’s perspectives being the point of departure (Ikonen & Ojala, 2007, p. 82), instead of a feminist epistemological approach that seeks to bring women’s experiences and perspectives to the fore as a means of changing narratives (Narayan, 2004, p. 213).

Whither the Key Informant Interview?

This article has suggested that even within research that seeks to be “participatory,” power hierarchies may be perpetuated by inadvertently over-emphasizing the knowledge of key informants. How might research informed by a feminist perspective address this issue in a practical way?

This article uses a feminist approach to propose that even “ordinary” community members have knowledge. Alongside FGDs that allow women to separately participate, and/or surveys of community members, conducting in-depth interviews

with ordinary community members can be an alternative and/or additional way of capturing knowledge. Including community members in an interview sample can be an important way of capturing diverse perspectives (McKenna et al., 2011, p. 121). Investing in one-on-one opportunities for women—not just women who are leaders, but “ordinary” women—to be interviewed thus allows normally hidden voices to be heard. This may shed light on power dynamics in a different way, enabling an understanding not just of women’s voices but how women’s lives are influenced (positively or negatively) by those in positions of power, including the power-holders normally considered as key informants. While interviewing key informants also reveals power hierarchies from the perspective of power-holders, understanding power from the perspective of the “ordinary” is particularly important.

Rather than prioritizing the knowledge of power-holders, a feminist lens to research prioritizes the knowledge of those considered ordinary—because each person has valuable knowledge. It also recognizes that focusing on the voices of the oppressed provides specific, otherwise hidden knowledge:

It should be clear that if it is beneficial to start research, scholarship and theory in white women’s situations, then we should be able to learn even more about the social and natural orders if we start from the situations of women in de-valued and oppressed races, classes and cultures. (Harding, 1991, pp. 178–180)

This “intersectional” (Crenshaw, 1991) approach to research sheds light on social contexts that may not emerge if the voices of power-holders dominate research. By engaging ordinary women in one-on-one interviews, the multiplicity of experiences of women may more readily emerge (Stanley & Wise, 1990, p. 22).

This is not to say that KIIs should never occur, or are never helpful. This article suggests that KIIs are a valuable method for capturing the perspectives of power-holders and decision-makers; understanding how power-holders maintain their privilege and shape dominant paradigms can be an important way of addressing inequalities most felt by the “ordinary” (Stephens, 2010). KIIs enable insider insights into complex issues, facilitate access into communities, and also represent a research method that is relatively easy to implement. Aside from these benefits, when used within their original longer-term ethnographic intent, KIIs can also provide deep knowledge that is grounded in relationships of trust with researchers. This article recognizes these benefits associated with KIIs, while focusing on critically analyzing the ways in which the common use of KIIs (especially in policy-related research) reinforces power and privilege held by key informants. It suggests the need to balance KII perspectives with “ordinary” voices of community members (McKenna et al., 2011, p. 122). This article proposes that the benefits of KIIs are best realized when this research method is used in combination with other research methods which enable “ordinary” perspectives to emerge. It suggests that researchers need to consider what is gained and lost through the use of this method, and to engage in

critical reflection with a feminist lens when choosing research methods.

To support such critical reflection, this article suggests five basic questions in considering the choice and use of research methods:

1. Whose knowledge is voiced through the use of this research method?
2. Whose knowledge is *not* voiced through the use of this research method?
3. How are power hierarchies between the researcher and research participants maintained or challenged through the use of this research method?
4. How participatory or flexible is this research method?
5. How does this research method enable intersectional analysis?

Conclusion

Using a feminist approach, this article has explored the challenges associated with KIIs. It suggests that KIIs do provide knowledge, access and insider insights—but argues that this knowledge also has limits, informed by the power and privilege held by key informants. This paper shows that the KII methodology is being used in different ways than it originally was intended. Rather than being part of longer-term ethnographic research, KIIs are now used as a shorter-term strategy for understanding communities. The meaning and value attributed to KIIs—which perhaps was justified in the context of longer-term, embedded fieldwork—has remained the same despite the method now often being used differently, particularly for policy-related research. This aspect contextualizes the critiques of KIIs in this article.

This article asserts that KIIs frame certain people as having “key” knowledge, privileging certain kind of knowledge. It suggests that this hierarchy for knowledge may inadvertently reinforce the agendas and perspectives of the dominant—men—while presuming that these key informants represent the voices of their communities. Even when other research methods complement KIIs, it is important to acknowledge that KIIs may be unconsciously valued more than other research methods, simply because these participants are seen as “key.”

This article argues that KIIs need to be understood as creating specific opportunities for focused contributions to knowledge over other kinds of research methods. Interviews, by virtue of being one-on-one, enable participants to share their perspectives more than FGDs or multiple-choice surveys. This means that in the context of KIIs, it is more likely that the voices and knowledge of those in power may dominate analysis.

A feminist lens to research suggests that recognizing the “ordinary” shifts the way knowledge is positioned, such that even ordinary accounts and experiences have value. In the words of participatory development scholar, Chambers: “it is those who live in poverty, those who are vulnerable, those who are marginalized, who are the best judges and the prime

authorities on their lives” (Chambers, 2009, p. 246). By intentionally providing opportunities for ordinary women to participate in research, opportunities may emerge for different perspectives of the world (Harding, 1991, p. 185). Instead of KIIs alone, this article advocates for in-depth interviews with “ordinary” women in the community alongside KIIs. It also argues that researchers need to critically reflect on the power and privilege of key informants when using KIIs.

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