

Process Analysis of HIV Counseling and Testing (PACT)

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Project Description: This is a descriptive pilot study of the process of HIV Counseling and Testing (HCAT) that will also help determine the feasibility of an innovative method of recording, analyzing, and interviewing participants about HCAT sessions. 30 HCAT sessions will be recorded and analyzed using Digital Audio Discourse Analysis. A subset of 15 of the 30 recorded test clients and all six counselors will participate in ethnographic interviews about the experience of HCAT both in the past and the recently recorded session. Clients will be asked to tell the story of their testing experiences and then listen to the recorded HCAT session, stopping the player to make comments. Interviews with counselors will explore their experiences as a trainee, positive and frustrating counseling experiences, their role in HIV prevention, and needs for further training. To triangulate the data analysis, counselors will also listen to one or two session recordings, stopping the player to make comments.

Digital Audio Discourse Analysis (DADA) is an approach to interaction that focuses on the rhetorical, narrative and interpretive strategies used by the interactants, for example to account for HIV risk behavior or motivations for testing. DADA is an empirical and interpretive approach to talk as situated action, rooted in ethnomethodology, conversation analysis and discursive psychology. DADA focuses on how interactants interpret and orient to each other's utterances by examining linguistic and paralinguistic features of subsequent responses. Specific attention is given to the ways that interactants use common sense interpretive repertoires to retrospectively construct risk behavior in ways that manages the allocation of responsibility for risk behavior.

Recordings of HCAT sessions and interviews will be made using digital MP3 recorders, not audiocassettes. Digital recording allows for superior recording quality and facilitates the repeated listening, analysis, and transcription of the sessions using an audio editing software program, CoolEdit 2000. After a preliminary analysis by repeated listening and note taking, key segments are selected for careful transcription including both linguistic and paralinguistic aspects of the interaction.

Certain paralinguistic details allow us to analyze the structure of turn allocation, or who speaks when, during HCAT. For example, micro pauses only a third of a second serve as a "slot" for a response to an utterance. The institutional and conversational constraints imposed on turn allocation are particularly important for understanding the ways in which institutional communication formats are initiated and maintained during the session. Previous research suggests that communications formats such as health education, depersonalized advice giving, interrogation of risk behavior for data collection - hinder the counselor's ability to engage clients in client-centered counseling.

Another software program, Atlas.ti, is used to index the digital audio recordings for comparative analysis. Process analysis of HCAT illuminates the multitude of tasks performed in an HCAT session. Once the various tasks that make up an HCAT session are categorized, sequenced and coded, precise measurement of the time counselors spend performing various HCAT tasks can generate useful quantitative information for comparison across the data set.