

SAFETY DIAGNOSIS  
TOOL KIT FOR LOCAL  
COMMUNITIES

# Guide to Organizing Semi-Structured Interviews With Key Informant

[ charting a course > to safe living ]

vol. 11

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vol. 11

*Institut national  
de santé publique*

Québec 

In cooperation with:

• Ministère de la Sécurité publique

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## The [ charting a course › to safe living ] collection

This document is part of a collection prepared to foster and support safety promotion in life settings. Volumes 4 to 13 are the main components of a safety diagnosis tool kit developed for local communities. To date, the following volumes have been compiled for this collection:

### Volume 1

Levaque, Renée, Laurence Le Hénaff and Pierre Maurice. *Formation pour l'amélioration de la sécurité et la prévention de la criminalité à l'intention des collectivités locales*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, 2006.

### Volume 2

Alvarez, Josephina. *Réalisation d'un diagnostic de sécurité. Trousse à l'intention des collectivités locales – Les diagnostics locaux de sécurité : une étude comparée pour mieux comprendre et mieux agir*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, 2006.

### Volume 3

Laforest, Julie. *Indicateurs de vulnérabilité associés à la sécurité d'un territoire*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, 2007.

### Volume 4

Rainville, Monique, Louise Marie Bouchard and Pierre Maurice. *Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities. General Guide*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, to be published in March 2010.

### Volume 5

Rochette, Daniel, Robert Lavertue and Louise Marie Bouchard. *Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities. Guide to Preparing an Area's Sociodemographic and Economic Profile*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, to be published in March 2010.

### Volume 6

Motard, Louise. *Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities. Guide to Analyzing Crime Using Official Statistics*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, to be published in March 2010.

### Volume 7

Bouchard, Louise Marie. *Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities. Guide to Organizing Telephone Surveys on Public Safety and Victimization in Life Settings*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, to be published in March 2010.

### **Volume 8**

Bouchard Louise Marie and Michel Ouellet. *Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities. Guide to Organizing Self-Administered Surveys on Public Safety and Victimization in Life Settings*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, to be published in March 2010.

### **Volume 9**

Bouchard Louise Marie and Michel Ouellet. *Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities. Guide to Organizing Self-Administered Surveys on Public Safety and Victimization in Life Settings (Social Housing Version)*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, to be published in March 2010.

### **Volume 10**

Rainville, Monique. *Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities. Guide to Organizing Focus Groups*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, 2009.

### **Volume 11**

Laforest, Julie. *Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities. Guide to Organizing Semi-Structured Interviews With Key Informants*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, 2009.

### **Volume 12**

Ouellet, Michel, Monique Rainville, Louise Marie Bouchard and Catherine Belley, *Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities. Guide to Direct Observation of Community Safety*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, 2009.

## Note to readers

This guide to organizing semi-structured interviews is part of the *Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities*. It has been prepared for people who want to plan and conduct this type of interview with key informants during safety diagnoses. The procedure described here may also be used in other contexts provided an appropriate interview plan is designed.

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## Organization of the guide

This guide has four sections.

The first section briefly describes the nature and usefulness

of *semi-structured interviews*.

The second section explains

*how to plan and conduct*

them and analyze the data gathered.

The third section provides *additional references*,

while the fourth contains a *sample interview plan*

and instructions on how to use it.

1

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

2

HOW TO PLAN

3

REFERENCES

#

INTERVIEW PLAN

## Semi-structured interviews – A general overview

Like focus groups, direct observation and literature reviews, semi-structured interviews can be used to gather qualitative information. Interviews of this type are suited to working with small samples and are useful for studying specific situations or for supplementing and validating information derived from other sources used for making safety diagnoses. In addition, since they provide access to perceptions and opinions, they are effective for gaining insight into problems that are not immediately perceptible but that nonetheless cause concern in certain areas or in certain segments of the population.

During safety diagnoses, semi-structured interviews should be used to explore crime and safety problems perceived by key informants. In particular, they should focus on the following topics: crime and victimization, disorderly conduct and incivility (nuisances), the perception of safety or the feeling of safety and the assessment of public services (see Appendix 1).

# Procedure

## PLANNING INTERVIEWS

### Identifying respondents

Key informants from a community under study are “privileged witnesses, or people who, because of their position, activities or responsibilities, have a good understanding of the problem to be explored. These witnesses are not necessarily members of the population targeted by the study, but they all have a major interest in that population.”<sup>1</sup> In addition to being privileged witnesses of specific problems, they may represent specific client groups and areas, have administrative responsibilities in a municipality or community organization, be experts in a particular field, and so forth.

It is recommended that the stakeholder table or the list of community organizations be consulted to identify key informants. If necessary, members of the safety diagnosis committee can also be asked to suggest respondents or even to act as key informants themselves. It can be useful to draw up a list of potential respondents before launching the recruitment process.

### Number of interviews

It is hard to determine the exact number of interviews that have to be done for a safety diagnosis. However, several questions must be taken into account in deciding on how many interviews to conduct:

- *Qualitative and quantitative data sources already used for the diagnosis.* During a safety diagnosis, it is important to cover all safety topics with a range of sources. In this context, semi-structured interviews may be viewed as a way of supplementing other data collection methods, and it may be sufficient to conduct only a few interviews with key informants from the study community. However, if semi-structured interviews are the sole source of information, more interviews should be conducted.
- *Range of viewpoints represented in the diagnosis.* Semi-structured interviews can be a way of capturing concerns and perceptions of groups that have not been contacted with other data collection methods.
- *Available time and resources.* At least two days are needed to prepare, conduct, transcribe and analyze a semi-structured interview. It is recommended, therefore, that the number of interviews scheduled take into account available time and resources. It is also important to consider the fact that key informants are often stakeholders in high demand and therefore not always available. As well, there is the question of the total length of the data collection phase.
- *Data saturation.* Under optimal conditions, data collection from key informants should end once data saturation is achieved, i.e. when interviews do not provide any new or additional insights because the information gathered is repetitive.

1. *Séance d'information dans le cadre du Diagnostic local de sécurité*, p. 25. Available on the Internet at [www.vps.fgov.be/doc/syllabusFr.pdf](http://www.vps.fgov.be/doc/syllabusFr.pdf). [Translation]

## Preparing interviews

Even though semi-structured interviews are flexible, they require rigorous preparation. It is essential to define their objectives, devise an interview plan and draw up a consent form. Some of the main steps are as follows:

- Study the interview plan (see the section “Key informant semi-structured interview plan – Instructions for use), decide which questions are most appropriate for the respondent or prepare new ones.
- Draw up a consent form specifying the rules of the interview and the confidentiality commitment, or adapt the sample form given in Appendix 2.
- Contact the respondent: explain the goal of the interview and the safety diagnosis project, obtain his/her permission, schedule an appointment and agree on where the interview will be held. The place selected should be neutral, confidential, comfortable, quiet, free of distractions, and easily accessible for the respondent.
- If necessary, send the consent form and the interview plan to the respondent.
- If necessary, prepare equipment for recording the interview.
- Contact the respondent again to confirm the date and location of the interview.

## INTERVIEWING RESPONDENTS

Semi-structured interviews should last from 60 to 90 minutes. Sixty-minute interviews are perfectly acceptable and ensure that neither the interviewer nor the respondent lose their concentration.

### Initiating interviews

An easy way to start an interview is to introduce yourself to the respondent and then remind him/her of its goals and projected length and the topics to be discussed. It is important to tell the respondent that he/she will be interviewed as an expert or as a representative of a group of people or an organization. If the interview is to be recorded, the respondent must be asked for his/her written or verbal consent and reminded that his/her statements will be kept confidential at all times. This is a good time to have the respondent sign the consent form, if necessary.

It is highly recommended that interviews be taped (with a digital or other type of tape recorder), even if they will not be transcribed in full. Note that taping can only be done with the prior approval of the respondent (see Appendix 2). If he/she refuses, notes must be taken instead.

### Conducting interviews: a few tips

- Start the interview with a general, open-ended question.
- Ask as few questions as possible; the respondent should do most of the talking.
- Making reference (anonymously, of course) to statements made in other interviews or to findings based on other data sources can a good way to encourage respondents to express themselves. It is also useful for validating information already gathered.
- Respect the respondent's pace and do not be afraid of pauses or silences.
- Interviewers should not judge what respondents say. They must keep the interview focused on the topics previously defined (see the section "Key informant semi-structured interview plan – Instructions for use), refrain from suggesting answers and be careful not to ask leading questions.
- Be careful not to ask closed questions that leave respondents no room to elaborate and that can slow the interview's pace.
- Be sure to cover all of the pertinent topics included in the interview plan.
- Ask clear and direct questions such as How? Where? When? Who? What? Why? How much? How many?<sup>2</sup>
- If necessary, formulate questions so that informants answer on behalf of the people they represent<sup>3</sup>.
- Listen carefully to all answers and ask more questions to obtain additional information<sup>4</sup>.
- Ensure that key informants thoroughly understand each question<sup>5</sup>.

### Concluding interviews

Since semi-structured interviews do not consist of closed questions, it may be hard to end them. When interviewers feel that all topics have been discussed and that the time set aside for the interview is up, they can ask the respondent if he/she has anything to add. The sample interview plan given in this guide suggests two questions for ending interviews and interviewers may use either one. Interviewers must then thank the respondent for participating, explain how the rest of the safety diagnosis project will proceed and mention that the results will be sent to him/her once the diagnosis is complete. Soon after the interview, it is a good idea to summarize what the respondent said and to write down your impressions and any things that stood out. This will make it easier to transcribe and analyze the interview.

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2. Based on the document *Outils pour l'évaluation, la planification et le développement participatif* :  
<http://www.unhcr.fr/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/publ/opendoc.pdf?tbl=PUBL&id=44c4864f2>.

3. Idem.

4. Idem.

5. Idem.

## DATA ANALYSIS

An in-depth discussion of the processing and analysis of data gathered for safety diagnosis purposes can be found in the *General Guide*. The process as described below is merely a brief summary of the steps usually involved, particularly in analyzing data from semi-structured interviews:

- Ideally, transcribe and reread the tape recordings or notes made during the interviews. Since transcribing recordings in their entirety can be a fairly cumbersome task, a compromise solution is to simply identify and write down the main themes that emerge as you listen to the tapes.
- Classify the information gathered using an analytical framework based on the topics discussed by the respondents during the interviews. Answer the question “What?” For example, what were the principal problems raised by the respondents?
- Identify the main ideas expressed for each topic.
- Identify the most important points and classify them by safety topic.
- Validate the findings among the members of the project team and with other designated authorities.



## References



Interviewing in qualitative research

<http://fds.oup.com/www.oup.co.uk/pdf/0-19-874204-5chap15.pdf>



The in-depth interview

[http://www.pra.ca/resources/indepth\\_V4\\_e.pdf](http://www.pra.ca/resources/indepth_V4_e.pdf)

## Key informant semi-structured interview plan

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

Interviewers must have an interview plan for conducting semi-structured interviews. This section presents a sample semi-structured interview plan adapted to the context of safety diagnoses. It begins with a few instructions on how to use the plan.

**Always bear in mind that this interview plan should be used in a flexible manner.** It can be adapted, if necessary, to the topics the interviewer seeks to explore, the type of informant being interviewed, and so forth.

The proposed plan begins with a section entitled “**Introduction of interviewer**”, which can easily be adapted. The important thing is that the interviewer introduces himself/herself and reminds the respondent of the topics that will be discussed during the interview. In this way, the respondent knows exactly what the interviewer’s expectations are.

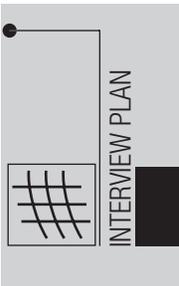
The second section is the main part of the interview plan. It indicates which topics are to be discussed and suggests possible questions. Two series of questions are proposed, one on **Safety problems** and the other on the **Assessment of public services**.

Contrary to the situation with a closed questionnaire, interviewers do not have to ask all of the questions proposed in the interview plan. They merely have to follow the general outline. In regard to safety problems, it is important 1) to obtain information on the safety problems encountered in the area under study and 2) to encourage the respondent to identify the problems he/she considers most worrisome. As for the assessment of public services, the main purpose is to gauge the level of satisfaction with these services and to pinpoint perceived problems.

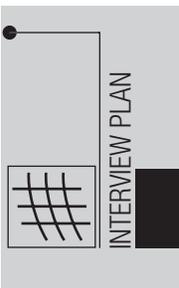
To make the interview flow more easily, it can be useful to summarize each topic just discussed before moving on to another one. The interview will also flow better if interviewers ask the main questions first whenever they introduce a new topic. In any event, the interviewer must choose questions with which he/she is at ease and which are adapted to the interviewee. The questions have to be formulated in different ways depending on whether the person being interviewed is a citizen, a community organization service provider or a mayor.

In the sample interview plan shown here, three clarifying questions are proposed in the event that interviewers would like the respondent to explain certain things in more detail. Interviewers must keep a few different versions of these questions in mind so that they can encourage the respondent to talk and can thus keep the discussion going.

If respondents have difficulty identifying safety problems, interviewers can give some examples, but they must not suggest answers (see Appendix 1).



The third section of the sample plan is aimed at **concluding** the interview and suggests two questions for this purpose. The goal is to enable interviewers to make sure that the topics they wished to explore have been covered as completely as possible. Obviously, not all key informants will be able to talk about all safety topics. For example, during an interview with a respondent who works on a specific problem or with a specific clientele, certain topics may not be discussed because they have no bearing on that problem or clientele. Therefore, it is important to decide what topics are pertinent when the interview is being prepared. However, interviewers must try to cover as many topics as possible when interviewing informants with a general knowledge of the area under study.



## SAMPLE INTERVIEW PLAN

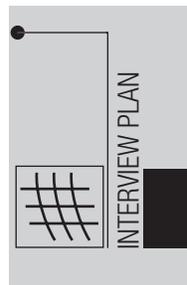
### Introduction of interviewer

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I have been asked to \_\_\_\_\_.

During the interview, I would like to discuss the following topics: crime and victimization, disorderly conduct and incivility (nuisances), the perception of safety or the feeling of safety, and the assessment of public services in your area. With these topics in mind...

### Safety problems

Main questions	Additional questions	Clarifying questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you tell me about the safety problems encountered in your area?</li> </ul> OR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which safety problems affect your area?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you learn about these problems?</li> <li>• Why is this considered a problem?</li> <li>• Under what circumstances does the problem arise?</li> <li>• What is the scope of the problem?</li> <li>• Which places are most affected by the problem, when does it usually occur and who are the main victims?</li> <li>• Have you noticed any changes in the situation over the past few years?</li> <li>• Which safety problems give rise to complaints?</li> <li>• How do you explain the problem?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you expand a little on this?</li> <li>• Can you tell me anything else?</li> <li>• Can you give me some examples?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your experience, which safety problems bother people the most?</li> </ul> OR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your opinion, what are the most worrisome safety problems in your area?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why?</li> </ul>	



### Assessment of public services

Main questions	Additional questions	Clarifying questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generally speaking, are people satisfied with the services offered by the municipality?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If not, what are the main problems that you have witnessed or heard about?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can you expand a little on this?</li> <li>Can you tell me anything else?</li> <li>Can you give me some examples?</li> </ul>
<p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In your opinion, how satisfied are people with the public services available?</li> </ul>		
<p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you know of any groups who are dissatisfied with certain services?</li> </ul>		
Conclusion of interview		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there any other safety problems that we have not discussed and that you find worrisome?</li> </ul>		
<p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you want to add anything on safety problems or public services?</li> </ul>		

This plan is available in MS Word format on the Web site of the Québec Safety Promotion and Crime Prevention Resource Centre / Centre québécois de ressources en promotion de la sécurité et en prévention de la criminalité (crpspc.qc.ca) at:  
[http://www.crpspc.qc.ca/default\\_an.asp?fichier=outils\\_diagnostic\\_an.htm](http://www.crpspc.qc.ca/default_an.asp?fichier=outils_diagnostic_an.htm)



# **APPENDICES**

## Appendix 1

# List of safety topics and main aspects to be considered

### TOPIC: CRIME AND VICTIMIZATION

#### Categories that might be considered under this topic:

It is preferable to classify crime and victimization data derived from official statistics using the categories in the *Criminal Code*. However, many types of data gathered during safety diagnoses are not formulated in legal terms or are too vague to be placed in one of the categories of the Code. In such instances, it is necessary to use or create other categories that are easier to interpret. Some examples are given below.

#### Categories under the *Criminal Code*:

- Offences against people
  - Homicide
  - Criminal negligence and other offences
  - Attempted murder or conspiracy to commit murder
  - Assault (except sexual assault)
  - Sexual assault
  - Other sexual offences
  - Abduction or detention
  - Robbery or extortion
  - Criminal harassment
  - Threats
  - Other
- Offences against property
  - Arson
  - Breaking and entering
  - Motor vehicle theft
  - Theft over \$5 000
  - Theft \$5 000 and under
  - Possession of stolen property
  - Fraud
  - Mischief

- Other offences under the *Criminal Code*
  - Prostitution
  - Weapons
  - Offences against the administration of justice
  - Acts contrary to public morals and disorderly conduct
  - Harassing or indecent telephone calls
  - Other
- Offences related to the operation of a motor vehicle
  - Impaired driving
  - Failure to stop or remain
  - Other
- Offences relating to drugs and narcotics

**Other crime and victimization categories:**

- Discrimination
- Violence perpetrated or suffered by young people
- Violence perpetrated or suffered by seniors
- Intimidation at school
- Taxing on school buses
- Street fighting among gang members
- Intimidation of people by gang members
- Theft
- Other: specify the category

**TOPIC: DISORDERLY CONDUCT AND INCIVILITY**

**Categories that might be considered under this topic:**

- Lack of cleanliness in certain areas (presence of litter, syringes, pieces of glass, etc.)
- Abandoned or dilapidated buildings
- Graffiti on buildings or equipment
- Vandalism on private or public buildings or equipment
- Nuisances related to drug dealing or use
- Nuisances related to prostitution activities
- Inappropriate or intimidating behaviour by people who are intoxicated or whose mental health seems to be impaired
- Conflicts between groups of residents
- Other nuisances related to noise
- Other types of disorderly conduct and incivility: specify the category

## **TOPIC: PERCEPTION OF SAFETY AND FEELING OF SAFETY**

### **Categories that might be considered under this topic:**

- Perceived safety
  - Perception of safety in one's own community
  - Perception of one's own safety
- Perception of safety risks in one's life setting or in a particular place
  - For oneself
  - For one's family or children
  - For specific clientele (women, seniors, young people, etc.)
- Perception of risks related to the built environment
  - Poor or defective lighting of streets, sidewalks, parking lots, parks or other spaces
  - Boarded-up buildings
  - Isolated spots
- Protective behaviour
- Avoidance behaviour
- Factors that can have a positive influence on the feeling of safety
  - Housing stability
  - A climate of mutual aid among neighbours
  - Surveillance of houses by neighbours

## **TOPIC: PUBLIC SERVICES**

### **Categories that might be considered under this topic:**

#### Police services

- Police presence in the area under study
- Quality of police work in the area
- Quality of police response when complaints are filed

#### Fire service

- Quality of fire service response to calls

#### Maintenance of roads, streets and sidewalks

- Maintenance and repair of roads and streets
- Maintenance and repair of sidewalks
- Snow removal from streets
- Snow and ice removal from sidewalks

- Lighting of streets and sidewalks
- Complaints filed

Maintenance of parks and public spaces

- Maintenance of parks and public spaces
- Night-time lighting of parks and public spaces
- Safety of equipment in parks

Maintenance of buildings, equipment and public parking lots

- Maintenance of buildings and public equipment
- Night-time lighting around buildings, equipment and public parking lots

Other services

- Recreational activities
- Quality of the environment or drinking water
- Presence of community services

## APPENDIX 2

### Sample consent form

PROJECT "Enter the name"

Project context

**Define the context of the project**

I agree to participate in this project, whose conditions are as follows:

- The project is aimed at making a safety diagnosis. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key informants [**from the municipality, neighbourhood, etc.**].
- Interviews will last for about one hour and questions will deal with safety problems encountered in the study area and with the assessment of available public services [**in the neighbourhood, municipality**].
- The interview I give and the information it contains will be used solely for the purposes defined by the project.
- At any time, I can refuse to answer certain questions, discuss certain topics or even put an end to the interview without prejudice to myself.
- To facilitate the interviewer's job, the interview will be recorded. However, the recording will be destroyed as soon as it has been transcribed.
- All interview data will be handled so as to protect their confidentiality. Therefore, no names will be mentioned and the information will be coded.
- All data will be destroyed at the end of the project.
- For any information about the project, I can contact [**enter the name and contact information of the person in charge**].

Respondent's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This consent form is available in MS Word format on the Web site of the Québec Safety Promotion and Crime Prevention Resource Centre / Centre québécois de ressources en promotion de la sécurité et en prévention de la criminalité (crpspc.qc.ca) at:  
[http://www.crpspc.qc.ca/default\\_an.asp?fichier=outils\\_diagnostic\\_an.htm](http://www.crpspc.qc.ca/default_an.asp?fichier=outils_diagnostic_an.htm)



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