

The Data Collection Process

A doctoral student must jump through many hoops before they are able to collect data. Most of those in my program (Ed. D in Adult, Higher, and Community Education) are qualitative researchers. While numbers can provide much insight, sharing the stories of others, the telling of their unique life experiences, is an impactful way to advocate and gain support for a worthy initiative. As soon as I was given the green light from my institution to begin the data collection process, i.e. interviews and observations, I reached out to the director of the housing initiative requesting she send the recruitment email. I was thrilled at the number of responses I received from women willing to sit down and speak with me about their experiences as a single mother pursuing higher education while living in this affordable apartment complex.

Early on, it was suggested by the team that I offer incentives to my participants. Katy took it upon herself to find money in her budget that would pay for the incentives participants would receive for their time spent speaking with me. I truly do not think I would have had the response I did if I was not able to offer these women a gift for their time. They were so grateful, as was I. Funding for doctoral students is hard to come by, and is usually met with strict stipulations on how the money is to be spent. There were no funds that were offered through my institution that would allow me to purchase incentives with grant money. A major financial burden was taken off my plate because of Katy and Fahe's kindness and dedication to the successful outcome of my project.

My doctoral committee suggested a minimum of 12 participants. In an effort to gain trust from my research population, with the permission of the housing program director, I attended a family meeting on site, where I introduced myself and the project to the mothers who were in attendance. I was able to meet with many of them one on one after the meeting and explain to

them more about myself and the project. A few days later, the program director sent out the official recruitment email. She sent out a total of three emails on my behalf, and I was able to fill all 12 interview spots. Getting the minimum number of interviewees is always a challenging, nerve wrecking process. To have all of them commit over less than a month's time was simply amazing.

I traveled to the research site three times conducting interviews. Each time, I was so grateful for the time and responses I gathered working with these women. To earn their trust enough for them to share their intimate life stories is something I will always cherish. Many of them expressed gratitude to me and the work I am doing. I could not have done it without the support of Fahe and the women who chose to share with me what having affordable housing and child care while pursuing their education means for their success and their children's success.

I look forward to the next steps of data analysis. Digging in to the detailed life stories, and being able to share their goals and passions in hopes of breaking down societal stigmas that have been attached to the single mother for decades. Almost every woman I interviewed described herself as strong and independent, and are raising strong, independent children who will one day be our country's leaders. The work Fahe and their partner organizations are doing in providing a space for these women to see and reach their full potential is a model that should be recognized by state and federal policy makers as one that is essential to the success of the country's future. More work should be done to meet the needs of underrepresented populations who are struggling to make a better life for themselves and their children.