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Language Barriers Impact Emergency Medical Services:

Preliminary Results

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Background

Emergency medical services (EMS) care is a continuum that relies on accurate and efficient communication



Impact of language barriers in other healthcare settings is well-documented

Scant research on prehospital language barriers

Language Barriers Impact EMS Care

“And he kept saying ‘sangria sangria sangria’ and I didn’t know what “sangria” meant. And I didn’t know why he kept saying that to me...I was like “wine, is there wine in his pocket?” I didn’t understand, like what he was telling me.”



"Her blood pressure was up and everything was serious...it sounded as if it could've been a heart problem, and when we saw the vital signs we thought it could be a heart problem..."



...so then the other questions started coming in, so then it came out that there was a fight. And then it was like 'Oh, okay, now we understand.'"

Study Objectives

Describe formal and informal strategies utilized by EMS providers to overcome language barriers

Describe decision-making by EMS providers when faced with language barriers

Study Design

2 components

- Survey
- Interviews

2 types of data

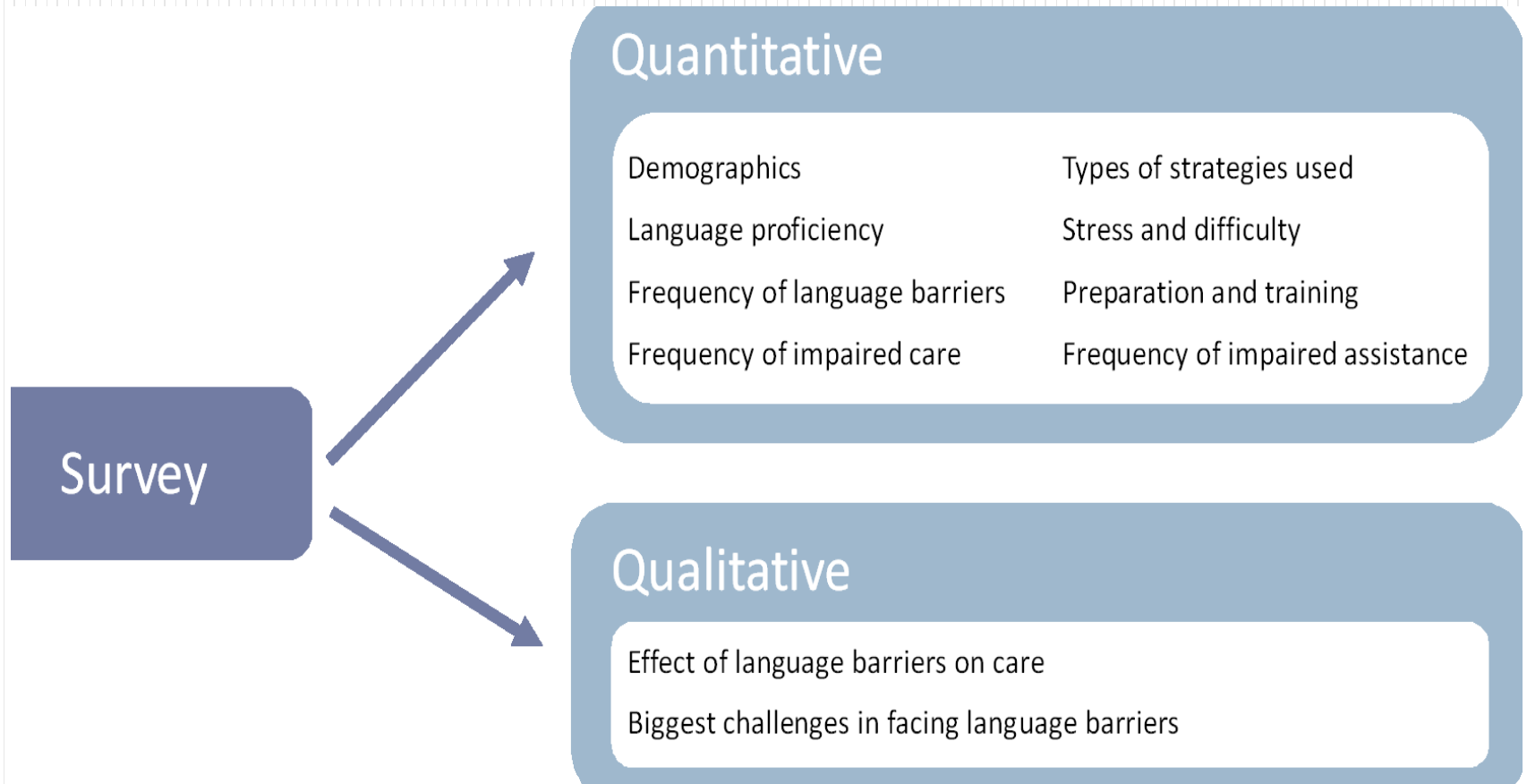
- Quantitative
- Qualitative

Locations

- New Mexico
- South Africa



Mixed Methods Design

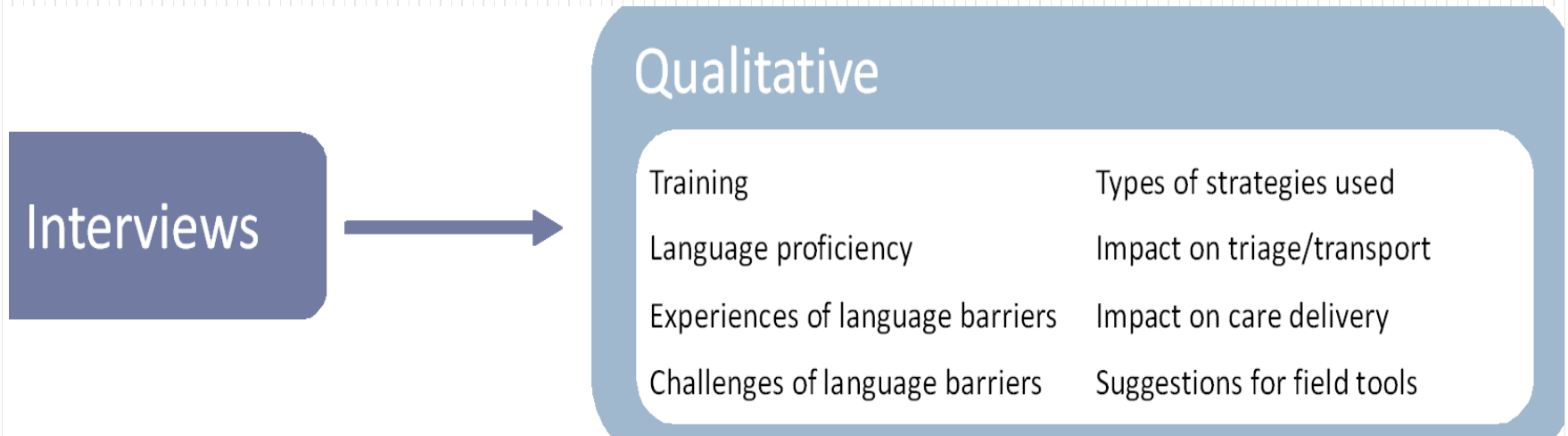


All dispatchers in study dispatch centers

Excluded if not working at time of survey or still in training

58 New Mexico respondents (overall 84.5% response rate)

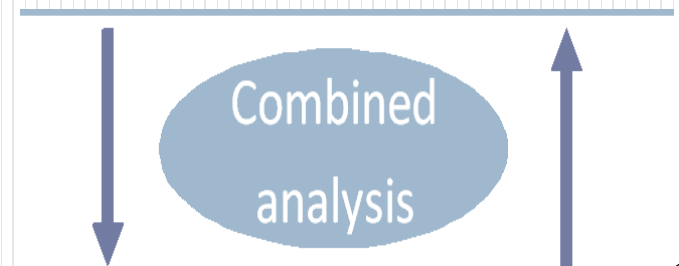
Mixed Methods Design



EMS field medics at all levels of training if dispatched by one of the four study dispatch centers

Excluded if still training, no shifts within past 30 days, no pediatric patients

Follow up with a combined analysis of Interviews and Surveys.



Results

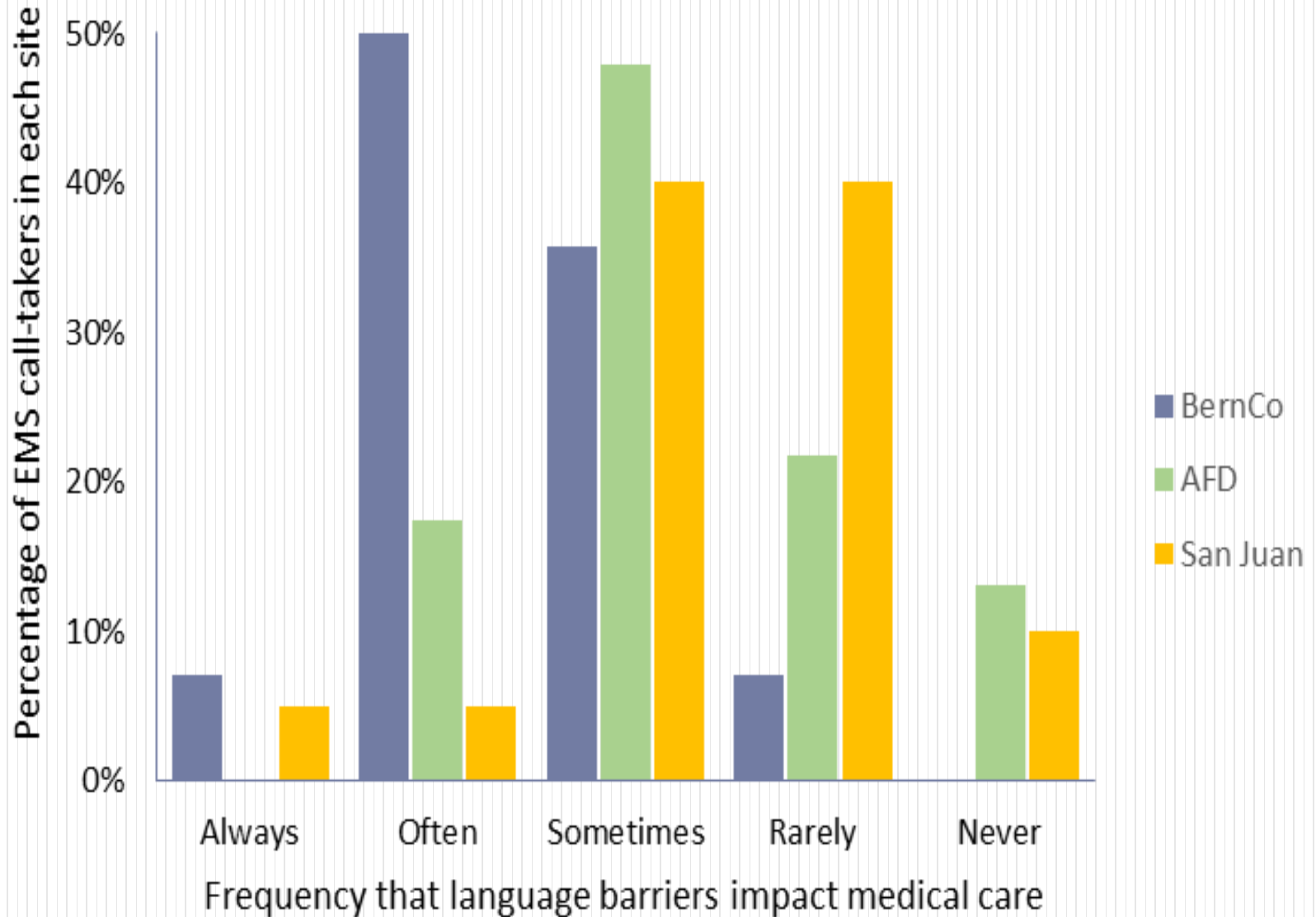
Dispatcher perception of the impact of language barriers on medical care

Impact of language barriers on patient care and transport decisions

EMS strategies to overcome language barriers in the field



Dispatchers' Perception of Language Barrier Impact



Impact on Decision Making

Increased likelihood of transport (36%)

Increased reliance on next provider in chain (48%)



Strategies: In the Spirit of EMS

Body language (80%)

Bystander translators
(84% Adult, 28% child)

Reliance on objective
assessment (76%)

Telephonic Interpreter
(32%)

Digital Tools (24%)



Recommendations

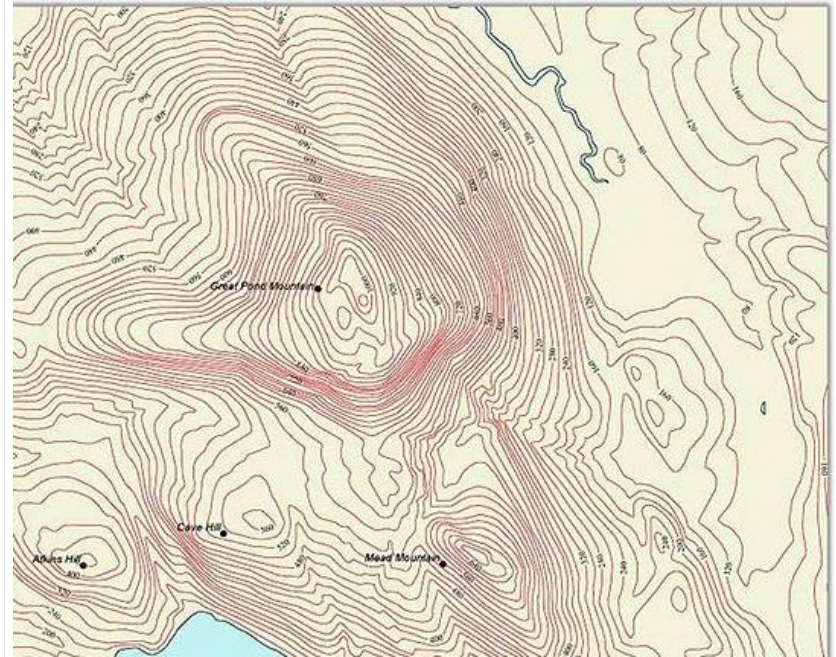
Telephonic
interpreters (44%)

Language classes
(73%)



Framework for Next Steps

- Get the lay of the land
- Test interventions & tools



Questions?