Learning Lab

Qualitative Data Handling in Nutrition Research

Focus Group Discussions

Wayamba University of Sri Lanka

Learning outcomes

Understand the Fundamentals of FGDs

Participants will be able to define what FGDs are, identify their key characteristics, and differentiate FGDs from other qualitative research methods.

Develop Skills for Effective Moderation

Participants will learn how to design discussion guides, facilitate group discussions, manage group dynamics, and apply probing techniques to gather comprehensive data.

Analyze and Interpret FGD Data

Participants will acquire the ability to synthesize data from FGDs, identify themes and patterns, and present findings effectively to inform research or decision-making processes.

Session 1: Introduction to Focus Group Discussions

Overview and Applications

Renuka Silva
Department of Applied Nutrition
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What is a Focus Group Discussion (FGD)?

"…an interactive discussion between 6-8 pre-selected participants, led by a trained moderator and focussing on a specific set of issues. The aim of a focus group discussion is to gain a broad range of views on the research topic over a 60-90 minute period, and to create an environment where participants feel comfortable to express their views" (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011, p. 136).

Unique Features of FGDs

Interactive discussions generating unique insights.

Diverse viewpoints from participants.

Moderators facilitate breadth and depth in responses.

Types of FGDs

Face-to-Face Discussions.

Virtual FGDs: Telephone and Online.

Mixed-Methods Applications.

Academic vs. Market Research vs. Public/non-profit vs. Participatory approach FGDs

Academic FGDs

Focus on generating scientific data.

Market FGDs

Emphasize consumer preferences and fast results.

Public/non-profit FGDs

To design, improve, or evaluate a public service

Participatory FGDs

Involves community members in research

Focus on community needs and sustainability

Research applications of FGDs

To explore topics about which little is known or where the issues are unclear.

To explain specific behaviors or beliefs and the circumstances in which they occur.

To evaluate a service, program, or intervention and understand reasons for its success or failure.

To design a survey or experimental study by identifying the issues, terminology, or components to include.

To gain diversity of experiences and perspectives on the study topic.

To understand context, culture, or social norms surrounding the research issues

To understand group processes (i.e., decision-making

When Not to use FGDs

- When aiming specifically to collect personal experiences from participants.
- For eliciting individual narratives from each participant (use in-depth interviews).
- Not suitable for sensitive topics (e.g. sexual behaviour, hunger at family level, mental illness).
- Less suited to reaching a consensus on the research issues.
- May not be fruitful to include participants with highly confrontational views

Focus Group vs. In-Depth Interviews

FGDs: Broad perspectives, group interactions.

In-Depth Interviews: Individual narratives, personal insights.

Choice depends on research goals.

Use Focus Group Discussions	Use In-Depth Interviews
To capture a range of views and experiences	To seek individual perspectives
To discuss or explain issues	To identify individual narratives
To explore new issues	To seek personal and sensitive information
To identify social and community norms	To collect detailed, in-depth information
To seek broad community-level information	To describe complex issues or processes
To observe group interaction	For geographically dispersed participants

Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths:

- Large data volume.
- Interaction-driven insights.
- Effective for community

Weaknesses:

- Less control over discussion.
- Potential dominance by some participants.
- Non-confidential.

Hennink, M., 2007, " International focus group research: A handbook for the health and social sciences ," Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Advantages of FGDs

Reflect real-world social interactions.

Generate diverse and rich data efficiently.

Flexible for different research purposes.

Challenges and Limitations

- Managing group dynamics.
- Dependence on skilled moderators.
- Time-consuming data analysis.

Summary

FGDs are versatile and impactful qualitative methods.

Require careful planning and skilled moderation.

Effective for exploring diverse perspectives and group dynamics.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in Qualitative Research

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Objectives

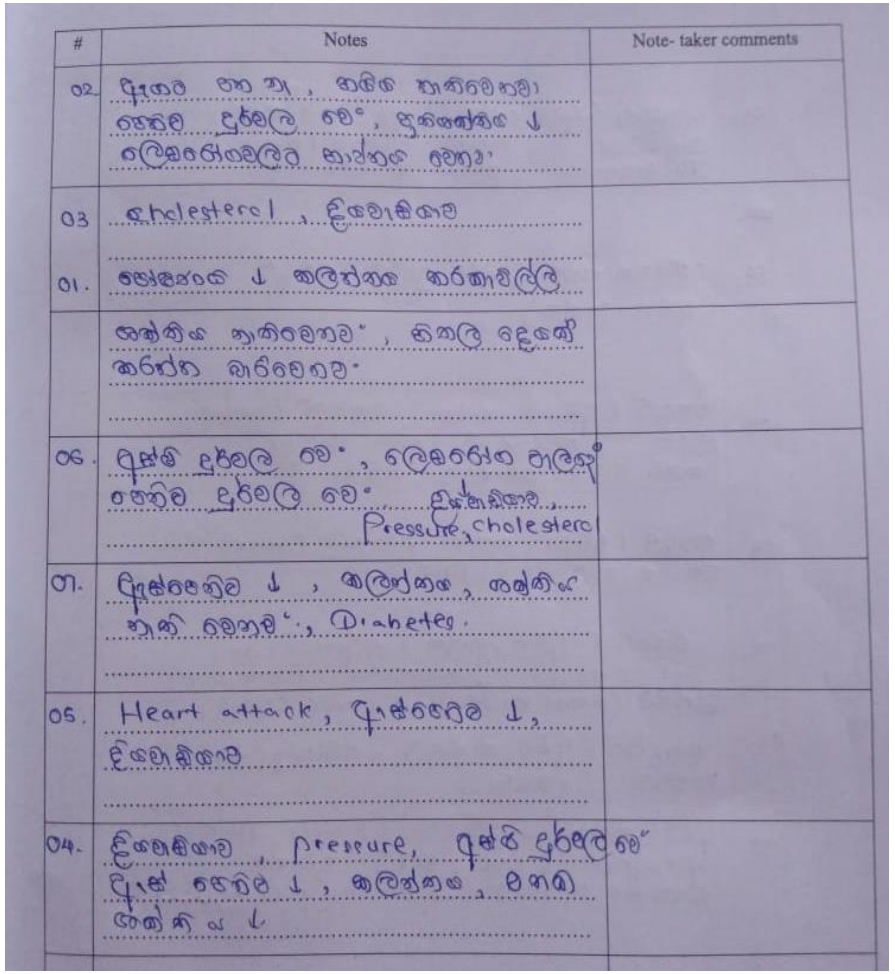
- To get understanding on;
    - planning and implementation of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).
    - skills required in conducting FGDs.
- Demonstrate the basics of data analysis steps using NVivo software.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

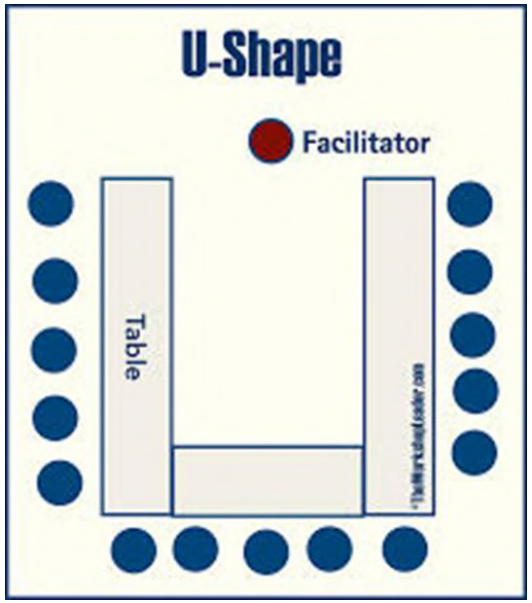
FGDs

- Discussion with a selected **group of people (8 -12)**
- Purposely selected individuals : different socioeconomic status
- Facilitated by a professional, **external moderator**
    - Person who asks questions
    - Should facilitate the discussion
- **Note taker/s**
    - Participants' answers : using specific template, flip charts
    - Participants are given numbers
    - Non-verbal expression

FGDs cont…



#	Notes	Note- taker comments
02	දැනට පන්ති, නමක නැතිවෙනවා පෙනිව දුර්වල වේ, ප්‍රතිශක්තිය ↓ ලෙඩරෝගවලට භාජනය වෙනව.	
03	cholesterol, දියවැඩියාව	
01.	පෝෂණය ↓ කලන්නය කරකාවිල්ල	
	ශක්තිය නැතිවෙනව, නිතල දෙයක් කරන්න බැරිවෙනව.	
06.	දැස්ති දුර්වල වේ, ලෙඩරෝග වැලඳේ පෙනිව දුර්වල වේ. දියවැඩියාව, Pressure, cholesterol	
07.	දැස්පෙනිව ↓, කලන්නය, ශක්තිය නැති වෙනව, Diabetes.	
05.	Heart attack, දැස්පෙනිව ↓, දියවැඩියාව	
04.	දියවැඩියාව, pressure, දැස්ති දුර්වල වේ දැස් පෙනිව ↓, කලන්නය, පනක ශක්තිය ↓	



- Audio record the discussion (if possible, video recording)
- "U" shaped seating arrangements

FGDs cont..

- Develop **Focus Group Discussion Guide (FGDG)**
- Questions are based on **specific frame-work**
- Themes and sub-themes are included
- Probing questions
- Maximum of 45 minutes – 1 hr

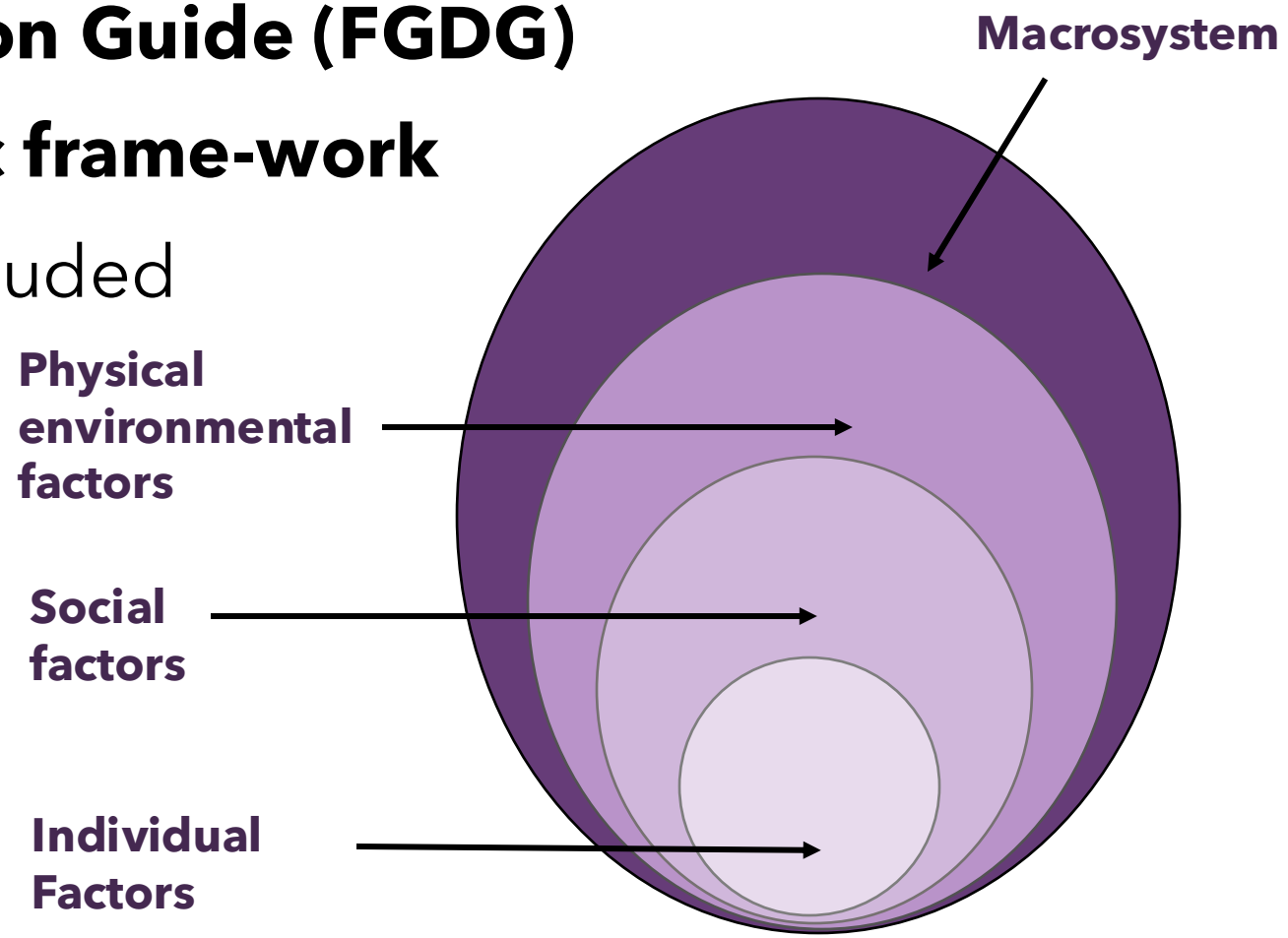


Fig 1 : Conceptual framework of fruit and vegetable consumption (Story et al., 2002)

Example : FGDG

- **Introduction**
- "**Good morning and welcome** to our discussion. My **name is…..** and we are researchers **from ……** Thank you for taking the time to join us today. The main **purpose** of our discussion is to understand your ideas and perceptions about your fruit and vegetable consumption. There are **no right or wrong** answers. So, please feel free to share your thoughts, even if they differ from what others have said. You might have noticed the **recorder**. We are recording this session because we don't want to miss any of your comments. We assure your **names will not be used** in any of our reports. ……".

Example : FGDG cont...

- **Opening question**

- What types of fruits and vegetables (F&V) did you eat yesterday?

- **Key questions**

- **Q 1**: Why do you include F&V in your diet?

Probing Q : What do you think will happen if you don't eat F & V?

- **Q2** : What influences your choices of F&V?

Probing Q : How do your friends influence your F&V consumption?

- **Q9** : What are barriers you face in eating F&V?

- **Ending question**

- **Q10 :** Is there any other important information about F&V that we haven't discussed?

Planning tips : FGDs

Identify the objective/s

↓

Decide the type of respondence

↓

Approval : authorities, ethical approval

↓

Develop FGDG

↓

Select moderator and note taker

→

Training and pretesting

↑

Select participants

↑

Get written consent

↑

Select a place

↑

Conduct FGDs

Data managing : Transcription & translation

Transcription

- Written account of spoken words
- Use audio recorded data
- Identify moderator's statements : bolded letters
- Laughter, loud voices, shouting, silence…. Have to be recorded

Translation

- Translate into English
- To feed into NVivo software

Data quality control

- Appropriate environment

- *Easy to reach and comfortable, no external people, less noise*

- Skillful moderator

- *Good listener, group integration, keen memory, verbal and non-verbal expression, consistency in asking questions*

- Careful data handling

- *Transcription, translation, good note taker, good recorder*

- Supervision

- Consistency, omissions, recording

Thank you!

Skills for Focus Group Discussions

Thushanthi Perera
Wayamba University of Sri Lanka

Learning Outcomes

01

To know the characteristics of a good moderator/ interviewer

02

To identify key concepts in moderating discussions

03

To familiarize with some common scenarios in FGDs

? ? ?

What makes you an effective moderator?

An Effective Moderator...

- Skillful in group discussions
- Uses pre-determined questions
- Establishes permissive environment

Moderator Skills

- Mentally prepared & competent about the topic
- Able to use small talk
- Make smooth & concise introduction
- Use pauses & probes
- Control participant reactions
- Use subtle group control
- Control the flow & timing of the discussion
- Use appropriate conclusion/s

? ? ?

How does this really work?

Before you begin the FGD

- Make sure you know about your FGD well
- Try and get to know your audience – will help build the initial rapport
- Check your venue before the FGD day
- On the day of the interview wear something that is comfortable yet professional
- Check if you have everything you need (a copy of your FGD, your notes, notebooks, recorders)

During the FGD

- Greet, smile and get ready
- Introduce yourself/your team, purpose/background of the study and ethical considerations/ ground rules
- Maintain your composure / Mind your non verbal cues (facial expressions, hand gestures, body

PAUSE & PROBE

- Maintain a pleasant environment / avoid any distractions/ conflicts
- Clearly establish how your discussion/interview would flow (the time that will take, the expectations)
- Make sure you check timing (note taking) & balance group dynamins (ramblers vs quite ones)
- Maintain the enthusiasm and interest throughout

Ending the FGD

- Use a few minutes to wrap up
- Thank the participant/s
- You may have some refreshments with you for the FGDs, let participants enjoy

Role of the Note taker

Facilitate the moderator

You will play a passive role mainly

You will not interfere the flow of the discussion

Make sure you have your note taking gears ready (flip charts, note books, pens)

Have a note taking **template** ready

Listening skills, quick thinking and recording down notes, legible writing

Things to Consider in Interpersonal Communication

When communicating ideas to someone, you should always consider the following to be an effective communicator.

Tone of Voice

Body Language

Expressions

You will need PRACTICE and self skill development to a certain extent before you head out for discussions/ interviews

Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews by Richard A. Krueger

? ? ?

Now Let's Brainstorm!

Some Scenarios...

Participants not speaking

Annoyed participants

Participant walks away during the interview

Sensitive questions/ areas

Inappropriate participant behavior

Final Notes

- Make sure you’re confident enough
- Rapport building is crucial
- Keep a neutral stance
- Be professional
- Be polite yet firm
- Probing is your friend in most instances (only when needed)
- You’re the captain, so make sure your crew will help you sail smoothly

Thank You

Next: Data Analysis for FGDs

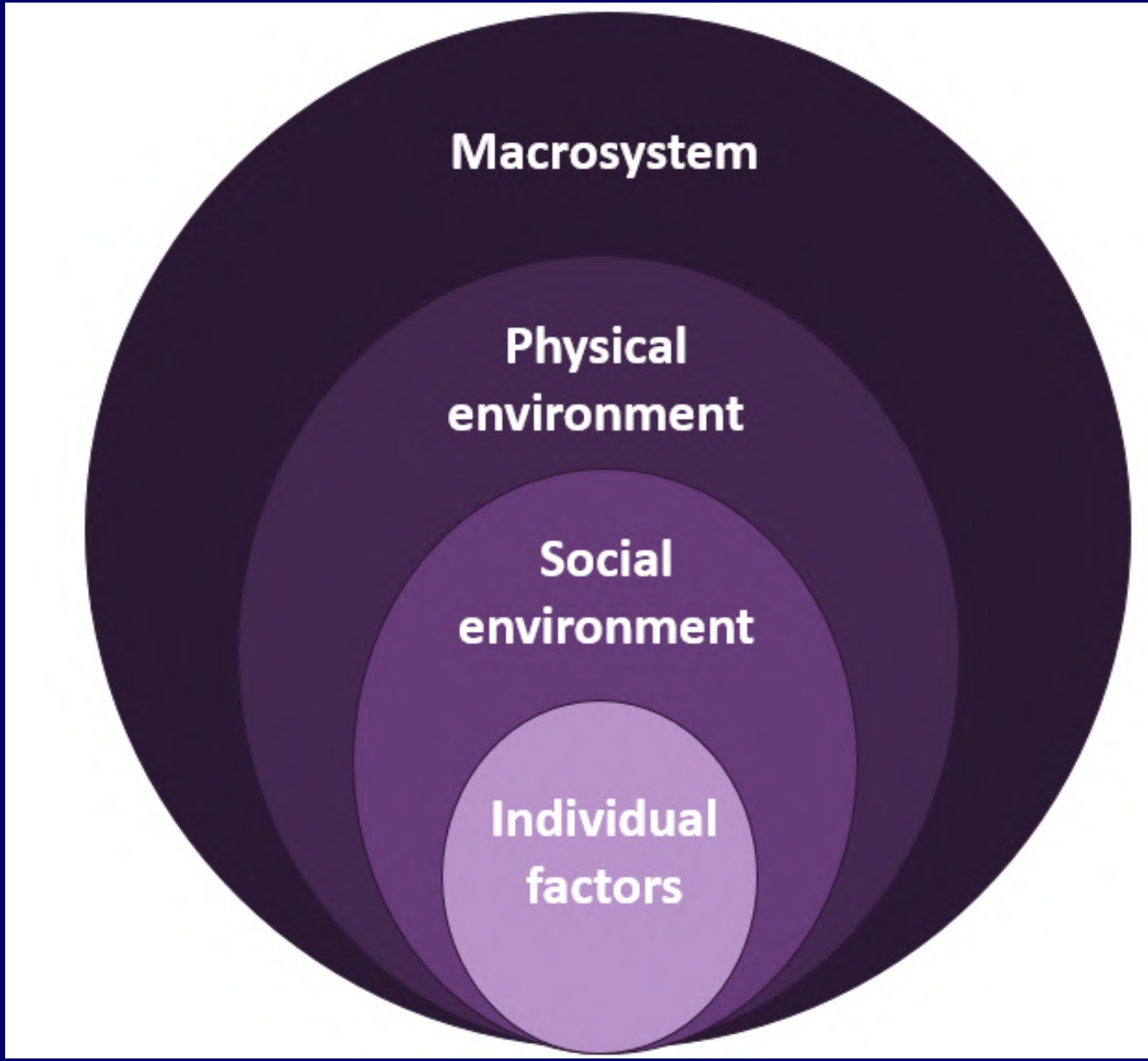
Data Analysis in FGDs

Hasara Sitisekara
Wayamba University of Sri Lanka

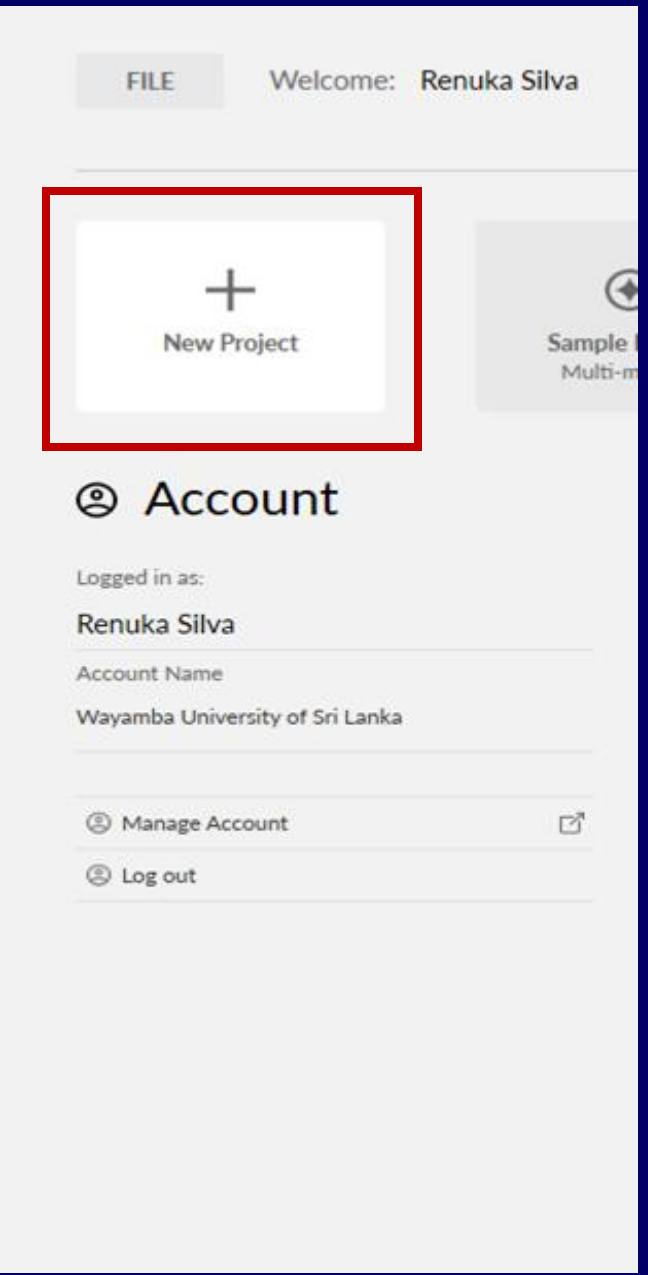
Steps for Thematic Analysis using NVivo

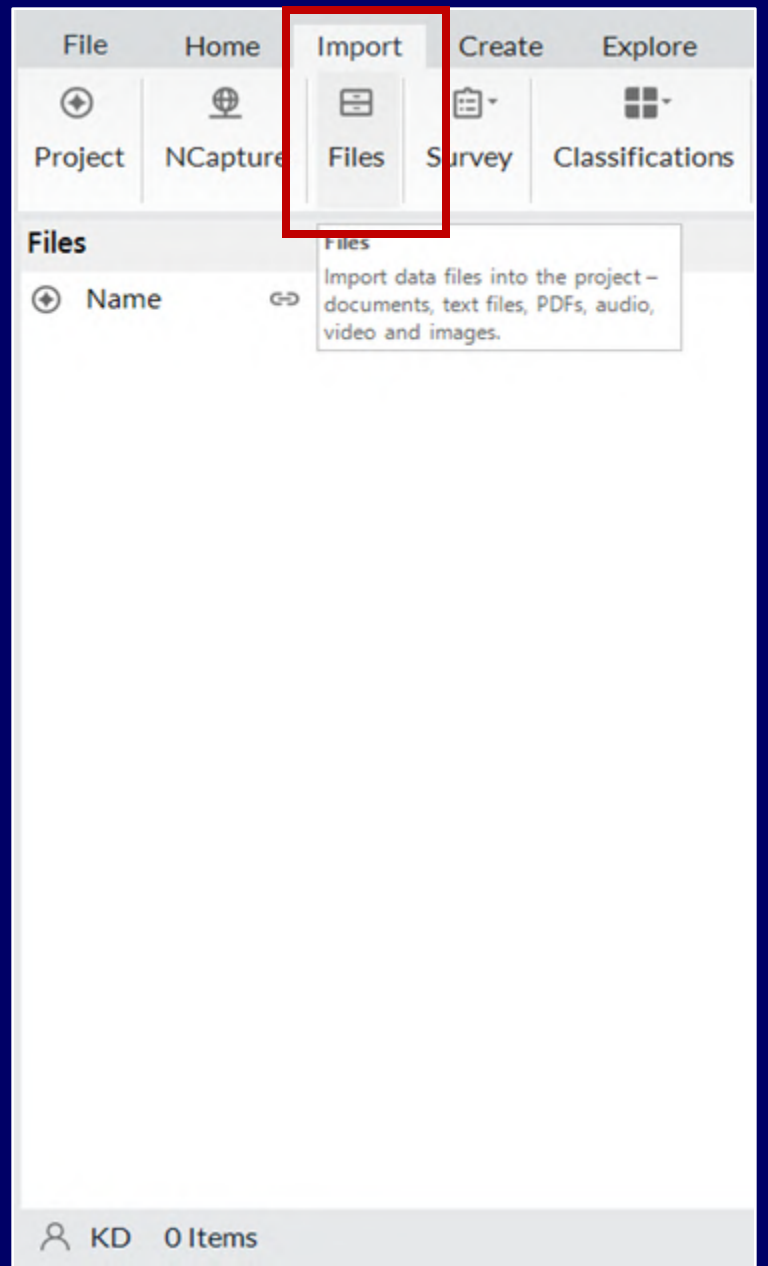
1. Define your Framework
2. Set up your Project in NVivo
3. Create Codes
4. Code the Data
5. Review and Refine Themes
6. Analyze and Interpret Data

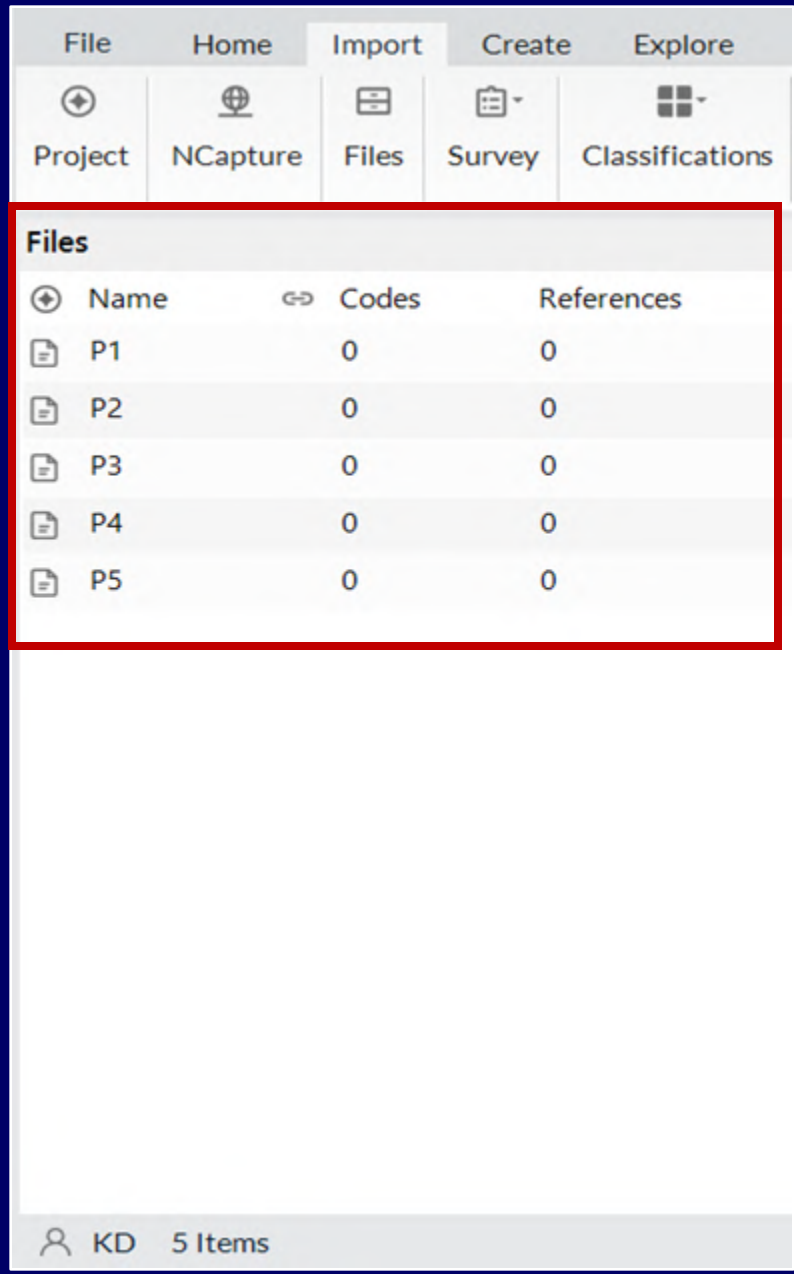
1. Define your Framework

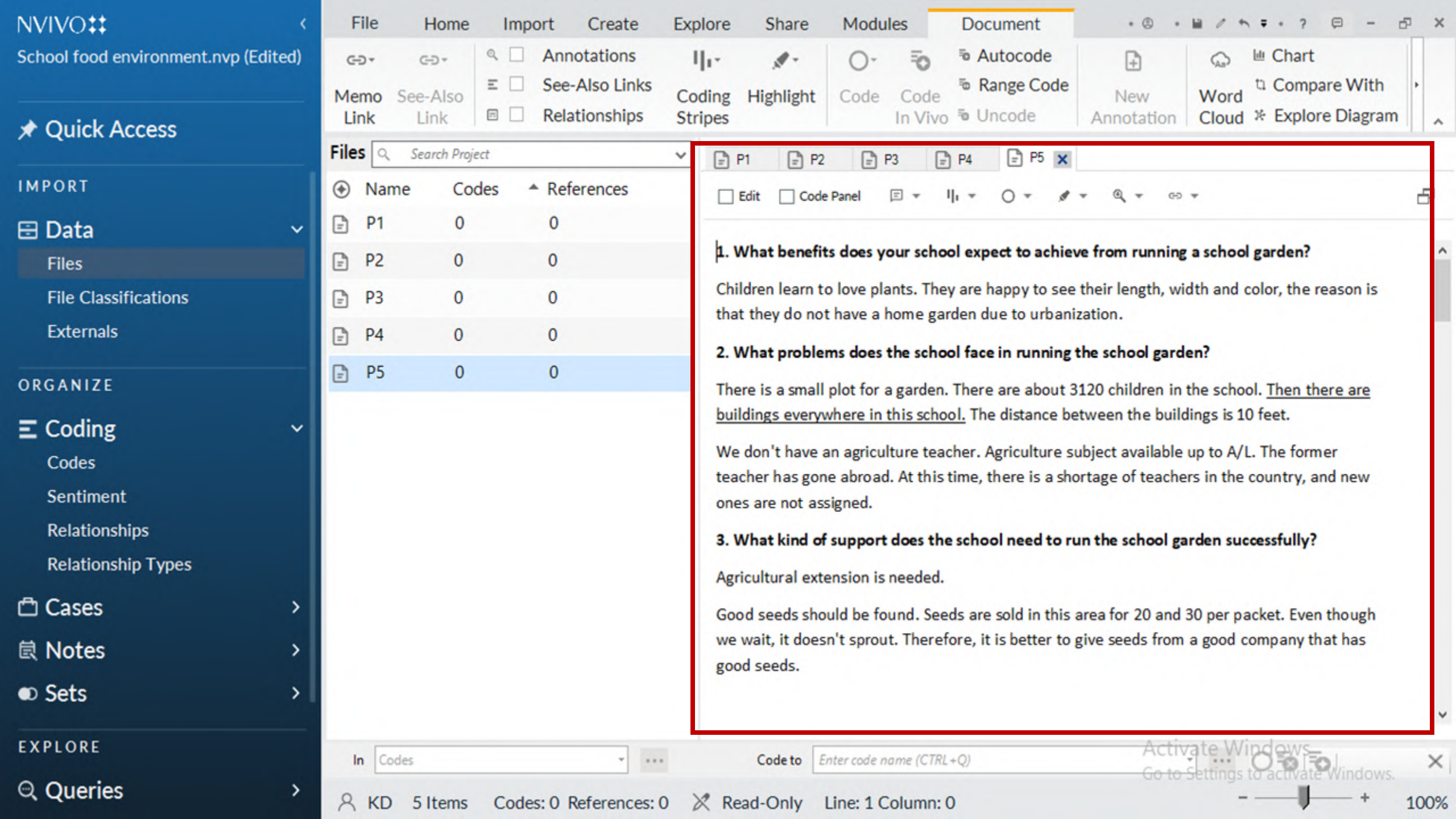


2. Set up your Project in NVivo








NVIVO
School food environment.nvp (Edited)
Quick Access
IMPORT
Data
Files
File Classifications
Externals
ORGANIZE
Coding
Codes
Sentiment
Relationships
Relationship Types
Cases
Notes
Sets
EXPLORE
Queries
File
Home
Import
Create
Explore
Share
Modules
Document
Memo Link
See-Also Link
Annotations
See-Also Links
Relationships
Coding Stripes
Highlight
Code
Code In Vivo
Autocode
Range Code
Uncode
New Annotation
Word Cloud
Chart
Compare With
Explore Diagram
Files
Search Project
Name
Codes
References
P1 0 0
P2 0 0
P3 0 0
P4 0 0
P5 0 0
P1
P2
P3
P4
P5
Edit
Code Panel
1. What benefits does your school expect to achieve from running a school garden?
Children learn to love plants. They are happy to see their length, width and color, the reason is that they do not have a home garden due to urbanization.
2. What problems does the school face in running the school garden?
There is a small plot for a garden. There are about 3120 children in the school. Then there are buildings everywhere in this school. The distance between the buildings is 10 feet.
We don't have an agriculture teacher. Agriculture subject available up to A/L. The former teacher has gone abroad. At this time, there is a shortage of teachers in the country, and new ones are not assigned.
3. What kind of support does the school need to run the school garden successfully?
Agricultural extension is needed.
Good seeds should be found. Seeds are sold in this area for 20 and 30 per packet. Even though we wait, it doesn't sprout. Therefore, it is better to give seeds from a good company that has good seeds.
In
Codes
Code to
Enter code name (CTRL+Q)
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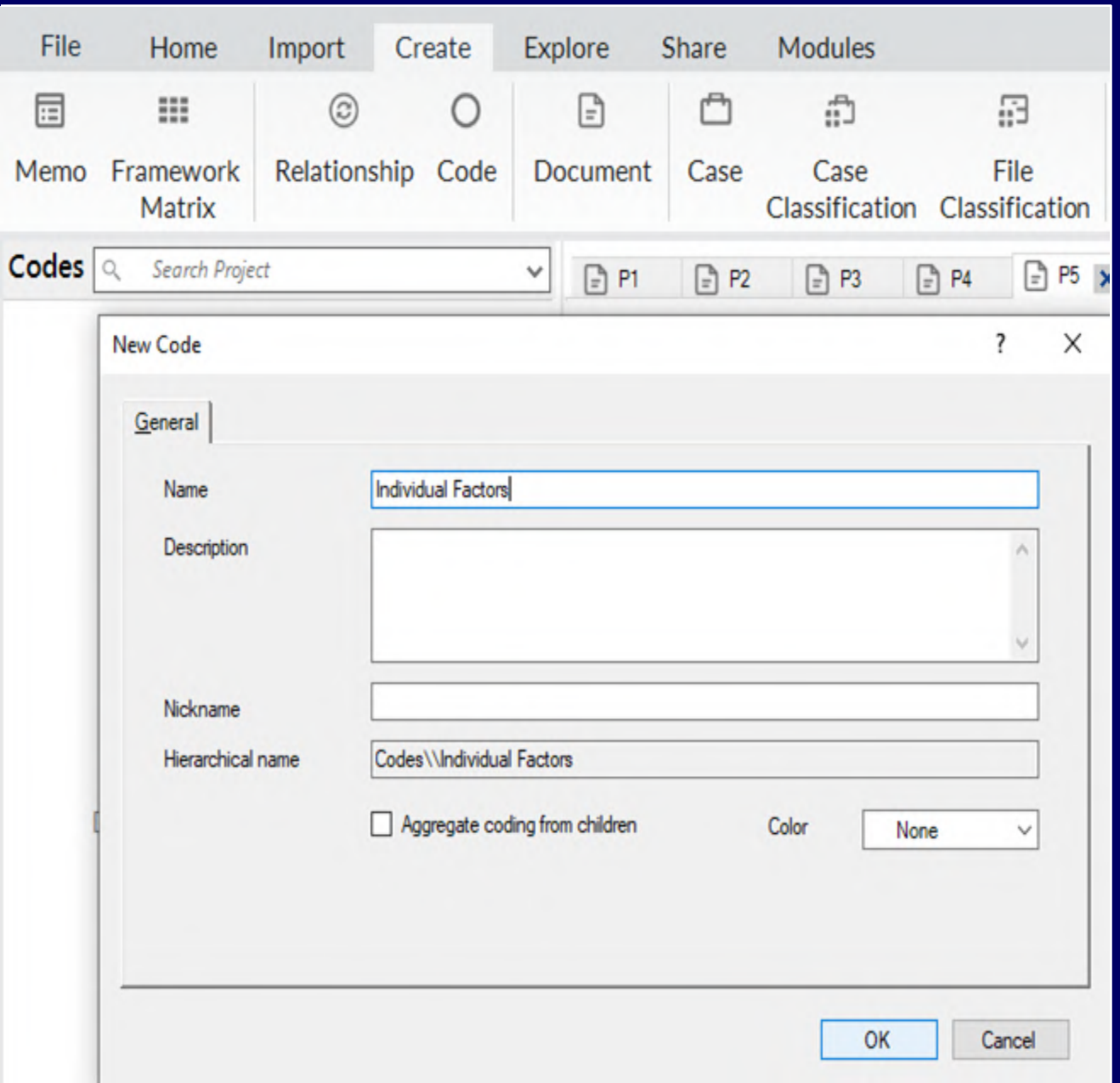
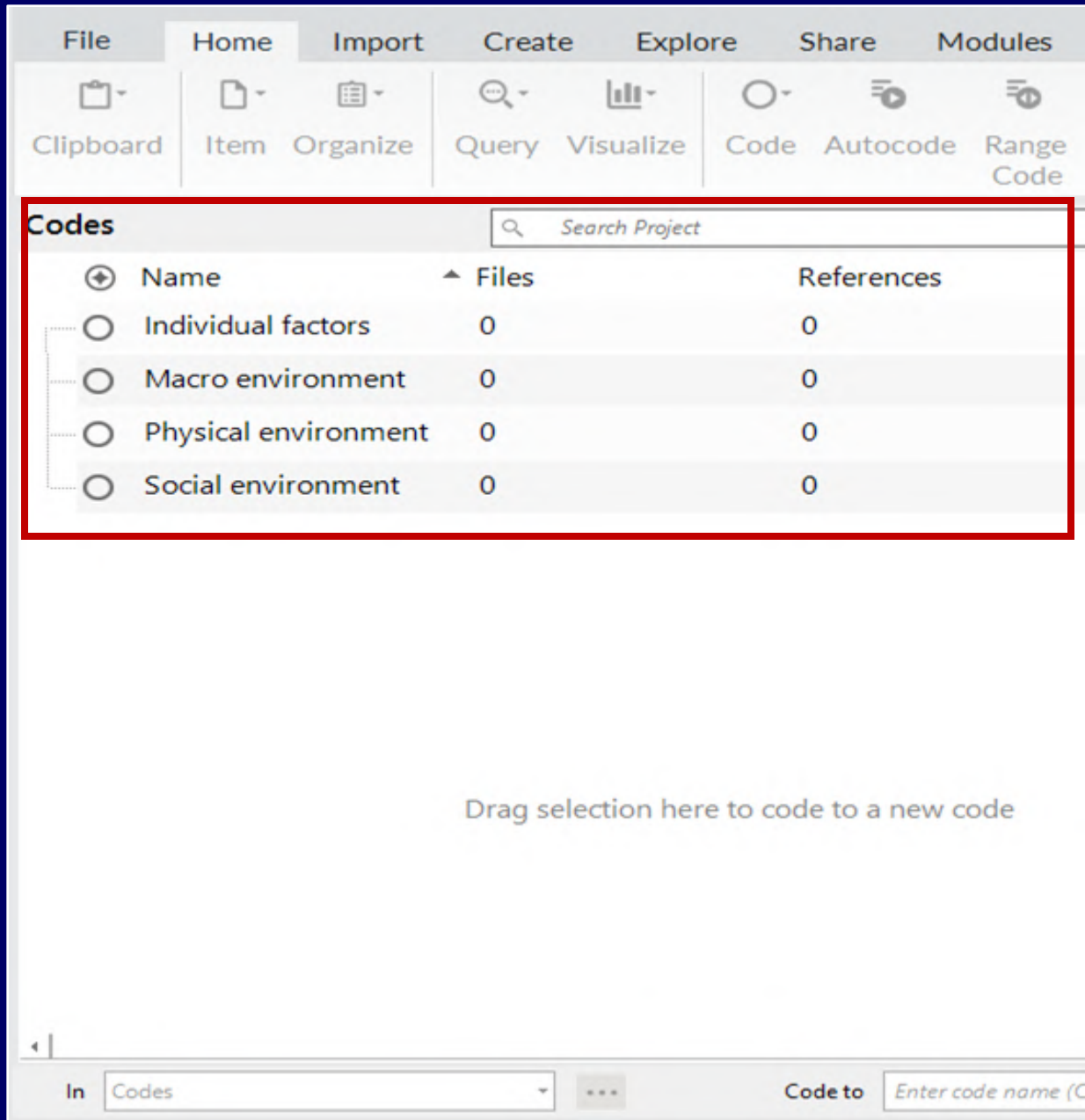
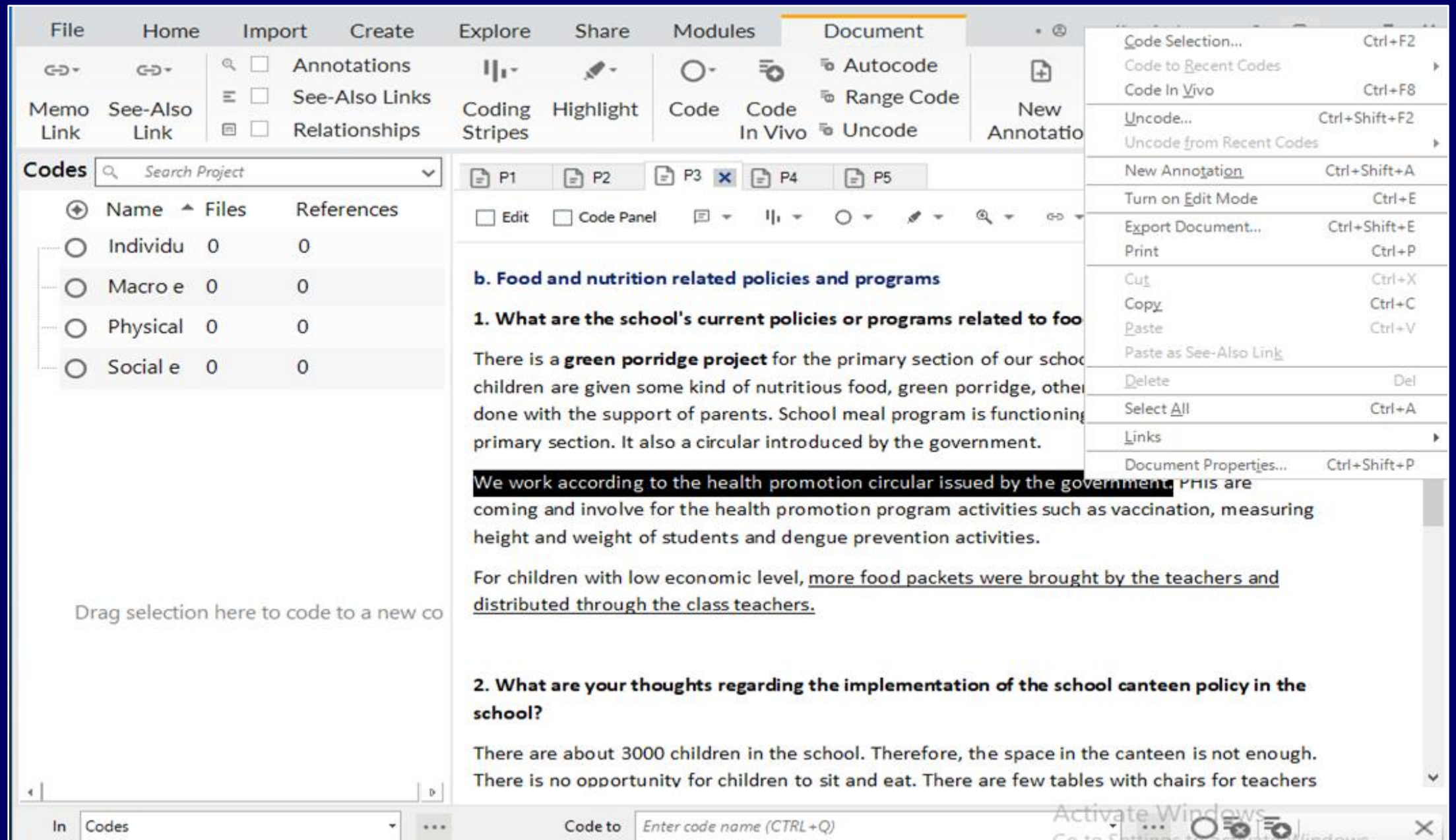
3. Create your Codes in NVivo





4. Code your Data in NVivo



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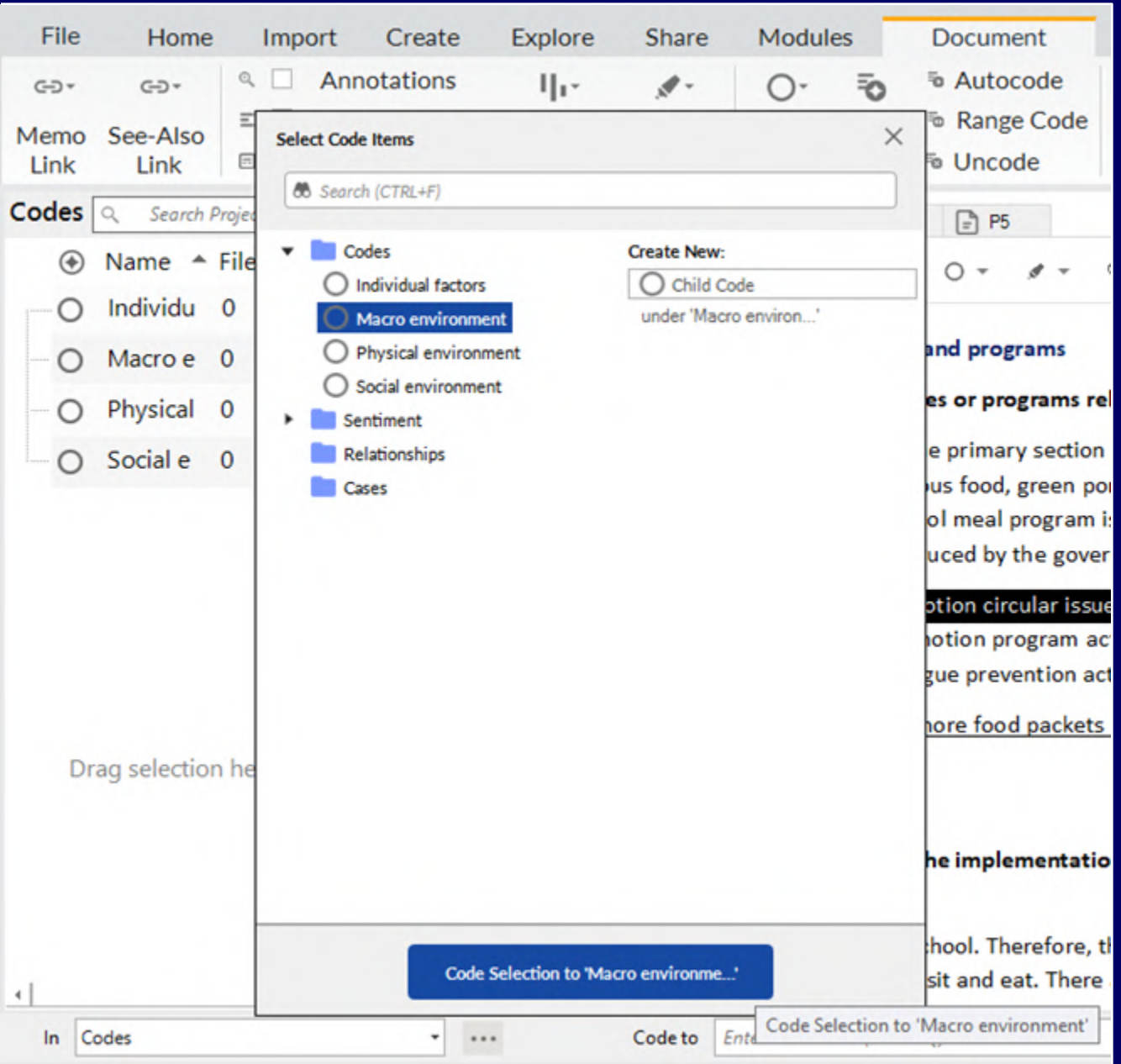

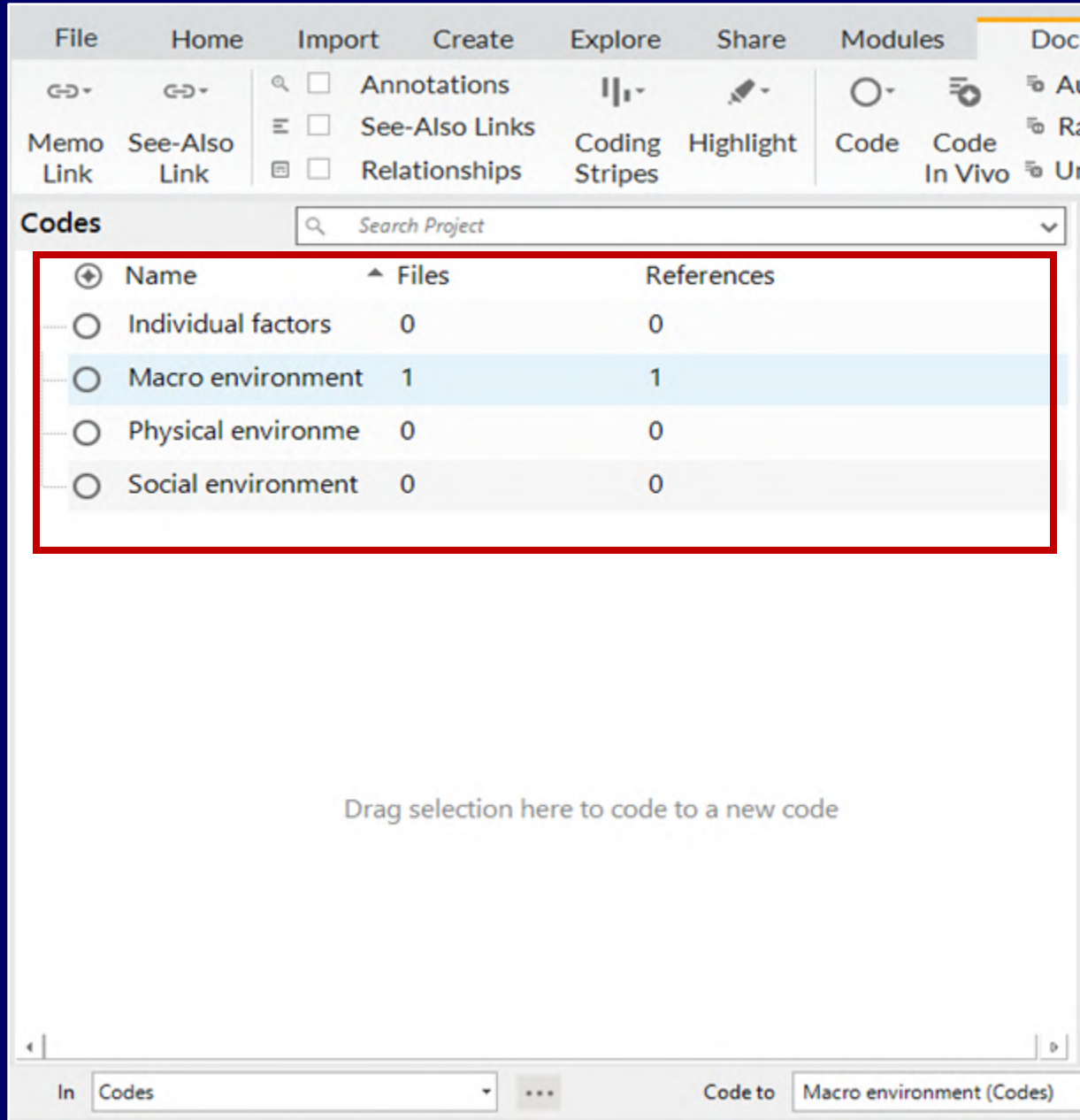

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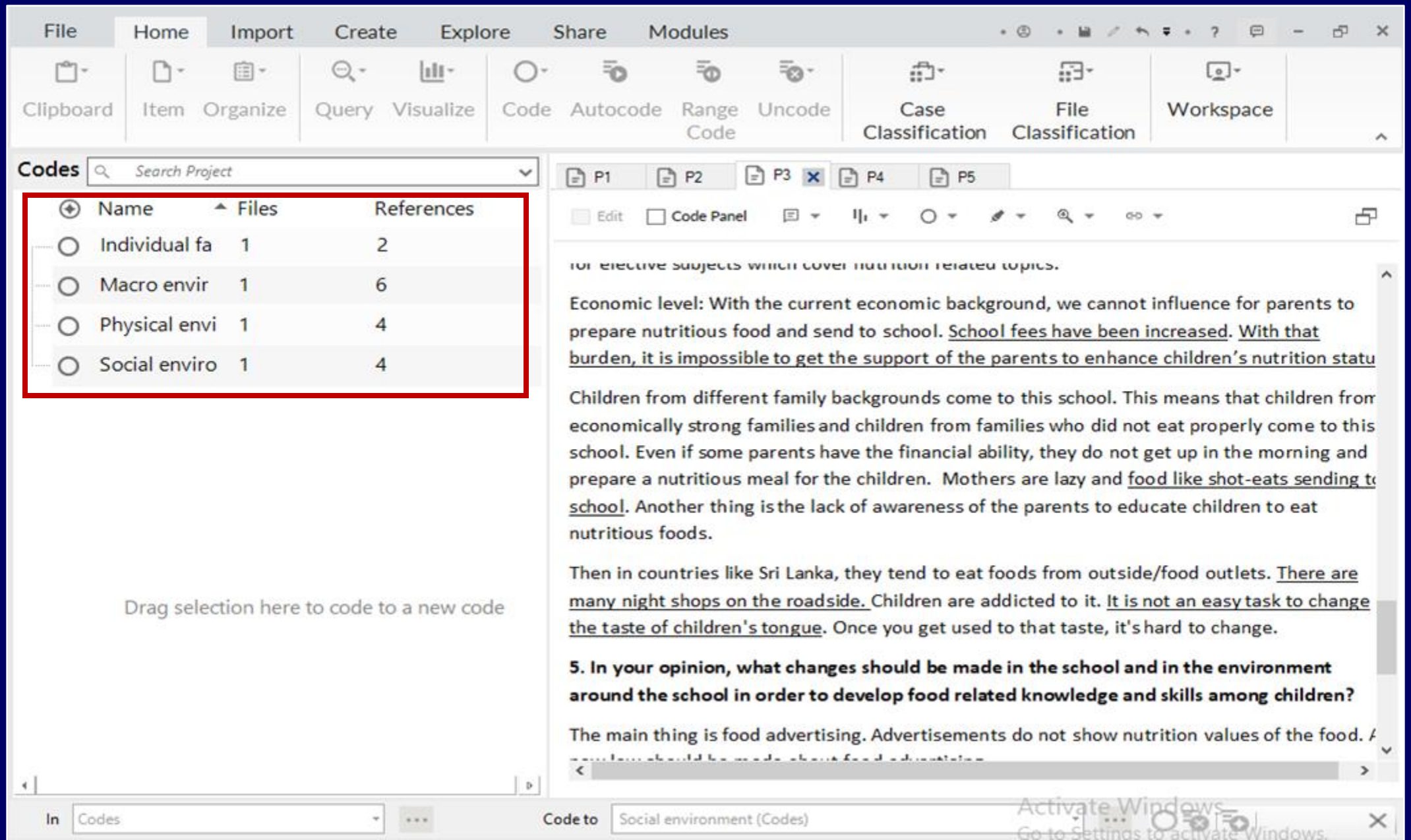
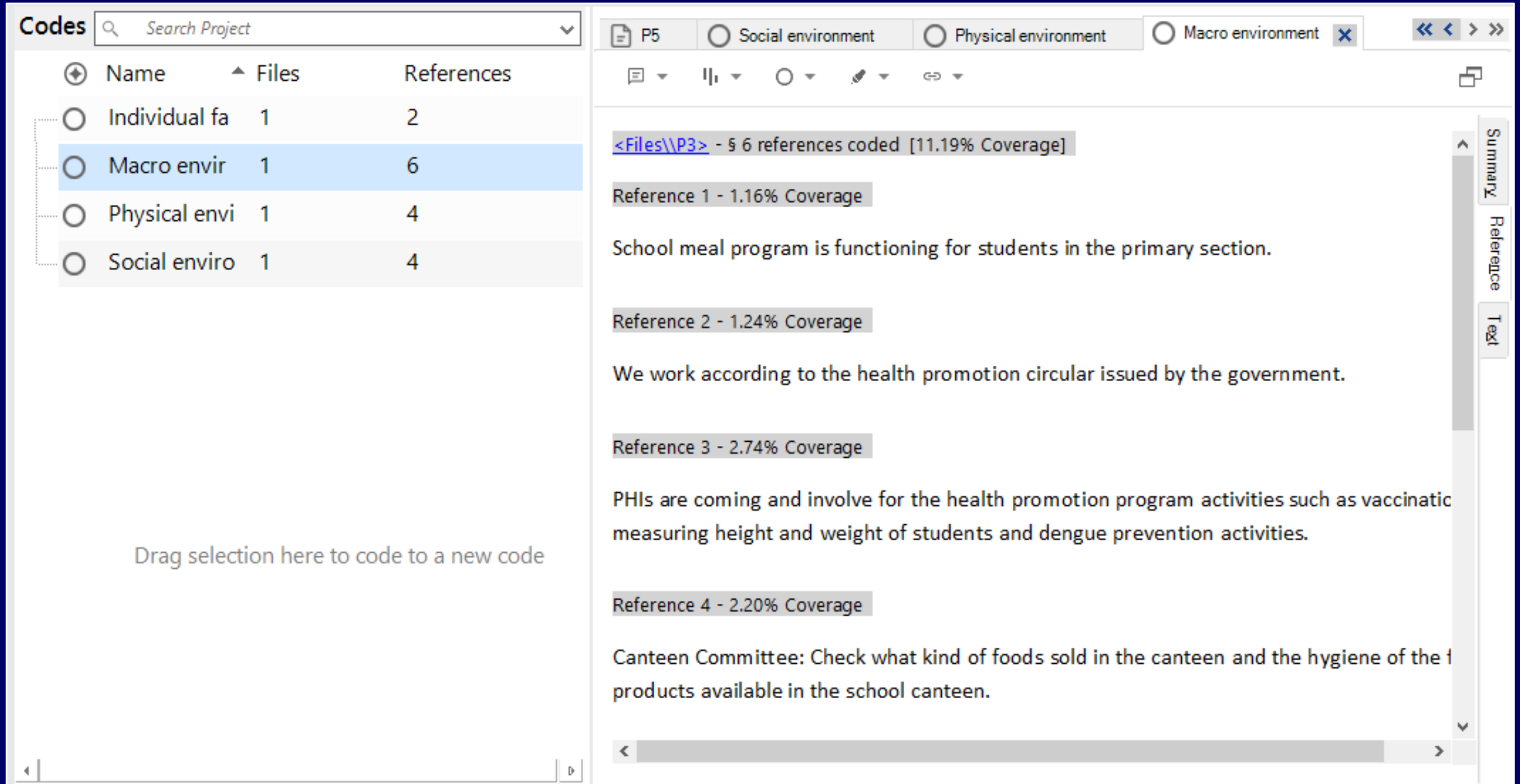


5. Review and Refine Themes in NVivo

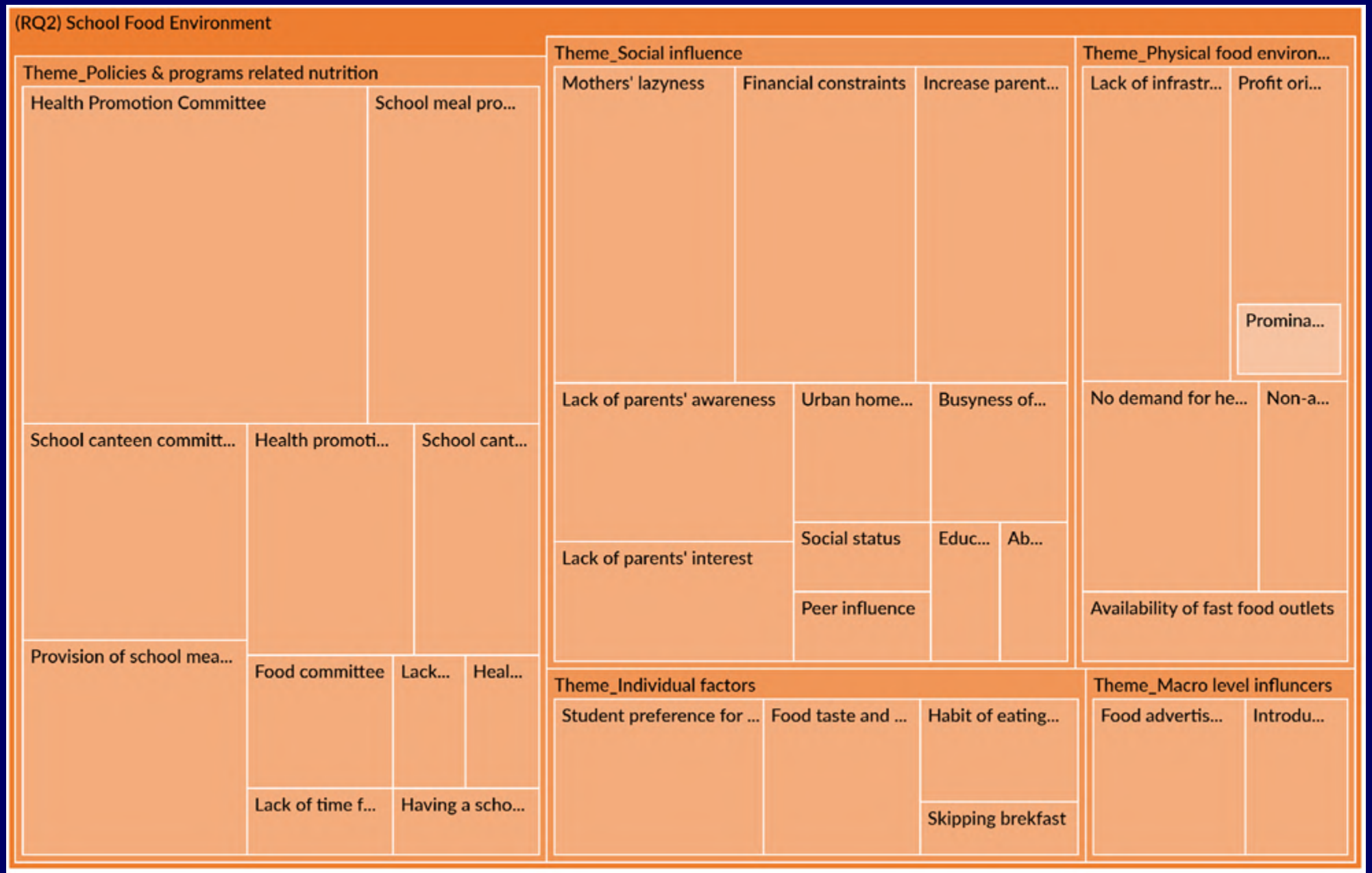


6. Analyse and Interpret Data

K50

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
29	(RQ2) School Food Environment		15	131	5/17/2024 10:19 PM	MMSK	5/18/2024 12:55 PM	MMSK
37	Theme_Individual factors		7	10	5/19/2024 1:03 PM	MMSK	5/19/2024 1:04 PM	MMSK
38	Food taste and preference		3	3	5/17/2024 11:28 PM	MMSK	5/18/2024 11:54 AM	MMSK
39	Habit of eating outside		2	2	5/17/2024 11:24 PM	MMSK	5/18/2024 11:58 AM	MMSK
40	Skipping brekfast		1	1	5/18/2024 12:36 PM	MMSK	5/18/2024 12:36 PM	MMSK
41	Student preference for unhealthy food		4	4	5/18/2024 8:31 AM	MMSK	5/18/2024 4:05 PM	MMSK
42	Theme_Macro level influncers		4	5	5/19/2024 1:29 PM	MMSK	5/19/2024 1:29 PM	MMSK
43	Food advertisements		3	3	5/17/2024 11:19 PM	MMSK	5/18/2024 11:54 AM	MMSK
44	Introduce new policy deccisions against sellinc		2	2	5/17/2024 11:32 PM	MMSK	5/18/2024 8:37 AM	MMSK
45	Theme_Physical food environment		10	16	5/19/2024 1:04 PM	MMSK	5/19/2024 1:05 PM	MMSK
46	Availability of fast food outlets		2	2	5/17/2024 11:26 PM	MMSK	5/18/2024 11:08 AM	MMSK
47	Lack of infrastructure facilities in canteen		5	5	5/18/2024 8:46 AM	MMSK	5/18/2024 4:07 PM	MMSK
48	No demand for healthy food in school canteer		4	4	5/18/2024 8:59 AM	MMSK	5/18/2024 4:05 PM	MMSK
49	Profit oriented school canteen		3	3	5/18/2024 9:00 AM	MMSK	5/18/2024 4:06 PM	MMSK
50	Student preference for unhealthy food		2	2	5/17/2024 11:11 PM	MMSK	5/22/2024 2:03 PM	MMSK
51	Theme_Policies & programs related nutrition		13	41	5/19/2024 1:30 PM	MMSK	5/19/2024 1:30 PM	MMSK
52	Food committee		2	2	5/18/2024 11:26 AM	MMSK	5/18/2024 3:53 PM	MMSK
53	Having a school canteen committee		1	1	5/17/2024 11:21 PM	MMSK	5/17/2024 11:22 PM	MMSK
54	Health Promotion Committee		10	12	5/18/2024 8:33 AM	MMSK	5/19/2024 10:59 AM	MMSK
55	Health promotion program		4	4	5/17/2024 11:06 PM	MMSK	5/18/2024 12:13 PM	MMSK
56	Healthy food festivals for schools		1	1	5/18/2024 11:11 AM	MMSK	5/18/2024 11:12 AM	MMSK
57	Lack of practical exposure i existing curriculum		1	1	5/18/2024 11:13 AM	MMSK	5/18/2024 11:14 AM	MMSK

6. Analyse and Interpret Data



6. Analyse and Interpret Data

Real-life scenarios and challenges

Non - responsive participants

Irrelevant responses

Overlapping answers

Thank you!

Team

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