MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY RESEARCH
WITH ETHNIC MINORITIES: CURRENT STATUS

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This study involved a 10-year review of the major marriage and family therapy related journals for articles involving racial and ethnic minorities. Despite an awareness of the importance of such scholarship, fewer than 5% of published articles focused on racial and ethnic minority populations and issues. This review of the marriage and family therapy professional literature provides a benchmark against which future publication rates can be measured.

Research on racial and ethnic minority couples and families has never been more needed. Ethnic minority populations continue to grow in the United States, necessitating a more thorough understanding of their mental health needs and relationship structures. In addition, many misconceptions and "partial truths" about these groups are held by the public in general and the mental health community in particular (Fine, 1993). For example, because of the prevailing notion of machismo in the Hispanic culture, it is a "common misconception that Mexican-American fathers are difficult to engage in family therapy" (Falicov, 1982, p. 147). Another common error has been to study racial and ethnic minority groups as if they were homogeneous (Dillworth-Anderson et al., 1993; Ponterotto & Casas, 1991). This is especially true for the peoples of Asia or Latin America, who, upon arriving in the United States, are often grouped as Asian-Americans or Hispanics despite their diverse nationalities and cultures.

Although many recognize the need for additional racial and ethnic minority research (e.g., Dillworth-Anderson et al., 1993; Sprengle & Lyness, 1993; Staples & Mirande, 1980; Vega, 1990), the exact nature of this need has not been examined for the field of marriage and family therapy. The
The purpose of this study is to review the status of racial and ethnic minority research in the field of marriage and family therapy (MFT). The goals are (a) to examine the racial and ethnic minority related articles that have been published in the MFT field over the last 10 years, (b) to determine if the percentage of published ethnic minority research has increased year to year, and (c) to establish a benchmark against which future efforts can be measured.

METHOD

Procedure

In a manner similar to other studies of this type (e.g., Ponteotto & Casas, 1991), this study reviewed the publication record of six of the most widely circulated journals in the field of marriage and family therapy for the time period 1984 to 1993.

The Inventory of Marriage and Family Literature (IMFL), “a multidisciplinary and nonevaluative collection of the published marriage and family literature” (Touliatos, 1994, p. viii), was used in the selection of the journals for this study. The IMFL annually catalogues articles published on marriage and family topics from several hundred professional journals. Each volume of the IMFL contains a list of those journals that publish 25 or more articles on marriage and family topics during the respective year.

In order to meet the criteria for inclusion in this study, the journals first had to appear on the aforementioned list in any of three volumes of the IMFL (Vol. 17, Touliatos & Czaplewski, 1991; Vol. 18, Touliatos, 1993; Vol. 19, Touliatos, 1994). Second, the journals had to be clearly identifiable by title or by journal description in Ulrich’s International Periodicals Directory (1992) as focusing on marital and / or family topics within the context of therapy. Third, the journal had to be currently publishing and had to be based in the United States, in that the present study focuses on the professional literature involving US minorities. Fourth, the remaining journals were ranked by circulation rates and the top six were selected for inclusion in this review.

The six journals that were selected were The American Journal of Family Therapy, Contemporary Family Therapy (formerly: The International Journal of Family Therapy), Families in Society (formerly Social Casework), Family Process, Family Therapy, and The Journal of Marital and Family Therapy.

Only articles involving racial and ethnic minority groups in the United States were included in this study. The process of examining all the articles in these journals was done by hand and by using the computer database PsychLIT (1990). PsychLIT was helpful in selecting the majority of the articles focusing on US racial and ethnic minority groups. The journals were reviewed by hand to include both the articles that PsychLIT failed to index as minority focused and the articles in which minorities made up only a portion of the research participants.

Each minority-related article was grouped by the specific minority that was discussed in the article. In addition, all of the ethnic minority related
TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal Title</th>
<th>Total Number of Articles Published</th>
<th>Racial/Ethnic Minority Focused Articles (% of journal’s Total)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Journal of Family Therapy</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>3 (1.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary Family Therapy</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>12 (4.03%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families in Society</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>52 (8.72%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Process</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>5 (1.35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Therapy</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>17 (6.94%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Marriage and Family Therapy</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>7 (1.91%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,162</td>
<td>95 (4.43%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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articles were categorized as being either empirical (quantitative or qualitative) or conceptual (theory or discussion) in nature. The intent of this categorization was to determine the format of the articles that have been adding to the field’s understanding of US racial and ethnic minority groups.

RESULTS

The six journals published 2,162 articles during the 10-year period. A total of 94 articles (4.4%) were found that focused on racial and ethnic minorities or specific minority issues. Articles were considered to be minority focused if they had race, ethnicity, or a specific ethnic group or topic in the title, abstract, or designated key words. The publication records for each journal are reported in Table 1.

In terms of the specific populations studied, African Americans were represented by 22 articles (1.02% of the total number of articles), Asian Americans by 15 (0.69%), Hispanics by 10 (0.46%), Jewish Americans by 7 (0.32%), and Native Americans by 8 (0.37%). In addition, 27 articles (1.25%) were categorized as “other” because they involved (a) a minority group not mentioned above, (b) a minority population identified simply as “non-white,” or (c) three or more ethnic groups. Sixty-five (69%) of the minority articles were indexed as conceptual, and the remaining 29 (31%) were categorized as empirical.

Apart from the 94 racial and ethnic minority focused articles, there were another 111 articles (5.13%) involving, but not focusing on, racial and ethnic minorities. The focus on racial and ethnic minorities in these articles ranged from their randomized inclusion as a portion of the research population to a peripheral discussion of ethnicity in a conceptual article. The combined 205 articles represented 9.5% of the total number of articles published in the six journals.
Trends in Publication Rates

There is some indication of increased publication of racial and ethnic minority focused articles over the 10-year period 1984–1993: 3.42%, 2.14%, 4.33%, 4.39%, 5.85%, 4.26%, 4.27%, 1.39%, 6.93%, and 7.37% of articles, respectively. The most recent increase, while very slight, occurred for the 1992 (6.93%) and 1993 (7.37%) calendar years.

DISCUSSION

There has been a recent increase in ethnic minority focused research, but there is still a clear shortage of information about US racial and ethnic minority groups in the MFT professional literature. Fewer than 5% of the articles published in the field’s top six journals during the last 10 years focus on racial and ethnic populations and topics. This shortage may be due to methodological factors and conceptual concerns that often complicate racial and ethnic research. For example, many racial and ethnic groups, having experienced prejudice and discrimination at the hands of the majority culture, are wary of cooperating with researchers for fear that findings could be used against them. This factor, along with their smaller numbers, makes it difficult to obtain a minority sample that is socioeconomically representative and of adequate size. Furthermore, a considerable difficulty exists in developing theories and constructing measures that are valid cross-culturally (Ponterotto & Casas, 1991; Sue et al., 1994).

There are several ways in which the MFT field has been and may continue to be affected by the scarcity of professional literature concerning racial and ethnic minorities. First, the lack of reliable information about minority segments of the population can make it difficult for the clinician working with minority families. Without sufficient knowledge, therapists can have a difficult time making informed decisions about even the most basic clinical issues and concerns. The inclination may be to treat these families as either very different or no different from the majority culture. In either case, therapeutic maneuverability and outcome are likely to be affected negatively (Hines et al., 1992).

Second, without sound empirical and conceptual articles, it is difficult to establish a culturally sensitive and reliable curriculum to educate therapists regarding racial and ethnic minority couples and families. This concern is especially prominent when one considers that the “faculty of most family therapy training programs are predominantly white” (Saba et al., 1989, p. 23). If majority culture educators are to help students become more aware of race and ethnicity as significant factors in marital and family therapy, reliable information must be available for class discussion and trainee supervision.

Third, it is difficult to recruit, educate, and employ minority educators in a profession that appears to be uninterested in family diversity and issues of large cultural systems. The shortage of journal articles focusing on minority issues and families could be interpreted as lack of interest, oversight, or even discrimination—none of which promote the profession.
to minority group members interested in marriage and family therapy programs and employment.

CONCLUSION

The need for more culturally sensitive clinical and research training will become increasingly important as the United States minority populations continue to grow (Ponterotto & Casas, 1991). In 1990, racial and ethnic minorities made up about 25% of the US population. These same groups are projected to reach 31–34% of the population by the year 2010 (US Bureau of the Census, 1993). Furthermore, even the most liberal population projections may be too low in that racial and ethnic minorities are often underestimated in census data (Ponterotto & Casas, 1991; Saba et al., 1989).

The results presented here demonstrate that more needs to be done to examine racial and ethnic minority populations and their concerns. As the field of marriage and family therapy continues to make advances in the area of family diversity, including racial and ethnic minority families, myths and unsubstantiated theories about these groups can be replaced with empirical data and expert opinion. This study serves as another call for more research on racial and ethnic minority populations and topics.

REFERENCES