

**Social
Work
Research**
with
Minority
and
**Oppressed
Populations**

Methodological Issues and Innovations

Miriam Potocky
Antoinette Y. Rodgers-Farmer
Editors

Social Work Research with Minority and Oppressed Populations: Methodological Issues and Innovations

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Foreword

Social work research about multicultural groups requires methodologies that can be adapted in the context of cultural interests and diverse points of view. There have been conceptual developments in social work practice about minority and oppressed populations in the past two decades; however, there have not been corresponding methodological innovations in social work research. Typically, new research knowledge has been introduced by social scientists, particularly by anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists. The work by social work researchers, although an important step in knowledge development, pointed to the differences in demographic variables across minority groups and other oppressed populations, with very little insight into the reasons for those differences.

Gratifying to the social work profession is the fact that great advances in social work research methodology have been made in recent years. Undoubtedly, this is a reflection of the increased efforts and sophistication of social work practitioners and researchers in studying social work with minority and oppressed populations. *Social Work Research with Minority and Oppressed Populations: Methodological Issues and Innovations* contains a representative sampling of these new developments. The editors, Miriam Potocky and Antoinette Y. Rodgers-Farmer, have provided an important service for social work researchers. They have carefully abstracted from each of the articles in this special collection research principles that can be generalized across different multicultural groups; and, most important, they have suggested fundamental research questions that will advance further knowledge about working with minority and oppressed populations. The contents of the articles indicate new techniques and adaptations of existing research methods to diverse populations; included are methods for recruiting subjects, development of action re-

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search, sampling, a method for constructing interval scales, and conceptualizations for expanding factors in assessment as well as defining salient clinical constructs such as depression. Moreover, extensive bibliographic references and reviews of research are provided about gay and bisexual men, low-income urban adolescents, depressed women of color, ethnic elders, and African-American and white children.

This volume is must reading for social work researchers. Written by outstanding social work scholars, it provides key issues and conceptual challenges for research with minority and oppressed populations. Highly recommended for social work academicians, practitioners, administrators, policy developers, and students, it sensitizes readers to issues and suggestions for developing prevention programs and implementing social work interventions.

This is a gem of a volume. It is succinct, authoritative and of the highest quality. I learned a great deal from reading it. There is something of value here for all social workers. Although this is a slim volume, it is extremely thought-provoking and important for the advancement of the social work profession.

Tony Tripodi
President, Society for Social Work and Research
Dean, The Ohio State University College of Social Work

Introduction

Miriam Potocky
Antoinette Y. Rodgers-Farmer

During the past two decades there has been a vast increase in the social work literature in articles reporting on research with minority and oppressed populations. There has not, however, been a commensurate increase in literature that addresses the methodological challenges of and strategies for conducting such research. A few seminal articles in the social work literature (for example, Becerra & Zambrana, 1985; Lockhart, 1985; Myers, 1979; Wong, 1982) as well as recent publications in allied disciplines (for example, Eichler, 1988; Okazaki & Sue, 1995; Ponterotto & Casas, 1991; Smith & Madison, 1992; Stanfield & Dennis, 1993) have sensitized us to the need to adapt traditional research approaches when working with minority and oppressed respondents. Building on these as a foundation, the purpose of this special publication is to bring together in one volume a collection of articles that present state-of-the-art knowledge and techniques on this topic.

We invited leading social work scholars who are actively engaged in research with minority and oppressed populations to contribute to this volume. Of the abstracts received, we selected those that presented the most insightful conceptualizations of the relevant challenges, as well as the most innovative strategies for addressing those challenges. Additionally, we were interested in presenting research principles that are generalizable to a variety of minority and oppressed populations. We believe this volume will be useful to established researchers and graduate students

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who possess fundamental knowledge of basic issues pertaining to cross-cultural research, such as power and status considerations, biased problem definition, respondent mistrust, sampling error, and test bias.

The articles contained herein represent a combination of conceptual and empirical works that address all stages of the research process: conceptualization, operationalization, measurement, research design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The articles make several new contributions to the existing literature on this topic. Roffman et al. describe the use of anonymous enrollment as a technique for engaging and retaining respondents in research. While the use of anonymity per se is a common research technique for increasing the validity of responses, what is new in this case is the application of this method in the context of intervention research—that is, research that includes a direct service delivery component. Since direct interventions typically involve face-to-face contact, and since members of minority and oppressed groups underutilize such services, the anonymous enrollment technique holds promise for increasing access to “hidden” populations. Safyer et al. provide a detailed account of the process of conducting an action research project. Their report is particularly valuable in its focus on the developmental stage of the research, a phase which is too frequently omitted from research reports in favor of a decontextualized emphasis on outcomes. Both Ortega and Richey, and Burnette address issues involved in research with “dually oppressed” populations—ethnic minority elders and women, respectively. These two articles provide comprehensive and complementary perspectives on highly sophisticated approaches related to definitions, measurement, and the expansion of conceptual frameworks. Finally, DeRoos and Allen-Meares present a relatively unknown statistical technique, Rasch Analysis, as a method for discerning differences in the subjective experiences of depression by members of different racial groups, using the same measurement instrument.

Before the Summary of each article, we provide a brief review of the article in which we point out the generalizable research principles that can be derived from the work, as well as suggestions for future directions. We thank all of the contributors as well as David F. Gillespie, Editor, *Journal of Social Service Research*, for their hard work and patience in preparing this volume.

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