

SURVEY METHODOLOGY IN  
OCCUPATIONAL ALCOHOLISM  
RESEARCH \*

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Among the several approaches available in social science research, the case study method has been predominant in occupational alcoholism research. This is illustrated by research which has been based in either single organizations or a small set of work organizations, or, in some instances, in samples of installations or offices which operate under a single organizational umbrella. While it is clearly recognized that this approach has been extremely valuable in generating in-depth data on the dynamics of programs, their operation, and the patterns of processing of individuals who are referred through program mechanisms, it is also evident that useful knowledge may be gathered through survey methodology.

The advantages of survey methodology are centered on greater opportunities for legitimate generalization if genuine representativeness of a well defined population can be sustained. A major problem with research which has been based on one or several work organizations is that such organizations are usually large, which is a common prerequisite for the researcher to locate adequate numbers of research subjects who represent the phenomena under investigation. We do know, however, that employee alcoholism programs have been diffused to many sizes of work organizations as well as to occupational organizations such as labor unions and professional associations. Thus, there may be some risk in generalizing about program phenomena from large to small organizations, at least until we have assurance that program-relevant variables operate in similar fashion regardless of organizational size or geographic location.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the use of survey methodology in studying occupational program consultants. We will describe the research experiences that have accompanied a series of surveys of OPCs conducted by Tulane University, hopefully elucidating some of the unique problems that

accompany the use of survey methodology in this specialty area. We shall also provide some specific illustrations which give some flavor of the intent and desired outcomes of our research effort. Finally, and perhaps most important, we hope to share with our colleagues survey research experience that may be valuable in subsequent design of other survey efforts in this specialty area. Specifically, it is evident that useful data could be developed from the application of survey methodology to the population of employee alcoholism program administrators, resource organizations in communities which provide referral and treatment services to programs, and populations of programs themselves, stratified by the different organizational bases within which programming occurs.

Our research goals can be summarized under three general headings. First, we are concerned with developing descriptive data about the nature and types of occupational program consultants and the patterning of their work activities. Second, we are concerned with the outcomes of the efforts of occupational program consultants and have cautiously but deliberately addressed the issue of the "success" of these outcomes. Third, from a more basic research perspective, we are focusing upon the development of a new occupation which may indeed have some ingredients of a semi-profession. We find social science literature to be generally barren of studies of the emergence of new occupations; research in the sociology of occupations tends to be centered on established semi-professions and professions, and must usually rely upon historical data to reconstruct the dynamics of the development of a particular occupation or profession. While such reconstructions have been fruitful, the study of occupational program consultants does provide longitudinal research opportunities which have usually not been available in the macro-level study of other occupations and professions.

We also must indicate at the outset that we are not alone in our research on occupational program consultants. Trice and associates have conducted a research study of a network of occupational program consultants in New York state and have reported the results of their analyses of the outcomes of consultants' activities. The principal differences between the Trice et al. research and our own is that our study is national in scope and has relied heavily on mail questionnaire instruments whereas their more limited geographical coverage allowed for the collection of personal interview data.

As is well known, an identifiable cadre of occupational program consultants emerged as a result of Federal grants to the states in 1972. Consultation to organizations for the purpose of developing employee alcoholism programs existed prior to this time, but it seems safe to conclude that the small number of individuals involved in these efforts did not constitute an identifiable occupational group. The prior existence of a variety of "experts" was, however, considerably influential in NIAAA's decision to support the development of a nationwide consulting force. Many of these individuals were engaged by NIAAA as consultants in the design of the 1972-73 training program which was to provide the new consultants with the essential technology for their work.

At the time the training was launched, Professor Trice and myself proposed to the organization in charge of the training a design for its evaluation, with a longer range goal that this would afford us the opportunity for a longitudinal study of this major consulting force from the outset. Our proposal was not accepted, and the training was evaluated by others. From

what we have been able to gather, this evaluation involved the collection of extensive data about the background, experiences, and orientation of the new consultants, but was conducted anonymously so as to make it impossible to link together the different data collections from individual consultants.

The first usable data made available to the Tulane research group was the result of a somewhat makeshift reporting system developed by NIAAA where consultants in each state were to submit forms describing the programs they had developed. The 1973 data was extremely sparse and essentially provided for a compilation of numbers of programs developed in each state in terms of public and private sector programming. The 1974 data, in which we had a consultative role in designing the data collection instrument used by NIAAA, provided a somewhat broader base of information about the work organizations where programs had been developed. We have had the continuing impression however that these data were tainted by the fact that they were based upon self-report and were generated in a context in which "numbers" of programs were believed to be used by NIAAA as the criterion of success. We did not at this time have any information on the characteristics of the consultants themselves or their employing organizations.

In 1974, Tulane was awarded a grant by the Occupational Programs Branch of NIAAA for the purpose of studying the development of occupational program consultants as well as studying the operation, organization, and outcomes of the occupational demonstration projects which had been funded by the Institute. This provided us with the first opportunity for primary data collection, and our goal was to interview state occupational program consultants on a nationwide basis. On the basis of the information available to us at that time, which included some descriptive information about consultants' activities in different states shared with us by NIAAA, we did not have a well organized notion of the appropriate emphases for data collection and thus launched the

nationwide interviews with an open-ended research instrument intended to generate data on the backgrounds of the consultants, descriptions of their work activities, consideration of their successes and problems, and particular attention to the integration of their activity into their home organization, which was usually the state alcoholism authority.

The open-ended approach at this time was deliberate in that we desired to work inductively in constructing our description of consultants' work. We were particularly concerned that our questions would have substantial research effects in that they would artificially structure the nature of consultant work on the basis of our preconceptions. We searched the literature at that time to find previous research on occupations that could be comparable to consultants, and essentially were unsuccessful with the exception of locating a small literature on the activities of county agricultural extension agents.

It was clear at this time that a state-based consultant endeavoring to construct a new health care delivery system in a work organization represented a fairly unique relationship in the history of efforts to introduce change into the workplace. Our research was further complicated at this time since the initial three year grants were quickly moving toward expiration in most states, and many individual consultants were highly anxious regarding their future, tending to use the interview processes<sup>as</sup> an opportunity to obtain information on how they might obtain sustained funding or other employment. This situation did not obtain in ten states which received "expansion grants" from NIAAA which allowed for a continuation and broadening of their consultation efforts. We conducted research interviews in these states as well, extending our data collection into 1976, and producing a massive amount of data on fifty fairly distinctive state "systems" of occupational program consultation. In

order to develop usable data, we had collected extensive amounts of information in the first ten states we visited, which were then collapsed into an interview schedule from which quantitative data could be collected. This was not altogether satisfactory since we continually encountered unique situations in the various states to which the interview schedule had to be adapted.

In terms of survey methodology, this phase of our data collection was straightforward. It was easy to identify occupational program consultants in the various states who were funded through the Federal grants. We did not include the relatively few private consultants who were operating in the field at that time. During this survey the somewhat different group of "local" occupational program consultants began to emerge. We also found that the funding and organization of consultation efforts in the various states changed rapidly from month to month, and with turnover of personnel, much of our data was not current even six months after it was collected. We thus undertook a mail questionnaire survey at the end of 1976 which was a successful effort in obtaining from all states responses which summarized their occupational consultation activity as of that date. It should be noted that response rates presented no difficulty in these interview surveys and we found virtually everyone willing to talk to us.

In 1977 we developed plans for a broader nationwide survey which was conducted in two steps. In mid 1977 we conducted another round of site visits to forty-eight states, excluding states and a territory where we knew that activity had become defunct. The purpose of these site visits was to gather more in-depth information on the funding and organization of consultation in the various states, which was particularly important since Federal grant funding had by this time expired practically everywhere. It

was during these site visits that we began our first "census" of occupational program consultants, using state-level personnel as key informants to identify persons in their state working at the local community level as consultants with some form of public fund support.

The development of this nationwide census through this method also included names and addresses of persons who were believed to be engaged in this work without public funds, but we quickly found that the identification of this sub-group by our state-level informants was quite unreliable. We thus chose to limit our 1977 questionnaire survey to full and part-time personnel who were engaged in consultation under the auspices of public funding. We developed a lengthy questionnaire on the basis of our research experience in 1975-76, and found that our on-site visits had been quite successful in setting the stage for cooperation in instrument completion. The response rate we obtained was over 80 percent.

Project activity was suspended in the summer of 1978, in part due to a sabbatical leave by the project director. When new funding commenced in November 1979, the primary goal of the first year of the project was to analyze the data base collected in 1977. We were aware that the field was changing and growing rapidly, and prepared to update with a national survey that is still underway at the present time.

For this survey, the problem of population definition was indeed difficult. We began by using our 1977 list of respondents, to whom we sent a letter and a post-card for return on which they were to indicate whether they were still engaged in consultation activity or, if not, who had replaced them in this work.

This postcard survey quickly brought to the fore the kinds of difficulties we were going to encounter throughout the latest data collection, namely the high degree of mobility in this population. This is represented by our difficulty in maintaining reliable addresses. We found that responsiveness to this postcard survey was considerably less enthusiastic than we had previously encountered, but we also noted that several years had passed since our on-site visits to each state. We are convinced that these personal contacts are an essential key to maintaining the kind of rapport essential for a high response rate.

We thus were able through this first postcard survey to establish who from our 1977 respondent population had continued to be engaged in program consultation work. We also had <sup>a</sup>partial inventory of new individuals who had come into the field, this being collected from the 1977 respondents who indicated they were no longer engaged in program consultation work and who provided us with the names of their successors.

We then cumulated the lists of both new and old program consultants for each state and returned to our key informant technique which we had previously found to be useful. Up until recently, NIAAA has maintained a somewhat updated list of occupational program consultants at the state level for each state. This provided us with a good number of key informants, and contact with some of these individuals resulted in referral to another person to function in this role. We asked these key informants to examine the list that we had developed on the basis of our first postcard survey. They were to add names of additional persons of whom they were aware, and while some took the option of deleting names from the list as well, our basic strategy of using self-definition in the survey did not allow us to sustain their editing of the list.

At the same time we also asked them to provide three items of information on each person who was on the list: Did the person receive public funds for