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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGIOSITY AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF 30 YEARS OF RESEARCH

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The main purpose of this study is to systematically examine research conducted over the past 30 years regarding the effects of religiosity on substance abuse among African American. The present study was designed to examine whether there is empirical support for a relationship between religiosity and substance abuse among African American. This study is a partial replication of a systematic review by Johnson et al. (2000) on the effect of religion on delinquent behaviors. Johnson and his colleagues (2000) found that there is a consistent negative relationship between religiosity and deviance in the most rigorous research. Given that various types of deviant behaviors are related to religiosity in different ways, the present study focuses solely on African American substance abuse in order to avoid masking effects and variations.

Keywords: Substance abuse, Religiosity, Spirituality, African Americans

INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse has been a serious social problem in the United States (Wallace & Muroff, 2002). The annual cost to society for substance abuse (e.g. productivity loss and health care cost) was estimated at \$143.4 billion (Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2001). Consequently, there have been continuous efforts to find out factors that prevent and remedy substance abuses. Previous studies found several significant protective and risk factors related to substance abuse such as family bonds, peer relationships, and school (Little & Steinberg, 2006; NIDA, 2002). Although these findings have been valuable, these have yet effectively to develop a comprehensive solution to the problem.

One critical limitation of the existing studies on substance abuse has been the exclusion of religious factors. Religion has been largely overlooked by practitioners and researcher because many people concerns that the inclusion of religious factors in practice may impose a specific perspective on clients or violate the separation of Church and State, which may lead to lawsuits. Even though there are potential risks related to the inclusion of religious factor in practice, dedicating ample attention to religious factors is crucial as religion appears to have a very significant influence on many people's lives. In particular, religion is an important factor for

African Americans, who are more active in religious organizations than other Americans (Benson et al., 1989; Chatters et al., 1999; Taylor et al., 1996).

However, opposing views on the relationship between religiosity and deviant behaviors including substance abuse still coexist (Chard-Wierschem, 1998; Johnson et al., 2000). Even though there is increasing agreement that religion is an inhibitor of substance abuse rather than a contributor (Batson et al., 1993), the strength of a religious effect is unclear. Clarification of the relationship between religion and substance abuse could have important implications for policy implementation in terms of the types of interventions that are utilized to prevent and treat substance abuse for African American.

PRESENT STUDY

The main purpose of this study is to systematically examine research conducted over the past 30 years regarding the effects of religiosity on substance abuse among African American. The present study was designed to examine whether there is empirical support for a relationship between religiosity and substance abuse among African American. This study is a partial replication of a systematic review by Johnson et al. (2000) on the effect of religion on delinquent behaviors. Johnson and his colleagues (2000) found that there is a consistent negative relationship between religiosity and deviance in the most rigorous research. Given that various types of deviant behaviors are related to religiosity in different ways, the present study focuses solely on African American substance abuse in order to avoid masking effects and variations.

Studies used in this systematic review were gathered from peer-reviewed journals dating from 1977 to 2006. Over 202 studies were found from the electronic databases -Academic Search Premier, Eric, Psychology and Behavior Science Collections, Sociological collections, SociIndex using the key terms religion, religiosity, drug abuse, substance abuse, African American, and Black. In order to be included, studies were required to meet the following criteria: (1) the main focus of the study was on African American; (2) the study analyzed the relationship between religion and substance abuse; (3) the measure of religion was specified; and (4) the study used a quantitative design.

Of those 202, only 9 mainly focused on religion and African American and therefore were included in this analysis. The soundness of the empirical evidence was assessed according to the sampling strategy, measurement of religiosity, and the quality of research methodology. The present study has used the same methodology as that used by Johnson et al. (2000). Regarding sampling strategy, only three studies used random sampling. As for religious measurement, most studies utilized two or more measures to cover the multiple dimensions of religious belief such as denomination, church attendance, prayer, and salience. In the present review, these studies treated religion variables as the main focus of the study.

The quality of the studies was assessed using criteria developed by Cook and Campbell (1979). Eleven criteria are utilized to assess the quality of research: (1) no ambiguity about causal inference; (2) the use of longitudinal data; (3) specification of response rate; (4) specification of missing data; (5) specification of race of subjects; (6) specification of gender of subjects; (7) specification of reliability of measures; (8) the use of multiple measures to represent a particular construct; (9) the use of diverse methods to collect data for operational representation of a construct; (10) use of multivariate statistics; and (11) interpretation of statistical findings (Cook & Campbell, 1979; cited in Johnson et al., 2000). Each of these eleven criteria was coded as dichotomized outcome. Presence of these criteria was coded 1 and the absence as 0.

FINDINGS

The nine articles used had an average score of .50 on the quality index, which has a score range of 0 to 1. It was lower compared to previous studies (.59) by Johnson and his colleague (2000). In the present systematic review, most studies demonstrated association and speculated about potential causation. Many articles were not able to deal with sufficiently with measurement errors. However, several studies tried to develop constructs to cover the multiple dimension of religious belief; “ritualistic dimension” (Glock, 1954), “associational dimension” (Lenski, 1961), “religious salience” and “devotionalism” (King & Hunt, 1962). Also, three studies used longitudinal data which greatly reduces the threat of spuriousness.

The intra-rater reliability was .97 for all measures examined. The distribution of the data on the quality or research was presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Quality of Research.

	Yes	No
No ambiguity about causal inference	2	7
The use of longitudinal data	3	6
Specification of response rate	6	3
Specification of missing data	2	7
Specification of race of subjects	9	0
Specification of gender of subjects	7	2
Specification of reliability of measures	4	5
No mono- operation bias (The use of multiple measures to represent a particular construct)	6	3
No mono-method bias (the use of diverse methods to collect data for operational representation of a construct)	0	9
Use of multivariate statistics	1	8
Interpretation of statistical findings	9	0

Consistent with previous literatures that support an inverse relationship between religion and substance abuse, (Johnson et al., 2000b), no study in this review suggests a positive relationship between religiosity and substance abuse among African American. However, two studies showed mixed effect that some dimension of religion had no effect on substance abuse. In addition, these two studies were ranked higher in terms of quality index (.55) than the rest of the studies that concluded that religion had a negative effect on substance abuse (.48). The present study fails to confirm that there is a consistent negative relationship between religiosity and deviance in the most rigorous research. However, in a given small number of research in the present review, the results should be interpreted with caution. Rigorous race-specific research is needed in order to verify the findings of the present study.

Overall, the present study supports the previous findings that religion may play an important role in deciding whether or not to engage in substance abuse. The results of the present study indicate that a fuller understanding of the religious factors may be necessary to addressing the

issue of substance abuse for African American. Identification of risk and protective factors can greatly increase the ability to prevent and treat substance abuse. Future studies are required to better understand the etiology of substance use among African American. Finding interventions will depend on the quality of knowledge about protective factors that prevent and remedy substance abuses.

IMPLICATIONS

The primary implication of this review for decreasing substance abuse is rather straightforward: Increasing the religiosity of individuals appears to have beneficial effects for Africa American. However, there has been considerable resistance about the inclusion of religious factors in social service programs because there are constitutional concerns, moral ambiguities, and conflicting interests and expectations.

Although the implementation of religious factors in social service program is a formidable task, it is important to remember the primary mission helping profession such as social work share --helping people in need. In addition, given the detrimental consequences of substance abuse for African American such as the devastating consequences of a felony conviction, helping profession needs to develop a better understanding of religious traditions to address substance abuse among African American. Change is inevitable. If the helping profession wants to remain true to our missions and provide better services to people in need, we must adopt an open-minded stance.

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