

INTRODUCTION

We present this set of articles and bibliography relating sociology to dentistry with several purposes in mind. We hope to make dentistry, and more importantly, dental health, a salient object for social scientific study by bringing together representative types of research. We hope also that the dental community will better understand what sociologists do in the dental domain, how they think and what they might contribute toward improving the level of oral health of a population.

This volume is also intended as an invitation to other social scientists to look into the extensive bibliographic stockpile. In so doing, it may be a useful guide to the kinds of subject matters already researched and, by omission or faculty quality, to what needs to be researched. The collection of papers should highlight the variety and range in types of work, approaches, disciplines, methods and theoretical and practical problems that have occupied "dental sociology." The papers do not exhaust potential foci and directions; they are meant to be examples of what has been done and to represent the range of possibilities.

As background to these objectives, it may be useful to point out some past and current trends in the field of sociology and dentistry. In the United States, at least, behavioral research (primarily psychologic and sociopsychologic) in dentistry has often been related to efforts expended by the U. S. Public Health Service's Division of Dental Health and its predecessor organizations. Through intramural research and consultation and extramural financial support through grants and fellowships, the Division of Dental Health was one of the pioneers in bringing social and behavioral science to the dental-medical community since the early 1950's.

The 1960's saw a rise in departments of behavioral science and community dentistry as part of American dental schools. These departments, often the professional homes for full-time social researchers, are often the places where social and behavioral scientists, medical sociologists and others located in associated medical schools and in traditional social science departments collaborate their efforts. The growth in numbers of researchers led, at the end of the decade, to the formation of what is now known as the "Behavioral Sciences Group" (a group primarily drawn from Anglo-Saxon countries but increasingly attracting interest in other parts of the world) of the International Association for Dental Research (IADR). The IADR, traditionally an association of biologic researchers, officially and warmly welcomed their new colleagues in the Spring of 1971. The year 1971 also witnessed a special landmark for the field as the Federation Dentaire Internationale sponsored special sessions at its Munich meeting on the "state-of-research" in the social sciences and dentistry.

Growth of the social science literature related to dentistry and growth in the numbers of researchers, and the locations of research seem likely to continue. Increasingly, the social science focus seems to be more and more applied research as the pressures in dentistry—as in general medicine—are concentrated on the delivery of quality services to greater numbers of people. The exigencies of manpower shortage and maldistribution create problems for the dental community that can profitably command the attention of the various social science disciplines; sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, political scientists and economists. Problems to be solved include those that have been around so long as to be termed almost endemic: motivating individuals to practice good oral hygiene, to control diet and to seek regular, preventive professional care; and convincing communities to fluoridate water supplies. Other problems are more recent and tied to ongoing social changes: how to organize dental care delivery systems, methods of payment, quality control and how to share power with community insurance, union, business or governmental groups. Perhaps there are no more "purely dental" problems. Perhaps the cultural, social and psychologic context will be part of dental solutions from here on. Certainly the subheadings in the bibliography suggest the proliferation of problems already posed. By delving into the references, the reader will also note that though a great many crucial questions have at last begun to be asked, the answers thus far given are by no means final.

And so the hackneyed plea of an urgent need for further research applies to the dental field as well.

The articles written for this collection are addressed to some of the issues mentioned above and at the same time represent various analytic approaches.

Robert O'Shea's "Dentistry as an Institution" is an attempt at macrosociologic description; it looks at the major organizational and role structures of North American dentistry and tries to put them into both historic and functional contexts. There has been very little work using this approach and his article more or less is a first attempt to view dentistry through this perspective.

The paper by Roger Cole and Lois Cohen on dental manpower is a demographic essay challenging a traditional reliance on dentist-population ratios to estimate need. It proposes other potential components that, though not previously utilized, might be available through current data collection mechanisms.

Erwin Linn's exploratory study of women dental students represents a first stage, hypothesis-finding expedition in an area previously little researched. His interview questions probe for the reactions of family, friends, fellow (men) students, instructors and (in anticipation) patients, experienced by "women studying in a man's world." Dr. Linn uses the interview technique to build toward the development of survey instrumentation to be used at a later stage of research.

Isabel Wolock and Edward Wellin studied the social organization of the dental profession in a small city, and their article represents one of the few pieces of research in dentistry that utilized the mapping of colleague networks, their bases and consequences. In many ways it bears comparison and contrast with Oswald Hall's early work on physicians.

The two remaining papers are included to indicate the growing interest in social research in dentistry and dental health in countries outside the United States. Judith Shuval's survey report, "Social and Psychological Factors in Dental Health in Israel," compares adult responses in Israel with similarly designed measurements from adult U. S. respondents. Her data should be of interest to students of cross-national research, as problems of direct comparability of methods and findings pertaining to health behaviors are suggested. N. David Richards' essay on "Dentistry in Great Britain" uses an historical sociologic approach to compare similar analyses of the North American dental institution.

Finally, the bibliography was gathered and organized by Lois Cohen with the assistance of N. David Richards (particularly for the references of publications from outside the United States), and painstakingly recorded and verified by Mrs. Verece Silverman.* This was a most time consuming and demanding effort, as it required sifting from thousands of articles, books, research notes and so forth, those that would have considered social science data on dental subject matter or would have relevance for social science theory development in the dental field. Particularly because translations from other languages require lengthy time lags, the bibliography may actually not be up-to-date as of December, 1970, as indicated. Dr. Cohen and her staff plan to continue this effort and hope to supplement this bibliography at regular intervals. The current listing formed the basis for several reviews of the literature presented at the Federation Dentaire Internationale meetings in Munich in 1971. The bibliography and reviews of it represent a stock-taking that should contribute to the present impetus of research and hopefully might even launch social research in dentistry into new directions.

It is with these same purposes that we introduce the articles that follow. ●

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