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Testing of a Design for Client Evaluation of a Conciliation Service

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TESTING OF A DESIGN FOR CLIENT EVALUATION OF A CONCILIATION SERVICE

by

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To The Office Of Graduate Studies:

The members of the Committee approve the practicum of James E. Dudley, James C. Euler, Peter Njoroge, and Richard Streissguth presented March 15, 1972:

Frank Miles, Chairman

Donald G. Welch, Co-Chairman
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INTRODUCTION

This study is an attempt to develop, design, and implement procedures for better data collection in the future and for an evaluation of the services provided in the past.

I. GENERAL STATEMENT

Conciliation Courts have developed across the country on the notion that casework services can, at best, save a marriage from divorce and, at least, can do no harm. Evaluation of the effectiveness of conciliation services is limited and contradictory.

This practicum is an attempt to develop a research design which can measure the effectiveness of conciliation service. We consider the first priority to develop a workable design which will insure response. A second priority, which will hopefully be developed next, is a value system which will give us data concerning what is effectiveness and which kinds of things need to be and can be measured by a client feedback system.

For the purpose of introduction, the following few pages are included to give historical perspective to the conciliation movement.
II. HISTORICAL STATEMENT

Early in the history of man, society institutionalized the family by the contractual means of marriage. When family breakdowns occurred, one method was developed to terminate the contract which we have called divorce. The process of this method has often been more destructive than anything that occurred within the marriage. Society has always recognized that the need for an exit from a marriage exists. Until very recently society has failed to recognize that the procedure should not be punitive, demeaning, and devastating.

Alternatives to marriage and divorce have been widely explored, i.e., mistresses, consorts, casual affairs, common-law relationships, trial marriages, etc. These have not received legal or social sanction, leaving little or no option but the polarized extremes. In France in 1866, however, a law was passed, making it mandatory that parties seeking a divorce must first go before a judge whose duty was to attempt to reconcile them. In our country, Michigan in 1919, and Wisconsin in 1933, preceded California's legislation of 1939 which provided for conciliation. In 1941 a bill was introduced in California to abolish conciliation, and it came close to passing. The facts, however, support that there was never a concerted effort or adequate budget for conciliation services to be an operational fact until 1954, when
Judge Louis Burke of California secured passage of legislation which financed a conciliation court and established qualifications and standards.

The state legislature of Oregon passed a conciliation law in 1963, and an agency was created in Multnomah County for the purpose of providing the conciliation service as provided by statute.

The purpose of conciliation as defined by law is:

...to protect the rights of children and to promote the public welfare by preserving, promoting, and protecting family life and the institution of matrimony, and to provide means for the reconciliation of spouses and the amicable settlement of domestic and family controversies.

Any legally married couple residing within the jurisdiction of the Conciliation Court may request the services of the Court. It is not necessary that a divorce suit be pending. The petitioner first comes in to sign a petition. The petition is then the instrument which gives the Conciliation Court its jurisdiction. The petition becomes binding in three particulars:

First, both parties are required to come in for an interview with a marriage counselor. If the respondent does not come in, a subpoena or warrant can be issued.

Second, the counselor cannot be subpoenaed as a witness in a further court hearing. (Whatever transpires in concilia-
tion interview is confidential, and that confidentiality cannot be waived.)

Third, a divorce cannot issue until forty-five days after the petition has been filed.

After the petition is signed, a letter is then sent to the respondent, requesting him (or her) to attend an informal, confidential conference to be conducted by a marriage counselor. The letter indicates that the counselor will be impartial and that his aim will be to help the marital partners discuss their problems for the purpose of discovering new approaches to solving them. No charge is made for the service of the Conciliation Court, and there is no filing fee. (An unusual provision in the Oregon statutes provides for a $10.00 additional fee in filing for all divorces where conciliation services are available, which, in part, finances the conciliation service. The balance of the funding is done by the county. With some self supporting funding, matching funding by the county is perhaps more easily secured.)

An additional feature of the conciliation program is that the counselor has recourse to the full equity powers of the Court. This means that husbands and wives can negotiate with the counselor without representation by an attorney, and the counselor can effect restraining orders, temporary separation, support and visitation, or other
orders as indicated and agreed upon by the principals, in a non-adversary, therapeutic setting.

Conciliation Court judges and counselors feel they provide a worthwhile service, even if the parties do not reconcile. In these cases counseling aids the partners to become less hostile toward each other to the point that they can at least continue to exercise their joint responsibility toward their children. Another alternative is to help the marital pair plan a separation that will not be destructive to either one. Perhaps the major effectiveness of the conciliation movement may be that it becomes a catalyst that enables couples to sit down together to discuss their problems. In the past, when one party has felt despair in a marriage, a principal choice available has been a legal choice of terminating the marriage under punitive conditions.

The conciliation movement is showing that a divorce court can make the legal aspects of divorce secondary to the socio-psychological aspects that are causative factors in family breakdown.

A review of the statistics for Conciliation Courts in the United States leaves some confusion. They range from "less than 2% effectiveness in New York to 55% reconciliation in Los Angeles," to the most recent Los Angeles study upping their previously reported success to a whopping 75%
effectiveness now. For these introductory remarks, let us just point out that the essential difference has been in the method of reporting. In New York conciliation is mandatory, and all divorce cases are seen and counted. In Los Angeles only petitions that appear hopeful are accepted. The 75% figure in the sample group were those who had reconciled and were found to be continuing to live together one year from the petition date.

The conciliation movement is growing rapidly. It has its own professional organization composed of judges, lawyers, and social workers, with equal professional status. The movement has its own journal, and it has developed standards and qualifications.
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Social work researchers must consistently attempt to relate their practices to a body of theories which can be tested under the fire of continued experience and serve as a basis for scientific investigation. Mary Richmond's Social Diagnosis in 1917 laid the foundation for the scientific approach to case work. The Milford Conference of 1929 conceptualized that social workers must submit their practices to periodic critical examinations in order to confirm their professional identity. A recent scientific inquiry was a symposium in honor of Charlotte Towle at the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration in May, 1969. At best, there are multiple theories of approaches to scientific research without one being a front runner.

In advocating evaluative research in an article in a bulletin published by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Elizabeth Herzog outlined nine questions which she felt had to be considered in any agency research of its methodology. These necessary steps in formulating this type of introspective research are as follows:

(1) What is the purpose of the evaluation?
(2) What kind of change is desired?
(3) By what means is the change to be brought about?
(4) How trustworthy are the categories and measures employed?
(5) At what points is change to be measured?
(6) How fairly do the individuals studied represent the group discussed?
(7) What is the evidence that the changes observed are due to the means employed?
(8) What is the meaning of the changes found?
(9) Were there unexpected consequences? 2

Mrs. Herzog indicated that the first three of these steps are primarily the concern of the agency or organization instigating the research, although she added that those doing the research needed to be involved also in aiding them to define their purposes and goals in clear, concise terms, formulate the specific problem, designate the intervention techniques, set standards for determining change and allocate agency resources for research purposes. The researchers, then, are responsible for the research design, reliability and validity of research tools, measurement intervals, representativeness of sample and consistency of the whole study. In talking about the crucial criteria for evaluative studies, Mrs. Herzog stated:

Since no criteria is likely to be free of pitfalls, the best defense is to be aware of the ones that exist, of the extent to which they are likely to bias results, and of the direction this bias will probably take, i.e., will it tend to make the outcome look better or worse than it really is? 3

A useful way to check for possible biases is to look at other studies and their methodologies and outcomes.
INTRODUCTION

There are very few marriage counseling programs which have been evaluated, even minimally. In order to cover all the possibilities of evaluating marriage counseling services, we have reviewed the literature which includes information regarding all counseling services' evaluations in general.

Social Work research which has been focused in many family service agencies has concentrated in two primary areas. It has concerned itself with the problems of organizational efficiency, including principally studies of cost, certain personnel problems, and the distribution of staff time. It has also been concerned with the study of the characteristic patterns of service in the family agency. Three major areas of concentration concerning methods of intervention have been researched. The first is treatment outcome, and especially the problems of measuring the results of casework service. Factors associated with continuance in treatment and the characteristics of brief service cases is the second area, and third, is the methods and techniques of treatment.

HISTORY OF MARITAL COUNSELING EVALUATION

The earliest endeavor to appraise marital satisfaction was a thirteen-item questionnaire developed by G. E. Hamilton
in 1929. Lewis Terman studied marital happiness during 1938. Burgess and Cottrell also looked at marriage counseling the same year. Three scales were developed at relatively the same time: the Terman Prediction Scale of Marital Happiness, the Adams-Lepley Personal Audit, and the Guilford-Martin Personal Inventory. In research at the Marriage Counsel of Philadelphia, the client was initially involved by being presented a questionnaire to fill out in the waiting room before the first interview. This face sheet contained such factors as sex, age, birthplace, etc., and facts about their relationship with family upbringing, the engagement period, length of courtship, areas of disagreement, future plans, sexual knowledge, family attitudes, and details about marriage adjustment, such as the sharing of household responsibilities, confiding, sources of disagreement, and estimates of personality. The sex adjustment schedule was handled by the counselor during an early interview. Engaged couples are asked to participate in the research evaluation after they are married, and if they agree, the above questionnaire is sent to them between three and six months after marriage.

A four-member research team systematically analyzed the case record for comparison. They found it exceedingly difficult to agree upon an evaluation because of individual values. They did, however, look at the type of problems
that were dealt with in the counseling session and the nature of the counseling process in terms of the role of the counselor, the behavior and attitudes of the clients as these bear upon the marriage, their use of counseling in terms of the marriage relationship, personal adjustment, and the results of counseling. The research team modified the schedule after pre-testing in order to preserve the items which had the greatest agreement. The study included provision for a follow-up study.

Genevieve Burton, Howard M. Kaplan, and Emily H. Mudd published a critique of their own methodology in a follow-up study of marriage counseling for couples with one member who had an alcohol problem. Their initial research covered a population which received some type of marital counseling (group or individual) over a ten-year period from 1954 to 1964 and included 227 couples. The follow-up research was started nine months after termination of therapy for the latest couples. "Efforts to locate people for interviewing were made by telephone, letter, home visits, or a combination of the three methods." Yet, despite these combined approaches in all categories studied, except those in group counseling, more than 50% of the population were not located, and therefore, they concluded that there was a need for building plans for a follow-up study from its inception -- "included
in follow-up plans should be some method for maintaining contact with clients, which hopefully would result in fewer 'not located' and 'refused' cases." ¹¹ The instrument used to test effectiveness was a 54-item open-ended questionnaire which was filled out by interviewers during the extensive interviewing situation. Research was conducted by the original therapists in half of the cases, and an "attempt was made to obtain the client's own evaluation of the efficacy of marriage counseling in alleviating both marital and drinking problems, corroborated by the data on the current status in the life areas (covered in the questionnaire)..." ¹²

Besides the need to plan for the follow-up from the beginning of the research, Burton, Kaplan, and Mudd concluded that:

(1) In a study covering a period of as long as ten years there would be considerable merit in having follow-up interviews immediately following termination of counseling. This would have provided an opportunity to compare client's progress from their initial contact to the end of counseling as well as a comparison between either of those periods and the time of follow-up.

(2) Perusal of some of the completed questionnaires indicated a need for immediate editing or consistency checks
while the respondents are still available.

(3) Experience with this follow-up indicated a vital need for intensive training of interviewers.

(4) Arbitrary selection of the follow-up period could significantly affect the results.\(^{13}\)

**RECENT STUDIES**

In considering the following studies an attempt has been made to find similarities or discrepancies which have a bearing on the directions of this research.

In a study done by Alice Brandreth and Ruth Pike in a small Canadian family service agency, one type of research plan was built into their program for a short time. The agency decided to test the feasibility of establishing research as a formal agency function, while also evaluating the effectiveness of its long-term marriage counseling services. The agency confined its investigation to what kinds of people sought service, what problems were presented, and what results were obtained within this one area of service. A four-part questionnaire was developed and administered at specific times to couples receiving marriage counseling between January 1, 1963, and March 31, 1964.\(^{14}\)

The first three parts of the questionnaire were given to the husband and wife during the first three interviews. Parts 'A' and 'B' were general questions designed to elicit
descriptive statistical data and to obtain a rating of the
problem areas according to the severity of the conflict.
Part 'C' dealt with questions about the couple's sexual
activity. Part 'D' was a repetition for the most part of
Part 'B', and it was given upon termination. Parts 'D'
and 'B' were then compared to ascertain the difference
between the couple's opinion and the social worker's opinion
of the improvement in the relationship. These sections
were then compared with each other and then with the coun-
selor's overall estimations of the change which had taken
place. Because the researchers felt that certain staff were
not involved and were, in fact, thwarting the whole effort,
they recommended that in any future agency research project,
there should be a "clearly defined administrative procedure
and the assumption of responsibility for the entire project
by a person or group especially interested in the study to
offset any antipathy toward research by staff members."16

In this study the subjective evaluations of both the
client and the counselor formed the basis for the data.
Even though the study covered only a short period of time and
was part of the initial therapy experience, only 42 of the
96 couples in the sample completed questionnaires. "Failure
to obtain completed questionnaires... was attributed to the
following factors:"
(1) Some couples refused to participate in the study.

(2) Some social workers were not committed to the research project.

(3) The most significant and most frequently occurring factor was unplanned termination.\textsuperscript{17}

Another follow-up study by R. V. Fitzgerald concentrated on clients' progress after conjoint marital counseling. In this follow-up, Fitzgerald was able to locate 75\% (37 out of 57) of his original population. His method of contact and gathering data was by telephone interviews about five to ten minutes in length. The original population were his clients who had terminated at least two and a half years prior to his research efforts. The author gave no reason why he felt he was not able to locate the remaining 25\% of the sample. Although there had been no thought given to a later follow-up during the original therapy sessions, Fitzgerald was able to locate a significantly greater number of his population than the previous researchers cited. This success in contacting ex-patients was not commented on by the researcher. The means of evaluating effectiveness of client progress was as follows:

...each patient was asked to describe his current situation and to compare his pre-treatment status with his status at the time of the follow-up,
whether worse, unimproved, or improved.\textsuperscript{18} Subsequently, they were asked to rate themselves.

This subjective data was assessed by the researcher in terms of his own observations and interpretations of the clients' current functioning. Of the subjects in this study, 14\%, or 8, remained in therapy for less than four conjoint sessions, and 16 out of 57 received four to fifteen sessions. Fitzgerald made the assumption that those participating in less than four one-hour therapy sessions were not genuinely involved in the process.\textsuperscript{19} All of these subjects were voluntary patients who sought Fitzgerald out or were referred to him for private therapy.

In the book, \textit{Patients View Their Psychotherapy}, by Strupp, Fox, and Lessler, a comprehensive questionnaire was designed, pretested, and mailed to 76 former clients by eleven psychotherapists. These therapists also completed a series of global ratings on each person, half men and half women taking part. Forty-four questionnaires were returned for a total of 58\% return rate. Patients were presented with 89 questions which asked for a degree of rating on a scale of five possibilities. The therapist's questionnaire contained 23 questions, 17 of which were before and after qualitative analyses, satisfaction with the patient, etc.

Some of the results are as follows:
Non-respondents received more therapy than respondents, and the therapist's evaluation of the results was the most positive toward this group. There was a slight difference between patients who were rated successful who returned the questionnaire as against the patients rated less successful who responded. The median age was 31 to 32 years at the beginning of therapy, and 35 at the time of the survey. Of the respondents, 70% were married, and 60% of this group had at least one child. The median family income was between $7,500 and $10,000. The educational level was high, averaging at least 16 years; 28% of the respondents were professionals, 16% managers, 20% housewives. As measured in terms of Hollingshead's index of social position, most people were from the upper social classes. The average patient was seen in 166 interviews; therapy typically lasted for 28 weeks, interviews being scheduled twice a week. The average number of months that the research was done since termination was 32 months. Seventy-five percent of the patients had had one therapist, while 14% had had three or more. One-third were seen in psychoanalysis as opposed to two-thirds in psychotherapy. The average fee charged was $15.00 an hour. Almost half of the respondents had had a record of previous hospitalization. Between two-thirds and three-fourths of the respondents credited the therapy
experience with significant improvements in their personal well-being, and these favorable results were described as lasting. The therapists generally agreed with the above findings. 20

A study by S. J. Freeman, Edith J. Leavens, and D. J. McCulloch, not dealing with either evaluation of services or follow-up, provides some conclusions regarding use of certain correlates sometimes used in measuring success in marital counseling.

We were surprised to find no support, even in the form of raw numbers or percentage differences, for such strongly held views such as that marital adjustment and counseling are influenced by the age of the subjects at marriage, or at counseling, by ethnic origin, by educational attainment, by number of therapy hours, by total duration of therapy, and so on ...we are able to offer some support to the many who believe that considerable involvement in the counseling of both partners to a marriage is important if not vital to the successful resolution of marital counseling. 21

This same study also points to the probability that middle class clients have a better outcome, due most likely to the greater comfort of counselors and this group in the therapy situation.

Mary W. Hicks and Marilyn Platt, in reviewing the research of the Sixties in the area of marital happiness and stability, pointed out that there is a necessity for having
effective and reliable means of measuring in research. They said that "there is virtually no research in this area in which observation of behavior by trained observers provides the data or in which self-reported data were validated against such objective criteria." However, as stated earlier, such behavioral measures can be expensive and time consuming and agencies sometimes do not have these resources available. There is another alternative as proposed by Ballard and Mudd:

...to distinguish between them in terms of 'validity,' one would have to set up still a third measure, such as whether the terminated client seeks further treatment in the future or whether he thereafter achieves certain stated relevant goals.

A follow-up study by Robert Ballard and Emily H. Mudd reported only on 56 clients participating in their research project and gave no account of the original sample or population and what, if any, were their problems in getting responses to their research inquiries. The follow-up was initiated five to ten years after the counseling of the subjects was discontinued. The reviewers, who were different from the original therapists, but who used the original casework records, gave their ratings on a form as to the positive movement of the client and these were then compared with the clients' subjective feelings of movement.
or progress as rated during an interview. In using this same research study to analyse some approaches to evaluate effectiveness of counseling, Ballard and Mudd indicate that there are four general sources for measuring this effectiveness: the client, the persons in his life most intimately involved with him, the social system itself, and the counselor. In a second article they compared the predictive efficiency of self-rating versus rating by reviewers on the basis of agency case records. Their reasoning was as follows:

The conduct of long-term follow-up interviews is an expensive and time consuming procedure. By comparison, the abstracting of existing agency records is both expeditious and economical.

Ballard summarized his marital research in four statements. The first was that judgments of the amount and direction of adaptive change occurring during marital counseling were obtained from existing case records by the conference judgment method. Similar ratings were obtained from the corresponding clients after an intensive follow-up interview five to ten years after the termination of counseling. Second, there was a statistically significant relationship between case review and client estimate of change indicating that, to a degree, both were responding to the individual quality of the individual counseling experience. Third, review ratings did not differ significantly
from client ratings of movement, whether the central
tendency of movement scores or frequency of assignment of
broad categories of change was considered. Fourth, reviewer
ratings of movement were not adequately predictive of client
ratings at the level of the individual case.26 This indivi-
dual discrepancy was thought to be related to disagreement
between case reviewers and clients on the labeling of the
main problem areas and this can be circumvented if there is
more specifically defined objects.

The most important research effort to date in the area
of measurement and results is the Movement Scale. This
scale was tested at the Community Service Society of New York.
Its purpose was to attempt to standardize through measurement
caseworkers' judgments so that they can be used as a reliable
measure of movement in clients. The work was begun in 1943
and was originally requested by the Institute of Welfare
Research "to determine and express how casework is carried
on, at what cost, and with what success."27

The first measure of movement developed out of the
Community Service Society Movement was Mowrer's Distress
Relief Quotient which had only a low order correlation with
worker's judgment of movement. It was eventually abandoned
in favor of an effort to refine worker's judgments so that
they could be used as measures of change.28
Maas reports the results of 44 "intensive casework projects." In the rough analysis using the descriptions obtained by Lagey and Ayres, four statements of results are given. In ten or about one-fourth of the studies no research was planned. Eight planned to assess the value of the program by conferences or committee discussions. Of those projects incorporating some specific research plan (about half of the projects), more than half planned on workers' rating on their own cases as the basis for assessing the value of the program. Only two programs incorporated control groups.

EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MARRIAGE COUNSELING RESEARCH

The use of trained observers has been shown to be both costly and time consuming. One alternative way of measuring effectiveness is to ask the individual whether he would use the service again and whether he would refer a friend to use the service. Such a report on behavior is subjective but not biased as asking about satisfaction or happiness. "If self-report must be used to collect data, concepts which have value connotations such as 'success' or 'happiness' might best be discarded." 30

Social Work research on the private family agency has thus far been focused primarily on studies of organizational efficiency and patterns of service. The voluntary family
agency has been the focus of many important studies of methods of intervention conducted in social work. Studies of the family in social work have been concerned primarily with family pathology and disorganization, as might have been expected. And social policy, regarding the family, has received comparatively little research attention in social work. This state of affairs can be viewed simply as a reflection of the fact that research of this sort is now in an embryonic, exploratory stage.

Social Work researchers are beginning to give more thought to the evaluative and research plan. The argument of the sheer difficulty of studying treatment because of the inherent complexity of the phenomena is not entirely convincing. The treatment situation seems no more complex than any other human interaction situations that have been studied. Vigorous and increasingly sophisticated research activity occurring in this area is occurring in other fields, notably psychology, and one of the results of this activity is the development of improved tools for investigating the treatment process. Some of these tools could be used in research on social casework. A more compelling explanation for the current state of social work research on treatment is the apparent failure, on the part of the profession and the schools, to foster development of practitioner-researchers who would make
a long range investment of their energies in research on treatment.

In terms of research on the multi-problem family there are three major failings. The first is that there is an extremely loose and vague definition of the phenomena to be studied. Second, there are few descriptive studies of multi-problem families. Third, there is a failure to conceptualize research problems in terms of some theory of family behavior and disorganization. Until some of these deficiencies are remedied, heavy emphasis on effective research in this area may be premature.

CONCLUSION

It is not yet possible to state any firm conclusions from the research literature about the general effectiveness of social work treatment in the family field. The studies that have been reported, such as the work in the movement scale, the St. Paul Family-Centered Project, and other similar, but less ambitious efforts, admittedly have not incorporated the controls and sampling procedures required to separate the influence of social work service from other factors effecting outcome.33
I. HYPOTHESIS

We arrived at our hypotheses by the following:

1. Interviews were conducted with administrators, professional caseworkers, and members of the secretarial staff to draw from them their expectations of what a study such as ours might disclose regarding the client population.

2. A member of our study group had been a full time counselor with the agency, and had work experience under the two administrations the agency has had since its establishment. As two other group members had completed a school year's field experience with the agency, the group possessed considerable knowledge of the agency and its clientele.

3. A review of the literature pointed up response patterns that might be applicable to the agency under study.

The following general hypotheses were set forth to be tested:

1. Difficulty would be encountered in reaching our sample population with the questionnaire.

2. We would receive a client response at a rate of at, or near, sixty percent.

3. Using self-addressed, stamped postcards as the
questionnaire would encourage a greater number of responses than earlier studies which used more lengthy questionnaires.

4. We would receive a greater response from those clients who were most recently seen by the agency (December, 1970) and a gradually declining rate of response as the time since clients were seen increased (to January, 1970).

5. Those individuals who had seen their contact with the agency as being a positive experience would respond significantly more than those who did not.

Positive experiences were seen as being:

a. Cases in which there was a reconciliation.

b. Cases where the clients felt the agency had helped, though there was no reconciliation.

c. Cases where divorce occurred rapidly and with little conflict.

6. The individuals who petitioned for agency services would be more likely to respond than the respondents to the petition.

7. There would be significant differences in the number of responses received based on the caseworker who actually counseled the individuals.

8. Female clients would be more likely to respond to our questionnaire.

9. Persons who had a greater investment in their
marriages would be more likely to respond than those who had less invested.

a. The response ratio would increase with an increase in the length of time the individuals were married.

b. Couples with several children would be more likely to respond than those with fewer children, and they, in turn, would respond in greater proportion than those without children.

10. Age of clients would account for significant differences in responses, with rates of response increasing in direct proportion to an increase in client age.

II. DESIGN

Because a follow up program and design has not been built into the conciliation movement, we were aware that our initial probings would be exploratory and require further refinement and study.

Initially, the practicum committee "brainstormed" as many ideas as could be thought of concerning what we would want to attempt to measure. These ideas were then tested against interviews with staff members at the conciliation service, the results of which comprised a two-page questionnaire, with considerable emphasis being given to what values
would be meaningful and measureable.

In reviewing a former research project we discovered that there had been a very low return rate and possibly this was due to a lengthy questionnaire which forced involvement and commitment. With this as a clue we changed course by devising a short postcard response which would be so simple, it was hoped that most everyone would find it convenient to respond.

The staff was again interviewed and meetings were held to determine the questions to put on this simplified response. Certain demographic data was not included on the questionnaire, as it was available in the various legal and social service files.

The following questions were selected for the reasons stated:

(1) Who referred you to this office?

(It was our opinion that this might give some clues as to the client's motivation to seek counseling, as well as some data regarding our relationships with other agencies, the Court, the legal profession, etc.)

(2) How many times did you see a counselor?

(This was used to give a measure of the involvement and commitment, as clients are advised that they are only legally required to see a counselor on one occasion. Additional
appointments are at the client's request.)

(3) How many times did your spouse see a counselor?

(This was used to develop data on whether individual psychotherapy or "marriage counseling" was being done.)

(4) Did you stay married?

(Perhaps one measure of results.)

(5) Would you use this office again?

(It was hoped that this might be a positive measure if clients felt success with the therapeutic response.)

(6) If divorced, how long was your court hearing?

(If less than an hour, it was a suggestion that the differences had been resolved. If more than an hour, the more unresolved the problems.)

(7) Would you refer a friend to this office?

(A refinement of No. 5.)

(8) Comment:

The self-addressed, stamped postcards were prepared so that clients could make short answers and were not required to identify themselves. Codings of file numbers were used for identification purposes. The postcards were then enclosed in a letter for mailing. (See Appendixes 'A' and 'B'.)
III. SAMPLE

The selection of our sample commenced in June of 1971. The decision was made to draw the sample from the population of clients who were the petitioners and respondents requesting services of the Multnomah County Family Services Agency during the calendar year, 1970.

That time period was chosen for several reasons, namely: the year was deemed to be representative of the present operations of the agency, with staff, administration, and policies remaining largely the same; the agency's records are based on calendar years; it was assumed that selection of that time period would insure that clients would have completed their series of appointments with the agency; and it was felt that the likelihood of being able to locate members of our sample would be enhanced by selecting a group recently seen by the agency.

We desired to select a sample which was representative of the population seen by the agency, and were particularly interested to determine if there was any significant correlation between the length of time since the clients were seen and their rate of response. Too, following interviews with staff members, we were cognizant that there might be seasonal differences in the motivational levels of clients. Therefore, we felt that our sample must be drawn in such a manner
as to insure that all months were appropriately represented. Weighing the various methods of sample selection it was deemed advisable to select our sample serially. This method was also compatible with the recording systems of the agency in which clients were assigned serial numbers as they petitioned for agency services.

In 1970, 688 individuals petitioned for agency services. As each case represented a marital couple, the total population of individuals seen by the agency was 1,376.

Since this is a pilot project for an initial attempt, we sought a low reliability of plus or minus 10%. Using the tables for sample size in finite populations it was determined that a response need be received for 160 individuals, a size adequate to give the study reasonable precision and to be representative of the total population receiving services.

Accepting that a 60% response rate is likely in surveys in which mailed out questionnaires are utilized, it was deemed necessary to select a sample of not less than 266 individuals to strive for our goal of 160 responses.

From a table of random numbers it was determined that our sample would be made up of 1970 cases with serial numbers ending in the number "4" and "2".

The sample was drawn, without replacement, and resulted in the selection of 69 cases (138 individuals) with case
numbers ending in "4" and 68 cases (136 individuals) with case numbers ending in "2".

As case files were pulled, it was found that one of the "4" files and two of the "2" files could not be located, so these could not be included in the study.

The remaining 134 cases (involving 268 individuals) became the sample for our study. This number comprised 19.4% of the total population seen by the agency in 1970.

Available to us in each conciliation case was a Formal Petition with an Intake Form. Both forms are most often completed by a caseworker with the assistance of the person petitioning for services.

The Formal Petition basically contains the names and addresses of both parties, the names and ages of any minor children, whether the couple has a divorce action on file, and the names of their respective attorneys. With couples with children, where there was a possibility of child support payments, the computer services of the Multnomah County Clerk of Court, Support Division, were used. This provided current addresses of both the contributors and recipients of child support payments in those cases where actual payment was taking place.

To determine if our sample was representative of the total client population served by the agency in 1970, the
two populations were compared along several indices.

During the period under study nine caseworkers were on staff with the agency, plus some graduate students from the Portland State University School of Social Work, and psychiatric residents from the University of Oregon Medical School, whose field experience included working with clients in a caseworker capacity. Comparisons were made between the number of clients seen by each worker, out of the total population, and those seen by the same worker in the sample.

### TABLE I

**COMPARISON OF RESPONSE RATE BY CASEWORKER**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caseworker</th>
<th>TOTAL POPULATION (1376)</th>
<th>SAMPLE (268)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. Clients</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>0.232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>0.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>0.106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>0.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>0.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>0.090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>0.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>0.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>0.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Secondly, the frequency with which the husband or wife was the petitioner in the total population was compared with those frequencies in the sample.

TABLE II

COMPARISON OF PERCENT RESPONDING BY SEX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TOTAL POPULATION (688 Couples)</th>
<th>SAMPLE (134 Couples)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. Couples</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband Petitioner</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>.622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife Petitioner</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>.377</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third comparison made was between the total population and the sample with regard to the codes assigned by the caseworkers as agency services were terminating. It should be noted that these codes indicate the worker's assessment of the disposition at the time the agency closes the cases. They are not necessarily the ultimate disposition of the case and can be quite misleading, yet the agency has based its effectiveness statistics on these figures.
**TABLE III**

**COMPARISON OF PERCENT RESPONDING BY DISPOSITION OF CASE CLOSING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOTAL POPULATION (1376)</th>
<th>SAMPLE (268)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No. Clients</strong></td>
<td><strong>Percent</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RE</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RR</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OS</td>
<td>488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PW-PD</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RE, Reconciliation Effected, denotes that at the time of termination the worker believes the couple have solved their immediate difficulties, and have discontinued their divorce action, if one were filed.

RR, Reconciliation Refused, is the code utilized by the worker to indicate that one or both parties have declined to continue in treatment, and that they likely will proceed with a separation or divorce.

OS, Off Schedule, is utilized for cases which are closed without the worker being able to assess why -- this would be the case when one or both parties fail to appear for appointments during the petition period.

PW-PD, Petition Withdrawn or Petition Dismissed, are
administrative closures which do permit either the petitioner to retract the petition, or the agency to decline acceptance of the petition if it is obvious that it is in the best interests of the agency and/or client to do so.

PC, Petition Continued, refers to the extension, or continuing, of the petition beyond the normal petition period.

By inspection, it is obvious that there is no statistically significant difference in the two samples at the .05 level of confidence based on the significance of differences between two proportions for this number of indices.

Intake Forms normally contain the ages of the parties, the number of years they have been married, and one client's assessment of the nature of their marital problem and reason for it. The Intake Form is actually somewhat of an informal worksheet for the worker, and though we had planned to make considerable use of the material contained on this form, we found there was a surprising lack of uniformity in the type and amount of data collected, and often much demographic data was omitted completely.

In cases where a divorce had been filed, an additional file, the official court file, was available. These contained the various legal forms, and frequently much pertinent data regarding the individual cases.
Prior to forwarding our questionnaire to the persons in our sample, we pretested our instrument with a test sample of individuals. Ten cases (twenty individuals) were randomly selected to be utilized in the pretest. One of the cases selected for the pretest was found to be a member of our major sample, and this case was omitted from the pretest and was replaced.

The pretest was forwarded to the clients via first class mail, using the addresses which were given by the clients at the time they petitioned for services.

Results of this pretest were quite disappointing in that while we reached seventeen of the twenty clients sought, only four responded. Though we believed we obtained relatively good results in locating persons from the addresses given on their petitions, we felt we might increase our effectiveness in locating individuals if more recent addresses were available. We attempted to accomplish this by checking the addresses of the entire sample against the most recent Portland area telephone directories, and the official court files in cases where a divorce was known to have occurred. We disregarded the return data on the pretest and proceeded in the expectation that the larger sample would provide a larger response.
The responding set was compared with the characteristics of the total population depicted in Tables I and II in order to test the representativeness of the set, in view of the inadequacy of returns.

Correspondence on these traits was somewhat closer to the universe than to the sample to which the questionnaire was mailed.

We decided to analyze those responses received, at least for illustrative purposes and the sake of future analyses.

In any event, care should be taken not to draw conclusions applied to larger or different populations.
RESULTS

This section includes the results of our data collection.

I. HYPOTHESIS I.

Difficulty would be encountered in reaching our sample population with the questionnaire.

Earlier studies using mailed out questionnaires experienced difficulty locating their sample populations. Because our sample included clients seen between one year and eighteen months prior to the mailing, and most of the addresses available to us were given by the clients at the time of their petition for agency services, a time when most were going through a crisis, we anticipated a problem in reaching our sample.

Our findings did not validate this hypothesis, as out of the 268 questionnaires sent to the sample, only eight were returned by the post office department for "Not At This Address." This constituted less than 3% of our sample.

II. HYPOTHESIS II.

We would receive a client response at a rate of, or near, 60%.

While optimally we could receive a 100% response to
our questionnaire, based on earlier studies our expectations were for at least a 60% response, and we required 160 returns to achieve this.

Our client response, however, was considerably less, in that only 65 persons responded out of the 260 who had received questionnaires. This was a 25% response, significantly less than that expected.

III. HYPOTHESIS III.

Using self-addressed, stamped postcards as the questionnaire would encourage a greater number of responses than earlier studies which used more lengthy questionnaires.

Some of the earlier studies reviewed used mailed out questionnaires which we considered to be lengthy and cumbersome. Following our pretest we were of the opinion that a more brief form, which minimized the number of questions and which would place what we felt were minimum demands on the client, would elicit a greater number of responses.

It appears that the postcard questionnaire did not have the effect of increasing the rate of response, and indeed may have had the effect of decreasing the rate of response.

IV. HYPOTHESIS IV.

We would receive a greater response from those clients
who were most recently seen by the agency (December, 1970), and a gradually declining rate of response as the time since the clients were seen increased (to January, 1970).

TABLE IV
RESPONSE PATTERN BY THE QUARTER OF YEAR PETITION WAS FILED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quarter</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>No Response</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Quarter</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Quarter</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Quarter</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Quarter</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By observation the spread of responses appeared to differ over time. The data suggested the reverse of our hypothesis, as those individuals most distant in time from our follow up responded with greater frequency. A chi-square test was done, but the computed value of $x^2 = 6.22$ was not significant for three degrees of freedom at the 5% level. Therefore, we rejected our hypothesis.

V. HYPOTHESIS V.

Those individuals who had seen their contact with the agency as being a positive experience would respond signifi-
cantly more than those who did not.

Positive experiences were seen as being:

(A) Cases in which there was a reconciliation.

Our findings were that a greater percentage (29%) of those who did not effect a reconciliation responded, as compared to the percentage of response among those who had reconciled (24%). Twenty-one percent of the "Off Schedule" cases, or cases in which one or both clients cancelled appointments, or simply failed to keep them, responded.

(B) Cases where the clients felt the agency had helped, though there was no reconciliation.

The questions, "Would you use this service again?" and "Would you refer a friend?" were intended to measure the "felt" helpfulness of the agency.

---

**TABLE V**

**COMPARISON OF RESPONSE RATE TO QUESTIONNAIRE BY CLOSING DISPOSITION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjustment</th>
<th>Number in Sample</th>
<th>Number Responding</th>
<th>Percentage Responding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation Effected</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation Refused</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off Schedule</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petition Withdrawn</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE VI
RESPONSE PATTERN TO QUESTION: "WOULD YOU USE THIS SERVICE AGAIN?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number Responding</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE VII
RESPONSE PATTERN TO QUESTION: "WOULD YOU REFER A FRIEND?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number Responding</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results did validate our hypothesis that a greater degree of response would be received from those who saw the agency as being "helpful."

(6) Cases where divorce occurred rapidly and with little conflict.

The length of time spent in the divorce hearing was used as a third means of measuring a positive experience with
the agency -- the shorter the hearing the more the differences (child custody, support, property settlements, etc.) between the parties had been reconciled.

Forty-five of the sixty-five persons responding did experience divorce, and of these thirty-six answered the question.

Our study indicated the hypothesis was valid in that a significantly larger number of those responding did spend less than one hour in their hearing.

<p>| TABLE VIII |
| RESPONSE PATTERN TO QUESTION: | &quot;HOW LONG DID YOU SPEND IN THE HEARING?&quot; |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Time in Hearing</th>
<th>Number Responding</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less Than One Hour</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Than One Hour</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VI. HYPOTHESIS VI.

The individuals who petitioned for agency services would be more likely to respond than the respondents to the petition.

It was our opinion that the person who had requested
the service of the agency would be more likely to respond than the person who was compelled to come for counseling. It was recognized, however, that people do sometimes file petitions to delay divorce action, to scare the partner, to "get back at" the partner, at their attorney's request, or because it is the socially acceptable thing to do.

Our findings were that a greater percentage of response was received from the petitioner, and it is of interest that almost half of the responses received (32) came from sixteen partners who both responded, though nine of the couples had divorced.

TABLE IX
RESPONSE PATTERN BY PETITIONER/RESPONDENT CLASSIFICATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>No. of Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Petitioner</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VII. HYPOTHESIS VII.

There would be significant differences in the number of responses received based on the caseworker who actually counseled the individuals.

The literature, and our own experience, suggested we would find a difference in response patterns depending on the
counselor who saw the client -- that the individual worker does much to influence the depth of the clients' involvement with the agency, and to affect the clients' image of the agency.

Our study supports this hypothesis, specifically in the atypical response rates of Counselors 'A', 'B', 'C', 'D', and 'I'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counselor</th>
<th>No. Clients Seen</th>
<th>Responding</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VIII. HYPOTHESIS VIII.

Females would be more likely to respond to our questionnaire.

Societal values seem to place greater stress on the
female partner when serious marital problems arise. She frequently faces loss of stature among her peers. More often she is left to care for any children the couple may have. She may experience a significant loss of income, etc. As such, it was believed that the woman would respond with greater frequency.

Our study validated this hypothesis, with the following results:

| TABLE XI |
| RESPONSE PATTERN BY SEX |
| Sex. | Number Responding | Percentage |
| Female | 36 | 66 |
| Male | 29 | 44 |

IX. HYPOTHESIS IX.

Persons who had a greater investment in their marriage would be more likely to respond to the questionnaire than those who had less investment.

Two criteria were used to attempt to measure "investment" -- length of marriage and number of children.

(A) The response rates would increase with an increase in the length of time the individuals were married.
TABLE XII
RESPONSE PATTERN BY YEARS MARRIED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Marriage</th>
<th>Total No. In Sample</th>
<th>No. Of Responses</th>
<th>Percentage Of Total Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less Than 1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our hypothesis at least partially supported in that a pattern of increasing rates occurs up to the fifteenth year of marriage. The last two-year groupings do not follow the pattern.

(B) Couples with several children would be more likely to respond than those with fewer children, and they, in turn, would respond in greater proportion than those without children.
TABLE XIII
RESPONSE PATTERN BY NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN FAMILY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. Of Children</th>
<th>Total In Sample</th>
<th>Number Responding</th>
<th>Percentage Of Total Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The small number of responses from families with large numbers of children limits our ability to test this hypothesis.

X. HYPOTHESIS X:

Age of clients would account for significant differences in responses, with rates of response increasing in direct proportion to an increase in client age.
TABLE XIV
RESPONSE PATTERN BY AGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Total In Sample</th>
<th>Number Responding</th>
<th>Percentage Of Total Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-50</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 50</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our hypothesis appears to be at least partially supported in that a pattern of increasing rates occurs up to 40 years of age. The last two age groupings do not follow this pattern.
LIMITATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is envisioned as the first of a series of practicums leading to the eventual development of an ongoing research program for the Multnomah County Family Services Agency.

We addressed three main issues:

(1) Could former clients be located?

(2) Would former clients respond to a questionnaire?

(3) Would there be significant differences between those that responded and those that did not?

It appears that we were able to reach the sample population, even as much as eighteen months after they were seen by the agency. This, however, may not have been the case, as there is a distinct possibility that other factors may have been involved in this apparently high rate of locating the sample. In cases where the couples did separate after they saw the agency, it is possible that the partner living at the address where the questionnaires were delivered merely disposed of the other partner's questionnaire. In cases where couples did remain together, the partner receiving the mail may have disposed of the questionnaire rather than have the issue of previous marital problems aired again. Also, if there were a new marital involvement, the questionnaire may have been
discarded lest the previously unsuccessful marriage be made an issue.

We had assumed that if we could locate the sample that they would respond to our brief postcard questionnaire. The responses we received were substantially less than had been expected. In spite of the relatively low response rate, the sample population that did respond appear to be representative of the entire sample.

In our post-study discussions we attempted to analyze what had occurred to cause this low rate of response.

We recognize that we did not use a second pretest following the re-design of our initial questionnaire, and that client feedback at that point might have disclosed several issues: that the clients did not understand the purpose of the study; that the brief, postcard format, rather than facilitating responses might have been seen as being of little importance; that the use of a postcard response would decrease the amount of anonymity -- the responses were in full view of the postman, family members, etc.; and that the clients were given no inducement or reward for responding.

In our assessment of who responded and who did not, we encountered several problems.

We were limited in the amount of demographic data available in all cases, to the extent that in approximately
22% of our sample we did not know the ages of clients, the number of children, the years of marriage, the number of previous marriages, etc.

The agency method of categorizing cases as "Reconciliation Effected," "Reconciliation Refused," "Off Schedule," and "Petition Withdrawn," is largely invalid as to the ultimate outcome of a case, as this only provides a caseworker's assessment of what occurred when counseling terminated, and "Off Schedule" frequently seems to mean, "I don't know what happened to the couple."

There appears to be a high correlation between those who responded and the individual caseworker involved. Upon examination it can be seen that other factors may be involved in this area, such as the methods utilized in the assigning of cases. Cases are not assigned at random. Caseworkers participate in the intake process and have an opportunity to exercise some choice in the cases they retain for counseling, indicating the possibility that a special selection process may be operating.

A further consideration is that although the questions we posed in an attempt to measure success of counseling or satisfaction with the agency were "interesting," we are aware that what the questions measure is unclear, and we do not know how the client interpreted those questions.
Our recommendations for further involvement in research in this agency would include securing considerable client involvement as early as possible in their contact with the agency -- to enlist their cooperation in the research program. Staff involvement is of equal importance.

A basic intake form which would provide for client assessment of their goals, and for the collection of standardized demographic data in each case would be of significant value.

Since the locating of clients posed a major problem, it is suggested that an intake form provide a "contact address" for each partner -- an address through which a person could usually be located.

While our study was not to assess the "success" of the agency, a step we feel that should have been taken was to establish a set of goals, which would include client, case-worker, agency, and societal goals, among others.

It seems apparent that these should be established and defined before further studies progress.
FOOTNOTES


3 Ibid., p. 23.


5 op cit., p. 18.


7 op cit., p. 59.

8 op cit., p. 60.


11 Ibid., p. 155.

13 op cit., Burton, Kaplan and Mudd, p. 157-158.


15 op cit., p. 35.

16 op cit., p. 39.

17 op cit., p. 36.


19 ibid., p. 262.


23 Ballard, p. 536.


25 ibid., p. 536.

26 Ballard, p. 538.
27 Maas, pp. 16-17.

28 op cit.

29 op cit., pp. 29-30.

30 Hicks, p. 269.


32 op cit., pp. 29-30.

33 op cit., p. 17.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A

1. Who referred you to this office?

2. How many times did you see a counselor?
   one  two  three or more
   How many times did your spouse see a counselor?
   one  two  three or more

3. Did you stay married?

4. Would you use this office again?

5. If divorced, how long was your Court hearing?
   less than one hour  more than one hour

6. Would you refer a friend to this office?

Comments:

Form F275
To you, our former client, we are appealing for help. After seven years of conciliation counseling, we are attempting to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. The only people who can really evaluate this is people like yourself who have used the service. Would you please take a moment to answer the attached questionnaire and mail it back to our office. (Room 302, Multnomah County Courthouse, 1021 S. W. Fourth Avenue, Portland, Oregon, 97204)

Any additional comments or suggestions you may have would be most helpful and appreciated.