

DESIGNING A SURVEY OF PUBLIC OPINIONS REGARDING ALCOHOL CONTROL POLICIES AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN AND WHITE ADULTS

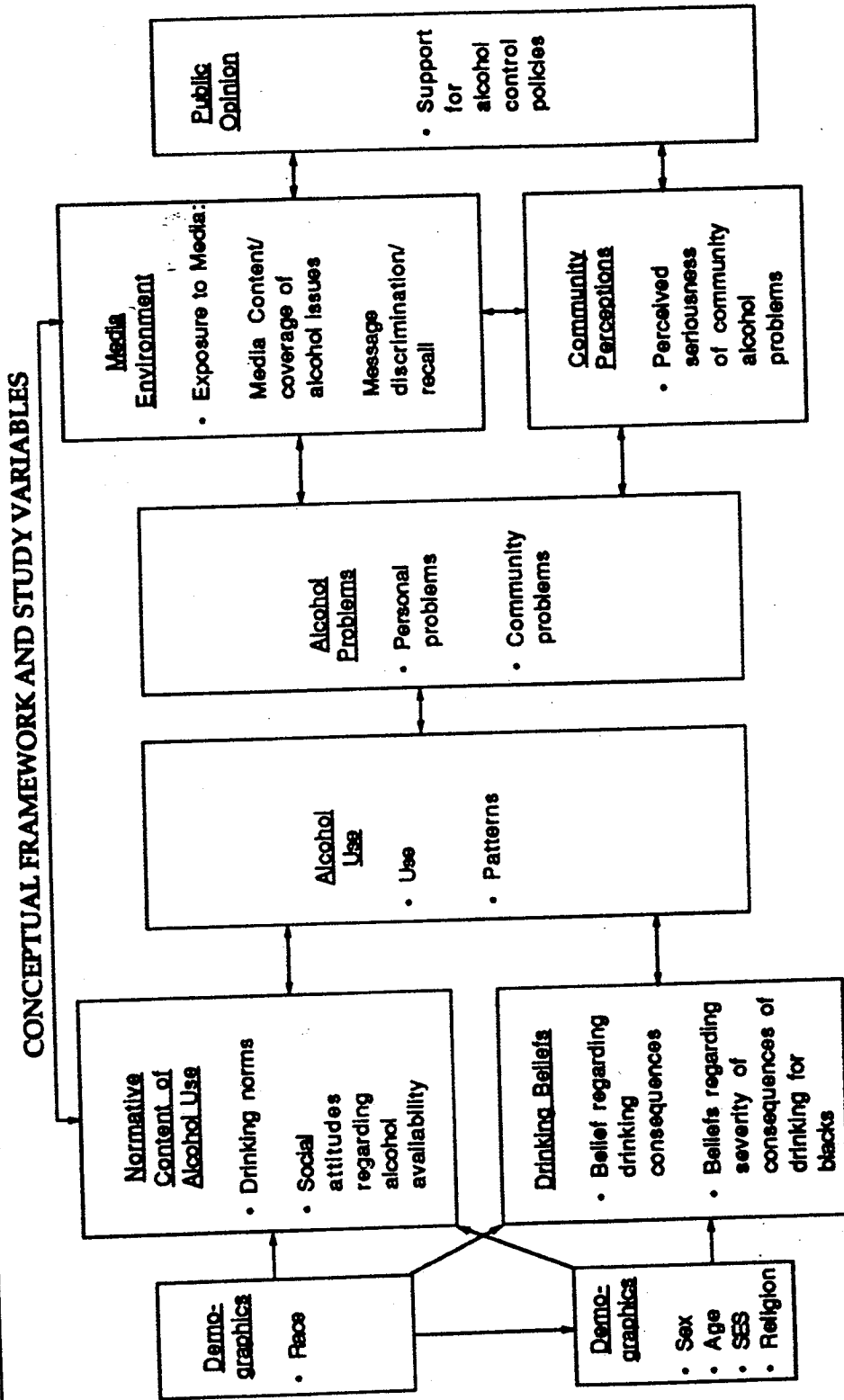
The incidence of alcohol-related morbidity and mortality in the United States is significant. Ethnic minority communities are particularly vulnerable to alcohol-related problems.¹⁻³ One avenue for reducing these problems is through the implementation of alcohol control policies. Alcohol control policies refer to the constellation of laws and regulations that affects how alcoholic beverages are manufactured, packaged, distributed, sold, and consumed.⁴ Effective implementation of public policies designed to minimize alcohol-related problems requires a significant level of public support.^{5,6} Moreover, public attitudes and opinions may well vary significantly across ethnic subgroups, and such differences must be understood for successful implementation of alcohol control policies. Race/ethnicity, however, has not been a major variable of interest in studies of alcohol control policy opinions, despite the debate and controversy that surrounds a number of alcohol control policy initiatives in African American communities (for example, the decision to rebuild liquor stores damaged during the Watts rebellion in South Central Los Angeles).

In 1994, the authors designed a five-year study to examine whether African American and white adults differ in their opinions regarding alcohol control policies and whether similar or different factors are related to support for alcohol control policies in the two groups. The purpose of this paper is to describe the overall design of the study. The model on which the present research is based is depicted in Figure 1. The model suggests that public opinions are influenced by multiple factors and that race/ethnicity may interact with any number of these factors to explain differences between African Americans and whites in their level of support of alcohol control policies.

Study design

To assess whether African Americans differ from whites in their support of certain alcohol control policies, the following multiple data collection efforts were developed: a media content analysis of African American-oriented and mainstream newspapers; an instrument validation substudy; and a cross-sectional, national telephone survey. Each data collection effort builds upon

FIGURE 1
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND STUDY VARIABLES



the other. For example, the national telephone survey will examine whether African Americans and whites differ in their control preferences using public opinion scales developed and validated from the media content analysis and validation substudy. There is theoretical support for these data-gathering strategies. According to the agenda-setting hypothesis, public opinions on alcohol issues are highly influenced by mass media.^{7,8} Other data suggest that African Americans rely on sources of information that are different from those of whites. African Americans favor newspapers oriented to their communities; they rely less on traditional print media for information.⁹

Media content analysis. The media content analysis aspect of this study is ongoing. It examines alcohol-related policy themes that are widely covered in African American-oriented and mainstream newspapers, compares shifts and changes in coverage of these issues, and examines whether differences in level of coverage might contribute to greater support for some policies among African Americans than among whites. Results from the media content analysis will be used to identify the policy areas that are to be included in the alcohol control policy opinion scales and to test specific hypotheses regarding media influences on public opinion.

The sample source for the content analysis includes mainstream and African American-oriented newspapers serving Los Angeles, San Francisco, Berkeley, Oakland, Chicago, Atlanta, New York City, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. These cities were selected because they have sizable African American populations. For consistency, only newspapers on NEXIS, a print media database, are being analyzed. Thus far, over 21,000 stories printed between 1991 and 1994 in 16 African American-oriented and 12 mainstream newspapers have been analyzed. The total number of alcohol-related stories during this time period was so large in the mainstream newspapers that only a sample was retrieved at random for further analysis; all alcohol-related stories from African American-oriented newspapers were retrieved. The computer software program used to retrieve articles for analysis is the InfoTrend program. In contrast to other content analysis software programs, the InfoTrend program has the capability of retrieving and downloading vast amounts of text from mass media print databases, such as NEXIS, and scoring text and deleting nonscorable text based on codes and rules provided by the investigator.

The dependent variable, alcohol policy media coverage, was operationalized as number and type of alcohol policy theme paragraphs. The independent variable, newspaper orientation (African American-oriented versus mainstream), was determined based on the newspapers' target audiences. The coding unit for the media content analysis was the paragraph. The process of coding paragraphs involved four tasks. First, words were selected to identify alcohol-related stories (e.g., alcohol, beer, liquor). Next, specific words or word combinations representing ideas were selected to identify policy-relevant alcohol text (e.g., legislate, permit, approve). Next, broad policy categories

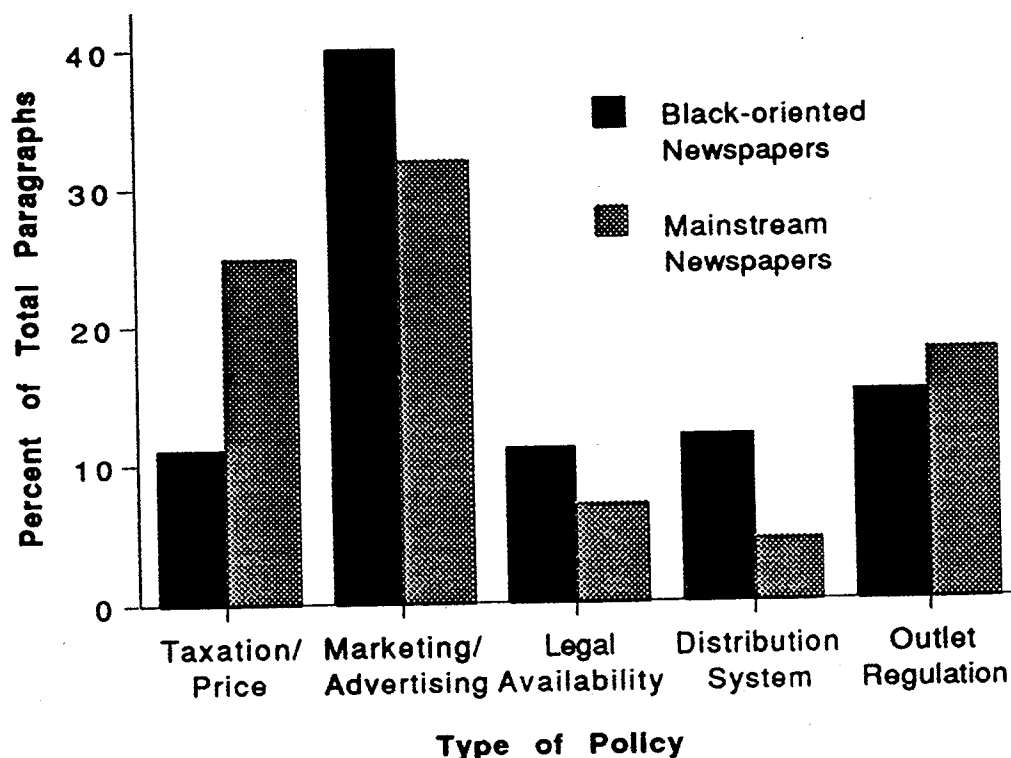
were developed based on the existing alcohol policy literature. Policy categories included economic policy control (e.g., alcohol taxes), legal availability control policies (e.g., minimum drinking age), structure of the distribution system (e.g., privatization of alcohol sales), regulation of individual alcohol outlets (e.g., limiting number of outlets), selling/server control policies (e.g., server training), controls on product contents and packaging (e.g., alcohol warning labels), and marketing advertising control policies.⁴ Rules were developed to score paragraphs as representing one or more of the categories. A paragraph was scored 0 if none of the predetermined categories applied and scored 1 if at least one of the categories applied. Intercoder reliability checks between computer and human (hand) application of rules were conducted using Cohen's¹⁰ kappa statistic of reliability. The kappa statistic was high (kappa = 0.80).

The content analysis has provided very rich data on policy themes that are widely covered in both African American-oriented and mainstream print media. Results based on a sample of 8,000 stories suggest that coverage of alcohol policy issues may slightly differ between African American-oriented and mainstream newspapers (Figure 2). In 1994, the two most dominant alcohol control policy issues in African American-oriented newspapers were restricting the marketing/advertising of alcohol products and regulating liquor outlets. In contrast, the two most widely covered policy issues in mainstream newspapers were restricting the marketing/advertising of alcohol products and increasing taxes on alcohol. African Americans may be exposed to different alcohol control policy issues than whites, and differences in level of exposure to alcohol policy issues may explain why African Americans are more supportive than whites of certain policies.

Instrument validation substudy. A validation substudy is planned for Year Two of the project. The validation substudy is designed to develop appropriate measures of opinions regarding alcohol control policies in African American populations. Existing scales that measure these constructs have not been validated for use in African American populations. Subjects will include 100 African American and 100 white adults living in the 48 contiguous states. The scale development sample will draw upon separate random samples of African American and white residents in the United States using random digit dialing (RDD) sampling procedures; these samples will approximate simple random samples of African American and white adult households with telephones. African American households with telephones will be oversampled using a RDD sample that targets telephone exchanges in geographical areas with a high density of African American households. One adult, aged 18 or older, will be randomly selected from each household. Data for the validation analysis will be collected via telephone interview methods. Interviews will last about 10 minutes.

The validation substudy will include questionnaire items regarding demographic characteristics, alcohol use, and opinions on alcohol control policies.

FIGURE 2
ALCOHOL-RELATED POLICY THEMES IN BLACK-ORIENTED AND
MAINSTREAM NEWSPAPERS IN 1994 (PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL PARAGRAPHS)



Note: Total paragraphs: 130 black oriented, 121 mainstream.

Items for the validation substudy will be based on the content analysis and drawn from published sources supplemented by new items. In the validation analysis, each scale will be assessed for internal consistency reliability using Cronbach's coefficient alpha in each population. Both inductive and deductive approaches to construct validity will be employed. Principal component factor-analytic techniques¹¹ will be used to assess whether public opinion items factor similarly for both African Americans and whites. Subscales based on the policy items will be created and factor analyzed as well. In addition, how well the public opinion scales distinguish between drinkers and non-drinkers in each sample will be assessed. Results should further advance psychometric research in the area of alcohol use and control.

General population telephone survey. The telephone survey will be conducted during Year Three of the project. A cross-sectional survey design will be employed to examine whether African Americans will be more likely than whites to support certain alcohol control policies. Subjects will represent a national probability sample of 1,800 African American and white adults, aged 18 or older; the sample will be evenly divided between African Americans and whites and in terms of age and gender to adequately represent the general

population. The general population telephone survey will use the same sampling design and data collection procedures employed in the validation substudy. Telephone interviews will last about 20 minutes.

The primary dependent variable, alcohol control policy opinions, will be measured by scales developed and validated in the media content analysis and validation substudy. Independent variables will include drinking norms, drinking beliefs, alcohol use and related problems, media exposure, and community perceptions about the seriousness of alcohol-related problems (Figure 1). Items measuring these constructs will be drawn from existing surveys. Indicators of alcohol control policy opinions will include both continuous and categorical measures. In each case, models will be fitted to predict public opinions on control policies as a function of race/ethnicity, with adjustment for potential confounders. Interaction effects between race/ethnicity and each predictor variable will be explored. Assuming a 5 percent Type I error rate and a 90 percent power level, 1,448 subjects will permit detection of significant differences in the control preferences of African Americans and whites. Our sample size of 1,800 will be more than adequate to detect such differences.

Discussion

The Public Opinions Regarding Alcohol Control Policy study was designed to address the paucity of research on the contribution of race/ethnicity to attitudes regarding alcohol control policies and to address theoretical and methodological gaps in the literature. The design of the study differs from that of previous work. It draws upon multiple data collection strategies (a media content analysis, a validation substudy, and a cross-sectional telephone survey); employs qualitative and quantitative research methods; samples a large, nationally representative sample of African American households with telephones; and, using state of the art computer technology, examines the potential role of African American-oriented and mainstream print media on alcohol control policy opinions.

Implementation of the study thus far demonstrates that multiple data collection efforts are critical to developing public opinion scales that are appropriate for use in African American populations and in ensuring that research conducted on African Americans addresses their day-to-day concerns. Findings from the content analysis have provided very rich data on policy issues that are salient in African American communities. Final study results should facilitate the work of community coalitions and health professionals in building support for alcohol control policy change in African American communities.

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