

Perceptions of Child Neglect Among Urban American Indian/Alaska Native Parents

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A survey of 101 American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) parents in Los Angeles was conducted to explore perceptions of child neglect among urban AIAN parents and factors associated with perceptions.

Participants rated substance abuse by parents as the most serious type of neglect. Providing material necessities and providing adequate structure were ranked as the least serious types of neglect. Gender, education, marital status, and indirect experience with Child Protective Services were significantly related to perceptions of neglect among urban AIAN parents.

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Introduction

One of the most pressing issues facing native communities today is the dramatic overrepresentation of AIAN (American Indian/Alaskan Native) children in the public child welfare system. This overrepresentation begins with the high rates of reported child maltreatment for AIAN children in the United States (21.3 for every 1,000 AIAN children compared to 11.0 for every 1,000 white children; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2005) and continues with higher placement rates for AIAN children. Indeed, of children who are served by the public child welfare system, AIAN children are three times as likely as white children to be placed in out-of-home care (Hill, 2007). Although AIAN children represent approximately 1% of the U.S. child population, they make up 2.1% of children in out-of-home care (USDHHS, 2006). Each year, approximately 6,500 of the 405,000 AIAN children who live on or near reservations are placed in substitute care (Cross, Earle, & Simmons, 2000), and though very few statistics are available on urban AIAN children, the existing data presents an equally grim picture. In Los Angeles County, for example, over 400 AIAN children were living in out-of-home care in 2000 (Los Angeles City / County Native American Indian Commission, 2000).

Historically, the vast majority of AIAN children in care have been removed from their homes on the basis on child neglect (DeBruyn, Lujan, & May, 1992; Lujan, DeBruyn, May, & Bird, 1989), and despite federal policies like the Indian Child Welfare Act that demand stricter standards in determining neglect in AIAN families, the incidence of reported neglect among AIAN children continues to rise (USDHHS, 2000). In cases of substantiated child maltreat-

ment, AIAN children are more likely than are children of any other race/ethnicity to be victims of neglect and least likely to be victims of physical abuse (USDHHS, 2006).

Scholars suggest that these high rates of neglect are related to a variety of contributing sociodemographic factors found in Native communities, including high rates of poverty, substance abuse, and poor health and mental health indicators (Berlin, 1987; Brown, Limb, Munoz, & Clifford, 2001; Cross, 1986; Miller, Hoffman, & Turner, 1988) as well as the effects of discrimination and forced acculturation (e.g., Cross et al., 2000). Many of the factors associated with neglect are found in reservation-based communities as well as urban native communities. However, in addition to the problems of poverty, substance abuse, and poor health, urban AIAN families may also suffer from social isolation and lack the informal social systems found in many reservation communities (Flynn, Clark, Aragon, Stanzell, & Evans-Campbell, 1998).

Although a variety of sociodemographic factors may put urban AIAN families at risk for child neglect, numerous child welfare experts assert that the high rate of neglect in AIAN communities may have less to do with the structural conditions related to neglect and more to do with cultural misunderstanding on the part of child welfare practitioners and policymakers. Indeed, child neglect in AIAN families has been determined in large part by non-Native social workers who may have limited understanding of Native child rearing or cultural norms (Earle & Cross, 2001). Further, some scholars suggest there may be a discrepancy between the way that AIAN parents view child neglect and the way in which outsiders view it which, in turn, contributes to the high rates of removals of AIAN children from their homes (Earle & Cross, 2001; Horejsi, Craig Heavy Runner, & Pablo, 1992). Earle and Cross note, for example, that standard definitions of neglect are based upon on a mainstream ideal of nuclear family structures and caregiving roles. This ideal does not fit with the common practice in AIAN families of relying on extended family and community networks to assist in child rearing (e.g., Cross, 1986).

Defining Child Neglect

Historically, what constitutes child neglect has oscillated between a broad range of activities that might include acts such as failing to ensure a child attends school regularly or not ensuring that a child has adequate shelter, to a more narrowly defined set of behaviors limited to only serious physical neglect inflicted with intent to harm. The age of the child, the intent of the perpetrator, the type of injury, and so on also mediate the extent to which any given act comes to be labeled as neglectful. Although definitions and categories of neglect have quite clearly evolved over time, they remain extremely vague and broad and are often in flux. Even so, professionals and scholars often treat child maltreatment, including child neglect, in terms of limited and easily defined forms of deviant behavior. Notably, scholars have suggested that definitions of neglect have been left broad intentionally to allow room for practitioners to consider local and community standards when making determinations of neglect (e.g., Rose, 1999). Although vague definitions do allow for more flexibility when assessing a potentially neglectful situation, they also leave room for personal bias and discrimination to color judgments regarding child neglect cases (Rose, 1999).

Ambiguity in the definition of neglect has important implications for public child welfare practice especially as it appears that *professional* definitions of neglect do not necessarily correspond to *community* definitions of neglect. Indeed, several researchers have found that social workers and community members often do not agree on definitions and standards of child neglect or the relative seriousness of different types of neglect (Gil, 1979; Giovannoni & Becerra, 1979; Rose & Meezan, 1995). Rose and Meezan and Giovannoni and Becerra, for example, found that mothers in their respective studies rated all dimensions of child neglect more seriously than social workers. Moreover, professionals themselves disagree about which behaviors constitute neglect and which neglectful behaviors are most serious (Gil, 1979; Rose & Meezan, 1993). Such findings present serious problems for child welfare policymakers. Definitions of neglect should reflect community norms, but differ-

ences of opinion between workers and community members indicate a lack of understanding of the population being served and may set the stage for mistrust between parents and professionals (Rose & Meezan, 1993).

Perceptions of Child Neglect in a Cross-Cultural Context

There is also evidence that definitions and perceptions of neglect differ by cultural group (Giovannoni & Becerra, 1979; Hong & Hong, 1991; Polansky, Chalmers, Bittenweiser, & Williams, 1981) and, consequently, the determination of neglect can be thought of as a culturally specific process. There are significant intragroup differences among ethnic groups according to socioeconomic factors, gender (Ringwalt & Caye, 1989), social class, number of children, and level of acculturation (Giovannoni & Becerra, 1979; Song, 1986).

Although previous studies have not explored AIAN perceptions of child neglect, scholarship related to Native parenting does suggest that Native parents may hold culturally unique ideas about what constitutes appropriate parenting. In some Native cultures, parents encourage their children from an early age to be independent and to develop a stronger sense of responsibility than non-Native parents (Green, 1983). Another common assertion is that Native parents may adhere to less strict rules around supervision and encourage older children to care for younger siblings at relatively early ages (e.g., Fischler, 1985; Gfellner, 1990). Importantly, these culturally specific parenting practices may be at odds with non-Native parenting expectations. Given the alarming rates of Native children in the child protective system due to child neglect, the lack of specific research on Native perceptions of adequate childrearing practices and definitions of child neglect is a critical oversight in the child welfare literature.

Implications of Defining Neglect

Inter- and intracultural differences in perceptions of child neglect present a serious dilemma for policymakers and practitioners. By not embracing a cross-cultural perspective, Western standards may

be imposed on all families regardless of culture. Yet, without some agreed-upon standards of child rearing, practitioners and policy-makers run the risk of endangering children. Over the past several decades, research highlighting the complex nature of the influence of culture on perceptions highlights the need to more thoroughly examine perceptions of neglect within diverse ethnic groups and view situations in a cross-cultural context. Currently, very little is known regarding perceptions of neglect among members of diverse ethnic groups. Moreover, while some practices may be accepted in certain cultures, we do not understand the boundaries of acceptance. Some behaviors, for example, may be sanctioned only within certain contexts or for a certain period. In the American Indian community, the available information on how the community views neglect is very limited and for the most part anecdotal. Native communities have recently reclaimed the right to supervise child welfare in their own communities, yet the way child maltreatment is defined continues to be based on Western standards and until more is known about perceptions of neglect within AIAN communities, it will be impossible to develop truly culturally appropriate child neglect standards for Native families.

To establish a baseline of perceptions of child neglect in the urban AIAN community, this study explored how urban AIAN parents perceive neglect and the influence of sociodemographic factors, AIAN-specific characteristics, and cultural orientation on these perceptions.

Sociohistorical Background of Urban AIANs

The AIAN population in the United States is extremely diverse and researchers must be careful not to generalize from findings based on limited samples. Currently, there are over 560 federally recognized tribes and 223 Alaskan village groups in the United States (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2007). Over 60% of the individuals who self-identify as American Indian in this country now live in urban settings (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003).

Although most AIAN people are urban, the overwhelming majority of research conducted on Native issues has been with reservation-based samples and little is known about AIAN people living in cities. In fact, urban AIAN families are likely to have substantially different experiences than other AIAN families and the move from reservation-based living to urban living introduced a number of social problems to the urban AIAN population including isolation, high rates of unemployment, and a lack of traditional parenting supports (Walters, Simoni, & Evans-Campbell, 2002).

Methods

The current investigation was part of a larger study exploring attitudes and beliefs of urban AIAN parents related to: the definition of child neglect, the role child protective services in AIAN communities, and child welfare policies affecting AIANs. The study was conducted in 2000 to 2001 with urban AIAN parents in Los Angeles County, the urban area with the second largest population of AIANs in the country (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001).

In this study, a cross-sectional survey approach was employed with 101 urban American Indian parents in Los Angeles County. Los Angeles County is home to the second largest urban AIAN population in the country (68,471) with over 200 tribes represented (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). To assist in survey development, two focus groups were convened—one with American Indian child welfare professionals working and another with members of a local Native child advocacy group, which included parents, community members, and Native agency representatives. After the instrument was developed, focus group members were asked to provide feedback on the measures, sampling strategy, and plan for interviewers. In addition, members assessed the instrument for cultural appropriateness.

Every attempt was made to ensure that the sample was as representative as possible and parents were recruited through presentations at Native agency and community events and local powwows,

and through recruitment fliers. In addition, snowball sampling was used, specifically targeting those who did not attend community events or receive services at Indian agencies in the area. The Human Subject Review Boards of the University of California, Los Angeles, granted approval of the study. It was made clear to subjects that their participation was voluntary and confidential and that they could cease participation at any time without penalty. A full description of the study and study procedures was sent to all subjects who requested this information. Interviews were conducted from January through April 2000 by the researcher and two trained interviewers. To decrease the refusal rate and make the respondents more comfortable, all interviewers were AIAN.

Measures

Perceptions of child neglect were measured by 56 vignette items. Each vignette scenario introduced a potentially neglectful situation and respondents were asked to rate the seriousness of each situation utilizing a five-point Likert scale format with one being *not at all serious*—will probably not harm child; three being *somewhat serious*—may be harmful to child; and five being *very serious*—is very likely to harm child. Of the vignettes, 40 were adopted from vignettes used in the established literature related to perceptions of child maltreatment (Giovannoni & Becerra, 1979; Polansky et al., 1981; Rose & Meezan, 1995). Only a small number of vignettes were worded exactly as they appeared in the original instruments. Based on results from the focus groups as well as input from AIAN child welfare experts, most others were adapted to make them more current and culturally appropriate. The remaining vignettes were developed for this study based on a review of the relevant literature and focus groups findings. To explore whether the age of a child was a factor in ratings, eight vignettes presented the same scenario first with a 5-year-old and then with a 10-year-old.

To examine perceptions of different types of child neglect, vignettes were grouped together into subcategories of neglect. Based

upon an extensive review of the literature on child neglect and feedback from Native child welfare professionals, 10 distinct subcategories or domains of child neglect emerged: substance abuse of parents (SUBAB), fostering delinquency (DELINQ), cleanliness (CLEAN), supervision (SUPER), nutrition (FOOD), providing material necessities (MATER), medical neglect (MEDICAL), emotional neglect (EMOTION), providing adequate structure (STRUC), and sexual mores of parents (SEX). The reliability of each subcategory of neglect was tested using Cronbach's Alpha. Of the 10 domains, 9 had alpha levels between .72 and .87. The subcategory (SEX) had an alpha level of .62.

To measure the concept of perceptions of neglect in general, the Total Perceptions of Child Neglect Scale (TPCNS) was developed. To create the scale, the 56 vignette item scores were recoded and added together for a Total Perceptions of Neglect Scale score. Lower scores indicated that vignettes were perceived less seriously overall and higher scores indicated that vignettes were perceived more seriously overall. The reliability coefficient for the scale was .94.

Demographics

Respondents were also asked (a) basic sociodemographic information including gender, age, level of education, number of children in the home, and experience with public assistance; and (b) Native-specific information including place of birth (reservation, rural, or urban), experience in boarding school, and length of time spent on the reservation.

Indirect Experience with CPS

In addition, respondents were asked if they had a friend or family member who had been involved with child protective services at some point.

Cultural Orientation

To assess the respondent's cultural orientation, parents were given a revised version of the General Ethnicity Questionnaire—GEQ

(Tsai, Ying, & Lee, 2000). The original instrument was designed for use with Chinese Americans and it has been used in a number of diverse populations with good reliability (Tsai, Mortensen, Wong, & Hess, 2002; Tsai, Nnamdi, Levenson, & Munoz, 2003). Several of the original questions related to language use were omitted and the remaining 20 norms and values questions were revised slightly to make them more culturally relevant and appropriate. A Cronbach alpha level of .88 was found for the scale, indicating strong internal consistency.

Sample Characteristics

The sociodemographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. The final sample was comprised of 66 women and 35 men, ranging in age from 18 to 78 years old. About a quarter of the sample (28%) had not graduated from high school. Approximately 22% of the sample a high school degree, another 35% reported attending some college or had an associate's degree and 16% reported having a bachelor's degree or higher. These statistics are quite similar to 2000 Census data on AIANs in Los Angeles.

The majority of respondents were married (52%), 18% had never been married, 23% were divorced or separated, and 3% were widowed. Of the sample, 50% had one or two children, 33% had three or four children, and 18% of the sample had five or more children. Parents in the sample had fairly low annual incomes with almost half reporting annual incomes below \$15,000. Only 7% of the sample had annual incomes above \$50,000. The median income for the sample was \$15,360 a year. Of the respondents, 54% were employed in full-time, 6% worked part-time, and 17% were unemployed and seeking work. Another 3% were retired and 20% were homemakers, students, or unable to work. These findings are consistent with the findings of other studies on AIAN adults in Los Angeles (Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission, 2000; Walters, 1995).

TABLE 1

Sociodemographic Profile of Study Sample AIANs in Los Angeles County

STUDY SAMPLE SIZE = 101	TOTAL AMERICAN INDIANS IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY = 68,471	
	SAMPLE	2000 U.S. CENSUS
Gender		
Males	35%	50%
Females	65%	50%
Age (median = 38)		
18–24	8%	16% ¹
25–44	69%	50%
45–64	18%	26%
65+	5%	8%
Educational Level (\bar{x} = 12.3 yrs.)		
Less than high school diploma	28%	41%
High school graduate	22%	21%
Some college or associate's degree	35%	27%
Bachelor's degree or higher	16%	12%
Marital Status		
Married	52%	43%
Divorced	17%	11%
Separated	6%	4%
Widowed	3%	4%
Never married	18%	38%
Other	5%	NA
Number of Children (\bar{x} = 3.1)		
1–2	50%	58% ²
3–4	33%	35%
5 or more	18%	7%
Income (\bar{x} = \$20,787)		
Less than \$10,000	23%	16%
10,000–14,999	25%	16%
15,000–24,999	28%	16%
25,000–34,999	7%	16%
35,000–49,999	11%	15%
50,000–74,999	7%	17%
Median Income	\$15,360	\$30,796

¹Of people over 17.²Of those with children.

AIAN-Specific Characteristics

As Table 2 illustrates, most American Indian parents in the sample were born in an city or urban area (55%), 12% were born in a rural area, and a third of the sample (33%) had been born on a reservation. However, although the majority of respondents had been born in a city, well over half had lived on a reservation at some point during their lives (63%) and over a quarter (28%) had attended an Indian boarding school as children. Over half of the respondents

TABLE 2

Native-Specific Characteristics of Study Sample American Indians/Alaska Natives in Los Angeles County, 2000 (n = 101)

	SAMPLE
Place of birth	
Urban	55%
Rural	12%
Reservation	33%
Ever live on a reservation?	
Yes	62%
No	38%
Mean years on reservation	7.2
Contact with other Indians	
No contact	11%
Once a week	17%
Twice a week	14%
Three or four times a week	11%
At least five times a week	48%
Attended Indian boarding school	
Yes	28%
No	72%
Mean years attended	5.8

reported contact with other American Indian people on a regular basis and 59% reported contact with other American Indians at least three times a week.

Cultural Orientation

The mean score on the General Ethnicity Questionnaire for parents in the study was 24.90 on a scale of 0 to 80 with lower scores indicating a higher AIAN cultural orientation. It appears that the AIAN parents surveyed had strong Native cultural orientations and low levels of acculturation to a non-Native culture. Notably, this strong cultural orientation occurred despite the fact that the average time spent in Los Angeles among parents was 24 years.

Data Analysis

We began our data analysis by examining the descriptive statistics of the study variables. Chi-square and t-tests were then performed to examine the bivariate associations among variables. The impact of four demographic characteristics (gender, education, marital status, and receiving public assistance), two AIAN-specific characteristics (history of boarding school attendance and place of birth), indirect experience with CPS, and cultural orientation on perceptions of child neglect was assessed using stepwise regression analyses. Complete case analysis was used for modeling and all explanatory variables were kept in each model, regardless of statistical significance. All analyses were performed using SPSS version 11.

Results

Vignette Ratings

To get a sense of which vignette scenarios parents perceived as the most serious and least serious child neglect situations, the overall mean scores of the 56 vignettes were examined. The seriousness rating on the majority of vignettes was quite high, with 69% of the vignette scores falling between four and five. These generally high

ratings are consistent with findings from other studies looking at perceptions of child neglect among diverse groups (Giovannoni & Becerra, 1979; Hong & Hong, 1991; Rose & Meezan, 1995). The 10 highest-rated vignettes and the 10 lowest-rated vignettes are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3

Ten Highest-Rated Neglect Items and Ten Lowest-Rated Neglect Items,
Native Parents in Los Angeles, 2000 (n = 101)

VIGNETTE ITEM	MEAN	ST. DEVIATION
<i>Ten Vignettes with Highest Mean Ratings</i>		
5-year-old left in charge of sibling at night	4.91	.35
5-year-old left in charge of sibling during the day	4.88	.41
5-year-old does not have food for 24 hours at a time	4.81	.46
Parents use drugs	4.80	.55
Household chemicals left in reach of 5-year-old	4.79	.48
Parent is often drunk in front of child	4.79	.59
Parent is often "high" in front of child	4.78	.59
Parent physically abuses another parent in front of child	4.77	.51
Parent encourages child to steal small items	4.77	.56
Parents do not take 5-year-old to the doctor when ill	4.77	.53
<i>Ten Vignettes with Lowest Mean Ratings</i>		
Food scraps on the floor	3.72	1.11
No discipline when needed	3.65	1.12
Parent never makes sure that homework is done	3.64	1.20
House is in poor condition	3.62	1.17
Parent does not attend to the child's spiritual needs	3.62	1.10
There are dirty dishes all over the house	3.60	1.17
Parent uses TV as a babysitter	3.53	1.25
Four or more people live in a studio	3.24	1.24
Rugs present a tripping hazard for a 5-year-old	3.11	1.26
No designated play area for a 5-year-old	3.09	1.29

Vignettes with the highest ratings included five situations in which there was the potential for imminent physical danger to a child such as leaving a 5-year-old in charge of a younger sibling or leaving dangerous household chemicals in the reach of a 5-year-old. The remaining five most seriously rated vignettes involved situations which were not immediately harmful to the child but rather, called into question the parent's judgment or moral code (e.g., encouraging a child to steal small items from the supermarket). All of the vignettes involving substance abuse of a parent were included among the ten highest rated vignettes. Vignettes with the lowest seriousness ratings tended to involve poor housing, cleanliness, or a lack of structure in the environment.

Importantly, age of the child involved in the vignette situation appears to have had a considerable influence on ratings. Five of the situations involving a 5-year-old child were among the 10 highest rated vignettes and no situation involving a 10-year-old child was included among the highest rated vignettes, suggesting that Native parents feel that age is an important consideration when judging the seriousness of the situations.

Ten Domains of Neglect

The overall mean scores of the 10 domains of neglect were examined to see which types of neglect AIAN parents perceived as more serious and less serious. As Table 4 illustrates, substance abuse (SUBAB) was rated as the most serious category of neglect, followed by sexual mores of parents (SEX), fostering delinquency (DELINQ), medical neglect (MEDICAL), supervision (SUPER), nutrition (FOOD), emotional abuse (EMOTION), cleanliness (CLEAN), providing material necessities (MATER), and providing adequate structure (STRUC).

Providing adequate structure (STRUC) had the lowest rating of any child neglect category in the study. The literature on Native parenting styles suggests that AIAN parents may traditionally provide less obvious structure compared to non-Native parents and several scholars note that AIAN parents may prefer to have children learn through experience or example rather than through discipline

TABLE 4

Means and Standard Deviations of Neglect Domains, AIAN Parents in Los Angeles, 2000 (n = 101)

CATEGORY	MEAN SCORE	STANDARD DEVIATION
Substance Abuse of Parents (SUBAB)	4.76	.55
Sexual Mores of Parents (SEX)	4.58	.50
Fostering Delinquency (DELINQ)	4.51	.57
Medical Neglect (MEDICAL)	4.42	.55
Supervision (SUPER)	4.41	.53
Nutrition (FOOD)	4.36	.56
Emotional Abuse (EMOTION)	4.18	.56
Cleanliness (CLEAN)	3.97	.64
Providing Material Necessities (MATER)	3.84	.59
Providing Adequate Structure (STRUC)	3.62	.87

(e.g., Gfellner, 1990). Scholars further suggest that this practice of noninterference by Native parents can be misinterpreted by outsiders as neglect (Earle & Cross, 2001; Weaver, 1997).

The subcategory providing material necessities (MATER) received the second-lowest ranking. This finding may have been related to the fact that many items in this category involved situations that could be related to poverty issues (e.g., 5-year-old has no shoes that fit). With the high rates of poverty in Native communities, we speculate that parents in the study were more understanding of the circumstances of poverty in families and rated situations accordingly.

Regression

To identify significant predictors of TPCNS scores among Native parents in Los Angeles, a stepwise regression analysis was conducted with TPCN score and eight independent variables—gender, education, indirect experience with CPS, public assistance status, place of birth, marital status, attendance in boarding school, and cultural orientation. As shown in Table 5, four independent

TABLE 5

Results of Zero-Order Correlation and Stepwise Regression Analyses of Total Mean Perception of Neglect Score and Eight Independent Variables, AIAN Parents in Los Angeles, 2000 (n = 101)

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE ^a	ZERO-ORDER CORRELATION COEFFICIENT	STANDARDIZED REGRESSION COEFFICIENT	PARTIAL CORRELATION COEFFICIENT
<i>Variables in the Equation</i>			
Gender ^a	-.487**	-.527**	-.552
Education	-.255**	-.239**	-.278
Marital status—previously married ^a	.116*	-.219*	-.256
Indirect experience with CPS ^a	-.182*	.189*	.229
<i>Variables not in the Equation</i>			
Marital status—never married ^a	.140	.084	.098
Public assistance ^a	-.040	.014	.016
Boarding school ^a	.095	-.003	-.003
Reservation ^a	-.154	-.080	-.097
Cultural Orientation	-.022	.085	.098

^aNo indirect experience with CPS = 0, Female = 0, Married = 0, No public assistance = 0, Did not attend boarding school = 0, and has not lived on a reservation = 0.

*p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01

R-squared (R²) and Change in R² for Stepwise Regression Model (n = 101)

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE ^a	CUMULATIVE R ²	CUMULATIVE ADJUSTED R ²	CHANGE IN R ²
<i>Variables in the Equation</i>			
Gender	.237	.229	.237**
Education	.307	.293	.070**
Marital Status—previously married	.345	.325	.038*
Indirect Experience with CPS	.380	.354	.034*
	F=14.68**		

^aF change is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**F change is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

variables were found to be significant predictors of total perceptions score: gender, education, marital status, and indirect experience with CPS. These four predictors, as a whole, explained over 38% of the variance in TPCN scores. Gender was the most powerful predictor of perceptions, explaining almost 24% of the variance in TPCN score with women having significantly higher mean scores compared to men. Education was the second-most powerful predictor and was inversely related to perceptions of neglect—the more education a parent had, the lower they tended to rate potentially neglectful situations. Marital status was the third most powerful predictor and those who had previously been married had significantly higher TPCNS scores than married respondents. Finally, indirect experience with CPS was significantly related to TPCNS score. Parents who had a friend or relative with CPS experience (indirect experience with CPS) had significantly lower mean scores on the scale than parents who did not have a friend or relative with CPS experience.

Discussion

Vignette Items

First and foremost, it is clear that urban AIAN parents have quite stringent beliefs around child safety and standards of care for children. The high rating of vignette items overall indicates that child neglect is taken very seriously by Native parents and that parents saw most of the vignette situations as deviating from appropriate child-rearing norms and values. The most seriously rated vignettes included situations in which there was the potential of imminent danger to the child (e.g., leaving a 5-year-old in charge of a sibling at night and leaving household chemicals in the reach of a 5-year-old). The remaining most highly rated vignettes involved situations, which were not immediately harmful to a child but called into question the parent's judgment or moral code (e.g., encouraging a child to steal small items from the supermarket or using drugs in front of a child). Notably, all three vignettes involving

parental substance abuse were also in the top 10 highest-rated vignettes. Many Native organizations have strong campaigns focused on the community education on the impact of substance use and abuse and findings from this study show that Native parents may be highly sensitive to the issue of parental substance abuse.

Domains of Neglect

Previous research with members of diverse community and professional groups shows that perceptions regarding the relative seriousness of different types of child neglect vary across groups. Rose and Meezan (1993) studied perceptions of neglect among African American, Latino, and European American mothers as well as child welfare workers. When exploring views about which types of neglect had the most potential for harm (e.g., having inadequate food), they found that Latino and African American mothers were in close agreement. European mothers had significantly different perceptions about the seriousness of different dimensions of neglect and their perceptions tended to be more similar to the views of child welfare professionals. For example, European American mothers and child welfare workers ranked the domain of *having inadequate food* more seriously (ranked 4.5 by European American mothers and 4 by workers) than African American and Latino mothers (ranked 7th by both groups). African American and Latino mothers ranked the domain of *unwholesome circumstances* much higher (ranked second) than European American mothers and child welfare workers (ranked fifth by both groups).

In the current study, a comparison of ratings on 10 domains of neglect is instructive and provides a rank order for how urban AIAN parents perceive different types of neglect. Similar to members of other communities of color, native parents ranked *having inadequate food* as one of the least serious types of neglect (ranked sixth). Moreover, Native parents ranked the domains equivalent to *unwholesome circumstances* (parental substance and sexual mores of parents) as the two most potentially harmful types of neglect. Although differences in the way the domains of neglect were measured make

it impossible to directly compare rankings between these studies, it appears that, like African American and Latino mothers, AIAN parents have comparatively less concern about situations that may be related to poverty or environment. This finding is not surprising given the relatively higher rates of poverty in many communities of color, as parents are likely to contextualize vignettes accordingly. Further research in this area would allow researchers to compare perceptions across diverse community groups including AIANs, as well as between AIANs and child welfare workers.

Supervision was one of the most seriously ranked types of neglect for mothers and child welfare professionals in Rose and Meezan's study (1995), falling within the top three rankings for each group sampled. Among AIAN parents in the current study, supervision was also perceived as a serious type of neglect (ranked 5 of 10). We were particularly interested in AIAN perceptions of vignettes related to supervision issues since lack of adequate supervision has historically been a major factor in reports of child neglect in AIAN communities. The discrepancy between the fairly high ratings of supervision vignettes in this study and child welfare literature describing more flexible supervision patterns in Native families may reflect tribal differences regarding appropriate parental supervision practices. It may also stem from cultural misunderstandings on the part of child welfare professionals. In some cases, child welfare workers may confuse leaving children unsupervised with the more traditional practice of having extended kin watch children. In other situations, workers may have a limited view of what actually constitutes a community's parenting norms since their contact with that community may be limited to families reported for abuse and neglect.

Notably, the lowest-rated vignettes for AIAN parents were those involving structure. A number of scholars have commented on the tendency of AIAN parents to use subtle encouragement with children instead of enforcing strict rules in the house (Earle & Cross, 2001; Gfellner, 1990). This less structured parental intervention may be seen as too lax, according to some cultural child rearing standards,

but in many Native communities, it is viewed as a way to allow a child to develop at his or her own pace and is considered a way to respect the child (Earle & Cross, 2001; Seideman, Williams, Burns, Jacobson, Weatherby, & Primeaux, 1994).

Regression Results

Four factors were significantly associated with TPCNS score: gender, education, marital status, and indirect experience with CPS. Of these, gender was the factor most significantly associated with TPCNS score and women had significantly higher TPCNS scores compared to men. Previous studies exploring perceptions of child neglect have also found gender to be the most significant demographic factor associated with perception (Ringwalt & Caye, 1989). The influence of gender may be related to a number of factors including the social roles that mothers and fathers play with children, differences in the amount of time spent with children, and different perceptions regarding the material and emotional needs of children. There may also be stronger social pressure for women to rate situations more seriously than males. Regardless of the reasons behind gender differences in perceptions, this finding has important implications for the way child welfare services are presented to families. Child welfare workers and policy makers must consult with Native community members of both sexes when developing definitions of neglect and planning appropriate agency interventions for families. Additionally, services for parents should be easily accessible to both mothers and fathers.

Consistent with previous research on perceptions of neglect in other communities, education was the second-most powerful predictor and the relationship between education and perceptions was inverse—as education increased, perception scores decreased (Giovannoni & Becerra, 1979; Ringwalt & Caye, 1989). One goal of higher education is to develop a person's ability to analyze situations from a variety of perspectives and it may be that as people become more educated, they become more tolerant and understanding of different child-rearing practices.

It is noteworthy that cultural orientation was not a significant predictor of perceptions of neglect. On the assumption that parents hold culturally bound perceptions of neglect, we anticipated that perceptions among urban AIAN parents would vary according to level of cultural orientation. The results of this study do not support this hypothesis and, instead, suggest that urban AIAN parents have a strongly shared sense of what constitutes child neglect regardless of cultural orientation. Research exploring intragroup differences in perceptions shows that beliefs about child neglect differs among sub-groups. Indeed, the relationship between culture and perceptions of child neglect may vary significantly among different subgroups of Native parents, as well as between native parents and other groups. Further research is needed to explore these relationships if we are to develop culturally appropriate definitions of neglect and create programs to combat neglect.

Conclusions

Study Limitations

This study provides some of the first data on perceptions of child neglect among urban AIAN people and offers valuable information for child welfare scholars and practitioners. Before discussing the implications of this study, however, it is important to acknowledge that the findings are limited in generalizability due to the small sample size and the use of a non-probability method. Certainly, the small sample size limits the statistical power and suggests the need to validate findings in a larger sample. Moreover, because the sample was generated from Los Angeles County, study findings may reflect differences that are unique to that geographic location or to the tribal affiliations of those interviewed. In addition, the research design is cross-sectional and, thus, does not offer information regarding the causal relationships among the constructs studied. Despite these limitations, results from this study have important implications for policy makers and practitioners.

Implications

Policymakers currently have an incomplete context for what constitutes acceptable child rearing in AIAN communities. A better understanding of the perceptions of child neglect among urban AIANs could assist in the development and implementation of child welfare policies that are culturally relevant and in line with Native child-rearing values and practices. Looking at vignette ratings in this study, clearly AIAN parents hold themselves and others to high standards of adequate child rearing. It is also apparent that their views about the relative seriousness of different types of neglect may differ from the views of child welfare practitioners. This information provides an important context for workers when making determinations of neglect in AIAN families.

If standard definitions of neglect reflect the top concerns of the communities served, in the case of urban AIANs, policymakers might focus more on substance use and medical concerns and less on material or structural concerns, or at least look for ways to address the later issues outside the context of neglect. Such practices will be challenging given diverse community definitions and practices regarding neglect, especially if these definitions contain significant differences. In creating definitions of child neglect, child welfare scholars and practitioners will have to search for ways to incorporate the differences in perception as well as the historical childrearing practices of diverse communities even while maintaining some general agreement of what constitutes neglect and how to best protect our most vulnerable child populations.

As this study shows, AIAN views regarding child neglect vary significantly by gender, education, marital status, and indirect experience with CPS. Thus, while it is important that policy definitions of child neglect be developed in conjunction with AIAN child welfare advocates, it is also critical that these advocates are representative of a diverse spectrum of AIAN people including people of different genders, educational levels, and tribal affiliations. Intragroup diversity must also be highlighted in Indian child welfare

training. In an attempt to provide more culturally relevant services to AIAN parents, some urban child protective service agencies have created specialized native units where social workers carry cases involving AIAN families. This is a good start at providing culturally appropriate services and building trust within urban Native communities. However, as these study results show, it is critical that social workers and program administrators are cognizant of the diversity within AIAN communities and not assume a common standard of child rearing is shared by all AIAN parents. When assessing neglect, social workers must consider AIAN cultural differences and explore whether particular practices are acceptable within the family's tribal culture.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing the need to continue to support and expand many of the culturally relevant practices and policies designed to alleviate child neglect already at work within some agencies, especially in light of this study's findings. Given the extent of child neglect in Native communities and the profound impact of neglect on families, concerted public awareness campaigns regarding the problem of neglect are essential. For community education to be successful, planners must be familiar with the urban AIAN community and outreach efforts must be tailored to a range of AIAN families. Because many of the urban parents in this study accessed Native agencies and attended Native events, it is imperative that child protective service agencies and social workers collaborate with local Native media and Native social service agencies in their efforts to increase trust among AIAN parents. These efforts must be sensitive to the sociohistorical context of child welfare in AIAN communities as well as the likely reluctance among AIAN parents of accessing Child Protective Services if needed. Workers can also help break down other barriers of trust for parents by providing culturally appropriate and accessible services. In addition, agencies should make every attempt to hire AIAN workers, recruit AIAN board members, and offer training on work with AIAN families.

Directions for Future Research

This study provides preliminary data on an important topic that has received little empirical attention and findings can be viewed as a base upon which future studies may build. Given the diversity of the urban AIAN community, larger-scale studies are needed to explore how different subgroups differ in perceptions and attitudes around child neglect. Moreover, parallel findings from previous studies suggest that native parents may hold different perceptions of neglect than child welfare workers and members of other cultural and ethnic groups. Comparison studies are needed to explore perceptions of child neglect across groups including AIANs.

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