

Foreword

Dr. Jeannine Carriere, University of Victoria
and Editorial Board Member of the First Peoples Child & Family Review

As I prepare my course materials for another semester at the University of Victoria School of Social Work I ponder on how I could be teaching a course entitled, *'Protecting Indigenous Children.'* Although I love teaching and the energy a new semester brings, I am sadly reminded that we do not offer courses entitled this way about other populations. For example, *"Protecting Italian Canadian children"* is not in our course calendar.

The reality is that Indigenous children continue to be represented in significant numbers in child welfare systems and institutions and endemic poverty plays a significant role in many of these situations. The only comfort I find in organizing this course is that I can look to this publication as I always have to share perspectives and voices from Indigenous colleagues and practitioners from across the country that share my concerns and are willing to speak on behalf of our children to inform research, policy and practice.

In this issue, I am pleased to see some offerings from a diverse number of scholars, practitioners and researchers. The journal begins with a discussion on

reconciliation and child welfare which is timely in an era where reconciliation for Aboriginal peoples in Canada is being widely discussed. In creating a community response for special needs youth, the authors remind us that solutions are within our own communities. The issues of poverty, homelessness and the sex trade for Aboriginal girls in Canada are reminders that the roots of child and family practice issues are structural and should be every citizen's concern. This volume also contains articles on policy and rights for Indigenous youth in systems such as education or child welfare. It is also exciting to include articles from other countries such as Australia in this volume and to have an article written en Francais which being one of my languages was a pleasure to read and one I can refer some of our students to.

As a social work educator I am proud to be affiliated with this journal since its inception. I was honored to be asked to write this foreword and hope that you appreciate the hard work of the editorial staff and many contributors of this volume and past publications.

Merci beaucoup. All my relations.

Jeannine Carriere

Editorial

The Insidious Poverty Epidemic: Considerations for Aboriginal Children, Families, Communities and other Indigenous Nations

Marlyn Bennett and Cindy Blackstock

While the array of articles in this issue may appear to cover eclectic topics including: the implications of reconciliation for child welfare; the special needs of Aboriginal children; Aboriginal mothers' involvement with parenting programs; obesity issues among Aboriginal children; domestic trafficking of Aboriginal girls into the sex trade and the maltreatment of Aboriginal children and youth in Quebec, they are all tied together by one insidious common element - poverty. Poverty creates a fracture in the wealth of Canadian society – one where the have nots are often poorly regarded by those more fortunate and one where governments tend to only pay lip service to addressing the unequal distribution of a wealthy nation's resources. Aboriginal peoples are particularly disadvantaged with over one in every two Aboriginal children living below the poverty line and many Aboriginal communities struggling to get clean water to drink and healthy food to eat.

Each of the articles in this issue explore how poverty impacts the daily lives of children and youth involved with social service and child welfare agencies, not only in Canada but in other places such as Australia. Poverty among Indigenous peoples is a contemporary legacy of colonization that undermines the ability of Aboriginal families to nurture and support their children. Poverty is the new colonization – it overtakes the spirit, physical, emotional wellbeing and negatively affects cognitive potential. These articles all suggest – that unless we do something about poverty the gaps in life chances for Aboriginal children, youth and families will continue unabated.

This issue begins by centering the significance of establishing reconciliatory approaches for Aboriginal people affected by child welfare. Mr. Justice René Dussault's article

regarding the path to reconciliation was based on a key note presentation he prepared for the Reconciliation in Child Welfare Conference held in November 2005 in Niagara Falls, which was jointly hosted by the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare, the National Indian Child Welfare Association, and the Child Welfare Leagues of Canada and America. In this opening article, Mr. Justice René Dussault, the former Co-Chair of Canada's Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples from 1991 to 1996, reflects on what he learned about how the broad range of colonial strategies, including residential schools, contributed to the pervasive poverty experienced by Aboriginal peoples. He also provides suggestions for how to proceed with reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples in the child welfare context.

Lack of service delivery for children with special needs is the focus of the next article about creating community responses to the needs of First Nations children in a remote northern First Nations community in Manitoba. Kinosao Sipi Minisowin Agency of Norway House, one of the largest First Nations in Manitoba, provides child and family services to status bearing Cree residents, living both on and off reserve within the province of Manitoba. Unfortunately disabled First Nations children do not enjoy a full and decent life, nor do they live in conditions that ensure their dignity, self-reliance and active participation in society. And more importantly the fact that disabled First Nations children do not enjoy a quality of life equal to that experienced by other Canadian children in similar circumstances, means that Canada has failed to live up to its responsibilities under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Children and adolescents living in remote northern communities who have special

needs face significant challenges as they often do not have equitable access to support and medical resources nor are their unique needs adequately considered in the broader persons with disabilities policy context. As a result, children with special needs are often referred to child welfare agencies to be admitted to foster care because of the absence of federally and provincially funded programs and services on reserves. This posed challenges for all involved, especially for the Kinosaio Sipi Minisowin Agency in Norway, as it lacked the funding and resources to be able to respond to the complex medical needs presented by the special needs children referred to their agency. In other situations, First Nations families often face the heart breaking decision to leave their community so that their special needs children can access services outside the traditional family support systems available in their own communities. Although many non-Aboriginal families of children with disabilities face challenges accessing the services their children need – Aboriginal children often experience problems even accessing the level of services that these non-Aboriginal families find lacking as the federal and provincial governments argue over who should pay for services to status Indian children on reserve. To counteract the difficulty of making these kinds of decisions, the community created the “Kinosaio Sipi Children’s Special Services Program” through community funds from the Norway House Cree Nation Community Master Implementation Agreement Trust Fund. This article by Ducharme, Muskego, Muswagon, Paupanekis, Muswagon, Spence and Ramdatt (hereafter “Ducharme, et al.”) showcases the agency’s innovative, but time limited approach, to how the needs of this special population are met within a frequently all too often environment characterized by service gaps, underfunding and jurisdictional conflicts over which level of government is fiscally responsible for services rendered to a special needs First Nations children placed into care by their families. Ducharme, et al. note that despite the success of the Children’s Special Services Program it is still hampered by funding restrictions which prevent it from keeping pace with its own success. Decisions to cutback services have been made which means that future clients will be turned away and the range of services previously provided curtailed. Ducharme, et al., conclude by highlighting recommendations while also reiterating that First Nations families should not have to make unsuitable choices that detrimentally impact on the wellbeing of their children, their families and their communities.

Barbara Harris, Mary Russell and Annemarie Gockel (hereafter “Harris, et al.”) look at the impact of poverty on a small sample of Aboriginal mothers who were involved in a longitudinal study regarding a Vancouver parenting

program. Harris et al.’s interviews with Aboriginal mothers reveal that Aboriginal mothers are interested in prevention interventions (looking at colonial factors and the need for emotional support), paying attention to process (ensuring that interactions are collaborative, comfortable, continuous, client centered with clarity around expectations to help mothers reach their goals), addressing needs (i.e. transportation, flexibility, access to services on an on-going basis, need to learn new skills to reduce parenting difficulties and basic needs such as clothing, and access to a phone as ways of reducing the challenges of poverty), and delivered within a cultural context to ensure a healthy environment to raise their children. Relationship building between mothers and service providers as well as having meaningful strategies to deal with poverty are crucial factors in creating healthy environments. Access to cultural activities was identified as important to the wellness and healing of mothers to aid them in reducing stresses in working their way through the demands of the child welfare system. More importantly, the women stated that service providers must do more to understand the realities that come with poverty and that there are structural factors that Aboriginal mothers are powerless to change on their own. For instance, Aboriginal women have limited choices and difficulty obtaining adequate housing for their families predisposing them to contact with the child welfare system. Lastly, the authors of this article note that family preservation programs such as parenting programs are not sufficiently equipped to address the inequity experienced by these Aboriginal mothers and that further cutbacks to social programs reduce the ability of these programs to make meaningful impact on the lives of Aboriginal women and children living in poverty. Service providers would do well to include Aboriginal mothers in the design, delivery, the monitoring and evaluation of such programs as well as include Aboriginal women in the decision making process and policy development associated with parenting programs.

Cyndy Baskin shares the results of a research project exploring structural risk factors such as poverty and child welfare involvement on homelessness of urban Aboriginal youth in Toronto. Aboriginal youth are one of the fastest growing populations in Canada and thus homelessness for this population is increasing while non-Aboriginal populations are aging and thus will reduce over time. Housing for Aboriginal youth is needed to ensure their health and ability to participate as productive members of society. The purpose of Baskin’s article was to examine the conditions under which Aboriginal youth became homeless as well as how homelessness among Aboriginal youth can be prevented and responded to. Baskin’s article

recommends policy changes and practical ways to ensure that Aboriginal peoples have some control over child welfare to ensure homelessness does not become an issue for future generations of Aboriginal youth. These suggestions come from the insightful and articulate perspectives of the youth who participated in Baskin's study as they know and understand many of the reasons behind their homelessness. Youth indicate that it is not enough that Aboriginal agencies are created and employ Aboriginal workers – the legislation, specifically, in child welfare, must be articulated from an Aboriginal perspective and must take into account the harm created by colonization and continuous poverty. This means creating Aboriginal specific policies including an Aboriginal Family and Child Services Act that would clearly differentiate between poverty and neglect as well as reflect Aboriginal values of collective responsibility for children, communal sharing of resources and assisting families when they are struggling rather than taking their children away. Equitable resources are required to ensure that poverty is eliminated so that families can adequately support their children and ensure their wellbeing into the future. Harris, et al. note that homelessness and poverty amongst the Aboriginal population are at unacceptable levels, especially given that this is the only homeland that Aboriginal peoples have ever known.

The social fallout resulting from colonization continues to rear its ugly head in the everyday lives of Indigenous people worldwide. Muriel Bamblett and Peter Lewis effectively paint a picture of the reality faced by Aboriginal populations in Australia as a result of colonization characterized by disempowerment, poverty, continuous disadvantages and cultural abuse. Using a rights based framework, the authors suggest how the non-Indigenous community and government can help Indigenous communities build a culturally respectful and competent service delivery system for Indigenous families so that communities of care can re-emerge and embrace Indigenous children, families, communities, culture and land.

Much of the research literature addressing human trafficking of young women into the sex trade fails to address the underlying reasons why Aboriginal girls are sexually exploited and/or may go missing in Canada. Anupriya Sethi indicates that Canada is rarely seen as country of origin from which girls, especially Aboriginal girls, are trafficked – rather Canada is seen more as a transit and destination country for other trafficked girls and women. Poverty is one of the main reasons why Aboriginal girls and women are forced into the sex trade at disproportionate rates. Unfortunately, people continue to wrongly believe that girls and women chose to be sexually exploited instead

of appreciating that poverty often forces these women and girls into sex work in order to get their basic needs met (food and shelter). Sethi's article highlights important issues identified by the grassroots agencies working with sexually exploited Aboriginal girls and contextualizes their experiences within the trafficking framework in order to distinguish sexual exploitation from voluntary engagement in sex work.

Growing rates of obesity among Aboriginal youth is the topic of interest to Shelley Spurr. She advances a theoretical perspective suggesting that more parental and staff participation in school based policy decisions is a way to begin addressing this rising concern among Aboriginal youth. Poverty plays a significant role in the increasing rates of obesity for Aboriginal teens. Spurr believes that school is the best place in which parents and teachers can begin influencing healthy choices for overweight and obese Aboriginal youth and as a means for preventing obesity in future generations. Spurr reflects on the approach taken by one high school in Saskatchewan and in analyzing her approach to understanding the politics of policy development to end obesity of Aboriginal youth in the educational environment, she relied upon tools used by Deborah Stone from her book, *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making* (2002). Above all else, Spurr believes that any successful anti-obesity strategy requires a collaborative approach from funders (i.e.: INAC) and provincial school boards.

The journal is proud to feature its first French language article which is presented along side an English translation. This article speaks to the issue of maltreatment of Aboriginal children reported to youth protection services in Quebec. This article draws on the Quebec Incidence Study (1998) to compare reports of child maltreatment respecting Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in Quebec. The authors suggest that poverty is one of the key factors predisposing families to become involved with the child welfare system.

Collectively, these articles point out that poverty underlies many of the health and wellness disparities affecting Indigenous children, youth and families – if it goes unaddressed very little progress will be made in closing the gap in life chances and experience. Readers must never forget that there are real people connected to each of these articles. Their courageous struggle to overcome the ravages of poverty should compel us all to begin thinking more about the multiple aspects of poverty in the lives of Indigenous children, families, communities and nations and doing something concrete about it – because we can!

Indigenous Peoples and Child Welfare: The Path to Reconciliation*

Mr. Justice René Dussault
Quebec Court of Appeal
Former Co-Chair of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

* This article is based on a key note presentation given by Mr. Justice René Dussault at the Reconciliation Conference on Child Welfare at Niagara Falls in November 2005. The original presentation can be found at http://www.reconciliationmovement.org/docs/Dussault_Oct2005.pdf.

I am pleased and deeply honoured to have the opportunity to address the issue of reconciliation in child welfare and to have this presentation published in this issue of the First Peoples Child & Family Review.

From 1991 to 1996, I had the privilege of being Co-Chair of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, along with Georges Erasmus, a Dene from the Northwest Territories. As many may recall, the Commission was made up of four Aboriginal and three non-Aboriginal Commissioners and was given an unprecedented mandate.

Commissioners were asked to look at virtually every aspect of the lives of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada in the North as well as in cities: their history, the way they are governed, their land claims, their treaties, their economy, their cultures, their education, their health, their living conditions, their relationship with the justice system, the state of their languages and more generally, their situation in Canada relative to that of non-Aboriginal Canadians.

The task assigned to our Commission by the Government of Canada was in fact no less than recommending ways to rectify the errors made when Confederation came about in 1867 and, for the first time, make Aboriginal peoples true partners in this great undertaking. That meant recommending ways to lift up the apparatus of colonization that had been imposed upon Aboriginal peoples during the last 150 years and suggesting principles and structures upon and around which to restructure their relationship with Canada.

Indeed, at the time of Confederation, it was generally assumed that Aboriginal peoples would disappear as distinctive peoples and, despite the treaties that were in place at that time, they were, without consultation, assigned to the exclusive jurisdiction of the Parliament of Canada (s.91(2w4)). It apparently struck no one as strange and possibly even improper, to hand over control of a whole people to a branch of the new federal government. Some of the worst features of colonization ensued.

Aboriginal peoples' traditional governments were disrupted, generations of children were forced into residential schools or given up for adoption outside their cultures, scores of communities were relocated, land that had been set apart in treaties was taken away and a system of welfare replaced any effort to permit them access to any self-reliant economic base.

Rest assured that I don't intend to delve into the technical aspects of the 444 recommendations of our 35,000 page final report. Given the overall goal of the Reconciliation Conference, which is to discuss

Questions or correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to:

rdussault@judex.qc.ca

the ways and means to achieve reconciliation in child welfare so that the rights of Indigenous children, families and Nations are supported, and not impaired, by the child welfare system, I think it is more appropriate to address what I call the “soul” of our report and share with you some of the cross-cultural challenges I personally had to face in fulfilling my mandate as Co-Chair of the Royal Commission.

You might find strange, at first glance, that I talk about the “soul” of our report. What I want to convey here is that our report addresses the fundamental covenant relationship between Canada and the Aboriginal peoples which is a central facet of Canada’s heritage. It proposes the development, with the full participation of the federal government, the provinces and the Aboriginal peoples, of a national policy of reconciliation of which we could all be proud. In that sense, our report goes to the fabric of what Canada is and could be. It may be a guide to the many ways we can begin, together, to repair the damage to the relationship and enter this millennium on a new footing of mutual recognition and respect, sharing and responsibility.

The terrible effects of the approaches of assimilation, control, intrusion and coercion on which the relationship has foundered over the last 150 years are most dramatically visible perhaps in the consequences of the residential schools and child welfare interventions that separated successive generations of Aboriginal children from their families and communities. In the case of the residential schools, it lasted from about the mid-nineteenth century until well past the mid-twentieth and, in the case of child welfare policies, it still exists in some places today.

Although the experience of growing up within these institutions was not uniformly bad for all, still they did extensive damage to:

- Feelings of self-worth,
- Family connectedness,
- The intergenerational transfer of skills and traditions, and
- The essential core of trust in and respect for others from which all people must draw in order to build loving relationships and healthy communities.

Aboriginal child welfare agencies have faced a long struggle to be able to include Aboriginal values and approaches in their operation. Children judged to

be vulnerable were routinely made wards of provincial agencies and placed in non-Aboriginal foster homes.

External agencies have been slow to understand the profound cultural differences and adjust their approaches accordingly. Fragmented services across a series of federal and provincial agencies ignored the integration that would permit a holistic approach. Some Aboriginal agencies, operating with minimal funding, untrained staff and under intense community pressure, have also failed to protect their charges. In many situations, social agencies are overwhelmed with human cost of social disruption.

No wonder the Commission recommended a much greater Aboriginal control of child welfare agencies. More particularly, it recommended that Canadian governments:

- a) acknowledge Aboriginal governments’ authority for child welfare;
- b) replace per capita allowances with block funding to encourage continuing preventative services;
- c) recognize and fund Aboriginal agencies in urban centres at levels equivalent to mainstream units.

Two themes emerged again and again in the Commission hearings: an overwhelming concern for the well-being of children and the belief that families are at the crux of personal and community healing.

Sadly, still today, a series of severe challenges place many Aboriginal children and families in jeopardy. The inability of tens of thousands of families to find meaningful work and a lifestyle that offers stability and independence puts the children of these families at high risk. Unfortunately, the abuse and the absence of parenting models that resulted from residential schools is keenly felt in subsequent generations.

How, therefore, should the work of reconciliation in child welfare proceed? I know you are well aware of the difficulties standing in the way, but your active participation shows that you are in no way deterred by the weight of the task and gives hope to many.

I readily recognize that there is no magic recipe that leads to reconciliation. Individuals should keep in mind, however, that over the past 25 years, efforts at reform, whether in political relations or social policies, have failed repeatedly to effect substantial change, because Aboriginal and government stakeholders have frequently reached an impasse on matters of principle

or perception even before practical problems could be addressed. First and foremost, reconciliation is a matter of trust.

Of course, if the process of reconciliation in child welfare was to become part of a larger process of reconciliation that addresses all the central aspects of the relationship, as there may be reasons to hope in the near future, the task would be made easier.

However, you should not underestimate the task of changing people's hearts and minds so that the majority understand the aspirations of Aboriginal peoples, accept their historical rights and strive to renew the relationship, creating a true partnership. Leadership from governments is necessary but not enough. Without mutual understanding, a renewed relationship is impossible.

Part of the answer is better information. Indeed, we were told many times during our mandate that most Canadians know little of Aboriginal life and less of Aboriginal history. Information in school curricula is limited. Media coverage is often unsatisfactory. Few governments, agencies and organizations promote awareness of Aboriginal issues among members, employees and colleagues. But information alone will not break down the walls of indifference and occasional hostility. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people need many more chances to meet each other and learn about one another.

In this regard, I would like to emphasize the responsibility incumbent upon each of us to contribute, through our actions and conduct, to reducing the feelings of incomprehension and distrust that, far too frequently, poison the relationship. Remaining passive and silent is not neutrality—it is support for the status quo.

Structural change will require time and can be accomplished only if governments and the public in general reject some false assumptions about Aboriginal peoples that are still very much current today.

One such assumption is that Aboriginal peoples constitute an *interest group*, one among many in a pluralistic society. They, along with the labour movement, the agricultural body, or any other groups are to be listened to respectfully, but they are not seen as having legitimate political authority, as being nations entitled to be treated as such.

Another false assumption is that Aboriginal peoples are *cultural minorities* like many others in our society, a view that negates the fact that Canada's First Peoples have ancestral and historical rights.

A third assumption is that Aboriginal peoples are *racial groups* rather than political and cultural entities, a view that negates the fact that their identity lies in their collective life, their history, ancestry, culture, values, traditions and ties to the land, rather than in their race as such.

A successful reorientation of our societies toward respect for Aboriginal autonomy and a greater participation in the mainstream institutions would enable us to move from regarding Aboriginal people as a problem to be fixed to realizing they are an asset to our countries; from being a burden to the taxpayers to being people that can contribute as full partners.

On a more personal note, I'd like to say that in accepting the Royal Commission's mandate, I knew it meant living on the border of a major cultural divide for a few years. Notwithstanding the little experience I had as Deputy Minister of Justice in dealing with Aboriginal groups in Quebec on matters like policing services, criminal prosecutions, the establishment of a circuit court in the northern part of the province or in implementing the James Bay Agreement, I knew I had everything to learn about the cultures and the ways of life of the various Aboriginal peoples living in Canada.

Later on, as I talked to Aboriginal people across Canada, I recognized the enormous diversity among them. Even though they share much, their outlook on life, their languages and spiritual beliefs differ from one another in many respects. They also differ in their life experiences depending on where they live in Canada. This diversity of Aboriginal perspectives and cultures is a reality that one must accept for the sake of a greater understanding across the cultural divide. Aboriginal people do not form a single entity or speak with one voice. It's neither convenient nor comfortable, but it can't be ignored.

It was quite a challenge for the Commission's staff to establish a successful working relationship in that they came from various walks of life—Indians, Inuit, Métis, Anglophones, Francophones—all with their own sensitivity and susceptibilities. Nor was it any different for the Commissioners, most issues

in our mandate being highly sensitive to Aboriginal people and to the Canadian public in general.

It was a fascinating voyage to the heart of History, by which I have been deeply moved.

First, I often had to face a wall of suspicion and, at times, of anger. I have even been told: "You can't be the doctor when you are the disease." Even if you know that the comment is not directed at you personally, the scope of the misunderstanding hits you in the face.

Then, I soon realized that I had to get deeply involved if I were to establish a relationship of trust. "Show me a glimpse of your soul" -- "Montrez-moi une parcelle de votre âme" told me many elders for whom reaching equality in a relationship requires from the partners that they first listen to each other and show that they share the same emotions and the same fundamental values tied up to life and to the nature of things.

This personal involvement has been conducive to the much heart-searching. Admittedly, the length of the discussion has sometimes nearly exhausted my patience. Much less however than the extent of the pain experienced in many Aboriginal communities. Despite well-intentioned efforts and the investment of significant sums, many Aboriginal people in Canada continue to live in third world conditions. It is a human problem unique in Canadian society.

In his report to the Canadian Government recommending the Commission's mandate, the late Chief Justice of Canada, the Right Honourable Brian

Dickson, expressed the hope that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people work together to re-establish the association of equals that once characterized the relationship between Indigenous peoples and newcomers in North America. To succeed, this partnership approach requires that partners from both sides question long-held views, put aside prejudices often inspired by ignorance and fear and accept the other in his or her difference.

With this end in view, building awareness and understanding through public education is certainly a first step. Yet knowledge alone is insufficient to change fundamental attitudes. Despite an overlay of concern, it does not take much provocation to uncover prejudiced attitudes and deeply embedded hostility among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike.

Also needed are opportunities, for meaningful interaction and commitment. A relationship among peoples is not a once-and-for-all transaction. It needs to be adjusted regularly and, from time to time, explicitly reaffirmed.

To this end, be not disturbed at being misunderstood; be disturbed at not understanding. Also keep in mind, as an Aboriginal elder once reminded me: "The substance of eloquence is that behind language, lies commitment."

Merci. Thank you.

Kinosao Sipi Minisowin Agency: Creating a Community Response for Special Needs Children

Charlene Ducharme^a, Doreen Muskego^a, Alfred Muswagon^a,
Clarence Paupanekis^a, Mike Muswagon^a, Walter Spence^a and Jacqueline Ramdatt^b

^a Kinosao Sipi Minisowin Agency, Norway House Cree Nation, MB

^b Formally with the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, ON

Introduction

According to the National Population Health Survey, there were approximately 564, 575 Canadian children and youth between birth and 19 years of age with disabilities in 1996-97 (CICH, 2000). Among Aboriginal¹ Canadians, 22% of youth between the ages of 15–24 are reported to have a disability—three times higher than that of non-Aboriginal Youth (Demas as cited by Hanvey, 2002). Today, most children with disabilities live at home with their families as opposed to being placed in institutions as they were for most of the 20th century (Valentine, 2001). Unfortunately, this notable change does not mean that disabled children are full and active members within their communities. Despite the policy attention directed to children in recent years, children with disabilities have at times been excluded and the particular needs of their parents overlooked; for First Nations² children and families the situation is even more prominent (Valentine, 2001). Access to sources of support such as disability support services, health services, equipment, home care, education, child care and recreation are just some of the challenges faced by special needs children and their families (Hanvey, 2002). For those living in remote, poorly resourced communities the difficulties are even greater. In this sense, First Nations children on reserve are particularly vulnerable; and although there are a large number of Aboriginal children affected by disability,

Abstract

The Children's Special Services program was created by the Kinosao Sipi Minisowin Agency to meet the requirements of special needs children and their families in the Norway House Cree Nation community of Manitoba. While the program itself is an excellent resource, its creation highlights the challenges faced by Aboriginal children with special needs and their families in regards to accessing services. Specifically, the creation of the program draws attention to the service vacuum that Aboriginal children with special needs must face. The value of the program to the community cannot be underestimated as due to its existence, fewer parents have to make the choice of either placing their children in foster care or moving from their community in order to access services.

service delivery is consistently poor or non-existent in Aboriginal communities (Hanvey, 2002).

This paper will highlight the Children's Special Services program which was created by the Kinosao Sipi Minisowin Agency in response to the lack of support services for special needs children and their families within the community. The factors driving the creation of the program, conditions and indicators of success as well as challenges will be examined.

Procedure

The data for this article was gathered through a group interview conducted with Kinosao Sipi Minisowin Agency³ (KSMA) staff members Doreen Muskego, Project Coordinator Special Services, Clarence Paupanekis, Executive Director, Charlene Ducharme, Assistant Executive Director, Alfred Muswagon, Term Program Coordinator and Norway House Cree Nation Councillor, Mike Muswagon. The meeting took place at KSMA head office in Norway House, Manitoba.

Background

Norway House Cree Nation Community

Kinosao Sipi Minisowin Agency (KSMA) is a fully mandated child and family services agency responsible for ensuring that child and family services, as outlined in the Manitoba Child and Family Services Act, are carried out with the membership of the Norway House Cree Nation. One of the largest First Nations in Manitoba, Norway House has a population of almost 6000 (on and off reserve combined). The community has experienced a significant amount of infrastructure and community development since 1994 and is equipped with a number of amenities including a hospital and personal care home, two schools, churches, apartment buildings, public works facilities, a shopping mall and motel (Norway House Cree Nation, 2005). Culture and traditions such as Treaty and York Boat Days are important aspects of life in Norway House and these are celebrated throughout the year.

Child Welfare Framework

KSMA received its mandate in April 1999 with the signing of a tripartite agreement between the Child and Family Services Support Branch of the Province of Manitoba, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, and the Norway House Cree Nation Chief and Council. Under this agreement KSMA is responsible for the provision of child and family services as governed by the Manitoba Child and Family Services Act. The agency's mandate was initially limited to First Nations members living on the Norway House Cree Nation reserve. However, the restructuring of the child welfare system within the province of Manitoba, under the 2003 Child and Family Services Act, has now provided the agency with a province-wide mandate. This expanded mandate means that KSMA is responsible for the provision of child and family services to status bearing Cree Nation members both on and off reserve throughout the province of Manitoba and has the authority to sign service agreements with other service providers to fulfill this function.

The restructuring of the child welfare system in Manitoba occurred through the implementation of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI). The AJI-CWI is a joint initiative of the Manitoba Métis Federation, the Assembly of Manitoba

Chiefs, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak⁴, and the Province of Manitoba. This joint initiative was based on the recommendations of the 1991 report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry⁵ (AJI) which found that Aboriginal people were not well served by mainstream child and family service systems (AJI-CWI, 2001). The newly developed child welfare system acknowledges cultural differences and returns the right to develop and control the delivery of their own child and family services to First Nations and Métis peoples (AJI -CWI, 2003).

Under the new system which came into effect in May 2005, the delivery of child and family services is a more shared responsibility between the Province and Aboriginal peoples with the proclamation of the Child and Family Services Authorities Act in November 2003. Aboriginal children and families now have access to child and family services under the auspices of Aboriginal Authorities/Agencies no matter where they live in the province of Manitoba (AJI-CWI, 2003). This is accomplished through the delegation of responsibility for the delivery of child and family services from the Province to four new child and family services Authorities: Métis Child and Family Services (CFS) Authority, First Nations South Child and Family Services (CFS) Authority, First Nations North Child and Family Services (CFS) Authority and the General Child and Family Services (CFS) Authority (AJI-CWI, 2003).

Each community-based child and family service agency in the province is accountable to one of the four province-wide Child and Family Services Authorities. KSMA is affiliated with the First Nations North CFS Authority. The Northern Authority is responsible for the executive management of the service delivery system for First Nations of northern Manitoba while its affiliated agencies are responsible for direct service within the communities (First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority, 2006).

It is believed that all Manitobans will benefit from this new approach which respects culturally appropriate services (AJI-CWI, 2001).

The Practice Context

All children have the right to enjoy a full and decent life. As articulated by Article 23 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC),

not only do disabled children have the right to a full and decent life, they are also entitled to conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate active participation in the community; States Parties are urged to recognize the right of disabled children to special care and services as well as assistance for children and their caregivers. Recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada as one of the most universally accepted human rights instruments in history, the CRC was ratified⁶ by Canada in 1991 (Shanner, 2003). However, despite this commitment on behalf of federal and provincial governments, the federal Standing Committee on Human Rights and Disabled Persons observed that both levels of government appeared to have forgotten the needs of Aboriginal people noting the fragmentation of services, lack of strong program structures and inconsistent standards (Canada House of Commons 1993 as cited by Hanvey, 2002).

Community supports for Aboriginal children are of particular concern as accessing community-based services is even more difficult for those residing in remote or rural areas. Given that at least 72% of Aboriginal youth live in small rural communities⁷, children and adolescence with special needs do face unique challenges. “Children and adolescence with special needs in rural and northern communities are extremely underserved and their needs poorly represented in policy and services derived from large metropolitan populations” (Centre for Excellence for Children and Adolescents with Special Needs, 2002).

Kinosao Sipi Children’s Special Services was created to meet the service needs of physically and developmentally disabled children living on reserve. Prior to the Children’s Special Services program, there were no therapeutic services available on reserve for children with special needs or support, educational or otherwise, for families caring for children with complex medical needs. While disabled individuals 18 years of age and older resident on reserve are able to access home support services through the local health care provider, children with disabilities, including those with complex medical needs, are automatically referred to KSMA for services.

Accommodating these referrals posed very real challenges for KSMA. As a child welfare provider, the agency did not have the resources or medical/health training to respond to the, at times, complex

medical needs of the children being referred. The agency also experienced pressure from family doctors and other professionals, who unaware of the service situation on reserve, would send letters filled with recommendations and suggestions for care based on urban expectations and accompanying resource base.

The availability of funds to develop a program to meet the needs of children and their families was also a challenge as KSMA does not receive funding for special services under its federal funding agreement, Directive 20-1⁸. Under this agreement, KSMA receives funding through two major categories known as operations and maintenance. Operational funding is based on the population of Status Indian⁹ children resident on reserve in the 0 – 18 age group and is intended to support the administrative functioning of the agency for salaries, travel, insurance and operational expenditures. Maintenance funds are provided on a reimbursement basis and cover costs related to placing children in care. Without designated funds to create programs to meet the service requirements of special needs children and their families, KSMA initially tried to respond to this service gap by using funds from its operations budget. This arrangement, however, created pressure on other service areas within the agency and could not be sustained. Without adequate funds to support the delivery of these much needed services, KSMA had to turn away up to 22 families seeking assistance.

Understanding the service gaps for First Nations children and families on reserve might better be understood when viewed in the context in which Aboriginal people receive health and social services in Canada. Aboriginal people receive services through a unique blend of federal, provincial and Aboriginal-run services as well as other programs and services (FNCFCS, 2005). The federal government provides services to Inuit and to status Indians on reserve. Health services are provided by Health Canada through the First Nations Inuit Health Branch and funding for child welfare services are provided by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). Provincial and territorial governments provide services to Métis, status and non-status Indians living off reserve.

Given the complexity of this service matrix, jurisdictional conflicts often do arise. Provincial governments have refused to provide services for Aboriginal people on reserve and the federal

government does not provide all the required services (Hanvey, 2002). These are long standing disputes between governments regarding who is responsible for the care of children. According to a recent report, 12 First Nations Child and Family service agencies experienced a total of 393 jurisdictional disputes in a one year period which required an average of 54.25 person hours per incident to resolve (FNCFCFS, 2005)

The situation in which a special needs child is referred to agencies such as KSMA often occurs in the following manner: A family initially tries to obtain services for their special needs child through the federal health care provider on reserve which delivers primary health care services. Through Health Canada's Non-Insured Health Benefits program, coverage is available for a specified range of drugs, dental care, vision care, medical supplies and equipment, short-term crisis intervention, mental health counseling and medical transportation (Health Canada, 2005). The full service requirements of special needs children which may include, in home support, special equipment, long-term occupational, speech and physical therapy may not fall within the spectrum of services provided. Children are then by default referred to the local child and family service agency, which is funded by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. The child welfare provider through taking the child into care is able to provide services under its maintenance budget which is then billed to INAC. Depending on the nature of the services provided, a jurisdictional dispute may ensue between the two federal departments (Health Canada and INAC) regarding which is fiscally responsible for the services rendered.

The limited and often lack of services on reserve had a direct impact on the lives of children and families in the Norway House Cree Nation community. In the absence of programs and services, families on reserve either placed their children in foster care or moved away from the community. By placing their child in foster care, which is covered under the KSMA maintenance budget, families are able to access some therapeutic equipment and services for their children¹⁰. Similar issues regarding the disruption of families in order to gain access to care was highlighted by the May 2005 Report of the Ontario Ombudsman which brought attention to the plight of Ontario families

having to place their special needs children in care in order to access services (Marin, 2005).

Families who move off reserve are able to access provincially funded services. Having to leave the familiarity and traditional family support of a home community in order to access services is an undesirable choice, however, the contrast between the resources available in an urban centre and rural or remote community can be great. Kinsoao Sipi Minisowin Agency Executive Director, Clarence Paupanekis, shared his own experience of this reality stating that his family did not become aware of the existence of in-home support services for children until living temporarily off reserve for educational purposes. While living in an urban centre, the family had access to a whole range of services and was able to receive in-home support services for their special needs child. These services, which were provided by the provincial government, did not follow the family when they returned to the reserve.

The Kinsoao Sipi Children's Special Services Program

For an agency with a stated vision of 'fostering healthy family unity for the betterment of the Norway House Cree Nation' (KSMA, 2005), turning away families in need of assistance was intolerable. In order to address this critical service area, KSMA was able to successfully obtain funds by submitting a three year proposal to deliver a Children's Special Services Project from the Norway House Cree Nation Community Master Implementation Agreement Trust Fund. This is a fund to which members of the community can put forward proposals on a yearly basis for social or economic causes of benefit to the membership of the Norway House Cree Nation. Proposals are reviewed by the Trust Committee and Chief and Council in terms of available funds and are then subjected to a community approval and voting process in meetings attended by band members. KSMA was able to receive a \$450,000 per year grant to develop and deliver a program which would provide services for children with special needs on reserve for a period of three years.

The KSMA Special Services program supports families in caring for their children in a way that promotes family unity and community strength. The Kinsoao Sipi Children's Special Services program, now in its second

year of operation, provides individualized in-home support services through a tri-level delivery model which is child-centered, family focused and community-based. Within the context of the program, special needs refers to a “disability, delay or health disorder which can be a physical or mental impairment that is anatomical (affecting bodily structure), physiological (affecting bodily functions) or a psychological abnormality (affecting the mind), or a combination which results in marked or severe functional limitations” (KSMA Special Services, 2005).

The goals of the program are to:

- Provide accessible services so that families with special needs children do not have to leave the community for service supports;
- Provide individualized In-Home Support Services;
- Improve the quality of life for all children with special needs by providing services to help them with the activities of daily living;
- Work with the whole family to ensure everyone is involved in the decision making process, thus empowering the family unit;
- Network with other resources (schools, hospitals, etc.,) in and out of the community;
- Educate families about disabilities to help strengthen the family’s care capacities; and
- Promote awareness and education on the issues and challenges faced by children with special needs and their families.

In-home support services offered in the program include:

Rehabilitative Therapy Services:

- Speech therapy
- Occupational therapy

Case Managers who provide:

- Counselling and advocacy
- Networking and referral
- Assessments, coordination and monitoring of care plans, evaluations, home-visits and escort services

In Home Service Providers who:

- Are trained to meet the unique needs of each child

- Assist with household needs
- Interact with children in planned daily activities
- Provide therapy services as trained by professional therapists

In 2004, the program provided a number of workshops and presentations for parents and care givers as well as camps for children including (KSMA, 2005):

- Alternative forms of communication (sign language and picture exchange systems) workshop
- CPR and First Aid Training
- Dental Health – a mouth course for special needs children
- Promoting Literacy presentation
- Occupational Therapy Mini workshop
- ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), ODD (Oppositional Defiance Disorder), and FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder) presentations
- Self-care Training for service providers
- Summer Camp for Extra Special Kids
- Self-esteem Camp including bully prevention and drug and alcohol prevention workshops

The importance of this program for families and children in the community should not be underestimated. Prior to the program’s establishment, families with children in need of specialized services either had to move off reserve whereby they qualified with the Provincial Children’s Special Services Program for a wide range of services for the parents and children, or parents had to place their children under a voluntary placement agreement with child welfare authorities in order to receive services. The Kinosao Sipi Children’s Special Services program helps to keep families together.

Indicators of success

The Special Services program has demonstrated considerable success since its implementation. The program has been able to meet the identified needs of children and families in the community for in-home support services, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy. Education which enables families to gain an understanding of the nature of their child’s disorder is also provided. As a result, there has been a significant increase in the demand for program

services and an increase in the number of families being served. One of the biggest indicators of success, however, is the gratitude and appreciation expressed by families and their strong support for the program's continuation. Some of the responses of families expressed in the Special Services Questionnaire are shared below:

A lot of families desperately need these services. There is finally something here in Norway House. A lot of families cannot afford to relocate to receive respite, occupational services etc.

When I found out my daughter was borderline autistic, I was glad I had answers as to why she was so different but also disappointed because I couldn't go to anyone for help in my community. I had high hopes for my daughter and my only answer would be to move her away. Now that this service is provided I feel that I don't have to leave because there is a door opened for her here – that she's been given resources to meet her needs.

This program has really helped my child with understanding and respecting herself. And it really helps our family.

It [the program] has taken a lot of pressure and stress from us. We live a healthier life now. Our son is more outgoing and interactive with other kids.

Two additional indicators of great significance are that since the program's implementation, fewer families have had to leave the community in order to access services and children are no longer being placed with child welfare authorities as a means of receiving assistance. Within the context of community development, the program is a source of employment for a number of community members. The degree of staff retention is also a worthy signifier with the program experiencing very little staff turn-over. This is a substantial benefit for clients as it supports consistency in service provision.

The ability of a program to operate in congruence with organizational and community principles is also a significant indicator of success. In this regard, the program has been successful in engaging families and promoting the family unit – something which is conceived as a benefit for all Norway House Cree Nation children. A positive aspect of family and community engagement is the use of

respite/support workers assisting the family and special needs child with family activities and/or participation in community events. The program utilizes community resources, of which families are identified as one of the most important, and in this way reflects and reinforces community values and beliefs of sharing and helping one another. The volunteer Parent Committee is another example of family and community engagement. This committee, consisting of parents who are currently involved with the Children's Special Services program, organizes monthly activities for children and families involved with the program. A modest budget is provided to assist the committee with setup activities.

It is important to note that there are some indicators of success which, though valuable, cannot be measured quantitatively. An example of such an indicator is the alleviation of stress and pressure on the family. Parents involved with the program have time for self-care and are no longer compelled to leave the workforce in order to stay home and provide care. These are factors which benefit the family as a whole and also function to improve parental self-esteem. The interest expressed by other Northern and Southern Manitoba communities to shadow the Special Services program is an indication that the program success is being noted.

Conditions for success

Undertaking a community needs assessment was cited as an essential condition for the success of the Special Services program. The community assessment (was) is a tool which can identify (identified) the nature and scope of community needs and actions which can be taken to address the issues as identified. An additional condition for success is hard-working, committed people to ensure proper implementation of the program. Strong advocacy skills and a political voice to raise awareness of issues, needs and negotiate solutions are also necessary. The philosophical underpinning of the program in terms of being child focused, family focused and community-based, requires active involvement and engagement of families and the promotion of family unity which is seen as a benefit to all Norway House Cree Nation children. Finally, as the Children's Special Services program is a community-based initiative, community support for program development, funding and evaluation is required. Community support is

sustained by ensuring transparency through monthly reports and an annual open house.

Challenges

Funding related challenges are the most common and pressing issues identified by KSMA staff in relation to the provision of services for children with special needs. Funding restraints are significant factors in terms of why the Special Services program was created, its current implementation and future sustainability. Restricted funding means that the program, ironically, cannot keep pace with its own success. The high number of clients being served and the program's fixed budget means that future clients may have to be turned away and/or the range of services provided curtailed in order to meet increasing demand. In actuality, this is already becoming a reality for the program; in the second year of implementation, cutbacks in services have already been made. The agency had initially been able to provide transportation and accompaniment services for children requiring out of community medical appointments and the program's previous capacity to assist parents to obtain therapeutic tools recommended for the children by professional services has diminished. Insufficient funding also means that KSMA is restricted in the populations of children which can be served. Although the agency would like to provide services for children with FASD, for example, this is not currently possible. The need for specialized personnel, such as a physiotherapist, to provide service to the children within the community, cannot be fiscally accommodated.

Conclusion

Through the use of community funds for program development, KSMA has been able to provide services for children with special needs and their families. While access to community financial resources for program development, implementation and evaluation was an option for KSMA, this is not the case for all First Nations child and family services agencies. Even for KSMA, this solution though successful, is a vulnerable one given the time limitations of program funding.

While the Children's Special Services program is a promising practice for which KSMA can be proud, the circumstances driving its creation does raise some troubling questions.

How is it that in a wealthy, modern nation there are children, families and communities that go without or are left with unsuitable choices? How is it that families who want to care for their disabled child either have to leave their community or surrender their child to child welfare authorities? The Kinosao Sipi Children's Special Services was created to fill a service vacuum created by governmental oversight and disputes essentially regarding fiscal responsibility for Aboriginal children.

It is fortunate for the children and families of the Norway House Cree Nation that they belong to a community which has found a way to respond to their needs. Communities need to be supported in this role while governments must come to terms with their responsibility for all children. In this regard, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Federal and provincial government departments, particularly Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) should permanently fund programs such as those of Kinosao Sipi Children's Special Services on reserve that are comparable and equally funded as those that are available in urban centres such as Winnipeg with the fundamental principle of working with the community network to promote and enhance the child, family and community values, beliefs, customs, and culture.
- ii. All stakeholders (CFS Agencies; First Nations/ Federal/Provincial governments; Non-Profit Agencies) assemble to create solutions for a mechanism to avoid any delays in service delivery.
- iii. Programs such as the Kinosao Sipi Children's Special Services are substantial enough to be independently incorporated community resources which work collaboratively with other community health and social service providers.

The circle of caring needs to be expanded so that families are not faced with unsuitable choices and no child is made to live with the consequences of them.

Endnotes

1. Aboriginal is a term used to denote the original inhabitants of North America. Three separate groups of Aboriginal people are recognized under the Canadian Constitution: Indian, Métis and Inuit. It is important to recognize that these are separate peoples

with unique heritages, cultural practices, languages and spiritual beliefs (INAC, 2004).

2. First Nation is a term which refers to Status and non-Status Indians in Canada. Although there is no legal definition for this term, it is widely used to replace the term Indian. First Nation is often used to replace the word 'band' in the name of a community (INAC 2002).

3. Norway House Family (child and family services) Agency.

4. Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak is a political body that represents the interests of Northern Manitoba First Nations Communities.

5. Commissioned in 1988 to examine the relationship between the Aboriginal peoples of Manitoba and the justice system, the AJI included an assessment of the historical treatment of Aboriginal people by the child welfare system (AJI-CWI, 2001).

6. Having ratified the CRC, Canada is obliged to respect the rights of children articulated therein.

7. Centre of Excellence for Children and Adolescence with Disabilities (2002).

8. This funding is administered by the federal department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

9. The term Status and non Status Indian are legal terms identifying an individual's legal status as an Indian as defined by the Indian Act.

10. Access to resources such as specialized foster homes or residential care facilities through the use of a voluntary placement agreement is also a restricted option as there is a limit regarding the number of times such an agreement can be entered into before the matter must then proceed through the courts in the form of a permanent order. Voluntary placement agreements are used for children ages 0-17 and end on the day the child turns 18 years of age (Section 14 Child and Family Services Act, 1985).

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The Impact of Poverty on First Nations Mothers Attending a Parenting Program

Barbara Harris^a, Mary Russell^b, and Annemarie Gockel^c

^a Barbara Harris, MSW, RSW, and Ph.D Candidate, is of Dene heritage. She is the First Nations Advisor and a Lecturer at the UBC School of Social Work & Family Studies. Research interests include urban Aboriginal women's experiences with addiction services, Aboriginal social work education and curriculum, and evaluation of services to First Nations.

Address: UBC School of Social Work & Family Studies, 2080 West Mall, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z2

Office: (604) 822-6622 Fax: (604) 822-8656

Email: bharris@interchange.ubc.ca

^b Dr. Mary Russell is a Professor at the UBC School of Social Work & Family Studies. Her research areas have included family violence, client feedback, and services for high-risk parents. Her practice areas include family violence and mental health.

Address: UBC School of Social Work & Family Studies, 2080 West Mall, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z2

Office: (604)-822-2794 Fax: (604)-822-8656

E-mail: mrussell@interchange.ubc.ca

^c Annemarie Gockel, MSW, and Ph.D. Candidate (UBC, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology). Her research includes high-risk parents, spirituality, and substance abuse. She was program manager as well as clinician in addiction services for many years.

Address: 306-1549 Kitchener St., Vancouver, B.C. V5L 2V8

Phone: (604)-258-4146

E-mail agockel@telus.net

Introduction

Parenting programs are an element of Family Preservation Services (FPS), which may be home based, or community based, and include a variety of educational, practical, and supportive resources aimed at mitigating or reducing risk of child abuse and neglect, without removing children from their

Abstract

Urban Aboriginal mothers' experiences with Family Preservation Services indicate that while such interventions ameliorate the challenges they face, poverty is not adequately addressed. Prominent are the importance of prevention; attention to process; cultural context; and attention to actual needs, however, First Nations mothers (a) feel lucky when they get things they need, (b) feel 'inadequate' about the inability to manage finances, and, (c) perceive the lack of support in meeting needs to be a result of racism. As well, poverty often leads to forced compromises which can perpetuate risk of coming to the attention of child welfare.

homes. However, although there have been increases in family preservation services, apprehensions are still increasing as well (Pelton, 1997). The Federal Provincial Working Group on Child and Family Services Information (2005) reported that between 1998 and 2000 Ontario's children in care (CIC) rose from 12,079 to 16,516; Alberta's CIC's rose from 6,629 to 7,946, and British Columbia's CIC's rose from 12,574 to 14,032. Additionally, in a review of investigations in Canada between 1998 and 2003, Trocme et al (2003) found an increase of 125% in substantiated cases of maltreatment, a pattern which echoes Petlon's conclusions.

In an Aboriginal context as well, apprehensions are not subsiding, yet this cannot be adequately explained by the above mentioned trends. Walmsley (2005) notes that while less than 1% of British Columbia's CIC's in 1955 were Aboriginal, by 1964 the number had jumped to 34.2%. Currently, some regions report that up to 80% of CIC's are Aboriginal (Trocme, Knoke and Blackstock, 2004). Blackstock, Trocme and Bennett (2004) note that

Aboriginal children are overrepresented, investigations are more likely to be substantiated, cases are more likely to be kept open for ongoing services, and children are more likely to be placed in out of home care (p.901).

Pertinent are the links between colonization, poverty and apprehension of Aboriginal children (Walmsley, 2005; Mandell, et al, 2003; Blackstock, Trocme and Bennett, 2004; Fox, 2004; Trocme, Knoke and Blackstock, 2004; McKenzie and Hudson, 1985). From residential schools, to the 60's scoop, to modern day child welfare, the agenda of assimilation continues. While Aboriginal agencies are moving towards greater control over child welfare (Bennett, n.d.; Timpson, 1995), a reduction in rates of placements "may not occur until resources are allocated to address the social problems that undermine parents' abilities to care adequately for their children" (p. 596).

In terms of parents' abilities to care for their children, the relationships between Aboriginal mothers and child welfare authorities are further clouded by a mainstream ideology of motherhood, whereby "individual First Nations women are blamed for the difficulties they experience in child raising...[with little or no attention to]... the history and current dynamics of colonialism and racial oppression" (Kline, 1993, p. 306). Kline argues that these dynamics are fundamental to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out of home care and further adds that privileging mainstream ideology of child rearing undermines and invalidates Aboriginal parenting practices and traditions.

In reference to research, Blackstock et al (2004) note that progress is limited in terms of developing data on services to families involved with non-Aboriginal child welfare authorities, that there is a lack of qualitative research on Aboriginal families within child welfare, and that research should include "Aboriginal child welfare agencies and mainstream agencies...." (p. 175).

Additionally, there is limited research on Aboriginal peoples' perspectives on prevention and support services. In a philosophical analysis of how FPS could be developed to serve Aboriginal clients, Coleman, Unrau and Manyfingers (2001) describe the need to attend to the different conceptions of family, time, parenting and spirituality, but also argue that "focusing exclusively on the family without

addressing larger social concerns perpetuates notions of pathology" (p. 66), while Anderson (1998) argues for a more prominent focus on family support versus apprehension.

Unfortunately, government cuts to income relief and to family preservation services during the period of the study indicate a general lack of commitment to poverty stricken families, and lack of concern about perpetuating the risks that child welfare and FPS supposedly seek to avoid. While an understanding of Aboriginal mothers' experiences with different aspects of child welfare is needed, this analysis provides important insight into urban Aboriginal mothers' experiences while attending mainstream family preservation services, and highlights the impact of poverty among these mothers. The findings indicate a need to reverse the current status of FPS, which has minimal priority within child welfare, and to restructure social services in order to eradicate poverty.

Context Of The Study

The data being reviewed here is based on a sub-group of participants in a longitudinal study of parent experiences with Project Parent, a program provided by Family Services of Greater Vancouver. The program provided intensive services to parents whose children were considered to be at risk of abuse or neglect by child protective services. Parents with young children attended the program at the centre for two days per week, while other parents received in-home visits as well as attending group programs at the centre. Transportation, meals and child care were provided. Individual counseling, parent education groups, coaching and modeling of positive parenting techniques, introduction to community resources, goal setting, and advocacy with other services were components of services provided. Program duration ranged from 3 months to 1 year. Families were followed through the program and for a period of up to one year after exiting the program. Of the 35 families involved in the study, six were headed by Aboriginal mothers, and of 115 interviews, 19 (16.5%) were conducted with this group; two participants were interviewed six times over a one and a half year period, one was interviewed four times, and three were interviewed only once. All six families in this report were living in poverty, and were in receipt of Income Assistance. Five of the mothers were living on their own, while

one had a live-in partner at the time of the study. Four of the mothers lived in commercial rental housing, while 2 lived in designated aboriginal accommodation. Two of the mothers completed high school, with four reporting only partial completion. Five mothers reported being victims of family violence, while four had addiction related issues.

While the findings may not be generalized to all urban First Nations women who come into contact with FPS, these 19 interviews provide a keen insight into issues faced by this population, including the impact of poverty. Importantly, the quotes are not restricted to experiences with FPS – rather, they reflect these women’s lived experiences during their interactions with FPS.

Results

In reviewing Aboriginal mothers’ experiences while attending Project Parent, the two prominent themes related to perceptions of services they have accessed, and of living in poverty. Aboriginal mothers expressed interest in prevention, paying attention to process, addressing needs, and cultural context. However, compounding the challenges that Aboriginal mothers face in caring for their children is the issue of poverty. As well, poverty leads to forced compromises which can perpetuate the risk of contact with child welfare services.

Prevention

Prevention is an important priority among Aboriginal mothers who want to overcome the historical patterns arising from colonization, to create healthy environments for their children, and to get the emotional support they need. First, it is important to realize the relationship between history, and the current realities, which include a lack of needed role models, and a lack of confidence in ability to parent. Parents do, however, want to break the cycle, and give their children what they need.

I'm not looking for someone to have all the answers in my life, I'm just saying how can I deal with my daughter in a positive way that's not like what I've seen growing up.

I've learned a lot about: number one, my dysfunctional behavior ... you only do what you know and sometimes you don't know a lot because you weren't taught a lot from

your own parents. I never had help before ... someone to show me how to parent.

Watching my girlfriend, helps me to realize I can do it, and at the end of the program, it made me have more confidence in myself.

Being aware of and acknowledging the intergenerational impact of colonial policy on Aboriginal families can help prevent the tendency to blame these mothers for their lack of skills and knowledge in parenting their children. For these mothers, history is a motivator.

Another concern among urban Aboriginal mothers is the environments which their children are exposed to. Minimizing the negative impact of the environment on children involves considering safety and security.

I'm really big on location ... there's a lot of programs in the DTES – I'm not prejudice. I've got family down there, but ... I have a hard time bringing her down there, so location is location. I like it here-it's bright, happy, safe.

I need a secure and loving environment. I wouldn't stand in the food lines if I had my kids with me... I wouldn't be taking them down there.

They have been asking me to volunteer, until about 8:30 at night and I'm like 'no, not in that area – it's nasty. I can't imagine commuting home with my daughter at night time like that.

Aboriginal mothers are aware of the influence of the environment on child well-being, and programs need to assist these mothers in ensuring healthy environments in which to parent their children. As will be seen later on, poverty is a crucial factor in relation to creating a healthy environment.

As well, prevention involves emotional support. Isolation is an insidious risk factor permeating the lives of Aboriginal women in a climate of marginalization, and these mothers recognize the risks associated with isolation.

I've already made my mind up – I don't want where someone comes to my house and does Outreach, because that is just going to put me back into that hole again of being depressed ... if I have no one to go to.

It was better for me because I'd started to get really depressed at home – not having nowhere to go; nobody to talk to.

I preferred my last social worker. He was there more emotionally for me ... because when I was just having a rough day at home, I could call him up and he'd take the time to talk to me ...

These mothers want to avoid getting depressed, and view emotional support as a necessary preventive measure.

The interest in preventive measures is a result of urban Aboriginal mothers' awareness of factors that affect their ability to adequately parent their children. They understand that history, environment and emotional support are all factors which influence parenting and ability to function, and it is important to build on these understandings, and support their goals in relation to overcoming historical patterns, creating healthy environments and avoiding depression by providing needed emotional support.

Paying Attention To Process

Another issue concerns the importance of process versus outcome based interactions that involve collaboration, listening, comfort and continuity, client centered services, and clarity regarding expectations. First, urban Aboriginal mothers prefer collaborative relations, and noticed a change after the cutbacks.

They kind of held my kids over my head, saying, if I don't come here, we'll take your kids. I didn't appreciate that, – I felt like they were holding my kids over my head and saying go or else. I had no choice in the matter.

My social worker put me in here. She didn't force me to be here, but it's something she thought would be best for me and my kids because I'm a single parent with two kids, and then she mentioned here, and I said: okay, I'll try it.

Before they would ask, they would always ask what everyone would like to learn or what we are looking for and then they would set it up for us. They don't do that now.

Importantly, while feeling coerced had a negative impact, all of the mothers expressed an appreciation for Project Parent, and collaborative relationships

can prevent hard feelings that may get in the way of helping mothers reach their goals.

Secondly, the issue of not being heard is common in the transcripts, and leads to further difficulties for clients. For example, the first quote in this section was from a mother who was cut off from services as a result of missing meetings with the worker

The reason why Carol is not seeing me no more – is because of missed appointments. And I said: well, I've asked you to remind me – maybe the day before, but she would call me on the day of the appointment, and the worst part of it is the days that I did have to see her would fall on Welfare Wednesday, which is the day I need to go and get groceries, because we are probably all out by cheque day. It may not look like we are struggling, but we are. I just need a little bit of a support system, to say: I'm there tomorrow... not, I'm here now!

Alternatively, when service providers don't listen, clients are frustrated, and sense a lack of caring or concern.

I've asked my social worker to come with me, more than 4 times. He's never come with me. And I told him that I feel like I'm at my wits end here ... I feel like as much as I ask you all for help, it don't seem like I'm getting it.

It is important to recognize that clients don't just want to be heard – they want congruent action. In both cases above, the participants felt unheard based on the inaction of service providers. The indication is that if a service provider did hear the client, and can't oblige the request, they need to - at the very least - inform the client of the situation, versus simply not acting. Clients are all too aware of the failure to listen and act on their behalf.

An additional concern related to feeling comfortable, and having continuity with staff and clients. Given the sordid history of social workers in the lives of Aboriginal families, it is understandable that establishing comfort takes time. Noticeable in these quotes is the affect of cutbacks to funding that led to a reduction in programming.

I wish we could have it the way we had it because it was so comfortable and we talked about what everybody wanted and what they needed help with and we would

have enough time to just talk about what is going on in our lives.

If I were to run something like that the first day would be trying to kind of know each other ... I want to feel comfortable and not just have total strangers and just blather out what is going on in my life. And they don't do that.

In our new parenting program we only have two people that I knew from there, we have a whole new crew and that's what makes it uncomfortable. At our old place it was the same people everyday.

Developing comfort takes time, and continuity provides comfort in sharing their concerns with other participants and staff. Importantly, these comments show the negative impact of service cutbacks on urban Aboriginal mothers. Apparent is the need to consider the importance of program continuity when making decisions about funding.

Urban Aboriginal mothers also appreciate client centered services that are structured, and provide practical skills in parenting. In the case of the former, structure helps maintain focus.

The people in the program now are not very focused and he doesn't seem in tune with what's going on, so it's a lot different. He doesn't have control over the group ... he just lets everything slide. That's what totally screws it up. It will just slide right off subject and there goes the whole day.

One final factor relevant to paying attention to process is that urban Aboriginal mothers described challenges related to clarity of expectations.

There's a lot of requirements required of me to – in order to get my children back – they don't really tell me directly what is expected of me – I kind of have to go around doing what I think they expect of me, in hopes that is what they want. I found that to be a big struggle but there's not really a lot of communication between us. They have their agenda that they have to fulfill – and because my kids are in care, I don't really know what that agenda is. They don't directly tell me what it is ...

Clear communication of expectations will assist mothers in understanding what they need to do to be able to move beyond their current status with child welfare agencies.

Overall, paying attention to process includes collaborative relationships, listening and acting, comfort and continuity, client centered services, and clarity regarding expectations. These issues indicate the importance of relationships between clients and service providers, and imply a need for respectful, sensitive interactions which can enhance successful outcomes.

Cultural Context

From a cultural perspective, parents expressed the importance of cultural continuity, but also discussed the cultural conflicts they experience as urban Aboriginal women. First, the importance of identity and culture is evident among urban Aboriginal mothers, who value the ability to foster their children's cultural identities.

She has to know, ... who she is and what her back ground is ... when I grew up I never had any of that so I just want to teach her to be proud of who she is.

Very good genealogical graphing and that was really interesting and helpful, and that's good for the kids. I can go through those later on and explain to my kids – I can explain their line to them - who their family is. That's important for them.

Additionally, these mothers also appreciate access to cultural activities, which assist them in their own wellness and healing.

With the counselor there was a lot of spiritual teachings... every time I went to see him I was learning so much about myself and the medicine wheel. It's like an unwritten or unspoken teaching to balance ourselves on the wheel - emotionally, spiritually, physically and mentally - that is something we always strive for and I was getting all of that from working with this individual. I think I was resenting the fact that I could no longer see this person.

I am going to a ceremony this week ... there's praying and drumming and singing ... It can be really healing because a lot of times I'll walk out of the Lodge feeling pretty A-ok – pretty relaxed.

I was given a name ...I was so thankful because for me it was like a sense of relief that now I don't have to worry about relapsing again. I'm not saying that name is

going to save me from doing that, but it just gives me that much strength.

Access to cultural resources can enhance urban Aboriginal mothers' ability to progress through the system successfully by providing a focus on healing and wellness, while reducing stress.

Furthermore, Urban Aboriginal mothers also appreciate Aboriginal service providers' familiarity with their specific needs and issues. There is a sense of common history that doesn't need to be explained, and which can facilitate a bond with workers.

They understand more because they are First Nations, whereas [in the] other one if I said something they would be asking all these million of questions and I don't want to get into it.

First Nations it's easier ... we all come from the same history so we have a lot in common.

The social worker I have – it's a lot easier because she only works with First Nations ... she knows more of my history so it's a lot easier for me and her to have a bond.

Thus cultural continuity involves teaching the children who they are and where they come from. For the mothers, ceremonies provide them with strength and comfort, and access to cultural resources/services provides a needed familiarity.

Secondly, for Aboriginal women, living in an urban setting involves cultural conflicts. One mother expressed the challenge of figuring out how she would provide her children with a sense of their father's cultural identity – Spanish, and her own side – First Nations.

I'm not sure which way I want to teach them. Last year we were going to Powwows all year round – so that's something I want to keep up ... I know in the Spanish culture the big thing is going to church on Sundays. That's something my culture doesn't do.

Another mother discussed the conflict between her and her mother, who abandoned her at an early age. As a result, she doesn't identify with her mother's culture, which leads to conflict in their relationship.

She tries to tell me to do cultural things on her side of the family, cultural stuff from where she comes from and why should I. I was never raised there. I'm not with your

band so why should I follow your traditional teaching.

As well, one mother feels alienated from her family, who are living on reserve.

And here is L, single mum, in the city, in Vancouver - bi-racial who is not full Native ... They can't relate to me. They don't relate to me paying my bills by myself, or feeding myself and not needing them.

None of the clients described opportunities to address concerns related to cultural conflict with service providers, yet being able to understand and negotiate these conflicts is an area of concern for these mothers.

Addressing Needs

In terms of needs, the main issues are accessibility, and help with basic needs. First, in terms of accessibility, parents appreciate transportation, and flexibility, but also want ongoing access to services. Importantly, providing transportation affects attendance in programs.

One of the thing that I like is that they have extra bus tickets to get me here and there, and if I don't have any bus tickets they provide a ride or make arrangements for me to get a ride – like this morning I didn't have any bus tickets or money to get here so they arranged for a ride.

They helped me – they are just very on the ball with how the rides are going to work out. Like if my kids are sick during the day they'll make sure to phone early enough to let me know that my kids are sick and I won't come in that day. Well organized.

Flexible access means that parents can get immediate assistance when they need it, but also relates to policies which limit access. Flexible access to services when they're needed reduces stress.

It was so nice there ... I could go to anybody if I needed help ... and they could help me right away. Just knowing that they're there it's a big load of your shoulders, but now that they are not there it is hard, it is really hard.

I'll be getting another family support worker, but she only works Thursdays and Fridays, and I need a support worker that can help me all the other days.

Urban Aboriginal mothers also appreciate flexible eligibility criteria that don't have age limits, and that allow the whole family to be involved. Such criteria for participation may be viewed as a funding issue, but also affect interest in attending.

It's kind of hard because of their age groups and they will only take kids for eighteen months and younger and she past that so it's really hard ... because of the cut backs a lot of them have age limits.

I didn't bother looking in to it because of where it is at ... and besides, men aren't allowed in it ...

Additionally, the need to maintain access to services on an ongoing basis, provides a sense of security.

I want to have something to lean on if I breakdown or something.

My social worker wants to close my file because I'm doing so good, but it sucks ... because I lose all my services, I don't get a bus pass, and I'll lose my social worker. I don't want to be stranded.

Thus, access to services affects attendance, reduces stress, and provides security.

As well, these mothers stress the need to learn new skills that will reduce difficulties in parenting. For example, improving communication alleviates frustration. Alternatively, while mothers want to know about developmental stages, asking for help and not getting it increases frustration.

It is just so much easier to communicate with her now, not trying to guess what's wrong with her. She can tell us what's wrong... before you were always trying to guess what was wrong with her and now she can tell us what is going on.

I was asking for support ... about her stages ... how to deal with her. But for the main part ... my worker basically reiterated things that I already know, so it made me feel kind of like I was spinning my wheels... it didn't really seem to go too far and ... that's not really helping me in the sense that I need.

As mentioned earlier, urban Aboriginal mothers want help in this area, in order to effectively parent their children. This involves behavioral and cognitive strategies such as age appropriate discipline, and

setting healthy boundaries, as well as simply improving communication. Ongoing feedback from clients can help ensure they're gaining the skills they need.

Secondly, parents especially appreciated help with basic needs. Many services are required that reduce the challenges of poverty including, for example, access to a phone, and clothing.

I use the phone here a lot because I don't have a phone. I use the phone, usually before and after my sessions when I'm here at Project Parent. If I have any faxing, like the support letters or personal letters for myself, say resumes or something like that, I have free access to fax services. Yes, so that's quite a bit.

She showed me the clothing room ... which was really helpful, because my girl is still using the clothes. And it's nice like that ... it's helpful.

It is also important to understand how adherence to policy can have a negative impact on clients and create further hardship in stressful times.

The first month that they were here they knocked off \$350 for support which is for food ... because of bureaucracy with the Court I wasn't supposed to get anything more than that until I had something called a "supervision order document" ... that could be passed to my financial aid worker. That didn't happen, so I didn't get the remaining of my supports. It was a real challenge for all of us to adjust to that part right there.

We're financially stuck right now, welfare isn't giving me anything. I am really stuck I am stressing right now because they're at the end of their milk, they're hungry because we have no food. The worker wanted a letter from my husband's work ... but I can't get a hold of his boss ... so she turned around and closed my file.

Furthermore, mothers fear repercussions if they aren't able to provide for their children.

I think it was two times I asked for a bed for her and for myself, and they turned it against me and split up my cheque ... saying you've exceeded the limit amount for some crisis grant. I said: excuse me, you want my daughter sleeping on the floor so you can call social services and have them take her? They didn't really get it.

Ultimately, the issue of poverty permeates the lives of this client group, and it is especially important to become aware of, and address poverty.

Understanding The Impact Of Poverty

A closer look at poverty in the lives of urban Aboriginal mothers indicates that these mothers (a) feel lucky when they get things they need, (b) blame themselves for financial difficulties, and (c) feel that the failure to get needs met is due to racism. Importantly, the reason social services exist is because of a belief that people have a right to a basic standard of living. Yet, these mothers lack a sense of entitlement, and feel lucky when they get things they need.

The foster parent brings them here, and then on the Tuesdays I just get my own way there ... I've been just lucky – I've had money at the time, so I've been able to get to the visits.

We are a lot more fortunate than other single parent families in that we live in Native Housing so we – if I'm in between jobs, I don't have to worry about it. I don't have to worry about the roof being yanked from us that sort of thing.

Furthermore, these mothers blame themselves for the difficulties in managing their meager finances:

I think I've made a lot of mistakes with my budget ... It was really crazy, like food and bus fare that was about it. But I think you really learn from your mistakes. I think lessons like that – it makes you learn more. Makes you plan more.

I got to learn how to keep money through the whole month. Like I said, we are on social assistance and I spend money that we don't have. It's just me ... my problem. I shouldn't have to struggle as much as I do because of the way that I spend money. And that's buying her extra clothes that she don't even fit yet, but she's got clothing in her closet until she is a teenager; because there may be a time where I say: I just don't have the money.

Ultimately, these mothers interpret the failure to get their needs met to be a result of racism, which permeates their experiences with service providers across disciplines.

It's hard. I'm only half First Nations, but it's hard to be at the point where people don't want to help because people think ... she's just a Native trying to get out from working.

They look at me as if I drink, and as if I use drugs, and I don't buy stuff for my kids ... I've done so much trying to show them that just because I'm Native, we all don't do that.

The doctors that I've been to have been really prejudiced with me ... I'm not your stereotypical First Nations – I'm a real person on welfare.... And I burst in to tears and I said: I'm tired of you people not signing this paper for me because you think I'm a Native who wants not to work. He was just judgmental and didn't sign it.

Last but not least, poverty stricken Aboriginal women have limited choices and have difficulty obtaining adequate housing. As such, they are often forced to make compromises which affect their vulnerability to interactions with authorities including child welfare, due to the negative impact on parenting. Thus, urban Aboriginal mothers find themselves in a CATCH 22 which is a direct result of living in poverty. For example; living with relatives who are still abusive leads to children picking up unhealthy behaviors; sharing a home with family who party at night affects getting adequate sleep; and living in housing where there are other social issues among neighboring families can lead to interactions with police.

Sometimes, her partner would be verbally abusive with her and saying things to her; when they get upset with each other. So our biggest challenge right now with S, is her copying those words when she gets frustrated. It's hard.

My partner's uncle – this is his place, so that's how we got here. Their hours are different than ours, so it's hard. They are like night owls and we're not ... so we're going to bed at 10 ... and they don't get up and start moving around until that time! So when they're sleeping, we are waking up. And they don't walk light upstairs ... so it's kind of hard sometimes.

Someone was calling social workers on me and saying that I was neglecting my children; and that they had no food; and

that they had no clothes. So I had people at my door investigating me ... you know how many times the cops have come to my house banging on the door demanding that there's a restraining order on me ... And I say: excuse me, you have the wrong door ... leave me the @#+ alone! It feels like the cops are always banging on my door, looking for someone, trying to tell me it's me ... and I'm like, what the? There's nothing going on here.*

Each of the above three quotes indicate scenarios could easily lead to attention from child protection services, as each situation affects the ability to parent their children. It's particularly important to realize that accommodations made due to poverty should not be blamed on these mothers or their capacity to parent. The choices are often a result of poverty, and related to minimizing hardship in meeting other basic needs such as food, and clothing.

Discussion

While FPS can provide help with basic needs, other stressors can be reduced by facilitating preventive measures. These include assistance with overcoming negative historical patterns arising from colonization, creating healthy environments for their children, and getting emotional support to avoid isolation and depression. Mothers in the current study indicated that they, like the majority of parents, have the best interests of their children at heart, and desire to overcome negative effects of history and environment. Group programs that provide continuous and flexible support as well as culturally relevant experiences were reported as beneficial in this regard by mothers.

In terms of the nature of services, mothers valued the provision of process versus outcome based interactions that include collaboration listening and congruent action, fostering comfort and continuity, and clarity regarding expectations. Mothers reported satisfaction when goal setting was a collaborative process wherein they experienced service providers as clearly listening to their accounts and being helpful in formulating positive strategies. Mothers also valued clear and specific information about expectations and/or requirements in terms of child protection supervision orders, as opposed to the common experience of vague and/or changing expectations and requirements.

Cultural resources that foster cultural continuity and healing were valued by the mothers, who found that positive cultural influences assisted them in regaining a sense of cultural identity and assisted in negotiating cultural conflicts. Mothers reported gaining strength from traditional cultural ceremonies and indicated a desire to pass on the benefits of their cultural identity and traditions to their children. Furthermore, mothers experienced greater empathy and a shared sense of history when service providers were of a similar cultural background. Cultural conflicts, however, of various types, were experienced by the mothers, none of which had been directly addressed by any service providers. This clearly indicates a gap in present service provision.

Furthermore, the need to ensure access to services needs to be addressed. In many instances this includes the necessity of meeting concrete needs such as transportation, clothing, or access to telephones. In other instances this requires modification of program intake criteria to include other family members that are important mothers..

Finally, it is particularly important to understand the impact of poverty on this population. The urban Aboriginal mothers in this study indicated that they feel lucky when they get things they need, blame themselves for financial difficulties, and feel that the failure to get needs met is due to racism. The extent of self-blame is noteworthy given the reality that Income Assistance rates place all families below the poverty line. Insufficiency of funds thus virtually ensures major difficulties in meeting basic family needs. Mothers benefit from messages that their situation is difficult, and from acknowledgment of their efforts to secure the best possible outcomes for their children. Mothers also appreciated assistance in dealing with the 'isms,' as acknowledgement of their experiences of stigmatization due to culture or class.

Ultimately, there is a need for comprehensive services that are adequately funded to meet the real needs of clients, and that are culturally appropriate to the client group. Furthermore, there is a need to restructure social programs to elevate those in need out of dire poverty. Family preservation services are not sufficient to address the inequity experienced by urban Aboriginal mothers, and current cutbacks further reduce the ability of such programs to make a meaningful impact on needs. Most importantly, there is a need to include service users in the design,

delivery, monitoring and evaluation of programming, as well as in the decision making processes associated with funding and social service policies.

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Aboriginal Youth Talk about Structural Determinants as the Causes of their Homelessness

Cyndy Baskin^a

^aAssociate Professor, School of Social Work, Ryerson University, ON, Canada

Introduction:

This article, which is based on a research project, explores the structural factors that may have led to the homelessness of Aboriginal youth in an urban centre. It begins with definitions of homelessness, then examines the prevalence of homelessness for Aboriginal youth and next turns to a brief discussion of colonization and the role of child welfare in this process. The article then reports on the findings of the project that was conducted with homeless Aboriginal youth in Toronto using a culture-based research methodology.

This research project was conducted by myself as the principal investigator and a youth who is currently attending university as the research assistant. I am of Mi'kmaq and Irish descent and a professor in a school of social work. The research assistant is a young, Ojibway woman with a social work degree who is now in law school. We are both active participants in Toronto's Aboriginal community and have many relatives who have been/are homeless youth and who have had involvement with child welfare.

Author Notes: Chi meegwetch to Lori Mishibinijima, the research assistant on this project, the youth workers who helped to set it up and the inspiring youth who participated. I hope I get to sit in future research circles with you.

Questions or correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to:

cbaskin@ryerson.ca

Abstract

This article explores structural determinants as possible causes of the homelessness of Aboriginal youth in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. It includes a brief literature review and provides some of the findings of a recent research project, which implemented an Aboriginal research methodology with homeless youth in Toronto. These findings point to a strong link between Aboriginal children growing up in poverty and involvement in child welfare and becoming homeless as youth. Suggestions for positive change at the policy level are offered in order to prevent the next generation of Aboriginal children growing up to become homeless youth.

Toronto was chosen as the site for this research project as both the principal investigator and research assistant reside there and have connections to several Aboriginal agencies that service youth. In addition, Toronto has a large Aboriginal population and represents many diverse Nations (Statistics Canada, 2003). The medicine wheel was selected as the research methodology for the project after consulting with Aboriginal youth workers and youth themselves. They confirmed that the majority of youth were familiar with the medicine wheel and it is a teaching tool used by many Nations such as the Cree and Ojibway.

While there does appear to be some overlap between Eurocentric models of structural determinants and those presented by Aboriginal scholars (DuHannmel, 2003; Thomas, 2003), such as education, income and diet, this article proposes that to adequately address determinants faced by Aboriginal youth, a framework that is culturally appropriate and addresses colonization needs to be implemented. It further proposes that an arm of colonization which is

likely related to homelessness among youth is their involvement in state institutional child welfare (Cauce & Morgan, 1994; Fall & Berg, 1996; Fitzgerald, 1995; Lindsey, et al, 2000; Maclean et al., 1999).

Current research on Aboriginal youth is minimal, especially in the area of homelessness. Available statistics do not illustrate the extent of the problem, although most advocates suggest that the rate of homelessness for this population is dramatically increasing (Abrahams, 2000; United Native Nations Society, 2001). The purpose of this research project, then, was to explore with homeless Aboriginal youth the conditions under which they became homeless, how they may be assisted today and what can be done to prevent homelessness from continuing in the future. The significance of this project is connected to the fact that Aboriginal youth are the fastest growing group in Canada while the non-Aboriginal population is aging (Hick, 2007; Hoglund, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2003). It asserts that it will become increasingly important to Canada's future, especially in terms of our workforce, to ensure that Aboriginal youth be healthy and productive members of society. This article contributes suggestions for change to social policies and direct practice focusing on control of child welfare by and with Aboriginal peoples.

Definitions

Common definitions of homelessness include people that live on the street, stay in emergency shelters, spend more of their income on rent or live in crowded conditions which keeps them at serious risk of becoming homeless (Golden, et al, 1999). The Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (1998) states that homelessness means simply not having secure housing.

This committee expands on the definition by contending that homelessness "means being exiled from the mainstream patterns of day-to-day life" (para.5). Canadian federal New Democratic Party leader Jack Layton (2000) describes homelessness as socially constructed. In particular, he contends that homelessness is usually defined to fit a specific political agenda, or certain stereotypes, which eventually becomes the definition in the eyes of the public.

The United Native Nations Society (UNNS) of British Columbia, which is one of the provincial

organizations of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples that advocates for the inherent rights of Aboriginal peoples (2001), states that Aboriginal homelessness includes "those who have suffered from the effects of colonization and whose social, economic, and political conditions have placed them in a disadvantaged position" (20). The UNNS (2001) acknowledges that there is a high rate of Aboriginal peoples at risk of homelessness and, therefore, the effects of colonization should be included as a major part of an Aboriginal specific definition.

With particular attention to youth, homelessness is usually defined as those youth aged 15-24 who are not living with a family in a home, or not in the care of child protection agencies. Homeless youth are also described as those living "in an unsafe or temporary living environment" (Fitzgerald, 1995, 7). The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2001) and Golden et al. (1999) describe homeless youth as those youth with no permanent address.

Prevalence

Many sources state that there is no accurate data regarding homeless Aboriginal peoples, let alone Aboriginal youth (Golden et al., 1999; Layton, 2000; Native Counseling Service of Alberta, 2000; UNNS, 2001). In Layton's *Homelessness: The Making and Unmaking of a Crisis* (2000), what statistics exist show that Aboriginal peoples in general do have a high rate of homelessness as compared to the rest of Canadian society. The NCSA (2000) states that "the Aboriginal homeless rate is at about 40% Canada wide" (3). Golden et al. (1999), in their major report for the City of Toronto, reports that Aboriginal peoples make up 15% of the homeless population in Toronto and that "many Aboriginal Canadian youth from reserves and urban communities end up on the streets of Toronto" (75). If this 15% figure is correct, it means that Aboriginal peoples are overrepresented in the homeless population by more than a factor of three considering they make up only 4.4% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2001).

It is also important to note that the rate of homelessness is usually derived from the number of people who use shelters. However, the UNNS (2001) indicates that shelter users do not represent the entire Aboriginal homeless population as many do not utilize the shelter system. Furthermore, the Aboriginal community is estimated to have a high rate

of concealed homelessness and these numbers are not included in the official data. This category includes those in transition homes, jails and detox centres, and those who live in overcrowded, unstable, or inadequate housing. It also includes "couch surfing," which is when people stay at a friend or family members' dwelling for a short period of time, then move on to another persons' home. Another category that often goes unnoticed is those who are at high risk of becoming homeless. This category includes many Aboriginal peoples who live in poor housing conditions and pay more than 25% of their income for rental accommodations. Therefore, to completely capture the Aboriginal homeless population, all of these categories of homelessness must be included (UNNS, 2001).

It is also significant to note that Aboriginal youth are the fastest growing segment within the Canadian population. In the 1996 census, Aboriginal peoples constituted 3.8% of the population, while in the 2001 census this figure rose to 4.4%. The median age for non-Aboriginal peoples was 37.7 while Aboriginal peoples had a median age of 24.7. The birth rate for Aboriginal peoples was also 1.5 times higher than for non-Aboriginal peoples. This population will continue to grow because, currently, 33% of the Aboriginal population is under age 14, as opposed to only 19% of non-Aboriginal peoples (Statistics Canada, 2003). Similarly, Castellano (2002) found that over 50% of the Aboriginal population is under 25. Thus, not only is there a high rate of Aboriginal specific homelessness, but there may be a substantially higher rate of youth homelessness within this population given the demographics.

Factors Associated with Homelessness

Within the literature, the most frequently cited cause of homelessness for all peoples in Canada is lack of affordable housing (Golden et al., 1999; Hulchanski, 2004; Shapcott, 2001; TDRC, 1998). Some authors (UNNS, 2001; Weinreb et al., 1998) argue that personal factors, such as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, addictions, poverty, poor health, and/or dysfunctional family relations, are the cause of Aboriginal homelessness. Other literature states that socio-economic status and the lack of resources on reserves are also causes of homelessness (Beavis et al., 1997).

However, UNNS (2001) argues that even what appear to be personal factors are in fact the effects of structural barriers. UNNS (2001) states that the homelessness of Aboriginal peoples is rooted in "structural factors such as unemployment, low wages or lack of income, loss of housing, colonization, racism, discrimination (systemic or otherwise), patriarchy, cultural and geographic displacement, and the reserve system" (p.2). Other authors contend that the historical introduction of foreign systems such as education, justice, health and child protection have left Aboriginal peoples in a "cycle of economic dependency, including high rates of poverty and unemployment" (Morrisette et al, 1993, p.94).

Based on the literature outlined above, we assert that the factors associated with homelessness are connected to the omnipresent concept of colonization. Colonization did not only create the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and mainstream society - it is also experienced personally. Thus, we emphasize that the history of colonization and its current impacts explains, in large part, why some Aboriginal peoples are homeless in their own lands. We also believe that a framework which addresses the negative impacts of colonization on Aboriginal peoples and emphasizes our strengths needs to be developed. A Eurocentric lens fails to do this as it tends to frame Aboriginal peoples as social and economic disadvantages to the rest of Canadian society while negating our political power.

Institutional Child Protection

The distinctive factor between homeless adults and homeless youth is that the latter are forced to leave home at an early age, before they have a chance to fully develop into healthy adults (Cauce & Morgan, 1994; Fitzgerald, 1995; Golden et al., 1999; MacLean et al, 1999). In general, many youth that are homeless come from the care of the child protection system such as adoptive homes, foster homes or group homes (Cauce & Morgan, 1994; Fall & Berg, 1996; Fitzgerald, 1995; Lindsey et al, 2000; Maclean et al., 1999). According to one study, between 25% and 50% of homeless youth were previously in the care of foster homes (Lindsey et al., 2000). This may be connected to the fact that these systems are designed to care for young children (under 15), so youth encounter barriers to service because they are

too old for children's services and not old enough for adult services. Therefore, they are often left with no choice but to live on the street (Fitzgerald, 1995).

The child protection system, historically a tool of colonization, continues to the present day (Anderson, 1998; Du Hamel, 2003; Hudson, 1997; McKenzie & Seidl, 1995; Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba, 1998). Although there have been some Aboriginal child welfare agencies developed throughout Canada (Anderson, 1998; Hudson, 1997; McKenzie & Seidl, 1995), Aboriginal children are still over represented in the child protection system (Hudson, 1997; McKenzie & Seidl, 1995; Thomas, 2003). This may be due to the restrictions placed on Aboriginal child welfare organizations. These organizations do have some control over the policies and procedures within their agencies, however, they are still usually required to comply with federal and provincial laws and policies. As researchers in the area of Aboriginal child welfare, Bennett, Blackstock and De La Ronde (2005) write:

Up to this day, provisions in both federal and provincial legislation dictate how child welfare will be governed, administered, and, often, delivered by the over 120+ Aboriginal Child and Family Services Agencies in Canada. This would not be so controversial if the provincial and federal systems were meeting the needs of Aboriginal children and youth but the evidence overwhelmingly indicates that the current legislation, policy and practice of child welfare are not making meaningful differences in supporting the well-being of Aboriginal children and youth. The question is thus raised why Canadian governments have not recognized tribal authority that sustained child well-being for millennia (45).

For anyone to take an institution such as child welfare that has left a challenging legacy for many Aboriginal peoples and turn it into something appropriate for Aboriginal communities is an enormous task. Yet it is obviously the goal of Aboriginal child protection services. As Hoglund (2004) advocates, both research and policies developed within an Aboriginal context by Aboriginal peoples is crucial because:

Understanding how contextual mechanisms foster as well as challenge Native children's healthy social development is essential

for generating informed, strengths-based research priorities and supporting Native sponsored policy and program development ... Researchers, educators, service providers, and policymakers need to look beyond Western European models of successful development to adequately understand favoured socialization and developmental processes within the sociocultural, historical, political, legal and socioeconomic contexts of Native children's lives and the families and communities in which Native children live (165 & 168).

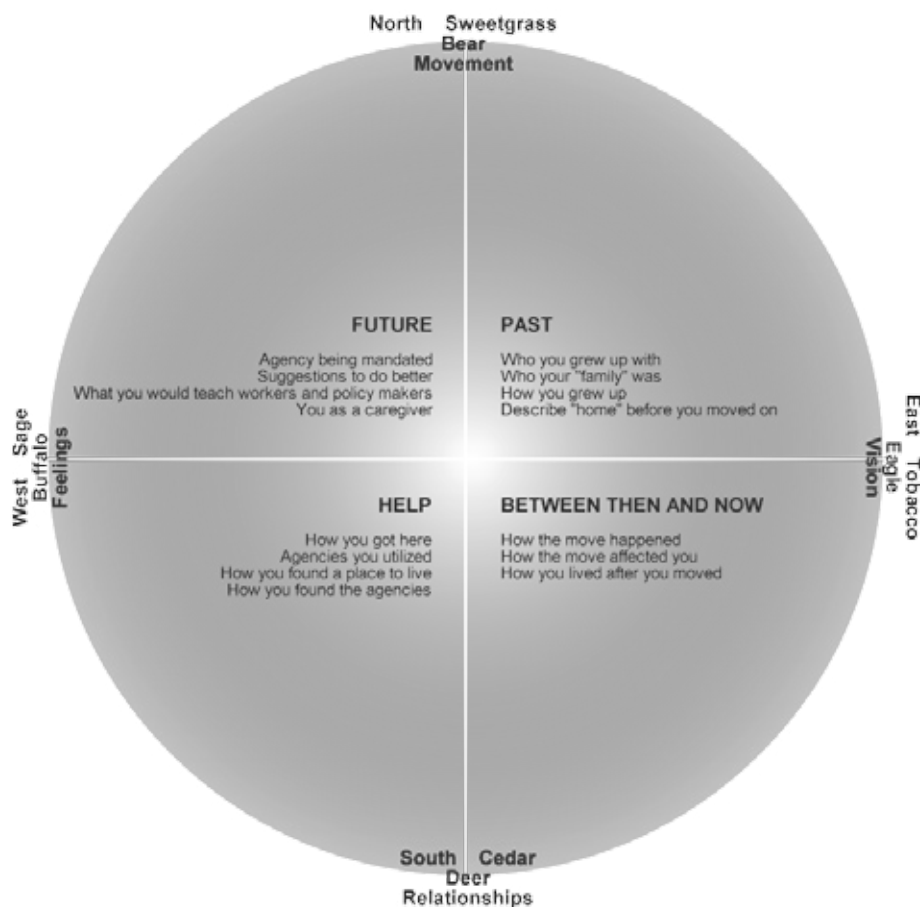
We stress that insider views are necessary in order to develop social policies that reflect Aboriginal worldviews and values. Thus, this research project explored the following questions with insiders – Aboriginal youth affected by homelessness:

- What is appropriate parenting within Aboriginal perspectives?
- What supports do Aboriginal parents, families and communities need to raise children?
- How does prevention become a priority?
- How do we frame “neglect” within the realities of poverty?

Aboriginal Youth Research Circles

In this research project with Aboriginal youth, which we (and an Aboriginal student research assistant) designed and conducted, one research circle took place at two youth programs within Toronto that service youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming so. A total of 24 youth participated. Basic information was obtained from the participants through a standard form that all of the youth filled out. Next, within the research circles, youth were invited to discuss specific areas about their past and current situations. They were free to decide for themselves which areas they wanted to contribute to. The research methodology was based on Aboriginal cultural protocols and integrated a tool known as the “Medicine Wheel” as shown below:

The youth were from a variety of Nations across Canada, however, the majority were of Ojibway and Cree descent. Approximately one fourth were Ojibway and another one fourth were Cree. There were also youth who had mixed Aboriginal heritage in their Nations, again approximately one fourth. About sixty-two per cent of the participants were male. None of the participants identified as transgendered



or transsexual. The majority of the youth reported as heterosexual. One youth reported being Two Spirited (gay, lesbian or bisexual). The age range spanned ten years from fifteen to twenty-five.

The youth participants were from many diverse towns and reserve communities across Canada, from Alberta to New Brunswick. The major trend in the place of origin was that three quarters of the participants were originally from reserve communities. The remainder were from small towns in northern areas of the country. Few participants were from large urban centres, and only one was born in Toronto. The length of time they had lived in Toronto also varied with some living here for eleven days and others for twenty years. At the time of this project, just over one third of the participants lived with a relative. Only four youth had lived in the same place for more than one year. The rest of the twenty youth had lived at their current address for less than a year. Thus, there was a dominant trend of temporary living conditions

with the youth who participated in this project.

Sixteen youth had completed grades eight through eleven. This illustrates that many of the youth had a high incompleteness rate for academic studies. This is especially significant considering that many of the participants were in their early twenties. One particular question on the information form was "what grade are you currently completing?" Six youth answered they were not completing any grade at the time and they had not completed grade twelve (needed for a high school diploma). This shows that in this group of Aboriginal youth in their early twenties, many have not completed high school and were not in the process of doing so. Of twenty four youth, only three were currently completing a college education and none were attending university. This information demonstrates a great need for more comprehensive educational resources and greater access to education that addresses the worldviews and needs of Aboriginal youth.

Eastern Direction: Looking Back

The first topic raised with the youth was “who they grew up with.” It was suggested to them that they talk about who their family was/is, how they grew up, and what were their homes like before they moved on. Most of the youth stated that they grew up in the care of the Children’s Aid Society (CAS), which included foster homes and group homes. More than half of all of the respondents mentioned having to relocate more than once. Those that stated they relocated said they moved to and from several different families and in some cases these homes or families were spread across the country. Four youth mentioned being in trouble with the law, were incarcerated, or always “getting into trouble.” Seven youth mentioned living in a lone parent female headed family. Two of the youth lived with their mother, but later moved in with their father. One participant stated that he lived with his grandparents for awhile. Only two youth stated that they lived in two parent families – one of whom was later placed in the care of CAS. Hence, only one of the twenty four participants had lived with both parents for a significant amount of time. Many of the participants had also moved back and forth between their biological families and foster care while growing up.

The predominant theme in the youths’ profiles is that the majority were not living with their biological parents. The responses of the youth illustrates that many of them did not have what mainstream society considers as the “traditional” family. This in itself is not negative. What is negative is the fact that many of the youth were in the care of the state and placed in unstable homes meaning that they resided with families or in group homes where they experienced psychological, emotional, physical, sexual and spiritual abuse, neglect and acts of racism (eg. one female youth was given the nickname of “squaw” in her foster home). Those who lived in lone parent families also lived with an element of instability. Many moved from home to home, both biological and otherwise, without consistency in their lives.

Southern Direction: Between Then and Now

Youth were invited to talk about the move from their “homes” into homelessness and how they lived after this move. The responses of the youth were varied. Each had a different story to tell. Some came to Toronto with their caregivers or relatives to look for

work or obtain an education. One youth was passing through Toronto, but experienced a crisis and was forced to stay. One stated that her adoptive parents were abusive which forced her to move out on her own. She stated that the street life was easier because she could make her own rules. Although this life was preferable in comparison to her home life, it was tough living on the streets. Resources were difficult to access because of her young age. One participant stated that she was “sick of group homes...too many rules” and that she was constantly moving from one group home to another. Two other participants explained how they lost their apartments due to lack of funds. Some of the youth that were in care, adopted, or in group homes stated that they lived in small towns and experienced a great deal of overt racism. They had believed that they could escape this by moving to a multicultural city like Toronto. A few youth explained how they were just released from jail, and how they were often in and out of jail. Three youth stated that they came to Toronto for opportunities; they wanted to change their lives around.

The major theme in these stories illustrates that growing up in the care of, or being involved long term with, CAS – whether that be adoptive homes, foster homes, group homes or moving between biological and foster families – is often a profoundly negative experience. When asked about the reasons for moving back and forth between biological and foster homes, youth explained that when a biological parent complied with the demands of child welfare, such as staying in counseling for a long enough time period or attending a substance abuse treatment program, they were able to go back to these parents. However, when the parent stopped complying by starting to drink again or getting back with an abusive partner, the child would once again go to a foster home.

In a number of ways, this response on the part of child welfare authorities can be linked to looking at Aboriginal parents only through a Eurocentric lens. Often when Aboriginal parents are placed in a position of complying with demands to get their children back into their care, intentionally or not, it is a set up for failure. For example, they may not be voluntarily participating in programs, these programs may not be relevant in terms of examining structural reasons for their situations or they may not be culturally applicable, there may not be enough emphasis on support of and resources for the parent or the values

and worldviews of Western society are being applied to Aboriginal parents which skews assessments.

Few of the youth who participated in this project experienced a positive home life. Many participants felt that they were forced to leave their homes. This was explained as, for example, not being wanted any longer by adoptive parents because they were rebelling, getting into trouble or questioning the rules. Even though some expressed how difficult street life was, none of them regretted their decisions for this was better than what they left behind. Among other things, this demonstrates that interventions need to be implemented before youth feel forced to leave their homes.

Western Direction: Help Along the Journey

The next area youth were asked to discuss was how they were able to receive help from social services agencies and how they were able to find a place to live once in Toronto. Some youth explained that they asked other Aboriginal peoples they did not know where they could stay for the night. Other youth stated that their friends or family members informed them of Aboriginal agencies in Toronto. One mentioned walking by a building that had an Aboriginal logo painted on the front, so he walked in. Four youth said that they were referred to an Aboriginal agency by mainstream organizations that service youth. Most of the participants agreed that they felt more comfortable at an Aboriginal agency. However, they also stated that it was good to get served by both Aboriginal and mainstream agencies. There were a few who expressed some dislike for certain Aboriginal organizations because of their experiences there regarding other peoples' behaviours such as intoxication and violence, but they still utilized them.

For the most part, the youth expressed a great sense of community amongst themselves, both within youth programs and on the streets. They spoke about helping each other out by sharing information about resources, agencies and service providers within Toronto that were considered to be non-judgemental of them and some of their behaviours, such as substance using. Many youth talked about sticking together when on the streets for greater protection from both other people on the street and the police and letting others know about safe places to sleep. When they had something to share, whether that be money, alcohol, cigarettes or food, they tended to

share it with other youth. Some of them referred to each other as brothers and sisters even though they were not related by blood. They also shared secrets, stories, emotions and laughter.

Northern Direction: Looking Towards the Future

The participants then explored what they would do to make the system better for future youth. They talked about what they would like to teach social workers and policy makers, especially with regards to the child protection system. To put this in context for themselves, the youth chose an Aboriginal child and family services agency becoming mandated as a child protection authority as an example to discuss what they would like social workers and policy makers to know. There were mixed feelings from the youth about the agency's change from offering voluntary services to taking on the responsibility of child protection. Many youth felt that bringing an Aboriginal perspective to child protection was vital. Others felt that it was a negative move because, in their opinions, the Aboriginal agency was too concerned with minor issues. One youth gave the example that "[a worker from the agency] stripped my kids because they had diaper rashes." Another young mother stated that the agency forced traditional ways on her, when she just wanted some emotional support. Another youth stated that other Aboriginal services were just as likely to involve child protection and related the example of an Aboriginal day care centre calling the Aboriginal child protection agency because her child had a "running nose." Some youth felt that the Aboriginal agency is "too quick to jump on rumours." Some of the participants who made these comments about the agency also expressed dislike for mainstream CAS, saying that they often felt like they were under "a microscope" and that they did not believe that child protection – either mainstream or Aboriginal -- would be so cautious with older adults. Thus, they felt like they were being discriminated against specifically because they were Aboriginal youth.

Although some youth disagreed with Aboriginal family services agencies becoming mandated, their suggestions for change did express some common themes. One raised a great difficulty with child protection stating that children have to be protected, but at the same time, Aboriginal families have different needs that are often neglected by these services. Next,

they talked about the importance of incorporating Aboriginal culture into the lives of youth, no matter who their families are. The majority of the youth agreed that even though Aboriginal family services becoming mandated is an empowering concept, it does not work if these services have to use the same legislation as mainstream CAS. Although mandated Aboriginal child welfare agencies employ Aboriginal peoples as workers to varying degrees and incorporate some practices such as involving extended families as care givers of children, they must follow the same legislation – the Child and Family Services Act in Ontario – as all other mandated child welfare authorities. This Act is not inclusive of Aboriginal values, particularly around collective responsibilities for raising children, nor does it acknowledge the impacts of colonization or the inherent strengths of Aboriginal peoples and communities. It does not make clear distinctions between neglect and poverty nor does it include aspects of prevention which is crucial to the well being of the future of our children and youth. In keeping with these points, some youth spoke about how mainstream Canadian society decides what is acceptable child rearing for Aboriginal peoples and this is where the conflict lies. Other participants expressed that there is a need for more Aboriginal policy makers to change child welfare legislation or the cycle of oppression will continue. They explained that if this is not done, then it will simply mean “putting a brown face on it” [Aboriginal control of child welfare]. They further explained that this may “soften the blow” for some, but continue to oppress many.

The youths’ suggestions about the need for more Aboriginal policy makers and changing child welfare legislation is brilliant. Since the current Child and Family Services Act does not address the sovereignty of Aboriginal peoples, what is necessary then is an Aboriginal Family and Child Services Act. Such an Act could address many of the concerns that the youth raised in this research project. For example, it would be developed by Aboriginal peoples according to our definitions of family, child care and parenting. This Act could clearly differentiate between poverty and neglect. It would reflect the values of Aboriginal peoples such as collective responsibility for children, communal sharing of resources and assisting families when they are struggling rather than taking their children away from them. Perhaps most importantly,

an Aboriginal Family and Child Services Act would recognize the impacts of colonization upon all of us and focus our resources, both human and financial, on the well being of everyone in our communities and on the prevention of further internalized oppression which leads to the harm of all.

The next major issue that youth discussed was the policies governing who is allowed to be a customary care (foster) or adoptive parent and how these need to be transformed to better fit the circumstances of Aboriginal peoples. First, youth concurred that permanency planning should be key, ensuring that workers try to keep children with family members. Another point was to have more customary care homes and adoptive families in reserve communities. Overall, the youth expressed their belief that there must be more Aboriginal families willing to adopt or care for children, and that the government needs to encourage and support this process through funding and legislation. Some of the examples they introduced were that some Aboriginal families may not have a lot of money, but that should not be a deciding factor in caring for children. They pointed out that many lower income families can do a good job of raising children. Furthermore, the youth took the stand that if being poor is such a concern, then the government should provide the necessary funds to foster families. They adamantly stated that, after all, the government is the reason why so many Aboriginal peoples are living in poverty in the first place. Moreover, these youth believe that preference should not be given to two parent families. Many Aboriginal families are headed by one parent who can raise children in a positive environment. Youth also stated that, if non-Aboriginal families are going to take in Aboriginal children, it needs to be mandatory that the children be connected to their cultures. They also believe that more effort needs to be put into keeping siblings together if families have to place their children into care. However, all of the youth were adamant that keeping families together must be of the greatest importance. One promising suggestion made to help keep families was that there could be a group of parents that can be used as an information resource for other parents who need it during times when they struggle with raising their children.

The participants also addressed the issue of child protection workers. They suggested that workers should be Aboriginal or, if not, have intensive

training on issues affecting Aboriginal peoples. They stressed the need for greater consistency in training and education for helpers and how workers need to take into account what the client wants. They want workers to realize that everyone is different and what is “normal” for an Aboriginal family may not be “normal” for a mainstream one.

In conclusion, the theme for youth regarding the future was that for real positive change to occur, adding in a few cultural pieces is not enough, but rather legislation and social policies have to be completely changed to better suit the needs of Aboriginal families.

Coming Full Circle: Analysis

The depth of analysis these young people demonstrate both in terms of their knowledge and understanding of the reasons for their homelessness, and the critical lens from which they view the world is amazing. They are insightful and articulate. They call it the way they see it and no one is fooling them.

These youth were easily able to comprehend their life experiences, which were for the most part contact with child protection and separation from their biological families and home communities, within the realities of colonization and oppression. A comment that stands out most perhaps is from a young man who said, “mostly we’re taken away by child welfare because of poverty and this translates into neglect by them.” For Aboriginal peoples, poverty is a direct result of colonization which destroyed the original economic basis of our communities. In contemporary society, breaking out of poverty is, in large part, dependent on acquiring formal education and employment. However, education has been historically genocidal and is currently alienating for many Aboriginal peoples so that 68.5% of youth do not complete high school (Hick, 2007; RCAP, 1996). According to the RCAP report, both youth and parents are adamant that education does not prepare them for life in understanding themselves as Aboriginal peoples nor does it prepare them for life in the modern world. In fact, according to this report, youth stated they left school because they were made to feel ashamed of being Aboriginal, they experienced racism and there was no recognition of Aboriginal perspectives in history or respect for their cultures.

Certainly, low educational attainment affects peoples’ future employment and income levels. However, according to the results of a study conducted by Kunz, Milan and Schetagne (2000), Aboriginal peoples also have difficulty finding employment because of racism in the work place. They found that compared to white Canadians, Aboriginal peoples with university degrees are less likely to have managerial and professional jobs. In addition, they are over represented in the bottom 20% and under represented in the top 20% of income earners. Even with the same level of higher education, white Canadians are three times as likely as Aboriginal peoples to be in the top 20% of income earners. These results are confirmed by Hick (2007) as well. Clearly, these studies reveals that even with university degrees, job opportunities are out of reach for many Aboriginal peoples.

Unlike the generation before them, this group of youth usually has a roof over their heads at night. But they do not have homes. Thanks to Aboriginal agencies that service youth, most of these young people are housed and have access to some health services. However, most struggle with poverty, have not completed high school, are transient, and, in the case of many female youth, are single mothers involved with child welfare who are often concerned that their children will be removed from them. This concern seems to come from a belief in the tendency for social service workers to “blame the victim” (Anderson, 1998; Hudson, 1997; Thomas, 2003). Even within Aboriginal child welfare agencies, internalized oppression has caused some Aboriginal peoples to believe the negative stereotypes about some members of their community and thus they treat them just as the dominant society does.

From a structural perspective, for the most part Aboriginal child protection agencies continue to be mandated to operate within the framework of legislation and social policies not based on Aboriginal values and perspectives. Since these policies do not incorporate the distinct needs of Aboriginal peoples, a major focus needs to be creating legislation and policies that are compatible with Aboriginal worldviews in general while taking into consideration the great diversity of our Nations. In addition to this, the legislation and policies must also take into account past injustices and the effects they have on the health

and behaviours of Aboriginal peoples today. To simply add in “culturally based practice” without any change to oppressive legislation is clearly detrimental for it changes little (Anderson, 1998; Hudson, 1997; RAJIM, 1998).

Furthermore, mainstream legal and political discourses regarding self-government, Aboriginal rights and treaties are grounded in Western constructions of nationhood that originate from European history and cultures. Such discourses inevitably marginalize Aboriginal worldviews in the construction of nationhood in self-government and treaty negotiations. This approach, then, continues to entrench Eurocentric-Canadian structural power imbalances rather than creating positive economic, political and social change for Aboriginal peoples. I emphasize that until constructs of nationhood can be examined from both an Aboriginal and a Eurocentric lens equally, self-government that creates inclusive and sustainable Aboriginal communities is impossible.

The preliminary work from this research project also has many encouraging messages. These youth are greatly concerned about the next generation. When they spoke about their experiences and recommendations, they did not do so in ways that will necessarily benefit them, but rather because they hope to make contributions to the future of both their children and all Aboriginal children in general. These youth also view positive change as centring on re-structuring child welfare legislation and social policy. They identified that change simply by creating Aboriginal child protection agencies with Aboriginal workers is not enough.

Aboriginal child and family services agencies are to be commended for picking up the responsibility of child welfare and attempting to incorporate traditional knowledges into their work. However, many colonial legacies have been passed on to their shoulders, such as internalized oppression, family violence, poverty and suicide, which they are expected to heal. They also must face unrealistic expectations placed upon them by both the Aboriginal communities they serve and mainstream society and governments (Hudson & Taylor-Henley, 1995; Bennett, Blackstock & De La Ronde, 2005). Aboriginal peoples, including those who work in the area of child welfare, must re-claim the knowledge that prior to colonization, we lived as autonomous groups and our inherent right to

self-determination – which included controlling the affairs affecting our families and children – was never abdicated despite the policies and actions forced upon us by Canadian governments (First Nations Child and Family Task Force, 1993; Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario, 2001; Bennett, Blackstock & De La Ronde, 2005). Aboriginal responsibility and control must go beyond child welfare service delivery to the creation of legislation and policies that will restore traditional forms of government. This is crucial since present legislation and social policies related to child welfare are based on Eurocentric values and worldviews, thereby making them an ongoing tool of colonization. Hence, as the youth raised, Aboriginal peoples must become policy makers in this area. Without significant changes to social policies, the major request to keep families together and concentrate heavily on prevention, which one youth described as “eliminating poverty”, cannot possibly happen.

According to the voices of this group of youth, holistic good health rests largely on the value of supporting families through equitable access to resources to care for the well being of their children. Such resources include inclusive education that is representative of Aboriginal youth, job opportunities based on merit and anti-colonial, anti-racist policies and legislation all of which aim to eliminate poverty caused by colonization.

Expanding The Circle: Future Research

This paper reflects the responses of only twenty four youth and so it cannot be said that they are representative of homeless Aboriginal youth in Toronto. Further research needs to be conducted. This preliminary work can be used as a template in terms of the Aboriginal research methodologies implemented and the framework for examining the structural causes of homelessness for Aboriginal youth. Thus, these templates can be incorporated into future projects involving more youth in Toronto, other cities in Ontario and urban centres across Canada. The implications of this project provide evidence that Aboriginal research methodologies are legitimate ways of conducting research with youth, that colonization lies at the root of social ills such as homelessness and that state intervention in the lives of Aboriginal families must end in order to realize

self-determination and self-government. In order for radical social change to occur, it must become unacceptable that Aboriginal peoples are homeless in their own homeland.

A few youth workers, several Aboriginal agencies that work with homeless youth, and some of the youth themselves have indicated a strong interest in being involved with a larger research project as partners. Thus, the findings from this project are being used to submit research proposals to possible funders for future research which would include both

Aboriginal students and other youth as research assistants. In this way, these youth will have the opportunity to develop research skills while making significant contributions to this work. Their goal of creating a better world for the next generation is possible.

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Detoxifying the Child and Family Welfare System for Australian Indigenous Peoples: Self-determination, Rights and Culture as the Critical Tools

Muriel Bamblett and Peter Lewis^a

^a Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, Australia

Introduction

Our approach in this paper is to provide an understanding of how the traditional circles of care for Indigenous children in Australia have been fractured historically by colonization and its ongoing impact through contemporary complex systems of disempowerment, disadvantage and cultural abuse.

We describe how the lives of Indigenous children can be put back together by restoring Indigenous circles of care through the creation of a culturally competent children and family service system which is focused on prevention and early intervention rather than just child protection.

The conceptual framework which the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) promotes builds on a creative interplay of human rights principles and cultural respect. For the child and family service system such a framework means developing cultural-based programs and service standards out of which we create a new culturally competent service system for Indigenous children and families and creating a framework of trust and understanding between Indigenous, mainstream services and government.

The new Children, Youth and Families Act in the State of Victoria in Australia and its companion reform process is the first real attempt in Australia

Abstract

The toxic environment that is colonized Australia has broken many of the traditional circles of care for Indigenous children and created a service system which waits for Indigenous families to become dysfunctional before there is any response.

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) encourages an approach to Indigenous children and families which is culturally respectful, culturally appropriate and framed according to the need to respect self-determination and human rights. VACCA has developed early childhood and family welfare policies which identify how cultural-strengthening works as a preventative measure to address risk factors for Indigenous children.

With the ongoing reforms to Child and Family Welfare arising from the Children, Youth and Families Act, the Victoria State Government in Australia has an historic opportunity to lead the nation in creating an Indigenous-led child and family service system which focuses on issues of prevention and early intervention. The new Act prioritizes cultural and community connection in the best interest principles for Indigenous children, recognizes self-determination and requires generalist children's welfare services to be culturally competent.

The only way to ensure that every Indigenous child is effectively cared for is by developing the capacity of Indigenous communities to look after their own by strengthening Indigenous organizations and agencies. It is Indigenous agencies who are best placed to deliver innovative programs which are culturally embedded and carefully targeted to restore the circles of care for Indigenous kids. A culturally competent service system is what is needed to ensure better outcomes for Indigenous children.

at creating a culturally competent service system premised on the principle of self-determination for Indigenous communities. We believe that the Victorian experiment, if it is properly resourced, offers an historic opportunity to rebuild capacity for Indigenous families to once again 'look after their own'. Our hope is that the new policy environment

Questions or correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to:

peterl@VACCA.ORG

in Victoria, in regards to Indigenous child and family welfare, will provide further opportunity to expand VACCA's culturally-embedded, family-strengthening programs and begin the complex process of detoxifying the social environment for Indigenous peoples in Australia.

Colonized Australia as a Toxic Environment

We cannot however go forward or talk about the future and discuss our actions or strategies without first looking back. For Indigenous people in Australia the process of colonization involved acts of disempowerment premised on, in many respects, Indigenous peoples being defined as part of the flora and fauna rather than as diverse communities with sophisticated systems of law, politics, economy, trade, ecology and culture. Indigenous economies were changed by land being cleared for the use of sheep and cattle and crops. Indigenous laws were ignored and the land treated as a terra nullius.

With disempowerment came disconnection as Indigenous communities were forced onto missions and reserves under the so-called protection of missionaries and overseers. Indigenous culture, spirituality and language was dismissed and discouraged. Diverse communities were forced to live together and their customs concerning kin and marriage were dismantled, creating confusion and brokenness. Finally Indigenous peoples were deemed a doomed race and their children were taken away under a racially defined understanding of 'best interests of the child.'

As a result of over 200 years of colonization, the Indigenous communities of Australia have been subject to a series of culturally inappropriate impositions and policy arrangements. These impositions have denied the reality of Indigenous communities, ignored their laws and customs and, ultimately, failed to recognize these communities as sovereign political and legal entities. At Federation no Indigenous person was consulted or involved, no recognition was given to Indigenous sovereignty or governance. The myth of terra nullius prevailed. The constitution's only mention of Indigenous people specifically excluded them from being counted as citizens and one of the early acts of Federal Parliament in 1902 denied Indigenous people voting rights. Indigenous communities have suffered from policies of 'protection', assimilation and integration.

In his history of child welfare in Australia, Robert Van Krieken, contends that social control theory has limited application in explaining general child welfare policy and development. He does note one critical exception, Indigenous families and the removal of their children. Indigenous child removal was clearly a policy premised on the need to control Australia's Indigenous peoples.

The whole issue of the 'Stolen Generations' has become a critical battleground in Australia's self-understanding. Since its release on May 26, 1997 the *Bringing Them Home Report*, which was a product of investigations and hearings into the historic practice of Indigenous child removal, has been pilloried as an insubstantial affront to Australian national pride or admired as an honest account of one of the most debilitating practices the colonizers has utilized to culturally dismember Indigenous people. Most churches and all state and territory governments have made their apology to the Stolen Generations. Only the Federal Government and the Federal Parliament have refused (although the Senate has passed its own apology resolution). The Report revealed for the first time in the broader public domain the reality and impact of government "forcible removal policies" on Indigenous peoples. Even the term "Stolen Generations" has become a matter of controversy. The term itself was coined by non-Indigenous historian Peter Read who became aware of the large numbers of Indigenous children removed from their families and communities through much of the twentieth century. Through Indigenous child-care organizations and various Indigenous activist groups a campaign emerged in the 80s to investigate this hidden phenomenon. Eventually the then Labor Government requested the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission to investigate the issue. Prime Minister Paul Keating's Redfern Speech in 1992 marked the first official acknowledgement of Indigenous child removal.

The context for this policy was Australia's official approach to Indigenous people, through its State and Commonwealth governments. Government policy changed from that of segregation through 'protection,' which forced the Indigenous population onto reserves or missions controlled by white officials, to that of assimilation in which Indigenous people (particularly so called 'half-casts') were to be subsumed into the

general population. Child removal was one strategy in this assimilation policy.

It is estimated that tens of thousands of Indigenous children were removed from their families and raised in institutions or fostered-out to non-Indigenous parents. One of the key ideas behind welfare is the idea of the 'best interests' of the client. Indigenous peoples in Australia have suffered greatly from a racially mythologized version of this idea. The story of the Stolen Generations is replete with examples of how their 'best interests' led to separation and alienation. When you live in a racist country – a racist presumption can lie behind any notion of best interests. In the case of the Stolen Generations the presumption is that non-Indigenous families and, even more bizarrely, non-Indigenous institutions can provide better care than Indigenous families.

Various state Aboriginal Protection Acts gave authority to Aboriginal Protection Boards to care for Indigenous children, effectively denied their rights as parents and enabled removal of Indigenous children.

It made little difference what the family situation really was or how the children were cared for, because being Aboriginal was in itself reason to regard children as 'neglected.' Even on the rare occasions when officials did not regard Aboriginal culture with contempt and fear, the emphasis on marriage and having fixed housing and employment in definitions of 'neglect' was inherently biased towards seeing all Aboriginal life as neglectful.

The Bringing Them Home Report points out a critical meeting in 1937 which marks an official statement of the 'problem' from the point of view of the State Government Protectors. This meeting was the Canberra Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities. The Conference believed that 'full-blood' Indigenous people were dying out. Incredibly the Conference saw no reason to slow this process and resolved that no government assistance was to go to missions which served full-bloods. For "natives of aboriginal origin, but not the full bloods", the Conference adopted a policy of "ultimate absorption... by the people of the Commonwealth."

While authorities asserted that, by removing them from their families and communities the lives of many Indigenous children would be improved the policy has led to issues of identity and a fracturing of families and Indigenous communities. So called 'best

interest' has led to generations of despairing people.

The culturally abusive Stolen Generations episode was a specific racist and colonial practice which sought to 'whiten' and remove Indigenous peoples from the landscape of Australia. Its impact continues to disrupt Indigenous families today.

Current Issues

Child protection intervention in the lives of Indigenous community remains disproportionate in Australia. The reasons for this are complex and various. Annette Jackson, in her paper on child protection and the Indigenous community at the Eighth Australasian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect suggests five interrelated factors:

- The Child Protection and Placement system may be overly interventionist in relation to Indigenous children, due to limited understanding of cultural differences and the impact of history on Indigenous families.
- Fear, distrust and/or antipathy by Indigenous parents towards Child Protection authorities due to previous government policies therefore reducing access to less-interventionist options which require cooperation.
- Indigenous disadvantage which creates greater risk of abuse and neglect.
- Absence of Indigenous specific universal and prevention services.
- The disproportionately large population of young people in Indigenous communities creating greater pressures for care.

American child psychologist, James Garbarino (1995) talks of socially toxic environments and their impacts on the raising of children. VACCA would argue that for Indigenous peoples, colonial/dominant culture is such a toxic environment. Added to this, much of child protection practice is based on individualistic notions of child welfare and therefore at variance with Indigenous cultural perspectives. Even today culture is often blamed, overtly or covertly, for family dysfunction by some child protection services, ignoring the likelihood that it is the impacts of dominant, colonial culture which are creating the dysfunction. Dominant culture factors are most clearly present in considerations of 'the best interests of the child' which fail to acknowledge the importance of culture for both the child and the

Indigenous community. As legal commentator, Philip Lynch suggests:

The dominant conceptualization of best interests ideology as applied by the courts tends to construct the best interests of First Nations and Aboriginal children as separate, distinct and abstracted from their constitutive familial, cultural and racial contexts.

A culturally-appropriate and non-discriminatory approach to Indigenous child protection necessitates that the best interests of the Indigenous child must take into account the Indigenous child's relationship to their culture and their community, particularly as it informs the child's sense of identity.

The aim of meeting the best interests of both the child and the community may be better achieved through the incorporation of a 'community's best interests' analysis into the 'child's best interests' analysis.

For Indigenous people 'neglect' is still one of the main reasons for notification and removal. We need to remind ourselves that for much of the 20th Century, as stated before, "being Aboriginal was in itself reason to regard children as 'neglected'." The matrix of the colonial/dominant culture continues to provide a racially discriminatory environment which both creates disadvantage and blames that disadvantage on Indigenous communities. Clearly neglect is primarily caused by economic and social poverty. Until rights issues are adequately addressed, Indigenous communities will continue to suffer systemic disadvantage.

When it comes to questions of abuse for Indigenous children what puts them most at risk is cultural abuse and a culturally incompetent service system which demonizes rather than treats the core problem. When the culture of a people is ignored, denigrated, or worse, intentionally attacked, it is cultural abuse. It is abuse because it strikes at the very identity and soul of the people it is aimed at; it attacks their sense of self-esteem, it attacks their connectedness to their family and community.

Cultural Abuse Remains to this Day

Unfortunately, the Indigenous child and family services system is still primarily focused on the tertiary end of the spectrum. It isn't good enough to have

a service system which, in essence, tells Indigenous families to "come back later when your kids are being removed": that is, to be ambulance chasers waiting for families at the bottom of the cliff to fall off rather than catching them before they fall. We need to have the ability to intervene earlier without making Indigenous families fear once again that the welfare are coming to take their kids away.

The other area of complexity in Australia is how the relationship between Federal and State/Territory Governments tends to confuse the issue as to who is responsible for Indigenous child and family issues. Internationally, particularly in Canada, the United States and New Zealand, there is greater clarity as to which level of government is responsible for what. The source of clarity for those nations rests with their acknowledgement of self-determination.

International comparisons

The Bringing Them Home Report and more recently Chris Cunneen and Terri Libesmann in "A Review of International Models for Indigenous Child Protection" have observed some key international examples regarding how self-determination has impacted on Indigenous child welfare. In the United States, the Indian Child Welfare Act 1978 gives tribal courts exclusive jurisdiction in child welfare proceedings concerning Native American children who live on or have their permanent home on a reservation. State courts have joint jurisdiction with tribal courts over welfare matters which involve Native American children who do not have permanent residence on a reservation. State courts must transfer jurisdiction to tribal courts if the parents, the Native American custodian or the Tribe make a request unless one parent objects, the tribe has declined to handle the matter or the State court finds 'good cause' not to transfer the case (section 101 of the Act).

There are a number of cultural safeguards if a State court has jurisdiction over a welfare matter. The child's Tribe or American Native custodian must be notified and can intervene and participate at any point in the proceedings and all parties have a right to examine all reports and documents filed with the court (section 102). Voluntary relinquishment can only occur if the judge is satisfied that the Native American parent or custodian understands the terms of the agreement and must be in writing. Voluntary

consent to foster care arrangements can be withdrawn at any time (section 103(a) and (b)).

An Indian Child Placement Principle is incorporated in section 105. An emergency removal of a child can occur where the child is in imminent physical danger (section 112). In these circumstances either the case must be referred expeditiously to the tribal court or the child must be returned home.

In Canada the Government recognizes Aboriginal autonomy and self-government and has made specific settlements and treaties with different Aboriginal First Nations. In 1995 the Canadian Government began negotiations with First Nations to define the exact powers to be transferred, determine what jurisdictions could be exercised and the nature of financial responsibilities. Child welfare and criminal justice issues have been included in this process. In 1989 the Department of Indian Affairs released a discussion document after a 3 year review. Since then, while provincial government child welfare systems remain in control of legislation, a number of First Nation communities have developed proposals and negotiated agreements transferring control. First Nation communities are continuing to develop culturally appropriate service models of their own.

Like Australia and the USA, Canada is a federation with the provinces taking responsibility for child welfare. Some First Nation organizations have called for national legislation to provide a framework to enable First Nation communities to take responsibility for child welfare.

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the British invasion and subsequent wars between the Maori and the non-Maori led to the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. While the Maori chiefs believed they had allowed for the presence of non-Maori, and not acceded sovereignty, the non-Maori assumed sovereignty as a consequence of the cross-cultural misunderstanding of the terms of the treaty. Despite this fundamental misunderstanding, the Treaty of Waitangi has enabled Maoris to advocate for and, in certain situations, acted on rights of self-determination and Maori sovereignty. It has enabled constitutional appeals to seek justice in various areas of dispute between the Maori and the non-Maori.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Maori activist groups and Maori staff of the Department of Social Services contended that the Children and Young Persons Act

1974 (NZ) and the Department were racist in their approach to Maori children and demanded a level of Maori control over their own children. In response, the Department of Social Welfare commissioned a Committee to inquire and report on welfare service delivery to Maori communities. Arising from the Committee's report, the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989 addressed child protection and juvenile justice with the aim of focusing on children's wellbeing in the context of their families, whanau (kin group), hapu (extended kin group with many whanau), iwi (descent group with many hapu) and family groups. Importantly, family group conferencing has been as an essential practical component of this approach to the child welfare needs of the Maori community. The key principles of this act include:

- Participation of family, whanau, hapu, and iwi in decisions affecting the child,
- An affirmation that intervention in a child's family life should be the minimum necessary to ensure their safety and protection,
- Consideration is given to the effect of intervention on the family, whanau, hapu, and iwi and
- That wherever practicable, the child should be placed with a member of the child's hapu or iwi or, if this is not possible, with a person who has the same tribal and/or cultural background and location.

Critical to this approach has been an acknowledgement of Maori self-determination although questions are often raised as to the adequacy of the resourcing of these principles and approaches.

The VACCA Perspective

It is clear that Indigenous agencies and communities are often caught between the politicking of the Federal and State/Territory levels of government. More often than not it is the Indigenous sector which gets the blame for failing to deliver. What is needed are clear Federal and State/Territory plans which compliment each other and recognize that self-determination is a critical organizing principle for effective Indigenous child welfare.

Self-determination was a key policy principle in Indigenous affairs in Australia from 1972 to 1996 and was the key consideration in the establishment of land rights legislation, the Keating Government's

approach to native title and the founding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. At both national and state/territory levels it needs to be said that effective self-determination has been limited, with only land rights legislation delivering any real measure of autonomy. In fact the process of being granted self-determination was experienced by many Indigenous communities as a process of confusion and abandonment. Trudgen recounts that, in the case of the Yolgnu people

Some of the old men ... wept and said directly to the missionaries, 'Don't leave us. We will not survive without you against these other Balanda [white fellas]'

What actually occurred in the case of the Yolgnu was that non-indigenous structures were placed upon the Yolgnu and traditional leadership structures were ignored, not to mention any actual engagement between the two legal systems to carry out the process of enabling self-determination in a cross-culturally appropriate way.

The formal nature of the relationship between Australian Governments and Indigenous peoples has remained undefined due to the lack of any treaty or treaties. The current Conservative Coalition Federal Government has abandoned self-determination as a policy principle.

The issue of self-determination was a key concern of the Bringing Them Home Report into the history of Indigenous child removal.

Clearly, the implementation of self-determination is important for juvenile justice, child welfare, adoption and family law matters. It is the principle grounding a right for Indigenous people to exercise control over matters directly affecting their children, families and communities. The Indigenous perspective on self-determination provides for the development of control over these areas of social life through processes which may involve some form of autonomy or self-government.

The Bringing Them Home Report recommends various measures to enable self-determination for Indigenous communities in the area of child welfare and protection. While its recommendations concerning draft national framework legislation have not been adopted by the Commonwealth Government nor agreed to by State/Territory Governments they do

outline the critical issues at stake concerning the need for self-determination in the area of child welfare.

Before informed decisions can be made there needs to be proper negotiation between government and Indigenous communities and organizations relating to self-determination in juvenile justice, welfare and adoption matters. Communities must be in a position to make choices about what they see as suitable long-term solutions to particular issues.

In Australia, the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle influences the practice of Indigenous child protection. It is endorsed by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care and is accepted by State/Territory governments and, to varying degrees, incorporated into their child protection legislation.

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle includes the following:

- Removal of any Aboriginal child must be a last resort.
- If, after consultation with community controlled Indigenous Welfare agency, removal of a child from its family is unavoidable then the authorities must have regard to the direction of the Indigenous agency.
- If such a removal is necessary, then the child must be placed within the extended family, or if this is not possible, the child may be placed within the Indigenous community, within close proximity to the child's natural family.
- If there is not an Aboriginal placement available, then in consultation with the relevant Indigenous agency the child may be placed with a non-indigenous family on the assurance that the child's culture, identity and contact with the Aboriginal Community are maintained.

At VACCA we promote the need to:

- Enable self-determination for Indigenous communities;
- Respect and embed culture into all aspects of service delivery;
- Encourage positive and mutually respectful engagement between Indigenous agencies and services and generalist services, and
- Provide services which are premised on holistic and strengths based Indigenous child and family principles.

Human rights enables self-determination and self-determination enables Indigenous communities to have the capacity to take and action our responsibilities. For decades Indigenous leaders have emphasized rights not welfare. If Governments treat Indigenous people on the basis of self-determining rights as peoples instead of treating them as passive recipients of welfare as client communities, the debilitating effects of poverty can be overcome.

If we acknowledge that culture abuse is a significant problem then cultural-strengthening is the solution. Culture is central to identity. Culture defines who we are, how we think, how we communicate, what we value and what is important to us. We now know that fostering cultural identity is in the best interests of the child. This is not just true for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but for everyone. Modern child development theory has confirmed this.

Cultural identity is not just an add-on to approaches which focus on the best interests of the child. We would all agree that the safety of the child is paramount. No child should live in fear. No child should starve. No child should live in situations of neglect. No child should be abused. But if a child's identity is denied or denigrated, they are not being looked after.

Denying cultural identity is detrimental to their attachment needs, their emotional development, their education and their health. Every area of human development which defines the child's best interests has a cultural component. Your culture helps define HOW you attach, HOW you express emotion, HOW you learn and HOW you stay healthy.

In summary a culturally competent service system is one that:

- Focuses on the underlying socio-economic issues that lead to child neglect;
- Focuses on Indigenous children's right to culture;
- Views culture as a source of resilience;
- Responds holistically to child abuse and neglect recognizing that Aboriginal and Islander cultures view the whole child in the context of the whole family and the whole community;
- Focuses on child well being and early childhood development, including cultural well being; and

- Expands community based Early Childhood Service and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and Family Welfare Agencies and Services

The ongoing development of Indigenous children's services that provide culturally appropriate programs that build on families strengths and capacities is a major goal for VACCA and much of our work is centred on supporting and resourcing these services to deliver programs and services focused on child abuse prevention, early intervention, family support and early childhood development.

Capacity building for Indigenous Agencies and Workers

It is a matter of justice and necessary for the development of just relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples for Governments to facilitate capacity building for Indigenous agencies and workers. Before invasion, Indigenous communities had the capacity to live fulfilling lives and look after their children. This capacity was diminished by the process of colonization which dispossessed and fragmented Indigenous communities. Economic capacity was removed by changing the environment to make it suitable for colonial economic exploitation. Societal capacity was diminished by forcing Indigenous communities to either live on reserves or the outskirts of colonial society. Capacity for looking after children was diminished in many instances by taking children away. It is therefore a matter of justice that Governments take the responsibility of working with Indigenous communities to develop economic and societal capacity in a dominant culture context.

VACCA therefore contends that it is the responsibility of governments in Australia to resource and work with Indigenous child welfare agencies to oversee and facilitate the development of child care capacity for Indigenous parents and communities. It is also governments' responsibility to enable the development of Indigenous child welfare agencies' engagement of the dominant culture through resourcing governance capacity and professional skill development. In the past, Indigenous child welfare agencies have been subject to ad-hoc funding of particular projects but not funding of infrastructure. Without long-term infrastructure development and support Indigenous agencies are often forced into short-term strategies and unable to grow the organization

so that it can be more strategic in its approach. Addressing capacity building issues are fundamental to any approach based on self-determination.

Indigenous child welfare agencies need to be able to provide a full range of services from prevention to intervention. They also require training to ensure culturally appropriate good governance and service provision. In terms of developing professional capacity there are a range of areas which need to be addressed through both short term and long term strategies. In the short term, funding for Indigenous workers, on-going professional training and periodic two-way secondment between Indigenous welfare agencies and Government human services departments is required. Capacity building of this nature is not only required in the area of child welfare but also in general organizational development such as finance and human resource management. In the long term, programs which encourage Indigenous participation in tertiary education for social work, community development, finance and human resource management are necessary to breakdown the dependence of Indigenous child welfare agencies on non-indigenous professionals and government departments.

It is apparent that the need to enhance accessibility and cultural appropriateness for services aiming to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities has been recognized by the government and non-government sectors, with some attempts being made to remedy the situation. Clearly, the education and training of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers and the encouragement of Indigenous management of community-based support services should remain priorities, if the issue of accessibility is to be addressed effectively.

What is required is capacity building to deliver Indigenous child and family welfare professional practice which embeds culture in service delivery and provides an understanding of issues such as the impacts of intergenerational trauma.

Capacity building for non-indigenous Agencies and Workers

Capacity building is a two way street. In order to address the needs of Indigenous communities and, in the case of VACCA, their children, the non-indigenous community and mainstream professionals and services, need to develop the capacity for engaging

with Indigenous people in a culturally appropriate and non-racist manner.

There are two essential components in building the capacity of non-indigenous agencies and workers to engage Indigenous communities,

- Building cultural competence; and
- Building an awareness of the effects of dominant culture and how it privileges the non-indigenous as against the Indigenous.

Cultural competence has been defined as, a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals that enable them to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.

A culturally competent program is one which, appreciates and values diversity; understands the cultural forces which impact the program; understands the dynamics which result from cultural differences; institutionalized cultural knowledge; and adapts its services to fit the cultural context of the clients it serves.

To create the conditions which may facilitate cultural competence for non-indigenous agencies and workers there are several understandings which need to be realized. Firstly it is important to increase the levels of participation of Indigenous agencies/workers and pay respect to their right to self-determination. Secondly it is important to recognise that there are over 300 Indigenous nations/peoples and therefore not to generalize. Thirdly there needs to be a recognition that the imposed dominant culture's alien values of individualism and materialism do not, in most cases culturally match with Indigenous cultures. In broad terms there are dichotomies of values between non-indigenous and Indigenous in the areas of

- Adversarial v. consensus decision making;
- Individual/presenting issue v. holistic based approaches to child welfare; and
- An individual/immediate family v. a cultural/communal understandings of the child as a person.

Understanding cultural competence is relatively easy when compared to becoming aware of the effects of dominant culture on the relationship between Indigenous and non-indigenous people. The former involves an awareness of cross-cultural interaction, the latter involves an awareness of how power effects both the oppressed and the privileged.

Feminist scholar Peggy McIntosh contends that in mainstream society white people are privileged by the dominant culture. She suggest that there are at least 50 ways in which whites are unknowingly privileged by dominant culture. For example she says;

I can arrange to be in the company of my race most of the time;

If I need to move to rent or buy or if I need credit my skin colour will not be an obstruction to getting the property;

I can turn on the telly and see my race widely represented;

I can swear, get drunk, dress in second hand clothes, not answer letters without people saying how typical of my race;

I can do well without being called a credit to my race;

I am never asked to speak for all people of my race.

Further to this Peggy McIntosh suggests

I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks.

In the Australian context, entitlement for the non-indigenous is an unacknowledged space. Non-indigenous peoples contact with Indigenous people may help to deconstruct the 'white privilege' perception of the world to enable them to see the reality of this land. It is a way of acknowledging and limiting non-indigenous 'colonial blindness' which is created by the colonization process and maintained through dominant culture 'habits of addiction. "Those who have been dispossessed by a social system are by definition less possessed by that system's illusions about itself."

In other words, non-indigenous agencies and workers need to 'listen the silenced into speech' and hear and see the stories and perceptions of the Indigenous community.

To this end, mutual understanding, collaboration and partnership building is essential. Through these partnership networks cross-cultural commonalities and differences can be explored and better understood.

The intention is to build capacity through developing networks and partnerships.

Much of Indigenous disadvantage occurs as a result of systemic racism and structures that exclude Indigenous governance, culture and reality. There have always been divisive views in the community in regard to the rights and 'place' of Indigenous people. For the general community, less fear of the unknown, more accurate information and greater understanding of issues that concern the lives and situation of Indigenous people. For the organizations involved, we hope to build a greater capacity to be inclusive or at least to maintain positive interactions with the Indigenous community.

The concept of working collaboratively and developing inter-organizational linkages with mainstream services will require significant attention. Forging partnerships must be understood in context of:

- Impaired trust;
- Indigenous people being reluctant to access mainstream services because of historical factors; and
- mainstream services lacking culturally appropriate skills and understanding.

The process of developing collaborative relationships takes time. In terms of interacting with non-indigenous peoples it is about converting the colonizers, the non-indigenous community. But it is essential that we pay heed to the warnings of Paulo Freire in reference to those of the dominant culture who seek to journey with the oppressed:

It happens ... that as they cease to be exploiters or indifferent spectators or simply the heirs of exploitation and move to the side of the exploited, they almost always bring with them the marks of their origin [of being oppressors]: their prejudices and their deformations, which include a lack of confidence in the people's ability to think, to want and to know. Then a false solidarity emerges; one based on charity, paternalism or the desire for control.

Implications for VACCA

VACCA's role as an Indigenous child welfare agency in the context of a dominant culture environment is critical as it seeks to represent the child

welfare aspirations of the Indigenous community.

Its role in relation to the dominant culture requires VACCA to be an advocate for Indigenous cultural values, aspirations and right to self-determine to governments and the mainstream community. Given that it is the dominant culture's imposition of alien legal/social/economic structures and systems which has debilitated Indigenous capacity to self-determine and care for children, it is incumbent on the dominant culture to restore that capacity through appropriate resourcing and training. Governments need to acknowledge the reality of the past, particularly in relation to the Stolen Generations, and its on-going effects both in terms of the generational trauma it has caused and within its own colonially blind child protection approaches, engage Indigenous communities in seeking solutions to child welfare problems and provide adequate resources so that Indigenous child welfare agencies can address these issues.

VACCA also needs to be a bridge between the Indigenous and the non-indigenous communities in order to facilitate a less toxic environment for Indigenous children. This means promoting cross-cultural understanding and encouraging mutual capacity building. For the Indigenous community, VACCA can facilitate strategies of survival to enable positive child development. For the non-indigenous community, VACCA can provide cross-cultural education and develop strategies and partnerships which build their cross-cultural competence and develop their capacity to engage Indigenous communities without being culturally inappropriate, dominant or racist.

As VACCA seeks to build its own capacity, it will need to seek assistance from governments and the non-indigenous community. From time to time this will require the employment of people based on merit and professional ability and not necessarily on the basis of their status Indigenous persons. However the aim should be that, through appropriate mentoring and training, the aim will be to encourage and enable the eventual employment of Indigenous staff in these areas.

Through a positive engagement with the dominant culture, which includes providing analysis and critique, VACCA is well positioned to serve the interests of Indigenous communities in Victoria and facilitate communities of care for its children.

Some VACCA Examples

The following are some examples of successful culturally embedded programs we have at VACCA.

We have designed a playgroup program which is based on culturally embedded early intervention principles. Our playgroups have been a great success as they

- Provide activities which promote healthy development and enrich the lives of Indigenous children;
- Strengthen identity and cultural awareness;
- Strengthen families by:
 - connecting them to community;
 - strengthening inter-generational links;
 - providing parenting advice and support and
 - linking children and families to universal services where required.

Because our playgroups are supported, workers are able to encourage families requiring greater support or crisis intervention to connect with and utilize the various programs provided by VACCA. In 2006 we had 83 families coming to 5 playgroups and have closely involved Indigenous Elders as volunteers for the service.

The Koorie FACES program is a family strengthening program developed by the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO). The program aims to build confidence in parents and families of Indigenous children, with an emphasis on an increased understanding and knowledge of self, Indigenous culture and parenting practices and styles to build resilience against drug and alcohol misuse in children.

Koorie FACES focuses on the value and importance of Indigenous culture and Indigenous families; using a range of activities to ensure participants are involved in a fun and interactive learning environment. Indigenous leaning styles have guided the methodologies used throughout the program and include group discussions, story telling – particularly by Elders, roles plays, fun group activities which are highly visual and interactive and time to reflect on learning.

The program is not about telling families how to parent their children but focuses on participation and drawing on the groups own knowledge and experiences. We have had great interest and great success, at least in terms of the responses of Indigenous participants, in the program.

In terms of research, the evaluation of the – so far only pilot program – has provided us with a body of evidence which has strengthened our resolve in implementing ‘yarnin’ styled parenting programs to assist in empowering our families. By focusing on culture and the strengths of our families, particularly in the context of the impact and ongoing nature of colonization, Koorie FACES both communicates messages about parenting and how culture is a strengthening tool for bringing up kids to be resilient.

The Victorian Experiment

So with our rights-based, culturally-embedded conceptual framework in mind – how are we to develop collaborations to develop a culturally competent service system?

In this context we want to focus on the recent reforms put in place by the Victorian Government particularly as a result of the new Victorian Children, Youth and Family Act.

This is a historic time, a new time, perhaps. For two centuries non-indigenous laws have sought to control Indigenous people, deny their humanity and assimilate them. The Children, Youth and Family Act is a different kind of law. This is a law that establishes the principle of Indigenous self-determination as the basis for the decision making process in relation to Indigenous children. This is a law which values Indigenous culture and does not demean it.

In the previous two centuries government policies said it was in Indigenous children’s best interests for them to lose their culture, to assimilate, to be like others. The new law acknowledges up front that it is in the best interests of an Indigenous child for their culture and their connection to family, kin and community to be maintained and supported. Indigenous people have known that for over 400 centuries, now, Victoria has it in its child and family law.

The new Children, Youth and Families Act also

- Enables the Secretary of the Department of Human Services to transfer responsibility for managing Children’ Court protection orders to the head of an approved Indigenous agency;
- Makes mandatory compliance with the Indigenous Child Placement Principle;
- Makes mandatory the preparation of cultural plans for Indigenous children in out-of-home care; and
- Makes cultural competence one of the criteria for performance standards which community sector organisations must meet to stay registered.

What VACCA is hoping for is that the reforms will lead to a culturally competent service system. We believe that such a system must be built on the following aims which have been described in detail above.

- Ensuring Indigenous self-determination;
- Capacity building and resourcing Indigenous agencies so that they have the right infrastructure to operationalize their services through appropriate program development, human and financial management processes and deliver universal and preventative services as well as enhanced tertiary services; and
- Ensure that government, generalist community services organizations and the child and family judicial system are culturally competent by developing protocols, partnerships and collaborations and cross-cultural training.

For members of the dominant culture it can be harder to see the role culture plays in day to day life. But for those in a minority culture, the dominant culture plays a more visible role. Understanding the effects of the dominant culture on the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is not easy. However, fundamentally it’s about understanding how power and privilege affect us all.

There is a power dynamic which is always present but seldom recognized.

There are cross-cultural issues where there are frequently misunderstandings.

There is a lack of acknowledgement how practice often has a cultural bias – we see culture as a positive for resilience and lack of acknowledgement of culture as a risk factor.

Our hope is that with sound cross-cultural training and more importantly, sensitivity, these issues can be positively addressed.

As in any mature relationship, mutual respect and a positive attitude towards each other provides the best foundation. If generalist services believe that Indigenous people, culture and heritage make a positive contribution to the nation, and are not just 'problems' to solve, our relationships can deepen and be mutually beneficial. If we are to have a better relationship between our peoples we must begin with understanding and respect.

It's about creating a framework of trust and understanding between Indigenous and generalist services. It is a question of capacity building – for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

There are four aspects to this

- Firstly, non-Indigenous people need to understand why Indigenous organizations are different – we are different because of our history and our role in the community.
- Secondly – recognizing both the importance of culture and the importance of capacity building the Indigenous sector.
- Thirdly, we know we cannot do it alone so it is critical, as part of capacity building our sector that we will need to establish partnerships which are about equity and cultural respect – and not just a way for non-Indigenous services to tick the Indigenous box
- And fourthly, we know that Indigenous families will, from time to time, require generalist services; so it is critical that generalist services – whether they are government or non-government, undergo capacity building to be culturally competent.

Conclusion

These are some clues as to how we build a culturally respectful and competent service system, re-create communities of care and embrace for our children. And this not only means helping Indigenous communities to embrace their children and families but also how mainstream culture can also be embracing of Indigenous peoples. One of our key projects at VACCA concerns building a Melbourne based Indigenous family centre called Moondani, which is the local Woiwurung word for 'embrace'. In

many ways Moondani represents what we want for all Victorian Indigenous families and we are hoping that Moondani will be the first of many such family centres.

Embrace is a nurturing word and expresses the traditional Indigenous family value of how we embrace our children, families and communities and our embrace of the land. For our people all that we are comes from the embrace of the creator spirits for our people and our land. And through the land we feel that embrace which strengthens us and strengthens our culture. It is an embrace which we reciprocate through our family and community relationships. We need places of healing every where; for the land and our community.

So we would like to end with this picture that we use in Victoria – a vision of how we can build a respectful service system for Indigenous children and families.

The tree represents Indigenous cultures which stems from the land. Within the tree holds the children (yellow fruit) and the extended family (red fruit) and the community (the leaves). The black tracks that lead into the tree with the white tracks beside it represent VACCA and the Indigenous community walking alongside with Victorian government departments and generalist community service organizations. From each of the meeting places government departments and generalist agencies are able to learn more about Indigenous people and eventually appreciate and understand more about Indigenous cultures and Indigenous people are better enabled to navigate the dominant culture.

This picture is not just about compliance to a new system of care which respects Indigenous people and culture. It is about creating communities of embrace and reconciliation. It is a vision of the future for a social and cultural environment where Indigenous children are loved and valued for who they are and Indigenous children's culture and heritage is valued as a positive and vibrant part of the shared heritage of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples as Australians.

At this stage it remains a dream – but one which we hope will, for Indigenous peoples, end the nightmare of colonization and, for non-Indigenous people, provide a place of honour on the lands and waters of Australia.

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Domestic Sex Trafficking of Aboriginal Girls in Canada: Issues and Implications

Anupriya Sethi

1. INTRODUCTION

General trends

Human trafficking has received growing attention in recent years, both in Canada and worldwide, especially in the wake of increased focus on nation States' security and tightening the borders (Oxman-Martinez, Hanley, Gomez, 2005). The discourses on sex trafficking of women and girls in Canada continue to highlight international trafficking thus positioning Canada more as a transit and destination country than an origin country. Notwithstanding the fact that 500 Aboriginal¹ girls and women (and maybe more) have gone missing over the past thirty years (Amnesty International, 2004), domestic trafficking has not received the attention it deserves. Instead of being contextualized in a trafficking framework, sexual exploitation of Aboriginal girls is portrayed and understood as a problem of prostitution or sex work.

Similarly, despite the wide-ranging and often complex problems facing Aboriginal peoples today, policies continue to be dominated by a limited range of issues like health, violence, poverty and the criminal justice system (Stout & Kipling, 1998). This coupled with the tendency in policy decisions to analyze one issue at a time as against a holistic approach limits, if not excludes, the examination of linkages with the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal girls in Canada.

Questions or correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to:

anupriyasethi@yahoo.ca

Abstract

The current discourses on human trafficking in Canada do not take into account domestic trafficking, especially of Aboriginal girls. Notwithstanding the alarmingly high number of missing, murdered and sexually exploited Aboriginal girls, the issue continues to be portrayed more as a problem of prostitution than of sexual exploitation or domestic trafficking. The focus of this study is to examine the issues in sexual exploitation of Aboriginal girls, as identified by the grass root agencies, and to contextualize them within the trafficking framework with the purpose of distinguishing sexual exploitation from sex work. In doing so, the paper will outline root causes that make Aboriginal girls vulnerable to domestic trafficking as well as draw implications for policy analysis.

Significance, Purpose and Limitations of Study

The focus of this study is to identify key issues in domestic trafficking of Aboriginal girls, and outline implications for policy formulation and implementation at various levels of the Canadian government- federal, provincial and territorial, First Nations government as well as other agencies such as media, law enforcement officials, social welfare services, and justice system. The purpose is to highlight the issues, as identified by the grass root agencies working with trafficked girls, and to contextualize them within the trafficking framework in order to distinguish sexual exploitation from sex work. The study begins by outlining the definition of trafficking, which will form the basis of subsequent discussion and analysis in the paper. The next section examines the root causes that make Aboriginal girls vulnerable to sex trafficking, and the exploitation and manipulation they face in the trafficking process.

Recommendations for policy research and analysis are discussed in the final section.

Although this paper brings forth some key issues in the domestic trafficking of Aboriginal girls today, it is a preliminary study restricted in its scope and application. The primary limitation of this research is that it is based on the feedback and input of NGOs working with trafficked girls in Canada and does not necessarily reflect the views of the trafficked girls themselves. This is because all interviews with the key informants of this research were done over the phone due to constraints of mobility and time, but for the exception of a roundtable held in Vancouver, BC. Hence, it was considered inappropriate, unethical and impractical to interview sexually exploited girls over the phone. Another limitation is that the paper makes reference to all Aboriginal girls rather than making a distinction between First Nations, Inuit and Métis girls whose issues and realities could be similar and yet different. The limited data available on domestic trafficking combined with the small sample size made it difficult to identify the issues specific to each Aboriginal community. Finally, due to its limited scope, the paper does not necessarily draw linkages between domestic and international trafficking.

Furthermore, it is essential to note that the study focuses primarily on the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal girls and not Aboriginal women. While some issues are common to both women and girls, there are significant differences regarding the concepts, policies and laws that are applicable to each group. Therefore, to maintain clarity and keeping in view the fact that Aboriginal women are being initiated into sex trafficking at an increasingly younger age (Assistant Deputy Ministers' Committee, 2001), the focus of this study is Aboriginal girls.

Methodology

Considering the limited information available on domestic trafficking of Aboriginal girls in Canada, the methodology adopted for this study was two fold. The first phase involved conducting interviews and discussions with key informants from NGOs, women's organizations and other community-based groups or individuals dealing with the issue of sexual exploitation in Canada². A total of 18 key informants participated in the study. Five key informants were interviewed over the phone from four regions- Quebec (1), Prairies & NW Territories (2), Ontario

(1), Atlantic (1). In BC, a one-day roundtable was organized in Vancouver on 7th July 2006, which was attended by thirteen representatives from different community groups.

While majority of the key informants were front line workers, some were researchers and program coordinators, and a couple of them were the manager or director of the organizations providing services to sexually exploited women. Few key informants, now working as service providers, identified themselves as trafficked into sex trade in the past. The mandate of the key informants' organizations ranged from providing drop-in services to outreach, counseling, research, advocacy and/or a combination of these services. The interviews with the key informants were semi-structured and lasted for about 45 minutes to an hour.

The questions and discussions with the key informants covered three main areas- First, participants were asked about the mandate and clientele of their organization, and their experiences of working with sexually exploited girls. Second, informants outlined the root causes of sex trafficking, the methods traffickers use to maintain control and dominance over the girls, and the role of racism in the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal girls. Finally, the informants were asked to comment on the existing policies and programs to address domestic trafficking of Aboriginal girls and make suggestions, both at the policy and grass root level, to address the issue.

The second phase of the project involved analyzing the information gathered from the discussions and consultations with key informants, and substantiating it with published research in the form of journal articles, reports, government documents and other related materials.

2. OVERVIEW

Definition of Trafficking

This paper draws upon the trafficking definition of the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime.

“Trafficking in Persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other

forms of coercion, of abduction or fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payment or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over other persons, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs” (United Nations Crime and Justice Information Network, 2000).

As outlined in this definition, trafficking comprises use of threat, force, deception, fraud, abduction, use of authority and giving payment to achieve consent for the purpose of exploitation, including sexual exploitation. The element of ‘consent’ in the trafficking definition is usually misunderstood thus conflating sexual exploitation with sex work. It is often argued that a person who consents to engage in prostitution cannot be considered trafficked thereby suggesting that only coercion or force should form an integral part of the trafficking definition. However, it is essential to recognize that consent does not necessarily suggest an informed choice. As one key informant remarked, ‘it is rare that Aboriginal girls or women of color experience sex work. They are often trafficked for power and control, and coerced into prostitution for their survival needs’. Therefore, this paper would consider all those circumstances, which are elaborated in root causes, that lead to the sexual exploitation of girls as part of trafficking.

Scope of Domestic Trafficking

There is no national level data that tracks the transient Aboriginal population and their trafficking in sex trade. Lack of focus and/or clear understanding of domestic trafficking since sexual exploitation is often conflated with sex work, underground nature of the crime, and mobility of the trafficked persons across various cities, often make it difficult to assess the actual numbers. Moreover, majority of the cases of trafficking go unreported as girls are scared to take action against their traffickers³, resulting in the data on trafficked persons being partial, varied and debatable.

In the absence of actual figures on domestic sex trafficking in Canada, a look at the number of Aboriginal girls in prostitution can help throw some light on the extent of the issue. First Nations girls are

overrepresented in prostitution with an especially high number of youth ranging from 14% - 60% across various regions in Canada (Assistant Deputy Ministers’ Committee, 2001). National data in Canada reveals that 75% of Aboriginal girls under the age of 18 have experienced sexual abuse, 50% are under 14, and almost 25% are younger than 7 years of age (Correctional Service of Canada, cited in McIvor and Nahanee, 1998). In Vancouver alone, 60% of sexually exploited youth are Aboriginal (Urban Native Youth Association, 2002). One key informant reported that children as young as 9 are sexually exploited in Saskatoon and the average age of being forced into prostitution is 11 or 12.

Although the limited data available on sexual exploitation focuses primarily on urban centers like Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal, it does not imply that the issue is less chronic in smaller cities and rural Aboriginal communities. Only that it is not widely known or acknowledged (Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen, D’Hondt, and Formsma, 2004).

Pattern of Domestic Trafficking

Domestic sex trafficking of Aboriginal girls in Canada has various forms. It can be familial-based i.e. family members forcing other members to take part in sex trade. For instance, there are communities in the North wherein First Nations girls are sexually exploited and initiated into prostitution by their male and female relatives- brother, father, grandfather or an uncle (Lynne, 1998). Many key informants identified familial-based sex trafficking as poverty-driven and intergenerational or cyclical resulting from the residual impact of colonization and residential schools. Another type of sex trafficking is organized (gang related) and sophisticated in the form of escort services, massage parlors or dancers. One key informant referred to the hidden forms of domestic trafficking such as the existence of “trick pads”⁴ in some parts of Canada.

Additionally, key informants pointed out a characteristic intrinsic to the trafficking process- the movement of trafficked Aboriginal girls that follows a pattern of city triangles across different provinces in Canada. For instance, in Saskatoon, which is in close proximity to Edmonton and Calgary, girls are moved in triangles such as Saskatoon- Edmonton- Calgary- Saskatoon and Saskatoon- Regina- Winnipeg- Saskatoon. These triangles, often inter -connected,

are spread across Canada. For example, once girls are trafficked into Calgary, the triangle is Calgary-Edmonton-Vancouver. Although several factors contribute to the movement of girls, an emerging trend that a key informant pointed out, is the increased trafficking of girls due to the flourishing oil rigors and mining businesses in Alberta. Significant number of men travel back and forth from Saskatchewan to northern Saskatchewan or Alberta for short periods of time to work in oil rigs or at uranium mines. In keeping with their movement, girls are increasingly being moved around and sexually exploited.

3. RECRUITMENT METHODS

Coercion and deception are the underlying elements in the various methods that traffickers use to force Aboriginal girls in sex trafficking. Consultations with key informants of this research project revealed some of the ways of the recruitment of girls.

Airports: A couple of key informants identified airports as the point of recruitment in big cities like Montreal, which are witnessing a growing movement of Aboriginal girls, especially Inuit, from Northern communities. Traffickers often know someone in the community who informs them about the plans of the girls moving to the city. Upon their arrival at the airport, traffickers allure the girls under the pretext of providing a place to stay or access to resources. In the words of a key informant working as an Aboriginal outreach worker, 'Girls tend to believe in the promises of the traffickers as they are young, naïve and vulnerable in a new and big city. They are unsuspecting of the motives of the traffickers, since they belong to communities that have a culture of welcoming strangers'.

Schools: In cities like Winnipeg, Vancouver and others with high concentrations of Aboriginal peoples, traffickers are increasingly targeting schools as recruiting grounds. Traffickers entice Aboriginal girls, as young as in grade six or seven, on school playgrounds or on their way to school by promising them gifts, a good life style or getting them addicted to drugs (West, 2005). These girls are too young and vulnerable to understand or take action against sexual exploitation.

Bars: Several key informants discussed 'bars' as a fertile recruiting ground successfully targeted by traffickers. Young Aboriginal girls who move from

reserves to big cities might go to bars to "bridge the isolation" and connect with other Aboriginal peoples, especially since community centres in many cities close early in the day. Traffickers frequent these places to befriend girls, by buying them a drink or offering to help connect with other Native peoples, and later sexually exploit them.

Boyfriends: In many cases, traffickers pose as boyfriends and seduce young girls by buying them expensive gifts and/or emotionally manipulating them. Hence, it is not uncommon for sexually exploited girls to refer to the traffickers as their boyfriends. Due to their emotional and economic dependence on the traffickers, many girls refuse to identify themselves as sexually exploited (Thrasher, 2005).

Girls as recruiters: In yet another method, trafficked girls, as young as 11, are forced to recruit other girls (Urban Native Youth Association, 2002). When young girls approach their counterparts with dreams of a better lifestyle, it is real and convincing. Girls working as recruiters, in most cases, have no choice but to agree to the wishes of the trafficker due to fear or, in some cases, to meet their survival needs. It often results in a hierarchal set up wherein recruiters take the share of the earnings of the girls they have recruited. As recruiters move up in the hierarchal chain, they aim to get rid of the street work.

Dancers: Aboriginal girls, recruited as dancers at a young age, are frequently moved across provinces for their dance shows. Over a period of time, they lose ties with their home and community thus becoming isolated and vulnerable. When these girls grow old, appear less attractive and are forced out of dancing, they are sexually exploited for their survival needs.

Internet: Traffickers are increasingly using internet as a means to entice young Aboriginal girls, especially in rural communities (Thrasher, 2005), with the charm of a big city or false promises of a good job. Once these girls are in the cities, away from their family and friends, they are trafficked into the sex trade.

Hitchhiking: First Nations intergenerational poverty, lack of recreation and social activities for youth on-reserve, and inadequate public transportation facilities force young girls to hitch hike thus making them vulnerable to sexual exploitation. The Yellow Head Highway in BC, also known as the Highway of Tears, along which several Aboriginal girls have

gone missing or found murdered (Wilson, 2004), is a glaring example.

4. ROOT CAUSES

Key informants of this study identified the root causes that affect the safety and well-being of Aboriginal girls and put them at risk of sex trafficking. Although discussed under separate headings for the sake of simplicity and clarity, these causes are inter-related thus forming a vicious circle. It is important to note that while factors such as poverty, violence, and racism surface in various discussions in existing literature and policy decisions on Aboriginal peoples, their linkages with sexual exploitation have not been fully explored (Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen, D'Hondt, and Formsma, 2004).

Legacy of Colonization and Residential schools

Majority of the key respondents referred to the history of colonization as a fundamental factor behind the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal girls. Various aspects of colonization such as capitalism, church and the military has affected family units, language, culture and identity, economic status and parenting abilities of Aboriginal peoples (Lynne, 1998). The destruction of the social structures and family support system has rendered some communities dysfunctional thus leading to increased rates of violence, sexual abuse, substance abuse and suicide rates (Bennett & Shangreux, 2005).

According to one key informant, sex has traditionally been considered sacred in Aboriginal culture - A gift from the creator and a way to communicate. As a result of colonization, sexual abuse was introduced to Aboriginal communities, now living with the "historic imagery of Aboriginal girls being sexually available". Due to the intergenerational effects of residential schools, men and women have not learnt the meaning of healthy sexuality and parenting resulting in many residential school survivors sexually exploiting their own children (Assistant Deputy Ministers' Committee, 2001). Girls suffering perpetual violence and abuse have no choice but to leave their communities in search for a safer place. This coupled with culturally inappropriate welfare practices and lack of adequate support systems further expose them to the risk of sex trafficking.

Lack of Awareness, Acknowledgment and Understanding of Sexual Exploitation

Sections of the Canadian society such as Aboriginal communities (Thrasher, 2005), law enforcement officials, media, policy-makers, and legal system are unwilling to acknowledge domestic trafficking, especially of Aboriginal girls.

According to key informants, several factors prevent Aboriginal communities from acknowledging the sexual exploitation of their girls. These include poverty, limited resources, lack of education and understanding of the exchange of sexual favors for goods and resources as sexual exploitation and the fear of outside involvement resulting from ineffective past interventions. As one key informant remarked, 'our people have been researched to death but nothing has been done'.

Aboriginal girls in rural communities might be reluctant to talk about sexual exploitation, as sometimes they are battling with their own physical and mental health problems such as HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, depression and post traumatic stress disorder. Inadequate resources and the taboo associated with such diseases limits their capacity to advocate for ending sexual exploitation.

Limited initiative and willingness on the part of law enforcement authorities to actively deal with sex trafficking aggravates the reluctance in Aboriginal communities. One key informant mentioned a case wherein a law enforcement official, while speaking on the issue of sexual exploitation, expressed hesitation to specifically talk in the context of Aboriginal girls stating that 'they (police) do not work in the First Nations communities'. In cases, where officials do take a proactive approach to undertake research or document cases, they often lack the culturally relevant approaches or tools to address it adequately.

The lack of acknowledgement of sexual exploitation of Aboriginal girls acts a hindrance to initiating and implementing measures for addressing it. Thus, sexual exploitation continues to be viewed as or conflated with sex work. Aboriginal peoples are stereotyped as 'willing' to take up sex work and a great deal of ignorance surrounds Aboriginal culture and their living conditions.

Violence

A significant consequence of colonist government policies is the violence plaguing Aboriginal communities. Loss of cultural identity coupled with social and economic marginalization fuels violence and sexual assault (Mann, 2005). As pointed in the Aboriginal Justice Enquiry in Manitoba, violence in Aboriginal communities has reached epidemic proportions (Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991). While there are complexities in defining and contextualizing violence in Indigenous communities, suffice it to say that as a result of oppression and colonization “violence has invaded whole communities and cannot be considered a problem of a particular group or an individual household” (Jacobs, 2002 p.3). Increased family breakdown due to violence is resulting in an ever-increasing number of Aboriginal children in the welfare system. They experience culture loss and disassociation, and become extremely susceptible to sexual exploitation as a means to meet their emotional and practical needs.

The cycle of violence, that Aboriginal girls face, begins from their communities and continues into the trafficking process. Traffickers impose various forms of violence-physical, emotional, economic and sexual to initiate girls into sex trafficking and maintain control over them. Girls are forced to go with johns, not use condoms, and live in poor and unhygienic conditions. Traffickers often keep the earnings and the identification documents of girls to minimize their chances of escape, as in the absence of identification, girls have negligible or limited access to resources such as welfare services or addiction treatments.

Poverty

As Raven Bowen (2006) found in her study on domestic trafficking, poverty is a major cause of sexual exploitation. Girls are forced to move in search of survival opportunities and in the process suffer the kind of exploitation and isolation that is similar to that of international trafficking or organized crime. Poverty in Aboriginal families have reached an all time high, with 52.1% of all Aboriginal children living in extreme poverty (Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, 2000). In urban Winnipeg, Regina and Saskatoon, 80 to 90% of single Aboriginal mothers were living below the poverty level (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), 1996).

One of the main reasons for poverty among Aboriginal girls is the limited opportunities for employment and education. On-reserve unemployment is three times the national average and, in some Aboriginal communities, about 90% of the population is unemployed (McKenzie & Morrissette, 2003). High rates of unemployment coupled with limited welfare services leads to poor health, violence, cultural disintegration and increased poverty rates among Aboriginals (Bennett & Shangreux, 2005). High level of poverty in a patriarchal society is directly related to high rate of sexual exploitation (Farley & Lynne, 2005).

Closely related to poverty is homelessness, which is another significant risk factor in sexual exploitation (Farley & Lynne, 2005). Although the population of Aboriginal peoples is growing at a rapid rate, their housing needs remain unmet. Lack of affordable housing is evident from the fact that 84% of Aboriginal households on-reserve do not have sufficient income to cover the cost of suitable and adequate housing (RCAP, 1996). In the face of extreme poverty and consequently the absence of safe and affordable housing, girls become vulnerable to sexual exploitation to meet their basic needs of food, clothing and shelter.

Isolation and Need for a Sense of Belonging

Girls experience isolation in rural Aboriginal communities due to various reasons- boredom, dysfunctional families, limited education and employment opportunities, and taboo due to HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C and other sexually transmitted infections. Traffickers lure young girls by glamorizing life in a big city and presenting it as a way out of their communities.

The movement from reserve to big cities can be an overwhelming experience for many young girls brought up in a culture of strong family and community ties. In cities, they suffer isolation, racism and consequently low self-esteem. During the course of time, they lose contact with their communities and experience culture loss (Save the Children Canada, 2000). Many girls go to bars to overcome their isolation and end up being recruited by traffickers. Limited knowledge and availability of resources to Aboriginal peoples off-reserve further puts the young girls at risk.

Once forced into sex trade, Aboriginal girls continue to suffer sexual exploitation and turn “to street communities, drugs, pimps and dealers to develop personal identities and an enduring sense of place and belonging” (Downe, 2003, p.47). There is a spirit of camaraderie and unity among trafficked girls, as they share the same stories and a common history. Driven by the desperate need for trust and acceptance, many Aboriginal girls find love in their traffickers who they often refer to as their boyfriends. ‘It is amazing what girls can do to feel that they belong’, one key informant remarked. In such a scenario, although girls consent to being sexually exploited, they do it as they have no choice or means to help them in their loneliness, marginalization and lack of support system. Hence, it is essential to recognize isolation and social exclusion as a root cause of sex trafficking, instead of viewing it as a part of voluntary sex work.

Racism

The systemic racism that Aboriginal girls face from different sections of the Canadian society-media, justice, police, law-makers, service providers and the Canadian society at large, emerged as a key factor in discussions with almost all the key informants. In addition to the inadequate representation of Aboriginal peoples in the media, the ignorance and stereotypes associated with their culture and identity marginalizes them, especially youth. Aboriginal girls are perceived as ‘easily available’ due to the discriminatory and sexist policies, and their unequal status in the Canadian society (Mann, 2005; Olsen 2005). A study (Gorkoff & Runner, 2003) involving 45 interviews with sexually exploited girls revealed that Aboriginal girls are at risk not just because they are female, poor and homeless but also because they suffer racism and exclusion. Thus, the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal girls is yet another form of racial discrimination.

While stressing on the lack of concern or interest towards Aboriginal girls in sex trafficking, one of the key informants mentioned a profound example wherein a large number of people attended a presentation that a local faith based agency had organized to highlight the international trafficking of girls from Ukraine to Canada. However, the turn out of people is significantly low when such initiatives are organized for addressing trafficking of Aboriginal girls in their own city. ‘People are willing to speak about

trafficking in terms of World soccer and Asian gangs but disinterested to talk about the sexual exploitation of young Aboriginal children in their own backyard’, remarked the key informant. This indifference and discrimination towards the plight of Aboriginal girls reflects a NIMBY (Not-In-My-Backyard) syndrome, also known as NIMBY-ism. The NIMBY syndrome is often widespread and deep-seated, and involves intentional exclusion and inhibition of growth (Kean, 1991). In 1996 trial of John Martin Crawford, a serial killer convicted of killing three Aboriginal girls, Warren Goulding, one of the journalists covering the trial said, “I don’t get the sense the general public cares much about missing or murdered Aboriginal girls. It’s all part of this indifference to the lives of Aboriginal people. They don’t seem to matter as much as the white people” (Amnesty International, 2004, p.24).

Substance Use

Drug addiction “sucks Aboriginal girls in and keeps them there”. Traffickers lure young girls into taking drugs and then sexually exploit them. In many cases, Aboriginal girls with no prior history of substance use, take drugs to numb the pain of shame and humiliation they experience as a result of being sexually exploited. A study by Ontario Native Women’s Association (1989) found that eight out of ten Aboriginal girls have suffered some form of abuse- physical, sexual, psychological or ritual- in their communities and that these factors were associated with high rates of alcohol and drug use in these communities. Over time, the substance use develops into a chemical dependency⁵, which forces girls to engage in prostitution in order to support their addiction. One key informant quoted a trafficked girl, “I have two choices - To do drugs or to die”.

Role of gangs

Gangs are playing an increasing role in the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal girls. Some of the Aboriginal-based street gangs include the Manitoba Warriors, the Native Syndicate and the Indian Posse (Turenne, 2006). One key informant observed that a number of Asian and Somali gangs have been able to recruit Aboriginal girls and traffic them into the sex trade. Recruitment of gang members takes place not only in urban centres but also on-reserves and small rural communities (Criminal Intelligence Service

Canada, 2004). The average age of a female gang member ranges from 11-30 years with the majority between 14-25 years. The fastest growing street gang population consists of young children under 16 years old (Nimmo, 2001).

The reasons for young girls falling a prey to gang recruitments vary- poverty; physical, emotional and sexual abuse in their families and communities; sense of power, recognition and protection from street life; and most importantly, the need for belongingness and acceptance (Fontaine, 2006). Many young girls are attracted to gangs because they have suffered loss of cultural ties and find an alternative 'family' in the gangs (RCAP, 1996; Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), 2007a).

Most gangs thrive in drug trafficking; however some engage in sex trafficking as well. The gang culture follows a hierarchal framework in which there are powerful few at the top followed by the various levels of workers underneath (Nimmo, 2001). Accordingly, gang members have different status and roles. Prostitution is considered as the lowest activity in the gang and young girls, who are at the bottom of the hierarchy, are forced into prostitution to earn money for the gangs (Nimmo, 2001; Fontaine, 2005). These girls are also exploited to recruit other young girls in order to move up in the hierarchy and away from the street work.

Gaps in service provision

Key informants pointed towards the existence of a cycle of power, control and systemic oppression in the way services are delivered to sexually exploited girls. The narrow mandate and rigid functioning of certain agencies limits the scope and extent of services available to girls. For instance, trafficked girls usually work in the night and sleep during the day but most shelters do not accommodate this pattern (Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, 2002). Similarly, the long waiting period in service provision combined with the lack of consistent long-term funding act as deterrents for girls wanting to escape sexual exploitation. This is particularly true for the treatment of alcohol and drug addiction, which is often a difficult service to access. Healing and transition to a normal life is usually a lengthy process (Assistant Deputy Ministers' Committee, 2001), especially if a woman has been abused and exploited at a young age or for a long period. However, limited and short-

term funding focused on instant results fails to take into consideration the period required for healing and is often not enough to help trafficked girls make the transition to a healthy life. As one key informant effectively summed up - 'Drugs are more easily available than counseling or other support services'.

Culturally relevant services managed by Aboriginal peoples are minimal and even more limited are the services specifically for sexually exploited Aboriginal girls (Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, 2002). For instance, many key informants pointed out the scarcity of female-only residential treatment centres and the unwillingness and/or inability of these centres to address sexual exploitation issues. Treatment of addictions without addressing sex trafficking has limited effectiveness. Moreover, placing sexually exploited girls with other groups such as battered women may lead to bias and discrimination due to issues of class, and is usually not helpful as the problems and interventions for these groups are different from each other. Co-ed treatment centers can be unsafe for girls as older men in these centres may sexually exploit young girls (Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, 2002).

The contradictory welfare policies along with the lack of suitable alternatives for income also pose a barrier to girls wanting to exit domestic trafficking. A key informant working as an Aboriginal outreach worker discussed the problem of girls losing their housing when admitted to residential treatment centres, as welfare stops paying for it. Considering that finding a safe and affordable housing is a challenging task, such policies may uproot girls and make them further vulnerable to trafficking. Similarly, in the absence of apprenticeship programs, the employment opportunities for Aboriginal girls are limited especially since they have little or no education due to their trafficking at a young age. The gaps and barriers in service provision frustrate Aboriginal girls who often find it difficult to sustain their fight against sexual exploitation, which seems to be "the only thing normal and working".

Discriminatory Policies and Legislations

Several policies and legislations continue to marginalize Aboriginal peoples, especially girls. For instance, in the absence of clear policies around matrimonial property rights, Aboriginal girls are forced to leave their homes when marriages break-

up. The shortage of alternative housing services on-reserves and in rural communities forces girls to move to cities where they live in poverty thus becoming highly susceptible to sex trafficking. Similarly, Section 67 and Bill C-31 of the Canadian Human Rights Act discriminate against Aboriginal girls and their descendents, and negatively impact their rights and chances of a respectful life (NWAC, 2006).

Section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act provides that nothing in the Act affects any provision of the Indian Act, thus prohibiting Aboriginal peoples from lodging a complaint against the federal or the Native government. Such a provision perpetuates the oppression that status Indian girls face in their communities and leaves them without any protection that is available to other Canadian girls (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2007b). Despite amendments to the Indian Act, Section 6 in Bill C-31 translates into a loss of status after two consecutive generations of girls have married with non-registered partners and it is anticipated that by 2060, there will be no Aboriginal people with Indian Status (Mann, 2005). The benefits that Aboriginal girls are entitled to under registered status are of great importance since they remain the primary care givers in the family. Some of these benefits include access to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's programs, national-level services, non-insured health payment and tax benefits in addition to non-tangible benefits such as identification with their culture and community (Mann, 2005). The denial of these benefits may further isolate Aboriginal girls making them an easy target for traffickers.

5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of the root causes that make Aboriginal girls vulnerable to sex trafficking and the factors that contribute to their ongoing exploitation in sex trade, the key informants of this study made the following policy recommendations:

Acknowledgment and Recognition

Sexual Exploitation - A trafficking and human rights issue:

The first step in addressing domestic trafficking of Aboriginal girls is to acknowledge the seriousness of the problem. Countries like Canada are increasingly under pressure to tighten their borders and undertake

measures on the prosecution aspect of human trafficking, especially in the wake of US Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report. The over emphasis on criminalizing the movement of people across borders has shifted the focus away from trafficking as a human rights issue. Moreover, the discourses in transnational trafficking in Canada do not include domestic trafficking of Aboriginal girls within and across provinces. It is erroneous and unjust to consider domestic trafficking as less serious than transnational trafficking because the issues of control, isolation and exploitation that girls face at the hands of traffickers are severe irrespective of whether it is cross-cultural or cross-border (Bowen, 2006).

Honor Indigenous Knowledge:

There is a serious need to recognize and honor Indigenous knowledge (Stout & Kipling, 1998) by engaging "Aboriginal people as knowledge-keepers". Awareness and education programs are effective when implemented through participatory, interactive and inclusive processes that acknowledge the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples. Significant amount of research has been done on Aboriginal communities. While continuing further research in unexplored areas, the critical knowledge that already exists needs to be utilized and acted upon. The already identified gaps such as homelessness, poverty and unemployment demand action, as against further research and deliberations.

Recognize Diversity among Aboriginal Peoples:

Although larger systemic problems like poverty and impact of colonization are common to several Aboriginal communities, there are issues that are typical of each community. As pointed out by a key informant, 'saying someone is an Aboriginal is like saying someone is a European meaning that there are many groups, territories, languages etc of Aboriginal peoples'. Policy making should take into account this diversity, as there is no one pan-Aboriginal identity. Formulating and implementing a blanket policy meant to address the issues of all Aboriginal communities has limited effectiveness and sometimes perpetuates the already existing problems in different communities.

Collaboration

Establish a national level strategy for domestic trafficking:

Due to the lack of understanding or acknowledgment of domestic trafficking, there is no national level strategy to address, both the immediate causes and the larger systematic issues, which lead to the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal girls. Key informants expressed frustration at the disconnect that exists among the various levels of the government and other agencies like law enforcement, justice, health care and child welfare. Considering that the issues identified in domestic trafficking fall under the mandate of various agencies, standardized protocols and guidelines are essential to bring together initiatives of different stakeholders. A uniform approach shall help in sharing information and ideas, increasing awareness about domestic trafficking, and enabling different agencies to work towards common goals.

Bridge the Policy-Practice Gap:

Many participants pointed out the existing policy-practice disconnect reflected in the policy decisions. Although both the grass root agencies and policy makers are experts in their respective areas, the communication gap between them is rather unproductive. A limited, if not negligible, understanding of the other side often creates and widens the gap between what is required and what ends up being delivered thus leading to quick fix solutions rather than addressing the fundamental problems.

Input from communities, women's groups and grass root agencies in the policy-making processes can help ensure an informed decision-making. Furthermore, it is crucial to engage in a dialogue with the trafficked Aboriginal girls regarding various social policy issues that affect them since their input is based on lived experiences. At the same time, it is important to ensure that these girls do not end up being a poster child. The story of one girl should not be regarded as a blanket experience of all sexually exploited girls, each with their own struggles and disadvantages. There is a wealth of knowledge and community experience at the grass root level, which should be validated and fed into the social policies.

Alliance between Aboriginals and Non-Aboriginals:

The success of non-Aboriginals in forming productive alliances with Aboriginals has been limited. A key informant observed that at one extreme is the lack of concern or a hands-off approach towards Aboriginal issues and on the other extreme is the fear of recolonizing Aboriginal peoples. The informant emphasized that the guarded approach on the part of non-Aboriginals is equally unhelpful, as it further isolates Aboriginal girls who end up fighting for their rights in isolation. Non-Aboriginals will have to learn to be good allies by supporting and collaborating with Aboriginal populations in a way that gives Aboriginal girls the power and right to determine what is best for them.

Funding and Resources

Preventive rather than a Reactionary Approach:

One key informant remarked that traditionally Aboriginal peoples view life as a cycle of seven generations. The wisdom from the past three generations is used to guide the present, which is the fourth generation, and lay the foundation for the future three generations. The understanding of this vision is not reflected in social policies today, which focus on immediate and reactionary measures instead of combining it with long term prevention strategies.

Funding and services should be directed towards prevention programs like educating and mobilizing young girls in Aboriginal communities, raising awareness regarding the dangers of sex trafficking, and increasing collaboration between urban Aboriginals and communities on-reserve so that girls do not lose touch with their culture and homes. In addition to focusing on young girls vulnerable to sex trafficking, prevention strategies should focus on girls who have exited sexual exploitation to prevent them from being re-trafficked⁶. Funding should be granted for longer periods, as prevention work usually involves implementing a long-term strategy, which does not necessarily deliver quick results measurable in numbers.

Culturally Relevant Services:

Aboriginal girls should have access to culturally relevant services that move beyond crisis intervention and are long enough to help them make a successful transition to a safe and healthy life. Key areas in service provision should include culture specific safe transitional housing for sexually exploited girls and their children similar to the program “Honouring the Spirit of Our Little Sisters” created by Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre in Winnipeg (see endnote no. 6), establishment of healing centres and shelters specifically to meet the needs of trafficked girls, and adequate child welfare managed by Aboriginal organizations. The existing welfare services should be made more accessible. For instance, increased access to programs like income security, flexible curfew times in shelters, follow-up support, and reduced wait times in treatment centres. Similarly, harm reduction should be recognized as a useful measure for the health and safety of sexually exploited girls. Services like needles, food, condoms, and education regarding HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases should be readily available.

Capacity Building of NGOs:

Funding arrangements with NGOs should be flexible, adequate and long-term, especially for macro issues like domestic trafficking of girls. Key informants mentioned situations wherein agencies have to modify and, in some cases, reframe their mandates to fit the funding requirements. The excessive focus on the outcome of the funded initiatives affects the kind and extent of services that NGOs are able to offer to sexually exploited girls. The evaluation guidelines often make it difficult for NGOs working with vulnerable groups to demonstrate and quantify the work done at the ground level. Similarly, inconsistency in grants leads to NGOs devoting considerable time, energy and resources in arranging funds for their projects. The tight funding also leads to a high rate of employee turnover, as wages are limited and people are hired on a contract basis. A high turnover affects the efficiency of the NGOs’ projects, which require building long-term partnerships with stakeholders.

Additionally, more resources and opportunities are needed to enhance communication and collaboration among different NGOs in order to enable them to

coordinate their efforts against domestic trafficking – an issue which cuts across regions, instead of being confined to a specific area. The competitiveness for funding often leads to organizations working against each other rather than working with each other. Considering that a strong united voice is paramount to advocating for a social policy change, the funding arrangements should recognize the power dynamics and ensure that the role of NGOs as advocates for social justice remains unaffected.

Capacity Building in Aboriginal Communities:

Resources are needed for Aboriginal communities to support them in dealing with their challenges and problems. Aboriginal women are rather alone in their work against sexual exploitation of girls, especially on-reserves, where they face resistance from various sections like chiefs and counsels who refuse to admit that the problem has reached epidemic proportions (Save the Children Canada, 2000). Girls in Aboriginal communities should be mobilized and encouraged to take up the leadership role and teach their future generations to value both men and women.

Elders have a wealth of experience which they can share with youth to guide them through their curiosities, questions and dilemmas. Aboriginal youth should be provided an environment that facilitates an open dialogue with both their peers and elders. Similarly, there is a need for better role-models for young Aboriginal girls. A key informant spoke of a case wherein an Aboriginal girl, who had grown up in a city, came to live on-reserve. Just by being confident in her approach towards men, she subtly taught other Aboriginal youth the meaning of self-pride.

Schools and community service providers should be proactively engaged to decrease the drop-out rates of young children. Measures such as family support, counseling, homework clubs and culturally appropriate classes need to be in place to support children and keep them in the education system thus reducing their vulnerability to trafficking (Urban Native Youth Association, 2002). Resources should also be directed towards transportation, recreation facilities, awareness campaigns and apprenticeship programs in Aboriginal communities.

Legislative Reforms

Matrimonial Property Law needs to be reviewed, in consultation and partnership with Aboriginal peoples, to ensure that Aboriginal girls living on-reserve have equal property rights as those living off-reserve. Policy and legislative changes are also required in Bill C-31 to remove the residual gender discrimination against Aboriginal girls and their descendants, and rectify the loss of status under the Indian Act (NWAC, 2006). Similarly, Section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act should be repealed and a parallel human rights system be established in consultation with Aboriginal representatives to ensure that Aboriginal girls have access to remedies for violations of their economic, social and cultural rights (NWAC, 2006).

6. CONCLUSION

Key informants of this study identified significant issues and implications in the domestic sex trafficking of Aboriginal girls in Canada. However, the root causes and recommendations highlighted in this paper need further examination and analysis to better inform the future initiatives in domestic trafficking in Canada. As a starting point, it is of utmost importance to determine the actual number of girls that are domestically trafficked in Canada including smaller cities and rural areas. Further research should also include other groups such as immigrant girls, visible minorities, Aboriginal boys or two-spirited youth. Although many root causes and recommendations in this report could be generalized to other groups as well, there are subtle differences in each group which need to be explored for a thorough analysis. Additionally, there needs to be focus on addressing the role of men in Aboriginal communities. National level initiatives catering specifically to the abuse and trauma that men have suffered as a result of colonization are limited. Domestic trafficking of girls will continue to be a self-perpetuating phenomenon and the efforts to heal girls might not yield the desired results so long as the role of their abusers remains unaddressed.

As observed in the Aboriginal Justice Enquiry of Manitoba, “Aboriginal women and their children suffer tremendously as victims in contemporary Canadian society. They are the victims of racism, of sexism and of unconscionable levels of domestic violence” (Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991). Instead of conveniently labeling domestic trafficking of Aboriginal girls as ‘sex work’,

the holistic approach to dealing with it should begin by an acknowledgement of the problem from the various sections of the Canadian society. As recommended in the Article 4 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, state parties should recognize some groups of women as particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation including Aboriginal women (Lynne, 2005). The fundamental issues that put Aboriginal girls in a disadvantageous situations today underline the importance of recognizing and addressing their sexual exploitation as integral to the dialogue on trafficking within Canada.

Endnotes

1. Throughout this document, the terms “First Nations”, “Indigenous”, “Aboriginal” and “Native” peoples have been used interchangeably. While these terms can include all peoples of Aboriginal ancestry, it is essential to note that First Nations are identified as a distinct group with unique legal status. Within Canada, Aboriginal peoples are constitutionally recognized as Inuit, Métis and First Nations.
2. The data for this study was generated as part of the author’s work with Status of Women Canada in Ottawa. However, this paper expresses the views of the author and does not represent the official policy or opinion of Status of Women Canada or the Government of Canada.
3. Several factors explain the reluctance of girls to take action against their traffickers. Some of these include life threats to trafficked girls and their families, condition of confinement, fear of penalization, and lack of safe houses, shelters and other resources.
4. A trick pad is a place, usually a house in a secluded area, where girls are kept against their will and are coerced to engage in prostitution. Sometimes the girls are physically kidnapped and taken to trick pads (Urban Native Youth Association, 2002).
5. In many cases, the chemical dependency is a gradual transition beginning from alcohol, which is easily available, to marijuana, cocaine and then crystal meth.
6. For instance, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba, was instrumental in developing a safe house for sexually exploited Aboriginal girls in Winnipeg, aged 13-17, through the development of an advisory committee consisting of experiential victims of sexual exploitation who were consulted in planning the details of the site. The home called “Honouring the Spirit of Our Little Sisters” is for Aboriginal girls who have been sexually exploited. They are referred to this program from Child and Family Services and can stay as long as they want. The girls voluntarily choose to be involved in the program and its location is kept hidden to protect its clients (Kotyck, 2003).

Bio

Anupriya Sethi is a Canadian Commonwealth Scholar from India with two Masters degrees – a Masters in Social Work (MSW) from Carleton University in Ottawa and a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) from India. Her research interests include human trafficking, organ donation and organ trafficking, women's health, gender equality, and Aboriginal child welfare. Anupriya has authored reports on 'Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada: A Health Perspective' and 'Demystifying the Urban Legend: The Reality of Organ Trafficking' and co-authored a report on 'Reconciliation: Looking Back, Reaching Forward, Indigenous Peoples and Child welfare'. She has also written articles on social policy and gender equality issues such as dowry harassment, domestic violence and family mediation. During her academic and professional career, Anupriya has won several scholarships, awards and distinctions including a Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship awarded by the Government of Canada, two full scholarships under Department for International Development Shared Scholarship Scheme from the Government of United Kingdom and a Government of India National Scholarship. Prior to coming to Canada, Anupriya has worked as a Family Counsellor in India. Anupriya is currently working as a Policy Analyst with the Labour Program of the Human Resources and Social Development Canada.

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The Politics of Policy Development to End Obesity for Aboriginal Youth in the Educational Environment

Shelley Spurr^a

^aAssistant Professor, College of Nursing, University of Saskatchewan, SK, Canada. Shelley is currently enrolled in the PhD studies in Education Administration focussing on promotion of wellness in adolescents.

Canada, a country of considerable wealth and resources, has one of the highest standards of living in the world. This country is politically organized as a democracy which is supportive of political and civil freedoms, yet inequalities among certain populations prevail. Aboriginal people continue to have shorter life expectancy, lower educational attainment, and lower average annual incomes than do other Canadians (Cooke, Beavon, & McHardy, 2004). There are significant social and economic disparities among Aboriginal peoples, and these disparities have had significant impact on the lives and health of their children and families (Canadian Population Health Initiative, 2005). Within the school system, educational policy-making can serve to address inequalities. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to highlight the tools in Deborah Stone's book, *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making* (2002), to demonstrate why I believe policies should be developed to combat obesity in a school, to understand the politics of implementing these policies and to analyze and critique the ideas from hypothesized political opponents.

This paper begins by defining obesity and then provides evidence of its increasing rates both among non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal young

Abstract

Canada, a country of considerable wealth and resources, has one of the highest standards of living in the world. This country is politically organized as a democracy that is supportive of political and civil freedoms, yet inequalities among certain populations prevail. In general, Aboriginal people experience poorer economic, social, and environmental conditions than those of non-Aboriginal people (Canadian Population Health Initiative, 2005) and lower involvement in political and civil activity. This report also illustrates the inferior health status among Aboriginal people. Within the school system, an educational policy can serve to address an inequality. Hence, the purpose of the paper is to apply the tools outlined by Deborah Stone in her book, *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making* (2002), to demonstrate why I believe school policies should be developed to prevent obesity among Aboriginal youth, to understand the politics of implementing these policies and to analyze and critique the ideas from hypothesized political opponents. Addressing these injustices provides recognition of the racism in present-day educational policy decision-making processes, which can result in more significant progress toward an equal and just society which ensures the health of Aboriginal peoples and successive generations.

people. The interventive goals, as outlined by Stone (2002) are then defined and assessed through the following concepts: equity, security and liberty. Working to achieve these goals becomes a political struggle as each of these concepts suggests different interpretations and has some inherent and associated ambiguities. Next, I examine the problems associated with this policy initiative. Defining the problem can also develop into a political struggle as my strategic representation of the situation will almost certainly bring about controversy and opposition. The policy problems discussed include causes, decisions, power and interests. I identify some potential solutions to the problems presented, and lastly, present some future research implications.

Questions or correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to:

shelley.spurr@usask.ca

Introduction

In writing this paper, I have chosen to reference Deborah Stone's book *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making* (2002) (hereafter the "Policy Paradox")¹ as it offers a theoretical framework for policy analysis that accepts politics as a valuable and creative process, that is true to the diversity of the human mind, and that renders more visible the paradoxes of policy decisions. Stone wrote that policies include goals, problems and solutions. She created a model of reasoning that shows how decisions should be made in a series of well-defined steps:

1. Identify objectives;
2. Identify alternative courses of action for achieving objectives;
3. Predict the possible consequences of each alternative;
4. Evaluate the possible consequences of each alternative;
5. Select the alternative that maximizes the attainment of objectives (p.8).

Stone's book, *Policy Paradox*, helped me to think about developing educational policy, understand the politics of the obesity issue particularly among Aboriginal groups, and to analyze and critique arguments that might be expressed by opponents. Similar to Stone (2002), I have framed this paper with the following concepts: goals, problems and solutions.

Like Stone, I believe that policy decisions are highly influenced by personal experiences and values. As a nurse I have worked with Aboriginal children, youth and families, and from this experience I have observed the poverty, discrimination, health disparities, and the general inequalities that continue to exist within the Aboriginal nation. As such, I intend to approach this analysis as someone who knows that, due to racism and discrimination, Aboriginal children and families have suffered many injustices, and that addressing this legacy can result in more significant progress towards an equal and just society with better health outcomes for Aboriginal young people.

Although there are many health concerns among Aboriginal people, this paper focuses on overweight and obesity in Canada considered to be higher in Aboriginal children and youth than in

the non-Aboriginal population (Willows, 2005). The development and implementation of effective strategies to prevent obesity is a serious health challenge facing Aboriginal communities today. It is for these reasons that I believe there is an urgent need to examine the complex social processes of developing and implementing health policies designed to prevent obesity in Aboriginal youth.

Obesity issues among Aboriginal youth is multifaceted and as such, the biological, cultural, and social contributions to obesity must be addressed in order to fully understand the problem and develop appropriate interventions (Willows, 2005). However, that depth of analysis is not possible in this paper. Instead, the intent of this paper is to explore political controversies associated with the development of school health policies designed to prevent obesity in an Aboriginal high school.

Background

In 2005, the principal of Lee Brown High School² approached the University of Saskatchewan with an interest in developing a program to address ongoing health concerns, specifically obesity and Type 2 Diabetes, among the Aboriginal student population. A research partnership between the Lee Brown High School and the University of Saskatchewan was then initiated. The overarching goal of the research partnership was to establish a working relationship with the high school community with the future intent to build capacity in Aboriginal health research, to cultivate relationships with Aboriginal communities, to address the prominent health issue of obesity and to develop an intervention that is derived from the needs and priorities of the communities that successfully address healthy body weights in Aboriginal youth. As a PhD student, I worked with the students and teachers to explore the factors affecting the students' dietary and physical activity behaviours, as well as the staff's visions for future health promotion programs and policies among the parents and student body.

Policy initiatives, such as the proposed health promotion intervention at Lee Brown High School can assist to create and sustain a healthy environment that encourages healthy eating and physical activity among Aboriginal youth (Willows, 2005). Despite this knowledge, I anticipate that there will be

significant political debate when it comes time to developing policy aimed at preventing obesity among the Aboriginal student population in Lee Brown High School. The major opponent to this initiative would be the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Development (DIAND) and the local provincial school board. The operators, who manage the funding for the school, may not necessarily oppose the health intervention, but due to fiscal restraints, may decline funding this particular health policy initiative.

OBESITY AND THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS

The Evidence of Obesity

In Canada, children and youth are classified as overweight or obese based on their Body Mass Index (BMI), which is a ratio of weight in kilograms to the square of height in metres. In children, international standards for BMI account for normal growth and development by incorporating different age and sex percentiles (Cole, Bellizzi, Flegal, & Dietz, 2000). The rates of obesity among Canadian children and youth are increasing at alarming rates. To illustrate, Table 1 indicates that over a 15-year period in Canada (between 1981-1996), “the prevalence of overweight and obesity has tripled among boys and doubled among girls” (Tremblay, Katzmarzyk and Willms, 2002, p. 538). This data suggests that not only have children become more overweight in the past few decades, but also, that overweight children have been getting heavier.

Table 1				
Summary of Overweight and Obesity in Canada				
Overweight, including Obese				
	1981	1996	1981	1996
Boys	11%	33%	2%	10%
Girls	13%	27%	2%	9%

Evidence suggests that Aboriginal children and youth living in Canada have a high rate of overweight and obesity (Willows, 2005, p. 77). As shown in Table 2, Canadian Aboriginal children and youth, aged 4-19, also have a high prevalence of obesity (based on the data obtained from a study conducted by Young, Dean, Flett and Wood-Steiman, 2000). Another study of childhood obesity in Canada also suggests very high rates of obesity and overweight (i.e., BMI of

greater than 85th percentile for age and sex specific reference data) among Aboriginal boys (27.7%) and girls (33.7%) (Hanley et al., 2000).

Table 2		
Moderate-High Levels of Obesity in Aboriginal Children and Youth		
	Female	Male
>85% (Moderate-Level Obesity)	64%	60%
>95% (High-Level Obesity)	40%	34%

Obese children have a greater risk than normal weight children of becoming obese adults and, thus, at greater risk of developing one or more health problems such as type two diabetes mellitus, coronary heart disease, stroke and respiratory disorders (Harris et al., 2002; Janssen et al., 2005; Schwimmer, Burwinkle, & Varni, 2003). Evidence is accumulating to suggest that Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus (T2DM) is becoming an increasing burden for Aboriginal children and adolescents (Ritenbaugh et al., 2003). Young, Dean, Flett and Wood-Steiman (2000) found that among the Aboriginal children in their study, high fasting glucose and fasting insulin levels were associated with obesity.

The School Environment

As children spend a large amount of time in school, this environment is considered the most logical venue in which to accommodate and develop school health policies and programs for the prevention and management of obesity (Canadian Population Health Initiative, 2004). School programs and policies designed for prevention and management of obesity can then provide youth with the knowledge and support they need in order to adopt and maintain healthy eating and physical activity behaviours (Briggs, Safaii, & Beall, 2003). For example, school interventions have been effective for increasing student knowledge and consumption of fruit, fruit juices and vegetables, and decreasing consumption of high sugar beverages and fat intake among young people (Evans & Sawyer-Morse, 2002; O’Neil & Nicklas, 2002). Similarly, through participation in school programs, physical activity levels among students have increased while pulse rates, fasting and 30-minute plasma insulin levels have decreased (Dale & Corbin, 2000; Ritenbaugh et al., 2003). Schools also

offer opportunities for mentoring and individualized counseling for youth.

Clearly, schools have proven to be a setting where changes in healthy eating, physical activity behaviours and knowledge can occur, and would be an appropriate environment to begin working to prevent obesity among Aboriginal children and youth.

The Politics of Policy Development: The Case of an Aboriginal High School

Defining the Goals

I begin my political analysis by defining the major goals of this debate. The goals are defined as “a central component of a policy analysis and the rational attempt to achieve objectives” (Stone, 2002, p. 37). The goals addressed are equity, liberty and security. It is important to consider that the policy-making process can determine the way in which social values such as equity, liberty and security are addressed. Each of these values contains ambiguity and different interpretations that can be linked to a politic struggle. I define these concepts with the intent to convince opponents that developing interventive policies would be in the best interest of Aboriginal youth and families.

The Goal of Equity

The first social value addressed is equity. “Equity is defined as the goals of all sides in conflict about how resources are distributed” (Stone, 2002, p. 39). There are many important dimensions to consider in a distribution analysis. I focus on the concepts that involve defining the recipients and group-based distribution. The recipients in this case are people of Aboriginal ancestry. Stone (2002) states:

The group-based distribution perspective holds that some major divisions in society are relevant to distributive equity and that membership in a group based on these divisions should sometimes outweigh individual characteristics in determining distribution. An example of a distributive preference is a policy that favors members of a certain group that have been victims of historical discrimination (p. 45).

I now avow that Aboriginal people are entitled to group-based distribution as compensation for historical discrimination. More specifically, due to the

long-term effects of the residential school system, the government should develop policy to give Aboriginal youth a boost in distributive preference.

One example of a distributive preference would be the provision of free access to physical activities such as offered through after school sporting activities. The equity goal is to develop policies that support increased access to physical activity for the youth, and thus create a healthier environment. Sallis et al. (2001) indicated that increasing opportunities for exercise have been shown to be associated with increased physical activity levels. I recognize that this distributive preference is not direct compensation for the discrimination; however, increasing physical activity can assist in promoting healing in Aboriginal youth.

Furthermore, healing is promoted in Lee Brown High School by incorporating the teachings of the Medicine Wheel and by seeking to develop the individual as a whole (Haig-Brown et al., 1997). Moreover, “the mission emphasizes healing which nurtures the mind, body and spirit of the students” (p. 46), and both teachers and the elders indicate that there has been great success with this method (Haig-Brown et al., 1997). Certainly, the environment in Lee Brown promotes not only academics but also healing, and these successes support my argument that policy should be developed to support distributive preferences to Aboriginal youth. These policies would work to promote physical activity and psychological healing while also providing recognition of the injustices of the past.

Opponents to the group-based distribution might argue that non-Aboriginal people have paid for the mistakes of the past and for the damages caused by some residential school experiences. Opponents might accept the legitimacy of group-based discrimination for compensatory purposes, but often hold that compensation has already been given to groups affected by these residential school experiences. This belief may be countered by identifying the difficulty of measuring how much compensation is adequate for years of psychological and physical abuse. It is also difficult to measure the degree of harm that has been caused to many generations of Aboriginal families. I would like to challenge the opponents to recognize the ambiguity involved in their arguments and to consider the benefits of providing the distribution preferences entailed with the equity-based goal.

The Goal of Security

Another important value highlighted by Stone (2002) is security. Security is defined as “the satisfaction of minimum human needs” (p. 37). One metaphor found within the literature describes Lee Brown School as an idealized family. The students referred to the school teachers, staff and administration as “part of the extended family” (Haig-Brown et al., 1997, p. 147). Teachers and principals often find themselves in multiple roles. The principal stated “a parent for the Aboriginal family is someone who cares for the child” (p. 46). Traditionally in the Aboriginal culture, all adults have the responsibility to serve as parents. One teacher stated “it’s no different than being around my own family: there is a lot of humor and there are a lot of real heavy serious issues that we are dealing with...” (Haig-Brown et al., 1997, p. 147). The extended family, respect for one another and significant common experience bind the people in this school and contribute to a feeling of comfort and security for the students. It appears that Lee Brown promotes the value of security with the students in the school, and it is this type of environment that would support health policies designed to prevent obesity.

The Goal of Liberty

The last goal identified is liberty. Liberty is defined as the ability to “do as you wish as long as you do not harm others” (Stone, 2002, p. 37). Lee Brown High School not only provides a safe environment but also provides students with the freedom to develop strong Aboriginal identities. Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier and Archibald (1997) state:

Classrooms and schools are often hostile environments where the students are misunderstood, isolated, age-grade displaced, ignored in the curriculum and taught by methods designed for non-Indian middle-class students. In other high schools the Aboriginal students have been forced to integrate, give up their identity, adopt new values and a new way of life (p.79).

Lee Brown High School offers a program of studies that affirms the contemporary world of Aboriginal people and honors the best of Aboriginal heritage. Implementing school health policies designed to prevent obesity would also work to promote a sense of liberty for the students.

All the goals identified in this analysis are suggested justifications for the government and school board to consider in supporting the development of policies that are designed to prevent obesity. I have argued that it is justified because the policy will compensate for previous discrimination and promote equity to Aboriginal peoples. It is also appropriate to establish the obesity intervention policies because Lee Brown High School promotes a strong sense of security and liberty for its students.

Defining the Problem

I plan to represent the problem from my professional point of view in order to convince families and communities of the importance of implementing health policies for the students of Lee Brown High School. Here I point to several different concepts to define the problem, which Stone (2002) calls the “languages of causes, decisions, power and interests.”

The Languages of Causes

I begin this discussion by briefly considering the causes and intentional harm that the government caused with the establishment of the residential school system. Many years ago, the Department of Indian Affairs accepted the proposal to build and finance residential schools with the philosophy that Aboriginal children would best be assimilated into the dominant society when removed from the influences of their homes, families and communities (Barman, Hebert, & McCaskill, 1999b). Assimilation was the super-ordinate value of these historic initiatives. The government established schools with the intent of eliminating Aboriginal culture. In doing so, the subsequent programs and processes caused significant harm to Aboriginal peoples, communities and their cultures.

The subsequent school system was particularly devastating to Indigenous cultures. The long-term effects of this system of schooling and assimilation will likely continue for many generations to come. Dieter (1999) found that the residential schools fostered dependence and low self-esteem, and for the majority of First Nations people living in Canada, the effects of this schooling system is intergenerationally extending through four or five generations. The Canadian Population Health Initiative (2005) found

that, in general, Aboriginal peoples experience worse economic, social, and environmental conditions than those of non-Aboriginal people, and that six out of ten First Nation and Metis respondents identified residential schools as a significant contributor to poorer health status. Lower socio-economic status is normally associated with having a poor health profile, lower life expectancy, low levels of physical activity, decreased fruit and vegetable consumption and being overweight and obese (McMurray et al., 2000; Starfield, Riley, Witt, & Robertson, 2002). These studies illustrate the destructive nature of the residential school system and the profound effects to the psychological, social and physical well-being of many Aboriginal peoples. Moreover, the residential system of schooling and assimilation has led to large discrepancies in income, employment levels, and consequently health disparities within this population.

Opponents may argue that forcing the children into the non-Aboriginal way of life, despite some of the negatives, resulted in success for many Aboriginal people. In spite of extended separation from family and community, educated Aboriginal people continued to take pride in their past and many graduates of the residential schools have become successful and productive in society (Barman et al., 1999b). Opponents may also argue that the cause of the increased rates of obesity among Aboriginal students of the Residential school era was an unintentional consequence (an inadvertent cause). The story of inadvertent cause is a common interpretation of poverty and lack of education (Stone, 2002). In other words, opponents may argue that the increasing obesity rates among Aboriginal youth are due to the lack of knowledge, education and finances to maintain a healthy lifestyle with regular physical activity and healthy eating. It is an advantage for opponents to claim an inadvertent cause because no persons can be held morally responsible for the obesity problems among the Aboriginal populations.

This belief may be countered by recognizing that Aboriginal people have suffered major injustices and that racism is still a major influential factor in present-day policy decisions. Addressing both the intentional harm caused by the residential schooling system and the unintentional inadvertent cause is a method of overcoming racism and achieving a just society.

The Complexity of Decision-Making

Along with the causes, it is also important to analyze the decision-making process and the structure of Lee Brown High School. Generally in schools, the principals are pivotal actors in the decision-making process, and they can also be a significant source of political influence in the development of school policy (Piazza, 1991). However, it is important to recognize that policy decisions in Lee Brown are not solely made by the principal. This school has established a policy decision group called the Liaison Committee. Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier and Archibald (1997) point out that:

The Liaison Committee is made of two representatives of each of the three operators, and communicates with the Management Committee made up of a Parent Council representative, the Principal and the Superintendent. Officially, the principal serves as a liaison between the Parent Council in its role as guardian of the cultural dimensions of the schools program, and the staff and the students (p. 72).

The principal's role is not to develop policy but serves more to be a liaison and advocate for the students, parents, teachers, school board and community.

Along with the school principal, the Parent Council is also involved with decision making. Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier and Archibald (1997) indicate that:

The Parent Council also serves as an advocate and a "keeper of the vision" for the school. The Council is made up of a number of dedicated members of the city's Aboriginal community, and is responsible for framing guidelines for policy issues and supporting the cultural dimensions within the school. The Parent Council plans activities which contribute to the enhancement of Aboriginal identity and selects elders and other community personnel who may assist with the various programs (p. 85-6).

The Liaison Council also approves any program changes, serves in an advisory capacity for the administrators, and generally monitors the school's work in relation to members' perceptions of Aboriginal values and specific concerns (Haig-Brown et al., 1997). Lastly and more importantly, the Parent Council has been formed to make decisions in the best interest of the students in the school.

The Lee Brown High School is uniquely designed to ensure the principal and Parent Council is included in the decision-making process. Political conflict arises when the other operators of the school attempt to make decisions that are not in the best interest of the students. The possibility exists that even though the Parent Council and principal support policies to prevent obesity, the school board could take the decision not to fund the policy initiative. The decision-making process could obviously evolve into a large political battle with jurisdictional implications.

The Power within Policy Decisions

When analyzing the decision processes, it is important to acknowledge all the potential powers and influences on the decisions made at the school level. Political influence is generally conceived as being a function of power and is a major factor in shaping and determining which education policy issues and initiatives get attention (Mazzoni, 1991). From previous discussion, I indicated that decision-making for Lee Brown High School is developed through collaborative processes by the Liaison Committee. However, this partnership is not without power struggles and influences. There are many examples of the push and pull of power dynamics that occur when developing educational policy in Aboriginal schools. These include jurisdiction over education, finances and curriculum development. This paper is delimited to the challenge of power of jurisdiction in educational decision-making.

Since the beginning of education for Aboriginal people, there have been political struggles over jurisdiction in the areas related to educational policy. In 1973, “the Federal Government accepted the basic goals for education in the document ‘Indian Control Over Indian Education’, and the two principles recognized were “parental responsibility” and “local control of education” (Barman et al., 1999b, p. 16). Since recognition of these two core educational principles there have been many schools that have been successfully administered by Aboriginal peoples (Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000). Also, there have been significant advances in the development of culturally appropriate philosophies, practices and policies (Barman et al., 1999b). Despite these documented successes, the jurisdiction over educational policy and the interpretation of the basic

goals of this document remain at the center of self-determination over education.

Both principles recognized in the document “Indian Control over Indian Education” remain a political debate (this paper is delimited to the challenge of power of local control of education). The Minister’s National Working Group on Education (2002) recognized that Aboriginal people must have a definitive role in education including decision-making, planning, implementation and evaluation of programs and policies. However, Aboriginal people feel that control of education is still limited by the imposition of provincial jurisdiction and federal financing. Barman, Hebert and McCaskill (1999a) state that “real control over education as a human development process is critical and that this can only happen if First Nations governments exercise control over education” (p. 40). In this policy case, local control of education means allowing administrators, teachers, parents as well as students of Lee Brown High School to participate in developing and implementing school health policies. The continual debate over jurisdiction could mean that even health conscious and culturally appropriate policies that are designed to prevent obesity may be politically influenced by the DIAND and the school board.

Converting Political Interests

Thus far, I have alluded to the fact that the various groups including the Liaison Committee have power in the decision making process at Lee Brown High School. It is however important to understand how to motivate the people with the power to understand the importance of supporting policy development. For the purpose of gaining support of powerful groups, it is useful to portray the issue as involving highly diffused benefits and concentrated costs (Stone, 2002, p. 223). In order to sway the opponents to accept my conclusions, I strategically argue that the diffused benefits are not only for the students at Lee Brown High School but also for the families, friends and future students. Thompson, Gifford and Thorpe (2000) found that:

Connections to future generations is important, and Aboriginal people are cognizant of the need to change practices for the good of future generations, so behavioral change with a focus on the future is more likely to be successful than that focused on the individual (p. 741).

Therefore, the benefits of establishing school policies that are supportive of a healthy environment can be passed onto the community and consequently to subsequent generations of Aboriginal peoples.

The concentrated costs of the policy would be charged to the school board. The school board may argue that the obesity policy initiative is too expensive and cannot be funded. In this situation it will be important to convince the school board that the policy has greater benefit than burden as the health policy would work to increase the overall health and well-being of many generations of Aboriginal peoples as students will likely pass on health knowledge and practices to successive offspring.

I have argued that the government caused harm intentionally to many Aboriginal people by the formation of residential schools and by accompanying assimilation ideologies. I have also identified that the representatives of the Liaison Committee work in collaboration with the principle and staff of the school to develop policies at Lee Brown. I have identified that the DIAND and the school board may decline funding health policies designed to prevent obesity for students attending Lee Brown High School, and that both hold significant powers in the decision making process. In order to win this political debate, it will be imperative that the opponents understand the subtle benefits of obesity prevention policies, which is the improved health to subsequent generations of Aboriginal people.

Solutions to the Political Debate

Using the concepts of rights, rules and incentives, I identify some strategies that may be used to structure relationships and to coordinate behaviors in order to achieve the previous identified goals.

Rights of Aboriginal Peoples

The first strategy that I discuss is rights. It is important to understand that Aboriginal people have implied substantive rights to policy initiatives. Stone (2002) defines “substantive right as specific actions or entitlements that people may claim” (p. 328). Aboriginal people have substantive rights due to promises made by the Government of Canada by virtue of the Treaties. In 1988, the Government of Canada responded to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People with a long-term policy-based report designed

to increase the quality of life of Aboriginal people. In this report, the Federal government identified the need to understand and address the legacy of past relationships with Aboriginal people. With this understanding, the government identified a vision that included a “quality of life like any other Canadian” (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 2000, p.7). There are many other visions identified in this action plan; however, this paper focuses on the idea that in order to achieve a quality of life like any other Canadian, Aboriginal people will need policies that are designed to lessen the current health disparities that are so evident today.

One important inequality is the extreme poverty that many Aboriginal families experience on a daily basis (Canadian Population Health Initiative, 2005). Among Canadian children, the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth 1998-1999 found that among children aged 2-11 years of age, those whose lived with families below the low income cut-off (LICO) were more likely to be obese (25% prevalence) (Statistics Canada, 2002). The underlying assumption to explain the observation of the increasing rates of obesity is that poor nutrition and physical inactivity are characteristic patterns of people experiencing poverty (Canadian Population Health Initiative, 2004). While this study did not specifically include Aboriginal children, it establishes the fact that the poverty and the subsequent health disparities as a result of poverty seriously limit the quality of life for all children and youth, including Aboriginal children and youth. If the government truly wants to follow through with its vision of ensuring a quality of life for Aboriginal peoples like any other Canadian, both levels of government must move to support health policy initiatives that work to reduce the rates of poverty and health problems in Aboriginal families. Starting within the school environment at the policy development is just but one way to go about ensuring that this happens.

Opponents may argue that the rates of obesity are increasing in all populations and that the government needs to enhance programs to prevent obesity in Canada generally. To counter this argument, the prevalence rates for obesity in Canada are considered higher in the Aboriginal population than non-Aboriginal people (Willows, 2005). I would also remind any opponents to the obesity policy initiative that the government has acknowledged that Aboriginal

people have the right to health initiatives in order to achieve a quality of life like any other Canadian. Based on this information, there are two choices: (1) we can choose to ignore that Aboriginal people have a right to health initiatives and allow this problem to grow, or (2) we can assist Aboriginal communities to overcome this health challenge. I challenge the opponents to view the politics of Aboriginal rights with a different lens. This lens gives recognition to the potential benefits of such health policies for this unique population of people.

Flexible vs. Precise Rules

It is also important to evaluate the rules that govern with the school. The rule that a teacher must be present in the gymnasium when the students are participating in physical activities is one worth analyzing further. This rule was developed by the school board to ensure protection against potential liability in the case where an accident might occur. This rule, while important, may be perceived as extremely limiting and inflexible. It essentially limits student opportunities for physical activities to times when the teachers are available.

While working with the students in Lee Brown, I learned that only a small percentage of students were able to participate in organized physical activity and that there is a great potential to increase the opportunities for physical activities for the students at the school if the rule of “having a teacher present” was more flexible. A flexible rule “ensures fairness by allowing sensitivity to contextual and individual differences, allows officials to respond creatively to new situations, creates efficiency by letting officials use their knowledge of particular situations, and would symbolize the ideals and aspirations of the community” (Stone, 2002, p. 292). A flexible rule would be more suited for an Aboriginal school. The new rule would allow for sensitivity to this unique culture of people and work to promote physical activity opportunities for Aboriginal youth.

School administrators may argue that a precise rule is necessary to protect against liability and the safety of the students. A precise rule is “a rule that ensures fairness by treating likes alike, eliminates arbitrariness, and symbolizes the rule of law” (Stone, 2002, p. 292). The problem with this argument is that there are already too many inequalities among Aboriginal people that do not exist in the general population (for instance, access to health services,

post-secondary education, employment training, resources, etc.). The Canadian Population Health Initiative (2005) indicates the health and economic status of Aboriginal people is significantly less than that of non-Aboriginal people. There are also distinctions between groups of Aboriginal peoples and these unique features have policy implications for research, for resources and for the improvement of Aboriginal people’s health (p. 78). Culture, language and tradition are integral to the holistic view of health held by Aboriginal peoples living in Canada (Health Canada, 2003), and the application of a precise rule ignores all the unique characteristics of these populations.

Changing the provisions for who is allowed to supervise activity at the school would also open up more opportunities for physical activity for Aboriginal students. The school could potentially be opened in the evening for organized physical activities that would be offered free of charge. Having the school principal designate a parent or member of the Parent Council to supervise school activity would also provide possible opportunities for the whole community to become involved in their children’s lives and would help make the connection in their minds about the importance of physical activity in relation to health.

Teachers might also argue that the parents and council members cannot provide the same degree of safety as teachers because qualified teachers have training and experience with supervising classrooms and physical activities in gym settings that most parents and community members do not have. I would like to counter this argument by proposing that the teachers or administrators provide short workshops to parents designed to educate new supervisors (parents) on the safety standards and procedures required to supervise a gym and respond to emergency circumstances. Most parents will be able to acquire these skills, just as the teachers have acquired their skills.

Positive Incentives for Students

To sum up, I would like to demonstrate how the interventive policy can produce a positive incentive in the school. As stated earlier, there are many physiological effects of obesity. Research demonstrates that there are also profound psychological effects as well. Findings show that obese children are more likely to develop an undesirable body image and poor self-esteem (Paxton, Neumark-Sztainer,

Hannan, & Eisenberg, 2006). In yet another study, body satisfaction decreased significantly more among younger adolescents than older adolescents, among some racial/ethnic groups of males, and among those whose BMI increased, over a five year period (Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Paxton, 2006). Neumark-Sztainer, Paxton, Hannan, Haines and Story (2006) found that lower body satisfaction does not serve as a motivator for engaging in healthy weight management behaviors, but rather predicts the use of behaviors that may place adolescents at risk for weight gain and poorer overall health. Developing policies that work to prevent obesity can create a positive incentive to achieve a healthier body image and greater self-esteem. Providing opportunities for physical activity and healthy eating will help to create positive leaders for our future and will encourage young Aboriginal people to believe in themselves.

Future Research Implications

Future research includes exploring the cultural, social and biological contributions to obesity in Aboriginal youth. There is also future potential to investigate culturally relevant health promotion strategies and interventions in Aboriginal high schools across Canada, and research in this area will build capacity in Aboriginal health research. This method of policy analysis may also be useful in the development and implementation of policy for Aboriginal children and youth living in care. Lastly, there is potential to explore how to more effectively educate Aboriginal parents and families on how to become involved in health policy development and implementation not just within the educational environment but in all environments for their populations.

Conclusion

There are many political factors affecting policy decisions. Over the years, Aboriginal peoples have made great effort to address social values within the policy making process. One of the problems at the center of the historical struggle of Aboriginal peoples is the fact that the colonial government established residential schools with the intent to eliminate the Aboriginal culture and, thus, has caused significant and inadvertent harm to Aboriginal peoples and subsequent generations. Another political struggle is the acceptance of Aboriginal people's right to develop educational policies as set out in the document

"Indian Control Over Indian Education". This paper encourages policy makers to understand that Aboriginal people have the right to develop health policies in the educational environment for their children and that there are many potential benefits to developing obesity prevention policies within the school setting. It has been asserted that well-considered policy decisions are amongst the most important contributions leaders can make to overcome racism and for achieving a more just society for the health of all Aboriginal people and their successive generations.

Endnotes

1. The term Aboriginal is a constitutionally recognized terms that generally includes Indians, Métis and Inuit peoples. The term "Indian" refers specifically to "A person who is registered or entitled to be registered in the Indian Register" of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND). For the purposes of this article, I have chosen to utilize the more generalized term "Aboriginal people" throughout the paper.
2. Stone's book, *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making* (W.W. Norton, 1997, 2001 and 2002) is used in teaching programs around the world. In 2002, it won the American Political Science Association's Aaron Wildavsky Award for an Enduring Contribution to Policy Studies.
3. This is a pseudonym to protect the identity of the school. Lee Brown is an urban high school for Aboriginal youth located in what is recognized as traditional territory of the Plains Cree (Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, & Archibald, 1997). The High School is organized and run jointly by the Parent Council, the Catholic School Board and the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), where all three groups are recognized as the operators of the school (Haig-Brown et al., 1997). The Federal government is held responsible for funding the school while the school board sets the global budget following Provincial school system budgetary procedures, while a Parent Council proposes budget priorities (Haig-Brown et al., 1997, p. 85).
4. The "Medicine Wheel" is a framework commonly used by First Nation and Aboriginal organizations to develop community based service models. The teachings of the medicine wheel provide a useful framework that some First Nations and Aboriginal organizations use to balance the requirements of provincial legislation with a deep respect for the cultural background of families and children. The medicine wheel is widely used to describe humanity as being interconnected and interdependent with one's family, community, tribe, nation and all of creation. It emphasizes the importance of balance among all aspects of one's life, beginning with a spiritual core and expanding outward to the physical, emotional, intellectual, and social realms (Shangreaux, n.d.).

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Les mauvais traitements envers les enfants autochtones signalés à la Protection de la jeunesse du Québec: Comparaison Interculturelle*

Marc Tourigny^a, Pascale Domond^b, Nico Trocmé^c, Bruno Sioui^a, et Karine Baril^a

^aDépartement de psychoéducation de l'Université de Sherbrooke.

^bDépartement de psychologie de l'UQAM

^cÉcole de travail social de l'Université McGill

Introduction

La question des mauvais traitements envers les enfants dans les communautés autochtones¹ soulève depuis plusieurs années de nombreux débats et fait l'objet de préoccupations importantes de la part des services de protection de l'enfance canadiens et québécois. Pour l'ensemble du Canada (hormis le Québec), Blackstock, Trocmé et Bennett (2004) ont comparé des données relatives aux mauvais traitements envers les enfants autochtones à celles se rapportant aux enfants non-autochtones d'origine canadienne et non-autochtones d'autres origines ethniques. Les résultats des analyses comparatives effectuées ont permis de connaître l'incidence du phénomène des mauvais traitements pour deux groupes et ont révélé des différences significatives quant aux types de mauvais traitements, au contexte dans lequel ils émergent ainsi qu'aux conséquences qui en découlent. Ces différences laissent croire en l'importance de tenir compte des différences interculturelles dans l'étude des mauvais traitements envers les enfants au Canada.

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Résumé

L'étude vise à décrire les signalements impliquant des enfants autochtones et à les comparer à ceux impliquant des enfants non-autochtones à partir d'un échantillon représentatif des signalements faits aux services québécois de protection de la jeunesse. Les résultats démontrent qu'au Québec, les situations impliquant des enfants autochtones, par rapport à celles impliquant des enfants non-autochtones, se caractérisent par l'occupation d'un logement subventionné, l'abus de substances chez les parents, un nombre plus élevé d'enfants dans la famille, le fait que le signalement soit reçu en urgence sociale et le fait que le signalement provienne moins souvent de la mère. Les enjeux pour l'intervention auprès des familles autochtones et des recommandations pour les recherches futures sont discutés.

Cette approche comparative a des retombées positives tant au plan de l'avancement des connaissances que sur le plan de la prévention et du traitement, car elle permet de contribuer au développement d'organisation de services et de programmes d'intervention adaptés aux besoins spécifiques des familles autochtones et non-autochtones touchées par ce problème. Cependant, aucune information n'est disponible à ce jour concernant les différences interculturelles pouvant exister concernant les mauvais traitements chez les enfants autochtones et non-autochtones au Québec. Le but de cette étude est de palier à ce manque d'information en examinant les différences et similarités pouvant exister entre les dossiers des enfants autochtones et non autochtones signalés aux services de protection de la jeunesse du Québec.

Population autochtone du Québec

Selon la Loi sur les Indiens, « un Indien est une personne qui est inscrite dans le Registre des Indiens du

Ministère des Affaires Indiennes et du Nord Canadien (MAINC) ou qui a le droit de l'être », distinguant ainsi les Indiens inscrits, les Indiens non inscrits et les Inuits (Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones, 2001). La population autochtone québécoise n'est pas homogène puisqu'elle est composée de dix nations amérindiennes et de la nation inuite, réparties dans près d'une soixantaine de communautés sur tout le territoire québécois et dont 70% occupe les terres réservées (Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones, 2001). En 2001, l'Enquête auprès des peuples autochtones (EAPA) a démontré que le Québec comptait une population autochtone de 79 400 personnes, soit 8% de tous les Autochtones du Canada et 1% de l'ensemble de la population du Québec (Statistique Canada, 2003). De ce nombre, 68 735 étaient, en 2005, des Indiens inscrits et 46 709 demeuraient sur une réserve (MAINC, 2006). Selon cette même enquête, 34 090 enfants vivaient durant cette période dans une famille autochtone, représentant environ 2% des enfants québécois. Soixante huit pourcent (68%) d'entre eux avaient entre 0 et 14 ans, un pourcentage supérieur à ce que l'on observait pour les enfants non-autochtones pour ce même groupe d'âge (59%).

De 1996 à 2001, la population autochtone s'est accrue plus rapidement que l'ensemble de la population du Québec, ayant augmenté de 11%, comparativement à 1% pour l'ensemble de la population québécoise. Les rapports plus récents de 2005 montrent que la population autochtone du Québec s'est accrue depuis l'année 2001 (Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones, 2005). Composée de 82 824 personnes, cette augmentation laisse croire que le nombre d'enfants autochtones ait également considérablement augmenté depuis les informations disponibles en 2001.

Historique des populations autochtones du Canada: politiques de colonisation et d'assimilation

Bon nombre de rapports historiques portant sur les populations autochtones du Canada convergent sur le fait qu'au cours des 500 ans ayant suivi l'arrivée des Européens, et plus particulièrement au cours des années ayant suivi l'adoption de la Loi sur les Indiens en 1876, qui a fait en sorte que tous les Indiens sont devenus sous la tutelle du gouvernement canadien, un bouleversement social a été engendré chez les Autochtones, perturbant ainsi

leurs valeurs et leur mode de vie traditionnels. Dans certains cas, des communautés autochtones auraient été complètement anéanties par les politiques et les mesures assimilatrices canadiennes² (Commission royale sur les peuples autochtones, 1996; Dupuis, 2001). En effet, leurs enfants auraient été enlevés ; leur gouvernement, leur économie et leurs traditions réglementés ou bannis par des lois (Armitage, 1995; Bennett & Blackstock, 2002; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Réame & Macklem, 1994). Le refus du droit de vote, la réglementation de l'identité, l'interdiction d'acheter des terres, la proscription des cérémonies spirituelles, la relocalisation vers des réserves et la ségrégation imposée dans celles-ci, la restriction sur le plan des droits civils et politiques, l'expropriation des terres en vertu de lois (p.ex., la Loi sur les Indiens) et l'obligation pour des enfants autochtones de fréquenter des pensionnats où il appert qu'une forte proportion d'Autochtones, aujourd'hui âgés de plus de 35 ans, auraient été abusés physiquement et agressés sexuellement (Commission de la santé et des services sociaux des Premières Nations du Québec et du Labrador, 2006) sont des exemples de politiques racistes et oppressives à l'égard des peuples autochtones rapportés dans ces rapports.

Premiers systèmes de protection et de bien-être de l'enfance appliqués aux populations autochtones

Dès le début des années 1870, le gouvernement fédéral commença à établir des écoles résidentielles pour enfants autochtones âgés de 5 à 16 ans dans le but d'enseigner à la jeunesse autochtone comment devenir des membres productifs de la société selon les lignes de conduite européennes et chrétiennes (Miller, 1996). Les enfants étaient donc retirés de leurs foyers et de leurs communautés pour être placés dans ces pensionnats dirigés conjointement par le gouvernement et différentes communautés religieuses. L'assimilation des Autochtones s'effectuait alors par l'endoctrinement des enfants afin qu'ils abandonnent leur style de vie et leur langue. Ces écoles existaient en vertu de la Loi sur les Indiens de 1876 et se sont répandues dans toutes les provinces, particulièrement celles de l'ouest canadien et à l'exception des provinces maritimes (Miller, 1996). L'enfance autochtone aurait également été la cible d'exploitation et de maltraitance par le remplacement, dans les années 1960, des pensionnats au profit des premiers systèmes

de protection et de bien-être de l'enfance comme système de soins pour les enfants autochtones du Canada (Armitage, 1995). Toutefois, l'implantation de cette nouvelle organisation ne répondait toujours pas aux besoins des Autochtones et renforçait plutôt la désintégration des familles de ces communautés (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002). À titre d'exemple illustrant l'inadéquation de la politique des systèmes de bien-être et de protection de l'enfance visant les Autochtones, les conditions de vie et la pauvreté, plutôt que la maltraitance, auraient été les raisons principales pour lesquelles de nombreux enfants autochtones ont été retirés de leurs familles. Même si les enfants étaient placés en raison de situations d'abus ou de négligences graves, les conditions de vie ou les soins médicaux étaient souvent la raison de l'intervention des systèmes de protection (Tiechroeb, 1997).

À la fin des années 1960 au Canada, environ 30% à 40% des enfants suivis par les systèmes de protection de l'enfance auraient été des enfants autochtones, alors qu'ils représentaient moins de 4% de la population canadienne (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Dès 1983³, la surreprésentation des enfants autochtones dans les systèmes de protection de l'enfance était étendue à l'ensemble du pays, avec notamment des taux variant entre 50% et 70% d'enfants autochtones en tutelle pour les provinces des prairies (Armitage, 1995; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Tiechroeb, 1997).

Selon Tiechroeb (1997), une faible proportion de ces enfants retournait dans leur famille d'origine après avoir été placés dans des familles d'accueil ou adoptés. Ceux qui retournaient à la maison après des absences prolongées se retrouvaient aliénés de leur famille et de leur environnement culturel (Hudson & McKenzie, 1985). En effet, « élevés par des parents [non-autochtones] de classe moyenne, ils ont grandi avec une connaissance et une compréhension limitées de leurs racines. » (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002, p.21). De plus, l'agression sexuelle et l'abus physique de ces enfants de la part des parents d'accueil ou des parents adoptifs auraient été rapportés par certains d'entre eux (Tiechroeb, 1997).

Les répercussions des politiques sociales sur les peuples autochtones

La relation entre le gouvernement du Canada et les peuples des Premières Nations, marquée par la pression

sociale, économique, politique et culturelle résultant des politiques assimilatrices, a eu des conséquences dévastatrices auprès des communautés autochtones du pays. Ces politiques de colonisation, d'expropriation et d'assimilation ont entraîné des répercussions notamment sur leurs systèmes familiaux, par le bris des liens familiaux, et leur situation économique (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Hudson, 1987; Kimelman, 1985). Selon Bennett et Blackstock (2002), l'application forcée des services provinciaux de bien-être et de protection de l'enfance chez les familles autochtones n'a fait qu'exacerber les effets dévastateurs subis par ces peuples au cours de la colonisation et qui perdurent encore à ce jour, notamment en termes de problèmes psychosociaux et socioéconomiques. Parmi ces problèmes sociaux, signalons la pauvreté, la violence conjugale, les mauvais traitements envers les enfants, la criminalité et l'alcoolisme.

La pauvreté

Les données du recensement de 1991 analysées dans le rapport du Conseil Canadien de Développement Social montrent que les Autochtones vivant en milieu urbain au Canada ont deux fois plus de risques de vivre dans la pauvreté que les non-Autochtones⁴ (Lochhead & Shillington, 1996). En effet, alors que le taux de pauvreté moyen pour tous les habitants en milieu urbain était de 25%, le taux de pauvreté des personnes autochtones vivant en milieu urbain s'élevait à 56% durant cette période. Dans le même sens, le taux de pauvreté des mères canadiennes chefs de famille monoparentale s'élevait à 45%, alors qu'il atteignait 73% chez les mères autochtones (Conseil national du bien-être social, 2000). De plus, en 1995, 60% des enfants autochtones de moins de six ans vivaient au sein d'une famille pauvre, comparativement à 25% pour l'ensemble des enfants canadiens (Conseil national du bien-être social, 2000). Les conditions de vie observées dans les milieux autochtones ont également un impact sur l'espérance de vie moyenne de ces enfants, qui est de huit ans inférieure à la moyenne nationale une fois qu'ils atteignent l'âge adulte (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Les données plus récentes montrent que le problème de pauvreté chez les enfants autochtones est encore d'actualité, puisque selon le recensement canadien de 2001, 40% des enfants autochtones vivant à l'extérieur des réserves sont pauvres (Statistique Canada, 2003).

Pour ce qui est du Québec, les données liées aux profils de la population autochtone du Québec du recensement de 2001 nous indiquent que la pauvreté frappe les familles autochtones de cette province. À titre d'exemple, on constate que la moitié de la population autochtone âgée de 15 ans et plus vivant au Québec, soit 25 880 personnes, avait un revenu inférieur à 15 330 \$ durant cette période. Peu de données québécoises récentes nous permettent de connaître le taux de pauvreté chez les Autochtones comparativement aux non-Autochtones, mais les données présentées en 1999 par le Conseil Canadien de Développement Social révélaient que 37% des Autochtones vivaient en 1995 sous le seuil de faible revenu établi par Statistique Canada, comparativement à 23% des Québécois (Schetagne, 1999).

Éducation, emploi et chômage

La situation d'emploi et d'éducation chez les jeunes Autochtones apparaît plus difficile que chez les non-Autochtones. En effet, 14% des Amérindiens, 17% des Métis et 19% des Inuits vivant hors réserve étaient chômeurs, comparativement à 8% des non-Autochtones (Statistique Canada, 2003). Ainsi, dans l'ensemble, les Autochtones de 15 ans et plus affichent des taux de chômage beaucoup plus élevés que les non-Autochtones. En ce qui concerne le niveau d'éducation, alors que 19% de tous les Canadiens de 25 ans et plus auraient obtenu un diplôme universitaire (Bowlby, 2002), c'est le cas pour seulement 8% des Autochtones au Canada dans la même tranche d'âge (Kunz, Milan & Schetagne, 2001; Statistique Canada, 2003).

Selon Statistique Canada (2003), au Québec, concernant le taux de diplomation universitaire, on estimait en 2001 chez les personnes âgées de 25 ans et plus à seulement à 6% la proportion des Autochtones ayant obtenu un grade universitaire au niveau du baccalauréat ou à un niveau supérieur (contre 10% de la population totale) ; et à 48 % la proportion ayant un niveau inférieur au diplôme d'études secondaires (comparativement à 39% pour la population totale).

En matière d'emploi, les Autochtones représentaient en 2001 2 % de la population active au Québec. Toutefois, le taux de chômage dans cette population se situait à 18% durant cette période (MAINC, 2006).

À notre connaissance, nous ne disposons pas de données permettant de croire que le problème de

faible scolarisation et de chômage soit largement résolu pour les Autochtones du Québec. Bien qu'il y ait eu une nette amélioration de la scolarisation des jeunes Autochtones au cours des trois dernières décennies, le faible taux de scolarisation des populations autochtones rapporté en 2001 démontre que le problème affecte plus que la moitié des jeunes autochtones adolescents et adultes.

Violence conjugale

Les femmes autochtones sont davantage à risque que les autres Canadiennes d'être victimes de violence conjugale. L'enquête sociale générale sur la violence conjugale menée au Québec en 1999 révèle que 25% des femmes autochtones auraient été agressées par un conjoint ou un ex-conjoint au cours des cinq dernières années, comparativement à 8% des femmes non-autochtones (Jiwani, 2000). De plus, la probabilité d'être tuées par leur conjoint lors d'une rupture d'union serait huit fois plus élevée chez les femmes autochtones que chez les non-autochtones. Dans le même sens, les formes les plus graves de violence, soit celles qui pourraient mettre la vie en péril (être battue, étranglée, menacée avec une arme à feu ou un couteau ou agressée sexuellement) seraient également plus courantes chez les femmes victimes autochtones.

Abus de substances et criminalité

La consommation d'alcool serait un problème grave au sein des communautés autochtones. En effet, Bennett et Blackstock (2002, p.40) citent ce que la Commission royale sur les peuples autochtones (1996) a conclu à cet effet, soit que « l'alcool est la substance la plus intoxicante qui risque d'entraîner le plus grand nombre de problèmes chez les peuples et les communautés autochtones au Canada. ». Une étude ontarienne utilisant des données de 1985-86 a quantifié la consommation d'alcool par comté, et elle a comparé les comtés avec réserves autochtones aux comtés sans réserves (Adrian, Payne, & Williams, 1991). Les comtés avec réserves avaient un pourcentage supérieur de consommation d'alcool comparativement à celui du reste des comtés et la présence des réserves expliquait 25% de variation de la consommation d'alcool dans la province. L'étude a permis d'établir un lien direct entre le niveau faible de revenu et la consommation d'alcool, où chaque

1 000\$ supplémentaire ajouté aux bénéficiaires après impôts était mis en corrélation avec une diminution de 0,3 litre de la consommation totale d'alcool.

On ne dispose pas de données spécifiques pour le Québec concernant la criminalité au sein de la communauté autochtone, mais les données canadiennes témoignent de la présence de ce problème social. À cet effet, les résultats de l'enquête sociale générale sur la violence conjugale révèlent qu'environ 35% de la population autochtone canadienne avait déclaré avoir été victime d'au moins un crime dans les 12 mois précédant l'enquête, comparativement à 26% chez les non-Autochtones (Jiwani, 2000).

Les jeunes Autochtones, comparativement aux non-Autochtones, sont présents en plus grande proportion dans tous les aspects du système de justice pénale au Canada. Bien qu'ils ne constituaient que 5% de la population en 2001-2002, ils comptaient pour près de 25% des placements en détention provisoire, 22% des placements en garde ordonnée, 17% des mises sous probation et 16% des applications de mesures de rechange. Ces taux ne seraient toutefois pas uniformes d'une province à l'autre (Gouvernement du Canada, 2005).

Signalements pour mauvais traitements dans la communauté autochtone

Les rapports annuels des ministères provinciaux et territoriaux des services de protection de l'enfance estimaient, pour les années 2000-2002, que 7 600 enfants étaient en placement au Canada et 80% de ces enfants seraient des Autochtones (Farris-Manning & Zandrastra, 2003). Quant à l'évolution du nombre d'Autochtones impliqués dans les services de protection de l'enfance, le MAINC (2006) révèle que les cas de signalement pour protection de l'enfance dans la communauté autochtone ont augmenté de 70% de 1995 à 2003.

Liens entre les problèmes sociaux et les mauvais traitements envers les enfants

Plusieurs études montrent que les mauvais traitements envers les enfants, notamment la négligence, sont fortement associés au contexte socioéconomique dans lequel l'enfant évolue, caractérisé notamment par un faible niveau de scolarisation de la mère, des

ressources socioéconomiques peu élevées, le chômage chez les parents, l'abus de substances des parents et la violence conjugale (Black, Heyman, & Slep, 2001; Gelles & Hargreaves, 1990; O'Keefe, 1995; Schumacher, Slep, & Heyman, 2001; Sedlak, 1997; Zuravin, 1987).

Malgré le lien existant entre les difficultés socioéconomiques des familles et l'occurrence des mauvais traitements chez les enfants, peu de données à ce sujet sont disponibles pour les communautés autochtones. En effet, aucune donnée québécoise ne semble exister concernant les liens entre les mauvais traitements chez les enfants autochtones et les facteurs de risque sociaux-économiques et concernant la spécificité culturelle des situations de mauvais traitements signalées à la protection de la jeunesse et impliquant un enfant autochtone.

Comparaison des mauvais traitements dans des familles autochtones et non-autochtones

Deux études canadiennes, comparant les mauvais traitements dans la communauté autochtone et non-autochtone, ont été répertoriées. Dans une étude exploratoire, Leung et Carter (1983) ont examiné les différences culturelles concernant les mauvais traitements envers des enfants d'origine chinoise, autochtone ainsi que canadienne-anglophone ayant un dossier à l'hôpital général de Vancouver. Bien que cette étude présente plusieurs limites méthodologiques, elle suggère que dans les familles autochtones, le syndrome d'alcoolisme fœtal, la négligence (sous forme de «failure to thrive») et les ecchymoses seraient plus présentes en comparaison aux familles canadiennes anglaises. Quant à l'identification de l'auteur des mauvais traitements, les résultats ont démontré qu'il y a une prépondérance des mères comme auteurs des mauvais traitements pour les cas autochtones, alors que pour les cas canadiens-anglophones, on identifie une proportion plus importante d'agresseurs qui n'ont pas de lien de parenté avec l'enfant (conjoint de la mère, gardien d'enfants et autres).

Blackstock et al. (2004) ont réalisé à partir d'une vaste enquête canadienne une série d'analyses comparatives entre les signalements d'enfants autochtones, ceux d'enfants non-autochtones d'origine canadienne (hormis ceux d'origine québécoise) et ceux des non-autochtones d'autres origines ethniques faits aux services canadiens de protection de la jeunesse⁵.

Les résultats ont démontré que la situation des enfants autochtones se caractérise, comparativement aux situations des deux autres groupes, par une plus grande proportion de familles: 1) vivant de l'aide sociale; 2) vivant dans un logement insalubre; 3) ayant reçu des services de la protection de l'enfance dans le passé; 4) impliquées dans des situations de négligence; et 5) de familles ayant déménagé dans les 6 derniers mois.

En ce qui concerne les parents autochtones, comparativement au deux autres groupes, on retrouve des différences significatives quant: 1) à la plus grande proportion d'entre eux à avoir vécu des mauvais traitements dans leur enfance; 2) aux problèmes d'abus de substances (drogue/alcool) qui sont davantage présents; 3) à la plus forte présence d'activités criminelles; 4) à l'isolement social plus présent; 5) à une plus grande présence de maladie mentale ou de problèmes de fonctionnement cognitifs; et 6) à l'âge moins élevé des parents. Enfin, toujours selon cette étude, le fait d'être un enfant autochtone augmenterait les probabilités que les mauvais traitements soient jugés fondés et que l'enfant soit placé au moment de la prise en charge.

Chez les enfants, comparés aux deux autres groupes, les enfants autochtones se différencient principalement par une plus forte présence de problèmes d'abus de substances et d'absentéisme scolaire.

Limites méthodologiques

Malgré l'avancement des connaissances apportées par ce type d'études comparatives, des limites méthodologiques se doivent d'être soulevées. Une de ces limites concerne le fait qu'il est possible que des différences entre les Autochtones et les non-Autochtones soient davantage attribuables au niveau économique plus faible des familles autochtones et non à des différences d'ordre culturel. Comme le niveau économique est une variable fortement associée aux mauvais traitements envers les enfants, et comme les familles autochtones sont nettement plus défavorisées économiquement, le contrôle du niveau économique permettrait de mieux dégager les différences liées à la culture. Une seconde limite a trait à l'utilisation d'analyses univariées pour déterminer les différences entre les groupes. Cette stratégie ne permet pas de dégager l'apport unique de chacune des variables permettant de caractériser chacun des groupes par rapport à l'autre. Des stratégies d'analyses multivariées semblent plus intéressantes à cet égard.

La présente étude vise donc à examiner le phénomène des mauvais traitements d'enfants autochtones signalés aux services de protection de la jeunesse du Québec à partir d'un échantillon représentatif des signalements québécois. Plus spécifiquement, deux objectifs ont été fixés, le premier visant à décrire les signalements impliquant des enfants autochtones et le second à comparer ces signalements à des signalements impliquant des enfants non-autochtones. Afin de palier à certaines limites méthodologiques identifiées précédemment, les deux groupes d'enfants ont été appareillés quant au revenu familial, à la région administrative où vit la famille et aux figures parentales vivant dans le milieu de vie de l'enfant.

Méthodologie

Procédure

La présente étude porte sur des analyses secondaires réalisées à partir d'une banque de données provenant d'une enquête (étude d'incidence québécoise - ÉIQ⁶) qui visait à documenter tous les signalements reçus et retenus entre le 1er octobre et le 31 décembre 1998. Les signalements proviennent de 16 des 18 régions administratives du Québec, chacune desservie par une Direction de la protection de la jeunesse (DPJ). Deux régions ont été exclues de l'enquête en raison de leur faible nombre par rapport à l'ensemble de la population québécoise et des difficultés d'accessibilité résultant de leur éloignement : le Nunavik, dont la population est de 8 000 habitants et les Terres Cries de la Baie James, dont la population est de 9 000 habitants.

Le taux de signalements retenus et documentés (taux de réponse) au cours de l'étude a été calculé en divisant le nombre de signalements documentés par le nombre de signalements enregistrés par les DPJ au cours de la même période (Tourigny et al., 2002). Pour l'ensemble des signalements retenus (N = 4 929), le taux moyen de questionnaires complétés est de 86% (variant de 64% à 99% selon les DPJ).

L'échantillon final de notre étude a été tiré des signalements retenus. Un signalement est défini comme "Toute situation d'un enfant de 0-17 ans, rapportée au directeur de la protection de la jeunesse par une personne qui pense que la sécurité ou le développement de cet enfant est ou peut être compromis" (Ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux, 1988: 5).

Échantillon

Un premier échantillon a été constitué de 215 enfants dont le signalement a été retenu et qui vivaient avec au moins un parent autochtone. Pour chaque enfant de cet échantillon, un enfant non-autochtone comparable a été sélectionné par la suite. L'appariement des deux groupes s'est fait à partir des caractéristiques suivantes : 1) le signalement provient du même Centre Jeunesse ; 2) les figures parentales présentes dans le milieu de vie de l'enfant ; et 3) le revenu familial annuel. Il a été impossible de réaliser un appariement individuel parfait, car pour un certain nombre d'enfants autochtones, il nous a été impossible de trouver un enfant non-autochtone présentant exactement les mêmes caractéristiques. Toutefois, des analyses de Khi-carré montrent que les deux groupes ne se distinguent pas significativement sur ces trois

variables. L'échantillon final comprend donc 215 paires d'enfants. Le Tableau 1 montre que les enfants des deux groupes vivaient principalement avec leurs deux parents biologiques (42%) et près du tiers des enfants vivaient dans une famille monoparentale (31%). Les enfants vivaient dans des familles ayant un très faible revenu, puisque plus de la moitié (56%) vivait dans une famille dont le revenu était inférieur à 15 000\$ (40%) ou provenait de l'aide sociale (16%), le quart (22%) vivait dans une famille dont le revenu familial se situait entre 15 000 et 25 000\$. Malgré de légères différences entre les deux groupes concernant cette variable, il n'y avait toutefois aucune différence statistique significative. Enfin, au niveau de la région, 30% des enfants provenaient de la Côte-Nord, 15% de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue, 17% de la région de Montréal et 37% provenaient du reste du Québec.

Tableau 1

Caractéristiques à partir desquelles les signalements d'enfants autochtones ont été appariés aux signalements d'enfants non-autochtones (N = 430)^f

Caractéristiques des situations	Total N = 430%	Enfants Autochtone N = 215%	Enfants Non Autoch. N = 215%	Khi-carré (dl)
Centre jeunesse¹				
Côte Nord	30.2	30.2	30.2	
Abitibi/Témiscamingue	15.3	15.3	15.3	
Montréal/Batshaw	17.2	17.2	17.2	
Autres centres jeunesse	37.2	37.2	37.2	
Revenu familial annuel				13.25 (5)
Moins de 15000\$	40.0	39.1	40.9	
15000\$ à 24999\$	21.9	26.0	17.7	
25000\$ à 40999\$	7.0	5.6	8.4	
41000\$ et plus	3.0	2.3	3.7	
Vit de l'aide sociale	15.8	17.7	14.0	
Inconnu	12.3	9.3	15.3	
Caractéristiques familiales				
Milieu de vie de l'enfant signalé				1.37 (4)
2 parents biologiques	42.3	42.6	42.5	
1 parent biologique avec conjoint	19.7	18.6	20.9	
1 parent biologique seul	31.0	31.2	30.8	
Autres types de famille	3.4	3.6	3.2	
Inconnu	3.6	4.5	2.7	

(1) Aucun test statistique n'a été effectué pour cette variable puisque l'appariement était parfait.

Variabes	Canada (Trocmé)	Quebec (Tourigny)
Structure familiale*		
2 parents biologiques	21.9	42.1
Recomposée	21.6	18.6
Monoparentale	56.5	31.2
Source de revenus		
temps plein	15.8	12.4
temps partiel	10.2	7.2
aide sociale*	58.1	74.6
Autre	16.0	5.7
Logement non sécuritaire	7.9	10.5
Déménagement 12 derniers mois*		
Aucun	60.1	68.8
1	22.9	18.3
2 ou plus	17.0	12.9
Caractéristiques des mauvais traitements*		
Non fondé	26.3	13.5
Fondé	49.5	80.9
Suspecté	24.2	5.6
<i>Abus physique</i>	18.6	14.9
<i>Abus sexuel</i>	10.1	11.6
<i>Négligence</i>	57.9	62.3
<i>Abus psychologique</i>	6.5	26.0
<i>Abandon</i>	Nd	7.4
<i>Troubles comportement</i>	Nd	19.5
<i>Violence conjugale</i>	7.0	Nd
Caractéristiques de l'enfant		
Abus de subst. naissance	6.1	2.5
Anxiété ou dépression	7.6	7.4
Nombre de problèmes 0	77	80.2
Nombre de problèmes 1	12.7	11.9
Nombre de problèmes 2+	10.3	7.9
Caractéristiques des parents		
Age:		
30	49.5	39.7
31-40	44.7	43.1
41-50	5.4	13.9
51+	0.4	3.3
Histoire de maltraitance*	47.2	86.9
Abus alcool + drogues*	91.0	53.2
Activités criminelles	17.2	8.9
Santé mentale	21.7	15.8
Santé physique	7.0	9.8
Faible soutien social	33.9	29.4

Variabes

Le formulaire d'enquête pour documenter les signalements retenus a été élaboré principalement à partir d'instruments de mesures provenant d'enquêtes similaires dont l'Ontario Incidence Study (Trocmé, McPhee, Tam, & Hay, 1994), le National Incidence Study - NIS (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996) et l'Étude Canadienne d'Incidence - ÉCI (Trocmé et al., 2001). Le formulaire a été complété à la fin de l'étape Orientation par l'intervenant de la protection de la

jeunesse responsable de cette étape. Il a ainsi permis de recueillir de l'information sur les caractéristiques du signalement, des mauvais traitements fondés, de l'enfant signalé, des adultes jouant le rôle de parents auprès de l'enfant, du milieu de vie de l'enfant signalé et des services durant l'évaluation du signalement.

Caractéristiques du signalement retenu

Des questions portaient sur la description de la situation signalée, telles que la source de signalement (10 sources de signalements distinctes), le type de réception du signalement (service régulier et urgence sociale), et le fait que l'enfant ait fait l'objet d'un signalement retenu dans les 12 mois précédant l'étude ou d'une prise en charge au cours des cinq années précédant l'étude.

Problématiques fondées

La présence de sept problématiques (abus physique, abus sexuel, négligence, abandon, mauvais traitements psychologiques, troubles de comportement sérieux et autres) jugées fondées suite à l'évaluation faite par l'intervenant de la protection de la jeunesse était documentée. Les définitions des problématiques provenaient de l'inventaire concernant le bien-être de l'enfant en relation avec l'exercice des responsabilités parentales - ICBE (Vézina & Bradet, 1990), du NIS (Sedlack, 1991), de l'ÉCI (Trocmé et al., 2001) et du Système clientèle jeunesse - SCJ (Trudeau & Pellan, 1998) pour la problématique des troubles de comportement sérieux.

Caractéristiques de l'enfant, de sa famille et des figures parentales

Le formulaire d'enquête a permis d'obtenir de l'information sur les caractéristiques démographiques de l'enfant (âge et sexe) et sur la présence de huit problèmes vécus par l'enfant (problèmes à la naissance, retard du développement, handicap de l'ouïe, de la vue ou de la parole, problème chronique de santé, problème d'apprentissage, hyperactivité, problèmes psychiatriques, dépression/anxiété).

Concernant les variables familiales, la sécurité ou non du logement, le fait que la famille soit propriétaire du logement ou non, le nombre d'enfants signalés dans la famille, la présence d'une autre personne significative pour l'enfant (autre que les figures parentales), le

nombre de déménagements dans les 12 derniers mois et le nombre d'enfants dans la famille ont été mesurés.

Dix problèmes, connus ou soupçonnés, (violence conjugale, consommation d'alcool ou de drogue, criminalité, santé mentale, santé physique, faible soutien social, retard mental, problèmes financiers séparation/divorce ou autre) permettaient de décrire les difficultés vécues par les figures parentales. Pour la présente étude, nous avons utilisé le nombre total de problèmes vécus par la figure parentale principale et les problèmes qui se sont avérés statistiquement significatifs entre les deux groupes. Le niveau de coopération du parent a été évalué à partir de l'échelle de l'ICBE, une échelle en quatre points allant de «adéquat» à «sérieusement inadéquat» (Vézina & Bradet, 1990) et le questionnaire permettait également de documenter si le parent avait lui-même vécu des mauvais traitements dans son enfance.

Stratégies d'analyse

Des tests de khi-carré et des tests-t ont d'abord été effectués afin de comparer les enfants autochtones et non-autochtones (version 9.0 de SPSS). Pour le premier objectif, ces comparaisons ont porté sur 28 variables à l'étude (Tableau 2). Les 16 variables qui s'avéraient significatives ont été utilisées dans une analyse de régression logistique par blocs hiérarchiques afin d'identifier les variables qui prédisaient l'appartenance aux groupes d'enfants. Lorsque les variables indépendantes sont nombreuses et intercorrélées, l'approche hiérarchique diminue le nombre de variables à se retrouver simultanément dans le modèle, ce qui améliore la performance des procédés d'estimation. Aussi, la comparaison des résultats, d'une étape à l'autre, fournit quelques détails supplémentaires concernant les liens entre les variables indépendantes. L'ordre d'entrée des trois grandes catégories de variables était le suivant, soit : les caractéristiques du signalement, les problématiques fondées et les caractéristiques liées à l'enfant signalé et sa famille.

Résultats

Analyses univariées

Les résultats provenant des analyses de Khi-carré révèlent un certain nombre de différences importantes et significatives entre les dossiers de signalement d'enfants autochtones et ceux d'enfants non-autochtones (voir Tableau 3).

Tableau 2 Variables utilisées pour l'analyse univariée afin de comparer les deux groupes	
Caractéristiques du signalement retenu	
1.	Type de réception*
2.	Signalement antérieur retenu (12 mois) NS
3.	Prise en charge antérieure (5 ans)*
4.	Sources de signalement - mère*
5.	Sources de signalement - famille élargie*
Variables liées à la problématique fondée	
6.	Présence d'un abus sexuel NS
7.	Présence d'un abus physique NS
8.	Présence de négligence*
9.	Présence d'abandon NS
10.	Présence de mauvais traitements psychologiques NS
11.	Présence de troubles de comportement*
12.	Présence d'une problématique autre NS
Variables liées à l'enfant signalé et sa famille	
13.	Sexe de l'enfant NS
14.	Âge de l'enfant NS
15.	Nombre de problèmes connus chez l'enfant*
16.	Nombre de besoins de services pour l'enfant NS
17.	Milieu de vie de l'enfant NS
18.	Nombre d'enfants signalés dans la même famille*
19.	Nombre d'enfants dans la famille *
20.	Présence d'une autre personne significative NS
21.	Nombre de déménagements NS
22.	Type d'occupation *
23.	Logement non sécuritaire *
24.	Niveau de coopération du parent*
25.	Mauvais traitements dans l'enfance du parent*
26.	Nombre de problèmes connus chez le parent*
27.	Présence de violence conjugale vécu par le parent*
28.	Présence d'abus de drogue et d'alcool chez le parent*

* Neuf autres sources de signalement ont été documentés et testés statistiquement mais aucune différence significative entre les deux n'a été détecté.

Caractéristiques du signalement retenu

Les résultats portant sur les caractéristiques du signalement retenu démontrent que les signalements impliquant des enfants autochtones étaient plus souvent reçus par les urgences sociales (26% vs 12%) et que les enfants autochtones avaient plus fréquemment fait l'objet d'une prise en charge par les services de protection de l'enfance aux cours des cinq dernières années, comparativement aux enfants non-autochtones (25% vs 14%). Deux différences significatives ont été détectées quant à la proportion des différentes sources de signalements: dans les signalements impliquant des enfants autochtones, on retrouvait moins souvent de signalements faits par la mère de l'enfant signalé (7% vs 15%) et plus souvent un signalement provenant d'un

Tableau 3					
Caractéristiques des signalements, des enfants et leur familles selon que les enfants sont Autochtones ou non					
Caractéristiques des situations		Total N = 430%	Enfants Autochtone N = 215%	Enfants on autoch. N = 215%	Khi-carré (dl)
Caractéristiques du signalement retenu					
Type de réception:	Services réguliers	81.2	74.4	87.9	12.56***(1)
	Urgence sociale	18.8	25.6	12.1	
Prise en charge antérieure (5 ans)	Oui	19.2	24.8	13.7	8.35**(1)
	Non	80.8	75.2	86.3	
Source de signalement-mère	Oui	10.9	7.0	14.9	6.90**(1)
	Non	89.1	93.0	85.1	
Source de signalement-famille élargie	Oui	10.9	16.7	5.1	14.92***(1)
	Non	89.1	83.3	94.9	
Variables liées à la problématique fondée					
Présence de négligence	Oui	42.6	48.4	36.7	5.95*(1)
	Non	57.4	51.6	63.3	
Présence de troubles de comportements	Oui	25.3	17.7	33.0	13.38***(1)
	Non	74.1	82.3	67.0	
Variables liées à l'enfant signalé et sa famille					
Âge de l'enfant:	0-5 ans	38.9	40.7	37.1	4.37 (2)
	6-11 ans	29.5	31.8	27.2	
	12-17 ans	31.6	27.5	35.7	
Variables liées à l'enfant signalé et sa famille (suite)					
Nombre de problèmes connus chez l'enfant					
	Aucun	73.9	80.2	67.9	8.28*(3)
	1 problème	16.2	11.9	20.3	
	2 problèmes	6.5	5.4	7.5	
	3 problèmes et plus	3.4	2.5	4.2	
Nbre d'enfants dans la famille					
	1 seul enfant	33.7	29.8	37.7	28.18***(5)
	2 enfants	27.4	22.3	32.6	
	3 enfants	17.9	16.7	19.1	
	4 enfants	11.6	17.2	6.0	
	5 enfants	5.8	8.4	3.3	
	6 enfants	3.5	5.6	1.4	
Nbre d'enfants signalés dans la famille					
	1 seul enfant	51.4	44.7	58.1	11.96*(4)
	2 enfants	21.2	22.8	19.5	
	3 enfants	14.9	15.3	14.4	
	4 enfants	8.4	11.2	5.6	
	5 enfants et plus	4.2	6.0	2.3	
Type d'occupation du logement					
	Logement subventionné	25.9	35.7	16.6	56.67***(3)
	Logement non subventionné	36.9	27.6	45.9	
	Propriétaire	26.4	17.9	34.6	
	Autres	10.7	18.9	2.9	
Variables liées à l'enfant signalé et sa famille (suite)					
Logement sécuritaire	Oui	92.2	89.5	94.9	4.02*(1)
	Non	7.8	10.5	5.1	
Niveau de coopération du parent					
	Adéquat	63.7	56.7	70.7	10.60*(3)
	Légèrement inadéquat	16.0	20.5	11.6	
	Modérément ou sérieusement	18.6	20.5	16.7	
	N'a pas été contacté	1.6	2.3	0.9	
Mauvais traitements dans l'enfance du parent	Oui	75.3	86.9	61.5	20.66***(1)
	Non	24.7	13.1	38.5	
Présence de violence conjugale					
	Non	68.7	62.1	75.2	11.35**(2)
	Connu	22.2	24.8	19.6	
	Soupçonné	9.1	13.1	5.1	
Présence d'abus de drogue/alcool chez le parent					
	Non	60.7	46.7	74.8	55.51***(2)
	Connu	27.8	43.9	11.7	
	Soupçonné	11.4	9.3	13.6	
Nbre de problèmes connus chez le parent					
	Aucun	30.8	26.6	35.0	15.47***(3)
	1 problème	28.3	29.4	27.1	
	2 problèmes	19.6	19.2	20.1	
	3 problèmes et plus	21.2	24.8	17.7	

1. Le ratio de cotes estimé est une mesure de l'augmentation de la cote dans une catégorie par rapport à l'autre, il identifie les catégories les plus à risque.

2. L'intervalle de confiance du ratio de cotes est une mesure de la précision du ratio de cotes estimé.

3. La statistique de Wald identifie les catégories où le phénomène est le plus fréquent. Cependant, si la probabilité est supérieure à 0.05, on ne peut rejeter l'hypothèse qu'il n'y a pas de différence entre les catégories.

4. La statistique du rapport de vraisemblance est un indicateur de la capacité de chacune des variables à prédire le phénomène, au-delà de la contribution des autres variables incluses dans le modèle. La probabilité tient compte du nombre de paramètres utilisés par la variable pour prédire le phénomène.

membre de la famille élargie (17% vs 5%).

Problématique fondée

Quant aux données relatives aux problématiques qui ont été jugées fondées lors de l'évaluation du signalement, on note une proportion plus grande d'enfants victimes de négligence chez les Autochtones (48% vs 37%) et une proportion plus faible d'enfants ayant des troubles du comportement (18% vs 33%). La proportion d'enfants vivant des abus sexuels, psychologiques ou physiques est semblable chez les deux groupes.

Caractéristiques des enfants, des parents et des familles signalés

Les données se rapportant aux caractéristiques des enfants signalés démontrent que les cas autochtones et non-autochtones ne se distinguaient pas en proportion quant à l'âge de l'enfant. Toutefois, les enfants autochtones présentaient moins de problèmes connus comparativement aux enfants non-autochtones. En effet, 80% des enfants autochtones signalés ne présentaient aucun des problèmes documentés dans l'étude comparativement à 68% des enfants non-autochtones.

Les familles autochtones comptaient davantage d'enfants comparativement aux non-autochtones. En effet, 48% des enfants autochtones vivaient dans une famille ayant trois enfants ou plus contre 30% pour les enfants non-autochtones. De même, 53% des enfants autochtones vivaient dans une famille où au moins deux enfants avaient été signalés, comparativement à 42% pour les enfants non-autochtones. Enfin, une plus grande proportion d'enfants autochtones vivait dans un logement subventionné (36% vs 17%) et non sécuritaire (11 % vs 5%), en comparaison aux enfants non-autochtones.

Concernant les parents, le niveau de coopération des parents autochtones était plus souvent inadéquat que celui des parents non-autochtones (43% vs 29%). Ces premiers ont plus souvent été victimes de mauvais traitements dans leur enfance (87% vs 62%), impliqués dans des situations de violence conjugale connues ou soupçonnées (38% vs 25%) et impliqués dans des problèmes d'abus de substances connus ou soupçonnés (53% vs 25%). Concernant le nombre de problèmes connus chez le parent, le même scénario se présente. Lorsque que l'on compte trois problèmes et plus connus chez le parent, se sont les parents autochtones qui sont surreprésentés (25 % vs 18%).

Tableau 4
Facteurs associés aux signalements retenus impliquant un enfant autochtone: modèle de régression logistique par blocs hiérarchiques

Variables	Rapport-des cotes	IC À 95%		Wald	prob	LR	prob
Type de réception						7.920	.0191
Urgence sociale /service régulier	2.6525	1.2348	5.8275	6.2144	.0127		
Inconnu /service régulier	7.3621	0.5433	99.7658	2.2535	.1333		
Source du signalement: mère						5.315	.0211
Non/Oui	3.0694	1.1582	8.1345				
Retard de développement de l'enfant						4.638	.0131
Non /oui	1.0028	1.0516	7.0667				
Fratrie totale						8.501	.0035
Pour chaque frère/sœur (0-5)	1.3461	1.0944	1.6558				
Problèmes d'abus d'alcool /drogue du parent						16.854	.0000
Oui/non	3.0753	1.7359	5.4483				
Type d'occupation du logement						46.118	.0000
Logement subventionné/log.non subventionné	5.7954	2.47	13.60	16.30	.0001		
Propriétaire /logement non subventionné	1.5746	0.68	3.62	1.14	.2857		
Autre/logement non subventionné	12.31	3.99	38.05	19.02	.0000		
Inconnu / logement non subventionné	8.00	2.52	25.47	12.42	.0004		

Pour déterminer lesquelles de ces caractéristiques, différenciant les dossiers autochtones et non-autochtones, permettent de prédire qu'un signalement de protection de la jeunesse au Québec soit celui d'un enfant autochtone comparativement à un non-autochtone, nous avons effectué une analyse de régression logistique sur les deux catégories d'enfants signalés.

Analyses multivariées

Le tableau 4 présente les résultats du modèle de régression logistique des facteurs associés aux enfants d'origine autochtone signalés aux services de protection de la jeunesse du Québec. Le résultat du test d'ajustement de Hosmer et Lemeshow (1980) montre qu'il n'y a pas de différence significative entre les prédictions du modèle et les données observées (Goodness of Fit = 7.08; $df = 8$; $p = .5278$), ce qui implique que le modèle obtenu reflète bien les données observées. En ordre décroissant d'importance, les facteurs suivants sont associés à une plus grande probabilité que le signalement implique un enfant autochtone: 1) le type d'occupation du logement, à savoir que les enfants autochtones vivent plus souvent dans un logement subventionné ou un autre type de logement; 2) plus de problèmes connus ou soupçonnés d'abus de substances chez le parent; 3) le nombre plus élevé d'enfants dans la famille; 4) le fait que le signalement soit reçu par les urgences sociales; 5) le fait que la source de signalement soit moins souvent la mère de l'enfant signalé; et 6) le fait que les enfants souffrent moins de retard de développement. Le type d'occupation du logement et les problèmes connus ou soupçonnés d'abus de substances chez le parent sont les variables caractérisant nettement le plus les signalements impliquant un enfant autochtone.

Le modèle de régression obtenu permet de prédire correctement 81% des signalements autochtones et non-autochtones. Le modèle prédit mieux les signalements non-autochtones (86%) que ceux correspondant aux signalements autochtones (76%).

Certaines variables significatives lors des analyses univariées n'ont pas été retenues par le modèle de régression. Ces variables sont: 1) la prise en charge antérieure (5ans); 2) la source de signalement provenant de la famille élargie; 3) les variables liées à la problématique fondée, telles que la présence de négligence et la présence de troubles de comportement;

4) le nombre d'enfants signalés dans la famille; 5) le niveau de coopération du parent; 6) les mauvais traitements vécus par les parents dans l'enfance; et 7) la présence de violence conjugale.

Discussion

Forces et limites méthodologiques

La présente étude est la première à brosser un portrait québécois des mauvais traitements envers les enfants autochtones signalés aux DPJ du Québec. Les analyses réalisées l'ont été à partir d'un échantillon représentatif des signalements impliquant des enfants autochtones pour la période et les régions couvertes par l'étude. Cette représentativité n'est toutefois pas parfaite car la courte période de collecte de données (automne 1998) pourrait avoir fait en sorte de surreprésenter ou de sous-représenter certains phénomènes plus saisonniers⁷. De plus, deux régions administratives ont été exclues de l'étude, soit le Nunavik et les Terres Cries de la Baie James, deux régions ayant une très forte population autochtone. Enfin, soulignons que l'ÉIQ n'a porté que sur les enfants signalés à la protection de la jeunesse et ne représente donc pas un portrait exact de la situation des mauvais traitements vécus par les enfants autochtones du Québec.

Une limite importante de ce type d'étude qui compare deux groupes ethniques est le biais lié aux définitions utilisées concernant les mauvais traitements envers les enfants. En effet, les définitions retenues sont davantage susceptibles de refléter la position des groupes ethniques majoritaires nord-américains. Il est donc possible que du point de vue des groupes autochtones, ces définitions ne correspondent pas exactement à celles retrouvées dans leur culture. Les plus grandes différences pourraient se retrouver au plan de la définition de la négligence et des troubles de comportement et, dans une moindre mesure cependant, au plan de la définition des abus physiques, des abus sexuels et surtout de l'inceste qui font généralement l'objet d'un consensus plus large à travers les cultures.

Par ailleurs, quelques forces intéressantes de cette étude sont à souligner, dont le fait d'avoir appareillé les deux groupes sur des variables liées au lieu de provenance du signalement et à certaines caractéristiques familiales, dont le revenu socioéconomique, permettant ainsi de mieux dégager des différences culturelles. Enfin, le fait d'avoir utilisé une approche d'analyses multivariées permettait de mieux isoler le rôle de chacune des variables à l'étude.

Pauvreté chez les familles autochtones signalées en protection de la jeunesse au Québec

Bien que les conditions de pauvreté des familles autochtones ne puissent expliquer les résultats issus de nos analyses comparatives, il est important de souligner que les familles autochtones de l'étude constituaient un échantillon représentatif des Autochtones signalés en protection de la jeunesse, alors que les non-Autochtones ne représentaient qu'un sous groupe de leur population dû à l'appariement des deux groupes. Le pourcentage de familles autochtones signalées à la protection de la jeunesse et affectées par un revenu annuel de moins de 15 000\$ est de 39 %, en comparaison à 29% pour l'ensemble des familles québécoises signalées, démontrant que la pauvreté représente un enjeu majeur dans les situations autochtones signalées à la protection de la jeunesse et qu'elle représente une caractéristique importante de ces familles signalées. La mise en place de solutions au phénomène des mauvais traitements dans les communautés autochtones doit donc obligatoirement tenir en compte ce phénomène de pauvreté.

Caractéristiques des signalements d'enfants autochtones

Les résultats de l'étude nous démontrent qu'au Québec, les caractéristiques des signalements d'enfants autochtones diffèrent peu des signalements impliquant des enfants non-autochtones vivant dans des familles ayant un revenu familial équivalent. Seulement six des variables permettent de distinguer les signalements d'enfants autochtones. En effet, ces derniers se caractérisent par une proportion plus grande: 1) de signalements reçus par les urgences sociales; 2) de familles vivant dans un logement subventionné; 3) de familles constituées d'un plus grand nombre d'enfants; et 4) de parents présentant un problème d'abus de substances. De plus, les signalements d'enfants autochtones ont une proportion moins grande d'enfants présentant des problèmes de retard de développement et dont la source de signalement est la mère.

Situation de crise

Une première différence importante entre les deux groupes a trait au fait que les signalements d'enfants autochtones sont reçus deux fois souvent que les non-autochtones par les urgences sociales, c'est-à-dire en dehors des heures de services réguliers (8h à 17h). Ces signalements pourraient se produire lors d'une crise familiale et provenir de l'entourage de la famille, dont

les membres de la famille élargie et les membres de la communauté, deux sources qui ont signalé le quart des situations impliquant des enfants autochtones.

Famille et logement

Les familles autochtones signalées se caractérisent aussi par un nombre plus élevé d'enfants dans la famille et une proportion plus faible de familles vivant dans un logement non subventionné ou dont elles sont propriétaires. Cette surreprésentation est également présente concernant le nombre d'enfants par famille dans la population autochtone du Québec, comparativement à la population générale du Québec (Affaires Indiennes et du Nord Canadien, 2002). Ce plus grand nombre d'enfants est susceptible d'entraîner un stress additionnel pour les parents autochtones. Il est également attendu qu'il y ait moins de déménagements dans les familles autochtones compte tenu qu'une bonne proportion d'entre elles vivent dans une réserve et donc aurait un environnement social plus stable.

L'abus de drogue ou d'alcool

Les parents des enfants autochtones signalés sont plus nombreux à présenter un problème d'abus de substances, ce que rapportaient également Trocmé, Knoke et Blackstock (2004) dans l'étude canadienne. Le problème lié à l'abus d'alcool et de drogue apparaît particulièrement important dans les communautés autochtones, d'autant plus que la pauvreté s'avère un facteur de risque important de l'abus de substances (Commission royale sur les peuples autochtones, 1996; Santé Canada, 2006).

De plus, la consommation abusive d'alcool et de drogues chez les parents se révèle être également un facteur de risque connu de mauvais traitements envers les enfants (Bays, 1990; Famularo, Kinscherff & Fenton, 1992; Kelleher, Chaffin, Hollenberg & Fischer, 1994; Peterson, Gable & Saldana, 1996; Trocmé, McPhee & Tam, 1995). En effet, la toxicomanie, notamment, affecterait les capacités parentales en altérant les capacités de supervision parentale. (Dore, Doris & Wright, 1995). D'ailleurs, dans l'ÉCI, les cas de violence psychologique et de négligence sont plus fréquents lorsque la consommation abusive d'alcool et de drogues des parents est rapportée. Plus spécifiquement, le risque de négligence était 1.5 fois plus élevé dans les familles où il y avait abus de substances chez les parents, que dans les familles où l'on ne rapportait pas de consommation abusive (Wekerle, Wall, Leung & Trocmé, 2004).

Bien que la présence de négligence ne soit pas identifiée dans les analyses multivariées comme une variable distinguant les deux groupes, la proportion d'enfants négligés dans le groupe d'enfants autochtones est plus élevée que celle du groupe d'enfants non-autochtones de notre étude. De plus, par rapport à l'échantillon total des enfants signalés de l'ÉIQ, où 35% de l'ensemble des enfants québécois signalés avaient été victimes de négligence, la proportion d'enfants autochtones impliqués dans une forme de négligence est nettement plus élevée, soit de 48%. Cette prédominance de la négligence dans les familles autochtones avait également été constatée dans d'autres études et pourrait donc être associée aux problèmes d'abus de substances des parents. (Trocmé et al., 2004; McShane, 1988).

Dans le contexte des services de protection de l'enfance auprès de familles autochtones, il apparaît important de travailler auprès des parents présentant des problèmes de consommation abusive de drogue et d'alcool. Bien qu'il n'y ait pas encore de programmes de traitement de la toxicomanie ayant démontré clairement leur efficacité, Santé Canada a recensé un ensemble de programmes qui ont été implantés dans les communautés autochtones. Plusieurs de ces programmes ont été adaptés à la culture autochtone et semblent prometteurs.

Retard de développement et troubles de comportements

Les résultats montrent également que les enfants autochtones présentent dans l'ensemble moins de problèmes que les enfants non-autochtones. Notamment, la présence de retard de développement et de troubles de comportement chez l'enfant semble être davantage associée aux enfants non-autochtones.

Compte tenu de la présence plus importante de certaines caractéristiques familiales démontrées dans les analyses univariées, soit une plus grande proportion : 1) de parents ayant une consommation abusive de substances; 2) de parents ayant plus de trois problèmes; 3) de parents impliqués dans de la violence conjugale ou; 4) de parents ayant vécu des mauvais traitements durant leur enfance, il est étonnant de constater que les enfants autochtones présentent quant à eux moins de problèmes que les enfants des familles non-autochtones. Il est toutefois possible que les enfants autochtones puissent bénéficier du soutien de la famille élargie et ainsi être moins affectés par

les problèmes de leurs parents. La stabilité plus grande (moins de déménagements chez les familles autochtones) pourrait expliquer la présence de ce soutien social que nous ne retrouverions pas chez les enfants non-autochtones. Ces résultats diffèrent de ceux de Trocmé et al. (2004), ces derniers ayant plutôt constaté que les enfants autochtones du Canada (excluant le Québec) présentaient davantage de problèmes que les enfants non-autochtones⁸. Les différences significatives se situaient au plan des handicaps à la naissance liés à l'abus de substances ainsi qu'au nombre de problèmes de comportement identifiés chez l'enfant.

Similarités et différences notées entre l'ÉIQ et l'ÉCI

Les données comparatives pour l'ensemble du Canada (hormis le Québec) obtenues par Trocmé et al. (2004) concernant les mauvais traitements envers les enfants autochtones et non-autochtones signalés aux services de protection de l'enfance s'apparentent aux données comparatives obtenues au Québec, particulièrement concernant les caractéristiques familiales. En effet, la prédominance d'abus de substances, le plus grand nombre de problèmes et les mauvais traitements dans l'enfance sont davantage rapportés par les parents autochtones que les non-autochtones dans les deux études. Tel que présenté précédemment, certaines différences sont observées entre les données comparatives canadiennes et québécoises, principalement en ce qui a trait à la présence des troubles de comportements et des problèmes connus, ces derniers étant plus présents chez les enfants autochtones que les non-autochtones de l'ÉCI, alors qu'ils sont moins rapportés pour les enfants autochtones de l'ÉIQ en comparaison aux enfants non-autochtones.

Mais ces comparaisons entre les données comparatives canadiennes et québécoises doivent se faire avec prudence. En effet, il est difficile de comparer ces résultats pour différentes raisons, notamment, dû au fait : 1) que l'étude de Trocmé et al. (2004), contrairement à l'étude québécoise, n'a pas apparié l'échantillon de familles autochtones au niveau du revenu familial ; 2) que les deux échantillons canadien et québécois diffèrent, les familles autochtones de l'ÉCI semblant vivre davantage de difficultés psychosociales (plus de familles monoparentales, davantage de déménagements dans les 12 derniers mois, parents plus jeunes, consommation abusive de substances plus importante, plus d'activités criminelles

et plus de problèmes de santé mentale chez les parents); 3) les analyses de Blackstock et al. (2004) incluent un troisième groupe ethnique, ce qui fait en sorte que nous ne pouvons pas préciser spécifiquement la différence entre Autochtones et non-Autochtones; et 4) que la définition de certaines variables, dont les troubles de comportements, diffèrent d'une étude à l'autre. Ainsi, certaines tendances peuvent être dégagées entre les deux études, sans toutefois pouvoir offrir de comparaisons parfaites.

Enjeux pour la pratique

Compte tenu que les parents autochtones ayant fait partie de notre étude étaient affectés par de multiples problèmes personnels (problèmes économiques, mauvais traitements vécus dans l'enfance, abus de l'alcool/drogue et violence conjugale) et vivaient dans certains contextes (nombre élevé d'enfants dans la famille et monoparentalité) fréquemment associés aux risques de mauvais traitements (Schumacher et al., 2001), il est peu réaliste de penser que les situations de mauvais traitement et de troubles de comportement puissent cesser sans que des interventions intensives touchant à ces multiples aspects soient mises en place.

L'implantation de programmes de traitement dans les communautés autochtones doit toutefois tenir compte de la culture de ces communautés. Selon Morin et Joncas (2004), il semble n'y avoir aucune contre-indication à l'utilisation, pour des enfants autochtones, d'un modèle de traitement ayant démontré sa valeur auprès d'enfants nord-américains. Cependant, Morin et Joncas (2004), tout comme plusieurs autres auteurs, s'entendent sur le fait que si les cibles et les techniques d'intervention sont transférables à la culture autochtone, certaines sources de tension sont susceptibles d'apparaître et de miner l'intervention si les intervenants non-autochtones ne modifient pas leur style interpersonnel pour tenir compte des valeurs autochtones (LaDue, 1994; Lafromboise, Trimble, & Mohatt, 1990; Santé Canada, 2006; Solomon, Heisberger, & Winer, 1981). Une approche privilégiant un degré de directivité plus grand que celui utilisé dans une thérapie conventionnelle avec les non-Autochtones semble être efficace dans le traitement auprès des Autochtones (Heilbron & Guttman, 2000). D'autres auteurs ajoutent aussi que les thérapies familiales traditionnelles, centrées sur la famille nucléaire, ne sont pas appropriées et devraient

être modifiées pour inclure la famille élargie (Carter & Parker, 1991; Heilbron & Guttman, 2000), notamment lorsque celle-ci montre une coopération adéquate pour la réussite du traitement. Un autre point à prendre en considération est le niveau d'acculturation des familles autochtones qui sont signalées, c'est-à-dire leur niveau de croyance aux valeurs traditionnelles de leur peuple (Connors & Oates, 1997; Topper, 1992). Pour des Autochtones encore très attachés à la culture traditionnelle, différents éléments de cette culture devraient être considérés dans le traitement (Ashby, Gilchrist & Miramontez, 1987; Heilbron & Guttman, 2000). À cet égard, il a été suggéré de faire appel à l'intervention communautaire en ce qui concerne le soutien moral à fournir aux familles signalées (Heilbron & Guttman, 2000). L'identification des alliances qui existent entre les familles et les clans de la communauté peut s'avérer fort utile, notamment pour réduire les sources de conflit que les familles sont susceptibles de rencontrer dans leur communauté. Sur le plan communautaire, le niveau d'attachement aux valeurs traditionnelles semble être encore plus important, puisque dans les communautés fortement traditionnelles, les intervenants non-autochtones pourraient avoir encore plus de difficulté à établir leur pratique (Darou, Kurtness & Hum, 2000).

Conclusion

Bien que les résultats présentés puissent être utiles aux décideurs, aux intervenants ainsi qu'aux chercheurs, ils soulèvent également quelques questions supplémentaires qui pourraient être répondues dans les recherches futures. Il semble nécessaire d'approfondir la compréhension des phénomènes de maltraitance et des troubles de comportement chez les jeunes Autochtones, en examinant davantage les caractéristiques de ces problématiques prises isolément, soit les abus physiques, la négligence, l'abus sexuel et les mauvais traitements psychologiques. Il serait nécessaire également d'entreprendre une étude longitudinale auprès des enfants autochtones et non-autochtones pour qui les signalements sont retenus ou corroborés en services de protection, en vue d'approfondir les connaissances sur la trajectoire de ces enfants et de mieux répondre à leurs besoins et à ceux de leur famille.

Par ailleurs, il s'avère nécessaire également de mieux connaître les définitions et les formes de mauvais traitements reconnues par les membres de la

communauté autochtone et de déterminer le degré de convergence pouvant exister avec celles attribuées par la DPJ. Les motifs et le contexte qui portent les membres de la famille élargie à signaler les enfants victimes de mauvais traitements devraient être également documentés.

Notes Finales

1. Le terme Autochtone est utilisé pour désigner les nations originaires du pays qu'elles habitent. Au Québec, les Amérindiens, les personnes d'ascendance amérindienne et les Inuits sont appelés Autochtones (Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones, 2001). Les Autochtones québécois se distinguent donc des Québécois de souche européenne, qui sont nés ici mais dont les ancêtres ont immigré à partir du 17^e siècle.
2. Les politiques d'assimilation des autochtones semblent s'être peu distinguées entre les diverses provinces canadiennes, notamment dans la mesure où les affaires autochtones relèvent depuis 1867 du gouvernement canadien.
3. « Pendant cette période on reconnaît généralement que le nombre total d'enfants autochtones placés sous les soins de personnes non-autochtones serait peut-être beaucoup plus élevé que les statistiques le révèlent si les enfants non inscrits et les enfants métis placés avaient été considérés comme des enfants autochtones dans ces statistiques. » (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002).
4. Les Autochtones qui vivent dans les réserves et dans les trois territoires, soit environ 36 % de la population autochtone, ne sont pas inclus dans les données. Comme le revenu est en général moins élevé pour la population autochtone qui vit dans les réserves comparativement à celle qui vit hors des réserves, l'inclusion de ces données ferait probablement augmenter l'incidence du faible revenu chez les enfants et les adultes autochtones.
5. L'Étude Canadienne d'Incidence (ECI) a été réalisé auprès d'un échantillon représentatif de signalements fait aux services canadiens de protection de l'enfance durant une période trois mois, 1^{er} octobre au 31 décembre 1998 (Trocmé et al., 2001). L'échantillon considéré dans les analyses de Blackstock et al. (2004) exclut les signalements québécois.
6. Pour de plus amples informations sur la méthodologie de l'étude, le lecteur peut consulter Tourigny et al. (2002).
7. Voir Tourigny et al. (2002) pour plus de détails concernant les forces et limites méthodologiques.
8. Dans l'ÉIQ, étant donné la spécificité de la LPJ, plusieurs des problèmes connus chez l'enfant auxquels réfèrent Trocmé et al. (2004) sont considérés dans la définition des troubles de comportements (et non dans la liste des problèmes chez l'enfant) afin de juger d'une situation de compromission de la sécurité et du développement de l'enfant, à l'instar des autres formes de mauvais traitements. Ces problèmes n'ont donc pas été comptabilisés sous la variable « nombre de problèmes de comportement » comme dans l'ÉCI. Malgré cette différence, les résultats de l'ÉIQ montrent moins de problèmes de comportements chez les enfants autochtones, contrairement à l'ÉCI qui en rapporte davantage

chez les enfants autochtones que les non-Autochtones, confirmant une différence des résultats entre les deux études.

Références

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Incidence of Maltreatment of Aboriginal Children Reported to Youth Protection in Quebec: Intercultural Comparisons*

Marc Tourigny^a, Pascale Domond^b, Nico Trocmé^c, Bruno Sioui^a, et Karine Baril^a

^aDépartement de psychoéducation de l'Université de Sherbrooke.

^bDépartement de psychologie de l'UQAM

^cSchool of Social Work, McGill University, Montreal

Introduction

The issue of child maltreatment in Aboriginal communities¹ has been the object of numerous debates for a number of years and is a major concern for youth protection services in Canada and in the province of Quebec. Throughout Canada (with the exception of Quebec), Blackstock, Trocmé and Bennett (2004) compared data on the maltreatment of Canadian Aboriginal children with data on Canadian non-Aboriginal children and with non-Aboriginal children from other ethnic communities. The results of the comparative study provided knowledge on the incidence of maltreatment for two groups and revealed significant differences as to the types of maltreatment, the context in which they emerged and the related consequences. The differences indicate the importance of taking into account intercultural divergences in the study of child maltreatment in Canada.

The comparative approach is positive in terms of increased knowledge, prevention and treatment as it fosters the organizational development of intervention services and programs adapted to the specific needs

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to examine reported cases of maltreatment in Aboriginal children and compare them with cases involving non-Aboriginal children based on a sample of such cases reported to Youth Protection services in Quebec. Results indicate that, in Quebec, cases involving Aboriginal children compared with cases for non-Aboriginal children are characterized by living situations such as subsidized housing, substance abuse in parents, an increased number of children in the family, the fact that a case reported was a 'social emergency' and that a case was less reported by the mother. Intervention plans with Aboriginal families and suggestions for future research are discussed.

of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families. However, there is no information available to date on the various intercultural differences regarding maltreatment in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in Quebec. The purpose of the study is to fill the gap in information by exploring the differences and similarities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cases of maltreatment reported to Youth Protection services in Quebec.

Aboriginal Population of Quebec

According to the Indian Act, an Indian is "a person who is registered or entitled to be registered in the Indian Register" of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), distinguishing between registered Indians, non-registered Indians and the Inuit (Native Affairs Secretariat, 2001). The diversified Aboriginal population of Quebec consists of 10 distinct Amerindian nations and one Inuit nation, living in approximately 60 communities throughout the province, and of which 70% live on reserve lands (Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones du Québec, 2001). In 2001, the Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS)

* Many thanks to Suzanne O'Connor for the English translation of this article.

indicated that Quebec had an Aboriginal population of 79,400 persons or 8% of all Aboriginal peoples in Canada and 1% of the whole of the Quebec population (Statistics Canada, 2003). Of this number, in 2005, 68,735 were registered and 46,709 lived on-reserve (DIAND, 2006). According to the same survey, 34,090 children at the time were living within an Aboriginal family, approximately 2% of all children in Quebec. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the children were between 0 and 14 years of age, 1% more than observed for non-Aboriginal children within the same age group, 59%.

From 1996 to 2001, the Aboriginal population grew at a greater rate than did the whole of the Quebec population, with an increase of 11%, compared to 1% for Quebec in general. More recent 2005 reports indicate that the Aboriginal population of Quebec has again grown since 2001 (Secrétariat des affaires autochtones du Québec, 2005). Consisting of a population of 82,824, the increase indicates that the number of Aboriginal children has also grown considerably since the last available information in 2001.

History of Aboriginal Communities in Canada: Policies of Colonization and Assimilation

Many historical accounts on Aboriginal peoples in Canada focus on the fact that in the 500 years following the arrival of Europeans, and more particularly in the course of the years following the adoption of the Indian Act of 1876, the result was that all Indians fell under the trusteeship of the Canadian government, which caused a social upheaval for Aboriginal peoples and disrupted their traditional values and way of life. In some instances, Aboriginal communities were completely annihilated by Canadian government policies and measures of assimilation² (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Dupuis, 2001). Their children were removed from the reserves and sent to residential schools; their form of government, their livelihood and traditions were regulated or banned under Canadian laws (Armitage, 1995; Bennett & Blackstock, 2002; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Réame & Macklem, 1994). Other examples of racist and oppressive policies towards Aboriginal peoples outlined in reports include: the denied right to vote, regulated identity, banned right to purchase

land, outlawed spiritual ceremonies, relocation onto reserves and imposed segregation, restricted civil and political rights, land expropriation under Canadian law (i.e. the Indian Act) and the forced removal of Aboriginal children to boarding schools where a high number of them, now 35 years of age or over, would have been physically and sexually abused (Commission de la santé et des services sociaux des Premières Nations du Québec et du Labrador, 2006).

First Child Protection and Well-Being Systems Applied to Aboriginal Peoples

Beginning in the early 1870s, the Canadian government proceeded to set up residential schools for Aboriginal children between the ages of 5 and 16 in order to teach Aboriginal youth how to become productive members of society according to European and Christian beliefs (Miller, 1996). The children were removed from their homes and communities and placed in residential schools jointly run by the government and various religious communities. Aboriginal peoples were thus assimilated through the indoctrination of First Nations children into abandoning their way of life and their language. The schools were created by virtue of the Indian Act of 1876 and spread to all the provinces, particularly in western Canada and excluding the Maritime Provinces (Miller, 1996).

During the 1960s, Aboriginal youth were further the target of exploitation and maltreatment in institutions under the first youth protection and welfare systems, a health system for Aboriginal children in Canada (Armitage, 1995). Such systems did little to recognize the needs of Aboriginal communities and rather led to the disintegration of family and community life (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002). One example of the inadequacy of youth protection and well-being policies for Aboriginal peoples points to living conditions and poverty, rather than maltreatment, as the main reasons for removing numerous Aboriginal children from their families. Although children were said to be institutionalized for reasons of serious abuse or negligence, living conditions or medical care were often the reason for intervention by youth protection agencies (Tiechroeb, 1997).

During the late 1960s in Canada, approximately 30% to 40% of children monitored by youth

protection systems were Aboriginal children, although they represented less than 4% of the Canadian population (Fournier & Crey, 1997). As of 1983³, the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in youth protection systems had spread throughout Canada, notably with rates between 50% and 70% of First Nations children under guardianship in the Prairie Provinces (Armitage, 1995; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Tiechroeb, 1997).

According to Tiechroeb (1997), only a small percentage of the children were returned to their families after having been placed in foster homes or adopted. As for the children who did return to their homes after prolonged absences, they found themselves alienated from their family and cultural environments (Hudson & McKenzie, 1985). Consequently, "Raised by middle-class, white parents, they grew up with little understanding or awareness of their roots" (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002, p.22). The children also reported incidences of physical or sexual abuse by foster or adoptive parents (Tiechroeb, 1997).

Impact of Social Policies on Aboriginal Peoples

The relationship between the Federal government and the First Nations people, marked by social, economic, political and cultural pressure under assimilation policies, had a devastating effect on Aboriginal communities throughout Canada. Policies of colonization, expropriation and assimilation have had major repercussions particularly on the family unit with the breakdown of family ties, and their poor living conditions (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Hudson, 1987; Kimelman, 1985). According to Bennett and Blackstock (2002), the forced implementation of provincial child welfare services under colonial policy and on Aboriginal communities has only exacerbated the devastating effects on First Nations people that endure to this day notably in terms of social and socio-economic problems including poverty, domestic violence, child maltreatment, criminal activity and substance abuse.

Poverty

Data provided in the 1991 report by the Canadian Council on Social Development indicate that Aboriginal peoples living in Canadian urban sectors

were twice as likely to live in poverty than non-Aboriginal peoples⁴ (Lochhead & Shillington, 1996). In fact, while the average level of poverty for all urban inhabitants was 25%, the level of poverty among Aboriginal peoples living in an urban area was 56% for the same period. Similarly, the level of poverty among single-parent Canadian mothers was 45%, whereas it reached 73% among Aboriginal mothers (National Council of Welfare, 2000). In addition, in 1995, 60% of Aboriginal children six years of age or under lived within a poverty ridden family, compared to 25% for all Canadian children (National Council of Welfare, 2000). Living conditions observed in Aboriginal communities also had an impact on the average life expectancy of these children, which is eight years below the national average once they have reached adulthood (Fournier & Crey, 1997). More recent data indicate that the issue of poverty among Aboriginal children continues to this day, as provided by the Canada census of 2001, with 40% of Aboriginal children outside the reserves living in poverty (Statistics Canada, 2003).

As for Quebec, data on the Aboriginal community in the 2001 Quebec census indicate that poverty exists among Aboriginal families in this province as well. For example, half of the Aboriginal population aged 15 years and over living in Quebec, or 25,880 persons, have an income of less than \$15,330 for the same period. There are little recent Quebec data available to indicate the level of poverty among Aboriginal peoples compared with non-Aboriginal peoples, however, data provided by the 1999 Canadian Council of National Development revealed that in 1995, 37% of Aboriginal peoples were living beneath the low income level established by Statistics Canada, compared to 23% of all Québécois (Schetagne, 1999).

Education, Employment and Unemployment

The issue of employment and education among Aboriginal youth appears to be more of a hardship than among non-Aboriginal youth, with 14% of Amerindians, 17% of the Métis and 19% of the Inuit living off reserve and unemployed, compared to 8% for non-Aboriginal communities (Statistics Canada, 2003). Overall, Aboriginal youth 15 years of age and over present a much higher rate of unemployment than non-Aboriginal youth. As for the level of education, 19% of all Canadians 25 years of age and over

have obtained a university degree (Bowlby, 2002), compared to only 8% of Aboriginal communities in Canada for the same age group (Kunz, Milan & Schetagne, 2001; Statistics Canada, 2003).

In Quebec, according to Statistics Canada (2003), the level of Aboriginal university graduates in 2001 among persons aged 25 years or over was estimated at only 6% who obtained a university degree either at the undergraduate or graduate level (compared to 10% for the total population of Quebec); the level of Aboriginal youth who obtained an education below high-school level was estimated at 48 % (compared to 39% for the entire Quebec population).

In terms of employment, in 2001, Aboriginal peoples represented 2% of the working population of Quebec. However, the unemployment rate within this population was at 18% for the same period (MAINC, 2006).

To our knowledge, we have no data available to indicate that the issue of low education and employment has been resolved within the Aboriginal community of Quebec. Although there has been a clear improvement in the level of education among Aboriginal youth in the last three decades, the low level of education among Aboriginal communities reported in 2001 indicates that the issue affects more than half of Aboriginal youth and adults.

Domestic Violence

Aboriginal women are more at risk of being victims of domestic violence than are other Canadian women as a whole. The general social survey on spousal violence conducted in Quebec in 1999 revealed that 25% of Aboriginal women were abused by a spouse or ex-spouse in the course of the previous five years, compared to 8% for non-Aboriginal women (Jiwani, 2000). In addition, the probability of being killed by their spouse following separation was eight times higher among Aboriginal women than among non-Aboriginal women. Similarly, the most serious forms of abuse, those that are life threatening (being beaten, choked, threatened with a firearm or sexually assaulted), were more prevalent among victimized Aboriginal women.

Substance Abuse and Criminal Activity

Alcohol consumption is a serious matter within Aboriginal communities. On the issue,

Bennett and Blackstock (2002, p.40) stated that the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) concluded that "Of all addictive substances, alcohol poses the greatest threat to Aboriginal peoples and their communities" in Canada. An Ontario study that included data from 1985-86 quantified alcohol consumption by county, comparing counties with Aboriginal reserves and counties without Aboriginal reserves (Adrian, Payne, & Williams, 1991). Counties that included reserves had a higher percentage of alcohol consumption than the other counties and the inclusion of reserves resulted in a 25% variation in alcohol abuse province wide. The study revealed a direct link between a low level of income and alcohol consumption; an additional \$1000 added to after tax benefits correlated with a .3 litre decrease in total alcohol consumption.

There are no specific data for Quebec on criminality within the Aboriginal communities; however, Canadian data indicate that it is a social problem. Results of the general social survey on domestic violence revealed that approximately 35% of the Aboriginal population in Canada had admitted to being victim of at least one crime within the 12 months preceding the study, compared to 26% for non-Aboriginal communities (Jiwani, 2000).

Aboriginal youth, compared with non-Aboriginal youth, have been involved in greater numbers in all aspects of the criminal justice system in Canada. Although they represented only 5% of the population in 2001-2002, they comprised more than 25% of admissions to sentenced custody, 22% of admissions to remand, 17% admissions to deferred custody and 16% of admissions to probation. The percentages vary from province to province (Government of Canada, 2005).

Reported Incidents of Maltreatment in Aboriginal Communities

The Provincial/Territorial Ministry of Child and Family Services Annual Reports, 2000-2002 estimated that approximately 76,000 children were under protective services in Canada and that approximately 40% of these children were Aboriginal (Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003). As for the increase in Aboriginal people involved in youth protection services, the INAC (2006) indicates that the number of cases reported to youth protection in Aboriginal communities rose by 70% between 1995 and 2003.

Links Between Social Problems and the Maltreatment of Children

A number of studies indicate that maltreatment towards children, notably neglect, is largely associated with a child's socio-economic environment, characterized by the mother's low level of education, reduced socio-economic conditions, parental unemployment, parental substance abuse and domestic violence (Black, Heyman, & Slep, 2001; Gelles & Hargraves, 1990; O'Keefe, 1995; Schumacher, Slep, & Heyman, 2001; Sedlak, 1997; Zuravin, 1987).

In spite of the correlation between the family's socio-economic condition and the incidence of child maltreatment, there are little data available on the issue for Aboriginal communities. In Quebec, there appears to be no data available on the link between child maltreatment and socio-economic risk factors, and as regards cultural specificity in cases of maltreatment reported to youth protection and involving an Aboriginal child.

Comparison of Maltreatment in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Families

There have been two Canadian cross-cultural studies conducted on maltreatment within Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. In one exploratory study, Leung and Carter (1983) looked at cultural differences in maltreatment among Chinese, Native Indians, and Anglo-Canadian children based on files at the Vancouver General Hospital. Although the study was methodologically limited, it indicated that within Aboriginal families, foetal alcohol syndrome, neglect (in the form of "failure to thrive") and ecchymosis are more prevalent than within Anglo-Canadian families. As for the perpetrator of maltreatment, the study indicated that in Aboriginal families the mother was the prevalent perpetrator whereas in Anglo-Canadian families the perpetrator more often had no family tie with the child (for example mother's partner, babysitter and others).

Referring to a major Canadian study on child maltreatment, Blackstock et al. (2004) conducted a comparative analysis on cases reported to youth protection services in Canada involving Canadian Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children (with the exception of Quebec) and non-Aboriginal children from other ethnic communities⁵. Findings indicated that, compared with the other two groups, a greater number of families of Aboriginal children: 1) lived

on social welfare; 2) lived in unsafe housing; 3) had previously received the services of youth protection; 4) had issues of neglect; and 5) had moved during the previous six to 12 months.

As for the parents of Aboriginal children, compared with the other two groups, the differences were significant in terms of: 1) a history of maltreatment in their own childhood; 2) problems with substance abuse (drugs/alcohol) which are more prevalent; 3) a higher incidence of criminal activity; 4) a higher incidence of social isolation; 5) a higher incidence of mental illness or cognitive behaviour problems; and 6) the lowest age as parents. Finally, in the study, the fact of being an Aboriginal child indicated an increased likelihood that cases of maltreatment would be substantiated and that the child would be placed in out-of-home-care.

When compared with the other two groups, Aboriginal children mainly differed in terms of a higher incidence of substance abuse and school absenteeism.

Limited Methodology

In spite of the increased knowledge acquired through this type of comparative study, methodological limitations must be acknowledged. One limit pertains to the fact that the different findings between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities could very well be due to economic and not cultural issues. As income level is a variable strongly associated with child maltreatment, and as Aboriginal families are distinctly economically disadvantaged, monitoring income level would better reveal culture associated differences. A second limitation concerns the use of univariate analyses to determine group differences. This type of approach does not allow for the unique role of each variable in identifying the characteristics of each group compared with the other. As such, multivariate methods of analysis would appear to be more favourable.

The present study aims to explore the incidence of maltreatment in Aboriginal children reported to youth protection services in Quebec based on a provincial sampling of such cases. More specifically, the study has two objectives: one, to describe reported cases involving Aboriginal children and two, to compare them with reported cases involving non-Aboriginal children. In order to offset the methodological

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limitations previously mentioned, both groups of children have been paired according to family income, the administrative region where the family lives and the caregivers in the child's life.

Methodology

Procedure

The study includes two subsidiary analyses conducted using data provided by a Quebec Incidence Study (Étude d'incidence québécoise - ÉIQ⁶) to document all cases reported and handled between October 1 and December 31, 1998. The cases come from 16 to 18 administrative regions in Quebec, each under the Director of Youth Protection (DYP) services. Two regions were excluded from the survey due to low numbers compared to the population of Quebec as a whole and to difficulty of access to their remote location: Nunavik, with a population of 8,000

inhabitants and the Cree Lands of James Bay, with a population of 9,000 inhabitants.

The number of cases retained and documented (number of responses) during the study was calculated by dividing the number of cases documented by the number of cases recorded by the DYP for the same period (Tourigny et al., 2002). For all cases recorded (N = 4,929), the average number of questionnaires completed was 86% (from 64% to 99% according to DYP services).

The final sampling in the study was taken from cases retained. According to the (Ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux, 1988: 5), a case is defined as - Any situation involving a child 0-17 years of age, reported to the Quebec Director of Youth Protection by a person who has reason to believe that the security or development of that child is at risk of being compromised.

Sampling

Table 1

Characteristics under which reported cases of Aboriginal children were paired with reported cases of non-Aboriginal children (N = 430) f

Characteristics of the Situations	Total N = 430%	Aboriginal Children N = 215%	Enfants Non Autoch. N = 215%	Chi-square (df)
Youth Centre¹				
North Shore	30.2	30.2	30.2	
Abitibi/Témiscamingue	15.3	15.3	15.3	
Montréal/Batshaw	17.2	17.2	17.2	
Other youth centres	37.2	37.2	37.2	
				13.25 (5)
Annual Family Income				
Less than \$15,000	40.0	39.1	40.9	
\$15,000 to \$24,999	21.9	26.0	17.7	
\$25,000 to \$40,999	7.0	5.6	8.4	
\$41,000 and more	3.0	2.3	3.7	
Living on social assistance	15.8	17.7	14.0	
Unknown	12.3	9.3	15.3	
Family Characteristics				
Home life of the reported child				1.37 (4)
2 birth parents	42.3	42.6	42.5	
1 birth parent with a partner	19.7	18.6	20.9	
1 birth parent alone	31.0	31.2	30.8	
Other types of family life	3.4	3.6	3.2	
Unknown	3.6	4.5	2.7	

(1) No statistical test was conducted for this variable as the pairing was precise.

A first sampling was taken of 215 children whose cases were retained and who lived with at least one Aboriginal parent. For each child in the sampling, a comparable case of a non-Aboriginal child was also selected. The pairing was done based on the following characteristics: 1) the cases reported are from the same youth centre (Centre jeunesse); 2) the caregivers in the child's life; and 3) the annual family income. It was not possible to produce a perfect pairing because for a number of Aboriginal children, there was no non-Aboriginal child with the exact same characteristics. However, Chi-squared tests indicate that the two groups were not significantly distinct under these three variables. The final sample therefore consisted of 215 pairs of children. Table 1 shows that the children in both groups were living predominantly with both biological parents (42%) and almost one third of the children were living in a single-parent family (31%). In the majority of cases, the family income was very low, with more than half (56%) living in a family with an income of less than \$15,000 (40%) or on social assistance (16%), and approximately one quarter (22%) living in a family with an income between \$15,000 and \$25,000. In spite of slight differences between the two groups under this variable, there was no significant statistical difference. In terms of region, 30% of the children were from the North-Shore, 15% from the Abitibi-Témiscaminque region, 17% from the region of Montreal and 37% from other regions of the province of Quebec.

Variables

The case-investigation form used to document retained cases was based mainly on measurement tools applied in similar studies such as the Ontario Incidence Study (Trocmé, McPhee, Tam, & Hay, 1994), the National Incidence Study - NIS (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996) and the Canadian Incidence Study - CIS (Trocmé et al., 2001). The form was completed at the end of the initial stage by a youth protection worker in charge at this step of the process. Information was collected on the characteristics of reported cases, substantiated cases of maltreatment, the child involved, adults with a parental role in the child's life, the child's living environment and child welfare services provided during the assessment stage.

Characteristics of Retained Cases

Questions focused on the description of retained cases such as the source of referral (10 separate sources

Variables	Canada (Trocmé)	Quebec (Tourigny)
Family Structure*		
2 biological parents	21.9	42.1
Reconstituted	21.6	18.6
Single-parent	56.5	31.2
Source of Income		
Full Time	15.8	12.4
Part Time	10.2	7.2
Social Assistance*	58.1	74.6
Other	16.0	5.7
Unsafe Housing	7.9	10.5
Move in the Past 12 Months		
None	60.1	68.8
1	22.9	18.3
2 or more	17.0	12.9
Characteristics of Maltreatment*		
Unsubstantiated	26.3	13.5
Substantiated	49.5	80.9
Suspected	24.2	5.6
<i>Physical Abuse</i>	18.6	14.9
<i>Sexual Abuse</i>	10.1	11.6
<i>Neglect</i>	57.9	62.3
<i>Emotional Abuse</i>	6.5	26.0
<i>Abandonment</i>	Nd	7.4
<i>Behaviour Problems</i>	Nd	19.5
<i>Domestic Violence</i>	7.0	Nd
Child Characteristics*		
Substance Abuse and Birth	6.1	2.5
Anxiety or Depression	7.6	7.4
Number of Problems 0	77	80.2
Number of Problems 1	12.7	11.9
Number of Problems 2+	10.3	7.9
Parent Characteristics*		
Age:		
30	49.5	39.7
31-40	44.7	43.1
41-50	5.4	13.9
51+	0.4	3.3
History of Maltreatment*	47.2	86.9
Alcohol and Drug Abuse*	91.0	53.2
Criminal Activity	17.2	8.9
Mental Health	21.7	15.8
Physical Health	7.0	9.8
Lack of Social Support	33.9	29.4

of referral), how cases were reported (regular services and social emergency), and the fact that the child was the object of a retained case within 12 months prior to the study or taken into custody within five years preceding the study.

Substantiated Cases

Seven forms of substantiated maltreatment (physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, abandonment, mental abuse, severe behaviour problems and others) were documented based on the written assessment by the

youth protection worker. The definitions were provided through information collected on child welfare in relation to parental functioning - ICBE (Vézina & Bradet, 1990), NIS (Sedlack, 1991), CIS (Trocmé et al., 2001) and through the *Système clientèle jeunesse - SCJ* (Trudeau & Pellan, 1998) for serious behaviour problems.

Characteristics of the Child, the Family and Caregivers

The maltreatment investigation form provided information on child characteristics (age and sex) and eight forms of developmental problems (birth defects, developmental delay, hearing, sight or speech disability, chronic health problems, learning disabilities, hyperactivity, psychiatric disorders, and depression/anxiety).

Family variables such as safe or unsafe housing conditions, home ownership or not, the number of reported children in the household, the presence of other primary caregivers (other than biological parents), the number of family moves within the previous 12 months and the number of siblings in the household were also measured.

Ten confirmed or suspected concerns (domestic violence, alcohol or drug abuse, criminal activity, mental health problems, physical health issues, lack of social support, cognitive impairment, history of abuse, custody dispute, financial issues/separation/divorce or other concerns) defined issues related to caregivers. For the present study, we used the total number of primary caregiver problems and issues seen as statistically significant between the two groups. The level of caregiver functioning was measured using the CIW four-point response scale ranging from “adequate” to “seriously inadequate” (Vézina & Bradet, 1990) and the assessment form documented whether the caregiver had also been the victim of childhood abuse.

Strategies of Analysis

Chi-square tests and T-Tests were used to collect data on comparisons between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children (SPSS Version 9 database). For the first objective, comparisons were based on 28 variables (Table 2). The 16 most significant variables were used in a linear logistic regression analysis in order to identify the variables between the two groups of children. When the variables are numerous and inter-correlated, the linear model diminishes the number of simultaneous variables, which results in more accurate estimates. As well, the comparison of results, step by

Table 2	
Variables used in the univariate study for the two group comparison.	
Characteristics of a Retained Case	
1.	Type of reporting*
2.	Previous retained cases (12 mos) NS
3.	Previous custody (5 years)*
4.	Sources of referral - mother*
5.	Sources of referral - extended family*
Variables Linked to a Substantial Case	
6.	Evidence of sexual abuse NS
7.	Evidence of physical abuse NS
8.	Evidence of neglect*
9.	Evidence of abandonment NS
10.	Evidence of psychological maltreatment NS
11.	Evidence of behaviour problems*
12.	Evidence of other problems NS
Variables Linked to the Reported Child and the Family	
13.	Sex of the child NS
14.	Age of the child NS
15.	Number of problems known in the child*
16.	Number of services required for the child NS
17.	Home life of the child NS
18.	Number of children reported in the same family*
19.	Number of children in the family*
20.	Presence of another significant person NS
21.	Number of moves NS
22.	Type of work*
23.	Unsafe housing*
24.	Level of cooperation by parents*
25.	History of maltreatment in a parent's childhood*
26.	Number of known problems in the parent*
27.	Evidence of a parent victim of domestic violence*
28.	Evidence of parental alcohol and drug abuse*
* Nine other sources of referral were documented and tested statistically but no significant difference between the two was detected	

step, provides some additional details on links between the variables. The order given to the three major categories of variables was; characteristics of cases reported, substantiated cases and characteristics of the reported child and family.

Results

Univariate Analyses

Results from Chi-squared tests revealed a number of major and significant differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal reported cases (see Table 3).

Characteristics of Retained Cases

Results on the characteristics of retained cases indicate that cases involving Aboriginal children were more often handled by emergency services (26% vs. 12%) and that Aboriginal children had more frequently

Table 3					
Characteristics of reported cases for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and their families.					
Characteristics of the Situations		Total N = 430%	Aboriginal children N = 215%	Non-Aboriginal Children N = 215%	Chi-square (df)
Characteristics of Investigated Cases					
Type of Reporting:	Regular services	81.2	74.4	87.9	12.56***(1)
	Emergency services	18.8	25.6	12.1	
Previous placements (5 years):	Yes	19.2	24.8	13.7	8.35**(1)
	No	80.8	75.2	86.3	
Source of Referral - Mother	Yes	10.9	7.0	14.9	6.90** (1)
	No	89.1	93.0	85.1	
Source of Referral - Extended Family	Yes	10.9	16.7	5.1	14.92***(1)
	No	89.1	83.3	94.9	
Variables Linked to a Substantiated Case					
Evidence of Neglect:	Yes	42.6	48.4	36.7	5.95*(1)
	No	57.4	51.6	63.3	
Evidence of Behaviour Problems:	Yes	25.3	17.7	33.0	13.38***(1)
	No	74.1	82.3	67.0	
Variables Linked to the Child Reported and the Family					
Age of the child:	0-5 years	38.9	40.7	37.1	4.37 (2)
	6-11 years	29.5	31.8	27.2	
	12-17 years	31.6	27.5	35.7	
Variables Linked to Reported Children and their Families					
Number of Problems Known in Child					
	None	73.9	80.2	67.9	8.28*(3)
	1 problem	16.2	11.9	20.3	
	2 problems	6.5	5.4	7.5	
	3 problems or more	3.4	2.5	4.2	
Number of Children in the Family					
	1 child	33.7	29.8	37.7	28.18***(5)
	2 children	27.4	22.3	32.6	
	3 children	17.9	16.7	19.1	
	4 children	11.6	17.2	6.0	
	5 children	5.8	8.4	3.3	
	6 children	3.5	5.6	1.4	
Number of Children Reported in the Family					
	1 child	51.4	44.7	58.1	11.96*(4)
	2 children	21.2	22.8	19.5	
	3 children	14.9	15.3	14.4	
	4 children	8.4	11.2	5.6	
	5 children or more	4.2	6.0	2.3	
Type of Housing					
	Subsidized housing	25.9	35.7	16.6	56.67***(3)
	Non-subsidized housing	36.9	27.6	45.9	
	Purchased home	26.4	17.9	34.6	
	Other	10.7	18.9	2.9	
Variables linked to a Reported Child and Family					
Safe Housing					
	Yes	92.2	89.5	94.9	4.02*(1)
	No	7.8	10.5	5.1	
Level of Parent Cooperation					
	Adequate	63.7	56.7	70.7	10.60*(3)
	Somewhat adequate	16.0	20.5	11.6	
	Moderately or seriously inadequate	18.6	20.5	16.7	
	Not contacted	1.6	2.3	0.9	
Parent History of Maltreatment					
	Yes	75.3	86.9	61.5	20.66***(1)
	No	24.7	13.1	38.5	
Exposure to Domestic Violence					
	No	68.7	62.1	75.2	11.35**(2)
	Unknown	22.2	24.8	19.6	
	Suspected	9.1	13.1	5.1	
Parent Drug/Alcohol Abuse					
	No	60.7	46.7	74.8	55.51***(2)
	Unknown	27.8	43.9	11.7	
	Suspected	11.4	9.3	13.6	
Number of Known Problems in the Parent					
	Aucun	30.8	26.6	35.0	15.47***(3)
	1 problem	28.3	29.4	27.1	
	2 problems	19.6	19.2	20.1	
	3 problems or more	21.2	24.8	17.7	

1. The odd-ratio is a measure of the increase of likelihood for one category compared to another. It identifies relative risk categories.

2. The odds-ratio confidence interval is a measure of the exactness of the estimated odds ratio.

3. The Wald test-statistic identifies categories where a phenomenon is the most frequent. However, if the likelihood is above 0.05, the hypothesis that there is no difference between the two categories cannot be reached.

4. The likelihood estimator is an indicator of the parameters for each variable to predict the phenomenon, beyond the input of other variables included in the likelihood model. The likelihood takes into account the number of parameters used by a variable to predict the phenomenon.

been taken into custody by child welfare agencies during the previous five years, compared with non-Aboriginal children (25% vs. 14%). Two major differences were noted as to the percentage of the various sources of referral: in cases involving Aboriginal children, fewer cases were reported by the mothers (7% vs. 15%) and were more often reported by a member of the extended family (17% vs. 5%).

Substantiated Cases

Data provided on substantiated cases following an initial case evaluation revealed a higher number of children victims of neglect (48% vs. 37%) and a lower number of children with behaviour problems (18% vs. 33%) within Aboriginal communities. The percentage of children victims of sexual, mental and physical abuse was similar in both groups.

Characteristics of Children, Caregivers and Families in Reported Cases

Data on the characteristics of reported children indicate that there is no distinction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in terms of the age of the child. However, Aboriginal children displayed fewer known problems than non-Aboriginal children. Finally, 80% of Aboriginal children displayed none of the problems listed in

the study compared to 68% for non-Aboriginal children.

Aboriginal families had more children than non-Aboriginal families with 48% of Aboriginal children living in a family of three or more children compared to 30% for non-Aboriginal children. In addition, 53% of Aboriginal children lived in a family with at least two reported children compared to 42% for non-Aboriginal children. Finally, a higher percentage of Aboriginal children lived in subsidized housing (36% vs. 17%) and unsafe housing (11 % vs. 5%) compared with non-Aboriginal children.

In terms of the caregivers, parent functioning was more often inadequate among Aboriginal parents than among non-Aboriginal parents (43% vs. 29%). Aboriginal parents were more often victims of maltreatment in their childhood (87% vs. 62%), more implicated in reported or suspected incidents of domestic violence (38% vs. 25%) and more implicated in reported or suspected substance abuse problems (53% vs. 25%). In terms of known problems involving parents the situation was the same. Where three or more problems are identified among caregivers, Aboriginal parents are over-represented (25 % vs. 18%).

In order to determine which of the characteristics, distinguishing between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

Table 4
Factors associated with retained cases involving an Aboriginal child: Linear logistic regression model.

Variables	Odds-ratio	IC to 95%		Wald	prob	LR	prob
Type of Reporting						7.920	.0191
Regular/Emergency Service	2.6525	1.2348	5.8275	6.2144	.0127		
Unknown / Regular service	7.3621	0.5433	99.7658	2.2535	.1333		
Source of Referral: Mother						5.315	.0211
Yes/No	3.0694	1.1582	8.1345				
Development Delay in the Child						4.638	.0131
Yes/No	1.0028	1.0516	7.0667				
Total Number of Siblings						8.501	.0035
For each brother/sister (0-5)	1.3461	1.0944	1.6558				
Parental Alcohol/Substance Abuse						16.854	.0000
Yes/No	3.0753	1.7359	5.4483				
Type of Housing						46.118	.0000
Subsidized/Non-Subsidized Housing	5.7954	2.47	13.60	16.30	.0001		
Purchased Home/Non-Subsidized Housing	1.5746	0.68	3.62	1.14	.2857		
Other/Non-Subsidized Housing	12.31	3.99	38.05	19.02	.0000		
Unknown / Non-Subsidized Housing	8.00	2.52	25.47	12.42	.0004		

cases, make it possible to predict that a case reported to youth protection in Quebec is that of an Aboriginal child or a non-Aboriginal child, we conducted a logistic regression analysis on both groups of reported children.

Multivariate Analyses

Table 4 displays the results of a logistic regression model of factors associated with Aboriginal children reported to the Quebec Director Youth Protection. Results from the Hosmer and Lemeshow (1980) risk-adjustment test indicate that there are no significant differences between the model predictions and the data noted (Goodness of Fit = 7.08; $df = 8$; $p = .5278$), indicating that the model's estimates well reflect the data observed. In decreasing order of importance, the following factors reflect a higher probability that a case involves an Aboriginal child: 1) type of housing in that Aboriginal children more often live in a subsidized or other type of housing; 2) more reported or suspected parental substance abuse; 3) a higher number of children in the family; 4) the fact that a case was reported to emergency responders; 5) the fact that a case is less often reported by a mother; and 6) the fact that the children suffer less from developmental delay. The type of housing and known or suspected parental substance abuse are variables that are clearly most characteristic of a case involving an Aboriginal child.

The regression model obtained is an 81% accurate predictor for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal reported cases. The model is a better predictor for non-Aboriginal cases (86%) than for Aboriginal cases (76%).

Some significant variables of the univariate analyses were not included in the regression model. The variables are: 1) previous custody (5 years); 2) the source of referral from the extended family; 3) variables linked to substantiated cases, such as neglect and behaviour problems; 4) the number of children reported within a family; 5) the level of parent functioning; 6) maltreatment of parents in their childhood; and 7) domestic violence.

Discussion

Methodology - Strengths and Limitations

The present study is the first to draw a provincial picture of cases of child maltreatment among Aboriginal children reported to the Director of Youth Protection (DYP) in Quebec. The study was based on a sampling of reported cases involving Aboriginal children within

specific regions and for a defined period of time. The representation is not perfect as the short data collection period (Fall 1998) could have over-represented or underrepresented a number of seasonal phenomena⁷. In addition, two regions were excluded from the study, Nunavik and the Cree Lands of James Bay, two areas with a very high Aboriginal population. It should also be noted that the Quebec Incidence Study (ÉIQ – Étude d'incidence québécoise) includes only cases reported to youth protection agencies and as such does not provide an exact picture of issues of maltreatment involving Aboriginal children in Quebec.

A major limitation to this type of study comparing two ethnic groups is the bias linked to definitions used to identify maltreatment of children. Definitions used are more susceptible of reflecting the position of dominant ethnic groups in North America. It is quite possible that from the point of view of Aboriginal groups, the definitions do not exactly correspond to those within their culture. Major differences may be noted in terms of the definition of neglect and behaviour problems and to a lesser extent, in terms of the definition of physical and sexual abuse and particularly incest, which are more cross-culturally prevalent.

Some notable strong points of this type of study include the fact that both groups have been compared in terms of regions where cases were reported and family characteristics such as income, which help define cultural differences more accurately. Finally, using a multivariate analysis approach provided a more precise definition of the role for each variable included in the study.

Poverty Among Aboriginal Families Reported to Youth Protection Services in Quebec

Although indicators of poverty within Aboriginal families cannot explain the results of the comparative analyses, it is important to note that Aboriginal families in the study were a representative sampling of Aboriginal cases reported to youth protection services, while non-Aboriginals represented only a sub-group of their population within the group comparison. The percentage of Aboriginal families reported to youth protection and with an annual income of less than \$15,000 was 39% compared to 29% for all family cases reported to youth protection in Quebec, an indicator that poverty is a major issue in

Aboriginal cases reported and a major characteristic of reported family cases. As such, finding solutions to the phenomenon of maltreatment within Aboriginal communities requires that the issue of poverty be taken into consideration.

Characteristics of Reported Aboriginal Child Maltreatment Cases

Results from the study indicate that in Quebec, characteristics surrounding child maltreatment cases differ very little between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children living in families with the same level of family income. Only six of the variables distinguish cases involving Aboriginal children, characterized by a higher proportion of: 1) cases reported to emergency responders; 2) families living in subsidized housing; 3) families with a higher number of children; and 4) parents with a substance abuse problem. Cases involving Aboriginal children also indicate a lower percentage of children with developmental delay and for which the source of referral was the mother.

Crisis Situation

A first major difference between the groups is that reported cases involving Aboriginal children are received twice as much as social emergencies than reported cases for non-Aboriginal children, in other words, outside regular service hours (8 a.m. to 5 p.m.). Cases reported may occur during a family crisis and come from the family's outer circle, including members of the extended family and individuals in the community, two sources that reported one quarter of all cases involving Aboriginal children.

Family and Housing

Reported Aboriginal families are characterized by a higher number of children in the family and by a lower number of families living in non-subsidized housing or in a purchased home. This overrepresentation also applies for the number of children per family within the Aboriginal community of Quebec compared with the population of Quebec as a whole (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2002). The higher number of children can be a source of additional stressors for Aboriginal parents. It is also understood that there are fewer moves within Aboriginal families as a good number of them live on a reserve and therefore have a more stable living environment.

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Cases involving parents of Aboriginal children more frequently include substance abuse problems, as also reported by Trocmé, Knoke and Blackstock (2004) in the CIS. Problems linked to alcohol and drug abuse are more prevalent in Aboriginal communities, as poverty is a major risk factor for substance abuse (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Health Canada, 2006).

As well, parental alcohol and drug abuse is a risk factor for child maltreatment (Bays, 1990; Famularo, Kinscherff & Fenton, 1992; Kelleher, Chaffin, Hollenberg & Fischer, 1994; Peterson, Gable & Saldana, 1996; Trocmé, McPhee & Tam, 1995). Drug addiction in particular affects parent functioning by altering the capacity to assume a supervisory role (Dore, Doris & Wright, 1995). In the Quebec Incidence Study, issues of mental abuse and neglect were most frequent in reported cases of parental alcohol and drug abuse. More specifically, the risk of neglect is 1.5 more prevalent in families with parental substance abuse than in families where substance abuse is not an issue (Wekerle, Wall, Leung & Trocmé, 2004).

In the present study, although the issue of neglect is not identified in multivariate analyses as a variable that distinguishes the two groups, the number of children victims of neglect among Aboriginal children is higher than among non-Aboriginal children. Furthermore, compared with the sampling of children in the QIS, with 35% of all cases of child maltreatment reported in Quebec identified as victims of neglect, the number of Aboriginal children victims of some form of negligence is distinctly higher at 48%. The prevalence of child neglect among Aboriginal families noted in previous studies could indicate a link with issues of parental substance abuse (Trocmé et al., 2004; McShane, 1988).

Within the context of child welfare services and Aboriginal families, it is important to work closely with parents with issues of alcohol and substance abuse. Although there are still no drug treatment programs that have clearly proven to be effective, Health Canada conducted a survey of programs put into place in Aboriginal communities. A number of programs were adapted for the needs of the Aboriginal culture and appear to show promising results.

Developmental Delay and Behaviour Problems

Results further indicate that Aboriginal children

generally display fewer problems than non-Aboriginal children. The presence of developmental delay and behaviour problems appears to be more associated with non-Aboriginal children.

Considering the predominance of some family characteristics found in multivariate analyses, such as: 1) parental substance abuse; 2) parents with more than three problems; 3) exposure to domestic violence or; 4) parents with a history of childhood maltreatment, it is significant to note that Aboriginal children display fewer problems than do children in non-Aboriginal families. It is possible that Aboriginal children benefit more from the support of an extended family and as such are less affected by their parents' issues. A more stable lifestyle in terms of fewer moves among Aboriginal families might explain a support system not found among non-Aboriginal children. Results differ from those of Trocmé et al. (2004), who noted that Aboriginal children in Canada (excluding Quebec) had more problems than non-Aboriginal children⁸. Significant differences noted were birth defects linked to substance abuse and childhood behaviour problems.

Similarities and Differences Noted Between the QIS and the CIS

Comparative data collected for the whole of Canada (except for Quebec) by Trocmé et al. (2004) on incidents of child maltreatment in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children reported to youth protection services are similar to comparative data obtained in Quebec, particularly as regards family characteristics. In both studies, the prevalence of substance abuse, the highest number of problems and a history of childhood maltreatment are reported more by Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal parents. As indicated earlier, there are differences noted between data collected from across Canada and in Quebec, particularly in terms of behaviour problems and known issues, the latter being more prevalent among Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal children in the CIS and less reported for Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal children in the QIS.

Caution must be used in looking at comparative data for Canada and Quebec side by side. Individual results are difficult to compare for various reasons, notably as: 1) the Trocmé et al. (2004) study, unlike the Quebec study, did not pair the Aboriginal family sampling with family income; 2) the Canadian and Quebec samplings are different, Aboriginal families in the CIS appear to have increased social stressors (more one-parent families, more moves in the last 12

months, younger parents, more substance abuse, more criminal activity and more mental health problems among caregivers); 3) the Blackstock et al. (2004) studies include a third ethnic group, making it difficult to be absolutely precise in determining Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal differences; and 4) the definition of some variables such as behaviour problems differs from one study to the other. A number of tendencies can be noted in both studies without as such presenting exact comparisons.

Challenges in Practice

Considering that Aboriginal caregivers included in the study had multiple personal problems (financial problems, a history of maltreatment during their childhood, alcohol/drug abuse and domestic violence) and home life issues (high number of children and single parenthood) frequently associated with the risks of maltreatment (Schumacher et al., 2001), it is unrealistic to believe that issues of maltreatment and behaviour problems will cease without major forms of intervention being put into place to address these various factors.

Implementing treatment programs in Aboriginal communities must take into consideration their distinct cultural nature. According to Morin and Joncas (2004), there seems to be no contraindication to using, with Aboriginal children, a treatment program that has proven its worth among North American children. However, Morin and Joncas (2004), and many others, agree that even though treatment outcomes and practices may be transferable to the Aboriginal culture, tensions could arise and undermine treatment programs if non-Aboriginal workers do not adopt culturally modified interpersonal skills to take into account Aboriginal values (LaDue, 1994; LaFramboise, Trimble, & Mohatt, 1990; Health Canada, 2006; Solomon, Heisberger, & Winer, 1981). An approach encouraging a more authoritative role by the participants than found in conventional forms of therapy appears to be more effective within Aboriginal communities (Heilbron & Guttman, 2000). Others argue that traditional forms of family therapy, focused on the nuclear family, are inappropriate and need to be adapted to include the extended family (Carter & Parker, 1991; Heilbron & Guttman, 2000), particularly when there is a clear collaborative effort for the treatment to be successful. Another issue to consider is the level of acculturation among reported Aboriginal families, their level of

belief in traditional community values (Connors & Oates, 1997; Topper, 1992). For Aboriginal people and their attachment to their traditional culture, elements of culture preference must be incorporated into treatment programs (Ashby, Gilchrist & Miramontez, 1987; Heilbron & Guttman, 2000). Consequently, it has been proposed to include community intervention in group therapy to provide moral support to the families in treatment (Heilbron & Guttman, 2000). Recognizing links that exist among families and clans within the Aboriginal community can be very useful, notably to reduce sources of conflict that the families may encounter within their own community. The strong level of attachment to traditional values within various Aboriginal communities is a major consideration as non-Aboriginal professionals may otherwise find it increasingly difficult to offer their services (Darou, Kurtness & Hum, 2000).

Conclusion

While the results of the present study may be useful for decision makers, professionals and researchers, they also raise questions that may be answered in future research projects. It appears necessary to acquire a deeper understanding of the phenomena of maltreatment and of behaviour problems among Aboriginal youth, by examining more closely and separately the characteristics of each issue, such as physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse and psychological maltreatment. It would also be important to conduct a longitudinal study on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children for whom cases have been retained or substantiated by youth protection services in order to have a deeper knowledge of the path of these children and to better meet their needs and those of their families.

Moreover, it is essential to have a better understanding of the definitions and forms of maltreatment as recognized by the Aboriginal community and determine the degree of convergence with those defined by the DYP. Motives and the context that compel members of the extended family to report issues of child maltreatment should also be documented.

Endnotes

1. The term Aboriginal designates the first people to have inhabited the country where they live. In the province of Quebec, Amerindians, persons of North American Indian descent and the Inuit are called Aboriginal (Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones du Québec, 2001). Aboriginal people in Quebec are distinct from the Québécois with European ancestry, born here but descendants of ancestors who began to emigrate here during the

17th century.

2. Policies of Aboriginal assimilation appear to have varied very little from on Canadian province to another, notably as pertains to Aboriginal affairs regulated by the Canadian government as of 1867.

3. For this period, it is acknowledged that the total number of Aboriginal children placed in the care of non-Aboriginal people would possibly be higher than statistics indicate if non-status children and Métis children placed had been considered as Aboriginal children in the statistical data..” (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002).

4. Aboriginal people who live on reserves and on the three territories, approximately 36 % of the Aboriginal population, are not included in the data. As income is generally lower in the Aboriginal population living on reserves compared to the percentage that lives off reserve, including the above data would probably increase the issue of low income in Aboriginal children and adults.

5. The Canadian Incidence Study (CIS) was conducted using a representative sampling of cases reported to youth protection services in Canada over a three-month period, from October 1 to December 31, 1998 (Trocmé et al., 2001). The sampling used in the Blackstock et al. (2004) study does not include reported cases in the province of Quebec.

6. For more information on the methodology applied in the study, the reader may consult Tourigny et al. (2002).

7. See Tourigny et al. (2002) for more information on methodological strengths and limitations.

8. For the QIS, due to the specificity of the Child and Youth Protection Act (Loi sur la protection de la jeunesse - LPJ) a number of known problems in children as referred to by Trocmé et al. (2004) are outlined under the definition of behaviour problems (and not on the list of problems in children) in order to assess if the situation compromises the security or development of the child, as with other forms of maltreatment. The problems were not included under the variable “number of behaviour problems” as in the CIS. In spite of this difference, the results of the QIS reveal fewer behaviour problems in Aboriginal children, contrary to the CIS that reveals more behaviour problems in Aboriginal children than in non-Aboriginal children, pointing to a difference in findings between the two studies.

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