

What is the State of Evaluation in Child Welfare?: An Indian Country Perspective

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Overview

- American Indian tribal governments
- Native children in the child welfare system
- Indian Country research experience
- Implications for child welfare evaluation in Indian Country
- Conclusion



American Indian Tribal Governments

- American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) tribes are sovereign governments
- U.S. Constitution, hundreds of treaties, federal laws, and court cases acknowledge tribes as governments



American Indian Tribal Governments

- 563 federally-recognized tribes located in 34 states
- Indian tribes hold 50+ million acres of land, approximately 2% of the U.S.
- Tribes are extremely diverse: traditions and culture, geography, natural resource endowments, intergovernmental relationships



American Indian Tribal Governments

- 1.5% of the U.S. population is AI/AN alone or in combination with another race
- Proportion of state population that is AI/AN varies- from 0% to nearly 16%



American Indian Tribal Governments

- Provide many of the same services to their citizens as other governments
- Almost all tribes provide some child welfare services
- Tribal service delivery systems vary from place to place



Native Children in the Child Welfare System

- Contentious relationships with state governments and lack of direct funding to address tribal child welfare needs have resulted in high levels of unmet child welfare service needs



Native Children in the Child Welfare System

- Inconsistent nature of federal policies results in a patchwork of programs and funding that grant tribes some programmatic authorities and resources but not others



Native Children in the Child Welfare System

- Tribes have access to Title IV-B, subparts 1 and 2, which together with the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Indian Child Welfare Act grants, make up the largest child welfare funding sources tribes have
- Until September 2009, tribes have not had direct access to Title IV-E



Native Children in the Child Welfare System

- The latest comparisons illustrating disparities in federal child welfare funding show that in FY 2003 states had access to over \$7 billion while Indian tribes had access to about \$57 million



Native Children in the Child Welfare System

- Status of Native children (compared to non-Hispanic Whites)
 - Live with single-parent family (31.1% vs. 17.7%)
 - Live with neither parent (9.5% vs. 3.7%)
 - Live with grandparent as head of household (10.1% vs. 4.2%)

(Kids Count, 2003, Annie E. Casey Fdn)



Native Children in the Child Welfare System

- Status of Native children (compared to non-Hispanic Whites)
 - Lower median income (\$36,120 vs. \$54,698)
 - Higher poverty rates (27.1% vs. 9.3%)
 - More likely to live in a family where neither parent is in the labor force (16.1% vs. 5.5%)

(Kids Count, 2003, Annie E. Casey Fdn)



Native Children in the Child Welfare System

- Status of Native children
 - Compared to White children, American Indian children are three times as likely to be placed in substitute care.
 - African American and American Indian children experience the highest levels of disparity at each point in the child welfare system.

(AFCARS Report, 2005; Hill, 2007)



Indian Country Research Experience

- Research has been conducted on American Indians since the early 19th century (Davis & Keemer, 2002)
 - “Researches into the Sanitary Conditions and Vital Statistics of Barbarians” (Dowler, 1857)
 - “Wild Babies” (Elliott, 1887)
 - “Mental Disease Situations in Certain Cultures- A New Field for Research” (Cooper, 1934)
 - “Studies in the Dietaries of Contemporary Primitive Peoples” (Klatzky, 1948)



Indian Country Research Experience

- At it's best:
 - Research questions were irrelevant to the community
 - Data extracted was never shared with the community



Indian Country Research Experience

- At it's worst:
 - Unauthorized studies, experiments, and projects
 - Misunderstanding and misrepresentation of culture, community values, worldview, etc.
 - Appropriation of Native culture
 - Abuse of Native subjects and data
 - Publication of private, tribal information
 - Lack of researcher accountability to subjects and communities



Indian Country Research Experience

- With various federal efforts in the 1960s to protect human subjects and the passage of the Indian Self-Determination Act (Pub. L. 93-638) in 1975, the dynamics of research began to change



Indian Country Research Experience

- Although the goals and accepted methodologies of social science research have changed over the years, today many tribes are still wary of researchers- and for good reason.



Implications for Child Welfare Evaluation in Indian Country

- Tribes largely believe in the importance of data and the science- practice relationship, but some critical issues must be addressed:
 - Who decides what “data” are and mean
 - Who decides what constitutes a positive outcome
- Tribes need to have a role in determining what to measure and how to measure it



Implications for Child Welfare Evaluation in Indian Country

- The trend toward evidence-based practice in general, and the emphasis on randomized controlled trials specifically, produce some significant challenges for Indian Country



Implications for Child Welfare Evaluation in Indian Country

- Small population size
- Culturally-appropriate practices may not lend themselves to measurement
- Research is very costly and resource-intensive
- Time between the practice being implemented and analysis of findings is relatively long
- Fidelity to models is a huge problem in a broad system with many untrained implementers



Implications for Child Welfare Evaluation in Indian Country

- Alternative research approaches show great promise:
 - Community-Based Participatory Research
 - Community-Based Evidence
 - Practice-Based Evidence



Conclusion

- Tribes value data.
- Tribes want to improve the quantity and quality of data available to them.
- Tribes have a sense of meaningful indicators and the best mechanisms to report and analyze data.



Conclusion

- Tribes are interested in research methodologies that yield credible data that:
 - Focus on outcomes for children and families;
 - Allow for analysis of systems issues;
 - Emphasize research/policy/practice relationships; and
 - Allow for improved tribal decision-making about Native children in state and tribal systems.



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