American Indian/First Nations Family Preservation:

A Scoping Review

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**Background**

For much of the past century, American Indian and First Nations families have born the brunt of practices aimed at delegitimizing and destroying tribal cultures. For many indigenous people in both countries, the boarding or residential school experience severed the link between student and his or her community and altered or eliminated the way in which parenting knowledge was passed from one generation to the next (Morissette, 1994; Weaver, 1998;). Even as boarding schools closed, the process of removing and assimilating native children continued. Social services agencies continued to judge tribal child-rearing practices and family structures ethnocentrically, determining as a result that native parents and communities were unfit to care for their own children (Unger, 1977).

In the United States, the effort to place American Indian children out of their families and communities has been perhaps most notably exemplified by the work of the Indian Adoption Project, a joint effort between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and The Child Welfare League of America (Gross 2003; Jones, 1995; Unger, 1977). This initiative had the singular goal of transracially adopting American Indian children. In Canada, the period known as the “sixties scoop” had a similar goal of promoting the placement of aboriginal children outside of their homes into the care of non-native, non-relative, caregivers (Blackstock, Trocme & Bennett, 2004).

In the United States, the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) in 1978 is significant as a turning point in policy from the support and encouragement of transracial adoption of native children to legislation focused on preserving tribal families and communities (Gross, 2003; Mannes, 1995; McEachron, Gustavsson, Cross & Lewis, 1996). The research of Stephen Unger and his monograph *The Destruction of American Indian Families* (1977) was integral in bringing the issue of disproportionate out of home placement of native children to light. In Canada during the same time period First Nations communities began asserting their constitutionally protected rights to establish child welfare and protection agencies.

Despite efforts to preserve tribal communities and families, American Indian and First Nations children continue to be disproportionately removed from the home (Blackstock et al., 2004; Carter, 2009; Donald, Bradley, Day, Critchley & Nuccio, 2003;). Although inconsistent and limited data on the well-being of American Indian and First Nations children and the outcomes of Indian children in care make it difficult to determine the full extent of the issues, it is clear that native children are not faring well in the care of public child welfare agencies (Fox, 2003; Willetto, 2007).

In both Canada and the United States, tribal survival depends on the reduction of out of home placement. Given this, family preservation efforts have been cited by scholars and policy makers as a way forward in Indian child welfare (Mannes, 1990). Despite this, little research exists on the implementation or outcomes of these programs. While research that focuses on the utilization of family preservation programs with populations of color may provide some insight regarding the experiences of native children, the unique cultures, histories, and political status of tribal peoples in North America should be recognized through research focused specifically on the experiences of these individuals and communities.

**Objectives**

Unlike a traditional systematic review, scoping reviews seek to determine what research does and does not exist within a given topic area. The goal of a scoping review is not to assess the quality of the evidence but instead to determine the feasibility and need for a systematic review and to identify the gaps in the current literature (Clapton, Rutter, & Sharif, 2009). With this in mind, the objective of this scoping review is to determine what does and does not exist with respect to empirical research in the area of family preservation for American Indian and First Nations children. The Child Welfare League of America defines family preservation as “comprehensive, short-term, intensive services for families delivered primarily in the home and designed to prevent the unnecessary out-of-home placement of children or to promote family reunification” (CWLA, 2011). Marc Mannes (1990) in his text *Family Preservation and Indian Child Welfare* offers the following:

Family preservation is an expansive concept that incorporates: 1) core philosophic tenets enjoining society to recognize that every child should grow up in a permanent family and proposing that the best way to accomplish permanency is by preserving families and preventing the placement of children outside the home, 2) a set of action theories prescribing how service agencies should respond to children and families in need, and 3) a portfolio of practice technologies promoting the usage of specific service delivery techniques and interventions.

It is this broader definition of family preservation offered by Mannes that informs the scoping review.

**Research Question:**

What is the current status of American Indian and First Nations family preservation research?

**Methods**

**Criteria for Selecting Studies for this Review**

Inclusion and exclusion criteria related to type of study, study participants, intervention type, and outcome measures are described below.

**Types of Studies**

Because the goal of this scoping review is the exhaustive documentation of the current status of research on American Indian or First Nations family preservation, the researcher utilized broad inclusion criteria. All studies that are empirical (involved the collection of qualitative or quantitative data) and focused on the need for, delivery of, or impact of family preservation efforts with American Indian or First Nations families were included in the search.

**Types of Participants**

Studies included in this review focused on American Indian or Alaska Native peoples of the United States and First Nations individuals from Canada. Studies that focused on individuals as well as agencies or policies were included.

**Types of Interventions**

This review focuses on those interventions that seek to prevent the out of home placement of American Indian or First Nations children or reunify the family after a placement has occurred. As this is a broader, scoping review not all studies are focused on an intervention.

**Types of Outcome Measures**

The review does not set inclusion or exclusion criteria based on particular outcome measures. As in other child welfare reviews, many of the studies focused on measures of safety, permanency, and well-being of children.

**Search Methods for Identification of Studies**

A multi-method search that included databases searching, hand searching of specific journals, and a review of grey literature, was utilized for this review. These three methods are described below.

**Database Search**

In an effort to identify studies related to American Indian or First Nations individuals the following search terms were utilized: american indian\* or indian\* or native america\* or native or indigenous \* or first nation\* or aborigin\* or alaska\* native or tribe\* or tribal\* or reserve\* or reservation\*.

To identify terms related to family preservation, the following set of terms were used: family preservation or family support services or intensive family preservation or intensive family preservation services or out of home placement prevention or reunification or out-of-home placement or out of home placement. The results of these two searches were combined with AND to yield 1638 sources from the following databases: MEDLINE, PsycINFO, ERIC, Dissertation Abstracts International, and CINAHL. Ebsco portal was used for the search. Study inclusion dates were 1978 through July, 2011 although the earliest included study was published in 1987. After screening the sources for the above inclusion criteria, 24 references were included from the database search.

**Hand Search**

A hand search was conducted of all issues of the online journal First Peoples Child & Family Review. As of July, 2011, the journal had released nine issues beginning in 2004. This search yielded eleven additional articles. Hand searches were also conducted of the past 10 years (Since first issue, 2002) of the journals Child Welfare (7 additional articles identified), Child Maltreatment (zero additional articles) and Child and Youth Services Review (3 additional articles). Without assessing the quality of the selected pieces and solely looking at the number of articles that fit the inclusion criteria, the online journal First Peoples Child & Family Review was determined to be the most important journal on this topic.

**Grey Literature**

In addition to the grey literature found through the database search, the researcher searched for grey literature through a variety of means. Three researchers were contacted for additional resources: Gordon Limb, Aron Shlonsky, and Peter Pecora. Dr. Limb is well published in the area of Indian child welfare, Dr. Shlonsky in child welfare, and Dr. Pecora in the area of family preservation. All articles suggested by the authors were already found through the database and hand search, although one of the authors did note that an empirical study of an American Indian family preservation initiative is currently underway and a paper will be submitted for publication in the coming months. Additionally, the following websites were searched using terms related to American Indian/First Nations and family preservation for research reports: The National Indian Child Welfare Association (nicwa.org), The child welfare information gateway (childwelfare.gov), the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (ojjdp.gov) was searched from 1990-2011, the official government websites of all ten Canadian provinces, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (aandc-aadnc.gc.ca) and the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada (fncfcs.org). The National Indian Child Welfare Association research library yielded 8 additional sources, the child welfare information gateway search yielded 4 sources, The First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada resource library yielded 7 additional sources. No other grey literature was found at the other sites.

**Data Collection Flow Chart**

**Included Studies**

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| **Study Identifier** | **Publication Type** | **Data Type; Research Method** | **Research Focus** | **Results and Conclusions** |
| (Barth, Webster II, & Lee, 2002) | Peer Reviewed | Quantitative; Secondary analysis | Study examined a cohort of 38,430 American Indian children in care in California. | * Kinship adoption was higher for American Indian/Alaska Native children and most often done by Aunts and Uncles rather than grandparents. * The rate at which American Indian/Alaska Native children remain in non-kinship foster care is substantially higher than for Caucasian or Latino children. |
| (Besaw, Kalt, Lee, Sethi, Wilson, & Zemler, 2004) | Report | Qualitative; Review of existing programs | This broader report on family strengthening initiatives includes a case study of a tribal foster care program on the Fond du Lac reservation in Minnesota | * The Fond du Lac foster care licensing and placement agency is described as a model program for keeping children in care on their home reservation |
| (Beaulieu, Abernathy, Bisaro, Pfeifer, and Bromley, 2010) | Report | Qualitative;  Policy review | A policy report on the Child and Family Service Act included interviews and community meetings | * The impact of the Child and Family Service Act is significant but the Act is difficult to understand * The Act does not adequately address the root causes of child abuse and neglect * There are community and cultural solutions to child abuse and neglect that should be acknowledged and supported * Lack of resources constrain program implementation * Legal challenges have highlighted gaps in the law * There is evidence to suggest that false reports of maltreatment do occur |
| (Blackstock, 2010) | Dissertation | Quantitative; Secondary analysis | First Nations and Non-aboriginal children in Nova Scotia removed from their families between 2003-2005 | * Poor families are overrepresented regardless of ethnicity * Substance misuse was cited most frequently as the reason for removal |
| (Brown, Limb, Clifford, Munoz, & Whitaker, 2004) | Peer Reviewed | Qualitative; Content analysis, interviews, focus groups | A nationwide content analysis of Title IV-E intergovernmental agreements, interviews and focus groups were conducted to examine Title IV-E funding arrangements for foster care and adoption | * Title IV-E tribal/state agreements vary widely with most tribes not receiving full access to state services. |
| (Brown, Limb, Chance, & Munoz, 2002) | Report | Mixed Methods; Survey research, case record reviews, focus groups | ICWA compliance is studies in Arizona. 61 case records are reviewed. 100 state workers, 17 tribal workers, 54 state attorneys, 15 tribal attorneys, 36 state judges, and 15 tribal judges were surveyed | * Arizona appears to provide ICWA training when workers begin employment but less so in an on-going fashion. * While the state maintains regular contact with the child’s tribe, timeframes imposed by Arizona’s Model Court Act do not allow sufficient time for collaboration. * State and tribal attorneys reported reading BIA guidelines but few state and tribal workers hard read the guidelines. |
| (Brown, Limb, Munoz, & Clifford, 2001) | Report | Qualitative; Content analysis, interviews, focus groups | A nationwide content analysis of Title IV-B Child and Family Services Plans (CFSP) and Annual Progress and Services Reports (APSR), interviews and focus groups were conducted to examine Title IV-B funding arrangements for foster care and adoption | * Administration for Children and Families program instructions for both the CFSP and APSR lacked detail and clarity as to what should be included * A majority of states reported consulting with tribes in the development of CFSP/APSRs * Over half of all state CFSP/APSRs did not reference any of the three specific measures outlined in ACF guidelines * A majority of states did not heed ACF “suggested measures” * A majority of states indicated they had in place or will develop specific ICWA compliance procedures but regarding the specific requirements, states are not addressing these components * Nearly all ACF regional administrators reviewed their states CFSP/APSR as satisfactory or good |
| (Brown, Whitaker, Clifford, Limb, & Munoz, 2000) | Report | Mixed Methods; Case record review, survey research | A nationwide content analysis of Title IV-E intergovernmental agreements, interviews and focus groups were conducted to examine Title IV-E funding arrangements for foster care and adoption | * Arizona appears to provide ICWA training when workers begin employment but less so in an on-going fashion. * While the state maintains regular contact with the child’s tribe, timeframes imposed by Arizona’s Model Court Act do not allow sufficient time for collaboration. * State and tribal attorneys reported reading BIA guidelines but few state and tribal workers hard read the guidelines. |
| (Carrire, 2007) | Report | Qualitative: Interviews | This study focuses on interviews from 20 participants on the need and utility of cultural planning in Aboriginal adoptions | * Cultural planning is important but information, support and follow-up are often absent |
| (Cherokee Nation, 2004) | Report | Mixed Methods; Program evaluation | Outcomes from the Cherokee Nation Permanency Outreach effort are described | * Project increased adoptions by Indian people * Indian families prefer to work with their tribe or another tribe in meeting adoption needs |
| (Dionne, 2008) | Report | Mixed Methods; Program evaluation | A tribal child abuse prevention program was evaluated using community surveys and a site visit from the funder. | * Decrease in child aggressive behavior * Increase in positive parenting practices * High satisfaction with the program |
| (Donald, Bradley, Critchley, Day, & Nuccio, 2003) | Peer Reviewed | Quantitative;  Secondary analysis | First-time placements of American Indian children in 1996 and a comparison group of non-Indian children in a Minnesota county | * American Indian families are younger and more likely to be exposed to physical neglect than their non-Indian counterparts * For both populations, alcohol use is a significant problem but rates are higher for American Indian families * The American Indian families in the study were, for the most part, in single-parent households and living in poverty |
| (Earle, 2000) | Report | Mixed Methods; Survey research | A survey of 10% of federally recognized tribes and the states in which they are located on reporting of Indian child welfare data to national data systems | * American Indian tribes should develop culturally sound definitions of abuse and neglect * The federal government should provide resources and assistance necessary to develop data tracking and reporting system on the abuse and neglect of American Indian children |
| (Earle, & Cross, 2001) | Report | Quantitative; Secondary analysis | A review of data from all published reports that included American Indian abuse and neglect figures. Part two of the study included analysis of data from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System comparing 12,164 American Indian children with a cohort of the same number of White children | * Reports of neglect are higher for American Indian children than for White children * Alcohol abuse as a factor in child abuse was more often reported for American Indian children than for white children * Reports of abuse and neglect are increasing for American Indian children * American Indian children are more likely to be placed in foster care than white children * American Indian children are less likely to be adopted * Physical and sexual abuse occurred less often for American Indian children * American Indian families utilized public assistance at a higher rate |
| (Evans-Campbell, 2008) | Peer Reviewed | Quantitative; Survey research | A survey of 101 American Indian/Alaska Native parents in Los Angeles explored perceptions of child neglect among urban American Indian parents | * Gender, education, martial status, and indirect experience with Child Protective Services were significantly related to perceptions of neglect among respondents |
| (Fluke, Chabot, Fallon, MacLaurin, & Blackstock, 2010) | Peer Reviewed | Quantitative; Secondary analysis | A multilevel examination of over 5,000 cases in the Canadian Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect | * The Aboriginal status of a child and structural risk factors affecting the family such as poverty and housing account for the overrepresentation in the child welfare system |
| (Fox, 2003) | Peer Reviewed | Quantitative;  Survey research | A survey of 10% of federally recognized tribes and the states in which they are located on reporting of Indian child welfare data to national data systems | * American Indian tribes should develop culturally sound definitions of abuse and neglect * The federal government should provide resources and assistance necessary to develop data tracking and reporting system on the abuse and neglect of American Indian children |
| (George, 1992) | Report | Qualitative; Interviews | Nine American Indian workers from three Families First demonstration projects | * The Families First philosophy is compatible with American Indian culture * The model should address paper work demand, short time frames, lack of resources, and the image of the social worker * The workers established trust by discussing their own cultural experiences and emphasizing reciprocity |
| (Halverson, Puig, & Byers, 2002) | Peer Reviewed | Qualitative; Interviews | Interviews with seven American Indian foster parents in the Rocky Mountain Front Range area of Colorado examined child welfare experiences and ideas of foster parents. | * American Indian foster parents are discourage with the current foster care system. * Examined the role of culture in caregiving * Explored differing definitions of family and relatedness * Highlighted the historical pain due to past family disruption |
| (Harbert, 2008) | Report | Mixed Methods; Program evaluation | A training on addressing the needs of Native American youth in foster care was evaluated through a follow-up survey. | * Participants increased knowledge of ICWA * Participants gained greater awareness and understanding of Native American culture * Participants felt the training made them more effective in delivering foster care services |
| (Harris, Russell, & Gockel, 2007) | Peer Reviewed | Qualitative; Interviews | Urban Aboriginal mothers attending a parenting program | * First nations mothers feel fortunate when they receive adequate services * First nations mothers feel ‘inadequate’ about the inability to manage finances * First nations mothers perceive lack of support in family preservation program as racism * Poverty often leads to forced compromises which can perpetuate risk of coming to the attention of child welfare |
| (Helgeson Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata, 1992) | Conference Proceeding | Qualitative;  Program Description | An Aboriginal child and family resource agency in Winnipeg, Manitoba | * Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc. is described as a potential family preservation model |
| (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2010) | Report | Mixed Methods; Program Evaluation | An assessment of the implementation of First Nations child abuse prevention grants | * The prevention approach is relevant and needed * The design of the prevention approach is appropriate * The research is inconclusive regarding impact and effectiveness of the programs |
| (Jimmie, & Lewis, 2009) | Report | Mixed Methods;  Program evaluation | A tribal child abuse prevention program was evaluated using survey research | * Surveys were currently being gathered * Anecdotal evidence indicates parent satisfaction |
| (Johnson, Evans, & Gravelle, 1992) | Conference Proceedings | Mixed Methods; Program Description | Michigan Families First Program in Lansing Michigan | * Michigan program is a potential model for family preservation services |
| (Jones, Miller, Susan, & Medina, 1998) | Report | Mixed Methods; Survey research and Interviews | Families with disabled children on the Navajo Reservation; 89 Parents, educators, and professionals from two school districts | * Parents were well informed of the services available to their children * Parents were using the services * Collaboration between schools and community agencies increased parent awareness * Parents would like more organized activities for their children, a library, and a parent newsletter |
| (Joyce, Encino, & Kayate, 1991) | Conference Proceedings | Mixed Methods; Program Description | The Home Base program, a family preservation program at Pueblo of Laguna | * Home Base is described as a potential family preservation model |
| (Jones, Gillette, Painte, & Paulson, 2000) | Report | Mixed Methods; Case record review, survey research | A study of compliance with ICWA in North Dakota was conducted. 94 open ICWA cases were reviewed, and 20 structure interviews were conducted | * There is a high level of compliance to determine tribal membership * There is mixed compliance regarding notification to tribes * Tribes made few requests for transfer to tribal court * Active efforts were made in over half the cases * Over half of foster care cases indicated that ICWA placement preferences were not followed. |
| (Julin, 1991) | Report | Mixed Methods; Survey research | Forty-four American Indians with experience with county child protective services in Minnesota | * Parents noted a lack of information about their rights as American Indian parents * County agencies failed to ask parents about the child’s eligibility for tribal membership * Tribal agencies were not notified of changes in placement * In many cases no effort was made to place children with relatives * Only a small percentage of respondents noted that Indian agencies were involved in the case |
| (Krishnan, & Morrison, 1995) | Peer Reviewed | Quantitative; Secondary analysis | Children 0-19 in Alberta, Canada in 1986. | * Population change, unemployment rates, percent of the population who are First Nations, and geographical location were all correlated with child maltreatment * Unemployement was most highly correlated with child maltreatment rates |
| (Lavergne, Dufour, Trocme, & Larrivee, 2008) | Peer Reviewed | Quantitative; Descriptive | A comparison of report profiles of Caucasian, Aboriginal, and other visible minority children whose cases were assessed by child protective services in Canada. | * Children of Aboriginal ancestry and from visible minority groups are selected for investigation 1.77 times more frequently than Caucasian children * Physical abuse is substantiated more often for Asian children * Neglect is the chief issue for Aboriginal and Black children * Racial bias may exist in the identification and reporting of maltreatment cases to child protective servies and in decisions about substantiation of maltreatment |
| (Limb, Chance, & Brown, 2004) | Peer Reviewed | Mixed Methods; Case record review, survey research | Case record review of 49 ICWA eligible children in a Southwestern state. Survey of 78 state caseworkers and 16 tribal workers. | * Case record review suggests compliance with ICWA * Differences exist in knowledge and perceptions of ICWA by state and tribal workers * Compliance with ICWA promotes better outcomes through reunification |
| (Limb, & Perry, 2003) | Peer Reviewed | Quantitative; Secondary analysis | The study is a secondary analysis of a sample of 5,741 public child welfare workers from a workforce survey conducted through the California Social Work Education Center. | * American Indian workers are significantly more likely than any other racial/ethnic group to have a high proportion of American Indians on their caseload. |
| (MacEachron, Gustavsson, Cross, & Lewis, 1996) | Peer Reviewed | Quantitative; Secondary analysis | Review of data from Association of American Indian Affairs surveys, Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Voluntary Cooperative Information System, and the 1970 and 1980 census. | * Tentative support for effectiveness of the act in reducing adoption and foster care placement rates for American Indian children |
| (Mall & Williams, 2007) | Thesis | Mixed methods; Secondary analysis, interviews | Analysis of tribal court decisions, tribal child welfare codes, and tribal family preservation programs and interviews of tribal officials were conducted | * The tribal perspective is useful gaining a more accurate perspective on ICWA implementation |
| (Mannes, 1989) | Conference Proceedings | Mixed Methods; Review of existing programs | Description of six placement prevention programs serving American Indians | * Intensive, short-term services in the home met needs for concrete assistance with transportation and money as well as counseling, stress and anger management, parenting and problem solving |
| (Mannes, 1990) | Book chapter | Qualitative; Concept mapping | An implementation assessment was conducted of two sites. One site was in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and one in the Rio Grande corridor of New Mexico | * The study identified 76 implementation issues that fell under six concept categories: Community education, coordination among agencies, family identification for services, funding, program and service development, and staff training. |
| (Mannes, 1993) | Peer Reviewed | Mixed Methods; Review of existing programs | Twelve American Indian Family Preservation Programs | * Family preservation services may be a better approach than culturally appropriate placements * Child protection and family preservation can coexist |
| (McGeshick, 1995) | Thesis | Mixed Methods; Review of existing programs | Examines prevention and treatment programs on the Fort Peck Reservation in the 1980s. | * Four Fort Peck reservation programs are described as a possible model for child abuse prevention and treatment |
| (Mindell, de Haymes, & Francisco, 2003) | Peer Reviewed | Qualitative; Review of existing program | A description of a collaboration between a university, a state child welfare agency, and a Native American community organization | * The collaboration is presented as a model for training and ICWA compliance monitoring * Guiding principles outlined were: Accessibility/flexibility, community empowerment and participation, recognition of urban Indian culture and history, bridge the gap between legal and social work practice in Indian child welfare, and Use the benefits of university, community, and child welfare system partnerships |
| (Morrison, Fox, Cross, & Paul, 2010) | Peer Reviewed | Qualitative; Narrative research | Roger Paul, a member of the Passamaquodd and Maliseet Tribes discusses customary adoption | * Cultural and institutional oppression continue to be embedded in current policy and practice and continue to have a detrimental impact on tribal children, families, and communities. * Little recognition of or support for the child welfare structure exists in tribal communities; as exemplified by the Wabanaki experience. |
| (Nuccio, 1997) | Report | Quantitative; Secondary analysis | Analysis of out of home placement data of St. Louis County in Minnesota and the state as a whole. | * Kinship care as well as the design of the Indian Child Welfare Act may be factors in the long-term care arrangements of Indian children. |
| (Quash-Mah, Stockard, Johnson-Shelton, & Crowley, 2010) | Peer Reviewed | Quantitative; Secondary analysis | Data were analyzed for a sample of almost 1600 American Indian children in the foster care system in four California counties . | * Children coming from a stronger American Indian Cultural Environment had fewer placements and placements that were longer. * Children from local tribes had longer placements |
| (Red Horse, Martinez, & Day, 2001) | Report | Qualitative; Case Study | A family preservation initiative on the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota is examined as a model program. | * Family preservation requires: community education and advocacy, tribal members as staff, reliance on tribal cultural systems, and social work systems based on cultural facilitation and strengths-based models |
| (Red Horse, Martinez, Day, Day, Poupart, & Scharnberg, 2000) | Report | Qualitative; Survey research, focus groups | The study uses a reality-based research approach to examining family preservation concepts in American Indian communities | * Indian traditions are alive and well in tribal communities and being used to prevent family break-up * Language, community, spirituality, and family are integral to family preservation * Mainstream social workers remain ignorant of tribal customs * Past and present cultural repression fuels individual and community pain * The current structure of mainstream child welfare practice leads to mistrust among American Indian families * Values conflict persists between American Indian and mainstream communities |
| (Richardson, 2008) | Peer Reviewed | Quantitative; Program evaluation | Two demonstration projects to address the disproportionate numbers of Native American and African American children in care in Iowa. | * Improved worker and participant alliance, family functioning and outcomes for children |
| (Robin, Rasmussen, & Gonzalez-Santin, 1999) | Peer Reviewed | Mixed methods; Survey research, Interviews, Diagnostic research | Survey research and diagnostic assessments were conducted with 582 Southwestern American Indian tribal members over 21. | * Foster care was associated with psychopathology * This association was modified by childhood sexual abuse * Attending boarding school was associated with psychopathology in males. Most notably drug use was strongly associated with boarding school attendance among males. * Adoption and missionary placement were not associated with multiple psychopathologies in the multiple regression but were associated with anxiety among females in the bivariate analysis * Increased suicide rates, increased utilization of mental health services and sexual abuse while attending boarding school were not found to be significantly linked to out-of-home placment |
| (Ryan, Murphy, Harvey, Nygren, Kinavey, & Ongtooguk, 2006) | Peer Reviewed | Qualitative; Interviews | Interviews were conducted with ten Alaska Native parents | * Nine practice for working effectively with Alaska Native parents are described: take time to build relationships, help families feel less isolated, listen to families, silence is OK, speak slowly and clearly, do not use acronyms, move slowly and be patient, always follow-up, and ask parents if this is their ‘picture’ of their child. |
| (Smollar, & Smith, 1990) | Report | Mixed Methods; Program Evaluation (site visits and interviews) | Evaluation of the impact of six demonstration projects designed to prevent placement of Native American children or reunify native families | * The context (tribal or non-tribal) in which the project was conducted affected whether services were tailored to specific cultural needs, identities as Native Americans, or emphasized client confidentiality * Not all projects met the objective of providing both social service and substance abuse treatment * Barriers to project effectiveness were high staff turn-over and inadequate staff training * Positive factors facilitating service delivery were positive client-worker relationships and strong community support * Insufficient time had passed to evaluate client outcomes * Similar projects should be encouraged in native communities |
| (Sudia, 1987) | Report | Qualitative; Policy Review | Examines changes in out-of-home placement of American Indian children between 1974 and 1985 | * Although placement rates have decreased, adoptions of Indian children are still high. * More Indian children are being placed with Indian families and served by tribal agencies * Data is incomplete and fragmented. A reporting system that coordinates tribal social services data is recommended |
| (Trocme, Knoke, & Blackstock, 2004) | Peer Reviewed | Quantitative; Secondary analysis | A sample of 2,898 cases involving aboriginal children were drawn from the Canadian Incidence Study of 1998 | * Child welfare reports involving Aboriginal children are more likely to be classified as suspected or substantiated than reports for Caucasian children. * Aboriginal children are twice as likely to be placed in foster care * Out-of-home placement rates are related to socioeconomic, child, parent, and maltreatment characteristics |
| (Trocme, MacLaurin, Fallon, Knoke, Pitman, & McCormack, 2006) | Report | Quantitative; Secondary analysis | An analysis of over 11,000 child abuse cases in the Canadian Incidence Study of 2003 | * In the bivariate analysis, First Nations children are overrepresented in the decision to substantiate maltreatment and the decision to place a child in out of home care * In the multivariate analysis, First Nations status no longer is a significant predictor of maltreatment substantiation when caregiver functioning is controlled for |
| (Waddell, 2003) | Thesis | Quantitative; Survey research | A study of 46 American Indian children in dependent care and their care providers in Butte County, California | * Those social workers with more experience tend to talk to children on their caseload about their tribal culture more often than those with less experience * The majority of ICWA eligible children are placed with Indian foster parents from tribes differing from that of the child or in non-Indian foster homes |
| (Wright, Hiebert-Murphy, & Gosek, 2005) | Report | Mixed Methods; Survey research, focus groups, interviews | A survey of 29 service providers, interviews and focus groups with 136 services providers examined approaches to supporting aboriginal children with learning disabilities in the child welfare system | * Survey research identified several unmet needs and barriers as well as community strengths, * Recommendations included: Providing adequate support services in Aboriginal communities, provide culturally appropriate services, develop a common and inclusive definition of disability, develop a voluntary sector within Aboriginal communities, dedicate national funding to the issue |

**Narrative Synthesis**

As noted above, scoping reviews are less concerned with the merit of a given study and more interested in providing an exhaustive summary of the research on a given topic. With this in mind, the following synthesis examines what types of studies exist related to American Indian and First Nations family preservation, what populations these studies focus on and what designs were utilized. Following this overview is a concept map that visually depicts the content of included studies as they relate to American Indian or First Nations family preservation.

**Chart 1- Study Design**

Study design (chart 1) was split relatively evenly between mixed methods, quantitative, and qualitative. Over half (52%) of the mixed methods studies were concerned with either highlighting or evaluating an individual program (n=11). The largest single focus (37.5%) of the qualitative studies were interested in the philosophical and conceptual understandings of family preservation (n=6). The majority of quantitative studies focused on secondary analysis of existing data sets (70.5%). Many of these examined the differences in outcomes between native and non-native children. Half of the studies focused on First Nations children were quantitative (n=6) while 26% of studies of American Indian or Alaska Native children were quantitative (n=11).

**Chart 2- Publication Type**

Given that the majority of the search protocol was focused on locating peer-reviewed articles through a database search, the low amount (39% of the included studies) of peer-reviewed publications is noteworthy. The breakdown of peer-reviewed studies between those focused on First Nations children or programs and those focused on American Indian or Alaska Native children or programs mirrors the larger body of included studies. Studies of First Nations children make up 23.8% of the peer-reviewed articles and 22% of the full body of included studies. Conversely, studies of American Indian or Alaska Native children make up 76.2% of peer reviewed articles and 78% of the full body of included studies. A majority (57.1%) of the peer-reviewed articles were quantitative in design. Although mixed methods design was more common than any other approach in the larger body of included literature, it was rare among peer-reviewed articles. Only two of the peer-reviewed pieces were mixed methods. Mixed methods approaches were most common among the reports (54.2% of reports), often used in program evaluation.

**Chart 3- Research Themes**

Research themes were divided into categories for the concept map to follow. The largest group of studies focused on differences between outcomes for American Indian or First Nations children in care and non-native children in care. Most of these studies were quantitative, peer-reviewed, and utilized secondary analysis. Although perhaps similar in nature, model program studies and program evaluations were separated. Model programs were reports that utilized data collection for the purpose of highlighting the strengths of a given program with the hope that other programs would replicate or learn from the approach. Program evaluation studies sought to determine the effectiveness of a given approach. Combined, these studies of individual programs made up 35% of the total included literature. ICWA compliance studies made up 13% of included studies. All of these studies focused on an individual region such as a state or county. The compliance studies were most often mixed method in design and included case record reviews. In general, the diversity of topics points both to a variety of approaches and the breadth of issues related to American Indian and First Nations family preservation.

**Concept Map**

The following is a concept map visually depicts the included studies as they relate to American Indian and First Nations Family Preservation. Levac, Colquhuan & O’Brien (2010) suggest such a qualitative thematic analysis in scoping reviews. Four core themes were identified from the analysis: Law, Need, Service Delivery, and Philosophy.

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**Recommendations**

The following are recommendations based on the above findings:

* In general, an effort should be made to increase the amount and diversity of peer-reviewed research on American Indian and First Nations children in care.
* No study examined experiences of both First Nation and American Indian children or families. Despite differences between these groups such as funding and legal realities, similarities in history and experiences of children in care may allow room for research that examines both groups.
* An effort has been made to examine ICWA compliance in a number of individual locations. Changes in local legislation, leadership, and training may make these studies less relevant over time. If these compliance studies it may be possible to begin synthesizing the findings to make larger, national-level conclusions about compliance with the law.
* Although studies of individual programs made up 35% of the included studies, none of these studies utilized a control group and few examined project outcomes other than client satisfaction. More rigorous evaluation of model programs may aid in building an evidence base for tribal family preservation programs.
* Lack of national data sources that capture information on American Indian children was cited in a number of studies and may
* Just over 20% (n=11) of the included studies resulted from a joint effort between the National Indian Child Welfare Association and Casey Family Programs to increase research in Indian child welfare. Despite only three of these studies being published in peer-reviewed journals, the effort had a lasting impact on the amount of available research. Perhaps a return to this effort is in order.
* Despite several studies focusing on level of compliance with ICWA, few studies examined the impact of this non-compliance and no study examined the outcomes of ICWA when compliance does occur. As the ICWA enters its third decade, perhaps more research is needed on the law.

**Limitations and Lessons Learned**

This process provided several important lessons learned. Because “family preservation” was defined broadly, many American Indian and First Nations child welfare research articles fit the criteria and the review results are perhaps too broad in scope. Addressing this would entail either broadening the research question to focus on child welfare generally as it applies to American Indian or First Nations populations and having additional search terms that reflect this or narrowing the inclusion criteria to focus solely on outcomes related to family preservation interventions and less on related issues and causes of out of home placement. There are also some search terms that should have been added. American Indian/Alaska Native as a term was found in three articles that discovered through other means. These articles were not found in the database search because of the use of the backslash between the two terms. The terms Inuit and Met**í**s should have also been included. Utilizing a Canadian co-author with more experience in issues and literature relevant to First Nations children would have strengthened the study. Approximately 75% of the included studies were focused on American Indian populations and this may have been a result of missed journals or grey literature that a Canadian co-author would have identified.

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