

Child Abuse and Neglect:

A Discussion Paper and Overview of Topically Related Projects

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However, this emphasis is also consistent with the micro level, that of direct services to help enhance family functioning. The notion is that if we are willing to expend resources once the family has failed and children have to be taken into care, significant amounts should be available to assist families before they go into crisis. Thus, for example, some very intensive (and intrusive) programs have been developed along a "family preservation" model, dedicating weeks of direct service involvement over a short period to trying to strengthen the family. *In evaluating such programs, it is important to consider whether families are left materially better off and whether that improvement is maintained over time.*

Supporting Trends: Native Child Welfare

If poverty, marginality, and inadequate supports for parenting contribute to child neglect and other child abuse issues, it is not surprising that Natives are heavily over-represented in the child welfare system. In recent years, allegations of child sexual abuse, starting in the residential school system and becoming endemic in many Native communities, have had a very high profile. But it is "neglect" that has led to the largest number of removals of Native children and it is the reaction to the imposition of culturally inappropriate, insensitive, and destructive child protection policies that has largely driven the demand for development of Native child welfare programs.

Native child welfare policy is closely tied to the larger issue of self-government. However, in many cases it has been targeted for immediate action, not only because of current system dysfunction, but also because of its extreme symbolic value, communities regaining control over their "future". This policy trend is strongly articulated in the recent Native Committee report in British Columbia (White and Jacobs, 1992):

"Your present laws empower your Superintendent of Child and Family Service and your family courts to remove our children from our Nations, and place them in the care and custody of others. The first step to righting the wrongs done to us is to limit the authority to interfere in the lives of our families, and to provide remedies other than the removal of our children from our Nations. This must be accompanied by the financial resources we require to heal the wounds inflicted upon us. At the same time, the responsibilities and jurisdictions vested in your Superintendent and the family courts must be vested in our Nations. Finally, as our Nations assert our own family laws to meet our contemporary needs, as we rebuild the authority usurped from our Nations, the laws of our Nations must have paramountcy over your laws as they apply to our people." (p.viii)

Implications

Raising the issue of abuse and neglect within Native communities has underlined the need to develop a whole range of child abuse prevention programs that are culturally appropriate. That in turn has focused attention on some directions in native child welfare that differ from (but also are attractive to) those in the larger society. One of these is the centrality of community focused intervention (i.e., the importance of addressing the whole community rather than working only with individuals or even individual families). The other is the fairly generic "spiritual" regeneration approach represented by the "healing circle".¹⁸

Obviously, a great deal of research and evaluation could be undertaken in this area; this is well beyond the scope of this paper. *However, the ways in which ideas from Native child welfare are being applied experimentally in mainstream programs is a fascinating focus for study.*

Child Abuse and Neglect Revisited

The argument in this paper is that physical abuse and neglect had been pushed far down the public agenda by child sexual abuse. However, once these issues were taken under the umbrella of family violence, there was new opportunity for attention. A broad family violence perspective supports the logic of family support approaches, policies and programs that have long been touted as fundamental prevention for abuse.

Having said that, it is neither necessary nor desirable to submerge the topic of physical abuse and neglect entirely. In fact, it is important to remain aware of the exact nature of the problems that we are seeking to solve so that we can frame our policies and evaluate our programs in terms of clear end goals.

Implications

There is a danger of adopting the family as our "unit of analysis" and holding to some view of overall family good at the possible expense of the needs of the children. The "best interests of the child" is a doctrine that requires attention in a family support context. *It is important to articulate how children's rights and advocacy can be built into family support programs.*

To help maintain a perspective on child abuse and neglect, we need periodic up-dates on the best current information and most interesting new thinking. Ideally, such material should be available in various forms, to make the information accessible to a general public, but also to meet the special needs of professionals in the field on one hand and policy makers on the other. For example, *it would be useful to have an enlarged range of "fact sheets" available through the National Clearinghouse*

Family Violence – covering aspects of neglect, institutional violence, emotional abuse, and the like. Similarly, it would be helpful to review the research and practice literature on child abuse and neglect and add to the list of available reprints. And the collection should include a separate emphasis on materials that evaluate policies and analyze trends.

An Overview of Topically Related Projects Funded by the Family Violence Prevention Division

There has not been a special emphasis on physical abuse and neglect per se in Health Canada's research or demonstration project agenda in recent years. Nevertheless, Family Violence Prevention Division staff identified 21 documents for review from among their projects of the last half-decade. Brief summaries of these are included as Appendix I so that readers can judge some of the scope of that work. Here, we will restrict ourselves to a few observations that place these reports in context. A more formal review would not be appropriate because there was never any intention that these projects should cover the field or address the range of abuse and neglect issues in depth (although the variety of training packages supported may represent the mass required to consider them as a body of work). Note that some of the reports were also cited above in Part I.

Broadly speaking, these reports fall under five headings:

- i) training materials;
- ii) literature reviews and analyses;
- iii) research studies;
- iv) conference proceedings; and
- v) program inventories.

Training Materials, Guidebooks, and Discussions of Standards

The largest number of project reports are in this category. These include the following numbered reviews in Appendix I:

(3): Church Council... (1988), a discussion guide on family violence for the use of church groups; (7): Fairholm (1990), a curriculum for volunteers teaching child abuse prevention in secondary schools; (8): Hutchinson (1988), background on family violence for correctional service workers; (9): Kinnon (1988), promoting interdisciplinary activity in ten national professional associations; (10): Lovell (1991), a curriculum for social support training for moms at risk of maltreating their children; (12): Morris (1988), a training package for pastoral care workers; (14): Nicholas (1989), an introduction to groupwork for Spanish-speaking lay counsellors; (19): Subcommittee... (1989), a guide for setting and monitoring standards of

