

A scoping study of Indigenous child welfare: The long emergency and preparations for the next seven generations

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ABSTRACT

This scoping study yielded 37 empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals addressing one of the most pressing, sensitive, and controversial issues facing child welfare policymakers and practitioners today: the dramatic overrepresentation of Indigenous families in North American public child welfare systems. These studies indicate that relative to other child welfare-involved families, Indigenous families typically experience intense social challenges in the face of few available services. They also may experience racism when accessing available county, state and provincial child welfare services that undermines trust and engagement. Some promising research suggests that partnerships between government child welfare systems and Indigenous tribes and communities may improve services to struggling families. Given the seriousness of the social justice issues, as well as the sheer volume of empirical research in child welfare, the question of how to strengthen child welfare with Indigenous families clearly is under-researched. Notable gaps in the existing literature include the voices of Indigenous children and parents involved in the child welfare system and attention to cultural variation in child protection beliefs and practices across the many Indigenous communities of North America. More work also is needed to design, implement, and evaluate culturally-based child welfare practices; and examine how to build capacity at the tribal level.

1. Introduction

This scoping study addresses one of the most pressing, sensitive, and controversial issues facing child welfare policymakers and practitioners today: the dramatic overrepresentation of Indigenous¹ families in North American public child welfare systems. In Canada, for instance, Indigenous children comprise 52% of foster children under 14 years of age despite representing just 8% of that age group in the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2016). In the U.S., Indigenous children under approximately age 17 have the highest rate (14.2 per 1000) of substantiated maltreatment reports (Children's Bureau, 2018), and are in foster care at a rate 3.3 times that of white children (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2017; Kids Count Data Center, 2016).

These and other disparities persist in the U.S. and Canada despite legislation designed to improve outcomes for Indigenous families. In the U.S., the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 (U. S. Public Law 95–608) was passed at the request of the tribes to reduce the involvement of Indigenous children in the child welfare system, halt the removal of Indigenous children from Indigenous communities, and reclaim their cultures. It focuses on Indigenous family preservation as integral to tribal sovereignty and reparative justice (Red Horse, Martinez, Day, Poupart, & Scharnberg, 2000). It recognizes that the removal of Indigenous children from their families is devastating not

only for those families, but for Indigenous communities as a whole. Maintaining Indigenous children in Indigenous homes or foster homes ensures continuation of Indigenous communities for future generations.

In summary, ICWA places exclusive jurisdiction of child welfare laws and regulations on tribal lands with tribes. Off-reservation, ICWA requires tribal notification by county or state child protection agencies of child maltreatment allegations and child custody proceedings involving Indigenous children eligible for tribal enrollment. The law requires “active efforts” before placing children in foster care, which is a higher standard than “reasonable efforts” used before removing non-Indigenous children from their families. To remove Indigenous children from their families, the law requires testimony by a qualified expert witness familiar with the child's culture. If out-of-home care is necessary, the law also specifies preferences for placements first with relatives, then members of the child's tribe and, lastly, another Indigenous family. Only after these placements have been considered can a child be placed with a non-Indigenous family.

Despite the centrality of ICWA to the well-being of Indigenous families and communities, the absence of a federal agency overseeing state compliance with ICWA has resulted in many instances of inadequate training and poor compliance. In view of the continued high rate of disparities in the removal of Indigenous children, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has made major changes in its rules to strengthen

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¹ For consistency, we will refer to Indigenous communities and peoples of North America (Canada and the U.S.) as “Indigenous,” unless their specific tribal, Indigenous, First Nation or Aboriginal names are specified in the research or when referring to a specific law (e.g. Indian Child Welfare Act).

compliance with ICWA and enhance the preservation of tribal communities by maintaining families and safeguarding children's connection to their communities (Federal Register, 2016; U. S. Department of the Interior, 2018).

Unlike Indigenous child welfare in the U.S., Canadian child welfare has several systems (Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013). Child welfare mandates differ across the 13 provincial/territorial areas. Each provincial system is shaped by federal, provincial, and First Nations legislation. There is no universal definition of child maltreatment across the Provinces. There is, however, a shared goal of protecting children from abuse, and basic understandings of sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect and emotional maltreatment, and exposure to interpersonal violence or substance abuse (Sinha et al., 2011).

1.1. Indigenous child welfare in historical context: the long emergency

The history of North America did not begin with the Colonial era. It began thousands of years prior when Indigenous people lived and thrived on “Turtle Island.” The history of Indigenous genocide and historical trauma in North America is manifested today in many forms of oppression, violence, and structural racism including within child welfare systems (Brave Heart, Chase, Elkins, & Altschul, 2011). To heal from the destruction of colonization and genocide, and to ensure the survival and reclamation of their ways of life, many contemporary Indigenous nations embrace the Seven Generations Philosophy. This philosophy considers how each decision made today will affect the next seven generations and beyond (Lyons, 2018).

Consistent with the Seven Generations Philosophy, the high rates of Indigenous families involved in child welfare may be viewed as a “long emergency.” Climate change scientists concerned with the effects of global warming use the concept of the long emergency to refer to sustained stress to social and ecological systems caused by multiple disasters affecting generations (see Orr, 2016). For example, the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico occurring in the midst of a long term, financial crisis resulted in unmet needs in the face of depleted resources. Indigenous people in the United States and Canada also have endured a long emergency from systemic actions to destroy their families, cultures, lands, and spiritual belief systems beginning > 500 years ago with the colonization of North America by Europeans.

Beginning in the early 1800s and continuing well into the 20th century, Indigenous families and children were victims of U.S. and Canadian governments' efforts to forcefully and brutally assimilate Indigenous people. Implementation of official policies severed children from their culture and kinship networks through forced removal from their families, displacement from tribal homelands, and mandatory boarding school attendance (see Adams, 1995; Bussey & Lucero, 2013).

During the U.S. boarding school era of the late 19th through the mid-20th centuries, the U.S. government established Indian boarding schools to force Indigenous children and youth to assimilate into European American culture. The goal was to sever Indigenous children from their families and communities via off-reservation boarding schools so that they could more easily coerce them to adopt the ways of European American culture (Adams, 1995). During this time, children were not only deprived of the care, nurturance and protection of traditional tribal child rearing practices, many experienced abduction and then emotional, physical, and sexual abuse in militaristic schools. While some children survived this treacherous process, many died from disease, malnutrition, and harsh conditions (Adams, 1995; Child, 1998; Lomawaima, 1994; Smith, 2004). The forced separation of children from their families and communities during the U.S. boarding school era continues to affect Indigenous families and communities today.

Indigenous children in Canada also were forcibly taken from their families. In 1920, the Canadian government mandated that all Indigenous children of school age attend a residential school. During the height of the Residential School System Era in the 1930s and 1940s, between 90,000 and 100,000 children were institutionalized. Although

most of these schools closed in the 1950s and 1960s, the forcible separation of Indigenous children from their families and communities continued during the “Sixties Scoop.” Through the late 1950s and into the 1980s, thousands of Indigenous children were “scooped” (forcibly removed) by the Canadian government from their families and communities and adopted into predominantly white, middle class families in Canada and the U.S. Many adoptees lost a sense of cultural identity. Their forced removal from their birth families and communities continues to undermine adult adoptees and Indigenous communities today (see Blackstock, 2011; Johnston, 1983; Milloy, 1999).

The history of government oppression and genocide has undermined Indigenous cultures and created risks for child maltreatment. Historical trauma, that is, the intergenerational trauma from unresolved grief and disruptions to normative, Indigenous child socialization processes, continues to resonate in many communities (Brave Heart et al., 2011). Inadequate exposure to Indigenous parenting role models, personal trauma histories, poverty and racism has weakened generations of Indigenous families (see Bussey & Lucero, 2013). This history also has seriously damaged both the capacity of many Indigenous parents to trust potentially helpful services from child welfare agencies and staff members (e.g., Horejsi, Craig, & Pablo, 1992), and the capacity of non-Indigenous child welfare agencies and staff to understand, evaluate and engage in effective services with them.

Bussey and Lucero (2013) summarized three challenges Indigenous families involved with child welfare face: a fear of losing their children as have others before them, the caseworker's lack of cultural knowledge, and being judged as an inadequate parent based on non-Indigenous cultural values. Furthermore, they point out that European American-based approaches to child welfare stress individualism, independence, confidentiality, and authority through formal education. These values not only conflict with traditional Indigenous values, they are quite similar to those that provided the foundation and justification for assimilative U.S. Indian policy in the late 19th century, including Indian boarding schools and the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887 that devastated Indigenous communities (Adams, 1995). From an Indigenous perspective, families are strengthened through kinship bonds; community and tribal connections; values and traditions; language; spirituality, and cultural practices (see Red Horse et al., 2000).

1.2. Conceptual framework

We approach this scoping study sensitized by multiple conversations with Indigenous elders from the Ojibwe (including Priscilla Day, personal communication, November 21, 2017) and Fond du lac (including Julia Jaakola, personal communication, March 19, 2018) tribes, as well as their writings (e.g., see Red Horse et al., 2000). For decades, Indigenous elders and scholars, who have personally experienced the impact of colonialization and historical trauma in their own families and communities, have been practicing, explicating, and advocating for culturally-based child welfare practices to improve services to struggling Indigenous families (e.g., see Red Horse et al., 2000).

We also approach this scoping study sensitized by concepts from developmental cultural psychology (Gaskins, Miller, & Corsaro, 1992; Miller, Hengst, & Wang, 2003), specifically, “universalism without uniformity” (Shweder & Sullivan, 1993). Certain human challenges, such as caring for the young and elderly, family conflict and child maltreatment, are common across cultural groups worldwide (“universalism”). The historical and cultural contexts of these common challenges, however, vary widely (e.g., the historical trauma experienced by Indigenous peoples, discussed, above). Thus, how they are understood and approached is culturally nuanced (“without uniformity”). Understanding such cultural nuance is necessary to avoid homogenizing families from diverse cultural communities including diverse Indigenous cultures. It also is critical to providing social services that make sense and are sustainable within diverse Indigenous cultural communities. An understanding of “universalism without uniformity” is

foundational for social workers to engage effectively with diverse client systems including for non-Indigenous social workers to implement culturally based services with Indigenous communities.

More broadly, everyone brings their own cultural blind spots to the challenge of understanding and supporting struggling families. Attention to various cultural cases, including diverse Indigenous families, can expose cultural blind spots in mainstream child welfare approaches, especially when values and practices conflict. A clear-eyed examination of these blind spots, in partnership with diverse communities, can suggest ways of thinking and acting that strengthens culturally respectful social work practice, policy and research within mainstream child welfare systems. Simply put, culturally diverse social workers, scholars and community members can design and implement more effective child welfare policies and practices not by inappropriately transplanting policies and practices from one cultural context to another or appropriating cultural resources, but by learning from one another about diverse ways of thinking about and approaching common social problems such as child maltreatment.

1.3. Research questions

This scoping study will examine the current state of the published, peer-reviewed empirical literature directly relevant to addressing the following research questions:

1. What is the current state of the literature pertaining to child welfare with Indigenous families (number of studies, number of empirical studies, publication sources, study foci, groups studied, data sources, research methods and perspectives)?
2. Why do disparities in the involvement of Indigenous families in county, state and provincial child welfare systems persist?
3. What are culturally-based child protection beliefs, practices, and programs within Indigenous communities?
4. What is the evidence regarding the effectiveness of culturally-based child welfare programs?
5. What are the challenges to the widespread implementation of such culturally-based programs?

2. Methodology

Our method is primarily based on the scoping review framework laid out by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), incorporating some recommendations of Levac and colleagues (Levac, Colquhoun, & O'Brien, 2010). A scoping study is a type of systematic review and knowledge synthesis that maps key concepts, types of evidence, and gaps in the literature (Colquhoun et al., 2014). Scoping studies are particularly useful when considering a broad, complex topic that has not yet been extensively researched (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Daudt, van Mossel, & Scott, 2013; Levac et al., 2010). Scoping studies inform practice and policy, and provide direction for research in emerging areas (Colquhoun et al., 2014). They are relatively common in medical research, but comparatively rare in social work. The broad aim of the current study is to examine the extent, range and characteristics of research addressing the involvement of Indigenous families in child welfare, provide a synthesis of research findings and identify directions for future research.

We characterize our scoping study design as “mixed method.” We intentionally integrate quantitative and qualitative methodologies for the primary purpose of breadth and depth (e.g., Haight & Bidwell, 2016). To examine question 1, we quantified the number of relevant studies with various characteristics over the review period. For research question 4, we reviewed the quantitative research evaluating various programs. Addressing research questions 2, 3 and 5 was primarily a qualitative, interpretive process. Using standard, analytic induction techniques (Schwandt, 2014), we read, discussed and re-read the scoped studies to identify major themes.

2.1. Identifying and selecting relevant studies

We included peer-reviewed, empirical studies directly related to the involvement of Indigenous families in child welfare systems published from 2000 through 2017.² We included studies of Indigenous populations from the United States and Canada, including populations referred to as American Indian, Alaskan Native/Inuit, Metis, Aboriginal and First Nations. With one exception, we excluded dissertations and other non-peer-reviewed literature from the scoped studies. We included a report to Casey Family Programs (Red Horse et al., 2000) due to the quality of the research, its relevance to our research questions and citations in the peer reviewed literature. Also excluded were several purely methodological studies, and other studies not focused on Indigenous people that simply indicated the presence of Indigenous disparities without further analyses.

Comprehensive searches for relevant studies were run in four online literature databases selected for relevance to the topic or interdisciplinary depth: PsycInfo (Ovid), Academic Search Premier (EBSCO), Bibliography of Native North Americans (EBSCO), and Scopus. In each database keywords were selected in three categories: (1) Native population; (2) child welfare; (3) quantitative, qualitative or mixed methodology. PsycInfo was searched utilizing a combination of subject headings, limits and keywords including population terms.³ Because the Bibliography of Native North Americans is already focused on Indigenous peoples, the search strategy for that database did not include population terms. Reflecting the nature of the scoping review framework, strategies were developed iteratively, with refinements added and results updated as the review progressed. Final strategies are reported in Appendix A.

Results were imported into a shared account in the Mendeley bibliographic management software where duplicates were identified, both automatically and manually, and merged. Team members reviewed the bibliographic records against initial criteria, sorting into folders along thematic lines. The full texts of articles that matched the initial round for inclusion were retrieved. As patterns in the literature emerged, articles were repeatedly sorted until the final pool for scoping was established (see Fig. 1).

2.2. Research team

Our methods included a deliberate integration of insider and outsider perspectives, i.e., “creating understanding” as described by Bakhtin (Morson & Emerson, 1990). Insider cultural knowledge and experiences provided a necessary context for identifying appropriate research questions for the scoping study, identifying culturally sensitive methods and procedures in the studies scoped, and interpreting research findings. Cary Waubanasum, currently a PhD student, is a member of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin with 10 years of post MSW practice experience with Indigenous peoples, and communities throughout Turtle Island. The outsider perspectives of other research team members were critical for identifying constructs taken-for-granted by insiders (Morson & Emerson, 1990), and providing additional professional expertise. Wendy Haight is a Professor of Social Work and Child Welfare Chair. Educated as a developmental, cultural psychologist, she focuses on child welfare beliefs and practices in diverse U.S. and international cultural contexts. Scott Marsalis is a professional librarian with a Masters in Library and Information Science and expertise in searching bibliographic databases. David Glesener, currently a PhD

² We found relatively few published, empirical studies of Indigenous families involved in child welfare prior to the turn of the century, and so chose the year 2000 as a cut-off date for our review.

³ Note that only PsycInfo was searched using subject headings. The others don't have robust thesauri, and the keywords (uncontrolled vocabulary terms) matched existing subject headings.

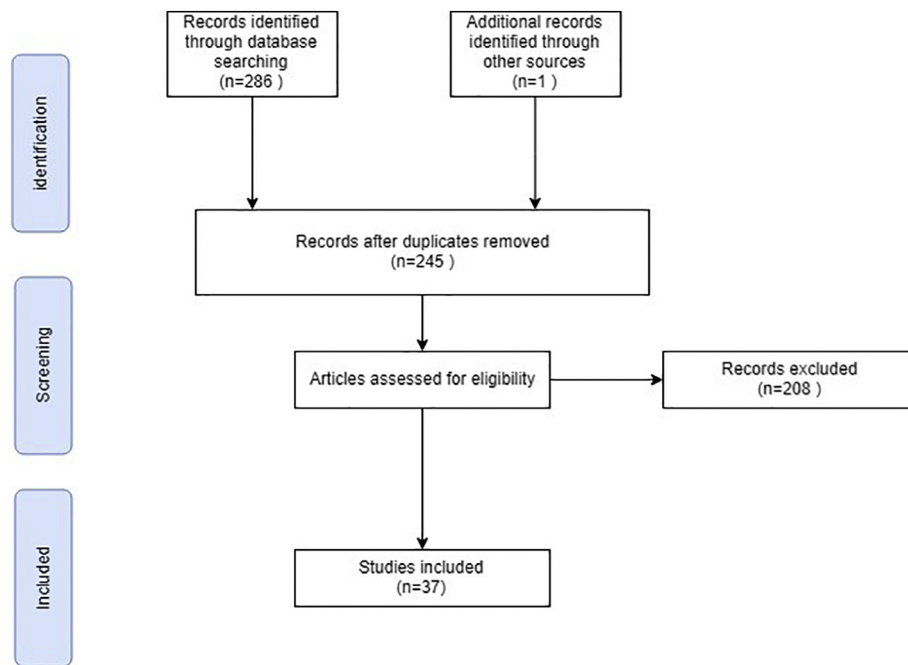


Fig. 1. PRISMA chart of scoping strategy.

student, combines an “insider” (child welfare) and “outsider” (white) perspective. He is a retired child welfare professional with 39 years of service in child protection including 6 years as supervisor of child welfare services to ICWA-involved families.

3. Results

3.1. Current state of the literature

As shown in Fig. 2, from 2000 through 2017 we located a total of 245 studies relevant to our research questions. Although this corpus included many important policy and historical analyses, only 37 (15%) involved original empirical (quantitative or qualitative) data. Throughout the 17 years of this study, 0 to 5 empirical studies were published per year.

As shown in Table 1, most of the scoped studies (N = 27, 71%) were published in child welfare journals with some in American Indian Studies (N = 5, 13%) and other (N = 5, 13%) journals.

Approximately half (N = 19, 51%) of the scoped studies were concerned with understanding disparities, primarily in out-of-home placements (N = 10). However, they included studies of kinship adoption

(N = 1), the prescription of psychotropic medication to child welfare-involved children (N = 1), parents' access to services (N = 1), outcomes of adult foster alumni (N = 2), use of differential response (N = 1), maltreatment substantiations (N = 2) and investigations (N = 1) (see Table 1).

A number of other studies (N = 11, 30%) focused on culturally based child protection practices and principles within Indigenous tribes and communities. Three additional studies (8%) provided some evaluation data on practice models with varying levels of cultural foundations. Two more studies (5%) evaluated compliance with ICWA. One study focused specifically on the experiences of Indigenous parents providing foster care (3%), and one of Indigenous professionals (3%) (see Table 1).

Most of the studies (65%, N = 24) used methods and perspectives from outside of Indigenous cultures. Even if these studies included Indigenous authors, most analyzed data from administrative records or secondary data sources collected primarily by non-Indigenous professionals, or used instruments developed within other cultural contexts. In contrast, 10 studies (27%) prioritized the insider perspectives and experiences of Indigenous professionals (N = 6), community members (N = 2), both community members and professionals (N = 1), and

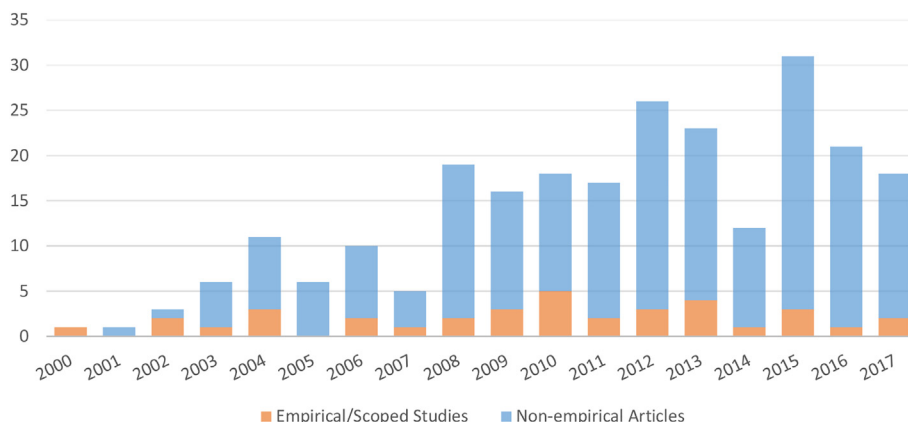


Fig. 2. Number of empirical and non-empirical articles on Indigenous child welfare in peer reviewed journals from 2000 to 2017.

Table 1
Description of scoped studies (N = 37).

First author	Pub. Date	Pub. source	Study focus	Group studied	Data source	Research method	Primary perspective
Barth	2002	Child Welfare	Disparities in kinship adoption	Not specified (CA)	38,430 cases from California Children's Services Archive	QUANT	Outsider
Bjorun	2014	Child Welfare	Culturally based practice	Wabanaki (Maine)	11 Indigenous child welfare staff	QUAL	Insider community members
Bussey	2013	Child Welfare	Culturally based practice	Not specified (Colorado)	118,238 Colorado children in CPS	QUANT	Outsider
Carter	2009	Child Welfare	Disparities in out of home placement	U.S. national data	NSCAW-2215 AI children	QUANT	Outsider
Carter	2010	Child Welfare	Disparities in out of home placement	U.S. national data	NSCAW-2215 AI children	QUANT	Outsider
Carter	2011	Child Welfare	Disparities in out of home placement	U.S. national data	NSCAW-510,000 children	QUANT	Outsider
Chabot	2013	Child Welfare	Disparities in out of home placement	Canadian national data	NCANDS- 510,000 children	QUANT	Outsider
Chaffin	2012	Child Welfare	Evaluating of manualized model to reduce disparities	Not specified (OK)	CIS-12,000 CP investigations	QUANT	Outsider
Donald	2003	Child Welfare	Disparities in out of home placement	Not specified (MN)	354 Indigenous parents	QUANT	Outsider
Fallon	2013	Child Welfare	Disparities in out of home placement	Canadian national data	52 Indigenous children in MN county	QUANT	Outsider
Fallon	2015	Child Welfare	Disparities in out of home placement	Canadian national data	12,000 children CIS	QUANT	Outsider
Ferguson	2006	Other	Disparities in prescribing psychotropic medication	Not specified (MN)	CIS-15,980 alleged maltreated children	QUANT	Outsider
Fluke	2010	Child Welfare	Disparities in out of home placement	Canadian national data	473 foster children	QUANT	Outsider
Fox	2004	Child Welfare	Disparities in out of home placement	Canadian national data	CIS-4787 CP investigations	QUANT	Outsider
Halverson	2002	Child Welfare	Disparities in out of home placement	Canadian national data	17,000 Children NCANDS	QUANT	Outsider
Hand	2006	Child Welfare	Experiences of Foster parents	Not specified (CO)	9 Indigenous foster parents	QUAL	Insider family
Hand	2006	Child Welfare	Culturally based practices	Ojibwe, U.S.	One Ojibwe community	QUAL	Insider community members
Johnston	2011	Americ-an Indian Studies	Experiences of Indian Social Workers	Inuit	10 Canadian Native Social Workers	QUAL	Insider professionals
Landers	2017	Americ-an Indian Studies	Disparities in mental health of adults who experienced out-of-home care as children	Not specified U.S.	129 Indigenous and 166 white adoptees	QUANT	Outsider
Lawler	2012	Other	Disparities in out of home placement	U.S. national data	50 states NDAS, GAO, AFCARS	QUANT	Outsider
Libby	2007	Other	Disparities in access to services to parents	U.S. national data	5501 children, NSCAW	QUANT	Outsider
Limb	2004	Child Welfare	ICWA compliance	US, Southwest County	49 ICWA eligible children	QUANT	Outsider
Limb	2008	Child Welfare	ICWA compliance	U.S. national data	50 states IV-B plans	QUANT	Outsider
Lucero	2012	Child Welfare	Evaluation of culturally-based practice model	Not specified, CO	72 Indigenous families	MIXED	Insider parent/outsider
Lucero	2016	Child Welfare	Culturally-based practice	Various, Alaska	75 AI/AN programs	QUAL	Insider professional
Lucero	2017	Child Welfare	Evaluation of a culturally-based practice model	Not specified, CO	5 staff of 3 tribes	QUAL	Insider professional. Some client voices
Morrison	2010	Child Welfare	Culturally based practice	Passamaquoddy & Maliseet (Maine)	single subject	QUAL	Insider family
O'Brien	2010	Child Welfare	Outcomes of adult foster care alumni	U.S. national data	1064 foster care alumni	QUANT	Outsider
Pooyak	2009	Americ-an Indian Studies	Culturally-based practice	Canadian child welfare workers	1 Indigenous, 1 white worker	QUAL	Insider professional
Quash-Mah	2010	Child Welfare	Culturally-based practice	Not specified, 4 CA counties	1600 Indigenous children	QUANT	Outsider
Red Horse	2000	Other	Culturally based practice	Ojibwe, U.S.	Foster Children 1992–1998 MN DHS	QUAL	Insider community member
Richard-son	2008	Child Welfare	Culturally-based practice	Not specified, 2 Iowa Counties	55 Iowa minority families	MIXED	Outsider Some client voices
Rousseau	2015	Americ-an Indian Studies	cultural practice	Not specified, British Columbia	3 Aboriginal professionals	QUAL	Insider professional
Jones	2015	Child Welfare	Differential response	Not specified, MN	122,095 children in child welfare	QUANT	Outsider
Simard	2009	Americ-an Indian Studies	Culturally-based practice	Weechi-it-te-win people, Canada	10 historical videos	QUAL	Insider professional
Sinha	2013	Child Welfare	Disparities in child maltreatment substantiation	Canadian national data	2143 investigations FNCIS	QUANT	Outsider
Sinha	2013	Child Welfare	Disparities in child maltreatment investigations	Canadian national data	3000 investigations	QUANT	Outsider
Trocme	2004	Other	Disparities in child maltreatment substantiations	Canadian national data	7672 children CIS	QUANT	Outsider

Note. QUANT: Quantitative study; QUAL: Qualitative study.

foster parents ($N = 1$). With the exception of assessments of three evaluation studies (8%) that included both insider and outsider perspectives, the experiences of parents involved with child welfare are notably absent. Also notably absent are the perspectives and experiences of children and youth (see Table 1).

Also as shown in Table 1, 11 studies (30%) employed qualitative methods, and two studies (5%) employed mixed methods with an emphasis on the quantitative component. Most of the studies ($N = 24$, 65%) used quantitative methods, and most of these studies ($N = 15$) used large, nationally representative data bases including the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-being (NSCAW)⁴ ($N = 5$), National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS)⁵ ($N = 1$), the Canadian Incidence or First Nations Canadian Incidence Study (CIS, FN-CIS)⁶ ($N = 6$).

Only six studies (16%) focused on specific tribes: Passamaquoddy and Maliseet, Ojibwe ($n = 2$), Wabanaki, Inuit and Weechi-it-te-win limiting our understanding of variation across diverse Indigenous cultures.

3.2. Why disparities persist

Several related issues emerged from the scoped studies pertinent to understanding disparities in the involvement of Indigenous families in child welfare.

3.2.1. Social challenges experienced by many child welfare-involved families are more intense for Indigenous families

Social challenges such as poverty, substance abuse, and domestic violence, among others experienced by many child welfare-involved families are relatively more intense for Indigenous than non-Indigenous families, likely resulting from historical trauma (Brave Heart et al., 2011). These challenges may contribute to disparities in child welfare involvement. In particular, low income is associated with findings of neglect (Bunting et al., 2018; Deater-Deckard & Panneton, 2017). In

⁴ NSCAW is a representative longitudinal survey of children and families who have been the subjects of child protection service investigations in the United States. It uses reports from children, parents, caregivers, caseworkers, and teachers, as well as data from administrative records. It used two cohorts from 1999 to 2012 including 12,000 children and 75,000 variables. The first cohort contained 6200 children aged birth to 14 years from a national sample of child welfare agencies across the country followed for five to six years. The second cohort had 5800 children aged birth to 17.5 years followed for three years. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Admin for Children and Families, Ofc of Planning, Research & Evaluation, Resource Library. (2018). National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW), 1997–2014 and 2015–2022. (Retrieved April 2018).

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/national-survey-of-child-and-adolescent-well-being-nscaw>

⁵ NCANDS is a federally sponsored child maltreatment data collection system involving all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico established in response to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1988. States annually submit data of all reports of alleged child abuse and neglect that received child protection services response. Case level data elements include child data, types of maltreatment, findings, child and caregiver risk factors, services, and perpetrator data. Agency level data include prevention and response services and caseload and workforce statistics. (HHS, ACF, Research Data & Technology National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System, 2018).

⁶ “The Canadian Incident Study” of reported child abuse and neglect is conducted every 5 years from child maltreatment reports to child welfare agencies in Canada. Findings are divided into abuse and neglect, maltreatment characteristics, investigation outcomes, child characteristics, household characteristics, referral characteristics, and agency characteristics. The study is a collaborative effort of federal, provincial and territorial governments, university-based researchers, Aboriginal Child & Family Caring Society, child advocacy groups, and child welfare service providers. The FN-CIS is the First Nation subset of CIS. (Public Health Agency of Canada, Ottawa, ON. (Retrieved April, 2018) ISBN 978-1-100-16,915-6 <http://cwrp.ca/cis-2008/study-documents>

Canada, child welfare-involved Indigenous families tend to experience greater economic poverty than other child welfare-involved families (e.g. Sinha, Ellenbogen, & Trocmé, 2013). Indeed, neglect is the largest category of investigation for Indigenous families (e.g., Sinha, Trocmé, et al., 2013). Using the 2008 CIS data, Sinha and colleagues (Sinha, Trocmé, et al., 2013) found that neglect only was the largest category of investigations for Indigenous children, and the proportion of Indigenous cases that involved neglect only was significantly higher than for non-Indigenous cases (41.2% versus 27%). Using the 2008 First Nations Component of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (FNCIS-2008) data, they again found that the overrepresentation of Indigenous children relative to non-Indigenous children in investigations was particularly pronounced for neglect (Disproportionality ratio = 6) (Sinha, Trocmé, et al., 2013).

In Canada, other social challenges often associated with poverty such as housing problems (Fluke et al., 2010; Sinha, Trocmé, et al., 2013), single parenting (Trocmé et al., 2004), and alcohol/other substance abuse problems (Sinha, Trocmé, et al., 2013; Trocmé et al., 2004) also are more intense for child welfare-involved Indigenous than non-Indigenous families. Sinha and colleagues (Sinha, Ellenbogen, & Trocmé, 2013) also found that Canadian workers identified a significantly greater percentage of investigated Indigenous than non-Indigenous households on every caregiver or household risk factor examined except “health issues.” Caregiver risk factors were: substance abuse, history of foster care/group home, domestic violence, few social supports and multiple risk factors. In addition to low income, household risk factors were: housing problems, caregiving resource strain and multiple household risks.

These Canadian findings of the relatively intense social challenges experienced by Indigenous families involved in investigations are consistent with those pertaining to families with children in out-of-home care. Based on their analysis of data from the 1998 CIS, Trocmé and colleagues (Trocmé et al., 2004) attribute the overrepresentation of Indigenous children both with substantiated cases and those in out-of-home care to disproportionate risk factors experienced by their families. They found extremely high rates of hardships among Indigenous families compared to other families including unstable housing, alcohol and drug use, and intergenerational maltreatment. They found that proportionately more cases from Indigenous families involved neglect than other families and family heads were more often single. Likewise, Fluke and colleagues’ (Fluke et al., 2010) analyses of the CIS 1998 data indicate that poverty and poor housing significantly account for overrepresentation of Indigenous families with children in out-of-home care.

Canadian findings of the intense level of social challenges experienced by Indigenous families relative to other child welfare-involved families are consistent with available U.S. data. Based on a case record review of children in out-of-home care in a Minnesota county, Donald and colleagues (Donald et al., 2003) found that Indigenous children were more likely to be exposed to physical neglect than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Their families were mostly single-parent households experiencing poverty. Although alcohol use was a significant problem for both Indigenous and other families, rates were significantly higher among Indigenous families (Donald et al., 2003. See also O’Brien et al., 2010). In a series of studies using data from the NACAW research, Carter (2009, 2010, 2011) found that Indigenous children in the U.S. in out-of-home care came from more economically insecure homes than did children from other ethnic groups. In addition, the caregivers of these children had a greater prevalence of substance abuse and mental health problems compared with non-Indigenous caregivers.

3.2.2. Appropriate services are even less available to child welfare-involved Indigenous than other families

Relatively poor availability of services also may contribute to disparities in the involvement of Indigenous families in child welfare.

There also is some evidence that services other than child welfare are even less available to child welfare-involved Indigenous than other child welfare-involved families.

In their study of Canadian families under investigation for maltreatment, Sinha and colleagues (Sinha, Trocmé, et al., 2013) point to poor accessibility to alternative social services for Indigenous families as contributing to the relatively high levels of child welfare services for families needing help with a range of social problems. They found that a higher proportion of Indigenous than non-Indigenous investigations involved non-professional referral sources: a relative, parent, or neighbor/friend of the child reflecting the relative scarcity of professional support other than child welfare for Indigenous families. They also note that despite multiple caregiver and household risk factors, 58% of Indigenous investigations did not involve substantiations of maltreatment.

Available data for U.S. child welfare-involved families is broadly consistent with Canadian findings of poor service accessibility. In their analysis of data from the NSCAW study, Libby and colleagues (Libby et al., 2007) found that unmet needs for mental health and substance abuse treatment characterized all parents in the study, but that Indigenous parents were even less likely than non-Indigenous parents to receive mental health services. In their study of children in foster care in northern Minnesota, Ferguson et al. (2006) found that significantly more white than Indigenous children received psychotropic medication, although it was unclear if particular groups were over-, under- or appropriately medicated.

Unmet mental health service needs also may be reflected in the adult mental health and wellness of Indigenous people who have experienced out-of-home care. In the U.S., Landers and colleagues (Landers et al., 2017) found using a purposive sample of 129 Indigenous and 166 white adults who had been separated from their birth families by foster care or adoption, that Indigenous people were more likely to report mental health and substance abuse problems than were whites. O'Brien et al., 2010 interviews with foster care alumni revealed that Indigenous people were less likely than whites to have access to therapeutic services and supports: counseling and mental health services, alcohol and drug treatment, group work or counseling.

3.2.3. Racism presents challenges to available child welfare services

In addition to relatively intense service needs combined with relatively poor accessibility to social services other than child welfare, there is some evidence that state, county and provincial child welfare services available to many Indigenous families reflects racism at the individual and system levels. First, workers may weigh various risk factors differently for Indigenous and non-Indigenous families in neglect cases. Using 2008 CIS data, Sinha and colleagues (Sinha, Ellenbogen, & Trocmé, 2013) found that, overall, differences in investigation characteristics (e.g., type of maltreatment, physical harm to the child and referral source), the child's age and functioning, household characteristics and caregiver risk factors accounted for disproportionalities in substantiation of maltreatment in Canada. These factors, however, did not fully explain disproportionalities in neglect cases. Worker confirmation of caregiver substance abuse and single parenting increased the odds that they would substantiate neglect in Indigenous, but not non-Indigenous children. On the other hand, the presence of housing problems increased the odds of a neglect finding for non-Indigenous, but not indigenous children.

There is some evidence that state and county workers also treat Indigenous families accused of neglect differently and more severely than other families in the U.S. child welfare system. Fox (2004) examined mainstream workers' perceptions of neglect in Indigenous and Non Indigenous families as reflected in NCANDS data. She found that neglect of Indigenous children was more often associated with foster care placement and juvenile court petition, while neglect for white children was more often associated with family preservation services.

Further evidence that Indigenous families are treated differently and

more severely in U.S. state and county child welfare systems comes from Minnesota state-level data between 2003 and 2010. Jones (2015) examined whether race predicts family assignment to a traditional investigative response or a differential response ("Family Assessment"). The traditional response is intended for cases in which there is a high level of risk to children. The differential response track is intended for cases in which there is a low to moderate level of risk. Its goal is to engage families in a non-adversarial way, identify strengths and needs, and connect them to resources. Jones (2015) reviewed previous research indicating that differential response has several promising outcomes including increased family and worker satisfaction, increased services to families, and more attention to needs that families identify as important: all without additional risk to children. Among other findings, Jones (2015) discovered that even after controlling for poverty, family structure and other risk factors associated with race, Indigenous children were less likely than white children to be assigned by workers to the family assessment track for 4 of the 8 years examined. She suggests that bias in workers' decisions for pathway assignment may underlie these disparities.

3.2.4. Racism in child welfare services can reinforce preexisting distrust resulting in disengagement

There also is some evidence that Indigenous families' and communities' experiences of racism in U.S. state and county child welfare services reinforces their distrust and disengagement from government child welfare services, a legacy from decades of genocide and cultural repression. While this distrust is legitimate and some government services lead to harm, some services are potentially helpful, especially when they prioritize Indigenous culture, partnerships, and guidance from Indigenous communities. Red Horse et al. (2000) surveyed 79 Indigenous people at national conferences and conducted two talking circles with Ojibwe elders in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Participants critiqued mainstream child welfare practices as reflecting an ignorance of Indigenous cultural experiences. They observed that mainstream practitioners typically do not have direct experience with healthy Indigenous families and communities. Such inexperience contributes to the development and reinforcement of negative stereotypes about Indigenous people, ignorance of traditional Indigenous support services and defensiveness among non-Indigenous child welfare workers. They further argued that mainstream child welfare practices that approach Indigenous families from a deficit perspective, and emphasize power and control, reinforce Indigenous peoples' distrust of white social workers.

Likewise, Halverson et al. (2002) qualitative interviews with seven Indigenous foster parents suggest how bias within child welfare practice can lead to the disengagement of families from the system. Foster parents described problems with child welfare workers stemming from workers' discrimination and negative perceptions of Indigenous people as poor caregivers. All reported feeling discouraged by the lack of support they received from workers.

3.3. Cultural beliefs and child protection practices within Indigenous communities

A number of empirical studies (9) contained data relevant to understanding cultural beliefs and child protection practices within Indigenous communities. There is some evidence suggesting a need for unique policies and practices for Indigenous people. For instance, in their analysis of U.S. national foster care data for Indigenous, African American and Hispanic children, Lawler et al. (2012) found that an independent construct was operating for Indigenous disparities. In this section, we turn to the cultural beliefs and practices within Indigenous communities for models of policies and practices that may reduce disparities and strengthen formal child welfare services to Indigenous families.

3.3.1. Children are embedded within extended families and communities who bear responsibility for their care

There is some evidence that within Indigenous communities, children are viewed as embedded within extended families and tribes who are responsible for their care. In Halverson et al.'s (2002) qualitative study of Indigenous foster parents, participants considered the children within their care to be their kin, even if they were not biological relatives. These participants contextualized their caregiving within a cultural-historical context involving the forced removal of Indigenous children from their homes, especially during the boarding school era. They described the importance of socializing Indigenous foster children through Indigenous practices as part of healing from such historical trauma.

Likewise, Red Horse et al.'s (2000) talking circles with tribal leaders, and Pooyak and Gomez's (2009) narratives from two Canadian social workers (one Indigenous and one non-Indigenous) practicing with Indigenous people, reflect a view of children as members of extended families and communities, and deeply valued members of their tribes (see also Morrison et al., 2010). Themes emergent from Hand's (2006) ethnographic research within an Ojibwe tribe, for instance, include the continuing importance of extended families and a general commitment to ensuring the well-being of children among all Ojibwe community members. The importance of the child as a member of an extended family and community also is reflected in Barth et al.'s (2002) large scale, quantitative record review of 38,430 young, California children in out-of-home care between 1988 and 1992. These data indicated that kinship adoption was higher for Indigenous than most other children and was especially likely to be with aunts and uncles rather than grandparents.

The importance of children as rooted within extended families and tribes/communities also is apparent from Morrison et al.'s (2010) case study based on a Wabanaki elder who had experienced customary adoption and tribal social services as a child. During interviews, he explained that there are no terms in the Wabanaki language for “nuclear family” or “adoption.” Children are born into a community, and that community is responsible for protecting and nurturing them. He described a community-based form of “wrap-around” services provided to those in need. For example, community members (including children) know who will serve as caregivers when children need safe places. If parents are drinking, for example, children will go to an “auntie,” temporarily. He viewed parents as the people a child is with at the time, and all cousins as brothers and sisters. He explained that determining who belongs to the community is not simply based on blood or even tribal affiliation. Rather, there is a psychological, emotional, and spiritual sense of relatedness. Children will feel welcomed where they are loved.

The importance of the child as rooted within the extended family and Indigenous community was also apparent from Lucero and Leake's (2016) qualitative meta-synthesis of three national projects involving 75 tribal child welfare programs. A common characteristic of these programs was a view that Indigenous children's well-being is grounded in cultural values and supported by cultural practices. A cultural definition of Indigenous child well-being included: (a) being nurtured and protected by family, kinship network, and community; (b) knowing and interacting with members of the kinship network; (c) feeling a sense of belonging to, and being recognized by the tribal community; (d) learning about and participating in tribal culture; and developing an Indigenous and tribal identity.

In their review of administrative data from four California counties over a five-year period, Quash-Mah, Stockard, and Johnson-Shelton (2010) found that Indigenous children have more stable foster care placements when living within environments that encourage traditional norms of extended kin relationships and community caretaking of those in need. Counties were ranked on “American Indian Cultural Environment” (or AICE), primarily by the percentage of the population identifying as “American Indian”, and by the presence of tribal reservations

or recognized tribes within their boundaries. Children placed in the counties with the strongest AICE, had fewer and longer placements. Evidence from one county with data on individual placements indicated that children whose home tribes were located in that county and who were placed on Rancherias (small reservations) had significantly longer placements.

3.3.2. Practice is non-coercive, strengths- and community-based

Another characteristic of Indigenous beliefs and child protection practices is a non-coercive, strengths- and community-based orientation to removing barriers to healthy functioning and healing from past traumas. Rousseau (2015) conducted a focus group with 9 Indigenous professionals and in-depth audio recorded interviews with 22 others working within the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development. In contrast to North American, government-run child welfare services, which typically focuses on diagnosing and treating family deficits and compelling behavioral change, Indigenous professionals described their management and practice as demonstrating strong collective values and a deep respect for community protocols (Rousseau, 2015). Rather than exerting expert authority and power, the orientation they described was one of sharing power with individuals and providing advocacy and support to remove barriers to healthy functioning.

Likewise, Pooyak and Gomez's (2009) narrative analysis of two Canadian social workers, an Indigenous woman practicing in a “mainstream” community, and a non-Indigenous woman practicing in an Indigenous community, reflected a non-coercive, community-based approach to child protection. They described that from an Indigenous perspective, children are the future and their care is vital to ensuring the survival of Indigenous people. They are embedded within families, networks of families, and their larger community. The non-Indigenous social worker observed that working within an Indigenous context allowed her to work in a more fluid and flexible way with clients on their own terms where she was able to use her professional “power” to reduce barriers rather than compel behavior change.

The non-coercive, community-based nature of tribal practices also was apparent from Bjorum's (2014) analyses of a focus group with nine Wabanaki (Maine) tribal staff members, a foster parent, and a tribal council member. Participants described fundamental differences in what guides the work of tribal and state child welfare workers. Tribal practice originates from a core value that these are “our children” in contrast to a bureaucratic system that prioritizes rules and regulations. They also described tribal workers as viewing the removal of a child from the community as having much more profound consequences than did state workers.

The consequences of removing a child from the community have ramifications not only for the child, but also for the community as a whole. One of the most consistent themes in Lucero and Leake's (2016) qualitative meta-synthesis of tribal child welfare programs was that tribal child welfare work is also cultural reclamation work, i.e., preventing the loss of the tribe's children. Although child protection was paramount, several other goals reflecting this theme underlay tribal child welfare that are not typically considered part of child welfare practice at the state or county level: (a) preserving tribal culture by strengthening children's cultural knowledge and cultural involvement, (b) maintaining children's connections to their kinship network and the tribal community, and (c) increasing the well-being of the tribal community.

Simard (2009) conducted a qualitative, secondary data analysis of culturally restorative child welfare practice using 10 videos, each 1 to 1–1/2 h in length, from an Indigenous child welfare agency. These videos are part of curriculum development data archives available to educate workers. They describe the foundational practices of the agency to promote Anishinaabe cultural identity through rectifying damage done to communities, rebuilding natural structures and fostering natural, existing resiliencies. They present an historical context

in which colonial governments have attempted to convert Indigenous people to mainstream ways through coercion. By contrast, they present a modal of governance through collaboration with elders, tribal leaders and grassroots community members. The underlying belief is that the people within Indigenous communities have the power to create the infrastructure and services to help and heal their people. In this context, child welfare practice emphasizes collective responsibility for raising children and instilling values and traditions of Indigenous communities. The definition of family is broader than the nuclear family. The community is seen as having a sacred responsibility for child rearing and mentoring fellow community members.

3.4. Evidence regarding the effectiveness of culturally-based and culturally-respectful programs

Several studies contained empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of culturally-based or culturally-respectful programs. Indigenous scholars have been advocating for, developing and implementing culturally-based child welfare practices for decades (e.g., see Red Horse et al., 2000). Some recent research includes empirical examinations of child welfare practices with Indigenous families that are culturally-based or culturally-adapted. We consider approaches that are culturally-based, at minimum, to recognize the impact of historical context including historical trauma on families, consider children's extended families and tribes/communities as critical resources for their care, and to be non-coercive, strengths- and community-based. Culturally-adapted approaches emphasize cultural competence and sensitivity in the delivery of approaches originally designed for other contexts, or apply approaches designed in other contexts that are based on culturally similar beliefs.

3.4.1. Culturally-based child welfare approaches designed for Indigenous child welfare

Lucero and Bussey (2012) present an evaluation of a collaborative and trauma-informed practice model for urban Indigenous child welfare. Established in 2000, the Denver Indian Family Resource Center is private, non-profit, and community-based. As part of the Colorado ICWA taskforce, it partners with child welfare systems in 7 counties in the Denver metro area to reduce disparities and prevent the break-up of Indigenous families. Its Family Preservation Model (DIFRC FPM) was developed over a 10-year period as a practice model for Indigenous families. The model incorporates components such as improving the cultural responsiveness of providers, encouraging partnerships, and otherwise supporting ICWA compliance (e.g., a commitment to kinship placements). It also incorporates direct practice components including team decision-making, intensive case management and treatment services.

Participants were 49 families with 106 children involved with child welfare due to parent substance abuse and child maltreatment. It also included 24 families with 73 children who were TANF-eligible and considered at-risk for child welfare involvement. Families were experiencing many challenges including untreated trauma, unmet mental health needs, domestic violence, housing instability, poverty, and substance abuse. Results indicate that the model shows promise in preventing out-of-home placement of Indigenous children, while at the same time improving parental capacity, family safety, child well-being, and family environment. Clients interviewed emphasized the importance of concrete help securing basic resources, parenting classes, culturally-sensitive services, and their cultural match with DIFRC workers.

Bussey and Lucero (2013) also examined Colorado state-level CPS data for 5-year periods from 1995–1999 to 2005–2009. These data showed a decrease in the disparity ratio for placement of Indigenous children compared to white children. Appropriately, these authors do not confirm causality from these data, but they do point out that the decrease in disparities followed a decade of efforts on the part of the

Colorado Department of Human Services and DIFRC to heighten county-level compliance with ICWA, partner on cases involving Indigenous children, refer families to culturally-responsive services and support kinship placements.

Richardson (2008) evaluated a Specialized Native American Program within the Iowa DHS. The program focuses on community outreach, prevention and intervention with Indigenous children and families at risk of involvement in the child welfare system. It aims to improve cultural competence in the delivery of services, increase attention to ICWA, reduce caseloads, increase available Indigenous foster homes and place greater emphasis on relatives and community networks as resources. Workers received training and developed the capacity to assist families through a more culturally competent, strengths-based approaches to promoting resiliency within families and utilizing family team meetings. Unit workers were aided by tribal liaisons employed by DHS to empower Indigenous families and mitigate involvement with DHS and court systems. Twenty three families who received services were assessed using the North Carolina Family Assessment Scale and the Colorado Family Risk Assessment. Some interviews were conducted with families and service providers.

Although formal statistical analyses were not presented, Richardson (2008) reported positive changes on all domains of family functioning (environment, parental capacities, family interactions, family safety, and child well-being) and decreased risk for most families. Providers reported improved relationships between DHS and the Indigenous community, increased flexibility in funding, increased awareness of Indigenous culture and understanding of cultural practices (Richardson, 2008). The presence of an Indigenous liaison was viewed as facilitating openness with Indigenous families and the presence of an Indigenous worker as increasing trust, engagement and alliance with families. Clients reported feeling listened to, respected and empowered (Richardson, 2008). The purchase of tangible items through flexible funding was important as was the Indigenous liaison and worker. Such “race matching” improved communication and empathy and facilitated a sense of comfort, commonality and support important to engagement.

3.4.2. Culturally-adapted child welfare practices

Lucero et al. (2017) evaluated the cultural fit of an approach for practice model development for tribal child welfare agencies. Three tribal agencies used Business Process Mapping (BPM) as a tool to develop culturally-based tribal child welfare practice models. Business Process Mapping (BPM) is a highly structured and detailed process that involves the staff working collaboratively to define and document each step of their practice from case referral and intake to assessment, service delivery and case resolution with the assistance of an outside facilitator. Lucero and colleagues considered that the collaborative nature of the BPM process could be a good fit for the tribal agency. Data included: a survey of tribal child welfare staff members' perceptions of process ($N = 31$), qualitative interviews ($N = 5$), focus groups after 1 and 2 years ($N = 23$, $N = 21$), and content analysis of case files to examine model uptake (random sample of 4–9 cases from each tribe). In summary, tribal agency members considered BPM to be a “mainstream” intervention, but found it to be useful in creating models reflecting child welfare practice in tribal cultural contexts. They also indicated that future adaptation of the BPM for use in tribal settings should help tribes to better articulate cultural values and norms, as well as differences between tribal and mainstream child welfare approaches.

Chaffin et al. (2012) compared recidivism rates and client satisfaction ratings of a subgroup of 354 Indigenous parents in Oklahoma to the larger sample of parents receiving SafeCare. SafeCare is a manualized, highly structured behavioral skills training model delivered as one component of a broader home visiting service. This model has been found to be more effective than home visiting services as usual including in reducing recidivism of child maltreatment. Inclusion criteria included that the child welfare-involved parent have a least one pre-schooler and no current untreated substance use disorder. Data were

not available on response rate of Indigenous parents. In the full study, 72% of all approached individuals agreed to participate. Modules addressed: a) parent/child interaction, basic caregiving structure and parenting routines, b) home safety, and c) child health. Service providers received classroom training and information about Indigenous culture and cultural competency. Six-year recidivism reduction for Indigenous subsample was equivalent to the larger sample, and overall client satisfaction ratings were positive.

3.5. Challenges of implementing culturally-based/culturally-adapted child welfare services

Several studies contain empirical data relevant to understanding the challenges to implementing culturally-based/adapted county, state and provincial child welfare services. Clearly, concerns about disparities in the involvement of Indigenous families have been voiced for decades. Likewise, Indigenous scholars and professionals have been describing and implementing culturally appropriate services to Indigenous families for decades. Furthermore, available empirical data suggest that culturally based county and state child welfare services may be effective. There appear, however to be a variety of obstacles to their widespread implementation.

3.5.1. Inadequate allocation of resources to agencies undermine services to agencies serving high numbers of Indigenous families

Several papers from the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS) indicate that the disproportionate involvement of Indigenous families in the child welfare system possibly reflects a lack of appropriate resources at the agency or community level in agencies with high levels of Indigenous cases. A stable finding across multiple studies and over time indicates that Indigenous children are more likely to be placed in out-of-home care in agencies where 45% or more of the investigations involve Indigenous children. Using data from the 1998 CIS, [Fluke et al. \(2010\)](#) found that a key predictor of placement decisions was the number of Indigenous reports to an organization. Likewise, [Fallon et al. \(2013\)](#) in their analyses of the 1998 CIS data found that the higher the proportion of investigations conducted by an agency involving Indigenous children, the more likely placement was to occur. Using the CIS data from 2008, [Fallon et al. \(2015\)](#) found that the higher the proportion of investigations of Indigenous children, the more likely placement was to occur for any child.

[Chabot et al. \(2013\)](#) built on the two previous studies ([Fluke et al., 2010](#); [Fallon et al., 2015](#)) using data from the 1998 and 2003 CIS to clarify the effect of the proportion of Indigenous reports on out-of-home placements. They examined two variables that might reflect limitations of resources, the “degree of centralization of the agency” and the “education degree of the majority of workers.” They found that agencies with access to workers with a more formal social work education and a centralized intake model reduce the likelihood of out-of-home placements in the presence of large Indigenous caseloads.

3.5.2. Agency-level factors impede culturally sensitive child welfare practices

There is some evidence that agency-level characteristics impede culturally based child welfare practices with Indigenous families. Using the 2008 CIS data, [Fallon et al. \(2015\)](#) found that the structure of agency governance is an important predictor of out-of-home placement. Specifically, children are at greater risk of placement in government-run agencies compared to community-run agencies (community agencies that receive provincial funding). They suggest that community agencies have a more autonomous structure and greater flexibility to provide culturally-sensitive services than provincially-run agencies.

That agency-level factors can disadvantage Indigenous families also is supported by [Rousseau's \(2015\)](#) qualitative study of the experiences of Indigenous professionals working in the British Columbia child welfare system. During focus group discussions with nine Indigenous

professionals and in-depth audio recorded interviews with 22 others, a variety of organizational-level factors emerged that participants viewed as impeding their practice with Indigenous families. These included poor support for Indigenous practice, racism, cultural incompetence, hierarchical structure and decision making, risk-averse practice norms, and change initiatives viewed as poorly implemented or merely rhetorical.

Poor agency support for Indigenous practice also emerged from [Johnston's \(2011\)](#) qualitative interviews with ten, Canadian social workers (9 non- Indigenous and 1 Indigenous) providing child welfare services in Nunavut (Inuit) communities. They described how a lack of training for working in Inuit culture led to cultural confusion, misunderstandings and the non-transferability of skills. They emphasized that taking the role of learners on the job was necessary for them to understand Inuit culture and function effectively in their roles as child welfare workers.

3.5.3. State-level factors impede culturally sensitive child welfare practices

There is some evidence that state-level factors, specifically, the failure to fully comply with ICWA, impede culturally sensitive child welfare practices leading to poorer outcomes for Indigenous families. ICWA mandated that states take certain steps when dealing with Indigenous families, but the federal government failed to put a formal monitoring system into place. Hence, compliance has been a problem ([Limb, Garza, & Brown, 2008](#)). Indeed, the limited empirical research of ICWA compliance published in peer-reviewed journals reflects somewhat mixed results. [Limb and colleagues \(Limb et al., 2004\)](#) conducted case record reviews of 49 ICWA-eligible children in out-of-home care and surveyed 78 caseworkers and 16 tribal workers in a Southwest state. State workers reported limited knowledge of many ICWA requirements, but nonetheless, 83% of Indigenous children were placed according to preferences outlined by ICWA. Both state and tribal workers reported a high level of state-tribal cooperation in working with Indigenous families.

Although this southwestern state demonstrated relatively good ICWA compliance, the situation nationwide seems decidedly more mixed. [Limb and Brown \(2008\)](#) conducted a nationwide, content analysis of the ICWA section within Title IV-E Child and Family Service Plans (CFSPs) of 43 states and the District of Columbia (7 states did not include an ICWA section within their CFSPs), and interviewed 11 Children and Families administrators and 8 state officials. They found that 75% of states had conferred with tribes and tribal organizations in the development of their CFSPs, and most of those that did not were in states without federally recognized tribes. They were, however, particularly concerned with whether or not three, minimum ICWA reporting requirements were met by CFSPs: 1) ICWA-eligible children were identified, 2) tribes were notified, and 3) preference was given to Indigenous caregivers when determining out-of-home or permanent placements for Indigenous children. They found that only 34% of states had plans to identify Indigenous children, 27% had specific measures to notify the child's relevant tribe and 41% demonstrated a preference for Indigenous caregivers when determining out-of-home or permanent placements. Perhaps most concerning, 52% of CFSPs did not include any of the 3 required specific measures.

4. Discussion

Our scoping study yielded 37 studies published in peer-reviewed journals that contained original, empirical data pertaining to child welfare with Indigenous families at the system and individual level. These studies indicate that relative to non-Indigenous child welfare-involved families, Indigenous families typically experience intense social challenges in the face of few available services. They also may experience racism when accessing available county and state child welfare services that undermine trust and engagement. These findings reflect a legacy of colonization, historical and intergenerational trauma,

and continued racism experienced by Indigenous people in child welfare systems. Some promising initial research suggests that partnerships between government child welfare systems and Indigenous tribes and communities can improve services to struggling families.

4.1. Limitations

Before discussing our findings, they must be contextualized within our study limitations. First, we note that scoping methodology brings systematicity and transparency to the search process. The actual review of the literature, however, remains an interpretative process. We induced themes from the literature that, from our standpoints, were meaningful. Others may have perceived other themes. Second, we searched literature published in peer-reviewed journals. We did not search the grey literature (e.g., conference presentations, white papers, agency reports) or include dissertations.

4.2. Implications for research

Given the seriousness of the social justice issues, as well as the sheer volume of empirical research in child welfare, the question of how to strengthen child welfare with Indigenous families clearly is under-researched. Notable gaps in the existing, published, peer reviewed empirical literature include the voices of children and parents actually involved in the child welfare system. Several recent dissertations do address the child welfare experiences of Indigenous parents (Cameron, 2010; Neckoway, 2011), grandmothers (Hill, 2012), workers (Hardisty-Neveau, 2012; Quash-Mah, 2013) and youth who have recently transitioned out of foster care (Navia, 2015). Supporting these emerging scholars and research directions is vital.

Attention also is needed to cultural variation across the many tribes of North American pertaining to child protection beliefs and practices. Systematic empirical research into Indigenous beliefs and practices pertaining to child protection and child welfare, generally, is thin. In addition, the majority of scoped studies combine data across diverse Indigenous communities with no attention to cultural variations. Understanding culturally specific and common beliefs and practices across diverse Indigenous communities regarding what constitutes child maltreatment and effective responses is critical to implementing meaningful child welfare interventions.

In order to understand the child welfare experiences of Indigenous people, it is necessary to implement research methods that are understandable within the cultural contexts of specific Indigenous communities, and methodologies that can adequately convey Indigenous perspectives. In addition, many Indigenous people and communities are protective of their traditional and ceremonial practices and beliefs. In many cases, non-Indigenous research methods are inappropriate to conduct research into these areas. Furthermore, Indigenous people have experienced abuse and misrepresentation at the hands of outside researchers (see Smith, 2013). There is, however, a growing literature on Indigenous methodologies (See Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Kovach, 2010; Smith, 2013). Indigenous research methods that stem from Indigenous knowledge create a path for accurate representation and interpretation of the experiences of Indigenous people and communities. The use of such methodologies for understanding child welfare within Indigenous communities is reflected in some recent dissertations. For example, Cameron's (2010) methods of inquiry into how experiences with child welfare affected the personal and social identities of Anishinabe participants included the "Aboriginal Circle paradigm." Neckoway's (2011) exploration of Ojibway parenting and responses to family challenges included a modified "Talking Circle" format.

More work also is needed to build the capacities of Indigenous child welfare systems; and to design, implement and evaluate culturally based county, state and provincial child welfare programs. More systematic research is needed to address basic empirical questions

including: Do Indigenous families who receive such services experience better child welfare outcomes than those who do not? Are they more engaged in and satisfied with services? What are the experiences of workers and families? How can such programs be strengthened from the perspectives not only of administrators, but also of workers, parents, other family members and children and youth? Long term, systematic, mixed method research is important to evaluate fully any impact of culturally based programs on child maltreatment, recidivism, placement characteristics, etc. as well as family engagement and experience.

4.3. Implications for policy and practice

To return to the concepts of universalism without uniformity, we see two types of broad implications from our scoping study for policy and practice: those generally applicable to strengthening child welfare for all families, and those specific to Indigenous families.

4.3.1. "Universalism": reforming government-run child welfare systems

First, child maltreatment is a common and persistent problem across diverse cultural contexts. The focus of our study is Indigenous families, but we would be re-miss if we did not point out the value of a cultural perspective for strengthening government run child welfare systems for all families. Attention to child welfare systems operating in diverse cultural contexts, including Indigenous communities, can help us to identify taken-for-granted beliefs and practices within mainstream systems, and perhaps, think differently and more creatively about improving those systems. Indigenous ways draw our attention to the potential of less coercive, and more extended family-, community- and strengths- based approaches broadly relevant to reforming poorly functioning child welfare systems. For example, some non-Indigenous, child welfare-involved parents and professionals have criticized the existing U.S. child welfare system as adversarial, punitive, shame-based, under-resourced, and racially biased. They explained that their experiences within this system compounded their challenges including engaging in potentially beneficial services (parents), or practicing in a manner consistent with their professional ethics and personal morals (professionals) (Haight, Sugrue, & Calhoun, 2017; Haight, Sugrue, Calhoun, & Black, 2017).

Making change to complex county, state and provincial child welfare systems clearly is daunting, but it is possible. While it is never appropriate simply to transplant cultural practices from one cultural community to another, attention to diverse child welfare systems can stimulate ideas for changing existing, poorly functioning systems. In particular, there are government-run child welfare systems that, similar to Indigenous approaches reviewed in this scoping study, are minimally coercive, and extended family-, strengths- and community- based. For example, shortly after devolution, Scotland implemented *Getting it Right for Every Child* (GIRFEC) (Scottish Executive, 2004a, 2004b; Stradling, MacNeil, & Berry, 2009), a government program that provided a new child welfare framework that emphasized relationships between local service providers, the immediate community and vulnerable families; and the responsibilities of local communities for caring for all children (Algate & Hill, 1995; Stafford & Vincent, 2008). Japan offers yet another model where the legal system rarely becomes involved in cases of child maltreatment. Professionals "look with long eyes" at struggling families. They focus on developing and sustaining relationships with parents, who may need support for extended periods of time or in the future, and ensuring that children in out-of-home-care are well-integrated into their communities (Bamba & Haight, 2011). Critical study of such diverse cultural cases can stimulate new ways of thinking and approaching child welfare, as well as forecasting some of the potential challenges and strategies for establishing meaningful system change.

4.3.2. "...without uniformity": strengthening child welfare with Indigenous families

Second, the scoped studies we reviewed have specific implications for culturally based child welfare with Indigenous families. We began this paper by emphasizing the importance of understanding Indigenous child welfare within historical contexts. To conclude, we have come to view current disparities in the involvement of Indigenous families in child welfare as a manifestation of a "long emergency," that is, the sustained depletion of social and environmental resources, resulting from centuries of colonial oppression and government-sponsored genocide of Indigenous people. In contrast to a single disaster where relief can be expected from outside sources, in the long emergency solutions must draw upon and strengthen the healthy, functioning systems remaining within the affected communities.

In the case of child welfare with Indigenous families, our scoping study suggests that a promising path forward is for county, state and provincial child welfare professionals to look to Indigenous child welfare beliefs and practices for models of culturally appropriate policies and practices. Some promising initial research in Colorado (Bussey & Lucero, 2013; Lucero & Bussey, 2012) and Iowa (Richardson, 2008) is consistent with the practices advocated for and employed by Indigenous leaders (e.g. Red Horse et al., 2000; P. Day, personal communications, 2017–2018). It suggests that partnerships between government-run child welfare agencies and tribal agencies or communities can reduce disparities in the involvement of Indigenous families in county, state and provincial child welfare systems through culturally-based interventions that consider the child as embedded within an extended family and community, are strengths-based and community-focused, and minimize coercion.

At the same time, scoped studies also suggest that there are a number of inter-related, systems-level challenges to the widespread, scaled-up implementation of such programs. Challenges that must be addressed include the inadequate allocation of resources to child welfare systems providing services to Indigenous families, agency-level characteristics such as large size and inflexibility in service provision, and state-level factors especially the failure to comply with ICWA mandates.

Applying the concept of the long emergency within the context of the Seven Generations Philosophy to Indigenous communities underscores the complex, mutually dependent relationships between child welfare reform and cultural reclamation. Child welfare practice centered around Indigenous cultures and resources within tribes is one of the cornerstones for reclaiming and maintaining thriving, sustainable Indigenous nations that have been decimated by genocide, stolen and exploited lands, abrogation of treaties, displacement, boarding schools, assimilation, annihilation of languages, federal policies and poverty (e.g., see Marcynyszyn et al., 2012; Red Horse et al., 2000). At the same time, children need well-functioning families and communities to thrive and continue Indigenous nations into the next seven generations and beyond. Simply put, child welfare reform is necessary for reclaiming and maintaining healthy Indigenous communities, and cultural reclamation is necessary to successful child welfare reform. Yet the solutions to disparities pursued in the scoped studies are based primarily on supports to county, state and provincial child welfare systems. A notable gap in the literature is the systematic examination of the capacity building needs at the tribal or Indigenous community level (Priscilla Day, personal communication, April 30, 2018), and how addressing such needs can strengthen vulnerable Indigenous families.

Conflict of interest

The authors report no conflict of interests.

Appendix A. Search strategies

PsycInfo (last run 9/13/17)

1. exp Child Welfare/
2. child protection.mp.
3. exp Child Abuse/
4. child maltreatment.mp.
5. exp Child Neglect/
6. child welfare.mp.
7. child abuse.mp.
8. or/1-7
9. exp American Indians/
10. native american*.mp.
11. (ICWA or "indian child welfare act").mp. [mp=title, abstract, heading word, table of contents, key concepts, original title, tests & measures]
12. 9 or 10 or 11
13. alaska natives/ or inuit/
14. metis.mp.
15. first nations.mp.
16. 13 or 14 or 15
17. 8 and (12 or 16)
18. limit 17 to (all journals and english language and ("0400 empirical study" or "0830 systematic review" or 1200 meta analysis or 1600 qualitative study or 1800 quantitative study))
19. limit 18 to year = "2000–2017"

$N = 66.$

Academic search premier (last run 5/29/17)

(foster care OR child welfare OR child maltreatment OR child abuse OR ICWA OR Indian Child Welfare Act) AND (grounded theor* OR case stud* OR ethnogr* OR phenomenol* OR qualitative OR mixed method* OR action research OR "community based action research" OR "participatory action research" OR CBPR OR PAR OR narrative OR autoethnograph* OR focus group* OR foucault OR relativism OR talk story OR lived experience OR perspective OR implementation OR evaluation OR quantitative or "systematic review" OR meta-analysis) AND ((America* n3 Indian*) OR Native American* OR "first nation*" OR (aborigin* n3 canad*) OR ("Indigenous Peoples" AND (North America* OR United States OR Canad*)) OR AIAN OR Metis OR Alaska* native* OR Inuit)

Limiters – Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals; Published Date: 20000101–20,171,231.

$N = 107.$

Bibliography of Native North Americans (last run 5/29/17)

(foster care OR child welfare OR child maltreatment OR child abuse OR ICWA OR Indian Child Welfare Act) AND (grounded theor* OR case stud* OR ethnogr* OR phenomenol* OR qualitative OR mixed method* OR action research OR "community based action research" OR "participatory action research" OR CBPR OR PAR OR narrative OR autoethnograph* OR focus group* OR foucault OR relativism OR talk story OR lived experience OR perspective OR implementation OR evaluation OR quantitative or "systematic review" OR meta-analysis)

Limiters – Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals; Published Date: 2000–2017.

$N = 60.$

Scopus (last run 5/23/17)

TITLE-ABS-KEY ("foster care" OR "child welfare" OR "child maltreatment" OR "child abuse" OR ICWA OR "Indian Child Welfare Act") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (qualitative OR quantitative OR empirical OR mixed-method OR "mixed method" OR "systematic review" OR "meta-analysis") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (Indigenous OR (America* W/4 Indian) OR "First Nation" OR (Alaska* PRE/1 Native) OR Metis OR Inuit) AND PUBYEAR > 1999 AND PUBYEAR < 2018.

$N = 53.$

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