



Tamara C. Newcomb, M.S.<sup>1</sup> & Brooke Harrie, B.S.W.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychology, Munroe-Meyer Institute at the University of Nebraska Medical Center; <sup>2</sup>Department of Social Work, Munroe-Meyer Institute at the University of Nebraska Medical Center

## INTRODUCTION

There is a general concept within society about what comprises positive parenting, including specific parenting styles and strategies that are more beneficial than others. However, the extent to which the strategies actually differ between families is an issue largely overlooked. The specific ways in which individuals are socialized to parent are influenced by various factors, such as culture, religion, family history, social support, and geographic location. In fact, research suggests that beliefs about childrearing are adopted from one's culture of origin and are often resistant to change (Sigel & Kim, 1996). Childrearing practices, potentially a source of tradition, are often based on shared beliefs within a culture about the proper way to raise children. The importance of studying parenting interactions is obvious, as parents' childrearing decisions affect children's development.

The roots of Native American childrearing practices, interpersonal relationships, and family dynamics are deeply entwined in history as they have been passed down from generation to generation. Theoretical articles suggest that Native American parents may have different parenting styles than the majority/dominant culture (Barlow & Walkup, 1998; Glover, 2001; Jones, Kephart, Langley, Parker, Shenoy, & Weeks, 2001; and Lefley, 1973). However, few empirically based studies regarding these topics have been published. Empirical data on parenting strategies and styles, and on problem behaviors in children within the Native American community are necessary to aid clinicians working with Native American parents. This is especially true because most clinicians working with this population are not Native American themselves and thus not typically familiar with Native American cultural beliefs and customs (Barlow & Dauphinais & King, 1992; Walkup, 1998; and Wilkinson, 1980). In the absence of normative data on standardized measures, anecdotal information becomes the primary source for intervention. The current study examined parenting characteristics within a Native American population using both descriptive and well-standardized measures of parenting and child behavior.

## METHOD

### Participants

A total of 47 parents of children aged 5-12 years participated. Please see Table 1. Most parents were married or living with a partner, and were the biological mother of the child. Average age of parent was 35.77 years (range 20-58), and average child age was 8.45 yrs (range 5-12). There were more female children (n=27) than male children (n=20). Approximately 43 percent of the sample were from the Omaha tribe, with the remainder representing 21 other tribes/nations. Approximately 38% of the participants were from reservation settings, 30% from rural settings, 23% from urban areas, and 9% were from "other" or unknown.

### Procedure

Participants were recruited from the Midwestern United States and were contacted by word of mouth as well as at pow wows, fairs, and other cultural events. Flyers were distributed to some participants, who later contacted the researchers to receive a packet in the mail; completed packets were returned via pre-paid postage. Other participants received packets at the event, and either completed and returned the packet at the event, or returned the completed packet by mail. Finally, some participants received packets from previous participants who agreed to distribute packets to eligible families; these completed packets were returned via pre-paid postage. All participants were paid \$10 for their participation.

## MEASURES

### Demographic Questionnaire.

*Native American Parenting Scale (NAPS)* (Newcomb, 2005). This was designed to assess involvement of relatives in childrearing; parenting confidence and discipline; and expectations regarding formal education and traditional native values.

*Native American Acculturation Scale (NAAS)* (Garrett & Pichette, 2000). This assesses level of acculturation along a continuum from traditional Native American to assimilated mainstream American culture.

## MEASURES (continued)

*Parenting Scale (PS)* (Arnold, O'Leary, Wolff, & Acker, 1993). This assesses dysfunctional parenting in discipline situations.

*Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory (ECBI)* (Burns & Patterson, 1990; Eyberg & Ross, 1978). This assesses specific problem behaviors in children aged 2-16 years.

*Perceived Social Support from Family (PSS-Fa)* and *Perceived Social Support from Friends (PSS-Fr)* (Procidano & Heller, 1983). Each questionnaire measures the level of understanding and support provided by friends (PSS-Fr) and family (PSS-Fa).

*Parenting Sense of Competence (PSOC): Satisfaction and Efficacy* (Gibaud-Wallston and Wandersman, 1978). The Satisfaction scale measures parenting frustration, anxiety, and motivation, while the Efficacy scale measures capability, problem solving ability, and competence.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

<b>Caregiver Relation</b>		<b>Caregiver Tribal Affiliation</b>		<b>Target Child Age</b>	
Biological Parent	80.0%	Apache	2.1%	Mean	8.45
Step-Parent	2.0%	Blackfoot	2.1%	SD	2.00
Other	18.0%	Cherokee	6.4%		
		Cherokee, Creek	2.1%	<b>Target Child Gender</b>	
<b>Caregiver Gender</b>		Cherokee, Osage,	2.1%	Male	42.6%
Female	87.2%	Shawnee	2.1%	Female	57.4%
Male	12.8%	Cheyenne River Sioux	2.1%		
		Chickasaw, Choctaw,		<b>Monthly Family Income</b>	
<b>Caregiver Marital</b>		Cherokee, Keetoowah	2.1%	Less than \$800	10.6%
Married	40.4%	Choctaw	2.1%	\$800-\$1000	19.1%
Divorced	14.9%	Comanche	6.4%	\$1001-\$1500	6.4%
Separated	6.4%	Creek, Cherokee,		\$1501-2000	17.0%
Single	25.5%	Chickasaw	2.1%	\$2001-2500	19.1%
Widowed	6.4%	Iowa, Chippewa	2.1%	over \$2500	25.5%
Living with Partner	6.4%	Iowa, Otoe, Sac & Fox	2.1%		
		Navajo	2.1%	<b>Community of Residence</b>	
<b>Caregiver Education</b>		Navajo, Pawnee	2.1%	Rural	29.8%
9 <sup>th</sup> - 11 <sup>th</sup> grade	19.2%	Ogala Sioux	2.1%	Urban	23.4%
Completed high school	25.5%	Omaha	42.5%	Reservation	38.3%
1-3 years of College	38.3%	Ponca	4.3%	Other	6.4%
Completed Bachelor's	14.9%	Shawnee, Chippewa	2.1%		
Graduate Education	2.1%	United Keetoowah	2.1%		
		Winnnebago, Omaha	2.1%		
<b>Caregiver Age</b>		Winnnebago, Sioux	2.1%		
Mean	35.77				
SD	8.77				

Table 2. Standardized Measures

	Mean	SD	Z		Mean	SD	Z
PS Total	3.17	1.05	6.69 x 10 <sup>-4</sup>	PSS-Family Total	15.72	4.96	.1983
PS Laxness	2.74	.92	2.28 x 10 <sup>-4</sup>	PSS-Friends Total	15.24	3.85	.7653
PS Overreactivity	3.03	.67	.0305	PSOC Efficacy	28.28	4.96	.0032
PS Verbosity	3.98	.67	.2376	PSOC Satisfaction	34.68	5.59	.9999
ECBI Intensity	97.26	34.97	.9728				
ECBI Problem	6.49	8.48	2.45 x 10 <sup>-3</sup>				

## RESULTS

Initial data analysis focused on descriptive information regarding the background and values of the participating families. Review of the NAPS responses indicated that for the majority of families, one or both parents were primarily responsible for childrearing. However, in most cases, a significant role in childrearing was also shared with extended family members. These family members included grandparents, great grandparents, step-parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and older siblings.

Confidence in parenting was high, with most reporting they made good decisions regarding childrearing, were consistent with their discipline, and experienced relatively low levels of frustration with their children. Parents also reported being primarily responsible for discipline and teaching their child right from wrong and self-care skills.

## RESULTS (continued)

The use of noninterference was low overall, with most indicating it was important for their child to receive guidance in choosing friends, making decisions about the future, when engaging in minor and major misbehaviors, in developing respect for elders, and in learning things by a certain age. Noninterference was rated highest in the areas of importance that a child receive guidance in choosing hobbies/interests and extracurricular activities.

In evaluating formal education, most parents placed high emphasis on the value of receiving formal education, and most indicated that formal education did not interfere with their children retaining traditional values. In setting educational goals for their children, 58% reported wanting their children to attend college, while 32% reported wanting their child to receive a graduate education. In rating their goals for traditional and mainstream values for their children, about 94% indicated that both traditional and mainstream values were important. These data are consistent with the NAAS scores.

The mean NAAS score was 2.90 (S.D. = .62), a moderate level of acculturation. Using the authors' recommended cutoff score of 3.0, 39.3% of the sample fell within the "traditional" range. About 7.8% of the sample fell at the midrange, and about 14% fell within the "acculturated" range.

Descriptive statistics for the standardized measures are presented in Table 2. One-sample z-test's were conducted in order to determine if the scores on the standardized measures for this sample differed significantly from the normative data. It was found that the scores for the PS, ECBI, PS-Fr/Fa, and PSOC are all comparable to those obtained in their respective standardization sample.

## DISCUSSION

This study utilized well-standardized and accepted measures as well as a newly developed measure in order to collect descriptive and normative data on parenting styles/strategies and family characteristics of a diverse sample of Native Americans living in the Midwestern United States.

Families reported a range of parenting practices. In some ways, their reports closely resembled those in previous literature examining characteristics of Native American families. For example, parents reported extensive involvement of extended family members in childrearing, and they valued knowledge of traditional Native American beliefs for their children. However, parents also placed high emphasis on formal education for their children, and indicated that formal education did not interfere with traditional beliefs. This finding is contradictory to previous literature on Native Americans' view of education, which indicates that formal education is not emphasized in the Native American culture because of the desire to preserve traditional beliefs and practices (Berlin, 1987). Parents in this sample were very confident in their parenting abilities, believed that they made good decisions as caregivers, and indicated relatively low levels of overall frustration with their children. These results are very similar to what Gfeller (1990) found, reporting that Native American parents perceived their actual parenting behaviors as exceeding their perceived norm or ideal.

Participants in this sample responded to the standardized measures in a manner consistent with the normative group, indicating that the reported norms for the ECBI, PS, PSS-Fa/Fr, and PSOC may be appropriate for use with this group.

Some clinical implications have emerged from the results of the current study. The data demonstrated that Native Americans in this sample are similar in some aspects of their parenting to what has been reported in previous literature (e.g., reliance on extended family members). However, there have been significant changes from previous literature in some aspects of parenting as well (e.g., value of formal education). These findings underscore the importance of appreciating and understanding the context in which a family operates so as to improve the therapeutic relationship and ensure best therapeutic progress.

Strengths of this study include the assessment of tribal affiliation, reservation vs. urban vs. rural location, reliance on traditional parenting practices, and a measure of acculturation, along with standardized measures of parent and child behavior. Future research with a larger, and more diverse sample, is needed. Inclusion of both descriptive and standardized measures is likely to yield rich data, that will be useful in comparing results of future studies with those of past studies.