

You think, I think, but what do we think? A mixed methods study of the extent of co orientation between child welfare workers and Afro-Caribbean parents about child maltreatment in Alberta.

This research intends to examine the extent to which there is congruence (shared understanding) between Afro-Caribbean families and child welfare workers about what is regarded as child maltreatment and what are the experiences of each group which have shaped their current perceptions. With regard to child maltreatment, research has suggested that varying views about the issue can influence our approach to raising children on the one hand as well as the decisions about child abuse and neglect on the other (Agathonos-Georgopoulou, 1992). This study believes that the unstated views, the perceptions that I may think the Other has of me or about the issue under review may be more influential in shaping my response to that individual than that which is actually voiced. Secondly, the literature in this area has suggested that groups of people; professional and nonprofessional, as well as persons from different cultural backgrounds, vary in their perceptions of the severity of different forms of child maltreatment. The resulting conflict can negatively impact the relationship between the service provider and client, a factor, which Orlinsky, Ronnestad and Willutzki (2004) note may be the single most important factor influencing a positive outcome.

The third issue is the current literature shows that while there has been increasing focus on child maltreatment or child welfare as individual or related issues, it has remained largely silent on Black families experience with the child welfare system in Canada (Clarke, 2012; Dumbrill, 2010). Maiter, Palmer and Manji (2006) note that there has been a proliferation of research focused on the perceptions and experiences of White service users with regard to the child welfare system however, studies focused on the perception of service users which have included Native and Black participants, have sidelined their views, giving them minimal treatment in the analysis (Dumbrill, 2010). Yet, current research indicates that children from Caribbean families as well as other minority populations are more likely to “experience more negative consequences as a result of abuse than maltreated children from the dominant culture” (Maiter, Stalker & Allagia, 2009, p. 28). In addition to this, it has been shown that Blacks are reported to the child welfare system at a higher rate than Caucasian families but do not neglect or abuse their children at a greater rate (Clarke, 2012; Maiter, Stalker & Allagia, 2009). Where these families come in contact with the child welfare system, minority and poor children are often treated differently than their White counterparts as they move through the system with disproportional and disparate outcomes.

This staunch and negative reality for members of this population is met with the growing size of the population of Canadians of Caribbean origin. At the last Census, Canadians of Caribbean

origin were identified as the one of the largest non-European ethnic groups in Canada (Allahar, 2010). Labelle, Larose and Piché (2012) indicated that this population has grown more quickly than the Canadian population as a whole, increasing by 11% between 1996 and 2011 as against the Canadian population which grew by 4%.

Noting these gaps and the increasing significance of this issue for Canada, this study will be guided by the following core **Objectives**:

1. Understand to what extent there is agreement and/or disagreement in the perceptions of child welfare workers and Afro-Caribbean parents about what constitutes child maltreatment.
2. Understand to what extent there is accuracy in each stakeholder's understanding of the other's perception of child maltreatment.
3. Examine the experiences which have informed these perceptions.
4. Explore strategies or approaches which can be introduced to address any negative experiences or perceptions of the interaction between these stakeholder groups.

Methodology

The study will use a sequential mixed methods research design, utilizing a quantitative followed by a qualitative phase. This approach will allow for the qualitative to interrogate the general findings identified through the quantitative phase of the study. Two sets of participants will be engaged for both the quantitative (QUAN) and qualitative (qual) phases of the study. These participants will be service providers in the child welfare system and clients (current or previous) of the child welfare system.

Questions

1. What are the differences in the (i) views and (ii) perceived views of parents/caregivers and child welfare workers about the following:
 - The identification of specific behaviours as child maltreatment?
 - The seriousness of the behaviour?
 - The identification of specific behaviours as reportable to the child welfare system?
 - The identification of specific behaviours as requiring child welfare involvement?
2. What are the experiences of parents/caregivers and child welfare workers which have informed these views?