THE INDIAN EXTENDED FAMILY AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO PARENTING

This paper was made possible by Grant No. 90-C-1744(02) from the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, Children's Bureau, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, Office of Human Development Services, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. It's contents should not be construed as official policy of the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect or any agency of the Federal Government. It was developed and is distributed by the National Indian Child Abuse and Neglect Resource Center, 6539 E. 31st Street, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74145, reproduced freely by xerox.

The establishment of the National Indian Child Abuse and Neglect Resource Center is an indication that the U.S. Government finally recognizes that there are unique considerations to be taken into mind regarding Indians when addressing the issue of child abuse and neglect. What elements in Indian history, culture, psycho-dynamics, and socioeconomics impact on child abuse and neglect? What special programs are needed for Indians in order to address this growing problem? And what sensitivities are required by the social service delivery agents when they approach the area of Indian child abuse and neglect?

This paper will attempt to answer some of these questions by providing a very cursory outline of some of these factors, beginning with the initial contacts between the Indian and the White.

Very few generalizations can be made of Indians, but one safe one is that generally Indian tribes have been organized around the concept of the extended family.

One of the major factors impacting Indian child abuse and neglect is the breakdown of the extended family network among Indian populations. As Indians have been relocated to urban areas (by the government, by necessity for jobs, or for whatever reason), the extended family network has broken down in terms of the presence of the extended family in child-rearing.

Let us compare some of the ways Indian extended families have functioned in terms of child-rearing with the nuclear family practices of child-rearing prevalent in white society.

Within most Indian tribes, parents are not expected to take on the complete responsibility of rearing the child. A group of siblings or cousins live close together, in physical proximity, often even under the same roof, or certainly within easy walking distance. Often grandparents, aunts, uncles all share the task of child-rearing.

Sometimes it becomes necessary for economic reasons (or other reasons such as health) for children to move from one nuclear family to another. Most tribal traditions respect the wish of the child in terms of which relatives to live with. Within the extended family, young parents can expect to get as much help as needed to take care of their children, especially during times of emergency. Young parents are usually not expected to make decisions about their children all by themselves.

In contrast, the young white parents are expected by their families to be totally independent as soon as they marry, and self-sufficient in terms of raising their children. Young Indians appear to have more respect for their elders than do young whites, and therefore usually listen to advice from elders about child-rearing. Most elders in Indian tribes fo not expect young parents to accomplish child-rearing tasks all by themselves, which they have no experience in doing.

The expectations of the dominant culture are in sharp contrast to the Indian tribal experience. In the dominant culture young parents more frequently live long distances from their families. When the first baby is born they usually take complete responsibility in caring for the child.

Often social workers see an Indian child being raised by someone other than their natural parents and consider it a case of abandonment. This has led to many incidences of Indian children being removed legally from parental (and familial) custody with no just cause. Sometimes this separation of the Indian child from its family has been rationalized on the basis of the necessity to provide schooling in a boarding school. Such separations have been major factors in the breakdown of Indian family traditions that have maintained themselves over centuries. This destruction of Indian families cannot help but have important ramifications on the Indian child, who is once again the victim.

There is a direct ratio between the breakdown of these traditional Indian practices of child-rearing and the rising incidence of Indian child abuse and neglect. Therefore we cannot refuse to consider this factor in attempting to address the problem of abuse and neglect.

A SUMMARY OF CONTRASTING CULTURAL VALUES: INDIAN AND WHITE

	Tribal/Indian		White
1.	group or clan emphasis	1.	individual emphasis
2.	present oriented	2.	future oriented
3.	time, non-awareness	3.	time, awareness
4.	age	4.	youth
5.	cooperation, service, concern for groups	5.	competition, concern for self, profit
6.	harmony with nature	6.	conquest of nature
7.	giving, generous	7.	saving, selfish
8.	pragmatic	8.	theoretical
9.	patient	9.	impatient
10.	mystical	10.	skeptical
11.	shame	11.	guilt
12.	permissiveness and nonintervention	12.	social cohesion and force
13.	extended family and clan	13.	immediate family (nuclear)
14.	non-materialistic	14.	materialistic
15.	non-aggressive	15.	aggressive
16.	modest	16.	over-confident
17.	silence and thoughtfulness	17.	noise and rashness
18.	respect others' religion	18.	convert others to religion
19.	religion-a way of life	19.	religion-a segment of life
20.	land, water, forest belong to all	20.	a private domain
21.	beneficial & responsible use of resources for all	21.	profitable use of resource for self & investors
22.	equanimity and socialistic	22.	wealth and private property
23.	face-to-face government	23.	impersonal government
24.	compact living	24.	space living
25.	low self value	25.	strong self-importance
26.	ask for as little as necessary	26.	ask for as much as possible
27.	agreeableness	27.	constrains
28.	respect for others' differences	28.	contempt for others'differences
29.	extended family	29.	nuclear family
30.	principle of interdependence	30.	principle of independence.