

Helping child welfare workers improve cultural competence by utilizing spiritual genograms with Native American families and children

Gordon E. Limb^{a,*}, David R. Hodge^{b,c}

^a School of Social Work, Brigham Young University, United States

^b Arizona State University, West Campus, United States

^c University of Pennsylvania's Program for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 16 June 2009

Received in revised form 26 August 2009

Accepted 28 August 2009

Available online 8 September 2009

Keywords:

Spirituality
Native Americans
Child welfare
Genograms
American Indians
Cultural competence

ABSTRACT

This study represents an initial step at giving child welfare workers an important assessment tool as they seek to provide culturally and spiritually competent services to Native American families and children. In order to determine the relevancy and consistency of utilizing a modified spiritual genogram assessment tool with Native Americans, 50 Native American experts reviewed, rated, and gave feedback on its use. Results showed that while there were limitations in utilizing spiritual genograms, this assessment tool could help child welfare workers become more culturally competent as they develop interventions with Native American families and children.

© 2009 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade there has been increasing interest in including spiritual assessments in child welfare settings with families and children. Yet, no formally accepted or well-recognized guidelines for such assessments have been established. Spirituality is one of the essential foundations for the remediation of abusive and destructive behaviors, but it is the one that child welfare workers and practitioners tend to understand minimally, at best (DiLorenzo, Johnson, & Bussey, 2001; Frame, 2000). By underestimating or totally ignoring the impact that spirituality has on families and children, child welfare workers and practitioners are likely to become frustrated in their attempts to provide a safe and healthy environment for the families and children they serve.

Recently, a shift has occurred where child welfare workers and practitioners have been asked to focus more on a strength-based, holistic, systems perspective that promotes the inclusion of spirituality into their work with families and children (Bullis, 1996; Hodge, 2005; Jacobs, 1997; Rey, 1997; Van Hook, Hugen, & Aguilar, 2001). For example, the Joint Commission is the largest health care accrediting organization in the United States, accrediting most hospitals in the U.S. and many health care organizations (Hodge, 2006). The Joint

Commission recently revised its accrediting standards to require spiritual assessments in hospitals, behavioral health care organizations providing addiction services, and other health care organizations (Hodge, 2006; Koenig, 2007). Similarly, the National Association of Social Workers' (2001), a prominent organization that represents many child welfare workers, includes standards for cultural competence that stresses the role of spiritual competence in effective social work practice.

Although progress has been made in this area recently, studies continue to report that most child welfare workers and practitioners have received little training on how to include their client's spiritual strengths into their practice (Altshuler, 1999; Canda & Furman, 1999; Murdock, 2004). While this lack of training in addressing spirituality is problematic to child welfare workers generally, it is even more pronounced when dealing with specific racial/ethnic subgroups—the populations for whom spirituality is often most critical (Gallup & Castelli, 1989; Limb & Hodge, 2007; McGill, 1992).

As a result, the focus of this study is how to incorporate spirituality into child welfare settings with Native American families and children. Due to the unique spiritual beliefs and practices espoused by many Native Americans families, few studies have examined this vital resource—what some refer to as permeating all aspects of Native existence (Brave Heart, 2001; Cross, 2001; Cross, Earle, & Simmons, 2000). Given that child welfare workers will increasingly be required to utilize spiritual assessments in their work with Native families and children, a study devoted to this important topic is indeed warranted.

* Corresponding author. BYU School of Social Work, 2190A JFSB, Provo, UT 84602, United States.

E-mail address: Gordon_limb@byu.edu (G.E. Limb).

1.1. Native American spirituality

Although tremendous diversity exists among the hundreds of Native American tribes in the United States (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2005), spirituality continues to play a central role in Native culture (Gilgun, 2002; Limb & Hodge, 2008). From a Native American perspective, spiritual assessments are necessary in order to help the family obtain the “balance” necessary for proper mental health (Cross, 2001). Ignoring spiritual elements can be detrimental to the wellbeing (or balance) of both the Native American family and child. Typically in most therapeutic and child welfare settings, interventions focus almost exclusively on traditional biological, physical, or emotional problems (Hunter & Sawyer, 2006; Napoli, 1999). For many Native Americans, focusing on these areas without tapping into the spiritual may actually foster increased negative affect when these families believe that such challenges are caused by unbalanced spiritual relationships (Limb & Hodge, 2007).

Given the role spirituality is perceived to play in wellness, it is helpful to have some awareness of Native American spiritual beliefs and practices. As child welfare workers and practitioners sincerely inquire about spiritual beliefs and practices, an unspoken message is sent that their spirituality is respected and important in the intervention process. One important way to do this is by utilizing a spiritual genogram assessment tool.

1.2. Spiritual genograms

Currently, one of the more common assessment approaches used in social work and child welfare settings to address spirituality is a verbally-based spiritual history (D’Souza, 2003; Hodge, 2001; Mathai & North, 2003). Because this approach focuses on direct, verbal communication, some have considered this approach problematic for Native American families, and specifically children, who prefer a non-

direct style that involves nonverbal communication (Altshuler, 1999; Paniagua, 2005; Trujillo, 2000). Spiritual genograms represent a modified diagrammatic family tree alternative to the more traditional verbally-based spiritual histories (Hodge, 2001). Spiritual genograms help child welfare workers and the families and children they serve understand the flow of historically rooted patterns through time. Specifically, spiritual genograms provide child welfare workers and practitioners with a tangible graphic representation of complex expressions of spirituality over at least three generations.

When initiating a spiritual genogram approach, the basic family system is delineated in keeping with standard genogram conventions (Frame, 2000; Walton & Smith, 1999). Color coding is often used to provide a graphic “color snapshot” of the overall spiritual composition of the family system (e.g., red might symbolize traditional Native spirituality, black the Native American Church, etc.). In addition, spiritually meaningful events can be incorporated into the genogram by using symbols drawn from the client’s worldview. These symbols and short summary statements can also be used to denote significant events, personal strengths, and other important information. The procedure allows for the stability or fluidity of the person’s beliefs over time. Fig. 1 illustrates what a spiritual genogram might look like for one person, within the confines of a non-color medium.

In addition to drawing the spiritual genogram, the assessment tool includes a question set that is broken down into two sections, historical components and present spiritual functioning. These two sections are designed to help the child welfare workers and practitioners construct spiritual genograms with Native American families and children. After reviewing the literature, current theory, and consultation with Native American tribal organizations and individuals, the spiritual genogram assessment tool has been adapted by the authors to make it more consistent with Native American culture.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine two questions. First, how congruent are spiritual genograms with Native American

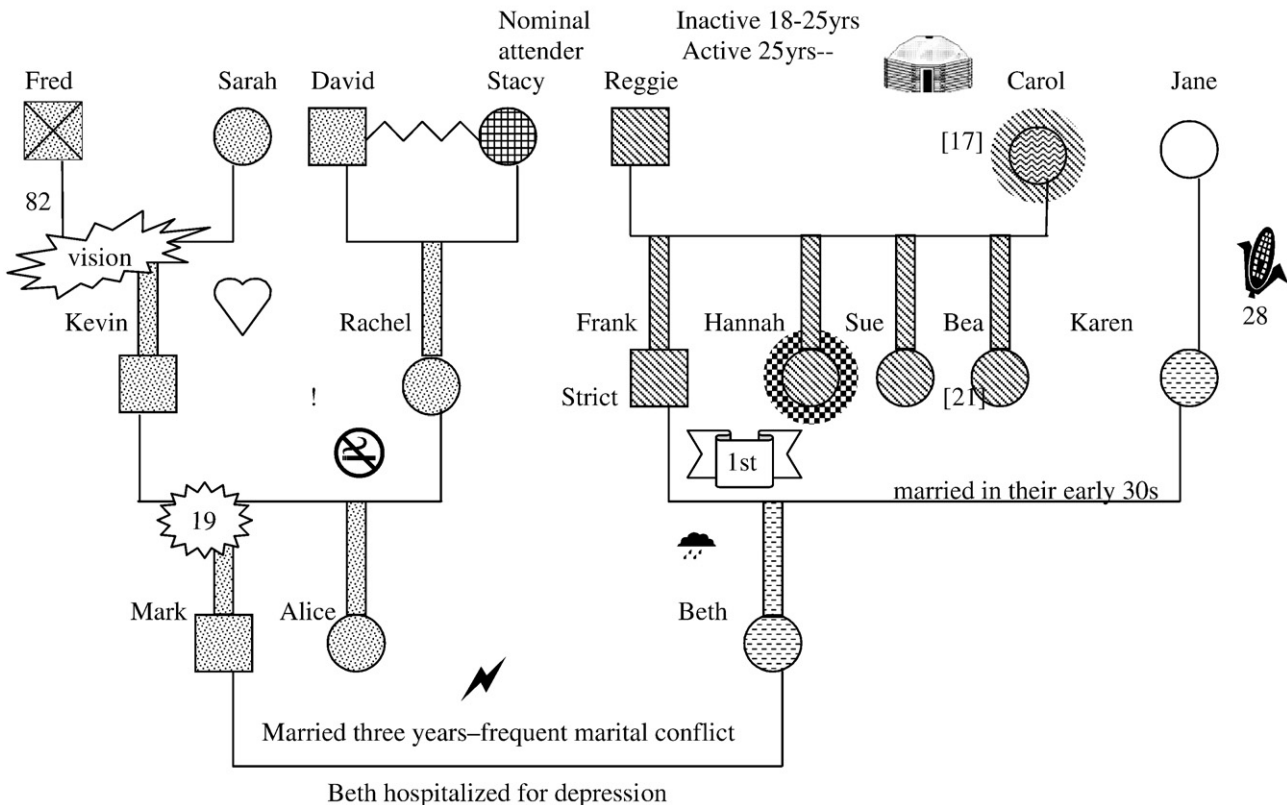


Fig. 1. Spiritual genogram example.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/346693>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/346693>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)