

Change and continuity in children's services: A descriptive study.

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Research

- Current gaps regarding research on child sexual abuse and domestic violence of children in the United States remain invalidated when it comes to cultural backgrounds of diverse populations.
- Mothers play an important role in healing victimized children by providing strength and support in the aftermath of abuse.
- Exploratory study conducted in 2009 focused on Hispanic mothers' experiences and perceptions after discovering abuse of their children, reactions to these events, and their concerns for the future.

Study Overview

- Collaborative Learning Research Carol A. Plummer, Ph.D., & Julie Eastin, Ph.D. from LSU
- Research Replication from Mid-West (primarily Caucasian and African American)
- 54 nonabusive maternal caregivers were recruited to participate in study.
- 45 Hispanic Caregivers focused in study.
- Study offered in English and/or Spanish

Population

- Hispanic population in a southwestern border town.
- Legal status of the families was unknown, but an ongoing connection with relatives in Mexico was the norm.
- Most of the participants spoke Spanish as well as English (only ten respondents elected to use the Spanish – Language survey).

Guiding Principles

- Advertised The Mother's Project Survey NMSU, Public Health Department, Mental Health Agencies, Dr's office, etc.,
- Phone number and contact person to set up a time or come in, walk in accepted all contacts maintained were private and confidential.
- Agency remained open after traditional hours for working mothers who wanted to participate in the study.
- Informed Consent, Confidentiality Statement, and Survey were provided to all participants.

TIPS FOR DATA COLLECTION

- From the time you meet the mother, in the waiting room or wherever, it is your job to make her feel welcome and at ease. Be warm and thank her for coming. However, until you are in a private space, do not mention what she is there for. If you need to clarify to make sure you have the right person, use a benign statement like, "Are you here for the Mom's project?"
- When she is in the room where she will be filling out the survey, have her be seated and, if needed, provide her with information on childcare (where her child will be, etc.). Tell her that we will have a few things to fill out before we start. First, thank her for helping out, with the idea that what she is doing is helping improve services for other moms going through what she has gone through. Find out if she needs English or Spanish materials and if she'd like to have a tape to follow along (mostly for those who have reading problems). Go through the consent form with her to make certain she knows what the study is about and her rights.

TIPS FOR DATA COLLECTION

- Make certain she signs the confidentiality statement (that anyone else she sees in association with the study she will keep confidential).
- Ask if she prefers to work in a room alone or if it would bother her if she shares space with another mom if that mother fills out her survey in the same room.
- Tell her that we value her time and want to give her a small cash stipend for her time and effort. Ask that she answer every question and consider each question carefully. Let her know that sometimes things are worded in ways that aren't clear or seem confusing, so feel free to ask questions. Many mothers have found that certain words or questions don't make sense, so don't hesitate to ask if we haven't been clear.
- During the survey completion, keep the room quiet and comfortable. If questions are asked, help them know what the words mean, or the intent of the question, but don't overstretch in interpretation or try to give them "answers."

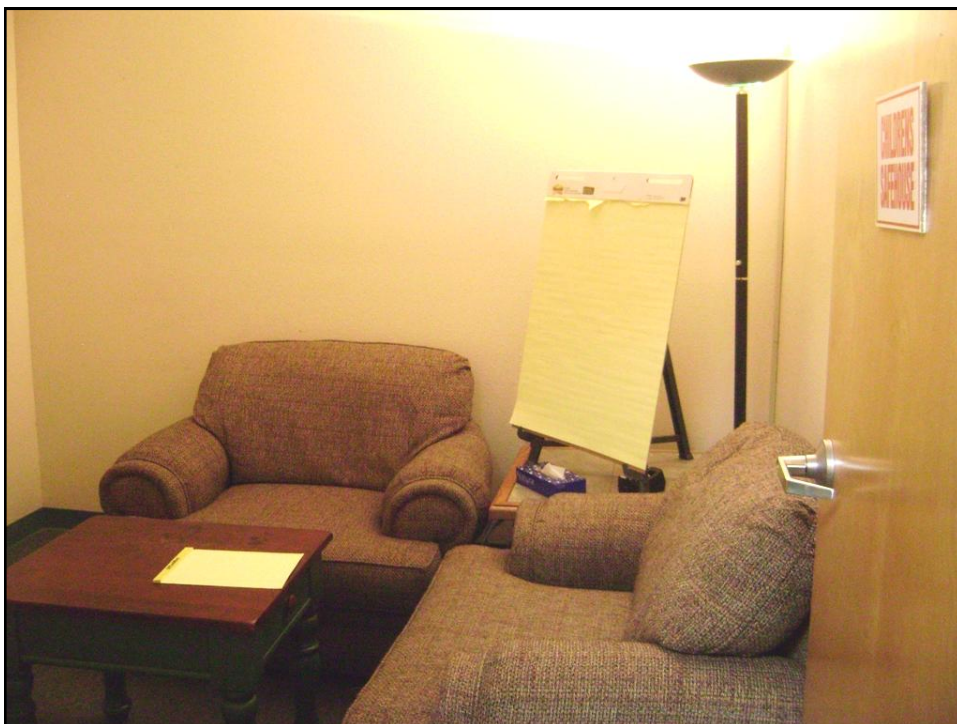
TIPS FOR DATA COLLECTION

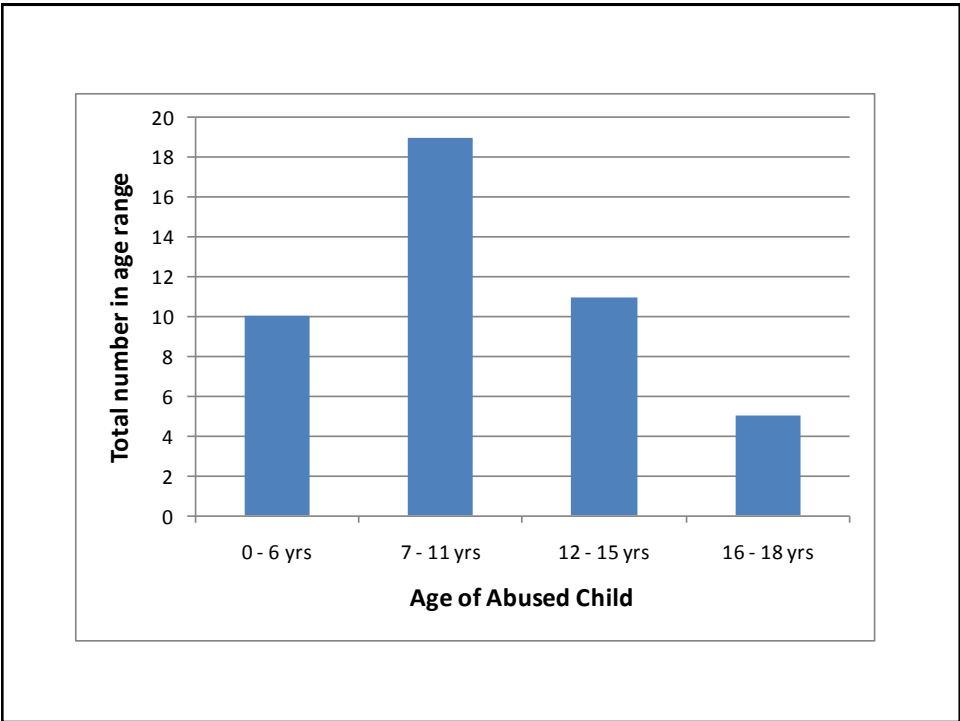
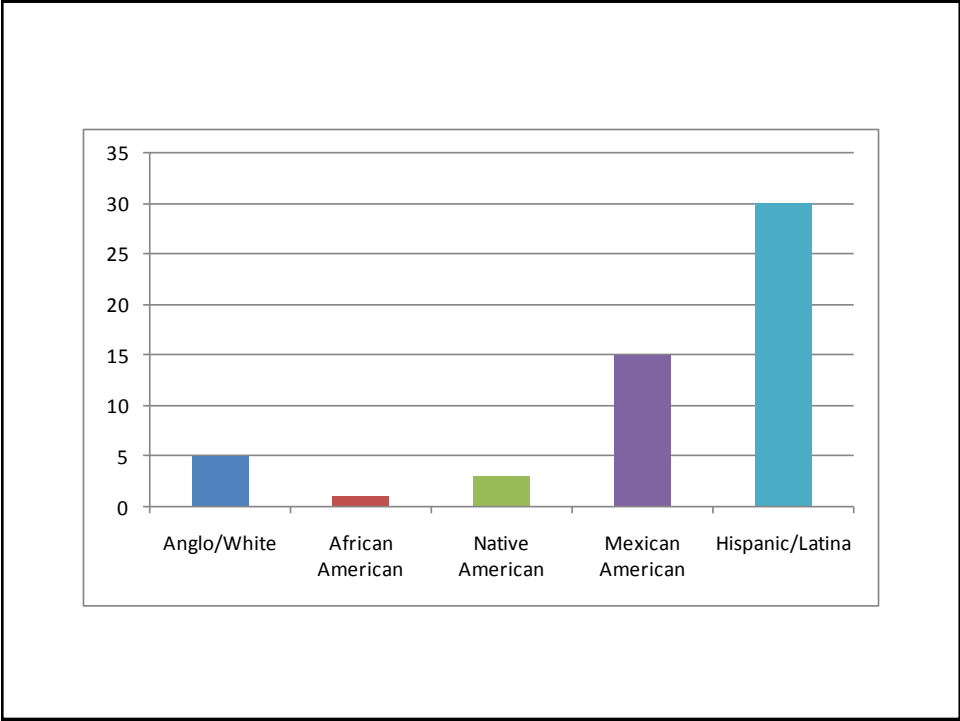
- After the survey is finished, before you pay them, look over each question to make sure they are all answered. Do it quickly and explain that you are just going to double-check to make certain they didn't miss anything---this commonly happens. If you find a blank (unanswered question), point it out to them and ask if they would complete it. Tell them if they did not answer it on purpose, or didn't want to respond, they can just write "no answer" over it. That is fine. No one has to answer everything.
- If anyone seems very upset or does not want to complete the survey, we need to take care for their mental and emotional state and suspend the study with them. If someone starts to cry or seems upset, ask if they are OK. They may have an emotional reaction without needing to stop, and just need a "how you doing?" Some will wipe a tear because the material is hard, but still want to continue. However, ask if they need to stop or talk to someone.

TIPS FOR DATA COLLECTION

- After the survey is completed and you have checked the survey, thank them again and give them the \$15 cash. They also need to sign a receipt to be certain we are documenting our use of money. They can sign any name if they are concerned about confidentiality.
- Give the moms each a handout listing resources available. This will include a crisis hotline, contact numbers for Safehouse and other agencies that can provide support and information.







Study Statistics 2009 - 2010

Age of Abused Child	Count
0 - 6 years	10
7 - 11 years	19
12 - 15 years	11
16-18 years	5

Household Income	Count
Under \$5,000	12
\$5,000 - \$10,000	10
\$10,000 - \$20,000	15
\$20,000 - \$30,000	5
Above \$30,000	3

Education	Count
Grade 6 or less	5
7 - 8 grade	4
9 - 11 grade	10
High School Graduate	8
Some College	13
Associate Degree	2
Bachelor or Master Degree	3

Mother's Relationship to Offender	Count
Husband / Partner	7
Ex	8
Other Relative	10
Known Non-Relative	17
Stranger	3

Findings

- Mothers in this study reported similar abuse-related information as those in the Midwestern Study, including the age and gender of both victims and offenders, relationship to the alleged offender, numbers of offenders and the types and numbers of abusive activities.
- **Nearly half** of the mothers in this replication study had a prior uneasiness that something was amiss. Similarly, many chose to talk with their children and watch things more carefully.

Findings

- Nearly 1/3 chose to confront the offenders with their concerns, as in the original study.
- This study confirms that maternal caregivers who identify as Hispanic, non-Hispanic Caucasian or African American all struggle with prior suspicions and how to determine what has occurred.

Findings

- Hispanic mothers reported less certainty about the abuse occurring at significantly higher rates than the Midwest sample ($p=.006$)
- Correlation in the two samples between education, income, educational level, and certainty about the abuse. **62.2% stated the child's behavior increased their certainty of the abuse.**

Findings

- Both samples were similar in some responses regarding their discovery process. This sample was less likely to report they doubted the abuse because they “know the abuser” and that the “child’s story changed.” However, this sample was more likely to be hesitant to believe because of the offender’s denial than for any other reason. In trying to understand this finding, it is important to consider that for many Hispanic background families, **there are tremendous cultural values placed on loyalty and respect for the extended family and family unity** (Ramos Lira et al., 1999). Thus recognition of these potential barriers to belief may help direct clinician inquiries and interventions.

Findings

- **Feelings of guilt** reported by maternal caregivers stemmed from the realization that they did not know of the abuse sooner and they did not protect their children. In order to intervene clinicians should address these maternal guilt feelings with the context of societal pressures experienced by others mothers more generally in addition to the specific cultural demands experienced by Hispanic mothers.

Findings

- **More education** reported greater negative relationship change with their children in the aftermath of sexual abuse.
- Concerns focused mostly on the future in general sexual acting out or misconceptions about healthy sex, school or learning, aggression, or behavioral problems. In many Hispanic background families, the emphasis on virginity before marriage and the taboos related to virginity.

Future Research

- Further, additional research should examine if more knowledge about the abuse assists mothers in believing the abuse.
- While there is acknowledgement that nonabusive mothers are a heterogeneous group, details about how they may be the same or different based on distinctive cultural backgrounds or values has received little empirical attention.

Further Investigation

- Examine the likelihood that knowledge of potential harm from child sexual abuse may enhance maternal sensitivity to negative outcomes, create expectations for negative outcomes, and even fuel the perception of negative outcomes in the mother/child relationship.

Mothers' comments

- "I've changed easily against my husband. I'm very worried about my daughter. I don't trust the majority of people. When she goes to school I always go with her."
- "We are all blown away that something like this happened. I'm more careful with my family now."
- "I personally appreciate my children more yet never let my guard down when it comes to trusting anyone."
- "I want her to be close to a person she is in love with."

Mothers' comments

- “He hasn't said anything but his actions, behaviors, and emotions are very worrisome. He wants to die.”
- “My daughter (15) says he touched her and her cousins and I took her to get checked with a doctor. I'm not sure it happened. I didn't leave them for a long time--just to go to the store. She's very distant and locks herself in her room and really doesn't like to talk” wrote a 31 yr old Latina mother.



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