CULTURAL ISSUES

Culturally Relevant Violence Research with Children of Color

—by Anthony Urquiza and Gail Wyatt

By most accounts, clinical and research interest in the field of child abuse and neglect have increased substantially during the last decade and a half (National Research Council, 1993). Notably understudied in this research is violence within ethnic minority families and/or violence against children of color. While clinical research has been conducted with children of different ethnic groups, this research has rarely examined the contribution of ethnicity in understanding the prevention, mediation, treatment, and/or outcome of child maltreatment.

In general, clinical research approaches to the problems of violence against children of color can be compromised in several important ways: by failing to address important socioeconomic, cultural, and racial factors; by using biased or skewed sampling strategies; by using ineffective or insensitive subject recruitment strategies; and by misinterpreting the data. We believe that the primary reason for these problems is that traditional clinical research practices are "embedded in a context of race, class, and ethnic stratification" (Landrine, Klonoff, & Brown-Collins, 1992). To promote a more culturally relevant approach to research on the neglect and physical and sexual abuse of children of color and within ethnic minority families, we must revise traditional clinical research methodology. Doing so

entails many difficulties not encountered in traditional paper-and-pencil research studies with readily accessible samples. However, in order to ensure the safety of all children, we must utilize research techniques that provide useful, relevant information about violence against children of color. This article provides an overview of some of the important issues in conducting culturally competent research with ethnic minority children, and proposes research strategies which may provide a greater understanding of the cultural context in which this maltreatment occurs.

Developing a hypothesis: Incorporating context

One of the fundamental issues in conducting research with children and families of color is the development of hypotheses which are culturally relevant and appropriate to the focus of the investigation. To develop culturally relevant hypotheses, researchers must adopt both a perspective about the importance of cultural context, and specific research methods that reflect this perspective. Adopting the perspective means embracing the assertion by Belsky (1980) and Garbarino (1977) that to understand individuals we must understand the dynamic system within which they exist. Whether or not researchers are members of the cultural group

NEWS

Editor-In-Chief Chosen for American Professional Journal on the Abuse of Children; New Resource Available to Prosecutors

—by Theresa Reid

Mark Chaffin, PhD, to be Editor-in-Chief of APJAC

APSAC's Board of Directors has chosen Mark Chaffin, PhD, Assistant Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Arkansas, to be Editor-in-Chief of the *American Professional Journal on the Abuse of Children (APJAC)*, to be published quarterly beginning in February, 1996. An APSAC member for many years, Dr. Chaffin was Book Review Editor, then Executive Editor, for *The APSAC Advisor*, and was elected to APSAC's Board of Directors in 1993.

Dr. Chaffin has significant expertise in both research and practice in the field of child maltreatment. Founding Director of the Family Treatment Program at the Child Health and Family Life Institute at the Arkansas Children's Hospital, Dr. Chaffin has published research in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, the *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *Child Abuse and Neglect: The International Journal*, and the *American Journal of Public*

Health. Dr. Chaffin's clinical work and research have addressed the assessment and treatment of child, adolescent, and adult sexual offenders, the role of substance abuse and depression as prospective risk factors for physical abuse and neglect, the psychophysiological aspects of PTSD in sexually abused children, and the role of dissociation in children's disclosure interviews.

In his nomination for Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Chaffin wrote, "I would hope that *APJAC*'s culture would be one which values many of the things we think are important in our field—diversity, rigor, fairness, respect, and integrity. These values must apply not only to the professional conduct of APSAC's members, but also to how the journal is operated." Dr. Chaffin is assembling an interdisciplinary Editorial Board comprised of APSAC members to ensure that the different disciplines reflected in APSAC's membership are represented in the

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The first step in the process of developing a hypothesis is identifying clearly the cultural group to be studied. As articulated by Abney and Gunn (1993), the researcher needs to be clear about the distinctions between race, ethnicity, and culture, and about the subtlety of distinctions within and between groups. Distinctions by race are minimally useful: they identify differences based on common ancestry and genetic physical characteristics, but obscure the enormous variability within these groups. People referred to as "Blacks" are identified by skin color, hair texture, and facial features, yet have diverse cultural origins which span the globe (Wyatt, 1990). To include people of similar skin color in one category is to suggest that genetic similarities rather than culturally bound belief systems, customs, and behaviors are the predictors that best explain violence occurring in communities and families.

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"Ethnicity" is typically used to refer both to race and land of origin, but does not explicitly encompass the influence of culture. To identify subjects as "Latino" or "Hispanic," for instance, is to identify them by ethnicity, but not by culture. Individuals of Latino or Hispanic origin are more accurately described by terms such as "Mexican," "Cuban," "Puerto Rican," "Dominican," and "Guatemalan." All of these more specific ethnic groups have unique and highly structured cultural traditions. Yet these are still insufficient descriptors of individuals' *cultural* groups. Mexico is a country of 85 million people, with very diverse cultures, socioeconomic groups, values, and practices.

Since most research on violence focuses on learned behaviors and their environmental context (Yee, Fairchild, Weizman, & Wyatt, 1993), sensitive hypotheses will take culture specifically into account. "Culture" is the set of beliefs, attitudes, values, and standards of behavior that are passed from one generation to the next. Cultural variables include language, worldview, dress, food, styles of communication, notions of wellness, healing techniques, childrearing patterns, and self-identity (Abney & Gunn, 1993, 19-20).

Hypotheses may also take into account subjects' "embeddedness" in their culture, or their level of acculturation (i.e., the degree to which members of a group adhere to traditional cultural practices) (Berry, 1990). At a minimum, assessing acculturation entails collecting data concerning generational immigration status, ethnicity of peer associations, language use, celebration of traditional holidays, and religion and spirituality. It is also important to acquire information about education and socioeco-

nomic status, as these are often mediators of an individual's cultural experience. Such information aids in addressing complex clinical research issues such as understanding ethnic identity among racially mixed children, or the impact of including them in studies that examine child maltreatment along with other ethnic minority children (Kerwin, Ponteroto, Jackson, & Harris, 1993; Root, 1992).

Bringing members of the group under study into the investigative process may be the most effective means of acquiring the contextual knowledge necessary to develop culturally relevant hypotheses. Some researchers have incorporated community organizations and developed culture-based focus groups as a means of guiding the development of investigative hypotheses (Newcomer, 1993). In fact, such groups and organizations may be a way to develop and ensure community cooperation through the investigative process (e.g., in acquiring human subjects' approval, recruiting subjects, addressing subject-related problems, interpreting results).

As a culturally sensitive hypothesis is being developed, researchers need to embark on a series of steps to implement culturally competent methodologies. These steps require amending traditional research methodologies in the process of designing studies, developing hypotheses, recruiting subjects, and collecting and interpreting data.

Study design

Traditional experimental or quasi-experimental designs may not be appropriate with people of color. Of particular concern are comparisons between ethnic groups and/or between an ethnic group and the majority culture as a means of explaining behavior, values, and cognitions. One of the problems in comparing ethnic groups to the majority culture (or to other ethnic groups) is that such comparisons support a perception of minorities as being deficient or less able in a particular psychological domain; that is, it supports a "deficit hypothesis" perspective (Katz, 1974). The assumption of the deficit hypothesis is that ethnic minority communities have for generations experienced economic and cultural deprivation that has resulted in several psychological (intellectual, characterological, and motivational) deficits. Historically, this "deficit hypothesis" has been implicit in and buttressed by studies which compare ethnic minority groups and majority groups on instruments which have been standardized on majority samples (Padilla & Wyatt, 1983).

Sue (1991) described three basic research designs which have been used with ethnic minority groups: point, linear, and parallel. *Point research* entails "isolated group comparisons on one construct or group of constructs derived from one culture" (p. 67). This design clearly lends itself to the support of the deficit hypothesis. Furthermore,

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Sue criticizes this design on the basis of the limited amount of information that can be acquired from taking only one reference point in making conclusions about a group under study, eliminating any broader cultural context as providing explanatory variables. In the area of physically abusive parent-child relationships, a practical example of point research would be to study one group of physically abusive parents, derive a hypothesis about the rigid and authoritarian parenting styles that contribute to their abusive behavior, then assess the rigidity and authoritarianism of abusive parents from another ethnic group.

Linear research refers to a sequence of studies "aimed at systematically testing the set of hypotheses predicted by the theory underlying the single construct of interest" (p. 67). The linear research model utilizes two or more points of reference on which to compare cultural groups. However, the construct is still developed from a single perspective which is assumed to be normative or universal. In the example used above, linear research might examine the constructs of authoritarian parenting, child compliance, and family control to understand cultural differences in physically abusive parenting. This approach may provide greater information about the parenting styles of ethnic groups, but still clings to concepts of parenting and parent-child relationships that derive from the perspective of one (usually the dominant) cultural group.

Sue (1991) argues that research must "develop separate but interrelated ways of conceptualizing the behavioral phenomenon of interest, one based on a Western conceptualization, the other reflecting an ethnic minority interpretation" (p. 68). The third approach, a *parallel* research design, consists of utilizing two linear strategies which are developed from alternative cultural viewpoints. Using this design entails generating constructs of parent-child relations from observations and measures acquired from parents and children belonging to each specific cultural group. To return to our example, constructs such as authoritarian parenting style, child compliance, and family control may be relevant to one cultural group; may be relevant in a second, but in a different form; and may not be relevant at all in a third.

Differences between cultural groups may play an important part in understanding many phenomena. When research comparing cultural groups is undertaken, however, researchers should be scrupulous about designing parallel studies that avoid the deficit hypothesis and use constructs generated from within the context of the different cultural groups they are comparing. Clearly, researchers should never interpret results as evidence that one group is better or worse than another. Researchers should also ensure that other variables within and between samples are controlled (Wyatt, 1994). For example, educational or economic factors can confound results presumed to derive from cultural differences (Wyatt, 1991).

We suggest that investigators attempt to design studies as well which utilize an intra-ethnic perspective, rather than making comparisons between ethnic groups. The intra-ethnic approach acknowledges that there is as much or more variation within ethnic groups as there is between ethnic groups, and encourages researchers to discuss and explain their findings from within the context of the culture. Furthermore, research is desirable that focuses on group strengths and competencies, rather than on problems or weaknesses. For example, rather than examining cultural family factors which predispose a child to be victimized (e.g., low SES, single-parent family, parental history of victimization), it may be more valuable to identify factors which appear to protect children (e.g., extended social and family contacts, participation in church-based activities).

Subject recruitment

One of the more difficult aspects of conducting clinical research with people of color is recruiting subjects. Often, cultural groups are not familiar with traditional scientific methods of subject recruitment and/or participation in a research project. They may not have an understanding of recruitment strategies and/or they may not value strategies commonly used by clinical researchers (e.g., telephone surveys, door-to-door community interviews, and advertisements in newspapers). Requests to participate may be viewed with suspicion, as not relevant to their daily lives, or as a possible threat or source of danger (Sue & Sue, 1972). Additionally, subjects may view a researcher who inquires about personal and private family matters as offensively intrusive, especially when the topic of investigation involves strongly culture-bound issues such as parent-child relationships, the use of physical punishment, discipline, family violence, and sexual behaviors and beliefs. To overcome some of these problems, it may be important to employ alternative strategies to contact and acquire ethnic minority research subjects. Unfortunately, such strategies often require extensive efforts on the part of researchers, which typically translates into the need for supplemental sources of research funding.

A fundamental requirement of this process is for researchers to leave the confines of their laboratories and universities, and "step into" the community they are seeking to understand. Researchers must develop thorough familiarity with the commu-

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nity and culture they wish to investigate, and must acquire some level of permission and acceptance by the community As suggested above, involving the community—for example, by developing a collaborative community board or organization—can be a very important part of the process. Researchers might contact the following groups:

- churches and medical clinics in agricultural areas to recruit migrant farmworkers

- community-based family support, political, and health organizations.

- neighborhood churches to recruit inner city families.

- organizations designed to support new immigrants

Rogler and Cortes (1993) suggest utilizing a culture's traditional institutions (e.g., street-front churches, stores dispensing curative herbs, neighborhood curanderos) as a means of acquiring a better understanding of mental health help-seeking pathways

Data collection

Research instruments that have been standardized on samples from the dominant culture are of limited usefulness in collecting data on people from other cultural groups. Only recently have differences in culture, language, and social status been examined as possible factors of ethnic minority group performance on these instruments. With this awareness, researchers have given increasing attention to the degree of cultural bias in standardized tests and to the development of tests which are more responsive and appropriate for people of color (Helms, 1992; Miller-Jones, 1989).

There is not a standard or stable set of procedures for conducting clinical research with people of color. In discussing the process of conducting culturally sensitive mental health research, Rogler (1989) asserts that, "In general, research is made culturally sensitive through a continuing and open-ended series of substantive and methodological insertions and adaptations designed to mesh the process of inquiry with the cultural characteristics of the group being studied" (296). In practice, this means viewing culturally sensitive research as a process which includes extensive field testing of measures and procedures, pretesting and pilot data, translating and "back-translating" instruments. Cauce and Gonzales (1993) suggest that research with people of color "should move beyond the examination of status or categorical variables and concentrate on the processes and transactions between individuals and their environment" (1993, 8). This may mean a move away from traditional "paper and pencil" methods of assess-

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ment and toward methods which respond to hypotheses related to a richer view of individuals within their environments (e.g., clinical interviewing, video-recording, interactions, and recording observations in the field)

Aside from fundamental problems with language and the inappropriateness of administering standardized measures to people of color (Bass, Wyatt, & Powell, 1982; Cole, 1981), the process of collecting information for later analyses may not be valued by some cultures. That is, some cultural groups may engage in patterns of communication which do not perceive written questions and inquiries as meaningful to their lives and therefore may not respond accurately. In a similar manner, there may be cultural prohibitions in discussing certain family practices (e.g., child-rearing, discipline) with individuals outside of the family or outside a circle of close family friends (National Research Council, 1993). Focus groups from the community under study can be very helpful in developing appropriate instruments and methods for data collection.

Because of the difficulty in acquiring sensitive personal data from some people of color, an ideal method of data collection may be clinical interviews and/or observation of subjects in a familiar environment. Conducting clinical interviews is not without its problems, however. Interviewers must be extensively trained about the community into which they will be entering, able to administer interview protocols reliably, and fluent in the language of their subjects. When family or parent-child interviews are needed, interviewers may need to be bi-lingual, as parents may be more comfortable speaking their native language, while their children may be more comfortable speaking English. Because the disclosure of violence-related behaviors and values is highly sensitive, researchers must facilitate interviewer-subject rapport (i.e., develop trust, comfort, and an ease of communication in the interview setting). The use of ethnically similar interviewers may substantially enhance the subject's willingness and ability to discuss family and violence-related behaviors and values.

Interpretation of data

Researchers who have developed their investigation from a perspective which acknowledges the role and contribution of cultural variables will give substantial attention to the operation of these variables when they analyze and interpret data. In addition to identifying a given behavior and recording its frequency, researchers must examine its cultural meaning. Adopting a singular perspective in interpreting data is likely to lead to misinterpretation. In issues of family violence, the intention and motivation of specific behaviors, when interacting with culturally-derived values, raise complex issues for both clinicians (Chioto, Tilden, Schmidt, &

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Urquiza, in press) and researchers. Landrine et al. (1992) suggest a two-fold methodology based on the distinction between etic (i.e., the researcher's outsider's perspective of the subject) and emic (i.e., the research participant's insider's perspective of the description and meaning of their behavior). Etic approaches to data interpretation rely on traditional empirical research tools such as operationalizing variables, searching for reliable instruments, and quantifying relationships between variables of interest. In contrast, emic approaches employ more qualitative methods, such as open-ended questions and semi-structured clinical interviews. The intent of this suggestion is not to challenge the validity of empirical research, but rather to place a greater emphasis on cultural variables such as spirituality, values about parenting, and beliefs about sexuality, which may be important in addressing child maltreatment-related clinical issues. Emic approaches allow greater opportunity for data interpretations to be framed from within the culture – i.e., by the cultural group under investigation–rather than solely from without. A two-fold methodology recognizes that behaviors and viewpoints different from those of the culture under investigation are a valuable source of interpretation.

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Conclusion

We have attempted to provide preliminary information which will assist readers to be more informed in reviewing research involving people of color. Furthermore, we have highlighted issues that require attention for future family violence research with ethnic minority groups. The revisions in methodology we have outlined here require adjustments in practice and outlook that many researchers will find difficult to accomplish. However, we believe that current research methodology in the field of family violence can serve to support racist and class-biased viewpoints in our society. In order to ensure the safety of all children and to be relevant to diverse cultural groups, family violence research methodology requires substantial revision.

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■ MEMBER REVIEW OF GUIDELINES INVITED

This mailing of The APSAC Advisor contains three special inserts: (1) Draft Guidelines for Descriptive Terminology in Child Sexual Abuse, (2) Draft Guidelines for Psychosocial Evaluation of Suspected Psychological Maltreatment of Children and Adolescents, and (3) additional information about APSAC's Third National Colloquium, to be held next June in Tucson. Your input on the guidelines (and your attendance at the Colloquium!) is important. If you don't find these inserts, please call the office at 312-554-0166. We'll be happy to mail them to you.