Published in final edited form as:

J Prim Prev. 2015 February ; 36(1): 65–70. doi:10.1007/s10935-014-0376-x.

Parenting in 2 Worlds: Pilot Results from a Culturally Adapted Parenting Program for Urban American Indians

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Abstract

This study reports the implementation and feasibility of a culturally adapted parenting curriculum, *Parenting in 2 Worlds (P2W)*, which we designed specifically for urban American Indian families by means of community-based participatory research and then pilot tested in three Arizona cities. Data come from matched pre- and post-test surveys completed in 2012 by 75 American Indian parents of adolescents aged 10–17 who participated in the pilot version of *P2W*. *P2W* is a 10-workshop program administered twice a week for five weeks by trained American Indian community facilitators. Parents completed pretest surveys during Workshop 1 and post-test surveys five weeks later during Workshop 10. Paired *t* tests assessed changes in parenting outcomes, cultural identity, and child anti-social behavior. Changes from pre- to post-test demonstrated statistically significant improvements in several parenting outcomes (discipline, involvement, self-agency, and supervision), a strengthened sense of ethnic and cultural identity and Native spirituality, and a decrease in the child's anti-social behavior. These results, which show significant if preliminary improvements in parenting skills and family functioning, suggest the feasibility of implementing a culturally grounded parenting intervention for urban American Indian parents.

Keywords

Parenting; Intervention; Urban American Indians; Community-based participatory research

The large health disparities faced by the majority (60%) of American Indians (AIs) living off reservation lands and in urban areas¹ (Norris, Vines, & Hoeffel, 2012) are shaped by complex family, social and cultural disruptions related to tribal-to-urban migration. Widely dispersed across neighborhoods and with diverse tribal backgrounds, urban AI families face challenges in maintaining connections to their tribal traditions and practices (Champagne, 1999). Researchers and practitioners have paid relatively little attention to this growing

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

¹The US Census definition of "urban" areas are places with 50,000 or more people (www.census.gov/geo/reference/urban-rural.html).

population, leading to gaps in knowledge about the cultural and other protective factors that help urban AI families prevent youth substance use and other problem behaviors. Research on the development of culturally grounded interventions specifically for urban AI families is scarce.

This article presents the initial pilot results from *Parenting in 2 Worlds (P2W)*, a culturally-based family-centered parenting program that aims to strengthen parenting practices, promote protective factors, and provide urban AI parents with strategies for preventing adolescent substance use and risky sexual behavior. *P2W* is guided by eco-developmental theory (Coatsworth, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2002; Szapocznik & Coatsworth, 1999). The theory posits that effective family functioning (Fraser, Galinsky & Richman, 1999) and parenting practices (Ackard, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, & Perry, 2006; Gorman-Smith, Tolan, & Henry, 2000) are key means of preventing adolescent substance use and other problem behaviors. In partnership with three non-profit urban Indian centers, community-based participatory research approaches guided the cultural adaptation of the *P2W* curriculum (Castro, Berrera, & Martinez, 2004). Community partners and residents collaborated and enhanced all aspects of the research project including the conception, recruitment, implementation, and interpretations of the findings (De Koning & Martin, 1996; Israel et al., 2010). A vital component of this process was that the three Indian centers had already decided to collaboratively begin offering parenting programs for their constituents and approached the university researchers to help design the adaptation and testing of a new curriculum that specifically targeted urban American Indian families.

In the first phase of adaptation, urban AI parents participated in a minimally modified version of *Familias: Preparando la Nueva Generación (FPNG)*, an evidence-based parenting curriculum for Latino parents (see Marsiglia et al., 2013; Williams et al., 2012), and the participants, facilitators, and workshop observers provided quantitative and qualitative data concerning the applicability, usefulness, and cultural competency of *FPNG* as delivered to urban American Indian families. The research team selected *FPNG* because it steered away from a “disease model” of substance use and reflected the ecological risk and resiliency factors and concepts considered important by community partners and researchers, including how to help children navigate a healthy pathway through multiple cultural environments. Urban AI professionals and the *FPNG* curriculum designers drew on these data to identify linguistic and cultural changes needed in order to make the curriculum more appropriate for urban AI families (Castro et al., 2004). To ensure resonance across urban AIs with different tribal backgrounds and migration histories, the cultural adaptation of *P2W* incorporated 10 inter-tribal cultural elements (e.g. spirituality, storytelling, Clans or Bands) previously established as common across multiple and diverse tribes (see Jumper-Reeves et al., 2014). Thus, the culturally grounded adaptation of *P2W* incorporated AI cultural values, AI worldviews on parenting, and family challenges specific to the AI urban experience. Designed to be flexible, the *P2W* curriculum allows all families to relate their own tribal and cultural practices and beliefs to the curriculum content. Curriculum lessons invite the participants to engage with and share their experiences of Native cultural values relating to parenting and healthy family functioning, rather than specify what those values are or should be.

The *P2W* pilot followed a 10-workshop, 5-week manualized curriculum that included workshops on (1) identifying your family's traditions, norms, and values; (2) communicating with your child; and (3) guiding your child's behavior effectively. Trained community-based urban AI facilitators delivered the curriculum, leading two workshops per week, using various facilitation strategies: informational discussions, individual and small group activities, videos, role-plays, games, scenarios, group presentations, activity sheets, and home activities. The purpose of this study was to test whether urban AI parents participating in the pilot version of *P2W* (a) increased their parenting skills, (b) increased their AI cultural identity, and (c) perceived that youth anti-social behavior decreased.

Methods

The *P2W* pilot test occurred simultaneously in three urban AI communities in Arizona during spring 2012, using identical recruitment, survey administration, and approved human subjects protection procedures. The AI presence in the communities varied, from under 3% of Phoenix and Tucson to over 11% of the Flagstaff population. The three collaborating urban Indian centers recruited urban AI parents for the study. For two of the communities, the majority of recruited parents were affiliated with tribes from nearby reservation communities, while the third site represented a greater diversity of tribal affiliations. Eligible parents self-identified as AI, lived in the Phoenix, Tucson, or Flagstaff urban areas, and were either a parent or guardian of an AI child between the ages of 10–17. Trained AI community facilitators and co-facilitators, one pair in each community, delivered the workshops and carried out data collection through self-administered written questionnaires. Pre-test surveys occurred during Workshop 1, and post-test surveys followed five weeks later during Workshop 10. Of the 92 parents completing pre-tests, 75 completed the post-test. We found no significant differences between those who did and did not complete the post-test on pre-test measures of demographic characteristics or outcomes. Participants and facilitators also reported satisfaction and fidelity data. Participants completed reaction/reflection forms after each of the 10 workshops (757 forms completed) and indicated high levels of satisfaction with *P2W* ($M=3.54$ out of 4). Using a standardized form and protocol, trained community members rated facilitator fidelity for every workshop in all three urban communities. These data indicated that the curriculum was delivered as designed 93% of the time.

Measures

Parenting Skills—Five scales measured parenting changes: (1) Difficulties with Discipline (Coleman & Karraker, 2000), gauging parents' trouble with discipline; (2) Parental Involvement (Gorman-Smith, Tolan, Zelli, & Huesmann, 1996), measuring how often the parents talked with their child; (3) Parental Self-Agency (Dumka, Soterzinger, Jackson, & Roosa, 1996), assessing confidence in parenting ability; (4) Parental Supervision of Curfew (Loeber, Farrington, Stouthamer-Loeber, & van Kammen, 1998), evaluating whether the child has a set curfew; and (5) Positive Parenting Practices (Gorman-Smith, Tolan, & Henry, 2000), measuring how often the parent gave praise, affection, and time.

Cultural Identity—Four scales assessed changes in cultural identity: (1) Ethnic Identity Commitment and Attachment (Phinney, 1992), sense of belonging and attachment to an AI community; (2) Ethnic Identity Exploration (Phinney, 1992), involvement in AI traditions and customs; (3) American Indian Way of Life (Moran, Fleming, Somervell, & Manson, 1999), living by or following the AI way of life; and (4) Spirituality (Kulis, Hodge, Ayers, Brown, & Marsiglia, 2012), the importance of and degree of participation in AI spiritual activities.

Perception of Youth's Anti-social Behavior—Parents also indicated how frequently in the past 30 days they thought their youth engaged in anti-social behavior including swearing, breaking rules, lying, and hanging out with others who get in trouble (Achenback & Rescorla, 2001).

Analysis strategy

Using SPSS 20, paired *t* tests of mean differences from pre-test (T1) to post-test (T2) assessed statistically significant changes in outcomes, aggregated across the three sites.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the aggregated sample. More parents lived in Tucson (45.7%) than in Phoenix (28.3%) or Flagstaff (26.1%). The mean age of the parents was 39 (range: 22–62) and a majority were female (69%). They were typically single parents, either never married and not cohabitating (43%) or not living with their current or former spouse (24%), rather than living with a spouse (19%) or unmarried partner (15%). The typical parent had a high school education or less (58%), and reported annual household incomes under \$10,000 (60%). On average, parents had lived in the urban area for 16 years, in a household of 4.6 people. Parents' tribal backgrounds were diverse. Of those listing a single tribal heritage, the most common ancestry was Navajo (37%), Tohono O'odham (19%), and Pascua Yaqui (12%). Nearly all—over 95%—of the parents had family members currently living on a reservation. A large majority of the parents had lived on a reservation (85%) at some time, including for most of their childhood (67%).

Table 2 presents the Cronbach's alpha for all scales, their mean values at T1 and T2, and paired sample *t* tests for changes at post-test after completing the *P2W* pilot curriculum. Four of the five scales measuring parenting skills had good internal consistency, with alphas above or close to .80 at both T1 and T2, but Parental Involvement was less internally consistent, especially at T2. Difficulties with Discipline was negatively worded so a negative *t* test indicates less difficulty at T2. Four of the five parenting measures revealed significant changes in the desired direction over time, including Difficulties with Discipline, $t(69)=-2.83, p=.006$, Parental Involvement, $t(73)=2.97, p=.004$, Parental Self-Agency, $t(71)=4.58, p<.001$, and Parental Supervision-Curfew, $t(72)=2.11, p<.038$.

The four scales measuring cultural identity had alphas at both time points above the desired level of .80, indicating good reliability. Ethnic Identity Commitment and Attachment, $t(73)=2.32, p=.023$, Ethnic Identity Exploration, $t(73)=2.44, p=.017$, following the Indian

Way of Life, $t(74)=2.03$, $p=.046$, and Spirituality, $t(73)=2.51$, $p=.014$, all showed statistically significant increases from T1 to T2 in the desired direction.

Finally, parents reported perceiving a significant decrease in occurrences of their child's anti-social behavior, $t(62)=-3.22$, $p=.002$.

Discussion

This paper examined the pilot results of a parenting curriculum culturally adapted for AI families living in the urban environment and the challenges and stressors they face living off reservation lands. The results of the pilot test of *Parenting in 2 Worlds (P2W)*, an AI-specific, AI-driven, and AI-based parenting curriculum, support the feasibility of adapting and implementing a parenting intervention targeting urban AI parents. Overall, parents who participated in the pilot study of *P2W* reported significant increases in parenting skills and Native cultural identity, and fewer instances of anti-social behaviors by their adolescent or pre-adolescent child. These findings provide preliminary evidence that a curriculum tailored to resonate culturally with urban AI families can strengthen family functioning and other parenting skills.

P2W showed results in the areas specifically targeted by the curriculum including enhancing family functioning and parenting practices, which have been shown to promote wellbeing in families (Fraser, Galinsky, & Richman, 1999) and to be an effective way to change youth behavior (Padilla-Walker, Nelson, Madsen, & Barry, 2008). This is reflected in the significant decrease in anti-social behavior (e.g. less swearing, breaking rules, lying, cheating, and hanging out with others that get into trouble) that parents perceived in their adolescent. Additionally, urban AI parents reported significant improvement in their cultural identification. Although the curriculum is not explicitly designed to increase cultural identification, it does incorporate AI cultural values, communication styles, and customs related to parenting, which have previously been linked to positive outcomes including greater resilience (LaFromboise, Hoyt, Oliver, & Whitbeck, 2006) and stronger anti-drug attitudes and norms (Kulis et al., 2012).

Because this is a pilot test of *P2W*, there was no comparison group. It is possible that a more generic and less culturally tailored parenting program might produce similar changes in parenting skills and other outcomes. Additionally, parents participating in *P2W* were self-selected; if only highly motivated parents attended the parenting workshops, results may not be generalized reliably to other urban AI parents. Future studies should examine these parenting changes through a randomized controlled efficacy trial, providing enough detail on the research process to facilitate duplication. If the positive results we report were replicated, a follow-up effectiveness trial would be needed to shed light on the factors that might ensure the sustainability of the intervention in different urban AI communities. While long-term causal and generalizable conclusions cannot yet be made, it appears that because the program was designed for urban AI parents, *P2W* holds promise as a curriculum that can positively impact parenting and family functioning for urban AI families.

Engaging urban AI families in a culturally-grounded, culturally-tailored parenting curriculum would seem to be a very good investment. By building upon the protective factors unique to AI families living in an urban environment, it may strengthen parenting skills, family functioning, cultural identity, and healthy youth behavior.

Acknowledgements

Funding for this research was supported in part by the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities of the National Institutes of Health, award 1 R01 MD 006110 (S. Kulis, P.I.). The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the views or policies of the NIMHD, the NIH, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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Table 1Sample Descriptive Statistics (*N*=75)

	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Urban Community			
Flagstaff	24.0		
Phoenix	29.3		
Tucson	46.7		
Gender			
Male	30.7		
Female	69.3		
American Indian Tribe			
Navajo	37.3		
Tohono O'odham	18.7		
Pascua Yaqui	12.0		
Apache, Gila River, or Hopi	8.0		
Other tribe, unspecified	2.7		
Multiple tribes	20.0		
Marital Status			
Married and living with spouse	18.7		
Married but not living with spouse	14.7		
Not married but living partner	14.7		
Widowed or divorced	9.3		
Single, never married	42.7		
Education			
Less than a high school degree	29.7		
High school diploma or GED	28.4		
Technical/trade school	10.8		
Community college	13.5		
4 year college degree	17.5		
Annual Household Income			
Less than \$10,000	60.3		
\$10,000–\$29,999	21.9		
\$30,000 or more	17.8		
Relatives currently living on a reservation			
Mother	41.9		
Father	40.5		
Siblings	44.6		
Grandparent(s)	43.2		
Other extended family (aunts, uncles, cousins)	79.7		
No relatives on reservation	5.4		
Ever lived on a Reservation (Yes)	83.8		
Lived on Reservation Most of Childhood (Yes)	66.2		

	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Years in Urban Area		16.7	15.3
Age		39.0	8.7
Household Members		4.6	1.9

Note. 75 participants of 92 completed both pre- and post-test surveys.

Table 2

Paired Sample *t* Tests for Changes in Parenting, Identity and Youth Outcomes

	α^a	α^b	$M(SE)^a$	$M(SE)^b$	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Parenting							
Difficulties with Discipline	0.78	0.83	2.93 (.12)	2.63 (.11)	-2.83	69	**
Parental Involvement	0.74	0.67	4.01 (.11)	4.30 (.10)	2.97	73	**
Parental Self-Agency	0.76	0.82	3.71 (.06)	3.93 (.06)	4.58	71	***
Parental Supervision-Curfew	0.74	0.82	4.50 (.09)	4.71 (.06)	2.11	72	*
Positive Parenting Practices	0.84	0.89	4.23 (.09)	4.31 (.09)	0.96	70	0.343
Cultural Identity							
Ethnic Identity Commitment and Attachment	0.86	0.80	3.40 (.07)	3.54 (.05)	2.32	73	*
Ethnic Identity Exploration	0.83	0.74	3.13 (.08)	3.30 (.06)	2.44	73	*
Indian Way of Life	0.86	0.87	3.08 (.09)	3.20 (.08)	2.03	74	*
Spirituality	0.77	0.82	3.19 (.09)	3.36 (.08)	2.51	73	*
Perception of Youth's Behavior							
Anti-Social Behavior	0.82	0.75	2.04 (.10)	1.83 (.10)	-3.22	62	**

^aRepresents Time 1 (Pre-test)

^bRepresents Time 2 (Post-test)

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.