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A Review of Literature on the Involvement of Children from Indigenous Communities in Anglo Child Welfare Systems: 1973-2018

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Résumé de l'article

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Abstract

A series of recent legal and policy developments in Canada have potential to contribute to reconciliation efforts, particularly related to the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in child welfare systems. However, systematic collection, analysis, and synthesis of research knowledge—particularly, research that is locally grounded—on Indigenous child welfare involvement is notably missing from these efforts. With the aim of collating existing research knowledge on this topic, this scoping review of literature includes a broad swath of literature spanning decades (1973-2018) and countries with similar settler colonial histories (Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand). Our search yielded 881 unique research publications. There was an increase in the number of publications over time in all four countries and a trend toward more empirical literature than non-empirical literature. We found that a plurality of publications focused on programs and services ($n = 191$), and policy or legal ($n = 168$) themes. While our review highlights a large base of literature on Indigenous child welfare involvement, it also illustrates the limits of the academic literature in representing the knowledge and experience of Indigenous Peoples and the need for more comprehensive synthesis and broader dissemination of the research related to Indigenous child welfare. These limitations restrict the extent to which existing research can inform the meaningful development of Indigenous child welfare policy in Canada. Due to these gaps, we advocate sustained investment in efforts to synthesize diverse sources of knowledge, support for open source publications, and structural support for Indigenous control of knowledge collection and dissemination regarding policy development related to their communities.

Keywords

Child welfare research, child welfare system, settler colonial history, overrepresentation, epistemology, Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand

A Review of Literature on the Involvement of Children from Indigenous Communities in Anglo Child Welfare Systems: 1973-2018

In Canada, there are new possibilities for research to support policy development in order to redress entrenched patterns of overrepresentation of Indigenous children in child welfare systems. The context of Indigenous child welfare in Canada is rapidly evolving due to recent legal decisions, legislative changes, and growing public attention to intergenerational harm resulting from settler colonial actions. Specifically, a series of decisions[1] by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal have led to rapid funding increases for historically underfunded First Nations child welfare agencies, although these funding shifts are limited in their reach and inclusion of non-First Nations Indigenous communities.[2] New federal Canadian child welfare legislation, passed in June 2019, creates potential for recognition of Indigenous self-determination in child welfare (Bill C-92, 2019). There has been an increase in public discussion of reconciliation, most notably as a result of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), which heard testimony from hundreds of Indigenous people who were removed from their families and placed in residential schools where they were often violently abused and neglected. In the TRC's (2015) Calls to Action, the first five recommendations relate to Indigenous child welfare reforms. These recent developments may lead to tangible shifts in policy and practice for Indigenous child welfare involvement in Canada.

However, the base of existing research that could inform the development of new programs and policies is still limited due to several structural realities. First, the lack of a federalized child protection system in Canada means that child welfare data and policy are decentralized, resulting in a fragmented knowledge base. In Canada, underinvestment in child welfare data and data related to Indigenous children in particular is also an important barrier to understanding Indigenous involvement in child welfare systems. Whereas the U.S. has multiple, regular, national sources of child welfare data,[3] Canada has no comprehensive federal-level child welfare database. Further, 11 years have passed between national-level child welfare studies in Canada.[4] In addition, provincial and territorial administrative data sometimes still excludes on-reserve First Nation children, and complementary datasets focused on child health and wellbeing have also excluded on-reserve populations (de la Sablonnière-Griffin et al., 2016; Jones & Sinha, 2015). Finally, to our knowledge, there has been no systematic effort to compile, analyze, and synthesize Indigenous child welfare research produced at the local (community or agency) level.

Examination of the parallel histories across similar settler colonial settings may be relevant to the

[1] See *First Nations Child and Family Caring Society and Assembly of First Nations v. Attorney General of Canada*, 2016, CHRT 2; 2016, CHRT 10; 2016, CHRT 16; 2017, CHRT 7; 2017, CHRT 14; 2018, CHRT 4; 2019, CHRT 7; 2019, CHRT 39.

[2] First Nations are the largest group of federally recognized Indigenous Peoples in Canada, with Inuit and Métis being the others.

[3] These include the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN), which houses and distributes national-level datasets including the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), the National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS), the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW), the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), and the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD; National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2020).

[4] The last Canadian Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS), a survey of select agencies, took place in 2008 and data collection for a subsequent study began in 2019 (Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal, n.d.).

development of policy supporting Indigenous self-determination in Canada. Settler colonial histories in Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand have systematically disrupted traditional ways of life, community, spiritual practices, and family structures for Indigenous Peoples. This pattern has been described as cultural genocide (Bintarsari, 2018; Rensink, 2011; Reyhner & Singh, 2010; TRC, 2015). In particular, colonial school systems in these countries grew out of missionary efforts to convert and "civilize" Indigenous Peoples: in Canada, the U.S., Australia, and New Zealand, State school systems were key mechanisms of assimilating Indigenous children into settler society (Adams, 1995; Milloy, 2017; Trafzer et al., 2006; van Krieken, 1999a, 1999b).

These settler colonial institutions implemented assimilation policies designed to separate children from their languages, spiritual and land-based practices, and community and familial networks. Since the mid-20th century, child welfare systems in these four countries have increased State involvement in the lives of Indigenous families. These systems have functioned to extend the impact of settler colonial intervention in Indigenous families, and it has had disproportionate impacts on Indigenous communities (Cram et al., 2015; Landertinger, 2016; Tilbury, 2009; White, 2017). Specifically, separation of Indigenous children from their families, and often from their communities, through child welfare intervention is a much more frequent occurrence than for non-Indigenous children in each of these countries (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2020; Children's Commissioner, 2016; Ministry of Social Development, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2018; Wildeman & Emanuel, 2014). The removal of children by the child welfare system has, in many ways, perpetuated the destruction of Indigenous community ties and local decision-making.

There are several potential resources that may help elucidate the state of knowledge on Indigenous children and child welfare. Academic research from countries with a shared history of colonization and Indigenous child removal represents one source. In recent years, there have been several notable efforts to compile and synthesize elements of the existing literature on Indigenous child welfare (e.g., Haight et al., 2018; di Tomasso & de Finney, 2015a, 2015b; Fiolet et al., 2019; Gatwiri et al., 2019; Macvean et al., 2017; Ritland et al., 2020). Each of these reviews makes an important contribution to the existing knowledge base. However, they have all been relatively limited in the number of studies they examined and in the scope of the topics and literature considered, which may be an artifact of the strict selection criteria applied in reviews to distill them to the most rigorous research. While these reviews comment on the inadequacy of existing literature in reflecting the varied lived experiences of Indigenous children, families, and communities, they may be missing existing literature that does contain crucial insights important for understanding Indigenous involvement in child welfare systems.

The task remains to create systematic links among the various forms of knowledge related to Indigenous children and families and broader research literature. This article is an attempt to take stock of existing literature on Indigenous child welfare involvement in Canada and in other comparable settler colonial settings over the past several decades. While we are writing from North America, we are interested in contexts similar to the U.S. and Canada and extend our analysis to Australia and New Zealand accordingly. We take a broad approach to identifying themes in the existing literature and suggest areas in which further synthesis may be warranted and useful. In particular, we examine the nature of literature prioritized in academic research spaces and the value assigned to empirical literature. We also aim to analyze and acknowledge what is being left out when mainstream standards around systematic review are applied to this field (e.g., all the literature produced by and with Indigenous communities but not

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published in mainstream academic journals). As a group of non-Indigenous scholars, we attempt to illustrate what is accessible when searching from within a Western, academic epistemological paradigm while acknowledging the great extent to which important sources of knowledge are deprioritized or missed entirely when doing so. We hope that the synthesis and analysis presented here will support ongoing work by Indigenous communities and scholars in order to move beyond a Western paradigm and highlight existing and new sources of knowledge that are grounded in Indigenous perspectives and experiences.

Settler Colonial Legacies and State-Sponsored Indigenous Child Welfare Involvement

Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand are bound by similar histories of settler colonial policies and practices that have harmed Indigenous children, families, and communities. Indigenous Peoples continue to deal with the traumas of forced child removal and inappropriate child welfare service provisions, resulting in the overrepresentation of Indigenous children across child welfare systems (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2020; Children's Commissioner, 2016; Ministry of Social Development, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2018; Wildeman & Emanuel, 2014). Histories of settler colonial intervention that systematically separate and disrupt Indigenous families and communities in these countries are well documented (Buti, 2002; Jacobs, 2006; Milloy, 2017; Simon & Smith, 2001). Structural legacies of poverty and intergenerational trauma—imposed by current and historical settler colonial policies and practices resulting in losses of land, culturally based systems of knowledge and care, and community ties—shape a context in which Indigenous children today are overrepresented in child welfare systems (Bombay et al., 2013; Brittain & Blackstock, 2015; Johnston, 1983; Milloy, 2017; Navia et al., 2018). In recent decades, a transition toward some Indigenous communities taking over jurisdiction of child welfare systems, along with some political endorsement of increased Indigenous self-determination, has accompanied shifts in both recognition of these traumatic histories and possibilities for redressing them (Libesman, 2014; MacDonald & Levasseur, 2014; Rae, 2009). A brief overview of the strikingly similar colonial histories and ongoing child welfare involvement of Indigenous children in these countries demonstrates the importance of better understanding how these patterns are documented, by whom, and for what purposes.

Beginning in the 19th century, State-sponsored education systems served to assimilate Indigenous Peoples into colonial societies. The residential school system in Canada, boarding schools in the U.S., missions in Australia, and Native schools in New Zealand[5] resulted in hundreds of thousands of children losing ties with their culture, language, land, and communities. From the mid-1800s to well into the 20th century, Native American children were systematically forced into residential schools off reserve in the United States. In 1973 alone, 60,000 Native American children were enrolled in residential schools. In Canada, an estimated 150,000 Indigenous children attended residential schools (TRC, 2015). In Australia, poor record keeping makes it impossible to know the exact number of children removed (Read, 2006), but one estimate is that at least 100,000 Aboriginal children were removed from their

[5] In New Zealand, the structure of the schools was different: There were not as many boarding schools, settler and Indigenous children were often in schools together, and Indigenous adults sometimes had a role in the schools (see for example May et al., 2014; Smith, 2009). However, infant schools in New Zealand played a predominant role in assimilation, with very young children being "the best soil for cultivation," as one 19th century missionary wrote (May et al., 2014, p. 197).

families to attend residential schools between the late 1800s and the 1960s (e.g., Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC], 1997) under the guise of child protection by the State. In New Zealand, schools were established to "educate" Māori children. The number of Māori children who attended is unclear and, though the schools were designed as instruments of assimilation, their spread has been described as both tempered by Māori resistance and facilitated through Māori participation (Simon & Smith, 2001; Smith, 2009). Violence, disease, abuse, and death have been well documented in residential schools in the U.S., Canada, and Australia (Jacobs, 2006; Milloy, 2017; TRC, 2015). The often-stated mission of these institutions was to destroy community and familial ties, traditional cultural practices, and Indigenous languages. For example, in Canada the explicit goal of residential schools was to "kill the Indian in the child" (TRC, 2015, p. 130).

In the second half of the 20th century, States continued to separate Indigenous children from their families, communities, and cultures, but the mechanism shifted from schools to child welfare systems (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1997; Halverson et al., 2002; Milloy, 2017; Timpson, 1995). Recent literature suggests this history of State-sponsored removal of Indigenous children from their homes precipitated the present overrepresentation in the child welfare system in the four countries we are considering here (Sinha et al., 2013; Tilbury, 2009). In Canada, the residential school system began to phase out in the 1950s and 1960s and, during the same period, provincial child welfare systems began operating on reserve. Thousands of children were placed in out-of-home care by child welfare systems, often due to poverty and cultural misunderstanding, resulting in what is called the Sixties Scoop (Johnston, 1983; TRC, 2015). In the U.S., there was a similar mid-century shift toward placing Indigenous children with foster and adoptive families. U.S. Senate hearings in 1974 demonstrated deep biases in social service workers in removing Native American children from their homes, largely for reasons of neglect (Subcommittee on Indian Affairs, 1974). In Australia, Aboriginal children removed from their homes—the Stolen Generations—were placed in foster homes or adopted by White families (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2018). Similarly, while a transition away from Native schools in New Zealand toward State-run child welfare systems began in the 1920s, throughout the mid-20th century Māori children were overrepresented in residential institutions (Dalley, 1998; Forbes & Stevanon, 2017; United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 2017).

Recent data from these countries indicate that Indigenous children continue to experience higher rates of involvement within child welfare systems than other children. In Canada, Indigenous children are less than 8% of the total child population but represent over 52% of the children in out-of-home care (Statistics Canada, 2018). In the United States, available data indicate that American Indian and Alaskan Native children represent less than 1% of all children but make up over 2% of out-of-home placements (National Indian Child Welfare Association, 2017). This disproportionality is compounded over time; it is estimated that more than 15% of Native American children, or 1 in 7, will enter foster care before they turn 18, in contrast to less than 6% of all children in the United States (Wildeman & Emanuel, 2014). In Australia, Indigenous children are less than 6% of the child population, yet represent 40% of the children in out-of-home care (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2020). Additionally, one longitudinal study showed that over half of all Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children had contact with the child welfare system (Delfabbro et al., 2010). Finally, in New Zealand, Māori children represent 25% of the child population, yet represent 55% of children in out-of-home child welfare placements (Children's Commissioner, 2016; Ministry of Social Development, 2017).

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The involvement of Indigenous children with child welfare systems is often driven by reports and investigations related to neglect. In Canada, cases involving child neglect are a primary driver of overrepresentation of Indigenous children and are linked to factors including poverty, poor housing, domestic violence, and substance use (Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013; Sinha et al., 2011). Conditions associated with neglect link back to colonial histories of displacement and violence. Resulting economic disparities, intergenerational trauma, and differences in worldview can increase both the perception of neglect[6] and situations of actual harm (Caldwell & Sinha, 2020; MacEachron & Gustavsson, 2005; Swift, 1995). In the United States, American Indian and Alaskan Native children are more likely to be involved with child welfare systems for reasons of neglect than were other groups, and they are the least likely to be involved for reasons of physical abuse (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2007). Similarly, in Australia, emotional abuse and child neglect were the most frequent primary types of abuse and neglect experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children between 2017 and 2018. The high rates of neglect are consistent with the disadvantaged socioeconomic conditions prevalent in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, such as overcrowding, unemployment, and limited access to services (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014). Available data from New Zealand indicate a divergence from the pattern in the other countries. Among Māori children, the number of out-of-home placements for reasons of neglect is lower than for other maltreatment types (Oranga Tamariki, 2019).[7]

Present-day policy and governance structures in Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand uniquely impact Indigenous families and children. In Canada, jurisdiction over Indigenous child welfare and family services is fraught with confusion between the federal and provincial governments,[8] and has led to denial and underfunding of services for First Nation children, which was found to be a human rights violation by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. In the United States, federal legislation regulates Indigenous child welfare systems through the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA, 1978), which transfers legislative, administrative, and judicial decision-making to Indigenous communities when an on-reserve child is apprehended in the child welfare system. In Australia, federal and state governments share jurisdiction over Indigenous child welfare affairs, though each state or territory is responsible for developing and implementing Indigenous legislation and providing services. As a consequence, jurisdictional differences in Indigenous child welfare provisions have generated service disparities between places of residency (Paul, 2016). New Zealand, which has full federal jurisdiction over child protection issues, continues to face criticism for failures in considering Māori culture and community in

[6] For example, when multiple caregivers are in one household, a parent may not need to be as attentive, which could be seen through a Western child welfare lens as supervisory neglect (see for example Neckoway et al., 2007).

[7] We were not able to locate data on overall child welfare cases in New Zealand, but the data on children in care indicate a lower level of neglect cases compared to the other countries we examined. The divergence between available data for New Zealand and the other countries merits further study.

[8] Typically, provincial governments hold jurisdiction over child welfare in Canada. However, through Section 35 of the Constitution Act (1982), the federal government has jurisdiction over Indigenous Rights and Treaty Rights.

child protection decisions.[9]

Systematically analyzing the variation in literature from across these four countries—which share similar settler colonial pasts but have divergent federal governance structures and policy realities—may be a valuable way to understand the variation related to Indigenous child welfare in each country. Similarities in governance structure across these four countries provide a foundation for cross-jurisdictional comparison of policies and practices impacting Indigenous families. However, there are important differences in each of these countries in terms of their approaches to balancing federal, state or provincial, and Indigenous governance to address the rights and unique needs of Indigenous children, families, and communities.

Given the comparable but uniquely situated histories, governance structures, and present-day patterns of removal of Indigenous children from their families in Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, the present scoping review gathers and analyzes available research on Indigenous involvement with child welfare systems in all four of these countries. We attempt to compile and examine research literature production over time and by critically examining the types and scope of literature, which arise (or are absent) from an academic search of literature. By synthesizing and comparing knowledge across and between jurisdictions, we hope to emphasize the potential for learning to both support implementation of new federal Indigenous child welfare policy in Canada and to inform further policy initiatives that improve outcomes for Indigenous families.

Methods

The following question guided this scoping review: "What is the state of literature on the topic of Indigenous child welfare involvement in Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand?" Our objective was to draw attention to the broad scope of existing research on Indigenous child welfare. We also sought to better understand trends in research focus and type, as well as the gaps in available knowledge.

Based on Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) scoping review model, which Levac et al. (2010) further developed, we undertook a process of identifying, charting, and summarizing existing research related to our research question. Multiple authors who have completed recent reviews of Indigenous child welfare or child welfare related literature (e.g., Fiolet et al., 2019; Gatwiri et al., 2019; Haight et al., 2018; Macvean et al., 2017) that are narrowly focused on empirical literature have noted the dearth of Indigenous voices and perspectives. Accordingly, we kept our inclusion parameters wide, purposely seeking to include studies that might be excluded if we applied selection criteria that focused narrowly on methodology or research design. Growing attention to Indigenous ways of knowing and research methodology are increasingly challenging classifications such as *empirical* and *non-empirical* that have long been central to the dominant, Western academic framework. Though we do use these terms in organizing our search results, we do so recognizing that they risk perpetuating a paradigm that may not reflect the worldviews of Indigenous families and children that are the focus of this literature.

[9] The Children, Young Persons and their Families Act (1989) articulated considerations of how child welfare decisions impact Indigenous children. However, its application has been limited due to oversight and funding concerns (Libesman, 2014).

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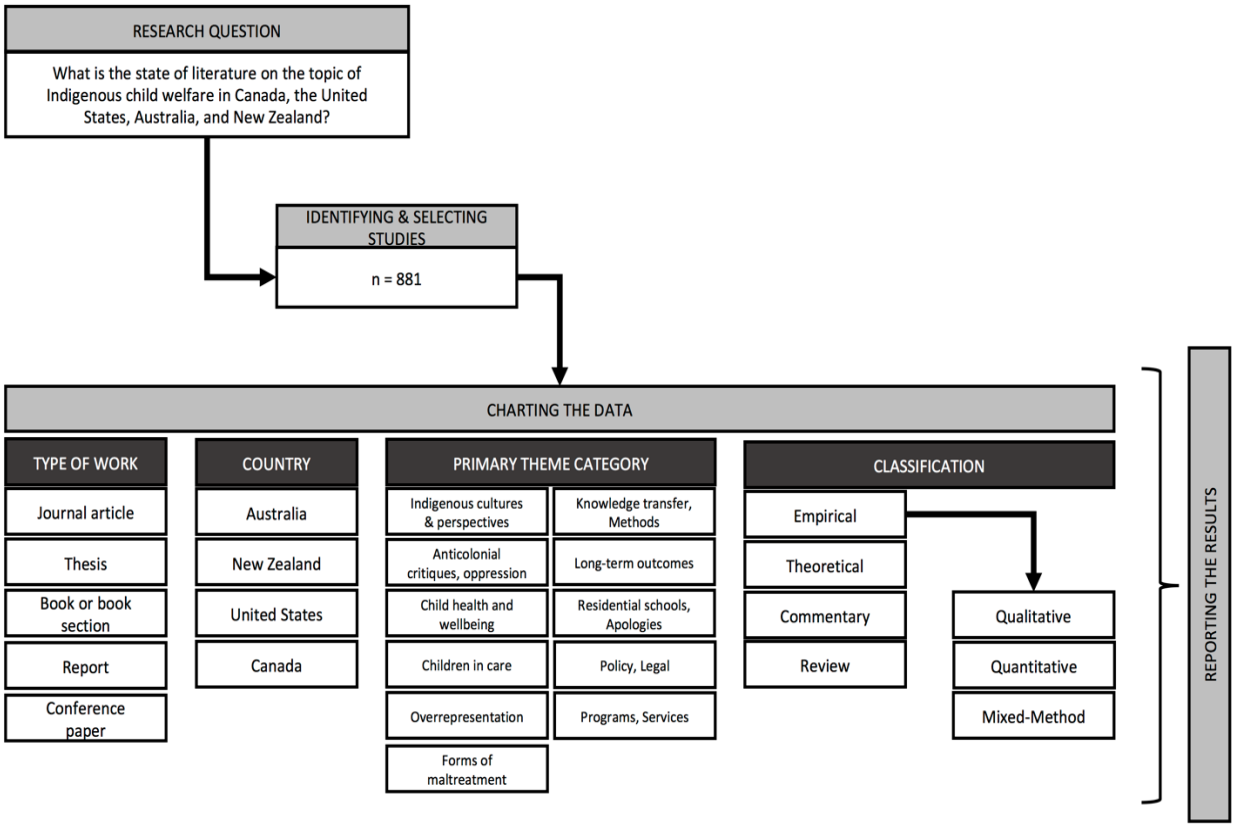
We limited our search to literature pieces published between 1973—the beginning of the period for which our electronic search yielded consistent, annual results—and 2018. The inclusion of several decades of literature was intended to allow for the examination of trends over time, and to span the period in which the disproportionate involvement of Indigenous children in all four countries emerged. Our scoping review process is outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Scoping Review Process



Our literature identification process involved searches in several social science electronic databases: ASSIA (Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts), MEDLINE, Social Service Abstracts, SocINDEX with Full Text, Social Work Abstracts, PsycINFO, and WorldCat (McGill University). We used two sets of keywords in our searches, summarized in Table 1. Our interest was in gathering the fullest possible set of literature produced over a long historical period; therefore, the first list included legacy search terms that may have been used in older sources but are now considered pejorative. The first and second sets of keywords were searched using the Boolean operators "OR" between words within each set and "AND" to combine sets.

After reviewing articles resulting from our searches, we included literature specifically pertaining to Indigenous child welfare and excluded research focusing only on Indigenous mental health, education, addiction, or other topics. Only articles published in English were considered due to our research team's

linguistic capacity. After verification among members of our team, we included a total of 881 literature pieces for descriptive analysis in the scoping review.

To document the literature found in our search, we created a database using Microsoft Excel to capture information about the included pieces. In addition to a citation and summary of each article, we included the following information in our database: type of work (journal article, thesis, book or book section, report, and conference paper); country (Canada, U.S., Australia, NZ, or multiple countries); primary theme; literature classification (empirical or non-empirical); empirical study design (if applicable); and empirical study details (if applicable).

Table 1. Keyword Searches

First set of keywords	Second set of keywords
Aboriginal, "First Nations," "Native American," Inuit, Métis, "Torres Island," "Torres Strait Islander," Māori, Eskimo, "Canadian Eskimo," Aborigines, "Indians of North America," "Arctic Peoples," "North American Indians," "American Native," "American Indian," Indigenes, and Indians	"child welfare" and the following related words: "child protection," "youth protection," "child abuse," neglect, "in care," placement, "foster care," "kinship care," "foster home care," "social work with children," "child advocacy," overrepresentation, "child care," "out-of-home care," "Stolen Generation," "Sixties Scoop," and "forced separation"

As we reviewed the research publications, we identified themes through applied thematic analysis (e.g., Guest et al., 2011; see Figure 1). We conducted this iterative coding process through review of the abstracts, discussion among our team members about possible themes, and reassessment of some initially identified themes, which we collapsed due to low article counts or for the sake of conceptual clarity. For example, we originally coded *child health trajectories* and *child wellbeing* separately, but we decided to combine them as *child health and wellbeing* due to low numbers in each and the significant conceptual overlap between the two codes. This process yielded the following list of 11 primary themes: *Indigenous cultures and perspectives*; *programs, services*; *anti-colonial critiques and oppression*; *child health and wellbeing*; *knowledge transfer and methods*; *children in care*; *overrepresentation*; *policy and legal*; *forms of maltreatment*; *long-term outcomes*, and *residential schools and apologies*. While the majority of articles were related to more than one theme (e.g., children in care and child health and wellbeing), we opted to assign each research publication a *primary* theme. One reviewer on our team assigned a primary code to each, and then a second team member re-coded some of the articles to establish consistency across the coding process.

In our review of the classification of research publications, we initially coded them as *empirical*, *theoretical*, *commentary*, or *review*. The latter three classifications were considered non-empirical: articles classified as theoretical built on existing research and theory to extensively critique, significantly

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extend, or reimagine existing theory; commentary pieces drew from existing knowledge and personal and/or professional experiences; and review publications summarized, synthesized, and commented on pre-existing empirical research, theoretical writing, or commentaries. These review pieces tended to propose important questions and areas for future research but did not extend the existing knowledge base by contributing new analyses of primary data. By contrast, empirical pieces presented original analyses of data and were sub-categorized as *quantitative*, *qualitative*, or *mixed method*. We included empirical study details in our database with further details on population, methods, and findings.

Findings

Our search of Indigenous child welfare literature yielded 880 unique publications produced in Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand between January 1973 and April 2018. We analyzed this literature according to time, geography, and empirical classification. Table 2 presents an overview of literature resulting from our search, which we analyze in more granular detail below.

Table 2. Type of Literature by Country (January 1973 to April 2018)

	Empirical				Non-empirical	
	Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed methods	Total	Total	Country *n*
Canada	77	55	15	**147**	**160**	**307**
United States	51	86	25	**162**	**156**	**318**
Australia	43	32	15	**90**	**99**	**189**
New Zealand	6	9	1	**16**	**24**	**40**
Multiple countries	2	2	0	**4**	**23**	**27**
Category *n*	179	184	56	**419**	**462**	**881**

Note. $N = 881$.

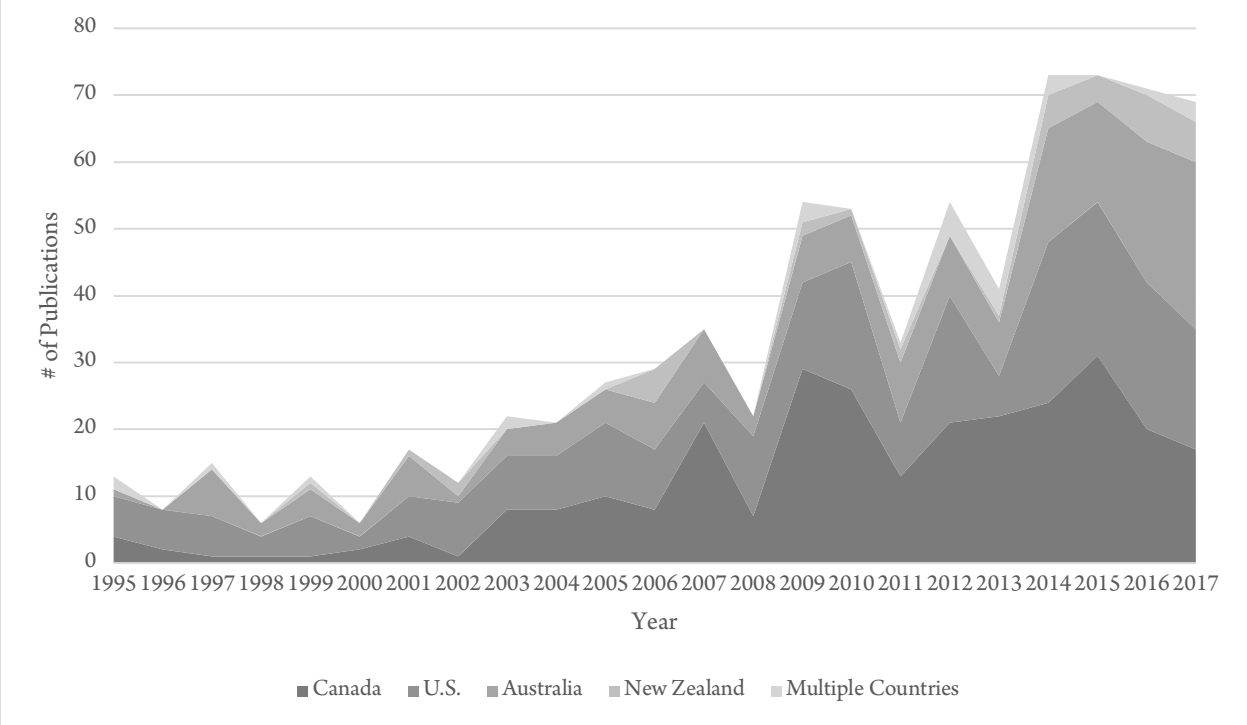
Total Breakdown by Country

Of the total of 881 research publications produced between January 1973 and April 2018, we found 307 articles focusing on Indigenous child welfare in Canada, 318 for the United States, 189 for Australia, and 40 for New Zealand. In addition, there were 27 articles that focused on Indigenous child welfare in more than one country. Over time, the number of total publications per year increased. Figure 2 illustrates these results, covering the period from January 1995 to December 2017,[10] during which time 87% ($n = 767$) of all publications we found were published. In the last decade in particular, we noted a higher

[10] For graphical clarity purposes, we excluded pre-1995 counts, when no more than 10 research pieces were produced in any given year. We also excluded 2018 from the figure because the data accounted for only four months (January through April) of that year.

number of publications, with significant peaks in 2009 and 2014. Since 2014, literature production has more or less stabilized at about 71 works per year across these four countries, although the literature is not evenly distributed across them.

Figure 2. Literature Counts by Year and Country of Focus (1995-2017)



Trends Over Time by Country

As shown in Figure 2, the quantity of Indigenous child welfare literature focusing on Canada, the United States, and Australia has rapidly increased, with a smaller increase in literature focusing on the New Zealand context. The expansion of child welfare research focused on Canada, the U.S., and Australia, parallels legal and policy developments that drew media attention to Indigenous child welfare in the public sphere. In Canada, the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada included extensive public testimony from Indigenous people and an inquiry into painful histories of residential schools (TRC, 2015). A Canadian Human Rights Tribunal case, initiated in 2007 and continued through 2016, focused on discrimination against First Nations children in child welfare and has prompted further remedial action (Blackstock, 2016; First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, 2020b). In addition, the First Nations Component of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (FNCIS-2008), the first full-scale national study of First Nations children in the child welfare system released findings demonstrating overrepresentation in 2011 (Sinha et al., 2011).

Similarly, in the U.S., increases are likely associated with greater media attention surrounding the

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overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the U.S. foster care system. For instance, since 2011, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Courts Judges has published annual briefs emphasizing this disproportionality (e.g., Padilla & Summers, 2011; Summers et al., 2013). In addition, highly publicized national-level court cases[11] that were linked to the ICWA may have also prompted further publication.

In Australia, Indigenous child welfare research production also increased beginning in 2009. Similar to public reports in Canada and the U.S., a report in Australia on the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Islander children from their families highlighted the overrepresentation of Indigenous families and youth in the Australian child welfare system (HREOC, 1997). The year 2017 marked 20 years since the publication of this report, which highlighted human rights violations against Indigenous families and articulated Calls to Action to redress them. A number of media pieces from this same year also noted that little had changed for Indigenous families since the report was published (Brown, 2017; Conifer, 2017; Dabbagh, 2017; Wahlquist, 2017), reflecting increased public attention to this issue. In New Zealand, there was a consistently smaller number of publications overall compared to the number of publications in other countries at which we looked. However, the amount of literature focusing on New Zealand has increased slightly since 2014. This uptick in publications seems to align with legislative reforms and federal government restructuring (Keddell, 2017)[12] that have been widely critiqued as de-prioritizing the role of Māori conceptions of family and increasing liability-focused child welfare assessment practices (Hyslop, 2017).

Total Empirical and Non-Empirical Publications

We found a balance among empirical and non-empirical publications when looking at the total number of publications between 1973 and 2018. Empirical publications presented original analyses of data, while non-empirical publications were either theoretical, commentary, or review pieces. Overall, we classified 47.5% ($n = 419$) of the literature reviewed as empirical and 52.5% ($n = 462$) non-empirical. This balance held across countries: Our search yielded around 50% empirical and 50% non-empirical for each country.

Empirical and Non-Empirical Publications Over Time

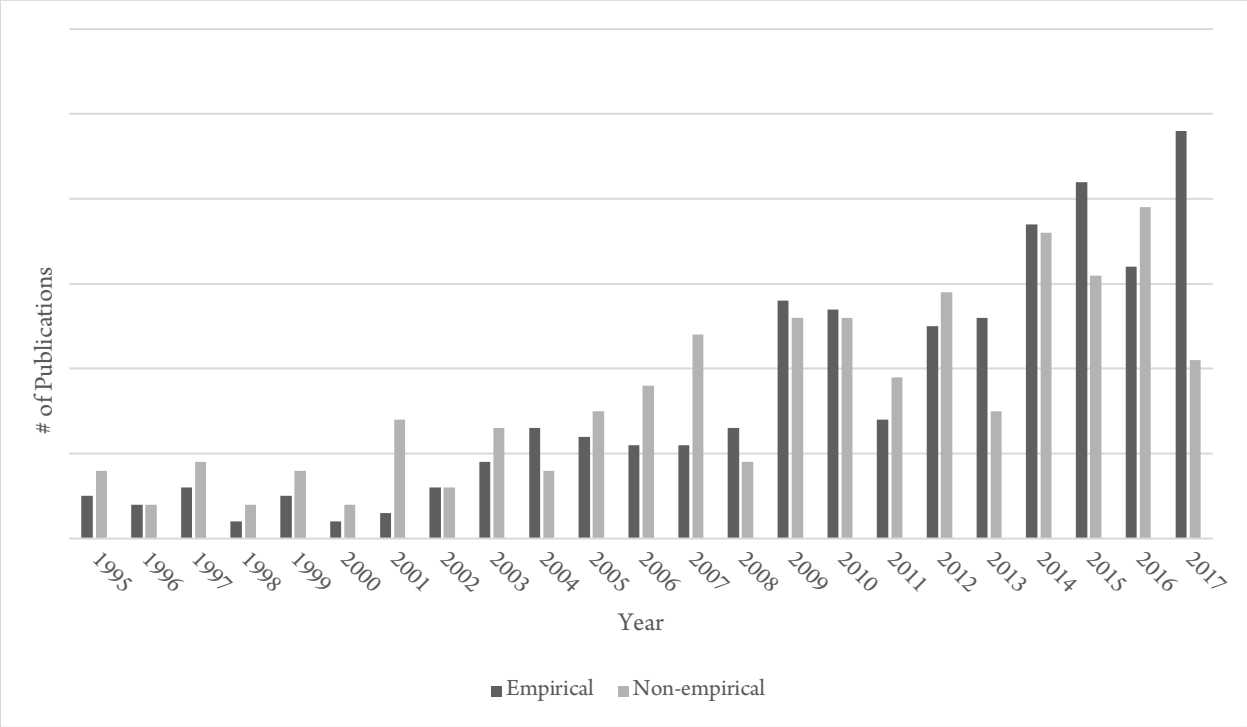
Over time, however, we noted a shift from a higher proportion of empirical publications toward more non-empirical publications. Figure 3 presents the quantity of empirical and non-empirical literature that

[11] For example, *Adoptive Couple v. Baby Girl* (2013), which questioned the applicability of the ICWA, was heard by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2013. That same year, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a federal court lawsuit on behalf of the Oglala Sioux and the Rosebud Sioux tribes against the state of South Dakota for not complying with the ICWA.

[12] In the mid-2010s, there were a number of reforms to federal legislation regarding child welfare. In April of 2017, a new Ministry for Vulnerable Children, *Oranga Tamariki*, replaced the federal agency of Children, Youth, and Families. The new ministry added preventive services and services for young people in care transitioning to adulthood to its mandate, among others (Keddell, 2017). In 2017, two federal legislative amendments—the Vulnerable Children Amendment Act (2014) and the Children, Young People, and Their Families (Oranga Tamariki) Legislation Act (1989)—adapted existing child welfare laws to be more child-focused and attentive to context.

was produced between January 1995[13] and December 2017.[14] As illustrated in Figure 3, prior to 2007, the number of non-empirical research publications generally surpassed the quantity of empirical literature. Since 2007, empirical literature production has steadily increased at a similar rate to that of non-empirical research. However, in 2017, the empirical literature quantity was more than double that of non-empirical

Figure 3. Counts of Empirical and Non-Empirical Literature by Year (1995-2017)



Empirical and Non-Empirical by Country

We further broke down empirical pieces according to research method (either qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods; see Figure 4); there is no clear trend over time.

[13] For graphical clarity, we excluded pre-1995 counts, when no more than 10 research publications were produced in a given year.
[14] 2018 was eliminated because the entire year was not captured in our review.

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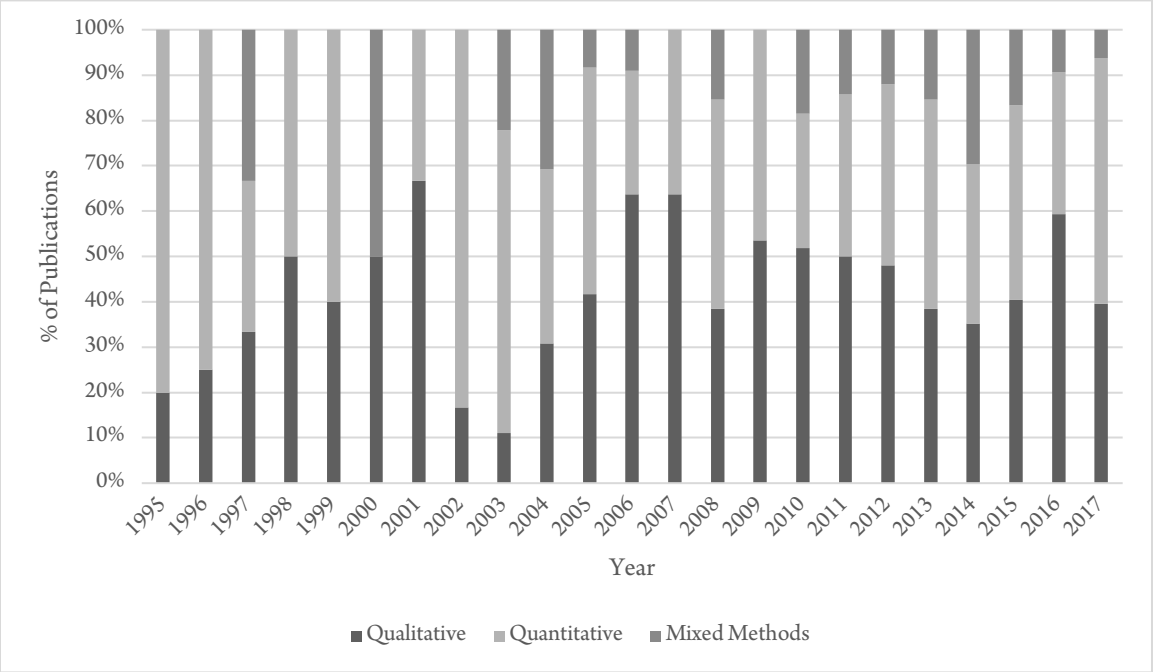
Figure 4. Percentage of Empirical Publications by Research Method Over Time (1995-2017)



Thematic Coding Findings

Table 3 provides a full summary of the results according to primary theme, empirical nature, and type of empirical study. We broke the classification of pieces down according to our thematic coding. Themes that had the largest number of research pieces were *programs and services* ($n = 191$), *policy and legal* ($n = 168$), and *overrepresentation* ($n = 104$). Conversely, the themes with the lowest number of pieces were *Indigenous cultures and perspectives* ($n = 37$), *knowledge transfer, methods* ($n = 34$), and forms of maltreatment ($n = 22$).

The following are core findings from the literature that are extracted from each of the 11 scoping review themes.

Table 3. Descriptive Results, Indigenous Child Welfare Research Publications from Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, January 1973 to April 2018

				Type of empirical, %		
Themes or codes	Total literature	Total non-empirical	Total empirical	Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed Methods
Programs and services	191	90	101	61%	19%	20%
Policy and legal	168	135	33	70%	12%	18%
Overrepresentation	104	25	79	6%	89%	5%
Anticolonial critiques and oppression	89	77	12	67%	17%	17%
Children in care	87	23	64	50%	39%	11%
Residential schools and apologies	53	33	20	60%	35%	5%
Child health and wellbeing	52	26	26	27%	50%	23%
Long-term outcomes	44	6	38	5%	79%	16%
Indigenous cultures and perspectives	37	20	17	82%	18%	0%
Knowledge transfer and methods	34	20	14	57%	29%	14%
Forms of maltreatment	22	7	15	40%	47%	13%
Total	**881**	**462**	**419**	**43%**	**44%**	**13%**

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Programs and services

The literature in this category describes and evaluates Indigenous child welfare services and programs. Literature in this domain highlights promising and best practices including culturally competent care (Bessarab & Crawford, 2010; Red Horse, 1982; Sinclair, 2008; Weaver, 1999), and relationship building between the worker and the family (Hughes et al., 2016; Kreitzer & Lafrance, 2010; McAuliffe et al., 2016; Sommerlad, 1977). It describes specific approaches, such as family group conferencing in which the social worker and child's family and community unite to determine how to keep the child safe (Connolly & MacKenzie, 1998; Ney et al., 2013; Schmid & Pollack, 2004; Waites et al., 2004). It also details intervention models developed and implemented by Indigenous community workers including interventions focusing on family preservation, fetal alcohol syndrome, and substance abuse (Cripps & McGlade, 2008; Howard-Wagner, 2015; McKenzie, 1989; Myhra et al., 2015). There are also recommendations for a social work education reform, including appeals for more cultural-competency training (Harms et al., 2011; Strega & Esquao, 2015; Zufferey et al., 2015).

Policy and legal

The literature included in this category examines specific legislation, court cases, and policies related to Indigenous involvement in child welfare. One focus is on past and current governmental policies that have shown to assimilate and marginalize Indigenous Peoples (Armitage, 1995; D'Souza, 1994; MacDonald & Ladd, 2000). Also included are analyses of governmental policies that were introduced to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in child welfare and service discrepancies between on- and off-reserve communities (Cradock, 2007; Hudson & McKenzie, 2003; Wien et al., 2007). Some of the literature also addresses the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (Blackstock, 2009, 2011a, 2011b), Jordan's Principle in Canada[15] (King, 2012; Lett, 2008; MacDonald & Attaran, 2007), and the U.S. Indigenous Child Welfare Act (Akhtar, 2012; Bending, 1997; Deitrich, 1982; Yablon, 2004). Literature in this primary theme also contains critiques of the neoliberal child welfare model, which is framed as reactive, bureaucratic, and managerial, resulting in greater policing of families (Hackell, 2016; Hyslop, 2017; Keddell, 2017; Libesman, 2015). Alternative child welfare frameworks, such as a human rights framework, are proposed to be more collaborative with families in practice (Filipetti, 2016; Libesman, 2015) and are suggested as a way to "re-establish to the greatest extent possible individuality and sovereignty within each Indigenous community" (Paul, 2016, p. 188).

Overrepresentation

The literature in this category includes analyses of child welfare population-based datasets, which consistently document the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in child welfare systems in the United States (Collmeyer, 1995; Crofoot & Harris, 2012; Mech, 1983), Canada (Blackstock et al., 2004; Sinha et al., 2011; Trocmé et al., 2003), Australia (Delfabbro et al., 2010; Tilbury, 2009; Zhou & Chilvers, 2010), and New Zealand (Buchanan & Malcolm, 2010; Cram et al., 2015). In addition, there is a disproportionate number of Indigenous families who are *reported to* and *investigated by* child welfare

[15] Jordan's Principle was conceived in response to a jurisdictional dispute over who would pay for First Nations child Jordan River Anderson's home care. The principle is meant to ensure that Indigenous children's needs are put first when they come in contact with health and social service systems and that provincial and federal governments reconcile costs *post facto* if needed (The Jordan's Principle Working Group, 2015).

officials (Bailey et al., 2015; Collings et al., 2018; Sinha et al., 2013). The major correlate for this overrepresentation is parental neglect, which is often associated with poverty, inadequate housing, mental illness, and substance addiction (Lujan et al., 1989; White & Cornely, 1981). Additionally, the overrepresentation can be linked to a lack of culturally appropriate services and cultural biases that can put Indigenous parents at higher risk of scrutiny (Dumont, 1988; Hélie et al., 2013; Hill, 2008).

Children in Care

The literature included in this category examines kinship care, foster care, and adoption practices, as well as the treatment and experiences of Indigenous youth in care. Kinship care, which is generally provided by grandparents, is often the optimal choice for Indigenous children in care (Hill, 2016; Spence, 2004; Worrall, 2006). Although kinship care is challenging, it has been underfunded and under-resourced (Hill, 2016; Mutchler et al., 2007; Purcal et al., 2014; Worrall, 2006). Additionally, there is a shortage of Indigenous foster parents, despite there being an overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system, which has been attributed to a mistrust of social workers and traumatic child welfare experiences (Brown et al., 2010; Halverson et al., 2002; Hanna et al., 2017). The literature suggests detrimental effects from placing Indigenous children in White foster homes, especially because children who are disconnected from their Indigenous culture and community tend to have difficulty developing a positive self-identity (Becker-Green, 2009; Moss, 2009; Sinclair, 2008). Additionally, publications in this theme document discrimination, oppression, and inequities that Indigenous youth in care experience (Anderson, 2014; Berlin, 1978; Green, 1983). Research calls for "culturally appropriate care," which includes cultural connectivity plans with Indigenous families and youth in care (Anderson, 2014; Green, 1983; Klamn, 2009; Raman et al., 2017).

Anticolonial Critiques and Oppression

The literature included in this category focuses on the impacts of colonialism on Indigenous families and children. Some of this literature frames recent policies resulting in mass removal of Indigenous children from their families and communities as an extension of the cultural genocide enacted against Indigenous people through settler colonial policies and practices (Cross & Blackstock, 2012; Cunneen & Libesman, 2000; O'Connor, 1994; Richardson & Nelson, 2007). Discourse justifying the persistent state intervention in Indigenous communities include "for their own good" rhetoric and the importance of civilizing the "savage" and "deviant" "Native" (de Leeuw et al., 2010, p. 286; Landertinger, 2016, p. 1; Palmer & Cooke, 1996, p. 710). In addition, the literature comments on the neoliberal child welfare system that led to greater austerity, privatization of services, and bureaucracy, which is described as ultimately furthering inequities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and families (Cunneen, 2015; Haebich, 2016; Kennedy-Kish et al., 2017; Rousseau, 2015). This literature also touches on historical and intergenerational trauma resulting from the systematic oppression of Indigenous Peoples under both colonial and neoliberal policies (Burnette & Figley, 2016; Maxwell, 2014; Moorehead & LaFromboise, 2014; Sherwood, 2015).

Residential Schools and Apologies

The literature included in this category describes residential school experiences in Canada, the U.S., Australia, and New Zealand, as well as government attempts to facilitate reconciliation in the wake of growing recognition of the harms and ongoing intergenerational impacts of these schools and their roles

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in furthering cultural genocide (Chadwick et al., 1986; Jacobs, 2014; Stephenson, 2006; van Krieken, 1999a, 1999b). The literature details assimilation tactics employed to extinguish Indigenous culture, as well as the child sexual and physical abuse that occurred within the school (Burich, 2007; Kuipers, 2015; Matheson et al., 2016). It documents ongoing psychiatric problems that some residential school survivors continue to experience, including substance addiction, gambling addiction, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and intergenerational trauma (Beiser, 1974; Bombay et al., 2013; Cromer et al., 2017; Reed, 2010; Ross et al., 2015). Government-led investigations to determine the extent of harm as a result of the residential schools and reports detailing reconciliation processes occurred in the late 20th and early 21st centuries in Canada and Australia (Attean et al., 2012; HREOC, 1997; Wilson, 2015). A number of scholars have critiqued Australia's reconciliation process, which began more than 20 years ago, as most of the calls to action have yet to be actualized (Davis, 2017; Fejo-King, 2011; Fernandez et al., 2017).

Child Health and Wellbeing

The literature in this category examines inequities in health and social services and disparities in health outcomes for Indigenous children, making links to child maltreatment and/or the child welfare system. It highlights a profound lack of culturally appropriate services for Indigenous families, focusing on Indigenous populations living on reserve in particular (Canadian UNICEF Committee, 2009; Joshua et al., 2015; Liu & Alameda, 2011). Service inequities augment the health and wellbeing challenges within Indigenous communities, where higher rates of youth suicides and family maltreatment, compared to non-Indigenous communities, have significant and long-lasting multigenerational impacts both for families and communities (Berlin, 1987; Kenney & Singh, 2016; Wallace, 1973). Intervention models to promote Indigenous child health and wellbeing are provided and a persistent recommendation is that greater connection to Indigenous traditions and cultures is linked with better health outcomes (Carriere, 2005; Freeman et al., 2016; McShane, 1988; Priest et al., 2012).

Long-Term Outcomes

The literature included in this category assesses trajectories and outcomes related to child maltreatment in Indigenous communities. Wide-ranging negative impacts on youth and adults are described. Child maltreatment and foster care experiences have been associated with offending youth behaviors, teen pregnancy, and youth homelessness (Barker et al., 2014; Malvaso et al., 2017; Nordberg et al., 2014; Shah et al., 2017). A significant finding is the correlation of adult psychiatric symptomology and experiences of childhood abuse and/or neglect. Specifically, several studies have demonstrated that Indigenous adults with child maltreatment histories also had a greater chance of experiencing post-traumatic disorder, depression, substance addictions, and suicidality (Barker-Collo, 1999; Mota et al., 2012; Piasecki et al., 1989).

Indigenous Cultures and Perspectives

The literature included in this category describes culturally based Indigenous childrearing, as well as tensions between Western and Indigenous views on parenting, attachment, and maltreatment. This literature explores the impact of colonization and assimilation policies on Indigenous childrearing (Glover, 2001; Moffat, 1994; Neckoway, 2011; Pihama et al., 2016). It also examines Indigenous definitions of "family" as including extended family and community networks, contrasting with

traditional Western understandings of family that are more likely to emphasize nuclear families (Cross, 2014; Limb et al., 2008; Montgomery-Andersen & Borup, 2012). Some works in this category critique the application of Western-based attachment theory in child welfare work with Indigenous families, positing that it unfairly discredits Indigenous parenting paradigms (Lindstrom & Choate, 2016; Neckoway et al., 2003; Yeo, 2003).

Knowledge Transfer and Methods

The literature in this category explores patterns and gaps in Indigenous child welfare research, research methodologies, and dissemination strategies. Several publications maintain that more empirical evidence-based research is needed in the field of Indigenous child welfare (e.g., Bennett et al., 2005; Timpson, 1995; Wells et al., 2009) and note the shortage and shortcomings of existing, population-based child welfare data (Fraser, 2013; Tilbury & Thoburn, 2009; Tonmyr et al., 2009). A number of publications advocate employing research methods, such as participatory action research, that center Indigenous voices and experiences (McKenzie, 1997; Poupart et al., 2009; Timpson, 2010; Waechter et al., 2009). Strategies for Indigenous child welfare research dissemination are also highlighted (Bennett, 2007; de Finney et al., 2009; Green et al., 2010; Leung et al., 2011). Literature in this category also comments on the propagation of negative Indigenous stereotypes and a lack of structural oppression analysis in recent Indigenous child welfare reporting (Harding, 2009; Lonne & Gillespie, 2014; Maydell, 2018).

Forms of Maltreatment

The literature in this category includes research focusing on specific types and subcategories of child maltreatment and neglect in Indigenous populations. The majority of the articles focus on sexual abuse or neglect. The neglect-focused articles explore associated risk factors, articulate divergent perceptions and definitions of neglect, and examine implications for Indigenous children (Evans-Campbell, 2008; Nelson et al., 1996; Newton, 2017; Slee, 2001). The research focusing on sexual abuse covers topics such as the correlates of sexual abuse, divergent perceptions and experiences of disclosing sexual abuse, the ways in which both communities and legal institutions silence and marginalize victims, and a lack of appropriate services in Indigenous communities (Bailey et al., 2015; Hamilton et al., 2016; Hodgson, 1990; Smallwood, 1995; Stanley et al., 2003). A handful of articles also focus on more specific topics such as maltreatment related injury (O'Donnell et al., 2010; Pike & First Nations and Inuit Child and Youth Injury Indicators Working Group, 2011).

Empirical Literature by Theme

We further classified the research publications as *empirical* (publications that present methodological details to describe the approach to new analyses of quantitative and/or qualitative data) and *non-empirical* (reviews, commentaries, theoretical pieces, and information-memoranda). Most empirical research was categorized under the themes *programs and services* (n = 101 research publications), *overrepresentation* (n = 79), and *children in care* (n = 64). Six themes hold comparable proportions within the total and empirical literature. For example, *child health and wellbeing* research encompasses

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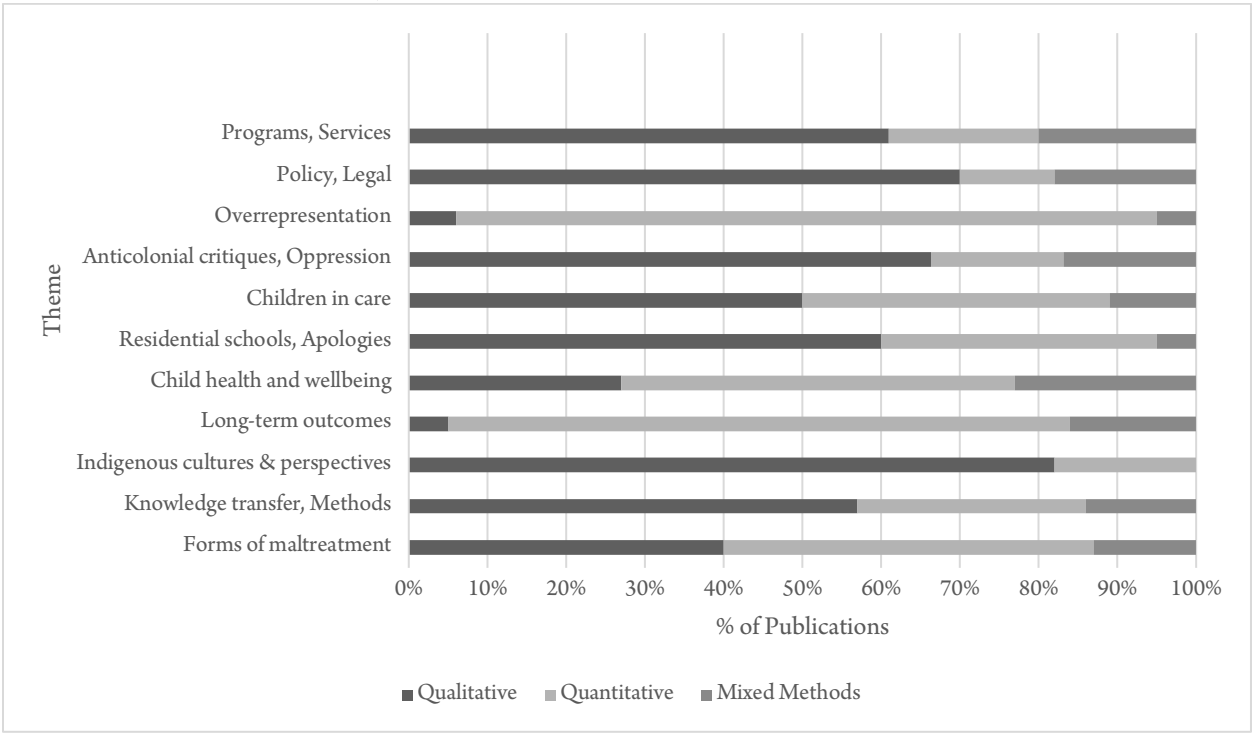
both 6% of the total literature and 6% of empirical research publications.[16] However, five themes hold dissimilar portions in the total and empirical literature. For instance, *policy and legal* makes up 19% of total literature in our review but represents only 11% of empirical research. This difference reflects the relatively large number of theoretical or conceptual discussion pieces included in this category. Another noteworthy example is the quantity of *overrepresentation* research within total (12%) and empirical (19%) literature.[17] The greater proportion within empirical literature may be a result of a number of large-scale quantitative studies, such as the FNCIS-2008, which document the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in child welfare systems. Figure 5 illustrates the breakdown of empirical research methods by primary theme.

Figure 5. Empirical Research Methods by Primary Theme (Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, 1973-2018)



We found that qualitative research was most employed within the majority of the following thematic categories: *Indigenous cultures and perspectives* (82%); *policy and legal* (70%), *anti-colonial critiques and oppression* (67%), *programs and services* (61%), and *knowledge transfer and methods* (57%). Conversely, the following themes were most present in research using quantitative methods:

[16] We considered proportions to be comparable if the difference between the proportion of total literature and proportion of empirical literature was 2% or less. In addition to *child health and wellbeing*, this was true for *programs and services*, *residential schools and apologies*, *Indigenous cultures and perspectives*, *knowledge transfer and methods*, and *forms of maltreatment*.

[17] The three other themes for which the proportion of empirical literature did not match the percentage of total literature were: *children in care*, *anti-colonial critiques and oppression*, and *long-term outcomes*.

overrepresentation (89%), *long-term outcomes* (79%), and *child health and wellbeing* (50%). Mixed-methods research, containing both qualitative and quantitative research methods, was generally the least utilized within each thematic category. It was most used in research coded *child health and wellbeing* (23%).

Discussion

At this critical time of rapid policy and legal development regarding Indigenous involvement in child welfare systems in Canada, the role of research to inform these shifts must be acknowledged. However, the extent to which policy changes support reconciliation efforts depend on how research is consulted, and what voices are included. Cumulatively, a substantial body of research has been produced about Indigenous involvement in child welfare in Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. Over the decades included in our search, we found 881 publications on this topic. Our search found a marked increase over time in publications based in Canada, the U.S., and Australia, and to a lesser extent in New Zealand. This body of literature covers diverse themes, with increasing attention to the complex settler colonial histories and present-day practices in these countries. We found a particularly large literature base focusing on programs and services as well as policy and legal components of Indigenous child welfare involvement. There was a much smaller amount of literature on knowledge transfer and methods, and specific forms of maltreatment.

Despite the size of the existing literature base identified through our review, recognition and acknowledgement of the limitations of the literature base derived through our review is of critical importance. Some of these limitations are linked to the methods we used in our literature search, others to the substantive focus of the literature reviewed. Our reliance on large academic search tools such as PsycINFO and MEDLINE means that we missed most of the grey literature available on this topic. For example, many organizations working with Indigenous families have produced documents such as program evaluations, legislative summaries, and analyses of funding allocation (e.g., First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, 2020a). Many child- and family-service agencies have invested in further research projects, and some have also thoroughly documented practice models, philosophies, and approaches (e.g., Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group, 2015; Dubois & Ramdatt, 2006; Goodluck, 2002; Petiquan et al., 2015; Southern First Nations Network of Care, 2019). Our search strategy may also have precluded us finding existing sources in Indigenous-specific databases, which aggregate academic and non-academic sources.[18] It is difficult to know much about this broad literature base (e.g., how much there is, its scope, and how comparable they are across jurisdictions) due to a lack of centralization of these reports which are sometimes treated as internal documents or are available only directly through individual agencies.

Further, limiting our search to publications that explicitly identified a focus on child welfare or related terms also excluded vitally relevant literature. For example, extant literature demonstrates that neglect investigations are the primary driver of the overrepresentation of Indigenous children (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2007; Sinha et al., 2011; Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014) and that neglect is strongly linked to a broad range of structural

[18] Two examples are the Native Health Database at the University of New Mexico and the Indigenous Studies Portal at the University of Saskatchewan.

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and family-level risk factors including poverty and challenges related to substance use and mental health (MacEachron & Gustavsson, 2005; Mulder et al., 2018). Without including these cross-cutting issues, we potentially miss myriad publications relevant to this topic even when no link to child welfare is made in the publication. Finally, unwritten histories and untold experiences are not captured here, nor could they easily be in future scoping reviews. The lack of space for oral histories or ways of knowing in written publications misses crucial insight and context of Indigenous child welfare involvement (e.g., Ormiston, 2010).

Thus, while our search is the broadest and largest we are aware of on this topic, it does not come close to reflecting the Indigenous knowledge on child welfare involvement. Future review or synthesis that is done in the realm of Indigenous involvement in child welfare ought to push beyond reliance on academic search engines and traditional Western, academic standards for assessing literature, lest the most potentially salient publications and experiences be excluded. This will necessitate inclusion of agency-level reports and program evaluations, which means supporting the development of a stronger base of studies produced by and in partnership with Indigenous communities. Failure to expand the range of knowledge that is considered in such reviews in this way means we will continue to ignore a potentially vast body of research and writing produced by, with, and for Indigenous communities, families, and practitioners. Meaningful review, synthesis, and connection to broader bases of research and knowledge that elevate and prioritize Indigenous voices, along with ongoing monitoring of new research production, will necessitate redefining the standards for what a thorough review entails. It will also require significant resources to seek out publications intentionally and proactively, which are currently decentralized.

A number of recent reviews of Indigenous child welfare and related literature demonstrate growing awareness of the need for synthesis of the many dimensions of this broad topic. For example, Macvean et al. (2017) compiled 16 publications on parenting interventions for Indigenous child psychosocial functioning. Similarly, di Tomasso and de Finney (2015a, 2015b) collated numerous sources on Indigenous custom adoption practices in a two-part discussion paper. In a scoping review of 37 studies, Haight et al. (2018) focused on Indigenous involvement in North American child welfare systems. Fiolet et al. (2019) examined 15 articles on Indigenous help-seeking behaviors related to family violence. In a large review of Indigenous youth in residential care in Australia and other countries, Gatwiri et al. (2019) included eight peer-reviewed articles and 51 grey literature publications. Finally, Ritland et al. (2020) reviewed 18 articles on culturally safe parenting programs to support Indigenous families dealing with substance use. Cumulatively, these efforts represent a big step forward for the state of academic knowledge on Indigenous child welfare. Several of them were published after April 2018, which is when we stopped our literature search, indicating increasing attention to the need for synthesis on this topic.

Still, in our review we found few articles that systematically work across existing literature to propose frameworks, create typologies, or consolidate research findings. For example, despite the large number of articles we coded as *programs and services*, we did not find any pieces that provided clear, explicit discussion of commonalities in terms of approaches, underlying practice values or paradigms, or challenges cutting across these programs and services. Further, we did not find anything that treated variation in findings as a potential strength, examining key contextual factors and correlates of outcome variables in order to make sense of and reconcile disparate findings. Our review suggests that researchers

are still sorting out how to integrate literature across these academic silos in order to bridge to policy and practice settings.

Accessibility of publications synthesizing literature on Indigenous involvement with child welfare systems is an important concluding point. Among the recent reviews we found on this topic, most exist behind a paywall, meaning they are accessible only to those who have access to academic journals, typically through affiliation with a university.[19] Beyond this, even when these reviews are available as open-source publications (e.g., di Tomasso & de Finney, 2015a, 2015b), access to many sources cited within the text are still be limited to those with academic credentials. These paywalls keep important findings from policymakers and practitioners who are best placed to act on learnings from research. While many authors frame their findings as being relevant for policy and practice, the structure and flow of this "knowledge" hinder this translation from taking place.

The investment of sustained public resources in Canada to synthesize, summarize, and publicly disseminate findings from existing research related to Indigenous child welfare involvement would catalyze the potential policy and program development, which could reduce the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in child welfare systems. The United States has several organizations that are publicly mandated and funded to do just this, including the Child Welfare Information Gateway, which collates and disseminates research, statistics, legal information, and practice resources for practitioners and policymakers as well as academic researchers.[20]

Issues of access to content, as well as prioritization of knowledge dissemination for policy and practice, will likely be best addressed through ensuring Indigenous control of these processes. On a basic level, this is needed to help correct the imbalance in current literature. It is also important to promote the trust and collaboration that might facilitate compilation of grey literature (e.g., from practice agencies' program evaluations). Fundamentally, Indigenous control of synthesizing literature about Indigenous child welfare involvement will ensure that these processes reflect Indigenous needs and perspectives. Canada has recently taken steps to acknowledge the disproportionate representation of Indigenous children in its child welfare systems, and passed federal legislation (Bill C-92, 2019) to more adequately acknowledge the importance of Indigenous children's community, cultural, and linguistic ties in the child welfare system, as well as the importance of Indigenous communities' self-determination in decisions affecting local children and families. However, this legislation came without any funds appropriated to support its implementation, and critics suggest that it was not developed with sufficient consultation with local communities, limiting its potential to substantively shift child welfare practices on the ground. At a time when there is an opening for Indigenous child welfare to be redefined at local levels, it is important that Canada make public investments in seeking, consolidating, and learning from the diversity of knowledge related to Indigenous child welfare. Investing in these tasks would contribute not only to enhancing the rigor and quality of research publications in the domain of Indigenous child welfare, but also to increasing the quantity of these publications, in order to inform smarter

[19] Without using our own academic credentials, the authors were not able to access several recent review articles (Fiolet et al., 2019; Gatwiri et al., 2019; Haight et al., 2018; Macvean et al., 2017).
[20] In addition, the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth, the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, the National Human Trafficking Hotline, and the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse are all federally funded, centralized hubs for information related to children and families (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2020).

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policymaking that better reflects various lived realities of Indigenous communities in Canada.

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