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Sioux Falls' Indian Population: Demographic Profile, Strengths and Challenges

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Abstract

Representatives of the urban Indian community in Sioux Falls, South Dakota conducted a door-to-door survey of urban Indian households in the winter of 1997. Data¹ from 526 urban Indian households is presented, paying particular attention to service utilization, helping behaviors within the urban Indian community, and potential challenges to the city as it experiences rapid influxes of Indians to the urban environment. Implications from the study are investigated, and recommendations for future research are made.

Introduction

As metropolitan communities grow, ethnic and racial composition typically changes. That is the current scenario in one urban area, Sioux Falls, South Dakota. An amazingly low unemployment rate of less than two percent and strong economic infrastructure made Sioux Falls a virtual “boom town” in the 1990s, attracting increasing numbers and greater population diversity over the last decade. The current study examines one dimension of the growth of Sioux Falls—specifically its Native American population—and attempts to provide a profile of urban Indians in this city as well as challenges and opportunities facing the city and its citizens.

South Dakota is a northern plains state with about 750,000 inhabitants, of which Native Americans are the largest minority group. There are two cities in South Dakota classified as “urban” – Sioux Falls on the eastern border and Rapid City on the western edge of the state. From 1990 to 2000, U.S. Census data show that the state of South

¹ Thanks are extended to Art War Bonnet, Director of the American Indian Services, Inc. of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, from whom access to the data was obtained.

Dakota population increased modestly (8.5 percent change) while Sioux Falls experienced a 23.8 percent increase. The urban Indian population in Sioux Falls grew by over 1,000, resulting in a 66.9 percent change (U.S. Census 1990).

The research literature offers examples of urban Indian studies, including those conducted in Detroit (Danziger, Jr 1991), Boston (Guillemin 1975), San Francisco (Lobo 1998), Minneapolis (Shoemaker 1988), Chicago (Garbarino 1997; Straus 1996), Phoenix (Liebow 1989; Liebow 1991), and Los Angeles (Gramstedt 1977; Weibel-Orlando 1999). These studies have generated greater understanding of the differences and similarities among urban Indian populations. Other studies have examined health care utilization (Waldram 1990), the development of ethnic community identity and growth of urban ethnic institutions (Liebow 1989), and tendencies toward residential segregation (Bohland 1982) among urban Indian populations. More recent scholarship has explored the development of Native American identity and the meaning of urban Indian community, other key dimensions to understanding the complexities of what it means to be Indian in an urban setting (Lobo and Peters 2001).

Method

A survey was developed by the American Indian Services, Inc. (AIS) to develop a profile of the Sioux Falls urban Indian population, understand more clearly the pattern of service utilization among Native Americans, and establish a baseline of information to support future fund-raising efforts. AIS is a local United Way agency whose purpose is to:

“serve the Native American population by providing social and economic assistance to direct and referral services and by creating opportunities to foster mutual understanding and positive communication between the Native American population of Sioux Falls and the larger, non-Indian community (AIS mission statement 2002)..”

The detailed questionnaire directed to heads of households included 68 items in categories such as housing, transportation, health, discrimination, employment, education, childcare, cultural background, and general demographics. After piloting the instrument, the

questionnaire was photocopied in quantities on red paper. Indian staff members and volunteers were oriented to the purposes of the study and how to administer the questionnaire. Signs in locations frequented by urban Indians as well as newsletter notices alerted the Indian community to the study. The intention of the study was not to sample the urban Indian community, but instead, to obtain the investment of all of the Sioux Falls urban Indian households in the study. Indian volunteers drew upon a list of urban Indians maintained by AIS and also used a snowball technique to locate subjects. Research volunteers then went door-to-door during December 1997 and January 1998, administering surveys in people's homes and in congregate living settings (e.g., homeless shelters, county and city jails, and the state penitentiary). After data collection was complete, the data were entered into the computer using SPSS, and univariate and bivariate analyses were conducted.

Findings

Comparing Sioux Falls' general and urban Indian data

The American Indian Services study resulted in data from 526 households representing 1537 urban Indians, or approximately 83 percent of the projected urban Indian population for 1997 within Sioux Falls. Therefore, the goal of reaching every urban Indian household was not achieved, but the proportion of urban Indians included in this study was significant.

Comparing the general 1990 Sioux Falls population data with the 1997 urban Indian study data revealed several things. For example, the Sioux Falls median household income in 1990 was \$27,286; seven years' later, the 1997 data revealed urban Indian median household income was about \$15,600 -- over 40 percent lower than the general population without consideration for inflation. Correspondingly, the unemployment rate for Sioux Falls plummeted below two percent in 1997, while unemployment rates among urban Indian heads of households exceeded 51 percent. The average number of persons per household within the general Sioux Falls population in 1990 was 2.43, while urban Indian households in 1997 averaged 2.9 persons. All told, these comparisons signal an economically disadvantaged/ impoverished urban Indian population with economic characteristics drastically dissimilar to the broader Sioux Falls population.

Profile of Urban Indian Heads of Households

Almost six of ten heads of households were female and had either a high school diploma or GED. Two-thirds of the respondents were under age 40. Almost 70% of the sample expressed interest in further education, but many identified impediments to that aim (such as finances and child care). Very few of the respondents (17%) described themselves as disabled

TABLE 1: Profile of Sioux Falls Urban Indians: Select Characteristics of Heads of Households

<u>Sex of head of household</u>		<u>Interest in further education</u>	
Male	43%	Yes	67%
Female	56%	<u>Deterrents to education</u>	
<u>Age of head of household</u>		Finances	
18-29 yrs	33%	Childcare assistance	47%
30-39 yrs	34%	Incarceration	15%
40-49 yrs	20%	Default past student loan	6%
50-59 yrs	8%	In school now	6% 6%
60 & over	3%	Need info/ACTs	6%
<u>Education of head of household</u>		Transportation	5%
Middle school	16%	Disinterest	5% 3%
HS/GED	62%	Work fulltime	
Associate's degree	5%	<u>Disabled</u>	
Vocational certificate	9%	No	83%
Bachelor's degree	3%		
Master's/doctorate	1%		
NA	4%		

Urban Indian Housing & Economic Conditions

About two-thirds of the sample reported living in rental housing, while only seven percent reported owning a house or mobile home (see Table 2). Equal percentages (about 8%) reported living (a) with friends or relatives, (b) in homeless shelters, and (c) in criminal justice facilities--whether prisons or half-way houses. Fifty-five percent of the heads of households reported the need for housing assistance, particularly in the areas of rent and energy assistance. Others indicated that help with the deposit or first month's rent would be beneficial. About four of five spent less than \$500 per month on rent or mortgage payments. Relatively low monthly housing costs were coupled with fairly high utility costs. Almost one-fourth of the respondents reported monthly expenditures of

\$100 for gas, \$40 for water, \$75 for electricity, and \$20 for garbage removal.

TABLE 2: Housing & Economic Conditions

<u>Type of residence</u>		<u>Have a savings account</u>	
Rent apartment	36%	Yes	30%
Rent house	16%	<u>Have a checking account</u>	
Live w/friend/relative	8%	Yes	20%
Incarcerated	8%	<u>Family income per week</u>	
Live in shelter	7%	Under \$100/week	28%
Rent mobile home	6%	\$101-\$200/week	15%
Own house	5%	\$201-\$300/week	30%
Rent room	4%	\$301-\$400/week	9%
Own mobile home	2%	\$401-\$500/week	8%
Other	7%	\$501+/week	10%
<u>Desired housing assistance</u>		<u>Employed</u>	
Yes	55%	Yes	49%
<u>Type of assistance desired</u>		<u>Types of job</u>	
Help with rent	46%	Laborer	38%
Energy assistance	12%	Housekeeping	15%
Low income	10%	Cashier/sales	12%
Deposit/1st mo's rent	9%	Professional	12%
New arrivals to town	4%	CNA/medical	6%
More/better housing	3%	Restaurant	6% 4%
Housing for large households	3%	Welder/mechanic	4%
Other	13%	Temporary worker	3%
<u>Monthly housing payments</u>		Other	
Under \$200	18%	<u>Satisfied with job</u>	68%
\$200-\$299	13%	Yes	
\$300-\$399	25%	<u>Duration on unemployment</u>	63%
\$400-\$499	26%	Under 6 months	20%
\$500 or more	19%	7-23 months	10%
<u>Monthly utility costs</u>		2-4 years	5%
Gas--\$75+/month	42%	5-15 years	2%
Water--\$30+/month	40%	Retired/other	
Electricity--\$50+/mo	56%	<u>Frequency of job change in 5 years</u>	19%
Garbage--\$20+/mo	38%	Never	29%
<u>Own a telephone</u>		1-2 times/seldom	36%
Yes	46%	3-5 times/sometimes	16%
<u>Own a vehicle</u>		6+ times/often	
Yes	44%		

Other measures of economic well-being were also measured. For example, 243 of 526 households (46%) had a telephone and 44 percent owned a car. Three of ten respondents had a savings account, and one in five had a checking account. More importantly, almost three-fourths of the respondents reported an income of \$300 or less per week. Only about half indicated that they were employed, with the most frequently cited jobs being unskilled (laborer, custodian, cashier, and construction worker). Of those who were employed, more than two-thirds reported being satisfied with their jobs. Of those who were unemployed, 63% had been unemployed less than six months and were interested in additional training and education. As another dimension of work force participation, almost half of heads of households reported changing jobs three or more times in the past five years.

Life in Sioux Falls

Almost one-third of the respondents (29%) had lived in the metropolitan area for less than one year, while about 40 percent had lived in Sioux Falls for six years or more (see Table 3). However, it is interesting to note that six of ten had lived at their current address less than one year, and about half (49%) had moved three or more times in the last five years. About one-third indicated that other urban Indians were living in their neighborhood or that having Indian neighbors was important to them. About half of the sample expected to be permanently located in Sioux Falls.

Heads of households were also asked whether or not they had been discriminated against in areas such as housing, legal matters, education, health, emergency food, medical care, food stamps, religion, TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), counseling, energy assistance, chemical dependency treatment, and WIC (Women, Infants & Children). Respondents uniformly disavowed experiences of discrimination, with more than three-fourths indicating they had not experienced discrimination in Sioux Falls.

TABLE 3: Life in Sioux Falls for Urban Indians

<u>Length of Sioux Falls residency</u>		<u>Reports of discrimination (% "yes")</u>	
Under 1 year	29%	Housing	26%
1-5 years	14%	Legal matters	23%
11 years +	27%	Education	16%
<u>Length of time at present residence</u>		Health	14%
Under 1 year	58%	Emergency food	11%
1-5 years	30%	Medical care	10%
6+ years	12%	Food stamps	10%
<u>Frequency of moves in 5 years</u>		Religion	10%
No moves	15%	Religion	10%
1-2 moves	36%	AFDC/TANF	9%
3-5 moves	39%	Counseling	8%
6 or more moves	10%	Energy assistance	7% 6%
<u>Indians living in neighborhood</u>		Alcohol/drug treatment	6%
Yes	32%	AA support group	4%
No	33%	WIC	
Don't know	34%	<u>Yearly dentist visits w/in household</u>	
<u>Important to have Indian neighbors</u>		None	43%
Yes	33%	1-2 times	40%
No	32%	3-4 times	10%
Undecided	31%	5-10 times	6% 2%
<u>Expect to live permanently in Sioux Falls</u>		11 or more times	
Yes	51%	<u>Yearly doctor visits w/in household</u>	
<u>Where go for medical services (% "yes")</u>		None	14%
Community Health	29%	1-2 times	29%
Tribal IHS	28%	3-4 times	22%
Local private practice	24%	5-10 times	12%
Free clinics	17%	11 or more times	24%
SDUIH	4%	<u>Type of health insurance</u>	
VA	4%	Medicaid	14%
Emergency room	5%	Medicare	10% 5%
		Employers health	4% 3%
		Medicare	
		Urban Indian Health	
		Veteran's benefits	46%
		Other	
		<u>Difficulty paying medical bills</u>	
		Yes	

Medical issues were investigated as well. Recognizing that the average household was comprised of almost three persons, the report by heads of households that no one had been to the dentist (43%) or doctor (14%) during the past year took on greater significance. Urban Indians

reported using a variety of health plans for care when they did seek assistance. Those included Medicaid (19%), employer's health insurance (14%), Medicare (10%), Urban Indian Health (5%), or veteran's benefits (4%). Interestingly, one-third reported going to their tribal Indian Health Service for medical services (which for most would be several hours away), and almost half reported using various free clinics in Sioux Falls. Almost half reported having difficulty paying medical bills.

Urban Indian Family & Community

Several measures suggest that the strength of family among urban Indians serves as a solid buffer to impoverishment (see Table 4). For example, of the sixteen elders over age 60 responding to the survey, only three indicated a need for help in any daily tasks. Often urban Indians responded that they relied on family and friends for housing (8%), transportation (33%), and childcare (53%). Cultural affiliation remained strong in that three-fourths of Sioux Falls' Indians had lived on a reservation in the past and made efforts to visit at least yearly. While only one in four spoke another language besides English, almost nine of ten said they would favor the creation of an Indian cultural center in Sioux Falls. Support for other cultural events was evidenced as well (91% for pow-wows, 57% for sweatlodges, and 42% for naming ceremonies).

TABLE 4:Urban Indian Family & Community

<u>Elders needing assistance</u> Of 16 people age 60 or older, only three said they needed assistance with daily tasks		<u>Favor Indian cultural center</u> Yes	91%
<u>Housing support</u> Live with friends/family	8%	<u>Preference for cultural activities</u> <u>(Percent "yes")</u> Pow-wow	91%
<u>Transportation support</u> Rely on friend/relative for rides	33%	Sweatlodge	57%
<u>Childcare support</u> Private babysitter	53%	Naming	42%
<u>Lived on reservation before</u> Yes	77%	Other	16%
		<u>Alcohol treatment among household members</u> Yes	43%
		<u>Know victim of domestic violence</u> Yes	45%

TABLE 4: Urban Indian Family & Community Continued

<u>How long ago lived on reservation</u>			<u>Householder used alcohol during pregnancy</u>	
Under 1 year	13%		Yes	11%
1-5 years	27%			
6-10 years	18%		<u>Children in Child Protective Services</u>	
11+ years	42%		Yes	14%
<u>Frequency of returns to reservation</u>			<u>Concern about drug/alcohol use in household</u>	
Never	26%		Yes	34%
Several times/year	34%			
Yearly	23%		<u>Favor outpatient substance abuse outpatient program in Sioux Falls</u>	
Every 2-5 years	4%		Yes	91%
Every 6-20 years	4%			
Whenever possible	9%			
<u>Bilingual</u>				
Yes	25%			

Difficulties within the family were present also. Almost half of respondents indicated that someone in their household had been in treatment for alcohol or drug abuse and almost half had been or knew of someone who had been the victim of domestic violence. About one in ten reporting knowing someone in their household had used alcohol or illegal drugs during pregnancy, and 14% had had children placed in Child Protective Services. About one-third expressed concern about drug abuse or other addictions, and nine of ten felt a substance abuse outpatient program in Sioux Falls would be beneficial to the Indian community.

Interactional Effects

According to professionals at the American Indian Services, many new immigrants to Sioux Falls are Indians from reservations in the region, and the transition to urban life for them is particularly difficult. To test this assumption, several bivariate analyses were run on the data (see Table 5). On most characteristics, recent arrivals to Sioux Falls did not differ significantly from urban Indians who had lived in the city for more than ten years. However, compared to urban Indians living in the city for a decade, recent arrivals were significantly more likely to have no savings or checking accounts, have Indian neighbors, use mass transit and not own a vehicle, rent instead of own housing, and report being

from larger households. This might suggest that recent arrivals to Sioux Falls would be less oriented to non-Indian cultural expectations and more apt to choose to reside in urban Indian enclaves more than those Indians who had lived in the city for a longer period of time. Whether this signals a change in the demographic structure of Sioux Falls and greater propensity for Indians to segregate in this metropolitan area deserves further research.

TABLE 5: Bivariate Analyses

Note: Two statistics were used in this analysis. Somer's d_{yx} is an asymmetric ordinal measure of association, interpreted as the proportion by which errors in predicting rank on a dependent variable are reduced by using information on rank of the independent variable. The uncertainty coefficient (U_{yx}) is a normed, asymmetric nominal measure of association that uses information about the whole distribution of the dependent variable in reducing uncertainty and classifying cases correctly (Loether and McTavish 1993).

<i>Influence of Recent Arrival Status on...</i>	d_{yx}	$\alpha \leq .05$
<i>Dependent Variable</i>		
Savings account	.15	.001
Checking account	.143	.001
Have Indian neighbors	-.167	.001
Own vehicle	.099	.002
Use mass transit/bus	-.083	.001
Rent housing	-.100	.001
Large household	-.026	.002
<i>Influence of Bilingual on</i>		
<i>Dependent Variable</i>		
Have Indian neighbors	.097	.001
Use mass transit/bus	-.144	.004
Income	.095	.035
<i>Influence of Having Indian Neighbors on</i>		
<i>Dependent Variable</i>		
Importance on having	.142	.001
Indian neighbors Driver's license	-.047	.001
Own vehicle	-.019	.025
Rent housing	.026	.001
Recent arrival	-.184	.001

TABLE 5: Bivariate Analyses Continued

<i>Influence on Importance of Having Indian Neighbors on</i>		
<i>Dependent Variable</i>		
Owning a telephone	.021	.002
Having a savings acc.	.024	.001
Having a checking account	.019	.011
Reporting alcohol concerns	.017	.005
Use of private babysitter	.107	.031
Sex of head of household	-.018	.001
Rent housing	-.017	.002
<i>Influence of Sex of Head of Household on...</i>		
<i>Dependent Variable</i>	d_{yx}/U_{yx}	$\alpha \leq .05$
Bilingual	$U_{yx} = .018$	.001
Frequency of doctor visits	$d_{yx} = .190$	.003
Owning a telephone	$U_{yx} = .008 U_{yx}$	.018
Importance of Indian neighbors	$= .014 U_{yx} =$	.001
Reported alcohol concerns	$.018 U_{yx} = .014$	.001
Householder through alcohol or drug treatment		.001
Children in Child Protective Services	$U_{yx} = .012 U_{yx}$	.018
Know of victim of domestic violence	$= .011 U_{yx} =$	.005
Employed status	$d_{yx} = -.072$	.027
Education	$d_{yx} = -.244$	.029
Rent housing	$d_{yx} = .245$	.001
Household size		.001

Attempts were also made to define cultural indicators and examine the extent to which there may be differences among households based on stronger affinity with Indian culture. Three measures were used-- whether the head of household was bilingual, whether there were Indian neighbors, and whether the head of household felt it was important to have Indian neighbors. The related hypotheses were that those households which were more attuned to Indian culture would be less in tune with urban non-Indian culture. Findings showed significant relationships between being bilingual and less income, higher mass transit usage, and greater likelihood of having Indian neighbors. Having Indian neighbors was associated with renting housing, having no driver's license or car, being fairly new to the city, and valuing the importance of having Indian neighbors. Those who felt having Indian neighbors was important were also less likely to have a phone, savings account or checking account. They were also more likely to be living with others (presumably extended family) instead of expressing choices of renting or

owning, and they reported more concerns about alcohol and drug use within their household. Also, they were significantly more likely to use private babysitters instead of daycare. Drawing upon family and kin as resources for childcare, transportation, and other services may suggest reliance upon the strengths of Indian culture, while problems that have plagued the Indian community (e.g., alcohol and economic disadvantage) may be related to alienation from the dominant culture.

Finally, influence of sex of the head of household was examined. Significant differences were observable between Indian households headed by males and females. For example, male heads of households were more likely to be bilingual, express concerns about alcohol or identify someone in their household who had gone through alcohol treatment. Male heads of households were more apt to be employed, have more education, and value the importance of Indian neighbors more than female heads of households. On the other hand, female heads of households were more apt to report incidences of domestic violence or placement of children in child protective services. Households headed by females were more likely to reside in rental housing, own a telephone, and see a doctor compared to households headed by males.

Discussion and Implications

Many of the challenges Indians face in living in an urban environment are borne out in the data--high unemployment, difficulty obtaining adequate housing, limited access to healthcare, and a sense of marginality in orientation to non-Indian culture (telephone, checking and savings accounts). On the other hand, many of the strengths of the Indian community are also apparent in the urban Indian profile--support of one another in examples of shared housing, childcare, and extended family providing services to elders.

The study design incorporated snowball sampling and dissemination of the questionnaire by Native Americans trained in the study protocol (a distinct advantage in garnering honest and open responses from respondents). However, there is no way to know the extent to which bias was interjected into the study by the way in which subjects were identified nor the degree to which the sample accurately reflects the whole population of urban Indians in Sioux Falls. By targeting only heads of households, the data also did not provide the depth of understanding that would have been obtained had all adult

respondents in a household provided information. Future research on similar urban Indian populations would be well-served by adopting this study's strategy of employing Native Americans for the data collection while being more systematic in the development of a simple random sample of the urban Indian community. Triangulating the study by using ethnography and/or spatial analysis of neighborhoods would be additional methodological strategies for improvement. A more thorough comparison of Sioux Falls with other comparable urban areas (by region, size, or economic ("boom") circumstance) would be a welcome advance in the study of urban Indian populations in general.

The unexpected finding of most respondents claiming they had not experienced discrimination was difficult to interpret. Sioux Falls, as a fairly homogeneous community, is largely insulated from diversity, an environment where racism and discrimination could flourish. Indian professionals wondered if the data suggested that urban Indians found so *much* racism and discrimination in social service settings and organizations that they didn't even access the resources available there and consequently maintained that they had not experienced discrimination. This topic deserves further research.

The data from the 1997 survey of Sioux Falls' urban Indian population tends to support Bohland's (1982) argument that many Indians do not wish to become assimilated into the urban environment, but rather draw upon tribal bonds that may "transcend the need for spatial proximity." In his 1984 work, Mucha suggested that many urban Indians:

"...do not want to give up the reservations that are for them on the one hand a kind of "personal homeland," and on the other, the guarantee of retaining their tribal and Indian identity. The only choice seemed to be the economic emigration to the industrial urban centers combined together with visits "back home," as often as possible.(p.330)"

For many urban Indians, Sioux Falls will be a permanent home, and support networks (formal agencies and informal family/friend groups) may buffer the harshness of poverty and marginality many urban Indians experience due to unemployment, lack of affordable housing, and racism.

Interest in Indian-specific services (Native American outpatient substance abuse program, cultural center, and Lakota ceremonies) may signal the impending new stages of development as the urban Indian ethnic community solidifies a sense of identity and matures within the Sioux Falls metropolitan area, a trend similar to that reported in John Price's (1975) work in Canada and the U.S. In that regard, new services generated by and for urban Indians may increase, and new pressures on the broader community (particularly in the area of affordable housing and educational opportunities) may be augmented as the urban Indian population continues to grow. Clearly, research of this nature offers directions to city planners and social service providers. Future decisions ultimately may either enhance or minimize the challenges and opportunities related to the viable presence of an ethnic community in the broader non-Indian community.

Conclusion

This research has contributed to the examination of urban Indian communities, specifically providing rich data on the urban Indian experience in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Obtaining a profile of this Indian population allows for better targeting of strengths within the Indian community as well as identifying challenges that urban Indians face in this Midwestern urban community. As the Sioux Falls population grows, the adjustment of recent arrivals to the urban area may continue to be challenging--both for the Indian families that come to the metropolitan area, and for the city as preparations are made (or not made) to facilitate a quality experience for all of its citizens.

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