

Community Risk and Protective Factors Related to Child Maltreatment in Native Hawaiian  
Families: An Exploratory Study

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**Abstract**

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Native Hawaiians are overrepresented in both child maltreatment and foster care entry rates in Hawaii's child welfare system. While these racial disparities are well-documented, less is known about the reasons for why they are happening. This multi-method study analyzed 2019 data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS) to describe child sociodemographics and risk factors of Native Hawaiians in Hawaii's foster care system ( $N=1,831$ ). Fourteen qualitative interviews were conducted to explore the patterns and precipitating factors that contribute to child maltreatment and varying reasons for home removal and foster care entry among Native Hawaiian children. The study also assessed how the Coronavirus pandemic affected Native Hawaiian families in order to understand family resilience factors during times of adversity. Little differences were found in the analysis of the risk profiles between Native Hawaiian children and children of other racial groups. Findings from the qualitative interviews indicate that the identified risk factors for child maltreatment are rooted within a historical context and the positive value and proper treatment of children is compromised by the contemporary problems experienced

by Native Hawaiians. Culturally related family factors are imperative to the development of protective factors for child maltreatment in Native Hawaiian families. Directions for future research include study replication with a more generalizable sample, and the examination of systemic-level factors that are above and beyond the risk factors in this study.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Native Hawaiian and part Native Hawaiian:**

Refers to a person of Hawaiian ancestry regardless of the blood quantum amount (Office of Hawaiian Affairs [OHA], 2019). Or as a descendant of the indigenous peoples inhabiting the Hawaiian Islands.

**Pacific Islander:**

Defined as a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Guam, Samoa or other Pacific Islands and may include people who identify as Samoan, CHamoru, or Tongan, etc. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

**Child:**

An individual who is less than 18 years of age (State of Hawaii Department of Human Services, n.d)

**Child Maltreatment:**

Any act or series of acts of commission or omission by a parent or other caregiver that results in harm, or the risk of harm to a child (Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2008).

**Child Abuse or Neglect:**

Acts or omissions causing harm or substantial risk of harm to the physical health or welfare of a child who is under the age of 18, by a parent, legal custodian or person responsible for the child's welfare. Circumstances may include but are not limited to: failure to provide food, health care, or food in a timely manner, the cause of pain or an extreme physical injury, psychological distress, impairment in the child's ability to function (State of Hawaii Department of Human Services, 2019a).

*Note:* Child maltreatment and Child abuse or neglect are often used interchangeably in this study, as it is in child welfare literature.

**Out-of-Home Placement or Care:**

The placement of a child away from their legal custodian, out-of-home placement options may include foster care, or kinship care with a licensed resource family home (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.; State of Hawaii Department of Human Services, n.d.).

**Confirmed or Substantiated Case:**

A report of child maltreatment with sufficient evidence and reasonable cause to conclude maltreatment occurred (State of Hawaii Department of Human Services, 2019b).

**Confirmed Child Victim:**

A child victim whose abuse(s) has been confirmed or substantiated by Child Welfare Services (State of Hawaii Department of Human Services, 2019a).

**Home Removal Reason:**

A listed reason associated with the removal of the child from their home and contact with the foster care system (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect [NDACAN], 2019).

**Cultural Identity:**

A perceived sense of an individual's social belonging to a cultural group, including their cultural heritage, values and customs (Green et al., 2015).

**Parent:**

An adult who is a custodial or noncustodial parent of a child (CDC, 2008).

**Caregiver:**

An adult, other than the legal custodian who is authorized to provide care for the child and care for the child's overall health and welfare (State of Hawaii Department of Human Services, n.d.).

**Protective Factor:**

An individual, family, or community characteristic or condition that promotes healthy development and wellbeing of children and protects a child by minimizing the risk or effects of maltreatment (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.).

**Resilience:**

A process that encompasses the ability to adapt and emotionally cope in a positive way to adversity and trauma (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.).

## Glossary of Hawaiian Terms

**‘Ohana:**

A Hawaiian word that embodies the essence and importance of family, including blood and non-blood relatives (Pukui & Elbert, n.d.).

**Aloha:**

A Hawaiian term and ideology traditionally encompassing the meaning of love, kindness, peace and affection (Teves, 2015).

**Hanai:**

The Hanai system is a traditional Hawaiian social practice that represents the informal exchange or adoption of children by relatives or non-relatives through selfless responsibility that's taken on and naturally embedded in the Hawaiian culture (Brown & Bloom, 2009; Howard et al., 1970). Hawaii federal law recognizes Hanai as a culturally competent system of support for Native Hawaiian children, under relative placement and guardianship.

## **POSITIONALITY STATEMENT**

As a Native Hawaiian student pursuing a master's in public health, my passion for my Hawaiian culture has been the impetus to working with Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander groups from an academic and research standpoint. My personal experience of conflicting emotions and hardships associated with my Native Hawaiian cultural identity, led me on this research journey to examine problems affecting Native Hawaiians, in a historical and cultural context. In order to conduct and present both ethical and non-biased research I acknowledge the biases and subjective views that I hold as someone that identifies as the same racial group with those that I interviewed. My racial background gives me an advantage to working with and accessing Native Hawaiians, a vulnerable group, who may otherwise be apprehensive or closed off to participating with research. My own experiences and understanding of cultural values also create an open and sensitive interpretation of meanings that participants portray in the data. Conversely, I am aware of the power differences that may exist between myself as a person in higher-level academia and a participant. So, to overcome potential challenges, producing a successful researcher-participant interaction with participants includes that I help participants understand my research goals and questions, and explain to them my own background and personal interest in this topic. And importantly, that I give these Native Hawaiians a voice to share their stories and express their emotions and thoughts in a safe non-judgmental space and that their perspectives are accurately depicted in the research. Likewise, as I am cognizant of the shared and/or opposing views that I may hold, I have refrained from allowing my own preconceived notions and feelings of child maltreatment and Native Hawaiian disparities in the child welfare system to misconstrue the data.

# Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

Child maltreatment is recognized as a pressing public health concern affecting families across the United States (CDC, 2021). Although underestimated, at least 1 in 7 children have experienced some form of child abuse and/or neglect in the past year (CDC, 2021.). In 2019, nearly 3.5 million children were involved in investigations of maltreatment or received an alternative service through child protective services (CPS), and of these children, over 142 thousand were removed from their home and assigned to receive foster care services (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services [DHHS], 2019). Differences in data on the reporting, investigation, and substantiation of child maltreatment cases reveal that racial disparities exist between Black and White children. (Cort et al., 2010; Dettlaff & Boyd, 2020; Drake et al., 2011; Font et al., 2012). Furthermore, Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) children are also more likely to experience out-of-home foster care placement, and less likely to receive an alternative in-home service to address child maltreatment within the family, reflecting the pervasive racial differences in foster care rates (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021). The severe repercussions that can result from child maltreatment, like the cumulative incidence of child welfare involvement, and child entry into the foster care system, to name a few, disproportionately affect children of color (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021; Cooper, 2013).

## 1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The disparities in the public child welfare system have long existed among BIPOC children, especially for African American children and American Indian and Alaskan Native children (AIAN) (Crofoot & Harris, 2012; Curtis & Denby, 2011; Dettlaff & Boyd, 2020, Lawler

et al., 2012). While the issue of racial disproportionalities in the child welfare system, specifically in foster care rates, has been well documented for African American and AIAN children, little is known about the grim relationship between Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islander (NHPI) children and the child welfare system. In 2019, over 49% of confirmed child maltreatment victims in Hawaii were of NHPI descent (State of Hawaii Department of Human Services, 2019a). Furthermore, NHPI children are persistently over-represented in Hawaii's foster care system. Although NHPI account for 27% of all residents in Hawaii, they account for nearly 50% of children in foster care, and those who identified as Native Hawaiian or part Native Hawaiian represent 46% of the foster care population (State of Hawaii Department of Human Services, 2019b; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Native Hawaiian children tend to not only stay in the system longer but also experience lower reunification rates with their families and cycle in and out of the system more frequently, compared to their White counterparts. Native Hawaiian children are also removed from their homes at higher rates than other racial groups (Godinet et al., 2010; Godinet et al., 2011) The lack of disaggregated data prohibits adequate examination of racial and cultural differences and inequities to understand how impactful and relevant the issue of foster care representation overrepresentation is for Native Hawaiian families, and why it's happening. (Fong & Petronella, 2021; Godinet, et al., 2011).

Knowing the risk profile of NHPI children who are put into the foster care system and why Native Hawaiians are overrepresented in Hawaii's child welfare and foster care system, is not clear. While local Hawaii organizations and programs are working to create downstream solutions to help families that are affected by the problem, limited empirical research has been done to understand the underlying reasons for why Native Hawaiian children are removed from their homes and placed into foster care at higher rates than other racial groups, and how this

ongoing issue can be prevented for this group. Applying a cultural and historical lens may be imperative to exploring the chronic issue of racial disparities in the child welfare system that's affecting Native Hawaiians (Brown & Bloom, 2009). The effects of colonization and historical trauma are reflected in the inequities and systemic barriers that Native Hawaiians experience today (Mokuau et al., 2016). The impact of these social determinants of health affecting Native Hawaiian communities engenders susceptibility of Native Hawaiians to other high-risk indicators that can impede optimal health and social status of Native Hawaiians (OHA, 2015a), which also may be theorized as increasing the risk of Native Hawaiian overrepresentation in Hawaii's child welfare system, and the risk for child maltreatment. With Native Hawaiian children counting as the largest number of confirmed victims of child abuse and neglect over the last couple of decades, it's important to avoid dismissing the fact that actual incidence of child maltreatment may be happening in Native Hawaiian families and working in conjunction with precipitating factors for reasons for home removal, despite contributing biases that may exist in the child welfare system (Miller et al., 2013). Therefore, understanding the contextual factors that can manifest into forms of child maltreatment among Native Hawaiian families is essential to formulate a greater understanding of why Native Hawaiian children are entering foster care at higher rates compared to other racial groups.

Furthermore, with the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic heightening individual and family hardships, severe stress and fatigue associated with the pandemic may exacerbate the risk of child maltreatment and challenge the documented protective factors for child maltreatment (Brown et al., 2020; Lawson et al., 2020). Therefore, the second half of this study focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on family dynamics within the Native Hawaiian community. Given what is known about the factors that may contribute to child maltreatment and the varying challenges

raised by COVID-19 that are posed on families, learning about lived experiences in this relevant time will provide an in-depth look into what resilience is for Native Hawaiians in a time that may incite family dysfunction.

Given the limited knowledgebase on child welfare with this population, understanding how Native Hawaiian children are valued in the culture and what factors influence how they are treated will be conducive in understanding the etiology of child maltreatment in Native Hawaiian families, and therefore may shed light on the issue of Native Hawaiian overrepresentation in the child welfare system. To date, most of the qualitative information about Native Hawaiians and child welfare have been collected from families that have been directly affected by the child welfare system. While this data is essential in understanding the lived experiences of families to understand barriers and challenges that are associated with the child welfare system and its processes, it's just as important to document perspectives from Native Hawaiian parents in order to understand what protective factors families employ that promote children's well-being and mitigate the possibility of child maltreatment. Similarly, by exploring the role of culture and conditions that bolster protective factors and resilience against family dysfunction and adversity, such as child maltreatment, community designed prevention efforts and policies can be better informed and customized to address child maltreatment and the needs of Native Hawaiian families living in Hawaii.

### 1.3 CURRENT STUDY

This study aimed at using an exploratory and multi-methods design to combine quantitative and qualitative data to describe child sociodemographics and risk factors of Native Hawaiians in Hawaii's foster care system and to explore Native Hawaiian perceptions of what contextual factors are perceived as contributing to child maltreatment among Native Hawaiian

families, to better understand the relationship between child maltreatment and reasons for foster care entry for Native Hawaiian children.

The purpose of this study is three-fold:

1. To describe child sociodemographics and risk factors of Native Hawaiian children in Hawaii's foster care system, through basic descriptive analysis using 2019 data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).
2. To explore how Native Hawaiian children are raised and valued in Native Hawaiian culture. And to identify what contextual factors shape how children are treated in Native Hawaiian culture and make it less likely for child maltreatment to happen in Native Hawaiian families.
3. To understand how the COVID-19 pandemic affected Native Hawaiian families with young children and understand how protective and resilience factors have unfolded during the pandemic and the influence of cultural orientation on these factors.

Given the prior research that largely examines racial differences in child maltreatment and child welfare involvement between Black, AIAN, and Caucasian groups, this study contributes descriptive and qualitative data including Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.

The use of a multi-methods research design supports the ability to develop a comprehensive view of the issue of interest using different data sources (Knappertsbusch et al., 2021). Given the novel research topic, the inclusion of quantitative data in this study offers a fuller well-rounded view of children who are removed from their homes by the child welfare system in Hawaii. A descriptive analysis was done to look at child sociodemographics and risk factors of Native Hawaiian children in Hawaii. Although quantitative data does not provide cultural or resilience-oriented data, it's a critical first step to look at demographics to understand the problem and the

risk profile of Native Hawaiian children in the system. Additionally, considering the researchers objective, utilizing qualitative data as a complimentary data source yielded unique insight on community perceptions of risk and protective factors for child maltreatment affecting Native Hawaiian families. And what contextual factors can influence family dynamics and functioning, in relation to the value and treatment of children in the Native Hawaiian culture.

The need for qualitative research in public health has grown increasingly popular to address rising questions in health research, in an innovative way to better study how different factors interact and influence health, and how people interpret health (Isaacs, 2014). The use of qualitative data, opposed to only using quantitative data, provides researchers with in-depth and contextually specific perspectives on health issues and an understanding of the phenomena of health-related behaviors and outcomes (Jack, 2006). Because qualitative data offers a way to look at people's lived experiences, and a view of how people interpret meaning with the social environment around them, qualitative research provided the best approach to explore Native Hawaiian perceptions of child maltreatment and family resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic (Miles et al., 2020). The inclusion of both data sources can bridge the knowledge of child maltreatment and precipitating factors for home removals reasons among Native Hawaiian children.

Two conceptual frameworks were used to explain the etiology of child maltreatment in Native Hawaiian families and child welfare disparities. The analysis for the current study is modeled after the historical trauma framework, or the more relevant, Indigenous historical trauma framework that speaks to the intergenerational trauma and oppression as an essential marker to understanding health among Native populations (Brave Heart et al., 2011; Kirmayer et al., 2014). This theory was first introduced in the health and behavioral science fields and is

becoming increasingly applied to the Public Health realm to understand and contextualize the trajectory and origin of post-colonial health and social outcomes of Indigenous communities (Sotero, 2006). The cumulative effects of historical trauma and cultural imperialism have been thoroughly researched under this theory, among children of Holocaust survivors, Native Americans and Aboriginal communities in Canada (Gone et al., 2019; Mohatt et al., 2014). The psychological construct of this framework underscores the collective emotional impact of historical trauma that has manifested in several ways. The impact is evident in the experiences of subsequent generations among several Indigenous and other vulnerable groups, such as the disparities in child maltreatment and domestic violence rates, poor mental health status and engagement in high-risk behaviors. Moreover, stressors associated with historical and cultural trauma have yielded tarnishing effects on parenting styles, and family systems for many of these groups (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMSA], n.d.). The Historical Trauma framework is combined with the Indigenist Stress Coping Model (ISCM). The ISCM stresses the relation of life-stressors associated with historical trauma and culture loss and their effect on physical and mental health outcomes among Indigenous colonized populations and recognizes the importance of buffering cultural factors on this relationship (Walters & Simoni, 2002). This theoretical model is applied to the current study to understand how trauma related stressors elevate the risk for child maltreatment and what cultural factors are exercised to attenuate the risk for maltreatment. And to explore the development of child maltreatment as a dysfunctional coping mechanism to the health and social inequities experienced by Native Hawaiians.

In this study, the ISCM provides a multi-angled view to understand how history involving settler colonialism of Native Hawaiians and the Hawai'i islands, along with cultural

loss, operates with modern day structural barriers and perpetuating systems of injustices and inequalities. And how these factors have left the Native Hawaiian population prone to specific risk factors, compared to other racial groups. The colonization of the Hawai'i islands was detrimental to the Native Hawaiian culture and population with its association with the loss of land, language and family values (Duponte et al., 2010). Applying the Indigenous Historical Trauma framework to this study proposes an extensive understanding of child welfare issues that affect Native Hawaiians, so that researchers and health workers can be culturally responsive at levels of prevention that need to be addressed at the individual level, where parents/caregivers are at the focal point of resources and then at the family level.

The social constructivist paradigm was employed due to the nature of study and its focus on understanding perceptions of important contextual factors that are associated with child maltreatment and resilience in the Native Hawaiian culture. In qualitative research, social constructivism is used to learn how people interpret life experiences, feelings and attitudes to conceptualize and construct social reality (Sagvaag & Barbosa da Silva, 2008). Social constructivism highlights the evaluation of concepts through interpretations and perspectives that can create subjective meaningful understandings of different social phenomena, which suggest an appropriate method for this research (Andrews, 2012). Additionally, this framework theorizes interaction within social environments as the foundation to understanding, knowledge development and social constructs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, discussing child maltreatment in Native Hawaiian families underscores the social constructivist approach to understand how people perceive the issue and explore factors that may explain why the problem of racial overrepresentation in the foster care system is affecting the society of Native Hawaiian families at higher rates than other racial groups in Hawaii. Importantly, the varying experiences

that different participants live and how that can shape the interpretation and development of meanings to interview responses, elucidates how people contextualize an issue, like child maltreatment, in socio-historical and cultural ways. Moreover, using the social constructivist framework suggests that with qualitative methods, the researcher can delve into an extensive exploration of cultural and social factors and norms that construct conceptions of child-wellbeing and factors of resilience among Native Hawaiian participants.

## Chapter 2. BACKGROUND

### 2.1 DISPARITIES IN CHILD WELFARE

Over the last several years, there has been a steady increase in the number of children entering Hawaii's foster care system. In a five-year period (2013-2018), there has been a 27% increase in the annual number of children in foster care. The trends being seen in Hawaii's child welfare data reveal that Native Hawaiian children are being significantly affected. Native Hawaiians remain to be disproportionately represented in the foster care system and are among the largest proportion of confirmed victims of child maltreatment compared to any other racial group in Hawaii (State of Hawaii Department of Human Services, 2019a; State of Hawaii Department of Human Services, 2019b). Understanding racial disparities in the child welfare system is complex, and there are a variety of explanations sought out by researchers and scholars that provide opposing explanations of racial disproportionality, such as bias, structural racism and discrimination in the child welfare system and greater risk and disparate needs of BIPOC families (Brown & Bloom, 2009; Cenat et al., 2020; Godinet et al., 2011). Additionally, the lack of racial data disaggregation for Native Hawaiian children has further compounded the enigma of understanding these disparities and has posed challenges for understanding cultural

differences and the experiences of different groups involved in child welfare. The vast differences in racial representation in child abuse rates and involvement with CWS becomes visible when accurate data is obtained reflecting specific group-level data, like for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, opposed to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (Fong & Petronella, 2021).

Across the United States, state-level data has examined how race and ethnicity may heighten risk for CWS involvement (Jones & LaLiberte, 2017; Putnam-Hornstein et al., 2013). In regard to risk assessment and child maltreatment reporting, research has uncovered that caseworkers may perceive Black children as being at greater risk for harm and substantiate cases of maltreatment among Black families at greater rates compared to their White counterparts (Font et al., 2012). Similarly, children of Black, Native American, and Native Hawaiian descent are also more likely to be placed in out-of-home care compared to White children (Ellis, 2019; Godinet et al., 2011; Lawler et al., 2012).

The problem of child maltreatment is multifaceted and other factors, such as sociodemographic characteristics or social determinants of health (SDOH), may catalyze this relationship. Universal risk factors for involvement in CWS and for child maltreatment have been identified at the individual, family and community level (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2004). Furthermore, these factors are similarly defined as factors associated with the reentry into the foster care system, as re-entry is indicative of repeated child maltreatment (Jedwab & Shaw, 2017). At the individual level, child demographics such as young age, gender, and the diagnosis of a disability or behavioral problem, have yielded differences in the probability of children becoming victims of child maltreatment. Regarding caregiver and family level factors, single parenthood, substance use, and low economic status and utilization of public

assistance services may contribute to various forms of child maltreatment, such as neglect or abuse. The community level factors may manifest into neighborhood characteristics associated with poverty or crime, and low social support. Conversely, protective factors promote resilience and make it less likely for child maltreatment to happen and attenuate the risk of child maltreatment affecting families (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2014). Protective factors also fall in different domains. For example, individual factors pertain to the child's ability to self-regulate emotions, cope in an active and positive manner, and form high self-esteem. Family protective factors include strong and stable family support, caregiver competencies and skills and the development of a positive parent/caregiver-child relationship. Lastly, protective factors such as having access to adequate resources, like healthcare and education, and building healthy social networks, are identified in the community domain.

Importantly, the role of culture should be considered in how it operates with the documented factors associated with the risk and prevention of child maltreatment (Korbin, 2002). Separate from race, the construct of culture facilitates unique factors that can have a different effect on child rearing, such as parenting and family dynamics (Murry et al., 2004). Ethnographic research on the intersection of cultural factors with child maltreatment has been studied to broaden the lens for understanding child maltreatment (Elliot & Urquiza, 2006). The meaning and perceptions of child maltreatment can differentiate across cultural groups and can translate into accepted forms of child discipline for some groups and differing expectations of proper child rearing. For example, Latino caregivers commonly use corporal punishment towards children as a method to correct disobedience or disrespectful behavior (Fontes, 2002). Similarly, in the Samoan culture, the act of physical punishment on a child is a significant cultural aspect in

order to teach appropriate behavior, build a child's consciousness of right from wrong and prevent problem behaviors (Dubanoski & Snyder, 1980; Pereira, 2010).

The assessment of corporal discipline in the Hawaiian culture has yielded varied results, however just as Samoans utilize physical discipline as a didactic method for shaping a child's behavior, Hawaiians have paired physical discipline to correct wrong behavior, with a justifying explanation to their child as to why they're using it, in order for a child to learn (Titcomb, 2019). In some studies, appropriate acts of physical discipline have been perceived as a preferred method over verbal discipline among Native Hawaiians, as verbal reprimand creates more emotional ramifications to the parent/caregiver-child relationship (Titcomb 2019; Dubanoski, 1981; Korbin 1990). However, the concept of severe and unjust physical mistreatment and neglect of children in the Hawaiian culture is generally seen as an aberration rather than an embedded cultural custom (DeBaryshe et al., 2006; Titcomb, 2019). As physical abuse becoming an accepted form of child discipline indicates a departure from important cultural values (Dubanoski, 1981).

Therefore, if actual incidence of maltreatment is a key contributor to family involvement with the child welfare system, then considering cultural norms and values in relation to child maltreatment is critical in exploring the disparities within the system (Nadan, Spilsbury & Korbin, 2015). Additionally, culture may also be instrumental in understanding how different communities value and perceive protective factors for child maltreatment.

## 2.2 HISTORY AND NATIVE HAWAIIANS

To date, a limited number of studies have focused on the underlying reasons for the disparities in the child welfare system affecting Native Hawaiians or the reasons and conditions that engender child maltreatment within Native Hawaiian families. To examine the health and

social problems that Native Hawaiians are afflicted by, history and cultural loss must be considered and understood as its impacts have transpired into generations of marginalization and oppression.

The Indigenous people of Hawaii, Native Hawaiians have endured the long-lasting ramifications of colonization, cultural loss. Physical environment, social systems and customs pertaining to Native Hawaiian culture were invasively disrupted by the arrival of Europeans and missionaries in the 1700's. Western contact was a vehicle for introducing new diseases and sicknesses that contributed to the decline in over 80% of the Native Hawaiian population between the eighteenth and early twentieth centuries (OHA, 2015b). A culmination of changes brought by the Western contact, also extended to Native Hawaiian culture as Native Hawaiians were forced to abandon their own cultural ideologies. For example, the long history of systems and processes that were created in an effort to assimilate Native Hawaiians to Western culture, affected the infrastructure of education. With the European and American missionaries coming to Hawaii, boarding schools for the children of Hawaiian chiefs discouraged traditional Hawaiian beliefs and attitudes, with the notion to inculcate Western values and eliminate the procreation of future Hawaiian generations (Kaomea et al., 2014). Similarly, Hawaiian language and customs were abolished, and children were taught in English and educated on Americanized concepts in public school institutions (Kape'ahiokalani, 1998; Morgan, 2014).

As a result of departure from Hawaiian culture, the family system also became more vulnerable to the forceful changes of the colonizers culture and norms, and centrality of the family structure was also tarnished for Native Hawaiians, including the value and care of children (Kanuha 2005; Liu & Alameda, 2011). The function of boarding schools in the 1800s similarly coerced Native children into Western culture and periled this community into the

deprivation of the transmission of cultural and parenting knowledge, as well as the development of positive family connections, therefore making the adoption of maladaptive child-rearing methods, like physical discipline, more likely, and impacting on the family dynamic (Horejsi et al., n.d.). The importance of 'ohana orientation, commitment and obligation are considered highly valued cultural concepts to Native Hawaiians (DeBaryshe et al., 2006). The family structure in Native Hawaiian culture is reciprocal in nature and is characterized by tight knit and close intergenerational and extended family relationships of support (DeBaryshe et al., 2006). And Native Hawaiian children are revered and held in high regard as the future in preserving culture passed on by kupuna, or elders. Strong family support and connections are reflected in the care for children, in that responsibility of caregiving is communal across multiple family members. (Titcomb, 2019). However, Native Hawaiian tradition and beliefs towards the significance of kinship connections and lokahi, or harmony in family, are believed to have been devalued by Western culture (Titcomb, 2019; Kanuha, 2005). As seen in Native American and Maori groups, structural changes to perceptions of gender equality, due to colonization contribute to the high rates of family violence displayed in these communities (Rose, 2014). Although the concept of intrafamilial and domestic abuse has been identified in the pre-colonization period, in ancient Hawaiian text and mythology, abuse is seen to be an aberration in the traditional culture (Kanuha, 2007; Titcomb 2019). Limited research indicates that colonization may have increased and normalized family discord, including violence within Native Hawaiian families (Kanuha, 2007). Along with the internalization of power and control inflicted on Native Hawaiians, the cultural and societal changes favoring patriarchy, caused changes to the value and subordination of women, thus creating implications for Native Hawaiian family dynamics, subsequent to colonization (Kauanui, 2008).

The effects from cultural loss and historical trauma can permeate multiples levels affecting the population to an individual (Alvarez et al., 2020; Gone, 2019). The health and social inequities that are seen today affecting Native Hawaiians, may stem from the historical events that have made a profound impression on the Native Hawaiian population, devastating multiple generations (Mokuau et al., 2016; OHA, 2015a). Native Hawaiians have the shortest life expectancy, exhibit higher mortality rates and bear the worst health and social status compared to other ethnic groups in Hawaii (Wu et al., 2017; Kaholokula, 2007). Overall, in the United States, Native Hawaiians are disproportionately impacted by chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity compared to other ethnic groups and experience high rates of drug and alcohol use (Mokuau et al., 2016). These health discrepancies extend to the more recent health concern of coronavirus (COVID-19). In several states, including California and Washington, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders have the highest rates of COVID-19 cases compared to all other racial groups (Kaholokulua et al., 2020). Furthermore, while the effects from the pandemic have also shown to impact family and social matters, recent data revealed that the pandemic may exacerbate the risk of intimate partner violence (IPV) among Native Hawaiians, given the higher prevalence of IPV among Native Hawaiians compared to non-Hawaiians in Hawaii (OHA, 2020). The Covid-19 global pandemic continues to bring light the disparities of varying social determinants of health affecting Native Hawaiians. Likewise, high poverty and unemployment rates and poor education attainment among Native Hawaiians reflect some of the proximal effects from historical trauma that are exacerbated by current societal and structural issue.

The oppressive conditions sustained over time, therefore, may cultivate further overrepresentation of Native Hawaiians in the negative indices related to health and social

outcomes. This perpetuation of the disparities and inequities in the social determinants of health for Native Hawaiians may then operate as precursors to increased risk of child maltreatment and precipitating factors that lead to varying reasons for home removal of Native Hawaiian children.

## Chapter 3. METHODS

This was an exploratory study using a multi methods research design utilizing quantitative foster care data and qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews. Together, both data sources were separately analyzed to produce a big picture understanding of what the Native Hawaiian children in Hawaii's foster care look like in terms of their demographics and caretaker characteristics. And to explore contextual factors in relation to the value and treatment of children, in order to understand child maltreatment and foster care entry of Native Hawaiian children and to assess family strengths and dynamics in adverse times. Although the data sets are unrelated, the results from the quantitative and qualitative data sources are triangulated to assess perceptions of risk factors for child maltreatment and how those compare and are related to reasons for home removal of Native Hawaiian children. This study application was submitted to and reviewed by the University of Washington's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and was granted approval in March 2021.

### 3.1 DATA SOURCES

#### 3.1.1 *Quantitative*

Data from the 2019 Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) dataset, was used to conduct descriptive analysis to examine the distribution of demographics and characteristics of the children in Hawaii's foster care system in 2019. This data system collects federally mandated case-level data on all children in foster care and those

who have been adopted through state and Tribal child welfare agencies (Children’s Bureau, n.d.). Both adoption and foster care elements are provided in the data, which includes child demographics, placement information, and some data on the biological and foster parents (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect [NDACAN], 2019). AFCARS data are submitted to the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) and data reports are managed by and made publicly available through the U.S Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau. The data system is helpful in presenting information that makes it possible to analyze foster care characteristics and trends and can be useful for policy development and managing programs (NDACAN, 2019). In this study, descriptive statistics are presented in order to efficiently summarize and organize the data of interest to understand how different variables are distributed across a sample of people, in this case, children in Hawaii’s foster care system (Holcomb, 2016; Kaliyadan & Kulkarni, 2019). The variables of interest included the child’s sex, child’s age, child’s disability status, the child’s family caretaker structure, reported removal reason(s), and removal manner type. Measures of central tendency are assessed for the continuous variables, child’s age, and the total number of removals from the home.

### 3.1.2 *Qualitative*

#### 3.1.2.1 Study Setting and Participants

Primary data for this study were derived from semi-structured interviews conducted with Native Hawaiian parents/caregivers living in Hawaii. Fourteen participants were recruited throughout the month of March 2021. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling was utilized to identify parents/caregivers who are representative of the Native Hawaiian population across the Hawaiian Islands. The researcher collaborated with people in Hawaii who had

established credible relationships and partnerships with local community members and organizations to solicit participation, using e-mail contacts, phone calls, flyers, and social media. Additionally, research participants who completed the interview were asked by the researcher if they were willing to identify potential study participants in the community, who met the criteria and who would be interested in this study. This mode of sampling would help generate interest in the study with other Native Hawaiian community members. The study aimed to welcome participants from a variety of demographic backgrounds. Administrative leaders of local organizations in Hawaii were contacted to discuss the research study and request that they share the study flyer with community members being served by the organizations. However, COVID-19 created challenges to accessing people for this study. Given the adjustments that schools and organizations have had to undergo and the updated infrastructures in place that align with safety protocols in response to the pandemic, organizations could not prioritize this study or guarantee that they could pass on the project information to potential participants. Therefore, utilizing a snowball sampling technique proved to be an efficient way of generating interest in study participation in a short time period. Importantly, being able to identify interested participants by implementing recruitment efforts through established communities and social networks, helped to establish trust in the study and researcher, among the study participants. In order to be both respectful and sensitive to the target population of this study, the researcher deemed this sampling approach as culturally appropriate (Sadler, 2010).

Eligibility criteria included that the participants were age 18 years or older, identify as Native Hawaiian, and have  $\geq 1$  child 13 years old or younger. This age was chosen based on the high risk of child maltreatment associated with age groups under the age of 13 (DHHS, 2019). Although the average age of NHPI children in Hawaii's foster care system are under the age of

six, the researcher wanted to widen the age criteria beyond six so that the study could capture a range of parents/caregivers who have young and older children because their experiences could vary from each other.

### 3.1.2.2 Study Procedure

Interviews were conducted and audio recorded over the telephone (n=11) and Zoom, a video communications platform (n=3). The length of the interviews ranged from 20-80 minutes. The researcher obtained verbal consent from each participant at the beginning of each interview and upon completion of the interview, each participant received a \$20 electronic Amazon gift card for their participation and time. The University of Washington Human Subjects Division approved this study and waived written informed consent.

### 3.1.2.3 Interview Guide

Demographic data were collected including age, gender, marital status, education and employment status, and household composition. The guide focused on questions about the way children are valued and treated in Native Hawaiian culture, as well as perceptions on contributing factors to child maltreatment in Native Hawaiian families. The second half of the interview guide asked questions pertaining to experiences with COVID-19 and how it affected the family dynamic, and how culture has shaped the participants' family resilience during the pandemic.

Interview questions were framed to focus on family-level resilience and positive attributes, rather than the needs and deficits that Native Hawaiian families possess, towards child caregiving and life-challenging experiences. The importance of using a strengths-based approach eludes the importance of using research methods and protocols that prevent the perpetuation of

stereotypes and characterizing different cultures in terms of weaknesses, especially Indigenous cultural groups. Using this kind of approach, with Native Hawaiian's specifically and understanding how to address the issue of persistent overrepresentation in the foster care system, means drawing on family and community strengths that are resourceful in mitigating the negative responses to adversity and focusing on resilience that paves the way to better health and behavior outcomes (Antonio et al., 2020; Kana'iaupuni, 2005).

### 3.2 DATA ANALYSIS

Once the interviews were completed, clean verbatim transcription of each interview was done. The interviews were transcribed using Trint, an online audio transcription software. Following transcription, a process of quality control was done to ensure integrity between the recordings and transcripts. Transcripts were cleaned and edits were made to phrases said in Pidgin English in order to enhance the readability of the interviews.

Each transcript was reviewed and memoing was completed by the primary researcher, as an initial step to explore meanings across the data, in the analysis process. All interviews were coded using Dedoose, version 8.3.45. A combination of deductive and inductive coding was used to develop the initial codebook. A priori codes were developed based on the literature review and conceptual frameworks. A list of inductive provisional codes was formed from emergent salient ideas identified by reviewing two transcripts. A coding scheme was finalized by the coding team, which consisted of the primary research and two secondary coders. Interview transcripts were divided between the primary researcher and the secondary coders and were double coded by the primary researcher and at least one other secondary coder independently. Transcript coding was discussed between coders to reconcile differences and reach consensus in coding applications in order to ensure intercoder reliability.

Pattern coding was employed to cluster codes around main ideas and to identify meaningful patterns within the data and coded excerpts were reviewed to confirm and ascertain interconnections between themes.

### 3.3 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS RESULTS

Table 1. presents descriptive statistics for children in Hawaii's foster care system in 2019, including demographic characteristics and risk factors associated with child maltreatment. In 2019, there were 2,875 children in Hawaii's foster care system, this represents a 4% increase from the previous year (State of Hawaii Department of Human Services, 2019b). Of these 2,875 children, 1,831 (64%) of them were of NHPI descent. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander children include children who identify as NHPI alone or in combination with another race. Because child welfare disparities exist for NHPI in Hawaii, data for NHPI was compared to all other races, including White, Asian, Black, American Indian or Alaskan Native, and more than one race. Children of Hispanic ethnicity may be any of these races. Results from the quantitative data revealed little to no differences between NHPI children and children from other racial groups, who were in the foster care system at the time. In both groups, a majority of the children were not clinically diagnosed with a disability upon entrance into the foster care system. Similarly, for all children in this sample, 91% of children were placed into foster care by court order, as opposed to voluntary removal. There were also no differences revealed in total home removal episodes, as both groups of children had a similar average: 1.33 for NHPI children, and 1.32 for all other children. Other child characteristics that were assessed differed by race. Among the different types of caretaker structures for which the child was removed, NHPI children were more likely than other children to be removed from an unmarried couple (41% vs 28%, respectively). Removal rates of NHPI children from a single mother caretaker structure was

lower (36%) than other children removed from a single mother (46%). However, data within the NHPI group revealed stark differences in these rates of removal from these two caretaker structure types, compared to the low removal rates among married couples and single males. Regarding home removal reasons, neglect was the most common reported reason, accounting for over 70% of cases for both groups of children in this sample. Meanwhile, the percentage for drug abusive parent as a reported reason for home removal was higher among NHPI children (32%) than non-NHPI children (26%). In contrast, children of all other races had a higher rate of reports for caretaker inability to cope as a home removal reason, than NHPI children (24% and 18%). On average, the age of NHPI children who entered the foster care system was 6.65, this is slightly younger by about one year, compared to other children who enter foster care. Missing data of 87 observations were excluded from these calculations.

**Table 1. Characteristics of Children in Foster Care (2019)**

	Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders		All other races	
	N (N=1831)	% (63.69)	N (N=957)	% (33.29)
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	913	49.86	461	48.32
Female	918	50.14	493	51.68
<b>Clinical Disability</b>				
Yes	239	13.10	135	14.17
No	1571	86.08	809	84.89
Not yet determined	3	0.82	9	0.94
<b>Caretaker Structure</b>				
Married Couple	307	16.77	169	17.68
Unmarried Couple	764	41.73	269	28.14
Single Male	87	4.75	71	7.43
Single Female	673	36.76	446	46.65
<b>Removal Reason</b>				
Neglect	1369	77.96	668	73.40
Drug Abuse Parent	563	32.06	244	26.81
Physical Abuse	328	18.68	156	17.14
Caretaker Inability to Cope	318	18.11	220	24.18
Sexual Abuse	87	4.95	37	4.07
Alcohol Abuse Parent	82	4.67	51	5.60
Inadequate Housing	82	4.67	31	3.41
Abandonment	78	4.44	41	4.50
Parent Incarceration	68	3.87	40	4.40
Child Behavior Problem	49	2.79	18	1.98
Drug Abuse Child	21	1.20	6	0.66
Child Disability	8	0.46	2	0.22
Parent Death	7	0.40	8	0.88
Relinquishment	7	0.40	7	0.40
Alcohol Abuse Child	3	0.17	4	0.44
<b>Removal Manner</b>				
Voluntary	151	8.25	85	8.88
Court Ordered	1680	91.75	872	91.12
<b>Continuous Variables</b>				
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Child Age	6.65	5.63	7.28	5.87
Total # of Removals	1.33	0.66	1.32	0.71

### 3.4 QUALITATIVE RESULTS

**Table 2** Demographics characteristics of the participants from the semi-structured interviews (n=14)

Variables	n (%)
Age (in years), mean (SD)	32.7 (9.8)
Number of Children, mean (SD)	1.4 (0.6)
Gender	
Female	11 (79)
Male	3 (21)
Ethnicity	
Native Hawaiian alone	9 (64)
Native Hawaiian in combination with another race	5 (36)
Marital Status	
Married	10 (71)
Single	3 (21)
Divorced	1 (7)
Employment	
Employed	11 (79)
Self-employed	2 (14)
Unemployed	1 (7)
Education	
Highschool	2 (14)
Some college	3 (21)
Associates degree	2 (14)
Bachelor's degree or higher	6 (43)
Unknown	1 (7)
Household Composition	
Living with immediate family only	8 (57)
Living with extended family	6 (43)

A total of thirteen interviews were completed with eleven female and three male parents/caregivers throughout March 2021. One interview consisted of two parent/caregivers. Table 2 reports participant demographics. Participants' ages ranged from 24 to 56 years old, with a mean age of 32. Participants identified as Native Hawaiian alone (64%) or as Native Hawaiian and another race (36%). Of the fourteen participants, a little less than half reported that they had a bachelor's degree or higher (43%), and a majority of participants were employed or self-

employed (93%). In terms of household composition, eight participants reported that they live with just their immediate family (57%), while 6 participants said they live with extended family members (43%). Nearly 70% of the participants were married.

As the primary focus of this study to assess the scope of child maltreatment and child welfare disparities affecting Native Hawaiian children, parents/caregivers shared their views of what contextual factors they believe to contribute to child maltreatment in Native Hawaiian families, in order to better understand the relationship between child maltreatment and reasons for child home removal and foster care entry. In the latter half of the data collection process, protective factors and resilience were explored among Native Hawaiian families in the context of adversity during the Covid-19 pandemic. Five major themes related to child maltreatment emerged from the analysis of the transcripts: (1) Intergenerational trauma, (2) Socio-cultural challenges and economic stressors from living in Hawaii, (3) Role of 'Ohana and importance of caretaker structure and dynamic, (4) High drug presence and incarceration rates in the Native Hawaiian community, (5) Importance of teaching in child-rearing and the effect on the cultural value of children. These themes encapsulated both risk and protective factors for child maltreatment and child welfare involvement. Three themes were identified related to the analysis of protective factors during COVID-19: (1) Restoration of cultural practices, (2) Perspective and Mindset, (3) Family support and togetherness.

#### 3.4.1 ***Theme 1. Intergenerational trauma***

Across respondent data, intergenerational historical trauma was referenced as a root problem that gives rise to the occurrence of child maltreatment and why Native Hawaiian children are removed from their families and placed into out of home placement care. Several participants identified emotional and psychological ramifications from history and the

fragmentation of Hawaiian culture. And how this has influenced the mentality of Native Hawaiians and how this can affect parenting decisions and the ability to care for their child. A participant discussed why they believe Native Hawaiians enter the foster care system at higher rates than other racial groups in Hawaii and linked this to Hawaii's history:

*“A lot of the times the families that enter into that kind of system, they choose to depend on the system that I guess some would say that if they are deeply into their Hawaiian culture, they would blame the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom...they'll just take advantage of the system and knowing how to work the system and take advantage of it...So I just feel like it's kind of a sense of giving up, I guess, and just relying on the system to care for them. It's sad that parents sometimes put their children in that situation because it becomes about the system and not the child...they just feel a sense of entitlement... it's sad what history has done with the overthrow of the Hawaiian government.”*

Another participant shared a similar thought and connected internalized emotion that's related to historical trauma and its relevance to the racial disparities in Hawaiian child welfare system:

*“I feel like sometimes there's just so much anger in the hearts of some Hawaiian families. That anger gets passed on generation to generation and it kind of just stumps some kids”.*

Conversely, some participants expressed a common, but opposing view, in that history and cultural loss has deterred Native Hawaiians' utilization of resources and ability to seek help when needed. Or how the lack of seeking support can prevent addressing child maltreatment and further perpetuate the issue within families. Changes to traditional child-rearing styles and parental attitudes towards children, such as the normalization of physical disciplinary practices based on the notion of assimilating to new dominant culture(s) and the need to feel to regain control of what's been taken from people, were noted as a result of being overcome or colonized

by an outside power. One participant elaborated how parenting has been affected by years of historical trauma:

*“There's been a lot of cultural trauma that's happened to Hawaii, many, many years and a lot of time that has caused stress on the family and stress on the couples...Hawaiians had to save a lot of things being taken away from them and so they're just very territorial about some things, like land is just one thing. It's like the land and the place that we live in that has been like kind of changing ever since, like hundreds and hundreds of years, but that also stems into families when they're just like this is mine, you're mine, I own you or something like that, and that's what causes the conception of the parents being more dominant.”*

Intergenerational factors were also connected to parenting quality. These factors were highlighted across many responses as participants discussed the mechanism of the way parents choose to raise their children and how it can be a reflection of how the parents were raised and what they were taught, thus strengthening or weakening the protective properties from the transmission of culture and positive family values over time. Healthy coping of intergenerational factors was seen as important to parental resilience and was noted as instrumental in the development of positive traits and the ability to care for children. This resonated with a mother who further explained the idea of preserving and incorporating negative parenting styles:

*“They were raised in not the best household or not raised with the best parenting styles, and they keep those parenting styles and think in their head, oh that's ok because it happened to me so I'm going to do that to my children.”*

### 3.4.2 **Theme 2.** Socio-cultural challenges and economic stressors from living in Hawaii

Participants identified varying factors associated with living in the state of Hawaii, as a contributor to child maltreatment and foster care entry resulting from produced stress within local Native Hawaiian families. A majority of participants discussed state conditions such as economic stress affiliated with the high cost of living, the government's low prioritization of

local Native Hawaiians and cultural exploitation of Native Hawaiian culture, in relation to perpetuating the marginalizing effects caused by historical trauma.

In regard to the economic challenges that living in Hawaii poses on residents, participants expressed how this reinforces susceptibility to family discord within Native Hawaiian households, which can make more Native Hawaiian families prone to child maltreatment incidence. There was consensus around low-income status and high rates of poverty among the Native Hawaiian population, and the need to have to work multiple jobs as a pressure that's distinctly linked to Native Hawaiians. This was described as a "Tug-of-War" by two participants, and others also noted the dissonance between trying to balance the responsibility to work in order to provide for their family, time towards developing strong parent/caregiver and child connections. Participants explained that with Native Hawaiian adults needing to work so much in Hawaii's economic climate, parents/caregivers lose the ability to form healthy bonds with their kids. Additionally, the stress from working can also lead to unhealthy distressing mechanisms, such as drinking, or taking it out on kids.

*"They will work five or six jobs, day and night...And so, with all that stress comes mistreatment, taking it out on your family and your kids, because in your mind you might think, oh my gosh, if didn't have kids, I wouldn't be in this situation or something like that."*

Participants additionally alluded to Hawaiians not being equipped as compared to other races, and that barriers to adequate resources and the low government support for Native Hawaiians widens social and health disparities, in the context of the ability to take care of family needs, as described by one father:

*"I think we're not a priority for anyone, not even the state. But our culture is used to share 'ohana, to share aloha, to share our culture with whoever is willing to buy it. You know, we have our Hawaii views, our landscape, the oceans. We have our cultural dance, food. So, they'll set up*

*a luau and tourists will buy into that because they want the authentic Hawaiian experience when they come to vacation. But is it authentic? And then when they do see somebody that is Hawaiian, they don't want that. We're pushed to the sides. Like our homestead lands, they're not in the main areas, they're on the outskirts, in the hot areas, up against the ocean, far away from accessible areas, away from central Oahu. They just push you where they want you to go and take everything from the culture and they give you nothing.”*

### 3.4.3 **Theme 3.** Role of ‘Ohana and importance of caretaker structure and dynamic

Several family characteristics that were identified as beneficial factors that enhance the positive values and foster proper treatment of children were considered as cultural values. A strong foundation of unconditional family love, support and openness was expressed as a safety net for children in the culture. And family dysfunction and family stress were identified as a result of a fragmented family foundation, leading to the inability to care for a child, which affects the value and prioritization of a child. Two participants highlight the importance of strong familial relationships and the importance of child-rearing as a family responsibility:

*“Being connected with your family, having strong relationships in your family is a protective factor for children, that, and there’s more people to maybe share the responsibility of raising the child.”*

*“I think especially with Hawaiians just being able to share in the caring of the children and the family, and I'm not just talking like my immediate family. It's a thing we all help with. We're all kind of keeping an eye on each other's kids. That's just how we are and that's just how you do. I think just knowing that other people are sharing in the caring of our keiki. We form a circle around the keiki, and we make sure the keiki are ok. The kids were ok because of the family unit around them, the aunties the uncles, cousins, the support system.”*

All but three participants also highlighted these positive attributes of family, as important for sustaining harmony in family or mitigating family discord. Practicing Ho’oponopono among

family members and the function of Hanai system was commonly described as an important feature in Native Hawaiian culture.

In emphasizing the importance of the structure and dynamic of dual parenthood, many participants discussed their views on differing caretaker structures and the way that these may affect how children are valued and how this may have an effect on overall family dynamic:

*“There's a lot of instances and stories where when you have separated parents that there's just a lot of hate there, there's a lot of like the child has to be between those two parents or those two families, and they kind of have to play one side and then the other side, depending on where they're at, which is very stressful, I think, for a child. So, for the adults to be able to respect each other and remember what they should do for the best interest of the child, remove the pride, and remove the need for power or the need to punish the other person, I think would be very healthy for their children.”*

One participant emphasized the significance of the father figure presence in response to changes in family structures for Native Hawaiians:

*“Very few families get the chance to [connect with and educate their children], just because of poverty levels, no time because you're working, you'll be working or both husband and wife are working versus just the husband, or the husbands just gone. And so, there's like no male figure, like a male role model anymore. So maybe they'll be the women's side, and the kane (men) will just not be around, and the kane is a pillar, I believe is a strong pillar for the people. And I believe a lot of people I've seen like that where there is no man around the house anymore and he's working all these hours. And that's the negative aspect of it where they're just working. And no time to put into educating, into the things that they learn where it may be fishing, diving, hunting, growing, farming, you know, and all of those aspects and being able to transfer that information on, is slowly being depleted or lost completely.”*

#### 3.4.4 **Theme 4.** High drug presence and incarceration rates in the Native Hawaiian community

Across all the participant data, racial differences in substance use and incarceration rates among Native Hawaiians were pointed out. Substance related problems, including substance use was cited as a primary precipitating factor for child maltreatment and child home removal of Native Hawaiian children. Substance use was commonly viewed as a factor that also leads to domestic violence within Native Hawaiian families. Opposite of that, some participants also noted that the absence of drug-related problems in a household and within a family, fosters safer and healthier family relationships between parents/caregivers and children. One participant elaborated on the impact of parental drug use and/or involvement with drugs:

*“I think drugs have a lot to do with a lot of the child maltreatment in the Hawaiian community. Because they're drawn away from family, and they're more influenced by the drug too”.*

Some participants also identified the high disproportionate rates of incarceration as a disparate factor unique to Native Hawaiians and an explaining factor as to why Native Hawaiian children are removed from their homes by the child welfare system, as described by one participant who doesn't believe the overrepresentation of Native Hawaiian children in foster care is surprising to them:

*“It doesn't surprise me because there are lots of people that are Hawaiian in the prison system and when you go to prison, your child is most likely going to be taken by the state, whether maybe that person is a single parent or maybe both parents together were taken or arrested. So then, yeah, I know there's a lot of movement for social justice reform and incorporating going to cultural practice to rehabilitate Native Hawaiians in and out of prison.”*

### 3.4.5 *Theme 5. Importance of teaching in child-rearing and the effect on the cultural value of children*

All participants shared that the core of child-rearing in the Native Hawaiian culture includes features of deep love and nurture. The centrality of child-rearing was commonly connected to the importance of the transmission of cultural values and teaching children morals, such as respect and learning to be a valuable asset to the community. Participants explained that children are a high priority in the family unit, as they are important in preserving the culture for future generations. The strong alignment of teaching and instilling values and morals with the high value of children was indicated as being important and relevant to the trajectories for adult outcomes and was reported as conducive to the proper treatment of children and a decreased chance for child maltreatment in Native Hawaiian families.

However, generational differences were noted in the way that recent generations of parents are raising their children, thus contributing to the way children are valued in Native Hawaiian families. Many participants expressed how children are no longer being taught important cultural values that include respecting family, and portraying appropriate behavior, and that with the lack of instilling cultural values into children, there's a cultural divide in the child and parent/caregiver dynamic and the expectations and value of children have changed. Furthermore, a few participants explained that the use of physical discipline is perceived as a culturally accepted form of discipline and can be effective in teaching children proper manners and how to behave properly, when used appropriately. But with the modern differences in child-rearing, physical discipline is not as commonly used, resulting in children displaying disrespectful behavior towards their parents. This resonated with a couple of different participants:

*“I was raised that even though keiki [children] are the future generation and are important that you should respect your kupuna [elders] also. I never, ever disrespected or talked back to any of my kupuna. And nowadays it's different. And I also hear parents saying what do you want to do? What do you want? You know, and when I was raised, it's like you will do this, you didn't have a choice. I have a 15-year-old and he's ten years younger from my fourth son. So sometimes I find myself doing that and I have to step back and say, wait a minute, why am I asking him what he wants to do? This is what he's going to do. When he's 18, he'll decide what he wants to do.”*

*“I was totally raised different from how my kids are getting raised. I mean, it's totally a different background of me, seeing how my kids like even now they kind of talk back to me a lot because I don't whack them. But it gets to that point where I do want to whack them and I teach them that, you know, hey don't talk like that.”*

#### 3.4.6 Summary of COVID-19 Results

Overall, participants expressed a range of emotional challenges they experienced during Covid-19. Financial hardships, limited family socialization and difficulties associated with becoming a new parent during the pandemic, were accompanied by fear, stress, and overwhelmingness, to name a few. Although many challenges were discussed, participants were able to identify silver linings throughout the pandemic. These hopeful moments included positive changes to the family dynamic such as strengthened family connections and improvement in family communication. And the opportunity for parents to learn their child's learning style by becoming their primary teacher at home.

Participants were asked to share what protective factors looked like during the pandemic and how they exercised resilience during this time. Over half of the participants identified how being able to engage in cultural practices has been a source of resilience during the pandemic and how these experiences have grounded people during this time. Participants discussed varying experiences in relation to restoring cultural practices during the pandemic such as becoming

more sustainable and resourceful by learning to grow their own food, participating in online Hawaiian education classes, and spending more time outside and in nature.

A majority of participants explained how the challenges from the pandemic highlighted the importance of ‘ohana, Aloha and family togetherness and support. The unity of the family system was instrumental for participants in giving them strength to handle issues related to the pandemic. For some participants, their perspective and mindset shaped by their cultural identity was identified as a facilitator in resilience. The ability to remain strong and positive during the pandemic was drawn from peoples’ cultural knowledge and upbringing, and religious foundations.

## Chapter 4. DISCUSSION

This exploratory study aimed to develop a comprehensive picture of Hawaii’s state child welfare disparities affecting Native Hawaiians, in relation to child maltreatment and foster care entry. Although preliminary in nature, the results from this study contribute to a growing body of research to examine the issue of why Native Hawaiians are persistently overrepresented in Hawaii’s foster care system. In exploring perceptions of factors that are influential to the way children are valued and treated, and risk-factors for child maltreatment, the qualitative findings indicate that these factors are deeply rooted within a historical context. It is evident that macrosystem-level factors, like the problems correlated with Hawaii’s history and years of cultural loss have transpired into negative outcomes and issues seen at the family-level. The data driven themes propose that the etiology of child maltreatment is attributed to macro-level factors, such as colonization and cultural loss, that engender a cyclical relationship between social determinant of health disparities and inequalities and the identified risk factors for child

maltreatment. This repeating cycle that entraps Native Hawaiians and imperils families to the incidence of child maltreatment and child welfare involvement, indicates that there's an intersect of the way children are valued with the involved cycling factors affecting Native Hawaiians. This suggest that the proper treatment of Native Hawaiian children is compromised by contemporary problems experienced by Native Hawaiians, and that the change to the positive traditional value of children in Native Hawaiian culture is perceived as a function of child maltreatment as a result of the continuing marginalization of Native Hawaiians.

Additionally, the conditions of living in Hawaii appear to act through an independent vessel with an array of issues, separate from the direct effects connected to history. The varying factors associated with Hawaii's high cost of living and the misuse of culture and land to accommodate the influx of tourism related attractions, further compounds the issues from historical trauma, therefore exacerbating the modern-day socio-economic marginalization of Native Hawaiians in Hawaii. Importantly, cultural factors that encompass family values, were found to promote protective factors and preserve the traditional value of children in Native Hawaiian families. Positive family characteristics were perceived as moderating the impact of challenges associated with SDOH disparities and inequities, and therefore reducing exposure to child maltreatment related risk factors.

While the topic of systemic bias and racism in the child welfare system was not explicitly raised in the interviews, participants overwhelmingly referred to macro-level factors that render Native Hawaiians to the aforementioned cycle, including the devalue of children. Which may underpin the existence of systemic injustices elsewhere in social systems and policies, thus placing Native Hawaiians at higher vulnerability for surveillance of child maltreatment and interactions with the child welfare system. This notions to the interconnectedness between

racism and culture, as culture is considered a determinant to one's health and social status (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion [ODPHP], 2014). Racism can manifest into the systems in place that implement policies and practices that contribute to the oppression of Native Hawaiians, based on the empowerment of a society that favors a dominant culture and belittles the Native Hawaiian cultural group (Arumugham, 2017). Which reflects the concept of cultural racism, that leads to the persistence of inequalities affecting Native Hawaiians (Scott, 2007).

Results from the AFCARS data showed that parental drug use was a highly reported reason for home removal of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander children. This was parallel to the qualitative data that cited drugs, as a particular problem affecting the Native Hawaiian community, and a primary contributing factor to child maltreatment. However, the issue warrants a further examination of the relationship between drug use and child maltreatment in Native Hawaiian families. Data has yielded inconclusive results on drug use rates, with some evidence of vast differences and higher illicit drug use among Native Hawaiians compared to other groups, and other data indicating insignificant differences in drug use rates (Mokuau et al., 2016; OHA, n.d.; Sakai et al., 2011;). However, Native Hawaiians are disproportionately representative of those sent to prison for drug offenses, and account for the largest proportion of charges for methamphetamine, despite the little differences in actual drug use compared to people of other racial groups (OHA, n.d.). The drug related problems among Native Hawaiians may be attributed to Hawaii's drug policies and the coinciding operations of the criminal justice and child welfare system. Child welfare governance can increase the visibility of vulnerable populations, such as Native Hawaiians, and act in conjunction with the correctional system to make them more susceptible to criminalization (Brown & Bloom, 2009). Alternatively, many participants that

identified drug use as an issue affecting the Native Hawaiian population, suggested that actual drug use may be a maladaptive behavior as a result of the distinct risk factors that burden Native Hawaiians.

Generally, participants attributed the incidence of child maltreatment to the matter of Native Hawaiians being burdened with more challenges and stressors, and not having as many resources compared to other racial groups in Hawaii. However, the history of the Native Hawaiian people and culture was often recognized as the primary reason leading to the disadvantages they face today, including intergenerational trauma affecting the family system, and the development of parental resilience and positive parenting traits that would reduce the risk of mistreatment towards children. One example is lent to the internal racialized oppression experienced by Native Hawaiians and how it can be a barrier to seeking help and utilizing resources (Kanuha, 2005). As reflected in the qualitative findings, participants attributed historical trauma to the reason many Native Hawaiian parents avoid seeking help and support when they need it, which in turn affects their ability to care and provide for their children.

Intergenerational factors were cited as imperative in both the proper treatment of Native Hawaiian children in families and in the maintenance of the stressors and generation of risk towards the mistreatment of children. Consistent with research on historical trauma and American Indians, negative emotions linked with trauma from cultural loss and the weakening of cultural identity, can be experienced across multiple generations. This mechanism by which intergenerational factors can affect later outcomes can thereby impede effective and proper parenting, and instead foster conditions for maladaptive parenting traits (Walls & Whitbeck, 2012).

Across a majority of the qualitative data, beliefs towards standard child-rearing practices that align with the proper treatment of children, and the positive value of children stemmed from a cultural standpoint. It was indicated that the transmission of cultural practices and family values, that aid in shaping parenting skills and behavior, is a source of protection in Native Hawaiian families. And a deviance from transferring cultural values that contribute to positive and proper child-rearing in the Native Hawaiian culture, can be a barrier to mitigating the impact of intergenerational trauma from colonization and cultural desecration.

Furthermore, parental factors in relation to poverty and the devalue of education over time were both identified as negatively altering the ability to care for children and as key players to susceptibility for child maltreatment and home removal among Native Hawaiians. The pathways in which poverty and devaluation of education increase the risk for child maltreatment was demonstrated in the unwillingness to secure a stable job or pursue and encourage higher education in some Native Hawaiians, thus affecting access to and the utilization of resources, as well as overall stability and the increased risk for distress (DeBaryshe et al., 2006). Although participants in this study did not directly link the long-standing issues of poverty and low educational attainment with history and cultural loss, previous studies have deemed low poverty and education status as trauma responses to the historical forces experienced by Indigenous groups (Brittain & Blackstock, 2015; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health [NCCAHA], 2017; O'Neil et al., 2016).

Likewise, the context of child maltreatment was perceived as an issue starting in the home and participants expressed treatment of a child as a reflection of the negative or positive experiences of how the parents themselves were raised. Findings from this study posit that child maltreatment may trace back to negative childhood experiences that Native Hawaiians

experienced. Data from the Hawai'i Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) showed that Native Hawaiians represented the group with the highest prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), compared to adults of other racial groups. (Ye & Reyes-Salvail, 2014). The long-term effects of ACEs have been linked to adverse health and social outcomes, including problems associated with substance use and abuse, mental health issues and low employment and education achievement (CDC, 2021; Lange et al., 2019). More importantly, a history of ACEs among parents/caregivers may hinder healthy and safe parenting and child-rearing outcomes and increase the risk for poor parenting styles behavior congruent with child maltreatment outcomes. Just as ACEs have been found to elevate risk factors for an array of future problems, these experiences can also decrease the strength of parental protective factors against child maltreatment towards their own child, including resilience and social connections (Panisch et al., 2020).

#### 4.1 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

In conclusion, this study acts as a steppingstone in filling in the gaps related to child welfare research and the Native Hawaiian population and understanding the larger issue of Native Hawaiian overrepresentation in foster care. Additionally, the research informed a preliminary understanding of how the value of children translates into the high maltreatment rates, despite the positive value of children and the nurturing characteristics of family factors in the Native Hawaiian culture. And findings from this study provide varying directions for future research. The results concerning perceptions of factors that incite the risk for child maltreatment, demonstrate the existence of a cycle of driving factors associated with historical trauma, social determinants of health and state conditions, and intergenerational and family components, that make Native Hawaiians vulnerable to child maltreatment and child welfare involvement.

Intergenerational factors and parental factors can operate in two ways by either reinforcing the cycle by exacerbating the impact of SDOH disparities or weakening the cycle of factors by cultivating a safety network of cultural and family factors that give families a strong foundation of stability and resilience, and overall protection from being looped into the cycle. However, it is evident that the child welfare system is becoming more detrimental to the Native Hawaiian family system, as it takes advantage of this cycle of factors. These findings conceptualize child maltreatment and reasons for home removal as a proximal result of the overrepresentation of Native Hawaiians in other indices of health and social outcomes, such as high poverty and crime rates, and low education and employment levels. With the identification of historical trauma and cultural loss as a higher-level contributing factor to these child welfare related disparities, further research should consider the stages of acculturation and the role these stages play in the resilience or marginalization of families. Supplementary to the work that's been done in evaluating child welfare bias, there is a clear need to further explore systemic-level factors leading to the disproportionate reports of child maltreatment and home removals among Native Hawaiian families. The importance of this is further illustrated in the analysis of the AFCARS dataset, as there were no vast differences in the risk profiles among children of different races in Hawaii's foster care system, yet NHPI children were removed from their homes at significantly higher rates than children from other races. This also stresses the point that there is something above and beyond just these identified risk factors that is contributing to the overrepresentation of Native Hawaiian children in Hawaii's child welfare system.

Furthermore, as the value of children was assessed to deepen the understanding of how children are treated in the Native Hawaiian culture, the responsibility of teaching morals and passing on cultural values was repeatedly cited as an essential factor that influenced the positive

cultural value of children. However, given the generational differences in child-rearing and the resulting changes to the value of children and parent/caregiver-child relations, this will need to be further explored to understand how this may contribute to strain and tension to the family dynamic, making it more likely for the occurrence of child maltreatment. Moreover, future research should examine the mechanism by which the utilization and normalcy of physical discipline acts as an effective teaching method within Native Hawaiian families, and how this may correlate with the risk or protection of child maltreatment in families.

In terms of the COVID-19, the pandemic has continued to shed light on the need for resources among vulnerable populations. However, despite the hardships and emotional challenges that many Native Hawaiians faced, families were able to employ resilient protective factors that helped to protect the family dynamic from the extreme negative outcomes from COVID-19. COVID-19 may be deemed as another marginalizing facet that places Native Hawaiians and other vulnerable communities, more at risk for deleterious health and social outcomes and behaviors. Therefore, studies should implore looking deeper at the impact of COVID-19 on parent/child relationships, protective factors within families and parental resilience.

In order to better understand if the injustices that are built into the systems in place that propagate Native Hawaiians into the aforementioned cycle of factors, are more unique to the issue of living in Hawaii, it would be important to look at the experiences of Native Hawaiian families with different systems across the U.S., in order to assess other realms of child welfare disparities and if other state welfare systems pose similar or different challenges to the Native Hawaiian community.

## 4.2 STUDY LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations to this study including the limitedness of the quantitative dataset, and the sampling method. While the AFCARS dataset proved to be sufficient in providing informative data on the demographics for the child entered into foster care, the dataset was very limited on the data it provided for the parents/caretakers in which the child was removed from. This made it very challenging in the utilization of the dataset to look at associations between race, and parental and caregiver risk factors with the reasons for home removal, in order to assess if race is a key player in the disparities evident in Hawaii's foster care system, above and beyond socio-demographic risk factors. Additionally, although this study is focused on the Native Hawaiian population, the dataset did not allow for disaggregation of Native Hawaiian data from other Pacific Islander data. Although their experiences in Hawaii may be similar, the presentation of quantitative data for both groups may prevent visibility to the actual differences in child demographic factors and reasons for home removal, that these group's data portray.

There were some limitations in the sampling and recruitment of participants. The researcher focused recruitment efforts on a widespread catchment area to avoid selection bias of participants, and utilized professional partnerships with Hawaii organizations and agencies, to access potential participants. However, most of the participants that were recruited were identified through personal relationships and snowball sampling, therefore subjecting the recruitment group as a non-representative sample of the target population. Although data saturation was met, this reflects the homogeneity of the group, which begs the need for the completion of more interviews, in order to obtain data that reflects generalizability.

This study implemented a multipronged approach in understanding the topic of interest and included data on COVID-19 for the sake of context in assessing family dynamics and protective factors. However, the limitation is that the researcher did not incorporate this portion in the main focus of the data and did not triangulate the findings related to the COVID-19 questions, with the results about child maltreatment and factors that are important in the treatment of children.

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## APPENDIX A:

### Qualitative Interview Guide

#### 1. DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

##### a. MAIN QUESTIONS:

- i. With which ethnic group or groups do you most identify with?
- ii. What is your gender identity?
- iii. What is your age?
- iv. What is your marital status?
- v. What level of education do you have?
- vi. What is your current employment status?
- vii. How many children do you have?
- viii. How would you describe your household composition?

Now that we've discussed demographics, I will now ask some general questions about perceptions on child treatment and well-being:

#### 2. CHILD MALTREATMENT QUESTIONS

##### a. MAIN QUESTION:

- i. Explain to me what parenting looks like for Hawaiians- parenting styles, how Hawaiians raise their children

##### b. FOLLOW-UP:

- i. What does parenting look like at its best? What about its worst?

##### c. PROBE:

- i. Why do you think this is?

##### a. MAIN QUESTION:

- i. What are your thoughts about how children are valued by families in your culture? - how do adults value children, how do they look at them?

##### b. PROBE:

- i. Has that changed over time?
- ii. Can you share some instances that show how children are valued in your culture that may be different or similar from how they are in other cultures?

##### a. MAIN QUESTION:

- i. What does proper treatment of a child look like in your culture?

##### b. FOLLOW-UP:

- i. Tell me why people think child maltreatment happens

##### c. PROBE:

- i. What might it look like?
- ii. What about for Hawaiian families? Do you think child maltreatment may look different or the same in other cultures?
- iii. How do people think child maltreatment in Hawaiian families should be addressed? What kind of families are affected by it?

- a. **MAIN QUESTION:**
  - i. Describe to me what kind of family, culture, or social factors you think contribute to a child's well-being and proper treatment of a child
- b. **FOLLOW-UP:**
  - i. What kind of factors or characteristics of a family make it less likely for child maltreatment to happen?
- c. **PROBE:**
  - i. Would you say that these factors are influenced by your cultural identity?
  - ii. What kind of Hawaiian cultural practices do people value in sustaining harmony and peace among family members?

Before we go into the next set of questions, I have one last question about child maltreatment. You may already be aware, but Native Hawaiian children are disproportionately overrepresented in Hawaii's child welfare system, representing nearly half of the foster care system.

- a. **MAIN QUESTION:**
  - i. Can you share your thoughts on that and describe why people think Hawaiian children enter into the child welfare and foster care system at higher rates than other racial groups?
- b. **PROBE:**
  - i. Are there things that may explain this?
  - ii. Are you aware of this already?
  - iii. Is this surprising?

The next set of questions focus on people's experience with COVID-19:

### 3. COVID-19 and RESILIENCE QUESTIONS:

- a. **MAIN QUESTION:**
  - i. Tell me how the COVID-19 has impacted you and your family
- b. **FOLLOW-UP:**
  - i. Looking at the family more specifically, how has it affected your family's dynamic specifically the relationship with your children?
- c. **PROBE:**
  - i. Have different relationships within your family been strengthened or severed?
  - ii. Have social networks and connections been disrupted or changed for you or your children?
  - iii. Have you experienced challenges with childcare plans? or school?
  - iv. Has your work schedule needed to change in order to accommodate taking care of your children?

- a. **MAIN QUESTION:**

- i. Describe to me what resilience looks like within your family during the pandemic – resilience meaning adapting in a positive way to when negative things happen, when faced with difficult life events, you recover and come back stronger
  - b. FOLLOW-UP:**
    - i. What are some of the factors that help your family overcome life adversities in general, and how did this unfold during the pandemic?
    - ii. What is the role of culture in shaping your family’s collective resilience?
  - c. PROBE:**
    - i. How has your approach to coping with COVID-19 been? What does it look like?
- 
- a. MAIN QUESTION:**
    - i. Now I would like you to think about concerns that your family had prior to the pandemic, and share if some of those concerns intensified or lessened during the pandemic
  - b. FOLLOW-UP:**
    - i. Tell me what kind of things you or your family have done to address the challenges that COVID-19 has posed to your family
  - c. PROBE:**
    - i. How has your Hawaiian heritage and cultural pride influenced your approach to handling challenges during this time?
- 
- a. **MAIN QUESTION:** Can you share with me what you have seen other Hawaiian families doing and how you have stepped in to assist families during this time?

**Probe**

Financial assistance  
 Childcare  
 Meal giving

**Acceptable Generic Probes:**

- i. Can you say more about that?  
 Tell me more about why you feel that way