

## **ABSTRACT**

The objective of this study was to understand the meanings parents make while parenting their children with externalizing behavior in a rural, isolated community. How parents have come to understand their child's behavior, what attributions they make, what their experience has been with mental health or counseling services within the community and treatment beliefs were examined. Participants were 5 parents from diverse ethnic backgrounds living in a rural area of Northern Canada. Data were analyzed for themes within and across the participant's descriptions. In-depth semi-structured phenomenological interviews revealed the following common experiences: participant's had similar histories of inconsistent parenting in their family of origin, became parents at a young age, entered early into a relationship and parented their child alone or with a step or co-parent. Participants reported an inconsistent parenting style and response to behaviour than their co-parent, described stress within the family and feelings of frustration, hopelessness, anger, and anxiety. Parents attributed externalizing behaviour to factors within the child or environment and identified barriers such as distance to specialized services, long wait times and lengthy intake systems. Therapeutic treatment was believed to be most beneficial before medications would be considered. The results of this study are discussed in relation to the existing research on parental attributions of children's behavior, and the social-cognitive model of Dix and colleagues (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986). Implications for health care providers are discussed and recommendations for future research are suggested.