



## Characteristics of maltreatment\*

\*Based on Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., MacLaurin, B., Sinha, V., Black, T., Fast, E., Felstiner, C., Hélie, S., Turcotte, D., Weightman, P., Douglas, J., and Holroyd, J. "Characteristics of maltreatment", in **Canadian Incidence of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2008: Major findings**, Ottawa 2010.

CIS-2008 estimates are derived from child maltreatment investigations from a representative sample of child welfare sites in 2008. The estimates do not include (1) incidents that were not reported to child welfare, (2) reported cases that were screened out by child welfare before being fully investigated, (3) new reports on cases already opened by the child welfare sites, (4) cases that were investigated only by the police, and (5) cases that were investigated only because of concerns about future risk of maltreatment. The findings presented are not directly comparable to findings presented in the CIS-2003 and CIS-1998 reports.

## Categories of Maltreatment

There were an estimated 85,440 substantiated child maltreatment investigations in Canada in 2008 (a rate of 14.19 investigations per 1,000 children). The CIS-2008 definition of child maltreatment includes 32 forms of maltreatment subsumed under five categories: (1) physical abuse, (2) sexual abuse, (3) neglect, (4) emotional maltreatment, and (5) exposure to intimate partner violence (the data collection form is found in Appendices F and G of the CIS-2008 report). Table 1 presents the incidence of substantiated maltreatment in Canada, broken down by primary category of maltreatment. The two most frequently occurring categories of substantiated maltreatment were exposure to intimate partner violence (34%) and neglect (34%), followed by physical abuse (20%), emotional maltreatment (9%), and sexual abuse (3%).

**Table 1: Primary Category of Substantiated Maltreatment Investigations in Canada (2008)\***

Primary Category of Maltreatment	Number of investigations	Rate per 1,000 children	%
Physical abuse	17,212	2.86	20%
Sexual abuse	2,607	0.43	3%
Neglect	28,939	4.81	34%
Emotional maltreatment	7,423	1.23	9%
Exposure to intimate partner violence	29,259	4.86	34%
<b>Total substantiated investigations</b>	<b>85,440</b>	<b>14.19</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Based on a sample of 6, 163 substantiated investigations. Percentages are column percentages

## Single and multiple categories of maltreatment

The CIS tracked up to three forms of maltreatment. A *single* category of maltreatment was identified in 82% of substantiated cases: exposure to intimate partner violence was identified as the single category of maltreatment in 31% of cases, neglect in 28%, physical abuse in 15%, emotional maltreatment in 6%, and sexual abuse in 2% of cases. *Multiple* categories of maltreatment were found in 18% of substantiated investigations (16% two categories; 2% three categories). The most frequently identified combinations were neglect and exposure to intimate partner violence; and emotional maltreatment and exposure to intimate partner violence.<sup>1</sup>

## Physical and emotional harm

The CIS-2008 tracked physical harm suspected or known to be caused by the investigated maltreatment. Information on physical harm was collected using two measures: one describing the nature of harm, and one describing severity of harm as measured by the need for medical treatment. Physical harm was identified in 8% of all cases of substantiated maltreatment (most commonly for bruises, cuts or scrapes): of these, 5% noted harm but no treatment was required, and 3% noted harm that was sufficiently severe to require medical treatment.

Information on emotional harm was collected using a series of questions asking child welfare workers to describe emotional harm that had occurred because of the maltreatment incident(s). If maltreatment was substantiated, workers were asked to indicate whether the child was showing signs of mental or emotional harm. In order to rate the severity of mental/emotional harm, workers indicated whether therapeutic intervention (treatment) was required in response to the mental or emotional distress shown by the child. Emotional harm was noted in 29% of all substantiated maltreatment investigations; symptoms were severe enough to require treatment in 17% of cases.

## Duration of maltreatment

Duration of maltreatment was established by classifying substantiated investigations as a single incident or multiple incident cases.<sup>2</sup> Single incidents of maltreatment were found in 42% of substantiated maltreatment investigations while 58% involved multiple incidents of maltreatment. Multiple incidents were found in the following categories of substantiated maltreatment: physical abuse (45%), sexual abuse (51%), exposure to intimate partner violence (56%), emotional maltreatment (67%), and neglect (68%).

For updates and more information on the CIS-2008, visit the Child Welfare Research Portal at <http://www.cwrp.ca> and PHAC's Injury and Child Maltreatment Section: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cm-vee/public-eng.php>.

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<sup>1</sup> Estimates of substantiated investigations involving multiple forms of maltreatment should be interpreted with caution due to their high coefficient of variation (Appendix K of the CIS-2008 report).

<sup>2</sup> Due to questionnaire length limits, information to establish *frequency* of maltreatment could not be collected.