

CIS-2008: Characteristics of children and families*

*Summary by Lise Milne. 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 Children and Families", in **Canadian Incidence of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2008: Major findings**, Ottawa 2010.

The CIS–2008 is the third national study examining the incidence of reported child abuse and neglect in Canada. This summary provides a description of substantiated maltreatment cases in terms of the characteristics of the children, their caregivers and their homes. The estimates presented are weighted Canadian estimates derived from child maltreatment investigations conducted in 2008 in a representative sample of Canadian child welfare sites. Estimates do not include (1) incidents not reported to child welfare, (2) reported cases that were screened out, (3) new reports on open cases, (4) cases investigated only by the police, and (5) cases investigated because of concerns about future risk of maltreatment. Readers are cautioned that the findings presented in this chapter are not directly comparable to findings presented in the CIS-2003 and CIS-1998 reports.

Age and sex of children in maltreatment-related investigations and substantiated maltreatment

The incidence of all maltreatment-related investigations was nearly identical for males (38.69 investigations per 1,000 children) and females (39.66 per 1,000 children). There was some variation by age and sex in the incidence of investigated maltreatment, with rates being highest for infants (52.00 investigations per 1,000 female infants and 51.63 per 1,000 male infants). Rates of maltreatment-related investigation were similar by sex for four to seven year olds (41.75 and 41.72 per 1,000 for females and males respectively).

The incidence of substantiated maltreatment was nearly identical for males (13.89 per 1,000) and females (14.50 per 1,000). There was some variation by age and sex in the incidence of substantiated maltreatment, with rates being highest for infants (17.56 substantiated cases per 1,000 females and 16.64 per 1,000 males). Rates of substantiated maltreatment were similar by sex for four to seven year olds, while there were more males reported in the 8 to 11 year old group and more females reported in the adolescent group.

Children's Aboriginal Heritage

Aboriginal heritage was documented by the CIS–2008 in an effort to better understand some of the factors that bring Aboriginal children into contact with the child welfare system. Aboriginal children were identified as a key group to examine because of concerns about their over-representation in the foster care system. Substantiated cases involved children of Aboriginal heritage in 22% of all cases (four times higher than for non-Aboriginal children): 15% First Nations status, 3% First Nations non-status, 2% Métis, 1% Inuit and 1% with other Aboriginal heritage (see Table 1).

Table 1: Maltreatment Investigations in Canada in 2008*

Aboriginal Heritage	Number of investigations	Rate per 1,000 children	%
First Nations, Status	12,751	NA	15%
First Nations, Non-status	2,561	NA	3%
Métis	1,828	NA	2%
Inuit	893	NA	1%
Other Aboriginal	477	NA	1%
Sub-total: all Aboriginal	18,510	49.69	22%
Non-Aboriginal	66,930	11.85	78%
Total Substantiated Investigations	85,440	14.19	100%

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

Child Functioning Issues

Child functioning across physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral domains was documented with a checklist of issues child welfare workers were likely to be aware of¹ (noted issues include only those confirmed by a diagnosis and/or directly observed by the investigating worker or another worker, disclosed by the caregiver or child, as well as suspected issues). The six-month period before the investigation was used as a reference point. In 46% of substantiated investigations at least one child functioning issue was noted. The six most frequently reported were academic difficulties (23%), depression/anxiety/withdrawal (19%), aggression (15%), attachment (14%), ADD or ADHD (11%), and intellectual or developmental disabilities (11%).

Primary caregiver and household profile & risk factors

In 91% of substantiated investigations the primary caregiver was female. Nearly half (45%) of substantiated investigations involved caregivers between the ages of 31 and 40. The great majority of substantiated investigations involved children whose primary caregiver was a biological parent (94%). In 78% of substantiated maltreatment investigations, at least one primary caregiver risk factor was identified, with the most frequently noted concerns being a victim of domestic violence (46%), having few social supports (39%), mental health issues (27%), alcohol abuse (21%), and drug or solvent abuse (17%).

A number of household risk factors were also tracked including social assistance, household moves in 12 months, and household hazards (including drug-related hazards, unhealthy or unsafe living conditions and accessible weapons). Families were receiving social assistance or other benefits as their

¹ Because the checklist documents only issues that child welfare workers became aware of during their investigation, the occurrence of these issues may have been underestimated.

source of income in 33% of cases. Families had moved once in the previous year in 20% of cases. In 12% of the investigations, at least one household hazard was noted.

Future directions

The CIS 1998, 2003, and 2008 datasets provide a unique opportunity to describe changes in child maltreatment investigations across Canada over the last decade. The expanded 2008 sample documents rates of investigation in five provinces as well as investigations and services provided in Aboriginal-run organizations. Furthermore, changes to the procedure for classifying investigations in 2008 will allow analysts to begin to track differences between investigations of maltreatment incidents and investigations of situations reported because of risk of future maltreatment. The CIS–2008 dataset will be made available by the Injury and Child Maltreatment Section of PHAC for secondary analyses.

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>.