

CIS 2008: Study objectives and scope*

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The Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2008 (CIS-2008) is the third nation-wide study to examine the incidence of reported child maltreatment and the characteristics of the children and families investigated by child welfare. The study gathered information from approximately 16,000 investigations conducted by over 2,000 workers in 112 sites in every province and territory in Canada. Nearly 40 researchers were involved in the research, initiated and funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) as a central component of their child health surveillance programs. Considerable staffing support was provided by all provinces and territories through their child welfare workers, support staff, and administrators. Five provinces including Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, Québec, and Saskatchewan provided additional support and funding for enriched samples to allow province-specific estimates. In addition, a number of stakeholders provided funding to support a First Nations CIS-2008 component, including the provinces of British Columbia, Manitoba, and Ontario; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada through PHAC; and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI) provided a grant to support the development of an integrated CIS database.

Objectives

The primary objective of the CIS-2008 was to provide reliable estimates of the scope and characteristics of child abuse and neglect investigated by child welfare organizations in Canada in 2008. Specifically, the CIS-2008 was designed to: (1) determine rates of investigated and substantiated physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, emotional maltreatment, and exposure to intimate partner violence, as well as multiple forms of maltreatment; (2) investigate the severity of maltreatment as measured by duration and physical and emotional harm; (3) examine selected determinants of health that may be associated with maltreatment; (4) monitor short-term investigation outcomes, out-of-home placement, and use of child welfare court; and (5) compare rates and characteristics of investigations across the 1998, 2003, and 2008 cycles of the CIS.

Scope

The CIS collected information directly from a national sample of child welfare workers at the point when they completed their initial investigation of a report of possible child abuse or neglect, or risk of future maltreatment. The scope of the study is therefore limited to the type of information available to them at that point. The study documented only situations that were reported to and investigated by child welfare sites. The study did not include information about unreported maltreatment, cases that were investigated only by the police, or reports that were made to child welfare authorities but screened out (referrals that were not opened for investigation). While the study reports on short-term outcomes of child welfare investigations, including substantiation status, initial placements in out-of-home care, and court applications, the study did not track longer-term service events that occurred beyond the initial investigation.

The 1998 and 2003 cycles of the CIS were designed to track investigations of alleged incidents of maltreatment. The CIS-2008 was redesigned to include both investigations of alleged incidents of maltreatment as well as cases involving *risk of future* maltreatment. This has complicated comparisons with past cycles of the study, where these were not tracked separately. For the purpose of this report, comparisons with previous cycles are limited to comparisons of rates of all investigations including risk cases which did not involve a specific allegation of maltreatment. In contrast, investigations involving risk of future maltreatment are not included in the CIS-2008 estimates of rates and characteristics of substantiated maltreatment.

Child welfare services in Canada: A changing mosaic

Child welfare statutes vary considerably in Canada. Some jurisdictions limit their investigation mandates to children under age 16, while others extend to youth under age 19. Provincial and territorial statutes also vary in terms of the specific forms of maltreatment covered, procedures for investigation, grounds for removal, and timelines for determining permanent custody. In addition to these legislative differences, there are important differences in regulations and investigation policies. These differences may be further accentuated by the implementation of differently-structured assessment tools and competency-based training programs.

Although provincial and territorial child welfare statutes apply to all Aboriginal people, special considerations are made in many statutes with respect to services for Aboriginal children and families. The responsibility for funding services for First Nations children and families living on reserve rests with the federal government under the *Indian Act* (Indian Act, 1985).¹ The structure of Aboriginal child welfare services is changing rapidly. A growing number of services are being provided either by fully-mandated Aboriginal organizations or by Aboriginal counseling services that work in conjunction with mandated services.²

In addition to variations in mandates and standards among jurisdictions, it is important to consider that these mandates and standards have been changing over time. Effects of those changes have been detected by the CIS cycles. From 1998 to 2003 the CIS found that rates of investigated maltreatment had nearly doubled. Most of the available data point to changes in detection, reporting, and investigation practices rather than an increase in the number of children being abused or neglected.

In summary, differences in legislation and investigation practices across provinces and territories, as well as changes over time have posed a challenge in estimating the annual incidence of reported maltreatment in Canada. Using a standard set of definitions, the CIS-1998, 2003, and 2008 provide the best available estimates of the incidence and characteristics of reported child maltreatment across Canada over a ten-year period.

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>.

¹ The Constitution Act (1982) recognizes three groups of Aboriginal peoples: First Nations, Metis, and Inuit. First nations children constitute 64% of the total Aboriginal child population.

² Blackstock, C. (2003). First Nations child and family services: Restoring peace and harmony in First Nations communities. In K. Kufeldt & B. McKenzie (Eds.) *Child welfare: Connecting research, policy and practice*.