



# Child abuse and neglect investigations in Canada: Comparing 1998 and 2003 data<sup>1</sup>

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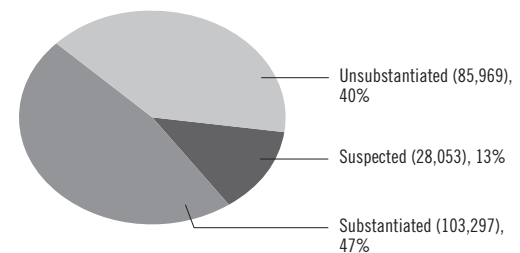
The 1998 and the 2003 Canadian Incidence Studies of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-1998 and CIS-2003) are the first and second nation-wide studies to examine the incidence of reported child maltreatment and the characteristics of the children and families investigated by Canadian child welfare services. In the fall of 1998, the CIS-1998 tracked 7,672 child maltreatment investigations<sup>2</sup> in a representative sample of 51 child welfare service areas across Canada and in the fall of 2003, the CIS-2003 tracked 14,200 investigations in a representative sample of 63 child welfare service areas. In all jurisdictions, excluding Quebec, child welfare workers completed a three-page standardized data collection form; in Quebec, information was extracted directly from an administrative information system. Weighted national annual estimates were derived based on these investigations.

## Investigated and substantiated maltreatment

In 2003, an estimated 217,319 investigations of child maltreatment were conducted in Canada (excluding Quebec). Forty-seven percent of these investigations were substantiated, involving an estimated 103,297 children, for an incidence rate of 21.71 substantiated investigations per 1,000 children. In 13% of investigations, there was insufficient evidence to substantiate maltreatment but maltreatment remained suspected by the investigating worker. Forty percent of investigations were unsubstantiated.<sup>3</sup>

With the Quebec administrative data included, an estimated 235,315 child maltreatment investigations (38.33 investigations per 1,000 children) were conducted in Canada in 2003. Nearly half of the investigations were substantiated by the investigating worker, for a national incidence rate of 18.67 substantiated investigations per 1,000 children.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 1. Child maltreatment investigations in Canada, excluding Quebec (CIS-2003)**  
Estimates based on a sample of 11,562 child maltreatment investigations

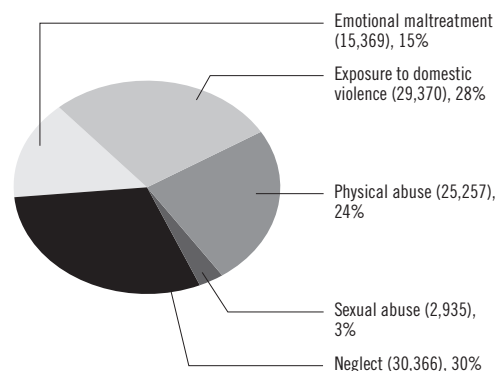


Source: CIS-2003 Major Findings Report, Table 3-1.

Figure 2 presents the primary categories of substantiated maltreatment in Canada in 2003. Neglect was the most common form of substantiated maltreatment. Nearly one-third (30%) of all substantiated investigations (an estimated 30,366 investigations) involved neglect as the primary category of maltreatment. Exposure to domestic violence was the second most frequently substantiated category of maltreatment (an estimated 29,370 child investigations), followed closely by physical abuse (an estimated 25,257 child investigations). Emotional maltreatment was the primary category of substantiated maltreatment in 15% of cases (an estimated

15,369 child investigations) while sexual abuse cases represented only 3% of all substantiated investigations (an estimated 2,935 child investigations).

**Figure 2. Primary category of substantiated maltreatment in Canada, excluding Quebec (CIS-2003)**  
Estimates based on a sample of 5,660 substantiated child maltreatment investigations



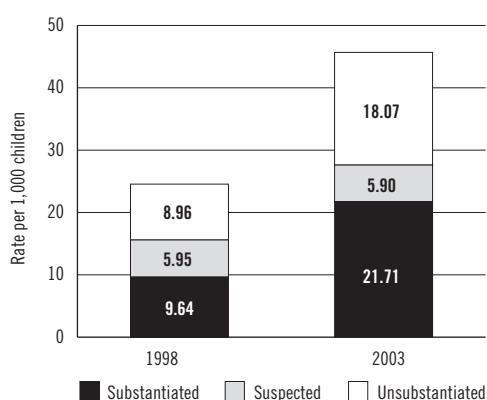
Source: CIS-2003 Major Findings Report, Table 3-3

### 1998-2003 CIS comparisons

The rate of substantiated maltreatment in the core CIS sample (Canada excluding Quebec),<sup>4</sup> has increased 125%, from 9.64 substantiated cases per 1,000 children in 1998 to 21.71 in 2003. This increase in documented maltreatment may be explained by improved and expanded reporting and investigation procedures, such as:

- 1) changes in case substantiation practices
- 2) more systematic identification of victimized siblings, and
- 3) greater awareness of emotional maltreatment and exposure to domestic violence.

**Figure 3. Child maltreatment investigations in Canada, excluding Quebec (CIS-1998 and CIS-2003)**  
CIS estimates based on a sample of 5,359 (CIS-1998) and 11,562 (CIS-2003) child maltreatment investigations



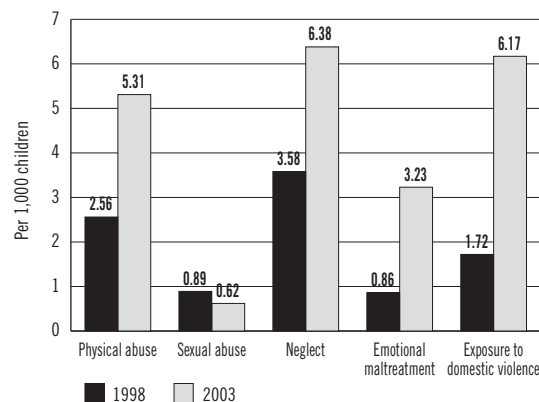
Source: CIS-2003 Major Findings Report, Table 9-1.

Part of the increase in substantiated cases seems to reflect a shift in the way child welfare workers classify cases, with a much smaller proportion of cases being classified as suspected (13% in 2003 compared with 24% in 1998). The introduction of structured assessment tools and new competency-based training programs may account for part of this shift.

Better identification of victimized siblings is a second factor explaining the overall increase in substantiated child maltreatment investigations. The average number of investigated children per family has increased from 1.41 to 1.66. (See Table 9-2 in the CIS-2003 Major Findings Report.) As a result, the number of investigated children has increased at a faster rate than the number of investigated families, which increased 56% from an estimated 83,976 families in 1998 to 130,594 in 2003.

The third and most important factor driving the increase in maltreatment cases is the dramatic increase in cases of exposure to domestic violence and emotional maltreatment (Figure 4). The rate of exposure to domestic violence increased 259%, from 1.72 substantiated cases per 1,000 to 6.17. The rate of emotional maltreatment increased 276% from 0.86 to 3.23 substantiated cases per 1,000. In 1998, these two forms of maltreatment accounted for 27% of substantiated cases. In 2003, they accounted for 43% of substantiated cases. These differences reflect a shift in awareness and in some cases, in legislation with respect to the impact on children of emotional maltreatment and exposure to domestic violence.

**Figure 4. Categories of substantiated child maltreatment in Canada, excluding Quebec (CIS-1998 and CIS-2003)**  
Estimates based on a sample of 2,046 (CIS-1998) and 5,660 (CIS-2003) substantiated child maltreatment investigations



Source: CIS-2003 Major Findings Report, Table 9-3.

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1. This information sheet is based upon the peer-reviewed CIS report: Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., MacLaurin, B., Daciuk, J., Felstiner, C., Black, T., et al. (2005). *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2003: Major Findings*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.
  2. The CIS does not track incidents that were not reported to child welfare services, reported cases that were screened out by child welfare services before being fully investigated, new reports on cases already opened by child welfare services, or cases that were investigated only by the police.
  3. This rate of unsubstantiated cases is similar to or lower than rates reported in most jurisdictions and reflects laws that require the public and professionals to report all cases where they suspect maltreatment may have occurred. Most unsubstantiated cases are indeed reports made in good faith; only 5% of reports tracked by CIS-2003 were considered to have been made with malicious intent. See Table 8-2(a) in the CIS-2003 Major Findings Report.
  4. To avoid confusion between the two sets of estimates (with and without Quebec), data presented here will be limited to the core CIS sample which excludes data from Quebec. National estimates including Quebec are excluded from this information sheet because of incomplete or unavailable data. Where available, estimates including Quebec can be obtained from the CIS-2003 Major Findings Report.

**Suggested citation:** Trocmé, N., MacLaurin, B., Fallon, B., Black, T., & Lajoie, J. (2005). *Child Abuse and Neglect Investigations in Canada: Comparing 1998 and 2003 Data*. CECW Information Sheet #26E. Montreal, QC: McGill University, School of Social Work.

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