



Children and Youth in Out-of-Home Care in Canada¹

Meghan Mulcahy & Nico Trocmé

There currently are no Canada-wide statistics on the number of children² and youth placed by child welfare authorities in out-of-home care. Child welfare services fall under the jurisdiction of provincial and territorial authorities, making it difficult to compile statistics at a national level. The most notable variations between provinces include mandate variation by jurisdiction with respect to the age to which children are eligible for services, differences in the length of time a child can receive out-of-home care services, and in the definition of “in out-of-home care.” The purpose of this information sheet is to compile the available statistics to derive a national estimate of out-of-home placement rates.

Methodology

Estimates were developed in three stages.³ First we compiled all available statistics presented in various federal, provincial, and territorial documents and websites, including: (a) placement statistics compiled by Human Resources and Social Development Canada for the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Directors (FPT) of Child Welfare Committee⁴ for years 1992–2004 and Social Security statistics on the number of children in out-of-home care from 1971-2003; (b) information from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada tracking on reserve Aboriginal children in out-of-home care from 1969-2007; (c) statistics reported by provincial and territorial authorities in their annual reports and/or their websites; (d) statistics reported by provincial associations, such as the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies, or through provincial reviews, such as the Hughes Report (2006) in British Columbia.

In a second stage we verified the statistics by ensuring that there was consistency over

time and between the statistics reported by different sources. We resolved discrepancies by examining the definitions used to generate inconsistent statistics and by consulting provincial and territorial officials. For instance, statistics reported by HRSDC for children “in care” in Quebec fail to distinguish between children living in out-of-home care *and* children living at home under the supervision (“care”) of child welfare authorities. We further verified our final estimates with provincial and territorial representatives on the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Child Welfare Outcomes Coordinating Committee.⁵

Finally, we developed population based estimates using child population estimates for the year 2007 (Statistics Canada) for children aged 0 to 18 and generated trend lines from 1992 to 2007 by interpolating estimates for jurisdictions with missing years.

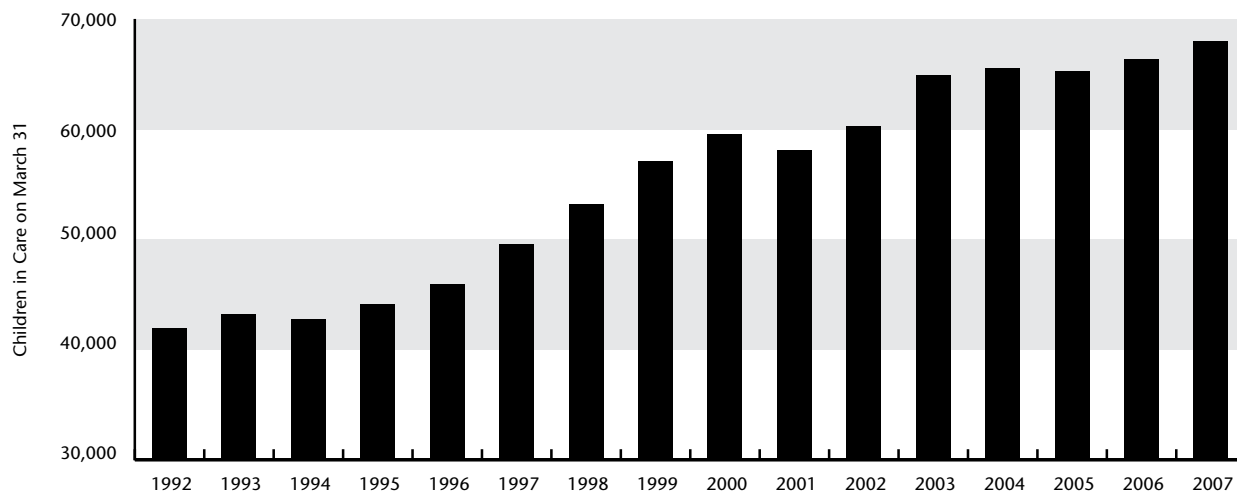
Rates of children and youth in out-of-home-care

There were an estimated 67,000 children placed in out-of-home care on any one day across Canada in 2007, a rate of 9.2 children in care per 1,000 children. In 1992 there were an estimated 42,000 children placed in out-of-home care, a rate of 5.7 children in care per 1,000 children. As shown in Figure 1, this increase has been relatively gradual, with the sharpest increases being noted at the end of the 1990s.

Conclusions

We estimate that 67,000 children were in out-of-home care across Canada on March 31, 2007. National trends over the past fifteen years indicate that the number of children in out-of-home care has been increasing steadily. By contrast, after years of increase, the rate of children in out-of-home care in the United

Figure 1. Children in Care in Canada: 1992–2007



States started to decline in 2002, to a low of 6.9 children in care per 1,000 in 2007 (United States Department of Health and Human Services). In a recent cross-national study, Canada (2001) was reported to have the highest rate of children in out-of-home care (Thoburn, 2007, p. 14).

Improved statistical reporting and greater research into factors contributing to out-of-home placement are required to understand these variations over time and between national, provincial, and territorial jurisdictions.

References

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- 1 This information sheet was reviewed by experts in the field of child welfare.
- 2 For the sake of brevity this document uses the broad term “children” to refer to children and youth.
- 3 A detailed report of the methods used to derive provincial and territorial estimates can be obtained from the *Out-of-Home Placement Data Harmonization Report*.
- 4 Formerly known as the Federal-Provincial Working Group on Child and Family Services Information
- 5 A national committee consisting of staff of child welfare services from each province and territory who report to the Directors of Child Welfare on data related to ten child welfare outcomes indicators.

About the Authors: *Meghan Mulcahy* is the former NOM coordinator and a social worker in New Brunswick; *Nico Trocmé* is a professor of social work at McGill University where he holds the Philip Fisher Chair in Social Work and directs the Centre for Research on Children and Families.

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