

Child Maltreatment in Quebec:

Findings from the Incidence Study of 1998

Marc Tourigny

Micheline Mayer

Chantal Lavergne

Nico Trocmé

John Wright

Isabelle Daigneault

For all correspondence and reprints contact Marc Tourigny, University of Sherbrooke
Faculté d'éducation, 2500 boul. de l'Université, Sherbrooke (Québec) Canada, J1K 2R1,
Telephone: (450) 463-1835 ext. 61722, Fax: (450) 463-6595 E-mail:

Marc.Tourigny@Usherbrooke.ca

This study benefited from the financial support of the following partners: the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, the Child Maltreatment Division of Health Canada, the Association des Centres jeunesse du Québec (ACJQ), the Institut de recherche pour le développement social des jeunes (IRDS), the Institut universitaire des Centres jeunesse de Québec, the Groupe de recherche et d'action sur la victimisation des enfants (GRAVE), the Partenariat de recherche et d'intervention en matière d'abus sexuel à l'endroit des enfants (PRIMASE), the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare, and the Centre de liaison sur l'intervention et la prévention psychosociales (CLIPP).

Posted on the Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal (www.cwrp.ca) on April 28, 2011

Abstract

Objectives: To present key findings from the Quebec Incidence Study of reported child maltreatment in terms of their incidence rates, characteristics and recurrence. **Method:** A survey conducted in 16 of the 18 service areas across Quebec tracked 86% of child maltreatment investigations conducted during the months of October to December 1998, which produced a sample of 4,934 investigated reports of child maltreatment. Information was collected directly from case workers who investigated the children's and family's background, the perpetrator characteristics, severity and types of maltreatment. **Results:** The highest incidence rates of both investigated and substantiated reports (7.3 and 5.1 per 1000 children respectively) were found for neglect. Differences were found in incidence rates according to age and gender. Girls were more often sexually abused than boys who were in turn slightly more often physically abused and neglected than girls. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of children reported more than one type of maltreatment and at least 28% of children had recurrent investigated reports during the survey period. Mothers were the most frequently reported perpetrators for all types of maltreatment except for sexual abuse, where the perpetrators were predominantly the fathers and stepfathers. Results also revealed that between 15% and 33% of the children were living with a parent who was also abused as a child. The percentage varies according to the type of maltreatment. **Conclusions:** The QIS provides much needed information for developing a better understanding of the profiles and needs of children and families investigated by child welfare authorities in Quebec. Results highlight the importance of neglect among maltreated children as well as the recurrence of reports.

Résumé

Objectifs: L'étude visait à documenter l'ensemble des signalements reçus par les services de protection de l'enfance du Québec afin de pouvoir décrire les taux d'incidence et les caractéristiques des diverses formes de mauvais traitements. Méthodologie: L'étude a été réalisée entre le 1er octobre et le 31 décembre 1998. Elle a permis de documenter 86% des signalements retenus pour évaluation, soit 4934 signalements retenus. Les données ont été recueillies auprès des intervenants responsables de l'évaluation du signalement et elles portaient sur les caractéristiques de l'enfant, de sa famille et des mauvais traitements (agresseur, types et sévérité des mauvais traitements). Résultats: Les situations de négligence représentent la forme de mauvais traitements la plus fréquente avec des taux d'incidence de 7.3 signalements retenus et 5.1 signalements corroborés pour 1000 enfants québécois. Des différences de taux sont observées selon l'âge et le sexe des enfants signalés. Les filles sont plus souvent victimes d'abus sexuels alors que les garçons sont plus souvent victimes d'abus physique et de négligence. Vingt-neuf pour cent (29%) des enfants ont été signalés pour plus d'une forme de mauvais traitements et 28% des enfants avaient déjà fait l'objet d'un signalement dans la dernière année ou d'une prise en charge au cours des cinq dernières années précédant le début de l'étude. Les mères sont plus souvent identifiées comme étant l'agresseur sauf dans les situations d'abus sexuels où se sont les pères et les beaux-pères qui sont les principaux agresseurs. Enfin, les résultats révèlent que selon la forme de mauvais traitements, de 15% à 33% des enfants vivaient avec un parent qui avait lui-même été maltraité dans son enfance. Conclusions: L'étude met en évidence l'importance de la négligence comme la forme de mauvais traitements la plus fréquente, elle montre également l'ampleur de la cooccurrence et de la récurrence des mauvais traitements signalés aux services de protection du Québec.

The maltreatment of children and adolescents represents a major concern in our society. Child maltreatment can take many forms, such as sexual abuse, physical abuse, psychological abuse and neglect. In order to face this important social problem, many countries, including the province of Quebec in Canada, have appointed themselves youth protection laws (Québec: *Loi sur la protection de la jeunesse* – LPJ – 1979).

In the context of child protection, it is essential to document the scope of the phenomenon of maltreatment, the nature of the various forms and the characteristics of victims and perpetrators in order to develop social policies and intervention programs adapted to the needs of families affected by this problem. In their review of child maltreatment incidence studies, Lavergne and Tourigny (2000) recently documented the results of over 20 publications from various regions of North America, Europe and Australia. Results of this review revealed important variations in the rates of reports of alleged incidents of maltreatment as well as in the rates of confirmed reports of maltreatment (i.e., substantiated reports). The rates of maltreatment reports varied from 5 to 72 per 1000 children from the community and those of substantiated reports varied from 1 to 40 per 1000 children. Reports of neglect represented over half of all incidents of maltreatment, followed by physical abuse (20%), sexual abuse (10%) and psychological abuse (6%) (Lavergne & Tourigny, 2000). The National Incidence Study (NIS), a national American survey on child victims of abuse and neglect that has been effectuated three times since 1980 (NIS-2 : Sedlack, 1991; NIS-3 : Sedlack & Broadhurst, 1996; NIS-1 : U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1981) found that neglect represented over half of maltreatment cases reported to child protection or known to professionals (Table 1). In 1993, 13.1 per 1000 American children who reported to child protection services were neglected while 23.1 per 1000 American children reported a combination of any types of maltreatment (Sedlack & Broadhurst, 1996). A Canadian study found that 4.5 per 1000 Canadian children were

neglected and reported to child protection services while 9.7 out of 1000 Canadian children were maltreated and reported to child protective services (Trocmé, Tourigny, MacLaurin, & Fallon, 2003).

Table 1. Annual incidence rates (rate/1000) of founded reports of maltreatment (all forms of maltreatment combined) and reports of founded types of maltreatment

Country/Author/Year/	Founded ¹	Sexual	Emotional	Physical	Neglect
Australia					
Johnstone & Broadbent - 1996-97	6.2	1.2	2.5	2.5	1.8
Broadbent & Bentley - 1995-96	5.8	1.0	1.8	1.7	1.3
Angus & Hall - 1994-95	6.1	1.0	1.7	1.8	1.6
United States					
National Incidence Study NIS-3 ²	23.1	3.2	3.0	5.7	13.1
1993	41.9	4.5	7.9	9.1	29.2
NIS-2 ² - 1986	14.8	1.9	2.5	4.3	7.5
	22.6	2.1	3.0	4.9	14.6
NIS-1 - 1979-80	9.8	0.7	2.1	3.1	4.9
Wang & Daro (1998)					
NCPCA ³ - 1997	15	1.2	0.6	3.3	8.1
NCPCA - 1996	15	--	--	--	--
NCPCA - 1993	15	2.6	1.1	4.1	6.8
NCPCA - 1990	--	--	--	--	--
NCPCA- 1986	--	--	--	--	--
U.S. Dept. (1998)					
NCANDS ⁴ - 1996	15	1.8	1.0	3.6	8.0
NCANDS - 1993	14	2.1	0.7	3.5	7.5
NCANDS - 1990	14	2.1	1.1	3.3	7.6
Canada					
Trocmé et al. (2003)					
Canadian Incidence Study – 1997-98	9.7	0.9	3.6	2.5	4.5
Ontario (Canada)					
Trocmé et al. (1995)					
Ontario Incidence Study - 1993	5.6	1.6	0.4	1.9	2.0
Québec (Canada)					
Quebec government - 1997-98	6.7	0.7	--	1.1	4.9
Quebec government - 1996-97	6.3	0.7	--	1.0	4.5
Quebec government - 1995-96	6.5	0.8	--	1.0	4.8
Quebec government - 1994-95	6.3	0.8	--	0.9	4.6

¹ The founded incidence rates correspond to situations in which the maltreatment was confirmed following the evaluation.

² The results presented on the first line are based on a gravity criterion, corresponding to maltreatment that leads to observable consequences on the child. The results on the second line correspond to maltreatment that seriously threatens the child's health or safety.

³ National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse.

⁴ National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System.

N.B. The results presented in Table 1 for Canadian Incidence Study, Ontario Incidence Study and NIS studies are similar to the results in our study in the following ways: the definitions of the different forms of maltreatment were very similar (the CIS study

even had identical definitions), the same type of data collection was used (questionnaires completed by case workers) and the same period of the year was used for the data collection of the CIS and OIS studies.

A second finding of Lavergne and Tourigny's (2000) review revealed that reported and substantiated maltreatment rates were generally two to three times higher in the U.S. than in Australia or Quebec and slightly higher than in Ontario (Canada). Except for psychological abuse, rates of neglect, sexual abuse and physical abuse were also two to three times higher in the U.S. in comparison with other regions. The annual incidence rates in Australia varied between 5.8 and 6.2 per 1000 maltreated children who referred to child protective services between 1996 and 1998 (Angus & Hall, 1996; Broadbent & Bentley, 1997; Johnstone & Broadbent, 1998). Similar rates varying from 6.3 to 6.7 were also reported in Quebec during the same period (MSSS, 1998) while the rates in America varied from 14 to 15 per 1000 children between 1990 and 1996 (U.S. department, 1998; Wang & Daro, 1998).

Although the large variability between these rates may be partly explained by the different populations studied, certain methodological characteristics may also play a role. Lavergne and Tourigny (2000) highlight the main characteristics that plausibly influence the different rates obtained. The definition of maltreatment used in these studies (including the age of the children affected by it), the method of calculating the incidence rates (which sometimes counts the same children various times when they report several occurrences of maltreatment during the survey period) and the source of the data (which is either provided by child protection systems or by questionnaires completed by the children's case workers) vary between studies. For example, these authors state that studies using legal definitions (i.e., defined by child protection laws and used by protection systems) and basing their incidence rates on data provided by child protective services systematically have lower rates than studies using research- or clinically-based definitions with data provided by questionnaires completed by child protection case workers.

Some limitations can be noted among previous studies on maltreatment incidence rates. For example, many studies use legal definitions of maltreatment rather than definitions developed by researchers. However, it is difficult to compare the rates of regions that have differing laws on child protection. The definitions do not always enable the distinction of different forms of the same maltreatment type and are not always based on a detailed description of the maltreatment situation (e.g., situations specific to each form of maltreatment, the duration, frequency, characteristics of the context). In addition to not always relying on commonly shared definitions of maltreatment, these studies do not generally use standardized data collection practices (Lavergne, Clément, & Cloutier, submitted). The use of a questionnaire developed by researchers could yield an increased control over important methodological aspects, such as the unit of analysis, the duplication of cases with multiple reports and new cases, which are all essential elements that are used in the calculation of incidence rates.

The present incidence study will thus use legal as well as research based definitions that will enable comparisons with Canada's regional rates as well as international incidence rates. In addition, questionnaires have been used to enable caseworkers receiving and investigating reports of maltreatment to describe many important aspects of the maltreatment situation, which are not commonly found in case reports or in child protection services' information systems. This detailed case worker-reported information about the maltreatment situations will in turn enable us to use the child as the unit of analysis and to insure that each child is only counted once even though he or she may have multiple reports of maltreatment during the survey period.

In the province of Quebec, the Youth protection law defines a number of situations that could threaten a child's security or development and identifies series of obligations on the part of professionals and citizens concerning the reporting of problematic situations. As a consequence

of this act, Quebec's youth protection and report processing presents a number of unique features, in comparison with the rest of Canada. For example, Quebec is the only province for which the system for processing reports to youth protection agencies (Child protection services – CPS) proceeds from a two-step case evaluation process, whereby a file may be closed at the end of the first phase and not retained for subsequent investigation. The first stage aims at evaluating the admissibility of the report by ensuring that the gravity of the offense properly corresponds to a legal definition. The reports are predominantly made over the phone and a decision must be made in the 72 hours following the report. The admissibility of a report generally depends on the following legal criteria: the child must be under 18 years old and the offence must be included in one of the situations enumerated in articles 38 and 38.1 of the Youth Protection Act (YPA). If the report is admissible, the second stage consists of CPS conducting a more thorough investigation. Their investigation aims at determining whether reported actions are founded and whether they are legally defined as a form of maltreatment. The investigation is conducted by personally meeting the main people implicated in the report. All other provinces only have one stage of evaluating the reports. Quebec also differs from the rest of Canada in that the youth protection law in Quebec considers serious behavior problems and the risk of maltreatment to compromise the security and development of children. However, in the present study we will only report rates of maltreatment and not the risk of maltreatment or behaviour problems. Behavior problems include children being truant, having relational problems with their parents, problems with psychotropic drugs and delinquent or self-destructive behaviours. These problems were not calculated in the incidence rates.

Specific features of the YPA (as compared with other Canadian provinces), such as the two-step screening and investigative process, which are inherent to the Quebec protection system, made it all the more important to conduct the Quebec Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse

and Neglect (QIS - Tourigny et al., 2002). In the present paper, three main goals are pursued: 1) to describe the incidence rates of maltreatment reports retained for investigation according to children's age and gender; 2) to describe the detailed characteristics of maltreatment according to their nature, duration and the identity of the perpetrator; and 3) to describe the frequency of intergenerational transmission of maltreatment as assessed by a parental history of childhood as well as the recurrence of maltreatment reports and the CPS involvement of reported children during the study period. The QIS is the first investigation of cases of child abuse and neglect carried out in Quebec. The QIS is primarily a descriptive study as it is more concerned with describing the reports received by Quebec protection services than with explaining the phenomenon of the child maltreatment or identifying risk factors.

Methodology

Sample

The QIS was conducted on the basis of the reports received by the CPS between October 1 and December 31, 1998. Two of the 18 regions were excluded from the study due to their low populations and the accessibility problems resulting from their remoteness; these were Nunavik (population of 8,000) and Terres-Cries-de-la-Baie-James (population of 9,000). Since Nunavik has two youth centers, a total of three youth centers were excluded from the study. Thus, 16 out of 19 Quebec youth centers (CPS) took part in the survey by documenting received reports of child maltreatment. Although case workers completed questionnaires for each report that was made, the present study used the child as the unit of analysis. The 9,790 reports documented represented a total of 9,448 different children: some children were thus the subject of more than one report over the three months of data collection. The analyses presented in this paper focus primarily on the sub-sample of 4,934 reports concerning 4,774 children whose maltreatment reports were retained for the second step of investigation, representing 50% of all reports.

Measures

The social worker completed the Evaluation/Orientation (E/O) form that collected information on the characteristics of the maltreatment, the characteristics of the child, and the adults filling the child's parents' role, the nature of the maltreatment identified at the time of the report and during the investigation, and the decisions made in the process of handling and investigating reports. After completing the investigation, the case worker completed the form. The information obtained during the investigation could therefore be based on various sources (e.g., child, parent, social worker, file of child protective services).

The E/O form enabled us to obtain information on the basic demographic characteristics of the child reported (age and sex). These questions also made it possible to document certain characteristics of the services already offered by the youth centre to the child in question (reports that had previously been retained and taken in charge). The forms also contained questions on the characteristics of the adults with whom the child was living and who acted as parents. For the present study, we documented if the reported children's parents experienced any neglect or abuse during their childhood.

Certain questions made it possible to document cases of maltreatment identified at the time of the report and during the evaluation. The E/O form was constructed in such a way as to document in detail up to three kinds of maltreatment per report. The form listed six kinds of maltreatment: physical abuse (six categories), sexual abuse (seven categories), neglect (eight categories), abandonment (four categories), emotional maltreatment (five categories), and one category for "other" kinds of maltreatment (see Table 3 for a list of subcategories of maltreatment). The definitions of these kinds of maltreatment come from the Child Well-Being Scales (Vézina & Bradet, 1990, 1992), the *National Incidence Study* (NIS - Sedlack, 1991), the *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect* (CIS - Trocmé *et al.*, 2001), and

the *Rapport du groupe de travail sur l'application des mesures* (MSSS, 1991) on the problem of abandonment. Since abandonment represents an extreme form of neglect and because of the low proportion of reported cases, it was grouped together with neglect in the present study. Each of the maltreatment reports was then described in more detail according to the perpetrator's identity and the duration of the abuse (one incident, less than six months and more than six months).

In addition, for each of the problems identified in a report, the worker had to make a clinical judgment concerning the level of corroboration of the facts reported. The facts could be: 1) founded/substantiated (sufficient evidence that maltreatment has occurred), 2) suspected (suspicion of maltreatment, insufficient evidence to substantiate presence or absence of maltreatment) or 3) unfounded/unsubstantiated (sufficient evidence to the absence of maltreatment).

Procedure

For the entire period of the survey, fifteen of the 16 participating youth centers agreed to let us document all reports received, whether retained or not, by each of the sub-regional offices located on their respective territories. At one CPS, a separate sampling strategy was adopted for the selection of retained reports. An exceptionally high number of reports received and processed by the youth centre's reception department made the case workers' task for the study more difficult. The establishment's managers proposed that the research team randomly select only one out of every two reports in order to lighten the case workers' workload and continue participation at this site.

This approach of documenting almost all reports had several advantages. It increased the representativeness of the sample and the results obtained for both Quebec as a whole and for each health and social service region; it improved the possibilities for statistical analyses, especially by

type of maltreatment; and it helped document rarer phenomena, such as reports implicating foster families or concerning less frequent types of maltreatment such as abandonment.

A response rate was calculated by comparing the number of reports documented by the QIS during the survey period with the number of reports received and recorded by each establishment. For retained reports, the response rate varied between 64% and 99% depending on the CPS. Thus, the QIS documented 86% of all reports received by CPS in Quebec during the study period. Lower response rates were mostly attributable to administrative or external factors, such as personnel vacations or turnover. However, no evidence of systematic bias was found. We made sure to test the representativeness of the EIQ data by comparing it with the data in the annual provincial report conducted during the same year as our study. We evaluated three variables common to the report and the EIQ, namely, the retention rates (i.e., the percentage of retained reports over received reports), the rates of substantiated cases where the child was comprised (i.e., the rates of retained reports describing actions judged as being compromising to the child's safety or development) and the judicial rates (i.e., the percentage of reports over all retained confirmed reports accepted by judicial services). For these three variables, the difference between the EIQ and the annual provincial rates were extremely low, under 2%, which suggests a high level of representativeness. Nonetheless, we were unable to verify the level of representativeness of the other variables due to a lack of data.

Every two weeks throughout the entire data collection period, the survey forms were systematically verified to detect any forgotten questions, incoherent answers, or comprehension problems. If it was deemed necessary to gather additional or more complete information on a problematic form, the case workers concerned were contacted by telephone, in person, or in writing. The ethics committees of the Université du Québec en Outaouais, the Université de

Montréal and the 16 participating youth centres approved this research project. As such, all required consent forms were obtained.

Analyses

In order to estimate the annual volume of reported children, a rate was calculated for the year 1998–1999 (from April 1, 1998 to March 31, 1999). In the calculation of each rate, the response rate in each youth centre was considered and weighted with an annualization coefficient. The formula used only counts a child once for a given type of maltreatment (not subtype), whether or not the child had been the subject of several reports during the survey period.

The first step was to estimate the number of children for the year ($NC_{(i,j)} * AC_{(i)} / RR_{(i)}$) for each subpopulation with a specific problem ($_j$) and for each youth centre. This estimate is obtained by multiplying the number of children who were subjects of a report with a specific problem ($_j$) and documented by the study ($NC_{(i,j)}$) by an annualization coefficient ($AC_{(i)}$) and then dividing the result by the response rate obtained ($RR_{(i)}$) during the study in the same youth centre. The annualization coefficient is calculated by dividing the number of reports received by the youth centre for the whole year 1998–1999 by the number of reports received by the youth centre during the survey period. For example, if 225 reports were received from a youth centre during the three months covered by the survey and the centre received 1,000 reports during the course of the whole year, the annualization coefficient would be 4.44 (1,000 divided by 225). As for the response rate, it is calculated by dividing the number of reports documented during the study by the number of reports received by the youth centre during the same period. For example, if the study documented 130 reports in a youth centre and the centre received 225 reports during the same period, the response rate for this youth centre would be 58% (130 divided by 225). In summary, if we wanted to determine the number of girls who reported sexual abuse during 1998–

1999 in a given youth centre, we would take the number of girls who reported sexual abuse in the centre in question (15 girls), multiply it by the centre's annualization coefficient, and then divide it by the response rate for the centre. The result would be: 15 multiplied by 4.44 = 66.7 divided by 58%, for an estimate of 115.3 girls who reported sexual abuse in this youth centre for 1998–1999.

The second step was to calculate the Quebec rate of reported children by dividing the sum of the estimates concerning the number of children reported during the year for each youth centre by the sum of the populations of children (0–17 years old) living on the territory of the health and social services regions served by the participating youth centers. The data on the population of children is based on the information from the 1996 census (Institut de la Statistique du Québec).

The standard formula for calculating the Quebec rate for a given subpopulation j is as follows:

$$R_{(j)} = \Sigma ((NC_{(i,j)} * AC_{(i)}) / RR_{(i)}) / \Sigma N_{(i)}$$

Where

$R_{(j)}$ represents the Quebec rate of children reported in a given subpopulation j .

$NC_{(i,j)}$ is the number of children reported in the given subpopulation j and documented during the survey period in youth centre i .

$AC_{(i)}$ represents the annualization coefficient for youth centre i . The coefficient is calculated by dividing the number of reports received by youth centre i for the whole of 1998–1999 by the number of eligible reports, or reports received by centre i during the survey period. For this coefficient, the numbers of reports used in the numerator and denominator refer to all the reports received including multiple reports for a single child.

$RR_{(i)}$ represents the response rate for youth centre i . This rate is calculated by dividing the number of reports documented in the study for youth centre i by the number of eligible reports, or reports received by centre i during the study period. Here again, a single child may be counted more than once.

$N_{(i)}$ is the number of children between 0 and 17 years old who live on the territory covered by youth centre i .

Finally, for each rate, we calculated a confidence interval of 95%.

Findings

Investigated reports

Annual rates of children whose reports of maltreatment were investigated according to the type of maltreatment and the result of the investigations are presented in Table 2. Of all investigated reports of maltreatment, the most frequent type was neglect, with a rate of 7.8 investigated reports per 1000 children. Other types of maltreatment were less often reported; in order of importance, we found psychological abuse (3.4 per 1000 children), physical abuse (3.3 per 1000 children), sexual abuse (1.7 per 1000 children), and “other forms of maltreatment” (1.2 per 1000 children).

Substantiated reports

When only considering the rates of children whose maltreatment reports were substantiated (see Table 2), we observed the same order of importance among types of maltreatment. Neglect remains the most frequent type of maltreatment experienced by the reported children. In Quebec, 5.6 per 1000 children were found to be neglected, 2.5 per 1000 were psychologically maltreated/abused, 1.9 per 1000 were physically abused, while less than one child per 1000 (0.9) was sexually abused and less than one child (0.9) per 1000 experienced

Table 2. Quebec maltreatment incidence rates for investigated and substantiated reports per 1000 children, according to the type of maltreatment, age and gender of the child

Maltreatment Type	Rate/1000	Rate /1000		Rate /1000			Rate /1000		
		Confidence Interval (95%)		Age groups			Gender		
		Total	Maximum	Minimum	0-5 years	6-11 years	12-17 years	Girls	Boys
Number of children in Québec	1 658 505				548 950	533 400	576 145	809 780	848 695
Physical abuse									
Investigated	3,3	3,5	3,1	3,3	3,8	2,7	3,2	3,4	
Substantiated	1,9	2,0	1,7	1,4	2,3	1,9	1,8	2,0	
Sexual abuse									
Investigated	1,7	1,9	1,6	1,5	1,9	1,8	2,6	0,9	
Substantiated	0,9	1,0	0,8	0,5	1,0	1,2	1,4	0,5	
Neglect/abandonment									
Investigated	7,8	7,9	7,7	9,8	7,5	6,0	7,7	7,8	
Substantiated	5,6	5,7	5,5	6,9	5,1	4,6	5,3	5,7	
Psychological abuse									
Investigated	3,4	3,6	3,2	3,9	3,4	2,8	3,3	3,4	
Substantiated	2,5	2,7	2,5	2,7	2,5	2,2	2,5	2,5	
Other									
Investigated	1,2	1,3	1,1	1,4	1,2	1,0	1,3	1,1	
Substantiated	0,9	1,0	0,8	1,0	0,9	0,8	0,9	0,9	

another form of maltreatment. Among investigated children, proportions of substantiated reports were above 70% for all types of maltreatment, except sexual abuse (53%) and physical abuse (58%), which were less often substantiated.

Differences according to gender and age

Some differences were found in the rates of investigated and substantiated reports according to the child's gender (Table 2). For substantiated reports, girls were three times more often sexually abused than boys (1.4 vs. 0.5 per 1000), who were in turn slightly more often physically abused and neglected than girls (2.0 vs. 1.8 per 1000 and 5.7 vs. 5.3 per 1000 for physical abuse and neglect respectively). Rates of psychological abuse or "other types of maltreatment" were found to be very similar for boys and girls. The same differences between boys and girls were found when examining investigated reports.

Different patterns concerning the age emerged according to the type of maltreatment (investigated or substantiated reports). For substantiated reports, the incidence rate of neglect, psychological maltreatment and other forms of maltreatment diminished with children's age. This decrease is however more pronounced in the case of neglect where the drop in the incidence rate was close to 2 children per 1000 between 0 to 5 year-olds and 6 to 11 year-olds. Conversely, the incidence rate for child sexual abuse increased with age. Finally, there was an increase in the rate of child physical abuse until the age of 12, then a decrease during adolescence. The same differences between the three age groups were found when examining the rates of investigated reports.

CPS antecedents of investigated reports

Among all children investigated for maltreatment reports, we found that 21% were the subjects of other reports in the year preceding the present investigation, and that 16% were under

youth protection because their security and development were compromised in the five years preceding the present study (Table 3).

Co-occurrences of maltreatment

Although half of the children whose maltreatment reports were investigated had only one substantiated type of maltreatment (49%), over one quarter (29%) of the children from the 4,774 whose reports were investigated had more than one type of maltreatment which was substantiated. Two different types of maltreatment were substantiated for 23% of children and three different types of maltreatment were substantiated for 6% of the children. There was no substantiated maltreatment for 21% of children whose reports were investigated.

Table 3. CPS antecedents of the child concerned by the investigated reports

Antecedent	Investigated reports	
	n	%
Report/past year	1008	20,7%
Total reports	4867	
Under CPS/past five years ¹	759	15,7%
Total reports	4843	

(1) Children are placed under the care of Child Protection Services when maltreatment is judged as founded and is grave enough to necessitate CPS intervention. Intervention is generally aimed at putting a stop to the maltreatment and reducing the sequelae among the children.

Substantiated maltreatment characteristics

The nature of each substantiated maltreatment type is reported in Table 4, their duration and the identity of the aggressor is reported in Table 5. Situations of abusive physical discipline were found to represent 63% of all cases of physical abuse of children, while 31% involved impulsive and irrational brutality. Thus, the majority of cases of physical abuse seem to occur in a context of excessive physical discipline or educational practices. The biological father (40% of aggressors), biological mother (36%) and, to a lesser extent, the mother's partner (12%) were the

Table 4. Proportion of maltreated children (substantiated) according to the characteristics of each type of maltreatment (substantiated reports), Quebec, 1998-1999

Types and subtypes of maltreatment	Sample		Annualized
	n ¹	%	n ²
Physical abuse	602	100	3 162
Excessive physical discipline	377	62,7	1 982
Impulsive/irrational brutality	188	31,2	987
Excessive physical restrictions	17	2,8	89
Excessive physical deprivations	11	1,8	57
Other physical abuse (e.g.: shaken baby syndrome)	9	1,5	47
Sexual abuse	293	100	1 529
Fondling or genital touching	189	64,5	986
Full sexual intercourse	41	14,0	214
Attempted intercourse	26	8,9	136
Exhibitionism/voyeurism	18	6,1	93
Other type of sexual abuse (harassment, exploitation)	19	6,5	100
Neglect	1 649	100	8 533
Lack of supervision/has (or may have) led to physical harm	427	25,9	2 210
Educational neglect	413	25,0	2 133
Lack of supervision/has (or may have) led to maladaptive behavior	345	20,9	1 783
Physical neglect	255	15,5	1 323
Medical neglect	103	6,2	529
Lack of supervision/has (or may have) led to sexual abuse	82	5,0	427
Other type of neglect	24	1,5	128
Abandonment	213	100	1 073
Refusal to ensure childcare or expulsion from the home	99	46,5	499
Parental absence	85	39,9	428
Abandonment following placement	28	13,1	141
Other	1	0,5	5
Psychological abuse	808	100	4 136
Exposure to family violence	373	46,5	499
Rejection/belittling/disapproval	192	23,8	984
Affective indifference/ignorance/disapproval	123	15,2	629
Threat of abuse/terrorism	103	12,7	525
Other psychological abuse	17	2,1	87

¹ This column represents the number of children identified between October 1st 1998 and December 31st 1998.

² This column represents the annualized estimates for the year 1998-1999.

main aggressors identified in cases of physical abuse. With regard to the duration of physical abuse, the results show that over 53% of children experienced abuse that lasted over six months, while 23% experienced a single episode of physical abuse.

Sexual touching (65%) and, to a lesser extent, full sexual intercourse (14%), and attempted intercourse (9%), were the main types of sexual abuse for which children were victims. A relative (27% of sexual aggressors), the mother's partner (15%), the father (14%), or an authority figure (10%) consisted of the most common sexual aggressors. It should be noted that a significant proportion of aggressors—28%—fall into the “other” category. Sexual abuse was the only type of maltreatment where the mother was not cited as an aggressor. Just over two fifths of children (43%) suffered from sexual abuse for over six months, while 31% were sexually abused a single time.

The kinds of neglect and abandonment most frequently experienced by children were refusal to assure child care or expulsion from the home (46%), parental absence (40%), failure to supervise/protect that has or may have led to physical harm (26%), educational neglect (25%), failure to supervise/protect that has or may have led to maladaptive behaviour (21%), and physical neglect (16%). The mother (59%) and, to a lesser extent, the father (30%) represented the vast majority of persons cited in situations of neglect and abandonment. Situations of neglect lasted for over six months in 63% of cases; very few cases represent single incidents of neglect.

Psychological maltreatment usually took the form of exposure to conjugal violence (47%) and rejection/denigration of the child (24%). The biological mother (44%), the biological father (36%), and, to a lesser degree, the mother's partner (12%) represent the majority of people cited in situations of psychological maltreatment. The largest proportion of children (76% of victims)

who suffered for over six months experienced psychological maltreatment. Just 7% of children experienced this kind of maltreatment only once.

Table 5. Duration and identity of the perpetrator according to the type of maltreatment

	Physical abuse		Sexual abuse		Neglect/ abandonment		Psychological abuse	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Identity of the perpetrator								
Biological mother	265	35,9	7	2,2	1607	58,3	550	44,0
Biological father	295	40,0	46	14,2	826	30,0	448	35,8
Adoptive mother	7	0,9	0	0,0	12	0,4	13	1,0
Adoptive father	4	0,5	0	0,0	9	0,3	7	0,6
Mother's partner	88	11,9	47	14,5	147	5,3	147	11,8
Father's partner	18	2,4	0	0,0	27	1,0	34	2,7
Foster care family			5	1,5	3	0,1	1	0,1
Relatives	17	2,3	86	26,5	40	1,4	14	1,1
Authority figure ¹	8	1,1	31	9,5	11	0,4	3	0,2
Stranger			12	3,7	7	0,3	0	0,0
Does not know			0	0,0	1	0,03	0	0,0
Other	36	4,9	91	28,0	65	2,4	34	2,7
Total perpetrators	738	100,0	325	100,0	2755	100,0	1251	100,0
Duration								
Single incident	136	22,7	91	31,1	118	6,3	53	6,6
Less than six months	100	16,7	59	20,1	454	24,4	99	12,3
More than six months	318	53,0	125	42,7	1164	62,6	612	75,8
Missing data	46	7,7	18	6,1	123	6,6	43	5,3

(1) This refers to a person with an authority position in regards to the child, such as a teacher, a babysitter or a coach.

Intergenerational Transmission of Maltreatment

According to the information collected by the case workers investigating children's reports, from 20% to 31% of children whose problems were substantiated were living with at least one parent who was also maltreated in childhood (Table 6). Neglected children were the most likely to be living with a parent who was also a victim of maltreatment: 31% of them had at least one parent who was a victim of childhood maltreatment (of any kind). Next came physically

abused children (27% lived with at least one formerly maltreated parent) and sexually abused children (26%). It should be emphasized that these proportions underestimate the real situation since the case workers did not have this information in 45% of substantiated cases. We may therefore assume that the true proportions are greater than those documented here and that, given the scope of the missing information, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions.

Table 6. Proportion of children for whom at least one parent was maltreated in childhood according the type of substantiated maltreatment of the child

	Total children	Children with at least one maltreated parent¹ (n)	%
Substantiated maltreatment type			
Physical abuse	602	163	27,1
Sexual abuse	293	76	25,9
Neglect/ abandonment	1860	581	31,2
Psychological abuse	818	181	22,1
Other	354	70	19,8

(1) This information was obtained by the CPS case worker who assembled the information during the evaluation of the report. For example, the information may have been provided by a parent, another professional or from the child's previous file of youth protection services.

Discussion

This first report presents the main incidence rate results of the QIS and has made it possible to depict for the first time the nature and scope of the maltreatment experienced by Quebec children who report to CPS. The QIS also gathered a large amount of information on each report, thereby enabling us to better describe the reporting children and families, and the characteristics of the maltreatment. The survey was carried out in such a way as to document up to three problems at once and also to analyze the same problems separately. Comparison of the rates obtained by the QIS with those from the operational data (Lavergne & Tourigny, 2000)

shows that the QIS rates are systematically higher than those of the Quebec government, thus revealing the importance of taking into account all the problems experienced by children (see Table 1). The youth protections services' databases and the resulting incidence rates only allow the reporting of one form of maltreatment, which highlights the importance of research to systematically document the different forms of maltreatment. Another strength that should be emphasized is the documentation of psychological maltreatment, a problem which had hitherto never been documented by Quebec youth centres.

Limitations

Nonetheless, the results need to be interpreted in light of its limitations. The participation of 16 of the 18 youth centres and a response rate of 86% for investigated reports enabled us to obtain an appreciable level of cross-Quebec representativeness. Despite the fact that the study was carried out in the fall of 1998, it seems to be sufficiently representative of the whole year 1998–1999, at least for the variables considered. However, this representativeness is not perfect and the data collection period may over-represent or under-represent certain rather seasonal phenomena. For example, reports from the schools are probably over-represented in the fall, and their annual proportion is probably lower than documented by the study, since this environment is fairly unlikely to be the source of a report during the summer.

Although the case workers were generally remarkably cooperative in completing the forms and the percentage of missing/unknown data is very low for the great majority of the questions documented—less than 3%—it should still be noted that this proportion of missing/unknown information is particularly high for certain variables, making it difficult to interpret the results for these variables. This is particularly true for maltreatment experienced by parents during childhood. Despite the high level of missing/unknown data, the results for these variables still show that a significant proportion of families have to cope with the

intergenerational transmission of maltreatment and that the portrait we present, if anything, underestimates the scope of this phenomena and of the difficulties parents face.

Main conclusions and their implications

From an array of data, we can first conclude that the maltreatment situations experienced by these children are severe: 1) more than one quarter of children (29%) whose maltreatment was investigated had experienced at least two different forms of maltreatment; 2) depending on the form of maltreatment, the proportion of children whose maltreatment duration was more than six months varies between 43% and 76%; 3) for a significant proportion of children, maltreatment appears to be recurrent and 21% had already been the subject of an investigated report during the last 12 months whereas 16% had been taken in charge during the last five years; and 4) the proportion of children living with at least one parent who has also been maltreated in childhood is high, especially considering that 45% of data is missing, varying between 15% and 33% according to the child's own type of maltreatment.

Another finding concerns the far from negligible proportion of children who find themselves back in the protection system for a second or subsequent time, which raises important questions concerning the ability of all the existing social services to end the cycle of victimization of children within their families. It should be remembered that 28% of retained reports concern a child who is already known to the protection services (21% of investigated reports in the past year and 16% under youth protection in the past 5 years). Some hypotheses concerning the explanation for this recurrence have been formulated. First, the mission resulting from the law in class legislation is to end situations where the child's security or development is in danger. This mission is very restrictive and does not allow one to treat the multiple problems that families have to face. It therefore appears inevitable that some families' situations do not improve enough to prevent a new episode of extreme difficulty. Moreover, the probability of report recurrence

may be greater if family community resources turn out to be insufficient. Case workers may orient toward these resources initially. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether the proportion of recurrences is to be expected or if it justifies questioning the interventions or the quality of community resources.

First, some returns to CPS may be attributable to the premature closing of files, but others may result from unforeseeable changes in families' situations. For example, a child that had already been taken in by CPS for neglect could later report sexual abuse following the arrival of the mother's new boyfriend in the family.

Second, certain recurrences may be attributable to parents' desires to receive help, from CPS because they were satisfied with the results of CPS' earlier intervention. These kinds of situations could indicate a deficiency in first-line services, which do not meet these needs. Alternatively, it may signify that parents find it difficult to call on the first-line services. Families with unsubstantiated reports or substantiated reports without an assessment that the child's security or development were compromised could refer to emergency consulting services. These services are able to absorb known cases that require emergency or backup interventions upon referral without a report. On the other hand, it is necessary for CPS to take children whose reports are substantiated and based on an assessment that determined that the child's security and development were compromised. It is also important to consider how the services could better contribute to permanently eliminating the dangerous situations that these children experience.

Last, recurrences must be analyzed from the wider perspective of the risk taken by case workers in closing a case. A situation will probably deteriorate when a youth protection file is closed and the family does not receive the first-line services that its multiple problems demand. The percentage of children whose files were closed in the past and later report to CPS again may vary based on how long these children were taken in charge. If case workers hesitate to close the

files due to excessive caution, fewer recurrences would occur yet it would not indicate that the services were effective. At the extreme, a total absence of recurrence could be interpreted as the erroneous application of the class legislation and a tendency to abuse the power arising there from. In fact, risk management is one of the central problems in applying the YPA (DePanfilis & Zuravin, 1998; Fluke, Yuan, & Edwards, 1999).

Finally, the results of the present study also highlight the importance of neglect among all the problems reported: 1) neglect represents the problem most commonly reported and considered to be substantiated by the protection services; 2) it is the most often linked to the phenomenon of intergenerational transmission (33%); and 3) the third highest proportion is found among children for whom neglect has lasted over six months (65%). The importance attributed to neglect in the QIS, as the most frequent form of abuse, is very similar to findings documented by most other studies (Lavergne & Tourigny, 2000). In effect, neglect is the form of maltreatment with the highest incidence rates in the United States (NIS-1 : : NIS-2 : ; NIS-3 :), Canada (Trocmé et al., 2003) and Australia (Angus et Hall, 1996 ; Brodbent & Bentley, 1997 ; Johnstone, Broadbent, 1998).

Comparisons

By comparing the rates of maltreated children obtained by the QIS to those from similar studies that document the cases of children known to protection services (Lavergne & Tourigny, 2000), we find that: 1) the U.S. studies reveal slightly higher rates of maltreated children, especially with regard to neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse; 2) the Canadian rates are fairly similar, except for the rate of psychological maltreatment, which is higher in Canada; and 3) the Ontario rates are lower than the Quebec rates for psychological maltreatment and neglect, very similar for physical abuse, and higher for sexual abuse (see Table 1).

Although the scope of the phenomenon of maltreatment described in this study is extremely anxiety-provoking, other Quebec, Canadian, and U.S. studies remind us that the situations reported to the youth protection services do not even represent the entirety of the situations of maltreatment experienced by children. Two national U.S. studies carried out in 1986 and 1993 showed that even though the professionals associated with these children were aware of their abuse, a major proportion of maltreatment is never reported to CPS (Sedlack, 1991; Sedlack & Broadhurst, 1996). These two studies also indicated that the number of all types of maltreatment rose considerably between 1986 and 1993. Overall, not only do the cases reported to youth protection services concern only a small proportion of all maltreated children, but the number of maltreated children has increased, at least in the United States.

Further research

The QIS documented rates of maltreatment within the province of Quebec as a whole, yet past studies documented wide variations in incidence rates on a regional level. For example, Australian studies revealed an incidence rate variation level of 300% according to the subregions examined (Johnstone & Broadbent, 1998). Similarly, in Quebec, the incidence rates can vary from 11 to 37 per 1000 children according to the administrative region considered (MSSS, 1998). These important differences are difficult to interpret with the current data because of the limited amount of information reported by general incidence studies on the principal aspects that could explain them. Among factors most susceptible to shed light on these variations are: 1) the real incidence rates and the presence of risk factors in a community (Trocmé, McPhee, & Tam, 1995; Wright, Boucher, Frappier, Lebeau, & Sabourin, 1997); 2) the community's capacity to identify maltreatment and its propensity to report it (Trocmé et al., 1995); 3) the methods used to derive incidence rates (e.g., definitions of maltreatment, control of duplicate cases) (Trocmé et al., 1995); 4) the criteria used by CPS to determine if a case is substantiated (Zellman & Faller,

1996); and finally, 5) the human and financial resources CPS have at their disposition to respond to children's and families' needs (Wright et al., 1997; Zellman & Faller, 1996). Moreover, it is probable that all these factors contribute to create the observed variations in incidence rates. It is of the utmost importance that the factors most likely to explain regional variations be documented in future studies while they continue to remain an important issue.

The continuance of the QIS and its replication in years to come could provide us with important information on the stability or changes in maltreatment reports over time and give us an indication of the efficacy of CPS interventions and social policies to prevent maltreatment and its recurrence.

The possibility of simultaneously documenting the incidence of maltreatment from different sources is another important aspect to consider in future studies. Four levels of case identification have been described and are represented in the form of a pyramid: the first and smallest level represents cases known by CPS; the second, those known by professionals such as hospitals, social services, schools, etc.; the third, those known by members of the children's communities and; the fourth, the maltreatment situations that have not yet been identified as maltreatment by anybody (Trocmé, McPhee, Tam, & Hay, 1994). Considering this, as the QIS solely documented what is considered to be a first level of case identification, it only describes the "tip of the iceberg" in terms of child maltreatment. Apart from the NIS (Sedlack, 1991; Sedlack & Broadhurst, 1996), no study yet has reported more than one level of case identification. Yet this type of study could prove to be interesting in many regards. First, it could yield a more complete and subtle description of incidence rates and maltreatment characteristics. Second, it could allow us to identify the children whose maltreatment history is known to the larger community of professionals, regardless of whether a report was made to CPS. It could also help document the report practices of different categories of professionals and contribute to

improve their capacity to identify maltreated children and to increase their knowledge of situations covered by the law, their appreciation of the facts and their propensity to report (Zellman & Faller, 1996).

It is also necessary to develop studies for which regional and international comparisons can be made. The QIS relies on the assessment of case workers to gather its information and is based on maltreatment definitions that are uniform across Canada. As such, we can perform analyses on the QIS in collaboration with the researchers from the *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect* (Trocmé et al., 2001), to examine provincial differences in the phenomena of maltreatment and the organization of youth protection services.

References

- Angus, G., & Hall, G. (1996). Child abuse and neglect Australia 1994-1995. *Child welfare series, 16*. Canberra, Australia: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
- Broadbent, A., & Bentley, R. (1997). Child abuse and neglect Australia, 1996-97. *Child welfare series, 21*. Canberra, Australia: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
- DePanfilis, D., & Zuravin, S. J. (1998). Rates, patterns, and frequency of child maltreatment recurrences among families known to CPS. *Child Maltreatment, 3*(1), 27-42.
- Fluke, J. D., Yuan, Y.-Y. T., & Edwards, M. (1999). Recurrence of maltreatment: An application of the national child abuse and neglect data system (NCANDS). *Child Abuse & Neglect, 23*(7), 633-650.
- Johnstone, H., & Broadbent, A. (1998). *Child abuse and neglect*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
- Lavergne, C., Clément, M.-E., & Cloutier, R. (submitted). PIBE ou la création d'une fenêtre sur des données de recherche dans le domaine de la protection des enfants au Québec. *Intervention*.
- Lavergne, C., & Tourigny, M. (2000). Incidence de l'abus et la négligence envers les enfants: Recension des écrits. *Criminologie, 33*(1), 47-72.
- MSSS. (1991). *La protection sur mesure. Un projet collectif. Working report on the application of youth protection measures*. Quebec City: Government of Quebec.
- MSSS. (1998). *Données opérationnelles de la direction de ressources informatiques*. Quebec City: Government of Quebec.
- Sedlack, A. J. (1991). *National incidence and prevalence of child abuse and neglect: 1988 revised report*. Rockville: Westat Inc.

- Sedlack, A. J., & Broadhurst, D. D. (1996). *Third national incidence study of child abuse and neglect (nis-3)*. Washington: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National center on child abuse and neglect.
- Tourigny, M., Mayer, M., Wright, J., Lavergne, C., Hélie, S., Trocmé, N., et al. (2002). *Étude sur l'incidence et les caractéristiques des situations d'abus, de négligence, d'abandon et de troubles de comportement sérieux signalées à la direction de la protection de la jeunesse au Québec (ÉIQ)*. Montréal: Centre de Liaison sur l'Intervention et la Prévention Psychosociales.
- Trocmé, N., MacLaurin, B., Fallon, B., Daciuk, J., Billingsley, D., Tourigny, M., et al. (2001). *Canadian incidence study of reported child abuse and neglect: Final report*. Ottawa, Ontario: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.
- Trocmé, N., McPhee, D., & Tam, K. K. (1995). Child abuse and neglect in Ontario: Incidence and characteristics. *Child Welfare, 24*(3), 563-586.
- Trocmé, N., McPhee, D., Tam, K. K., & Hay, T. (1994). Ontario Incidence Study of reported child abuse and neglect. Toronto, ON: Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse.
- Trocmé, N., Tourigny, M., MacLaurin, B., & Fallon, B. (2003). Major findings from the Canadian incidence study of reported child abuse and neglect. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 27*(12), 1427-1439.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human services (1981). *National study of the incidence and severity of child abuse and neglect*. Washington, Office of Human Development Services, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, Children's bureau, National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect.

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau (1998). *Child maltreatment 1996: Reports from the states to the national child abuse and neglect data system*. Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office.
- Vézina, A., & Bradet, R. (1990). Inventaire concernant le bien-être de l'enfant en relation avec l'exercice des responsabilités parentales. Under the direction of the Centre jeunesse de l'Estrie. Quebec City: Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux and Centre de recherche sur les services communautaires.
- Vézina, A., & Bradet, R. (1992). Validation of the child well-being scales (CWBS) in Quebec. *Science et Comportement*, 22(3-4), 233-251.
- Wang, C.-T., & Daro, D. (1998). *Current trends in child abuse reporting and fatalities: The results of the 1997 annual fifty state survey*. Chicago, IL: Center on Child Abuse Prevention Research, National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse.
- Wright, J., Boucher, J., Frappier, J.-Y., Lebeau, T., & Sabourin, S. (1997). *The incidence of child sexual abuse in Quebec*. Paper presented at the 5th International Family Violence Research Conference, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH.
- Zellman, G. L., & Faller, K. C. (1996). Reporting of child maltreatment. In J. Briere, L. Berliner, et al. (Eds), *The APSAC handbook on child maltreatment* (pp. 359-381). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.