



# CIS-2008 Major Findings Supplementary Tables: Mental or Emotional Harm by Primary Substantiated Maltreatment

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Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., MacLaurin, B., Sinha, V., Black, T., Fast, E., Felstiner, C., Hélie, S., Turcotte, D., Weightman, P., Douglas, J., & Holroyd, J. (2010) *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2008: Major Findings, Chapters 1-5*. Public Health Agency of Canada: Ottawa, 2010.

## Introduction

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 agencies in Canada. In addition to the tables presented in the Major Findings report, the Supplementary Tables Information Sheet Series describes key child, household and investigation characteristics by primary category of substantiated maltreatment including confirmed risk<sup>1</sup>. This Information Sheet examines the presence of mental or emotional harm as a result of maltreatment.

## Findings

There were an estimated 174,411 maltreatment investigations conducted in Canada in 2008, of which, 49% were substantiated (85,440 investigations). Workers were asked to indicate whether the child was showing signs of mental or emotional harm (e.g., nightmares, bed wetting or social withdrawal) following the maltreatment incident(s). In order to rate the severity of the mental/emotional harm, workers indicated whether the child required treatment to manage symptoms of the harm.

No mental or emotional harm was noted in most cases of substantiated maltreatment, however, as shown in Table 1, rates of harm did vary by primary category of substantiated maltreatment. Mental or emotional harm was identified in 47% of substantiated sexual abuse investigations and most of these cases were severe enough to require treatment. In 36% of substantiated emotional

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<sup>1</sup> The mental or emotional harm variable was only collected for maltreatment investigations.

maltreatment investigations, 30% of substantiated neglect investigations and 26% of substantiated physical abuse and substantiated intimate partner violence (IPV) investigations, mental or emotional harm was noted by the investigating worker.

Table 1.

*Mental or emotional harm by primary category of substantiated maltreatment in Canada in 2008<sup>^</sup>*

	Primary Category of Maltreatment										Total	
	Physical Abuse		Sexual Abuse		Neglect		Emotional Maltreatment		Exposure to IPV			
<b>Mental/Emotional Harm</b>	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
No mental/emotional harm documented	12,673	74	1,353	53	19,763	70	4,651	64	21,261	74	59,701	71
Mental/emotional harm, no therapeutic treatment required	2,171	13	-	-	3,355	12	982	13	3,118	11	9,705	12
Mental/emotional harm, therapeutic treatment required	2,249	13	1,138	44	5,181	18	1,687	23	4,465	15	14,720	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,093</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,570</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>28,299</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>7,320</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>28,844</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>84,126</b>	<b>100</b>

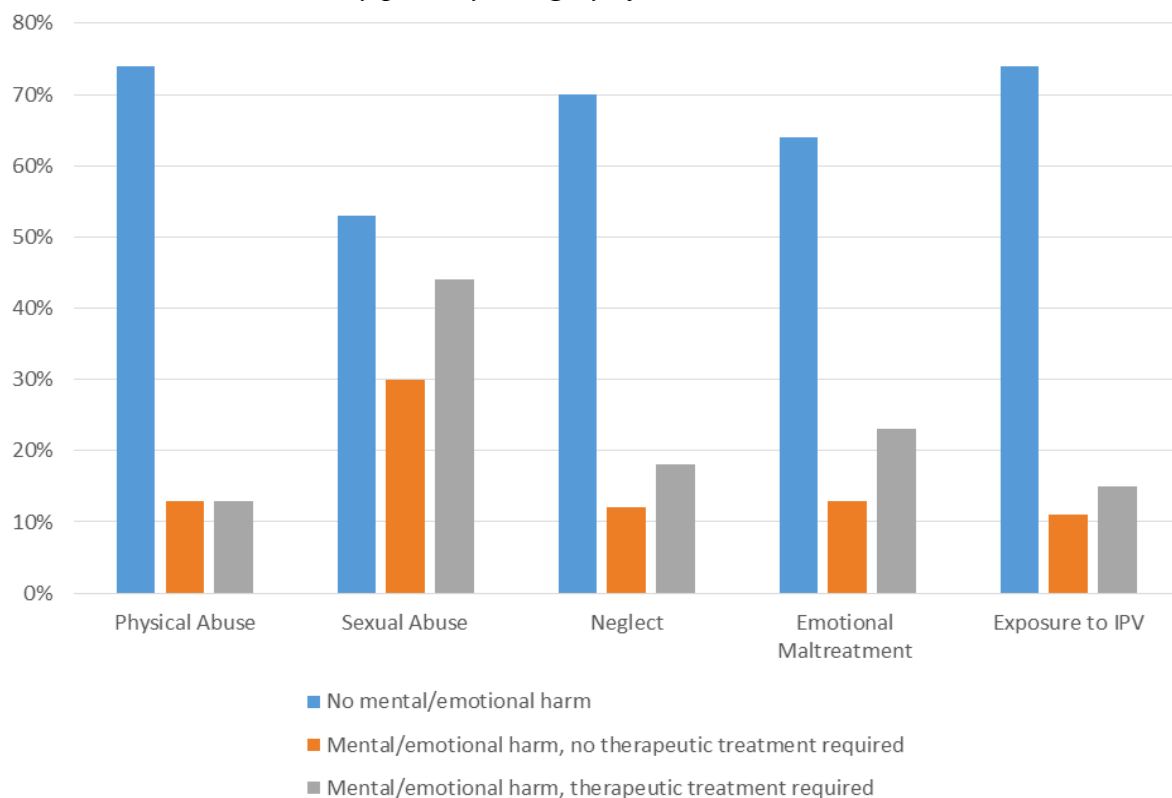
<sup>^</sup> Based on a sample of 6,044 substantiated child maltreatment investigations with information about mental/emotional harm. Percentages are column percentages.

- Estimates of less than 100 investigations are not shown, but are included in the total.

Please see Figure 1 for a visual representation of these findings.

Figure 1.

*Mental or emotional harm by primary category of substantiated maltreatment in Canada in 2008*



## **Background**

Responsibility for protecting and supporting children at risk of abuse and neglect falls under the jurisdiction of the 13 Canadian provinces and territories and a system of Aboriginal child welfare agencies which have increasing responsibility for protecting and supporting Aboriginal children. Because of variations in the types of situations that each jurisdiction includes under its child welfare mandate as well as differences in the way service statistics are kept, it is difficult to obtain a nation-wide profile of the children and families receiving child welfare services. The Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS) is designed to provide such a profile by collecting information on a periodic basis from every jurisdiction using a standardized set of definitions. With core funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada and in-kind and financial support from a consortium of federal, provincial, territorial, Aboriginal and academic stakeholders, the CIS-2008 is the third nation-wide study of the incidence and characteristics of investigated child abuse and neglect across Canada.

## **Methodology**

The CIS-2008 used a multi-stage sampling design to select a representative sample of 112 child welfare service agencies in Canada and then to select a sample of cases within these agencies. Information was collected directly from child welfare workers on a representative sample of 15,980 child protection investigations conducted during a three-month sampling period in the fall of 2008. This sample was weighted to reflect provincial annual estimates.

For maltreatment investigations, information was collected regarding the primary form of maltreatment investigated as well as the level of substantiation for that maltreatment. Thirty-two forms of maltreatment were listed on the data collection instrument, and these were collapsed into five broad categories: physical abuse (e.g., hit with hand), sexual abuse (e.g., exploitation), neglect (e.g., educational neglect), emotional maltreatment (e.g., verbal abuse or belittling), and exposure to intimate partner violence (e.g., direct witness to physical violence). Workers listed the primary concern for the investigation, and could also list secondary and tertiary concerns.

For each form of maltreatment listed, workers assigned a level of substantiation. Maltreatment could be substantiated (i.e., the balance of evidence indicated that an incident of maltreatment had occurred), suspected (i.e., the maltreatment could neither be confirmed nor ruled out) or unfounded (i.e., the balance of evidence indicated that an incident of maltreatment had not occurred).

A detailed presentation of the study methodology and of the definitions of each variable is available at <http://cwrp.ca/publications/cis-2008-study-methods>.

## **Limitations**

The CIS collects information directly from 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. Therefore, the scope of the study is limited to the type of information available to them at that point. The CIS does not include information about unreported

maltreatment nor about cases that were investigated only by the police. Also, reports that were made to child welfare authorities but were screened out (not opened for investigation) were not included. Similarly, reports on cases currently open at the time of case selection were not included. The study did not track longer-term service events that occurred beyond the initial investigation.

Three limitations to estimation method used to derive annual estimated should also be noted. The agency size correction uses child population as a proxy for agency size; this does not account for variations in per capita investigation rates across agencies in the same strata. The annualization weight corrects for seasonal fluctuation in the volume of investigations, but it does not correct for seasonal variations in types of investigations conducted. Finally, the annualization weight includes cases that were investigated more than once in the year as a result of the case being re-opened following a first investigation completed earlier in the same year. Accordingly, the weighted annual estimates represent the child maltreatment-related investigations, rather than investigated children.

Comparisons across CIS reports must be made with caution. The forms of maltreatment tracked by each cycle were modified to take into account changes in investigation mandates and practices. Comparisons across cycles must in particular take into consideration the fact that the CIS-2008 was the first to explicitly track risk-only investigations. In addition, readers are cautioned to avoid making direct comparisons with provincial and First Nations oversampling reports because of differences in the way national and oversampling estimates are derived.

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