



A comparison of First Nations and non-Aboriginal children investigated for maltreatment in Canada in 2003¹

Bruce MacLaurin, Nico Trocmé, Barbara Fallon, Cindy Blackstock, Lisa Pitman, and Megan McCormack

Background to the Canadian Incidence Study (2003) and the Mesnmimk Wasatek report

The 2003 Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-2003)² is the second nation-wide study to examine the incidence of reported child maltreatment and the characteristics of the children and families investigated by Canadian child welfare services. The CIS-2003 tracked a sample of 14,200 child maltreatment investigations³ as a basis for deriving national estimates. Information was collected directly from the investigating child welfare workers using a standard set of definitions.⁴

The overrepresentation of First Nations children reported to child welfare in Canada is well documented,^{5,6,7,8,9} however the precise reason why it exists is not as clear. This information sheet is based on the Mesnmimk Wasatek report, prepared under contract to the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, that compares children of First Nations heritage¹⁰ with non-Aboriginal children included in the CIS-2003 in an effort to better understand some of the factors contributing to the over-representation of First Nations children in the child welfare system in Canada. The final sample included 11,500 investigations for children, 0–15 years of age in Canada excluding Quebec.¹¹ The following analysis is based on a weighted sample and the incidence rates are estimates based on population estimates prepared by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society. For further

information regarding how these estimates were calculated please refer to the Mesnmimk Wasatek report.

Incidence of investigated and substantiated maltreatment

An estimated 23,366 First Nations child investigations (58.34 investigations per 1,000 children) and 187,763 non-Aboriginal child investigations (44.11 investigations per 1,000 children) were conducted in Canada, excluding Quebec, in 2003.

A higher proportion of investigations involving First Nations children was substantiated or remained suspected following the initial investigation period. Fifty-two percent of First Nations child investigations were substantiated by the investigating worker (30.24 investigations per 1,000 children) compared to 47% of non-Aboriginal child investigations (20.72 investigations per 1,000 children) in Canada, excluding Quebec, in 2003. In a further 14% of investigations (an estimated 3,286 First Nations child investigations) there was insufficient evidence to substantiate maltreatment, however, maltreatment remained suspected by the investigating worker. Twelve percent of non-Aboriginal child investigations (an estimated 23,455 investigations) remained suspected by the investigating worker. Approximately 34% of First Nations child investigations (an estimated 7,969 child investigations) compared to 41% of non-Aboriginal child investigations (an estimated 76,093), were unsubstantiated (Table 1).

Table 1: First Nations and non-Aboriginal child maltreatment investigations by level of substantiation in Canada, excluding Quebec, in 2003*

Level of Substantiation	First Nations Child Investigations			Non-Aboriginal Child Investigations			Total
	%	Incidence per 1,000 children	Number of child investigations	%	Incidence per 1,000 children	Number of child investigations	
Substantiated	52	30.24	12,111	47	20.72	88,215	100,326
Suspected	14	8.20	3,286	12	5.51	23,455	26,741
Unsubstantiated	34	19.90	7,969	41	17.88	76,093	84,062
Total child investigations	100	58.34	23,366	100	44.11	187,763	211,129

* Based on a sample of 11,080 child maltreatment investigations with information about investigated child maltreatment

Source: *Mesnmimk Wasatek Report*, Table 3-1

Primary categories of substantiated maltreatment for First Nations and non-Aboriginal child maltreatment investigations in Canada, excluding Quebec, in 2003

Neglect was the most common primary category of substantiated maltreatment in First Nations child investigations. Over half (56%) of all substantiated First Nations child investigations (17.06 investigations per 1,000 children) involved neglect as the primary category of maltreatment, an estimated 6,833 neglect investigations. Exposure to domestic violence was the second most frequently reported form of abuse in First Nations child investigations (5.93 investigations per 1,000 children). Emotional maltreatment was the primary category of substantiated abuse in First Nations investigations in 12% of cases (3.57 investigations per 1,000 children), followed by physical abuse (3.15 investigations per 1,000 children). Child sexual abuse was the primary concern in 2% of all First Nations child investigations, or 0.53 investigations per 1,000 children.

The most common primary category of substantiated maltreatment for non-Aboriginal child investigations was exposure to domestic violence, accounting for 30% of substantiated investigations (6.13 investigations per 1,000 children), followed by physical abuse (5.56 investigations per 1,000 children), neglect (5.20 investigations per 1,000 children), emotional maltreatment (3.20 investigations per 1,000 children) and child sexual abuse (0.63 investigations per 1,000 children) (Table 2).

Out-of-home placement for substantiated First Nations and non-Aboriginal child maltreatment investigations in Canada, excluding Quebec, in 2003

Sixteen percent of all substantiated First Nations child investigations (an estimated 1,946) resulted in a formal child welfare placement (kinship foster care, other family foster care, group home or residential/secure treatment) at the completion of the initial investigation. An additional 13% of

Table 2: Primary categories of substantiated First Nations and non-Aboriginal child maltreatment investigations in Canada, excluding Quebec, in 2003*

Primary Categories of Maltreatment	First Nations Child Investigations			Non-Aboriginal Child Investigations			Total
	%	Incidence per 1,000 children	Number of child investigations	%	Incidence per 1,000 children	Number of child investigations	
Physical abuse	10	3.15	1,261	27	5.56	23,687	24,948
Sexual abuse	2	0.53	211	3	0.63	2,681	2,892
Neglect	56	17.06	6,833	25	5.20	22,121	28,954
Emotional maltreatment	12	3.57	1,431	15	3.20	13,632	15,063
Exposure to domestic violence	20	5.93	2,375	30	6.13	26,095	28,470
Total child investigations	100	30.24	12,111	100	20.72	88,216	100,327

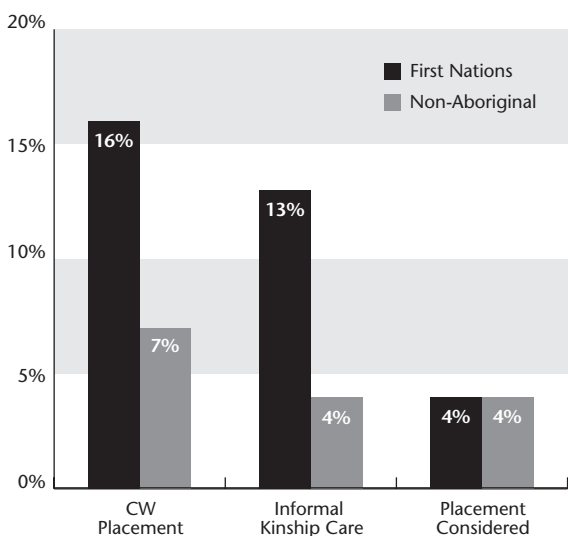
* Based on a sample of 5,367 substantiated child maltreatment investigations with information about primary categories of substantiated maltreatment

Source: *Mesnmimk Wasatek Report*, Table 3-2

substantiated First Nations child maltreatment investigations resulted in children placed in informal kinship care, while placement was considered for a further 4% of substantiated First Nations child maltreatment investigation. In total, 29% of First Nations children experienced a change of residence during or at the conclusion of the initial substantiated maltreatment investigation.

Seven percent of all substantiated non-Aboriginal child investigations (an estimated 5,562) resulted in a child being placed in formal child welfare care during the initial investigation, while an additional 4% of substantiated maltreatment investigations lead to a child being placed in informal kinship care. Placement was considered for a further 4% of substantiated non-Aboriginal child maltreatment investigations. In total, 11% of non-Aboriginal children experienced a change of residence during or at the conclusion of the initial substantiated maltreatment investigation (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Placement decisions in First Nations and non-Aboriginal primary substantiated child maltreatment investigations in Canada, excluding Quebec, in 2003*



* Based on a sample of 5,367 substantiated child maltreatment investigations with information about out-of-home placement

Source: *Mesnmimk Wasatek Report*, Table 7-6

A focus on future research

The overrepresentation of First Nations children in the Canadian child welfare system is a complex and problematic issue for child welfare researchers, practitioners, and policy makers. The significant overrepresentation of First Nations children in

substantiated child investigations and referrals to child welfare placement can clearly be related to the high level of caregiver, household, and community risk factors. The finding that neglect is the primary type of child maltreatment experienced by First Nations children calls for a reorientation of child welfare research, policy and practice to develop culturally sensitive and effective responses. Effecting change also calls for a much greater emphasis by child protection authorities on the structural factors contributing to child maltreatment amongst First Nations children, such as poverty, poor housing, and parental substance misuse.

- 1 This information sheet is based upon the peer-reviewed report, Trocmé, N., MacLaurin, B., Fallon, B., Knoke, D., Pitman, L., & McCormack, M. (2006). *Mesnmimk Wasatek – Catching a drop of light: Understanding the overrepresentation of First Nations children in Canada's child welfare system: An analysis of the Canadian incidence study of reported child abuse and neglect (CIS-2003)*. Toronto: Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare.
- 2 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*. Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2005.
- 3 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.
- 4 In Quebec, information was extracted directly from the administrative information systems.
- 5 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1996). Child welfare reform. In *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. (Vol. 3, Chapter 2.3). Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Retrieved on Sept, 24, 2008 from: http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sgmm_e.html
- 6 Farris-Manning, C., & Zanstra, M. (2003). *Children in care in Canada: A summary of current issues and trends with recommendations for future research, position paper*. Ottawa: Child Welfare League of Canada.
- 7 McKenzie, B. (2002). *Block funding child maintenance in First Nations child and family services: A policy review*. Winnipeg, MB: Kahnawake Shakotila' takenas Community Services.
- 8 McKenzie, B., Seidl, E., et al. (1995). Child welfare standards in First Nations. In J. Hudson & B. Galaway (Eds.), *Child welfare in Canada: Research and policy implications* (pp. 54–65). Toronto: Thomson Educational Press.
- 9 Office of the Auditor General of Canada. (2008). First Nations Child and Family Service Program, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (Chapter 4) In *The May 2008 Report of the Auditor General of Canada*. Ottawa: Author. Retrieved on Sept, 24 from: http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_200805_e_30714.html
- 10 This report focused on First Nations children, defined by First Nations status or First Nations non-status. Child investigations noting other forms of Aboriginal heritage were removed from the data set, including Métis, Inuit and other Aboriginal culture.
- 11 Data on Aboriginal identity were not collected for cases investigated in Quebec for the CIS-2003, therefore investigations conducted in Quebec were removed from this analysis.

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