

# Child Welfare Worker Characteristics in Canada in 2019

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Barbara Fallon & Rachael Lefebvre  
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## Introduction

The data presented in this information sheet were collected as part of the First Nations/Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2019 (FN/CIS-2019), a data collection effort to produce estimates of the incidence of reported and investigated child maltreatment in Canada. This Information Sheet describes the characteristics of child welfare workers investigating child maltreatment concerns in Canada in 2019, excluding Quebec<sup>1</sup>.

## Findings

There were an estimated 313,600 maltreatment-related investigations<sup>2</sup> conducted in Canada in 2019. Child welfare workers are mandated to conduct these maltreatment-related investigations, protect children who have been or are at risk of being abused and/or neglected by their caregivers, and to provide for their care and supervision when necessary. The following information sheet describes the worker characteristics of investigating child welfare workers for the 282,608 investigations conducted in Canada in 2019, excluding Quebec<sup>3</sup>.

A majority of the maltreatment-related investigations (70.6%) were conducted by an intake worker (i.e., a worker whose primary role is to investigate maltreatment-related concerns), followed by workers in a combination role (i.e., intake and ongoing child protection services; 16.2%), other positions (8.9%), and ongoing child protection services role (4.3%).

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<sup>1</sup> In Quebec, data were extracted from information systems from all agencies able to participate (17 out of 20 agencies) and these administrative data were matched to variables collected in the rest of Canada where possible. Investigating child welfare worker characteristics were not able to be extracted in Quebec.

<sup>2</sup> A maltreatment-related investigation refers to both maltreatment and risk-only investigations. Risk-only investigations are those in which a specific past incident of maltreatment was not suspected or alleged to have occurred, but rather a constellation of factors lead to concerns that a child may be maltreated in the future (e.g., caregiver with a substance abuse issue).

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 1.

The majority of investigations (87.9%) were conducted by a worker who identified as female. Most investigating child welfare workers spoke English as their first language (91.0%). See Table 1 for description of investigations' respective worker ethno-racial identity.

Table 1.

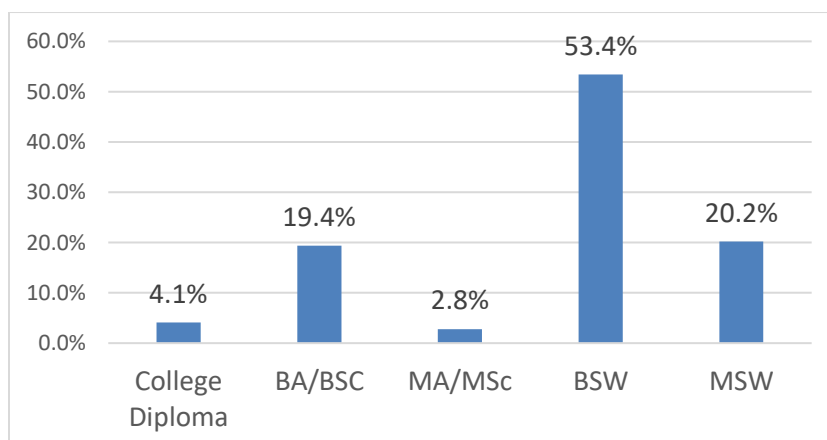
*Investigations' respective worker ethno-racial identity*

<b>Ethno-racial Identity</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
White	193,986	72.9
Black	20,020	7.5
Indigenous	14,890	5.6
Latin American	3,031	1.1
Arab	878	0.3
West Asian	581	0.2
South Asian	15,324	5.8
Chinese	1,287	0.5
Southeast Asian	1,549	0.6
Filipino	1,574	0.6
Japanese	182	0.1
Korean	333	0.1
Other (e.g., multiple ethno-racial identity categories selected)	12,290	4.6

Figure 1 displays investigating workers' highest level of education. Over half (53.4%) of maltreatment-related investigations in Canada (excluding Quebec<sup>4</sup>), in 2019, were conducted by a worker with a Bachelor of Social Work degree and 20.2% of investigations were conducted by a worker with a Master of Social Work degree as their highest level of education.

Figure 1

*Investigations' respective worker highest level of education*

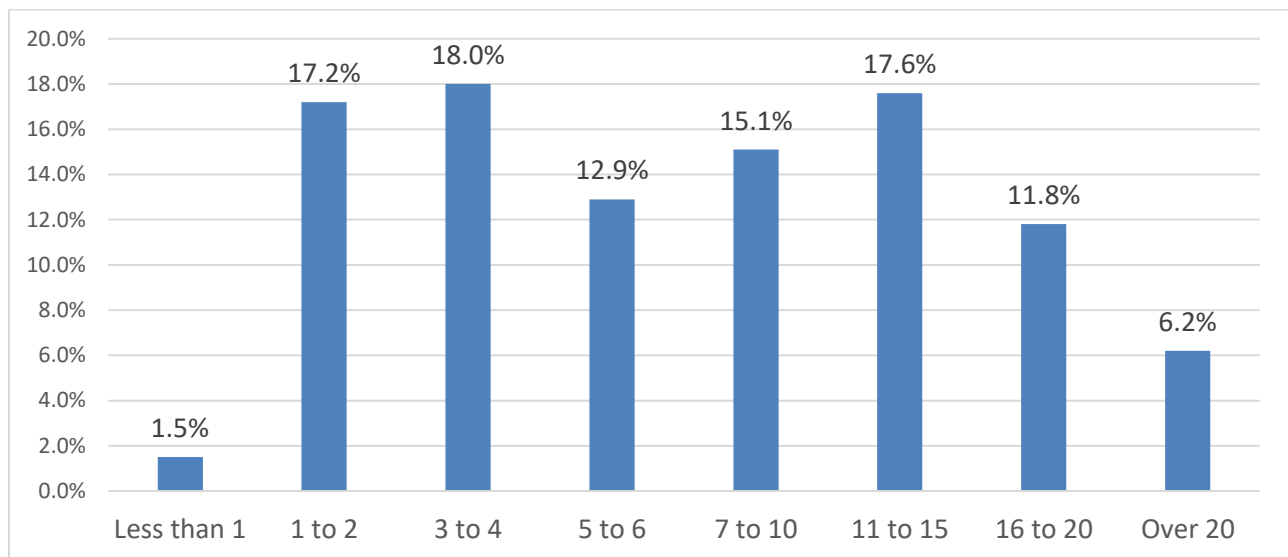


<sup>4</sup> See footnote 1.

Figure 2 shows investigating workers' years of child welfare experience. Just over half of investigations (50.7%) were conducted by a worker with seven or more years of child welfare experience and 18.7% of investigations were conducted by a worker with less 2 or less years of child welfare experience.

Figure 2

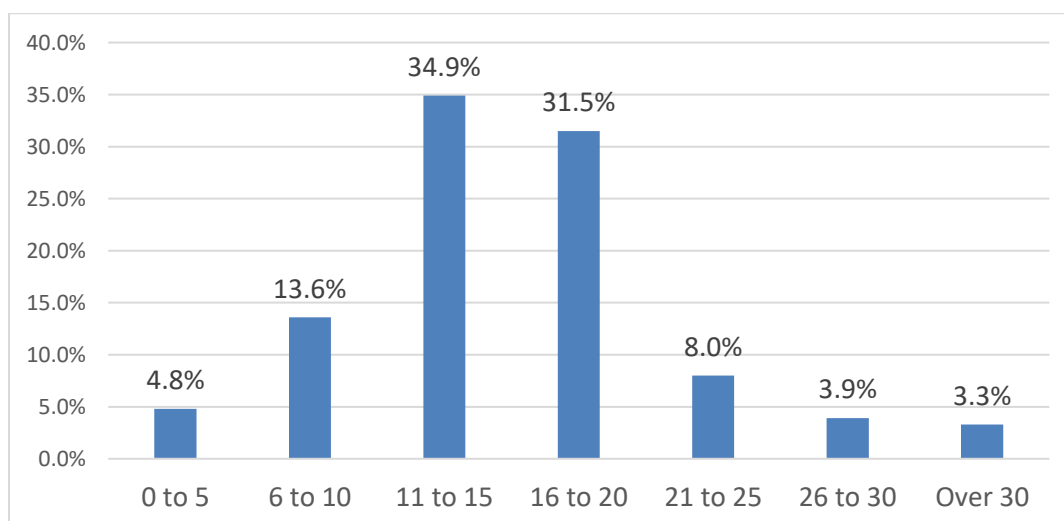
*Investigations' respective worker years of child welfare experience*



Workers who were asked to indicate what their average caseload size was. Thirty-five percent of investigations were conducted by a worker with an average caseload size of between 11 and 15 cases and 31.5% of investigations were conducted by workers with between 16 and 20 cases. See Figure 3 for a representation of investigations' respective worker caseload size.

Figure 3

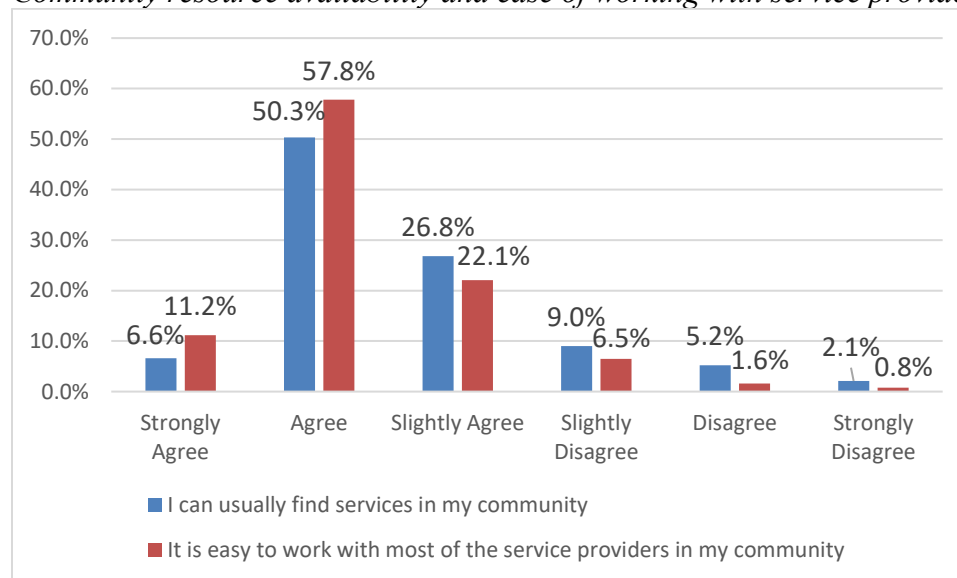
*Investigations' respective worker caseload size*



Workers were asked to indicate whether they could usually find services in their community that could help keep children safe in their homes. Resource availability was as issue in under one in ten investigations, as 7.6% of investigations were conducted by a worker who strongly disagreed or disagreed that they could find services in their community to keep children safe in their homes. Workers were also asked whether it was easy to work with most of the service providers in their community. The majority of workers (69%) either strongly agreed or agreed that it was easy to work with most of their community's service providers. See Figure 5 for perception of resource availability and ease of working with service providers.

Figure 5

*Community resource availability and ease of working with service providers*



## Methodology

The FN/CIS-2019 sample (for all regions excluding Quebec) was drawn in three stages. First, a representative sample of provincial and territorial mainstream child welfare sites and Indigenous child welfare agencies across Canada was selected. Cases were then sampled over a three-month period within the selected sites, and finally, child investigations that met the study criteria were identified from the sampled cases. Quebec administrative data were extracted for the year 2019 from the information system and, when possible, matched to the variables contained in the data collection instrument used in the rest of Canada. Data from the province of Ontario was collected in 2018 as part of the Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect and was merged with the rest of Canada. Complex survey weights were used to derive estimates of the annual rate and characteristics of child investigations in Canada.

For maltreatment investigations, information was collected regarding the primary category of maltreatment investigated as well as the level of substantiation for that maltreatment. Thirty-three 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.

Workers were asked to provide information on various other aspects of their investigation, including the characteristics of the household, caregivers, and child subject of the investigation; history of previous child welfare case openings; and short-term child welfare service dispositions (e.g., level of substantiation). Workers were also asked to provide information about their own characteristics (e.g., education, years of experience, case distribution) on a voluntary Worker Information Instrument. Worker information was collected for 94.2% of investigations. In the other 5.8% of investigations, the investigating worker did not complete their Worker Information Instrument.

## Limitations

Information about sampled cases was collected directly from the investigating worker at the conclusion of their investigation, except for sites in Quebec where information was extracted from the administrative information system. Therefore, the scope of the study is limited to the type of information available to them at that point. The FN/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 provincial estimates should also be noted. The agency size correction uses service volume as a proxy for agency size; this does not account for potential variations in investigations across agencies. 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 reports must be made with caution. Information based on child welfare worker characteristics has changed among cycles.

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