



# A Profile of Child Welfare Workers in Canada in 2008

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Kristen Lwin, Rachael Lefebvre, Barbara Fallon, & Nico Trocmé

## 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<sup>1</sup> this Information Sheet examines key characteristics of the child welfare workers who conducted the investigations.

## Findings

There were an estimated 235,842 maltreatment-related investigations conducted in Canada in 2008. In addition to child, caregiver, and case characteristics, key characteristics of workers who conducted these investigations were collected as part of the CIS-2008. The following information sheet provides a snapshot of the child welfare workers who conducted the investigations.

Table 1 displays the demographic features of child welfare workers. The majority of workers who participated in the CIS-2008 identified as female (86%) and as white (82%). Over ninety percent of workers identified English as their primary language (93%). Almost half of the child welfare workers that participated in the CIS-2008 were between 26 and 34 years of age (44%), followed by workers between 35 and 44 years of age (29%), 45 and 54 years (12%), 25 years or younger (10%), and 55 years or older (5%).

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

Table 1.

*Age, Gender, Primary Language, and Ethnicity of Investigating Workers in Canada in 2008<sup>^</sup>*

	Per cent
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	86%
Male	14%
<b>Primary Language</b>	
English	93%
French	5%
Other	1%
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
White	82%
Aboriginal	10%
Black	4%
Chinese	1%
South Asian	1%
Other	2%
<b>Age</b>	
Less than 26	10%
Between 26 and 34	44%
Between 35 and 44	29%
Between 45 and 54	12%
More than 54	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>^</sup>Total percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Table 2 outlines the worker's distribution of caseloads, at the time of the CIS-2008, by their position. An examination of the distribution of cases by position indicates that 37% of intake workers had a caseload of zero to ten cases, whereas 10% of generalists had a caseload of zero to ten. Twenty-three percent of generalists had caseloads of 21 to 30 cases; however, only 7% of intake workers indicated a caseload of 21 to 30.

Table 2.

*Distribution of worker caseload by worker position in Canada in 2008<sup>^</sup>*

Case Distribution	Intake	Generalist	Other
	Percent (N=395)	Percent (N=335)	Percent (N=163)
0-10 cases	37%	10%	24%
11-20 cases	56%	63%	56%
21-30 cases	7%	23%	16%
31-40 cases	-	3%	2%
Over 40 cases	-	-	1%
Total	100%	100%	100%

<sup>^</sup>Total percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

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

Figure 1.

*Distribution of worker caseload by worker position in Canada in 2008*

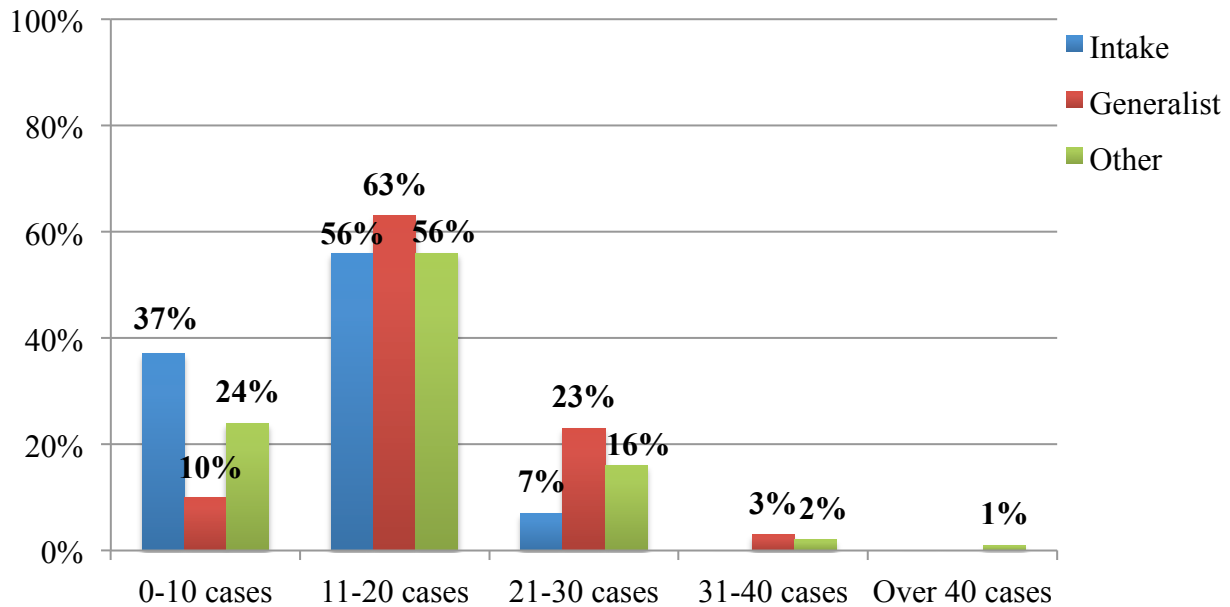


Figure 2 outlines the years of child welfare experience for investigating workers. Nine per cent of workers had less than one year of child welfare experience, followed by 24% with one to two years of experience. The proportion of workers with three to four years of experience (17%) was very similar with those who had five to six years of experience (16%). Lastly, 34% of the workers indicated over six years of child welfare experience.

Figure 2.

*Years of child welfare experience for investigating workers in Canada in 2008*

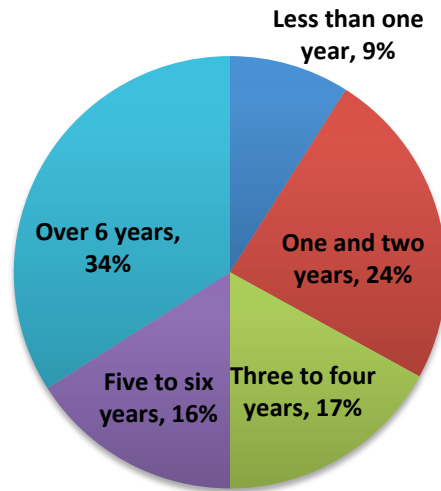


Figure 3 displays the highest level of completed education for investigating workers. The majority of workers (57%) were educated with a Bachelor of Social Work as their highest degree while ten percent of workers had completed a Master of Social Work degree. Twenty two percent of workers identified they had a Bachelor's degree in a field outside of social work and 2% of workers had a graduate degree outside of social work. Nine percent of workers had a certificate or diploma as their highest degree.

Figure 3.

*Highest level of completed education for investigating workers in Canada in 2008*

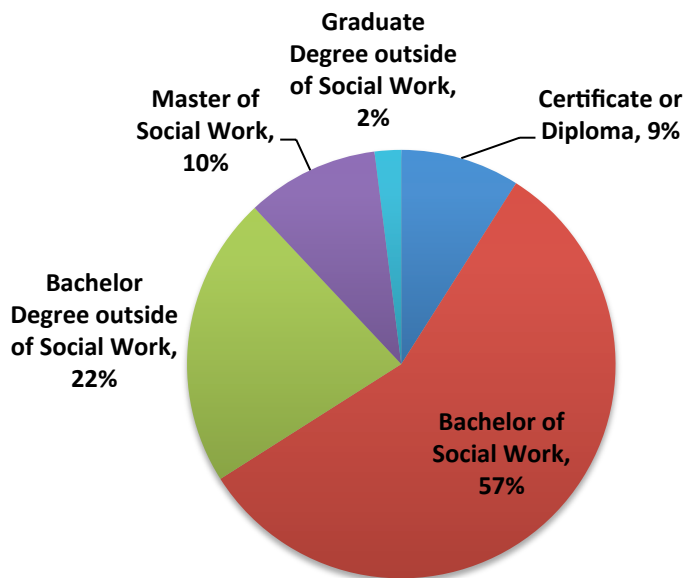
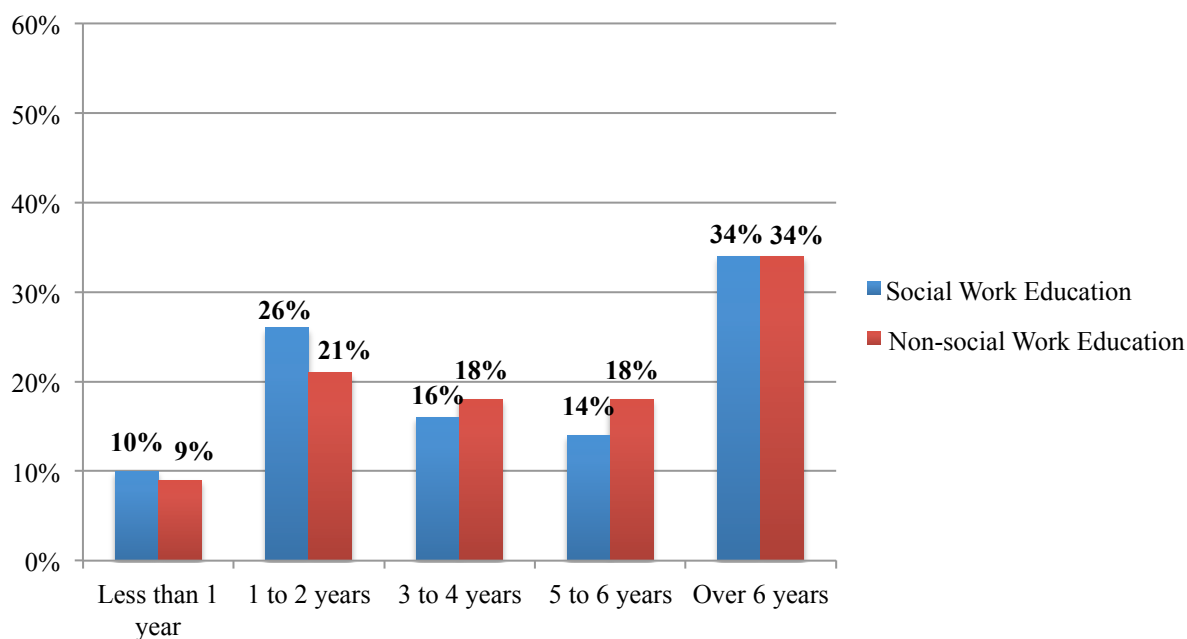


Figure 4 depicts education type (social work vs. non-social work) by years of experience. Workers with a social work education had similar years of experience compared to those workers with a non-social work education.

Figure 4.

*Child welfare work experience (years) by education type in Canada in 2008*



## Summary

As part of the CIS-2008, key characteristics of child welfare workers who conducted the investigations were collected. The majority of the workers were female, white, between the ages of 26 and 44 and identified English as their primary language. Overall, child welfare workers who had a Generalist position had higher caseloads compared to Intake positions. There is an almost even distribution between child welfare workers who have been in the field for less than three years, three to six years, and over six years. Lastly, the majority of participating child welfare workers identified as having a Bachelor of Social Work degree; therefore, those workers with a social work education outweighed those with an education outside of social work.

## **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 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 the 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 the maltreatment had not occurred).

For each risk investigation, workers determined whether the child was at significant risk of future maltreatment. The worker could decide that the child was at significant risk of future maltreatment (confirmed risk), that the child was not at significant risk of future maltreatment (unfounded risk), or that the future risk of maltreatment was unknown.

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.

**Suggested Citation:** Lwin, K., Lefebvre, R., Fallon, B., Trocmé, N. (2015). *A Profile of Child Welfare Workers in Canada in 2008*. CWRP Information Sheet #140E. Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal: Toronto, ON.