



A Profile of Investigations with a Noted Child Functioning Concern of FAS/FAE in Canada in 2008

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July 2015

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 children and families investigated by child welfare authorities in Canada. This Information Sheet examines characteristics of investigations where a worker noted that the child had Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effect (FAS/FAE).

Findings

Of the estimated 235,842 maltreatment-related investigations conducted in Canada in 2008, there was a noted child functioning concern of FAS/FAE in an estimated 5,881 investigations (3%). The primary caregiver functioning concerns for these investigations are shown in Figure 1. Alcohol abuse was noted in over half (53%) of investigations where the worker noted FAS/FAE, few social supports in 50%, and drug or solvent abuse in 37%. Overall, every primary caregiver functioning concern was more likely to be noted in investigations with a noted child functioning concern of FAS/FAE.

Figure 2 displays the number of previous child welfare openings in investigations with a noted child functioning concern of FAS/FAE. Investigations where a worker noted the child functioning concern of FAS/FAE were more likely to have been previously opened at least 2 times.

Figure 1

Primary caregiver functioning concerns in maltreatment-related investigations with a noted child functioning concern of FAS/FAE in Canada in 2008

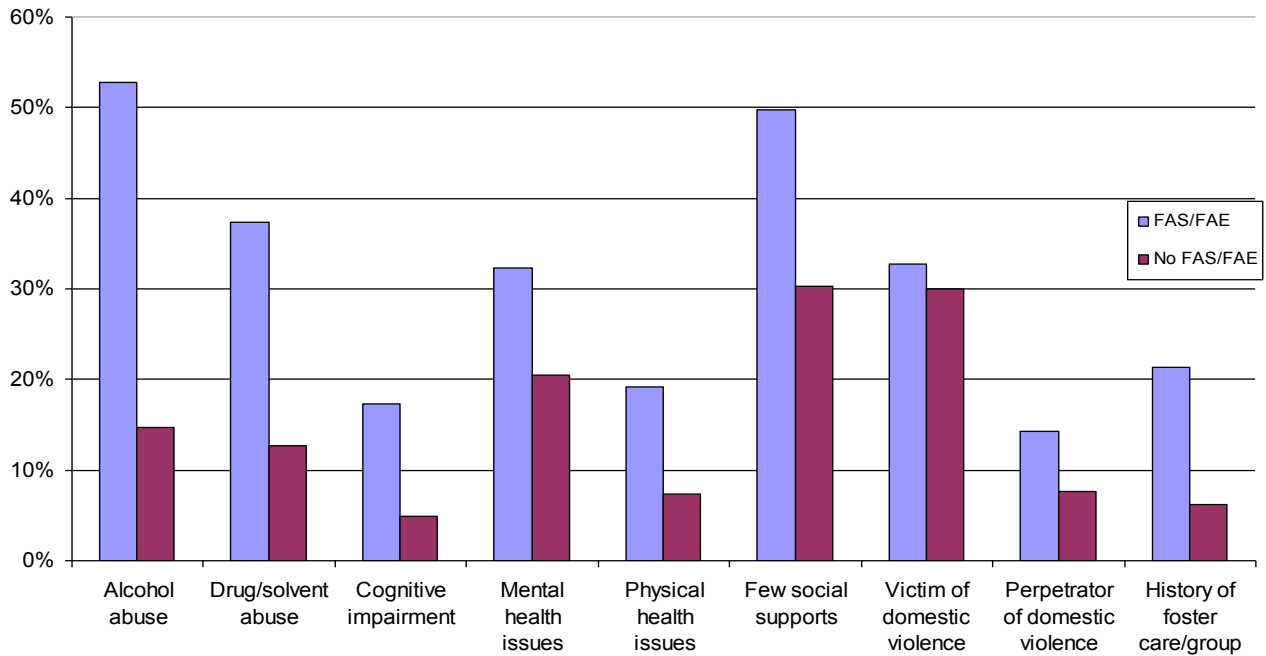


Figure 2

Previous child welfare case openings in maltreatment-related investigations with a noted child functioning concern of FAS/FAE in Canada in 2008

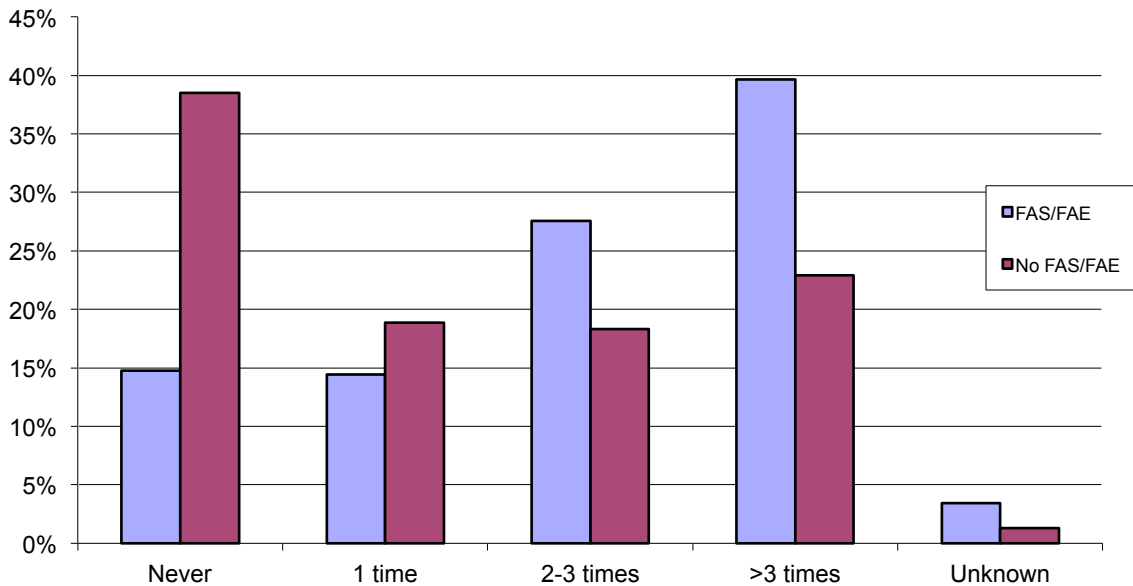
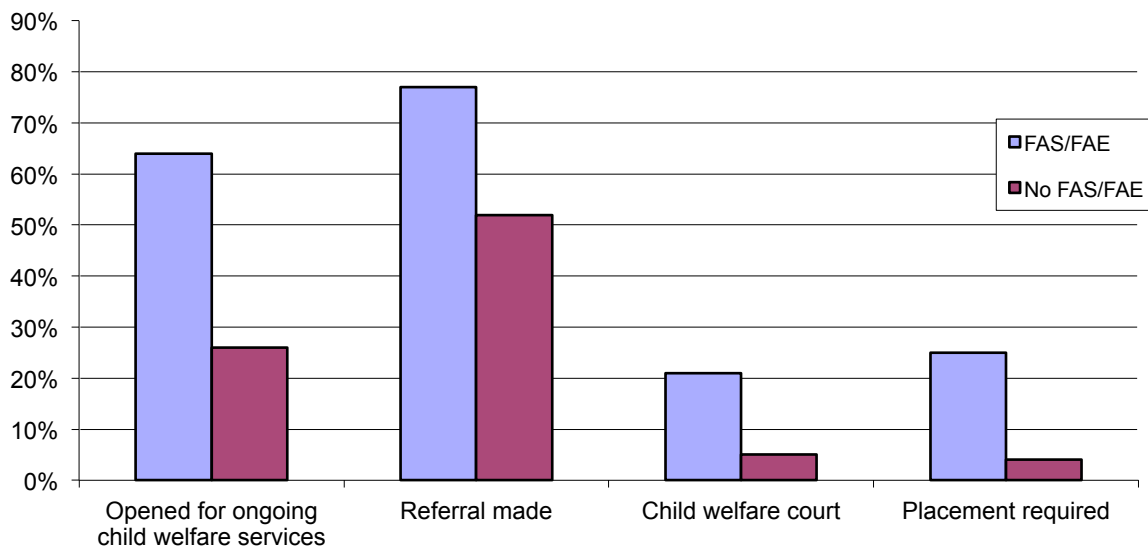


Figure 3 outlines the service provision in investigations where a worker noted the child functioning concern of FAS/FAE. These investigations were more likely to remain open for ongoing child welfare services (64% vs. 26%). Investigations with a noted child functioning concern of FAS/FAE were also more likely to have a referral made to services beyond the parameters of ongoing child welfare services (77% vs. 52%), and have an application to child welfare court considered or made (21% vs. 5%), and require an out-of-home placement (25% vs. 4%).

Figure 3

Child welfare service provision in maltreatment-related investigations with a noted child functioning concern of FAS/FAE 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 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: Goodman, D., Lefebvre, R., Fallon, B., & Trocmé, N. (2015). A Profile of Investigations with a Noted Child Functioning Concern of FAS/FAE in Canada in 2008. CWRP Information Sheet #162E. Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal: Toronto, ON.