

# Disparities in Investigation Characteristics by Age in Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving First Nations and Non-Indigenous Children in Canada in 2019



## Introduction

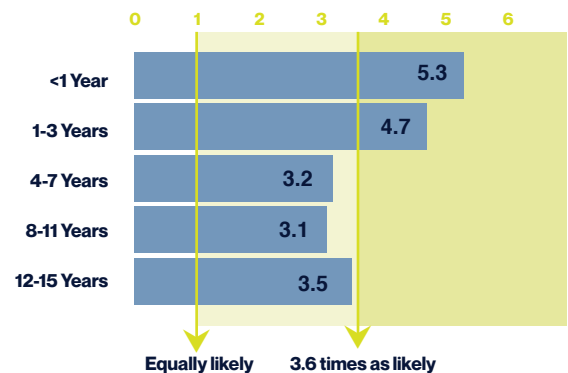
The data presented in this information sheet were collected as part of the First Nations/Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2019 (FN/CIS-2019), a data collection effort to produce estimates of the incidence of reported and investigated child maltreatment in Canada. This information sheet describes disparities in rates of various investigation characteristics by age. Incidence rates in the FN/CIS-2019 are calculated by taking the estimated number of child maltreatment-related investigations, dividing by the child population, and multiplying by 1,000 to get a rate per 1,000 children. It should be noted that incidence rate calculations consider the child's age as well as ethno-racial background (i.e., First Nations or non-Indigenous). Disparity indices presented in this information sheet were calculated by taking the incidence rate of various investigation characteristics for First Nations children and dividing by the incidence rate for non-Indigenous children. The disparities presented in this information sheet must be understood within the context of the ongoing legacy of colonialism, discrimination, and poverty that First Nations communities in Canada continue to face. Further information on the colonial practices that drive these disparities is available in Section 1 of the *FN/CIS-2019 Major Findings Report*.<sup>1</sup>

$$\text{Disparity Index} = \frac{\text{Incidence rate for investigations involving First Nations children}}{\text{Incidence rate for investigations involving non-Indigenous children}}$$

## Investigations

Figure 1 describes the disparity indices between rates of investigations involving First Nations and non-Indigenous children by child age category. Overall, First Nations children (0-15 years old) were 3.6 times as likely to be investigated for a child maltreatment-related concern compared to non-Indigenous children in Canada in 2019.<sup>2</sup> The disparity changes depending on the developmental period examined; First Nations infants were 5.3 times as likely to be investigated for maltreatment-related concerns compared to non-Indigenous infants while First Nations children eight to 11 years old were 3.1 times as likely to be investigated compared to their non-Indigenous peers. Additional information sheets summarizing investigation profiles by child age are available on the Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal ([cwrp.ca](http://cwrp.ca)) as part of a focus on developmental stages series.

Figure 1. Disparity indices by child age group for investigations involving First Nations and non-Indigenous children in Canada in 2019



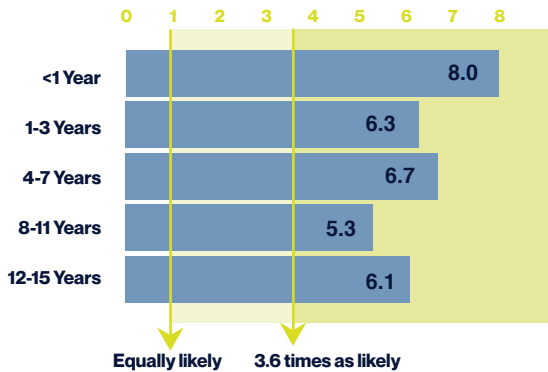
<sup>1</sup> Fallon, B., Lefebvre, R., Trocmé, N., Richard, K., Hélie, S., Montgomery, H. M., Bennett, M., Joh-Carnella, N., Saint-Girons, M., Filippelli, J., MacLaurin, B., Black, T., Esposito, T., King, B., Collin-Vézina, D., Dallaire, R., Gray, R., Levi, J., Orr, M., ... Soop, S. (2021). *Denouncing the continued overrepresentation of First Nations children in Canadian child welfare: Findings from the First Nations/Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2019*. Ontario: Assembly of First Nations.

<sup>2</sup> The figures presented throughout this information sheet indicate this initial investigation level of overrepresentation by noting that First Nations children were 3.6 times as likely to be the subject of a child welfare investigation compared to non-Indigenous children in Canada in 2019.

**Neglect Investigations**

The definition of child maltreatment-related investigations in the FN/CIS-2019 included both investigations focused on an alleged incident of maltreatment (maltreatment investigations) and investigations in which there was no specific concern of an alleged incident of maltreatment but where assessing the risk of future maltreatment for the child was the primary concern of the investigation (risk-only investigations). When workers indicated that their investigation was focused on alleged maltreatment, they could indicate one of five subtypes as the primary category of maltreatment – physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, emotional maltreatment, and exposure to intimate partner violence. Figure 2 describes the disparity indices in neglect investigations involving First Nations and non-Indigenous children in Canada in 2019. Disparity indices for neglect investigations are presented because neglect investigations have been shown to be a significant driver of the overrepresentation of First Nations children in the Canadian child welfare system and because monitoring and assessing neglect investigations are part of the calls to action outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in 2015.<sup>3,4</sup>

Figure 2. Disparity indices by child age group in neglect investigations involving First Nations and non-Indigenous children in Canada in 2019



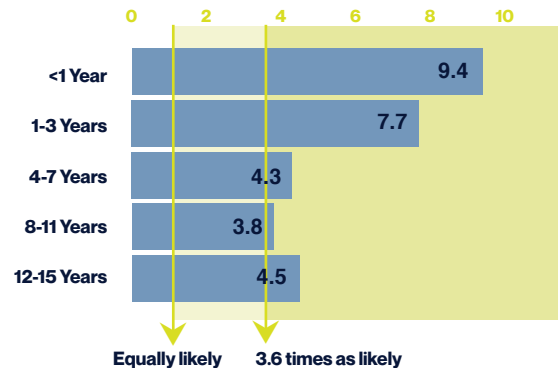
<sup>3</sup> Sinha, V., Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., MacLaurin, B., Fast, E., Thomas Prokop, S., Petti, T., Kozlowki, A., Black, T., Weightman, P., Bennett, M., Formsma, J., Brascoupe, P., O'Brien, S., Flette, E., Gray, R., Lucas, L., Hoey, S., Levi, J., ... Richard, K. (2011). Kiskisik Awasisak: Remember the Children. Understanding the Overrepresentation of First Nations Children in the Child Welfare System. Ontario: Assembly of First Nations.  
<sup>4</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* (2015), [https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/indigenous-people/aboriginal-peoples-documents/calls\\_to\\_action\\_english2.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/indigenous-people/aboriginal-peoples-documents/calls_to_action_english2.pdf).

Figure 2 shows that the disparity indices in neglect investigations between First Nations and non-Indigenous children were higher than the overall disparity indices in rates of investigations (see Figure 1). The greatest disparity index was for neglect investigations involving infants, with First Nations infants in Canada being eight times as likely to be involved in neglect investigations compared to non-Indigenous infants (see Figure 2).

**Child Functioning Concerns**

Participating workers were asked to indicate the child's functioning on the basis of 18 concerns that would be possible to assess in the initial investigation period (see the FN/CIS-2019 Major Findings Report for a complete list of the functioning concerns that were captured as part of the study).<sup>5</sup> Workers could indicate if these concerns were confirmed, suspected, not present, or if the presence of the functioning concern was unknown at the time of the child welfare investigation. Functioning concerns were considered noted when the worker endorsed the concern was "suspected" or "confirmed." Figure 3 describes the disparity in rates of investigations where at least one child functioning concern was noted for First Nations and non-Indigenous children. The greatest disparity in investigations with at least one functioning concern noted for the investigated child was in investigations involving infants (disparity index of 9.4), and the smallest disparity in investigations with at least one functioning concern noted for the investigated child was in investigations involving children eight to 11 years old (disparity index of 3.8).

Figure 3. Disparity indices by child age group for investigations with at least one noted child functioning concern involving First Nations and non-Indigenous children in Canada in 2019 (excluding Quebec)

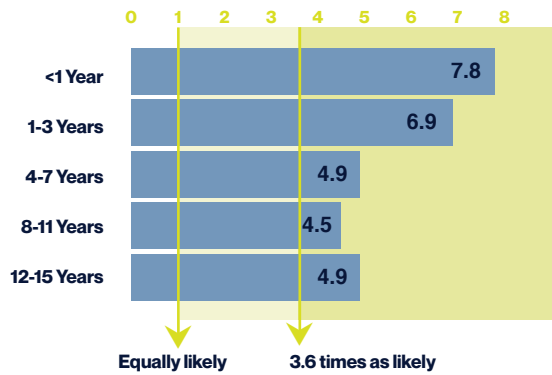


<sup>5</sup> Fallon, B., Lefebvre, R., Trocmé, N., Richard, K., Hélie, S., Montgomery, H. M., Bennett, M., Joh-Carnella, N., Saint-Girons, M., Filippelli, J., MacLaurin, B., Black, T., Esposito, T., King, B., Collin-Vézina, D., Dallaire, R., Gray, R., Levi, J., Orr, M., ... Soop, S. (2021). *Denouncing the continued overrepresentation of First Nations children in Canadian child welfare: Findings from the First Nations/Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2019*. Ontario: Assembly of First Nations.

### Service Referrals

Workers were asked to indicate if they made referrals to services for any family member, including services internal and external to the child welfare agency. First Nations children were more likely to be involved in investigations in which at least one service referral was made for a family member. The disparity indices ranged from 4.5 times as likely for eight to 11-year-old children to 7.8 times as likely for infants (see Figure 4).

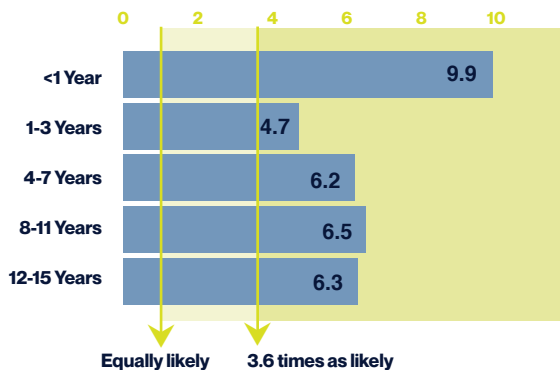
Figure 4. Disparity indices by child age group for investigations involving at least one service referral involving First Nations and non-Indigenous children in Canada in 2019 (excluding Quebec)



### Ongoing Services

Workers were asked to indicate if, after the initial child welfare investigation, the case was closed or kept open for ongoing child protection services. As shown in Figure 5, the disparity indices in investigations transferred to ongoing services for First Nations compared to non-Indigenous children were generally greater than the overall disparity indices in investigation rates (see Figure 1). The largest disparity index in investigations transferred to ongoing services was for infants; First Nations infants in Canada were nearly 10 times as likely to be involved in investigations transferred to ongoing services compared to non-Indigenous infants in Canada in 2019.

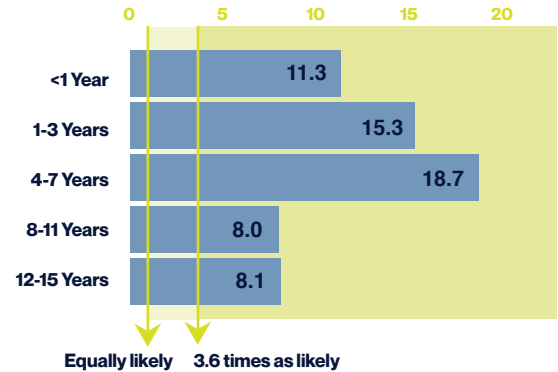
Figure 5. Disparity indices by child age group for investigations transferred to ongoing services involving First Nations and non-Indigenous children in Canada in 2019 (excluding Quebec)



### Placement

Workers were asked to indicate whether the investigated child remained at home or was placed in out-of-home care during the child welfare investigation. The disparity indices in investigations involving placements for all child age groups were much higher than the disparity indices in overall investigations (see Figure 1). First Nations children four to seven years old were nearly 19 times as likely to be involved in a child welfare investigation with a placement compared to non-Indigenous children in the same age group, and this represented the greatest disparity index in placement rates.

Figure 6. Disparity indices by child age group for investigations with placements involving First Nations and non-Indigenous children in Canada in 2019



### Summary

First Nations children of all ages were more likely to be involved in child welfare investigations and to have increased service involvement compared to non-Indigenous children in Canada in 2019. Across the service continuum (i.e., from investigations, to non-child welfare service referrals, to transfers to ongoing services, to placements), the disparity in rates between First Nations and non-Indigenous children built. For many metrics presented in this information sheet (i.e., overall investigations, neglect investigations, investigations with child functioning concerns, service referrals, and transfers to ongoing services) the disparity index was highest for infants compared to other age groups, indicating that First Nations infants are especially more likely to be investigated compared to non-Indigenous infants.

## Methods

The data presented reflect the clinical judgement of the investigating child welfare worker and are point-in-time estimates of the front-end of the child welfare service continuum. The FN/CIS-2019 sample (for all regions excluding Quebec) was drawn in three stages. First, a sample of 47 mainstream and 16 First Nations agencies was selected from a sampling frame that included all child welfare agencies in Canadian jurisdictions outside of Quebec. A three-month sampling period (October 1 – December 31, 2019) was then used to select cases within these sites. Investigating workers completed a data collection instrument for each sampled case. The final stage involved identifying child-level investigations meeting the study criteria. Complex survey weights were used to derive an estimate of child maltreatment-related investigations conducted in Canada in 2019 from these sampled cases. In Quebec, data were extracted from information systems from all agencies able to participate (this included data from six First Nations agencies). It should be noted that information on child functioning concerns, service referrals, and transfer to ongoing services was not collected in Quebec. Please see the *FN/CIS-2019 Major Findings Report* for a full description of study methodology.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Fallon, B., Lefebvre, R., Trocmé, N., Richard, K., Hélie, S., Montgomery, H. M., Bennett, M., Joh-Carnella, N., Saint-Girons, M., Filippelli, J., MacLaurin, B., Black, T., Esposito, T., King, B., Collin-Vézina, D., Dallaire, R., Gray, R., Levi, J., Orr, M., ... Soop, S. (2021). *Denouncing the continued overrepresentation of First Nations children in Canadian child welfare: Findings from the First Nations/Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2019*. Ontario: Assembly of First Nations.