



Geographic location and short-term service dispositions in Canadian child maltreatment investigations: CIS-2003¹

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The Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-2003) is a Canada-wide study that examined the incidence of reported child maltreatment and the characteristics of the children and families investigated by Canadian child welfare services. In the fall of 2003, the CIS-2003 tracked 11,562 child maltreatment investigations² in 55 child welfare service areas to provide a representative sample of both urban and rural areas across Canada, excluding Quebec. The CIS-2003 sites were categorized into three service area classifications: urban service areas—large metropolitan areas including suburban sites within a metropolitan site; mixed urban-rural service areas with a wide population density range; and rural service areas with primarily sparsely populated areas. Child welfare workers completed a three-page standardized data collection form. Weighted national annual estimates were derived based on these investigations.

In 2003, an estimated 217,319 investigations of child maltreatment were conducted in Canada, of which 44% or 103,298 were substantiated. This information sheet examines some key differences in substantiated child maltreatment investigations between geographic service areas for maltreatment type, transfers to ongoing service, referral and placement.

Figure 1: Primary maltreatment type by geographic service area (CIS-2003)
Estimates based on a sample of 5,660 substantiated child maltreatment investigations in Canada in 2003, excluding Quebec³

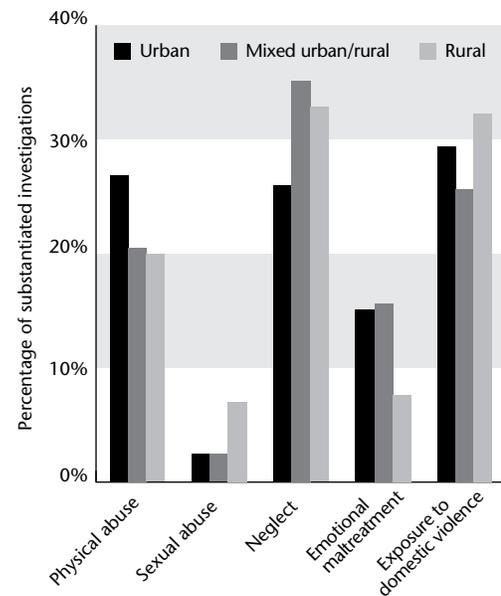


Figure 1 presents the primary categories of substantiated maltreatment by geographic location in Canada in 2003. Of all substantiated investigations in urban child welfare service areas, 27% were physical abuse, 2% were sexual abuse, 26% were neglect, 15% were emotional maltreatment, and 29% were exposure to domestic violence investigations. In mixed urban-rural service areas, 20% of substantiated investigations were physical abuse, 3% were

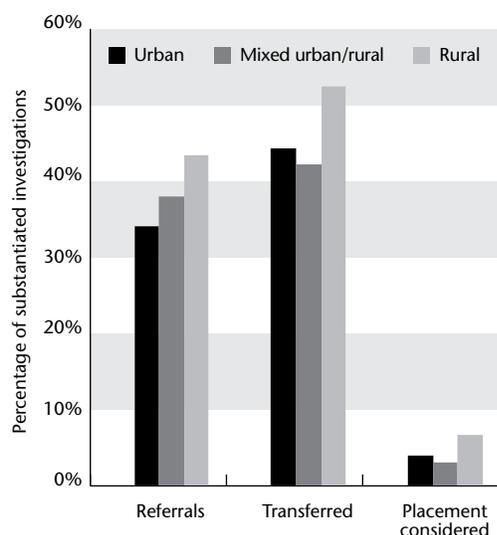
sexual abuse, 35% were neglect, 16% were emotional maltreatment, and 26% were exposure to domestic violence investigations. In rural service areas, 20% of substantiated investigations were physical abuse, 7% were sexual abuse, 33% were neglect, 8% were emotional maltreatment, and 32% were exposure to domestic violence investigations.

Substantiated investigations conducted in urban service areas involved 7% more physical abuse cases than either mixed urban-rural or rural service areas. Substantiated investigations in rural service areas involved far fewer emotional maltreatment investigations (8%) than either mixed urban-rural (16%) or urban service areas (15%).

Short-term service dispositions

Three service dispositions documented by the CIS-2003 were: referrals to support services, considering a child placement in out-of-home care, and transferring the case to ongoing child welfare services. The data presented below should be interpreted with care because events are tracked that occurred during the initial child welfare investigation. Additional referrals for services and admissions to out-of-home care are likely to occur for cases kept open after the initial investigation.

Figure 2: Short-term service dispositions by geographic service area (CIS-2003)
Estimates based on a sample of 5,660 substantiated child maltreatment investigations in Canada in 2003, excluding Quebec³



In rural child welfare service areas, 44% of substantiated investigations included a referral to an internal or external agency at the end of the investigation, compared to 38% in mixed urban-rural child welfare service areas, and 34% in urban child welfare-service areas. Also in rural service areas, 53%

of substantiated investigations were transferred to ongoing services, compared to 43% in mixed urban-rural areas and 45% in urban service areas. The out-of-home placement rate was the same for the three geographic areas. In rural service areas, however, 7% of substantiated investigations involved consideration of placement outside the family home at the conclusion of the maltreatment investigation, versus 4% in urban settings and 3% in mixed urban-rural service areas.

Rural agencies and rural catchments within mixed urban-rural agencies experience a level of practice isolation unlike that experienced in urban settings. At times, they practice child welfare in the absence of any other formal service provider, even though the array and complexity of child protection problems encountered are no less than those of more densely populated centres. This dearth of community resources obliges rural child welfare agencies to assume exclusive responsibility for the safety and well-being of the children and families in their communities. Consequently, they are required to remain involved in the lives of families beyond the initial investigation in order to offer supports and services. In more urban locations these supports and services are provided by less intrusive and specifically mandated community organizations. The scarcity of professional services in rural and mixed urban-rural environments also results in fewer referrals being made by workers in these areas in comparison to their urban counterparts.

This isolated practice environment places immense pressure on child welfare workers in rural areas as they grapple with the daunting task of keeping children safe using the only interventions to which they have access, specifically child protection proceedings or child placement. Consequently, at the time of case transfer from the investigative to the ongoing service phase, rural child welfare workers consider placing children in care at nearly twice the rate of workers in urban agencies. Awareness of the unique realities associated with child welfare practice in rural environments may be the first step toward community collaboration and leveraging of community resources in innovative ways to enhance child, family, and community well-being.

1. This information sheet is based upon: 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*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.
2. The CIS does not track incidents that were not reported to child welfare services, reported cases that were screened out before being fully investigated, or cases that were investigated only by the police.
3. Supplementary analyses conducted by Barbara Fallon.

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