



Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving Children with Academic Difficulty in Canada in 2008: Age, Gender and Primary Category of Investigated Maltreatment

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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. In addition to the tables presented in the Major Findings Report¹, this information sheet examines the age and gender of children in investigations with a noted child functioning concern of academic difficulties as well as the primary form of investigated maltreatment. The descriptive analyses presented in this information sheet were prepared by the authors with funding from a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Partnership Grant and a gift from the Royal Bank of Canada foundation to support the McGill Centre for Research on Children and Families' Children's Services Research and Training Program.

Findings

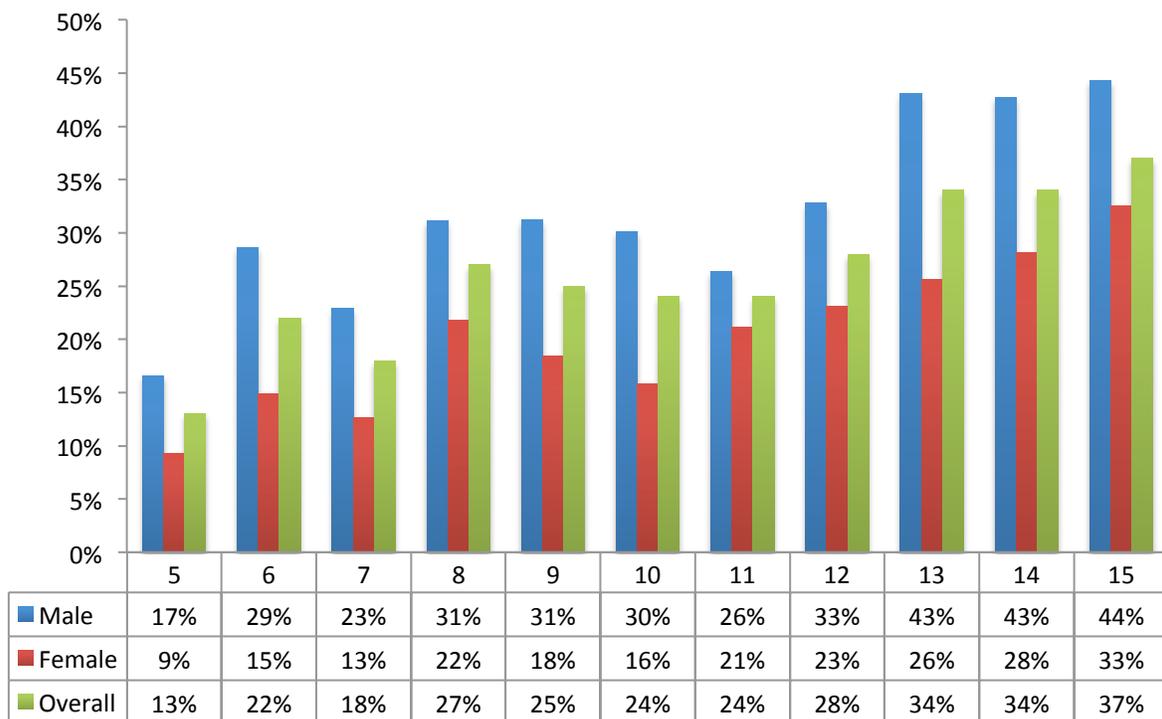
There were an estimated 235,842 maltreatment-related investigations conducted in Canada in 2008. An estimated 174,411 investigations were for an alleged incident of maltreatment and an estimated 61,431 were risk-only investigations. School aged children (5-15 years of age) were involved in an estimated 160,533 maltreatment-related investigations. In over one quarter (26%) of these investigations for school aged children, the investigating worker noted a child functioning concern of academic difficulty (an estimated 41,815 investigations). Figure 1 shows

¹ 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* –

the age and sex of children involved in investigations where academic difficulty was noted. Overall, children at the age of 5 were the least likely to have a noted concern of academic difficulty (13%). In contrast, adolescents were over two times more likely to have academic difficulty noted by the investigating worker, with the highest proportion among 15 year olds (37%).

Figure 1.

Proportion of maltreatment-related investigations in Canada in 2008 involving children with noted academic difficulty by age and sex

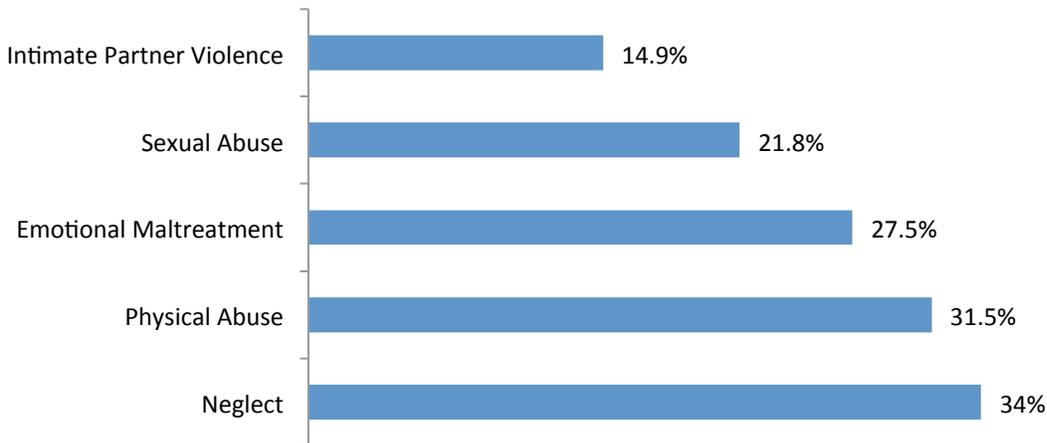


Across all ages males were more likely than females to have academic difficulty noted. Overall, an estimated 31% of investigations involving male children were identified with concerns of academic difficulty, compared to an estimated 22% of investigations involving female children.

The proportion of investigations involving a child with academic difficulty by primary form of maltreatment (excluding risk investigations) is outlined in Figure 2. Investigations where a child functioning concern of academic difficulty was noted were most likely to be for concerns of neglect (34%), followed by physical abuse (32%), emotional maltreatment (28%), sexual abuse (22%) and exposure to intimate partner violence (15%).

Figure 2.

Investigations in which academic difficulty was noted by primary form of reported maltreatment in Canada in 2008



Summary

In 26% of maltreatment investigations of school aged children – an estimated 41,815 children across Canada – concerns about academic difficulties were noted. Academic functioning concerns were noted more often in cases involving boys, in cases involving older youth, and in cases involving suspected neglect or physical abuse.

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.

Investigating workers were asked to indicate problems that had been confirmed by a diagnosis and/or directly observed by the investigating worker or another worker, or disclosed by the parent or child, as well as issues that they suspected were problems but could not fully verify at the time of the investigation. Academic difficulties were defined as “learning disabilities that are usually identified in schools, as well as any special education program for learning difficulties, special needs, or behaviour problems.”²

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

² See the CIS Guidebook at <http://cwrp.ca/cis-2008/study-documents>.

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 reopened 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.

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