

The Canadian child welfare system response to exposure to domestic violence investigations¹

Tara Black, Nico Trocmé, Barbara Fallon, and Bruce MacLaurin

The 2003 Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-2003)^{2,3} is the third child abuse and neglect incidence study to be conducted in Canada. The first cycle was completed in Ontario in 1993. The second and third cycles were Canada-wide studies, completed in 1998 and 2003 with the Public Health Agency of Canada. The CIS-2003 tracked a sample of 14,200 child maltreatment investigations, which were the basis for deriving national estimates. Information was collected directly from the investigating workers using a standard set of definitions. This fact sheet is based on a secondary analysis of data collected in the 2003 Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-2003) and summarizes the results of analyses of substantiated exposure to domestic violence cases.

Three categories of substantiated maltreatment were created in order to compare exposure to domestic violence to other forms of maltreatment: investigations involving only exposure to domestic violence, investigations involving exposure to domestic violence that co-occur with at least one other form of maltreatment, and other forms of maltreatment that occur in single or multiple forms (physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and emotional maltreatment). Over one third of substantiated child maltreatment investiga-

tions in Canada⁴ involved some form of exposure to domestic violence (34%); 25% of substantiated child maltreatment investigations involved exposure to domestic violence and 9% of substantiated child maltreatment investigations involved exposure to domestic violence co-occurring with another form of substantiated maltreatment. The other maltreatment category includes single and multiple forms of substantiated cases of maltreatment. That is, the category includes cases involving only physical abuse, only sexual abuse, only neglect, only emotional maltreatment, and all combinations of these four forms (see Figure 1).

Profiles of substantiated exposure to domestic violence cases

Forty-four per cent of exposure to domestic violence cases had never been opened before compared to 33% for co-occurring exposure to domestic violence cases and 35% for other forms of maltreatment (see Figure 2). Approximately one third of domestic violence only cases (36%) and other child maltreatment cases (33%) involved chronic maltreatment (multiple incidents over more than six months). In contrast, 62% of co-occurring cases of exposure to domestic violence were multiple incidents over more than six months.

Figure 1: Estimates for categories of substantiated maltreatment in Canada, excluding Quebec, in 2003

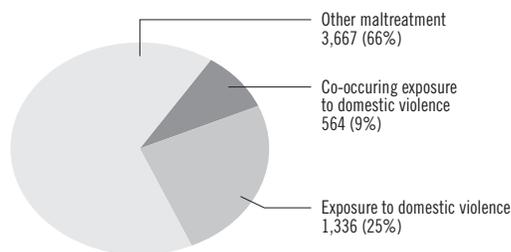
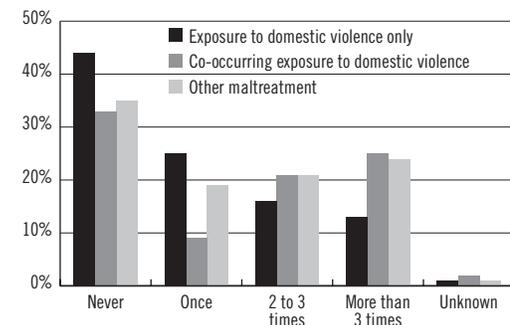


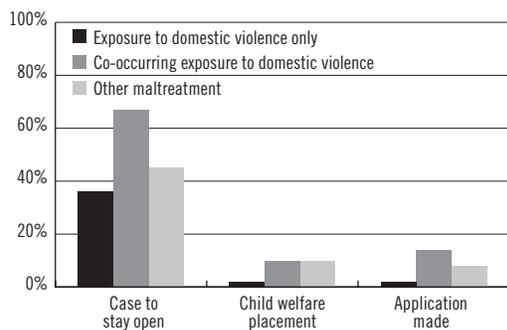
Figure 2. Estimates for cases previously opened in Canada, excluding Quebec, in 2003



Child welfare services

Figure 3 describes the child welfare services involved. Cases remained open for ongoing service less often (36%) for substantiated investigations involving exposure to domestic violence compared to 45% of substantiated investigations involving other forms of maltreatment, and 67% of cases involving co-occurring exposure to domestic violence. Children were placed in out-of-home care in only 2% of investigations involving substantiated exposure to domestic violence compared to 10% for cases of co-occurring exposure to domestic violence, and 10% for cases of other forms of maltreatment. Applications were made to child welfare court in only 2% of substantiated investigations involving exposure to domestic violence compared to 8% for other forms of maltreatment, and 14% for co-occurring cases of exposure to domestic violence.

Figure 3. Estimates for child welfare services in Canada, excluding Quebec, in 2003



Conclusions

Children who are the subject of investigations involving only substantiated exposure to domestic violence are less likely to be removed from their home than children experiencing other forms of maltreatment. The findings are consistent with other recent findings:^{5,6} the child welfare system's response to cases involving exposure to domestic violence do not necessarily result in higher levels of intervention. Investigations involving co-occurring exposure to domestic violence are more likely to have an application to child welfare court, more likely to be provided with ongoing services and have a placement rate as high as investigations involving other forms of maltreatment while investigations involving only exposure to domestic violence were less intrusive. The Canadian child welfare system is substantiating exposure to domestic violence but is concluding that these families do not require ongoing child welfare services. Understanding the current response is the first step in formulating future responses.

- 1 This information sheet is based on the following: Black, T., Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., & MacLaurin, B. (2006). *The Canadian child welfare response to domestic violence investigations*. Ottawa, ON: Public Health Agency Canada.
- 2 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.
- 3 The CIS is part of the national child health surveillance program of the Injury and Child Maltreatment Section, Public Health Agency of Canada.
- 4 National estimates including Quebec are excluded from this information sheet because of incomplete or unavailable data. Estimates including Quebec can be obtained from selected tables in Trocmé et al. (2005).
- 5 English, D. J., Edleson, J. L., & Herrick, M. E. (2005). Domestic violence in one state's child protective caseload: A study of differential case dispositions and outcomes. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 27(11), 1183–1201.
- 6 Kohl, P. L., Eldeson, J. L., English, D. J. & Barth, R. P. (2005). Domestic violence and pathways into child welfare services: Findings from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 27(11), 1167–1182.

Suggested citation: Black, T., Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., & MacLaurin, B. (2006). *The Canadian child welfare system response to exposure to domestic violence investigations*. CECW Information Sheet #39E. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto, Faculty of Social Work.

CECW information sheets are produced and distributed by the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare to provide timely access to Canadian child welfare research.

The Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare (CECW) is one of the Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-Being funded by Public Health Agency Canada. The CECW is also funded by Canadian Institutes of Health Research and Bell Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the official policy of the CECW's funders.

Funding was provided from the Injury and Child Maltreatment Section, Public Health Agency of Canada.



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