



Children and Youth in Out-of-Home Care in the Canadian Provinces

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Introduction

There are very few Canada-wide statistics on the number of children and youth placed in out-of-home care by child welfare authorities. Child welfare services fall under the jurisdiction of provincial and territorial authorities, and there are notable variations in child welfare mandates across jurisdictions. These include: the age of children eligible for services, the length of time a child can receive out-of-home care services, and the definition of “out-of-home care”. Accordingly it is difficult to compile child welfare statistics at a national level. The purpose of this information sheet is to estimate the number of children in care in Canada. It updates the 1992-2007 national estimates produced by Mulcahy and Trocmé (2010), combining their estimates with data, for 2008 to 2013, compiled from provincial child welfare systems.

Methods

Mulcahy and Trocmé, (2010) developed estimates in three stages. First they compiled all available statistics on the number of children in care in Canada from federal, provincial, and territorial documents and websites. Second, they verified these statistics by ensuring that there was consistency over time and between the statistics reported by different sources. Finally, they used CANSIM tables, which interpolate annual population estimates based on census data (Statistics Canada, 2007) to estimate populations of children aged 0 to 18.

To update these estimates, we contacted provincial child welfare representatives from the National Child Welfare Outcomes Subcommittee and asked them to share data on the number of children in care as of March 31st, in their respective jurisdictions, for the years 2008 to 2013. We were unable to obtain territorial estimates for these years. We compared the data they sent us to the previous data for their jurisdictions to ensure continuity between the two data sets, and clarified any discrepancies between the old and new data. If data was unavailable for a short period, for example a one- or two-year window while a jurisdiction changed their recording system, we interpolated estimates for the missing years. If data was unavailable for a jurisdiction for a longer period, it was excluded, and population estimates were adjusted accordingly. Of particular note, we could not obtain reliable point-in-time counts of children in Quebec for the years 1992 until 2001, and have excluded data for the province these years. It is for this reason

that our estimates for the years 1992 to 2007 vary slightly from those presented by Mulcahy & Trocmé (2010).

Number of Children and Youth in Out-of-Home Care

Table 1 presents the number of children in out of home care in the Canadian provinces from 1992 through 2013. Reliable estimates were not available for Quebec prior to 2003, and data for 2001-2013 are presented both including and excluding Quebec data. There were an estimated 62,400 children in out-of-home care across Canadian provinces on March 31, 2013. This number was quite close to the estimated 62,000 children in out of home care in 2003. The number of children in care rose slightly in the intervening years, to a peak of 64,800 children in 2009. In contrast, between 1992 and 2002, the number of children in out of home care rose steadily, from 30,900 to 45,900 (excluding Quebec).

Table 1.

Number of children in out of home care in the Canadian provinces (1992-2013; including and excluding Quebec)

Year	Excluding Quebec	Including Quebec
1992	30,935	not available
1993	31,256	
1994	31,420	
1995	32,392	
1996	34,184	
1997	36,551	
1998	39,491	
1999	42,520	
2000	44,545	
2001	45,901	

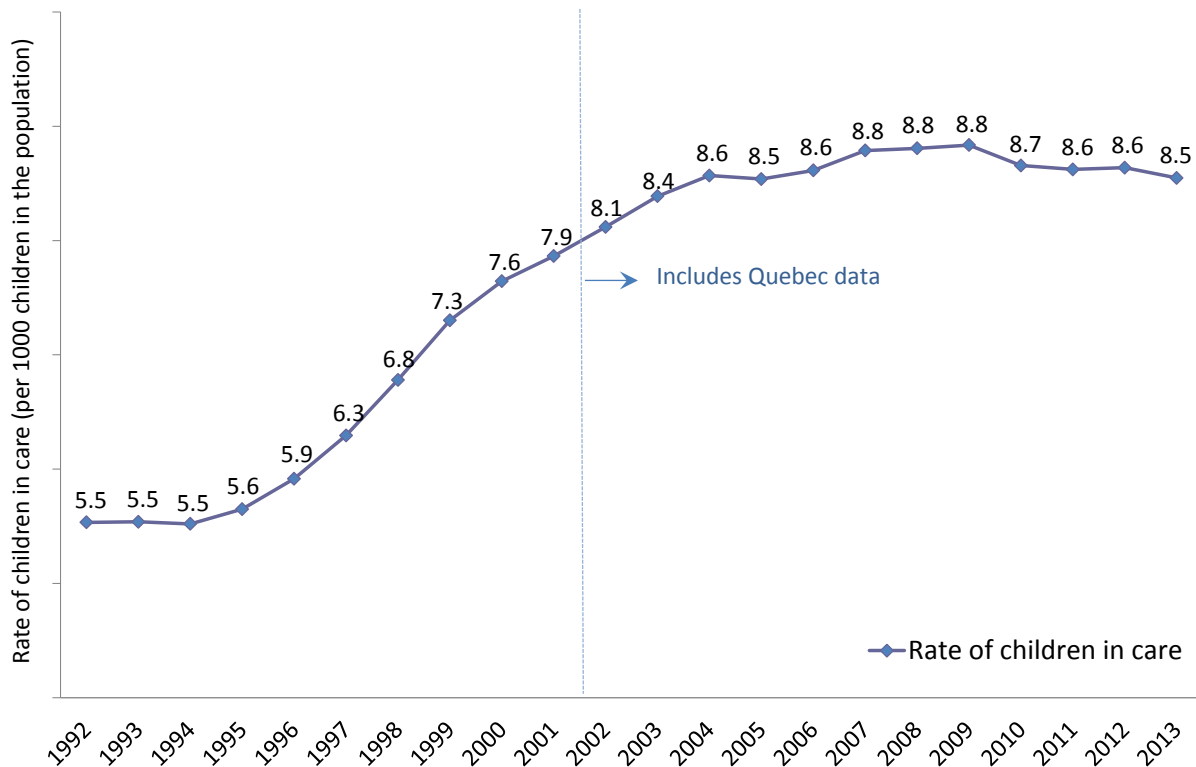
Year	Excluding Quebec	Including Quebec
2003	49,096	62,063
2004	49,752	63,167
2005	50,080	62,792
2006	50,828	63,294
2007	52,345	64,525
2008	52,729	64,643
2009	53,181	64,755
2010	52,138	63,390
2011	51,833	63,072
2012	51,750	63,128
2013	51,170	62,428

Rates of Children and Youth in Out-of-Home Care

Figure 1 presents the rates of children in out of home care, the number of children in care for every 1000 children in the population. In 2013, there were 8.5 children in care per every 1,000 children. As shown in Figure 1, the rate of children in out-of-home care in Canada increased markedly between the mid-1990s and 2004, rising from 5.5 per 1000 in the early 1990s and levelling between 8.5 and 8.8 during the years since 2004. Additional research is required to determine the reasons for these patterns in the rates of out of home care.

Figure 1.

Rate of children in out of home care in the Canadian provinces (1992-2013; including and excluding Quebec)



References

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