



Type of Investigation, Substantiation and Primary Category of Substantiated Maltreatment for First Nations Children across Canada

Ashley Quinn, Jennifer Nutton, Anne Blumenthal & Nico Trocmé

Introduction

The findings presented in this information sheet come from the 2008 First Nations Component of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (FNCIS-2008)¹. 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. This information sheet examines type of investigation, substantiation and primary category of maltreatment for First Nations Children across Canada. 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 14,114 investigations involved First Nations children. Of these investigations involving First Nations children, 73% were for an investigated incident of maltreatment and 27% were risk of future maltreatment investigations. At the end of the initial investigation, an estimated 6,004 maltreatment investigations involving First Nations children were substantiated (43% of all investigations), an estimated 981 investigations were suspected (7% of all investigations), and an estimated 3,339 investigations were unfounded (24% of all investigations). Workers determined there was a significant risk of future maltreatment to the child in an estimated 851 investigations (6% of total investigations), no significant risk of future

¹ Sinha, V., Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., MacLaurin, B., Fast, E., Thomas Prokop, S., ... 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.

maltreatment in an estimated 2,051 investigations (15% of all investigations), and unknown risk in an estimated 888 investigations (6% of all investigations). Please see Figure 1 for a visual representation of these findings.

Figure 1
Type of investigation and level of substantiation in investigations involving First Nations children in sampled agencies in Canada in 2008

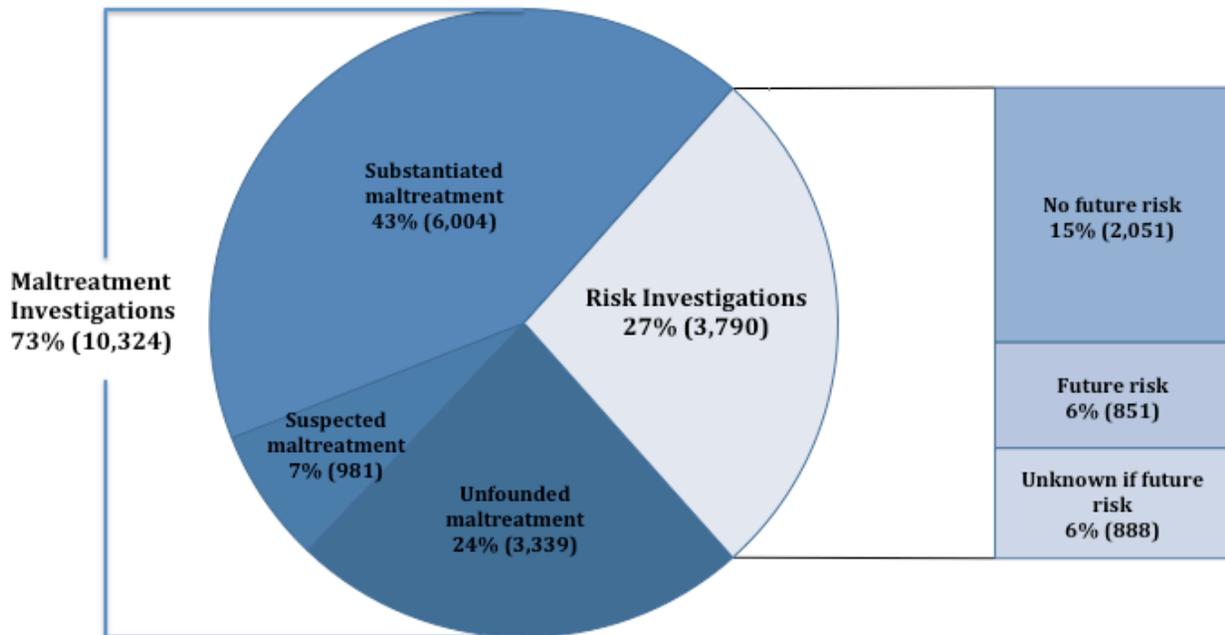
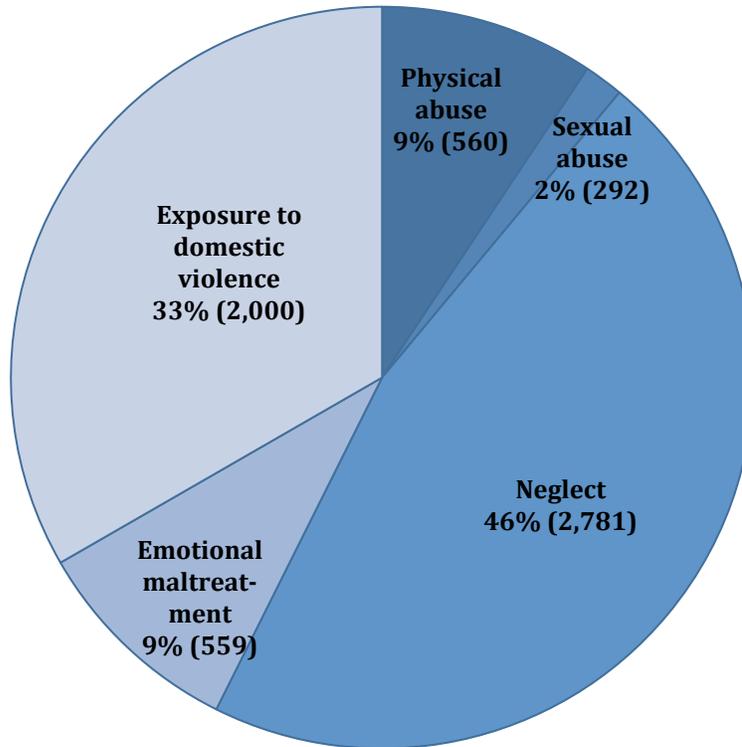


Figure 2 shows the distribution of substantiated maltreatment investigations across primary categories of maltreatment. Neglect accounts for the largest proportion. From an estimated total of 6,004 substantiated child maltreatment investigations involving First Nations children, 2,781 (46%) were for the primary maltreatment category of neglect, followed by 2,000 substantiated investigations for exposure to intimate partner violence (33%), 560 substantiated investigations for physical abuse (9%), 559 substantiated investigations for emotional maltreatment (9%), and 103 substantiated investigations for sexual abuse (2%).

Figure 2

Primary categories of maltreatment in substantiated maltreatment investigations involving First Nations children conducted in sampled agencies in Canada in 2008



Summary

Of the estimated 235,842 maltreatment-related investigations conducted in Canada in 2008, an estimated 14,114 investigations involved First Nations children. Seventy-three percent of these investigations involving First Nations children were for an investigated incident of maltreatment and 27% were for risk of future maltreatment. At the end of the initial investigation, an estimated 6,004 maltreatment investigations involving First Nations children were substantiated and workers determined there was a significant risk of future maltreatment to the child in an estimated 851 investigations. Neglect accounted for the largest proportion of substantiated maltreatment followed by exposure to intimate partner violence.

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. The FNCIS-2008 was a collaborated effort between the CIS research team and the FNCIS-2008 Advisory Committee, which is composed of representatives from major organization supporting and coordinating First Nations child and family service agencies, First Nations agencies (in provinces that do not have coordinating organizations) and the Assembly of First Nations. For more detailed information about the FNCIS-2008, visit: <http://cwrp.ca/fn-cis-2008>.

When describing the profile of child maltreatment-related investigations for First Nations families across Canada, the history and negative impact of imposed colonial policies must be acknowledged. These policies resulted in widespread removal of First Nations children from their families, homes, and communities and subsequent placement in residential schools and non-First Nations foster homes (Trocmé, Knoke, & Blackstock, 2004; Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004). In residential schools, First Nation children were not allowed to speak their language or engage in their cultural traditions, endured physical and sexual abuse, and were neglected, which led to malnutrition and many children dying from preventable diseases (Sinha et al., 2011). The colonial legacy of forced assimilation programs across Canada has profound implications for the abilities of First Nations communities to transmit traditional forms of caring across generations, due to legislation seeking to eradicate First Nations cultures and languages (Blackstock, Brown, & Bennett, 2007; RCAP, 1996; and Zlotkin, 2009). There is a body of research that provides a clear picture of why First Nations children come into the child welfare system, namely, neglect driven by poverty, poor housing conditions and substance misuse (Trocmé, Fallon, Sinha, Van Wert, Kozlowski, & MacLaurin, 2013). Interpretation of findings must take into account the context and structure of First Nations child welfare.

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. The CIS-2008 included 89 provincial/territorial child welfare sites, 22 First Nations and urban Aboriginal child welfare sites, and one Metis agency. The FNCIS-2008 is a study of child welfare investigations involving First Nations children which is embedded within the CIS-2008. 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 (3,106 investigations involving First Nations children and 12,240 investigations involving non-Aboriginal children). 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.

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 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 re-opened 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.

About the authors: Ashley Quinn is a PhD candidate at the University of Toronto Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. Jennifer Nutton is a PhD student at McGill University School of Social Work. Anne Blumenthal is a PhD student at the University of Michigan in the joint program in social work and sociology. Nico Trocmé is Professor and Director of the McGill University School of Social Work.

Suggested Citation: Quinn, A., Nutton, J., Blumenthal, A., & Trocmé, N. (2014). Type of investigation, substantiation and primary category of substantiated maltreatment for First Nation children across Canada. CWRP Information Sheet #131E. Montreal, QC: McGill University, Centre for Research on Children and Families.

References

- Blackstock, C., Brown, I., & Bennett, M. (2007). Reconciliation: Rebuilding the Canadian Child Welfare System to Better Serve Aboriginal Children and Youth. In I. Brown, F. Chaze, D. Fuchs, J. Lafrance, S. McKay, and S. Thomas Prokop (Eds.), *Putting a Human Face on Child Welfare: Voices from the Prairie* (pp. 59-87). Prairie Child Welfare Consortium and the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare.
- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP]. (1996). *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. Ottawa, ON: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.
- Sinha, V., Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., MacLaurin, B., Fast, E., Thomas Prokop, S., Petti, T., ... 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. Retrieved on April 8, 2013 from: http://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/en/FNCIS-2008_March2012_RevisedFinal.pdf
- Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., Sinha, V., Van Wert, M., Kozlowski, A., & MacLaurin, B. (2013). Differentiating between child protection and family support in the Canadian child welfare system's response to intimate partner violence, corporal punishment, and child neglect. *International Journal of Psychology*, 48(2): 128-140.
- Trocmé, N., Knoke, D., & Blackstock, C. (2004). Pathways to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in Canada's child welfare system. *Social Service Review*, 78(4): 577-600.
- Wesley-Esquimaux, C.C., & Smolewski, M. (2004). *Historic Trauma and Aboriginal Healing*. Ottawa, ON: The Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Canada.
- Zlotkin, N. (2009). From time immemorial: Recognition of Aboriginal customary law in Canada. In C.E. Bell & R.K. Paterson (Eds.), *Protection of First Nations cultural heritage: Laws, policy, and reform* (pp. 343-369). Vancouver: UBC Press. Retrieved on April 8, 2013 from: <http://www.ubcpress.ca/books/pdf/chapters/2009/ProtectionofFirstNationsCulturalHeritage.pdf>