



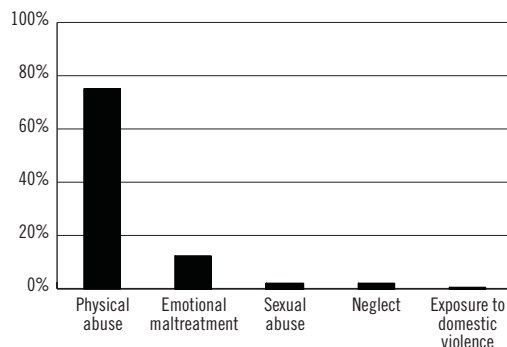
# Punitive violence against children in Canada<sup>1</sup>

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The 2003 Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-2003)<sup>2,3</sup> 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) to describe investigations involving punishment and explore the outcomes for victims of punitive violence.

Punishment accounted for 75% of substantiated incidents in which physical maltreatment was the primary category for investigation. In contrast, only 13% of emotional maltreatment, 2% of sexual maltreatment, 2% of neglect, and 1% of exposure to domestic violence occurred in a punitive context (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Substantiated child maltreatment involving punishment in Canada, excluding Quebec, in 2003**

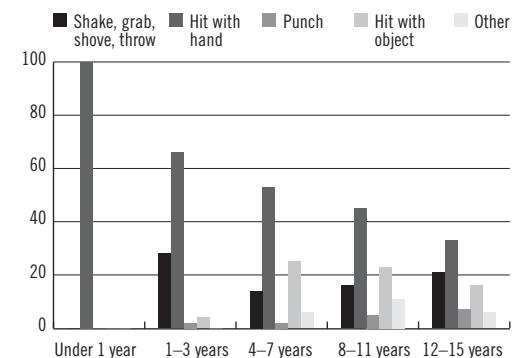


## Profiles of substantiated child maltreatment cases with punishment

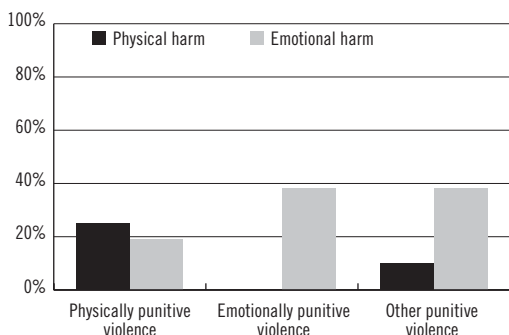
Figure 2 presents the overall age trends for each type of punitive violence. At all ages, physical maltreatment was by far the most predominant form of punitive violence. However, some age trends are evident within each form of violence.

Physical harm is infrequently noted in cases of punitive violence. The majority (75%) of physically punitive violence incidents did not result in physical harm. Physical harm was never noted in cases of emotional punishment. Of cases of “other” punitive violence, 10% resulted in physical harm. However, when physical harm was sustained in cases of physically punitive violence, its form varied by the type of maltreatment inflicted (Figure 3). Emotional harm was less likely than physical harm to be noted in cases of physically punitive violence; it was noted in 19% of cases. Compared to physical punishment, emotional harm was twice as likely to be identified in cases of emotional and “other” punishment; it was noted in 38% of cases of each type (see Figure 3).

**Figure 2: Victim age trends in punitive violence in Canada, excluding Quebec, in 2003**  
Percentage of all punishment in each age group



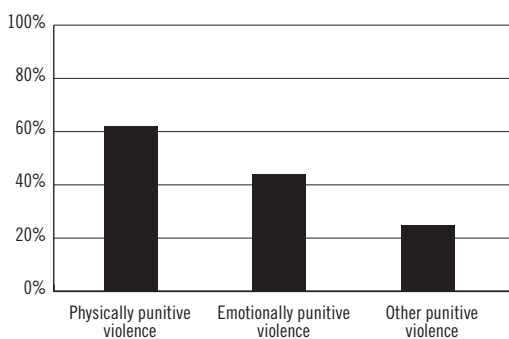
**Figure 3: Physical and emotional harm sustained in cases of punitive violence in Canada, excluding Quebec, in 2003**  
Percentage of each type of violence



### Context of punitive violence

In 62% of families for which physically punitive violence was substantiated, spanking was typically used as a form of discipline (Figure 4). Spanking was used in 44% of families for which emotional punishment was substantiated. Spanking was related less strongly to “other” punitive violence. It was used in 25% of these families as a form of discipline (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Percentage of punitive violence types for which caregivers used spanking as a form of discipline in Canada, excluding Quebec, in 2003**



### Summary of findings

1. Most physical maltreatment is physical punishment. Contrary to the public perception that child abuse is a result of pathological behaviour, the findings indicate most physical abuse cases are a result of punishment.
2. In most cases of physically punitive violence, no physical or emotional harm is documented. Whereas the image of abuse brings with it associations of injury, the reality of maltreatment is that the majority of substantiated cases do not result in injury.
3. The nature of punitive violence changes with the victim’s age. In infancy, 100% of physically punitive acts involve hitting with the hand. Hitting with objects becomes increasingly likely, as children grow older.

4. Substantial proportions of victims of punitive violence exhibit internalizing or externalizing problems. Nineteen percent of victims exhibited depression or anxiety, 20% displayed violence towards others and 19% were involved in negative peer relationships. Similar differences were noted to similar degrees among children who had experienced emotional punishment.
5. Most perpetrators of punitive violence are biological parents. It is commonly believed that step parents, particularly step fathers are the most likely perpetrators of family violence against children. The present findings do not support this belief.
6. Inadequate social support and domestic violence characterize the context of punitive violence for both male and female caregivers.
7. In the majority of families for whom physically punitive violence was substantiated, spanking was typically used as a form of discipline.
8. The present dataset cannot address the issue of causal direction between victims’ functioning concerns and their punishment experience.

- 1 This information sheet is based on: Durrant, J. E., Trocme, N., Fallon, B., Milne, C., Black, T., & Knoke, D. (2006). *Punitive violence against children in Canada*. Ottawa, ON: Public Health Agency of Canada.
- 2 Trocme, 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.

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