

Primary Caregiver Risk Factors in Investigations Involving First Nations and Non-Indigenous Children in Canada in 2019



Introduction

The data presented in this information sheet were collected as part of the First Nations/Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2019 (FN/CIS-2019), a data collection effort to produce estimates of the incidence of reported and investigated child maltreatment in Canada. This information sheet describes noted primary caregiver risk factors in child maltreatment-related investigations involving First Nations and non-Indigenous children in Canada in 2019. Workers participating in the FN/CIS-2019 were asked to consider nine risk factors based on their clinical judgement/assessment at the conclusion of the investigation. Workers could indicate if these concerns were confirmed, suspected, not present, or if the presence of the functioning concern was unknown at the time of the child welfare investigation. Risk factors were considered noted when the worker endorsed the concern was “suspected” or “confirmed.” The disparities presented in this information sheet must be understood within the context of the ongoing legacy of colonialism, discrimination, and poverty that First Nations communities across Canada continue to face.

Table 1. Noted primary caregiver risk factors in investigations involving First Nations and non-Indigenous children in Canada in 2019 (excluding Quebec)

| Primary Caregiver Risk Factors | First Nations Child Investigations | | Non-Indigenous Child Investigations | |
|--|------------------------------------|------|-------------------------------------|------|
| | # | % | # | % |
| Alcohol Abuse | 15,023 | 34% | 18,290 | 9% |
| Drug/Solvent Abuse | 10,213 | 23% | 17,566 | 8% |
| Cognitive Impairment | 4,149 | 10% | 6,864 | 3% |
| Mental Health Issues | 14,780 | 34% | 53,506 | 25% |
| Physical Health Issues | 3,771 | 9% | 13,509 | 6% |
| Few Social Supports | 14,710 | 34% | 51,234 | 24% |
| Victim of Intimate Partner Violence | 14,977 | 34% | 58,465 | 28% |
| Perpetrator of Domestic Violence | 5,027 | 12% | 16,864 | 8% |
| History of Foster Care/Group Home | 8,322 | 19% | 8,614 | 4% |
| At Least One Primary Caregiver Risk Factor | 32,159 | 74% | 120,954 | 57% |
| No Primary Caregiver Risk Factors | 11,507 | 26% | 90,938 | 43% |
| Total Investigations | 43,666 | 100% | 211,892 | 100% |

Percentages do not add up to 100% because investigating workers could identify more than one primary caregiver risk factor.

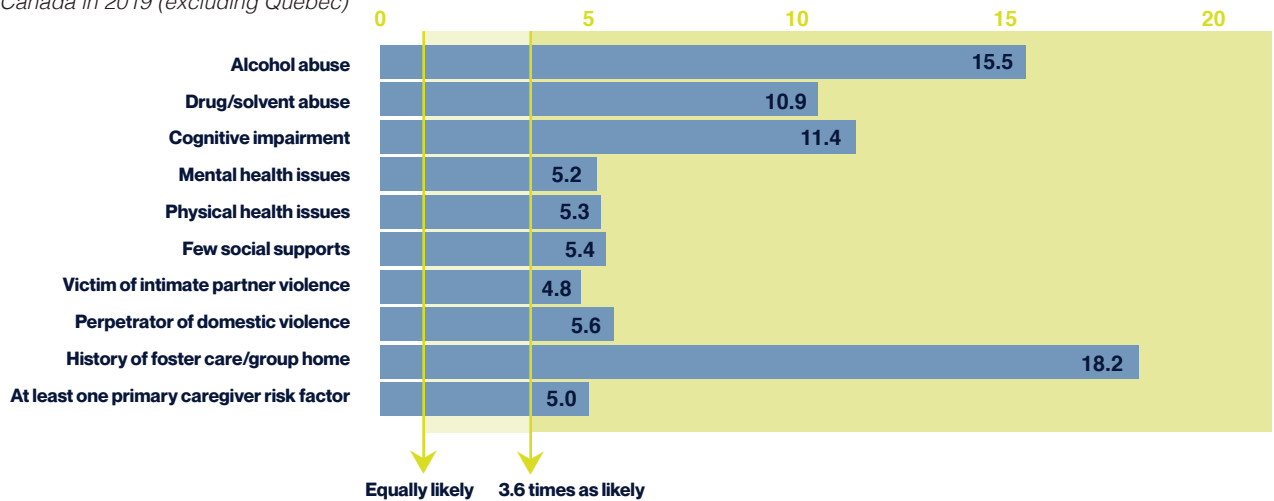
Based on a sample of 6,905 investigations in Ontario in 2018 and 6,354 investigations in the rest of Canada in 2019. Information on caregiver risk factors was not available in situations where the case was opened under a community caregiver, the youth was living independently, or the case was extracted from the Quebec administrative system. A community caregiver is defined as anyone providing care to a child in an out-of-home setting (e.g., institutional setting).

The differences in rates between First Nations and non-Indigenous child investigations must be understood in the context of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination, and poverty.

Table 1 describes the estimated number of investigations involving primary caregivers with at least one risk factor noted by the investigating worker in investigations involving First Nations and non-Indigenous children. All of the primary caregiver risk factors captured in the FN/CIS-2019 were more likely to be noted in investigations involving First Nations compared to non-Indigenous children. Seventy-four percent of investigations involving First Nations children involved a primary caregiver with at least one risk factor noted, compared to 57 percent of investigations involving non-Indigenous children.

Alcohol abuse, victim of intimate partner violence, mental health issues, and few social supports were the most frequently noted concerns in investigations involving First Nations children and were each noted in 34 percent of these investigations.

Figure 1. Disparity indices by noted primary caregiver risk factors in investigations involving First Nations and non-Indigenous children in Canada in 2019 (excluding Quebec)



Disparity indices presented in this information sheet were calculated by dividing the incidence rate of various investigation characteristics for First Nations children by the incidence rate for non-Indigenous children.

Disparity indices in rates of investigations with a noted primary caregiver risk factors in investigations involving First Nations and non-Indigenous children are presented in Figure 1. The disparity indices involving primary caregivers with noted risk factors were greater than the overall disparity index in rates of investigations (First Nations children were 3.6 times as likely to be investigated compared to non-Indigenous children in Canada in 2019).¹ First Nations children with a primary caregiver who had at least one noted risk factor were five times as likely to be involved in a child welfare investigation in 2019 compared to non-Indigenous children. The largest disparity involved primary caregivers who had a history of foster care or group home (disparity index of 18.2) followed by investigations involving primary caregivers who had noted alcohol abuse (disparity index of 15.5).

Summary

Primary caregivers in investigations involving First Nations children in 2019 were more likely to be facing complex needs compared to primary caregivers of non-Indigenous children. Information on the colonial practices that drive these disparities, including the residential school system and Sixties’ Scoop, is available in Section 1 of the *FN/CIS-2019 Major Findings Report*.²

¹ The figure presented in this information sheet indicates this initial investigation level of overrepresentation by noting that First Nations children were 3.6 times as likely to be the subject of a child welfare investigation compared to non-Indigenous children in Canada in 2019.

² Fallon, B., Lefebvre, R., Trocmé, N., Richard, K., Hélie, S., Montgomery, H. M., Bennett, M., Joh-Carnella, N., Saint-Girons, M., Filippelli, J., MacLaurin, B., Black, T., Esposito, T., King, B., Collin-Vézina, D., Dallaire, R., Gray, R., Levi, J., Orr, M., ... Soop, S. (2021). *Denouncing the continued overrepresentation of First Nations children in Canadian child welfare: Findings from the First Nations/Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2019*. Ontario: Assembly of First Nations.

Methods

The data presented reflect the clinical judgement of the investigating child welfare worker and are point-in-time estimates of the front-end of the child welfare service continuum. The FN/CIS-2019 sample (for all regions excluding Quebec) was drawn in three stages. First, a sample of 47 mainstream and 16 First Nations agencies was selected from a sampling frame that included all child welfare agencies in Canadian jurisdictions outside of Quebec. A three-month sampling period (October 1 – December 31, 2019) was then used to select cases within these sites. Investigating workers completed a data collection instrument for each sampled case. The final stage involved identifying child-level investigations meeting the study criteria. Complex survey weights were used to derive an estimate of child maltreatment-related investigations conducted in Canada in 2019 from these sampled cases. In Quebec, data were extracted from information systems from all agencies able to participate (this included data from six First Nations agencies). It should be noted that information on primary caregiver risk factors was not collected in Quebec. Please see the *FN/CIS-2019 Major Findings Report* for a full description of study methodology.

Suggested citation: Carnella, N., Fallon, B., & Saint-Girons, M. (2021). *Primary caregiver risk factors in investigations involving First Nations and non-Indigenous children in Canada in 2019*. CWRP Information Sheet #226E. Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal.