

Research Summary on First Nations Child Welfare

The 2003 Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-2003) provides some of the most reliable and representative data on the incidence rates of child maltreatment investigations in Canada. The CIS-2003 includes a sample of 11,562 child maltreatment investigations conducted between October 1st, 2003 and December 31st, 2003 in a random sample of child welfare agencies across Canada, excluding Quebec.

Are there differences in reported child maltreatment between First Nations and non-Aboriginal children?

- 52% of First Nations maltreatment investigations were substantiated (i.e., verified) compared to 47% of non-Aboriginal maltreatment investigations; 14% of First Nations investigations remained suspected compared to 12% of non-Aboriginal investigations; 34% of First Nations, and 41% of non-Aboriginal child maltreatment investigations were unsubstantiated (i.e., not verified).*
- Several reports based on CIS-2003 data have shown that *neglect* is the most commonly substantiated form of maltreatment for investigations involving First Nations children, whereas *exposure to domestic violence* is the most commonly substantiated form of maltreatment for investigations involving non-Aboriginal children.**
- CIS-2003 findings showed that 29% of substantiated maltreatment investigations involving First Nations children led to some type of out of home placement (kin foster care, other family foster care, group home, residential/secure treatments, or informal kin placement) either during or at the conclusion of the investigation, compared to only 11% of substantiated investigations involving non-Aboriginal children.***

Concerns of neglect are fuelling the overrepresentation of First Nations children in substantiating maltreatment investigations and arranging out-of-home placements.

What is driving this overrepresentation of First Nations children involved with child welfare?

- In 79% of substantiated investigations involving First Nations children, the family was found to be living in rental accommodations (this included band housing); 10% owned their own homes; 5% lived in another accommodation; and 2% were residing in shelters or hotels. In comparison, in 53% of substantiated investigations involving non-Aboriginal children, the family lived in rental accommodation; 36% owned their own homes; 3% had other accommodations; and 1% were staying in shelters or hotels.**
- Investigating workers described the housing conditions of 24% of substantiated First Nations investigations as “unsafe” and 21% as overcrowded; workers classified only 7% of substantiated non-Aboriginal investigations as having unsafe and/or overcrowded households.**
- Nearly half (49%) of substantiated First Nations maltreatment investigations involved families whose primary source of income was unemployment insurance or other benefits; only 20% of substantiated investigations involving non-Aboriginal families derived their primary income this way.**
- The most common source of primary family income in substantiated non-Aboriginal investigations was full-time employment (62%), compared to only 26% in substantiated investigations of First Nations families.**

- Female caregivers with alcohol and drug/solvent abuse were noted in 55% and 33%, respectively, of substantiated First Nations investigations. The comparable figures for substantiated non-Aboriginal investigations were 12% and 10% (alcohol and drug/solvent abuse, respectively).**
- Male caregivers with alcohol and drug/solvent abuse were noted in 74% and 49%, respectively, of substantiated First Nations investigations. The comparable figures for substantiated non-Aboriginal investigations were 24% and 13% (alcohol and drug/solvent abuse, respectively).**

Poverty, poor housing, and parental substance misuse is driving the overrepresentation of First Nations children involved with child welfare.

*Based on a sample of 11,080 child maltreatment investigations (children of Metis, Inuit, or other Indigenous heritage were not included)

**Based on a sample of 5,371 substantiated child maltreatment investigations

***Based on a sample of 5,367 substantiated child maltreatment investigations with information about out-of-home placement

References:

MacLaurin, B., Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., Blackstock, C., Pitman, L., & McCormack, M. (2008). *A comparison of First Nations and non-Aboriginal children investigated for maltreatment in Canada in 2003*. CECW Information Sheet #66E. Toronto, ON, Canada: Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto.

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