



Maltreatment rates in children with developmental delay¹

Ivan Brown and Ann Fudge Schormans

Maltreatment and developmental delay are related

It has been reported for many years that children with developmental delay are much more likely than other children to experience maltreatment. One study² reported maltreatment for as many as 11.5% of children with delay, as opposed to only 1.5% for other children. Physical neglect was an aspect of this maltreatment in 92% of the cases. For a population that is already very vulnerable, this is a serious concern.

About 178,000 Canadians under the age of 20 have developmental delay.^{3,4} A link between maltreatment and disability has been suggested for these children for many years. For example, it has been speculated that developmental disability is a consequence of maltreatment for 3–6% of all children who experience abuse or neglect. At the same time, for those children who already have developmental disabilities, 10–25% are likely to experience child maltreatment.⁵ The 1998 Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS)⁶ is the first large-scale study with data on the relationship between child maltreatment and developmental delay.

Neglect is reported most frequently

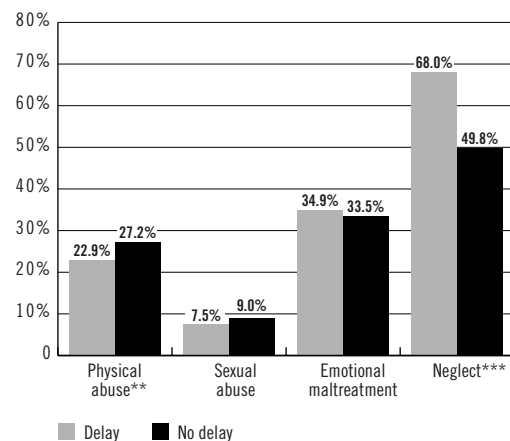
Data was collected for four types of maltreatment. Of these, children both with and without developmental delays were most likely to have substantiated reports of neglect, and least likely to have substantiated reports of sexual abuse.

However, children with developmental delays in the CIS sample were reported and substantiated significantly more frequently for neglect than were those without delays, but significantly less frequently for physical abuse.

CIS data also show that these children are more likely than non-delayed children to have substantiated multiple categories of maltreatment.

Moreover, these children are less likely to experience a single incident of maltreatment and more likely to experience multiple incidents over a longer period of time.

Figure 1: Percentage* of substantiated reports described by four types of maltreatment for children with and without developmental delay



* Percentages add to more than 100% because more than one type of maltreatment was substantiated for many children.

** Significantly lower for children with developmental delay.

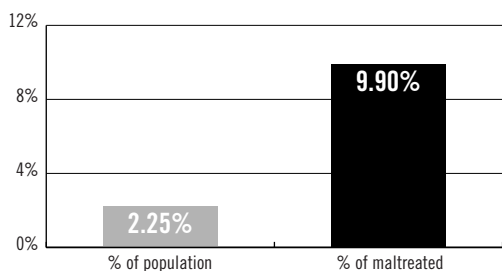
*** Significantly higher for children with developmental delay.

Source: CIS 1998

Children with delay are over-represented in all four categories of maltreatment

Children with developmental delay make up about 2.25% of the general population of children,⁷ but they make up 9.9% of the CIS sample of substantiated cases of maltreatment. This suggests that children with delay are reported and substantiated for maltreatment approximately 4.4 times more frequently than might be expected from their representation in the overall population.

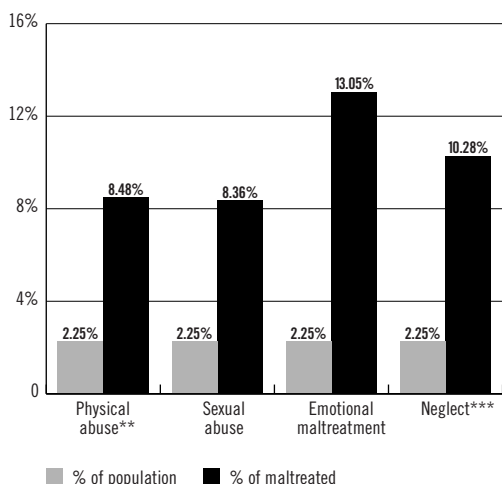
Figure 2: Over-representation of children with developmental delay in substantiated maltreatment



Source: CIS 1998

This over-representation occurred in all four categories of maltreatment recorded, but varied across the four categories of maltreatment: 3.77 times more frequently for physical abuse, 3.72 times more for sexual abuse, 5.8 times more for emotional maltreatment, and 4.57 times more for neglect.

Figure 3: Over-representation of children with developmental delay in four types of substantiated maltreatment



Source: CIS 1998

Summary

Data from the CIS provides evidence of a relationship between maltreatment and developmental delay. Children with developmental delay are more likely to be reported and substantiated for neglect than for physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. Further, they are more likely than non-delayed children to be reported for neglect, but less likely to be reported and substantiated for physical abuse. Children with delays are over-represented in physical and sexual abuse, and are especially over-represented in emotional maltreatment and neglect.

- 1 This information sheet is based on the peer-reviewed article, Brown, I. (2003). Abuse and neglect of disabled and non-disabled children: Establishing a place in quality of life study. In M. J. Sirgy, D. R. Rahtz, & A. C. Samli (Eds.), *Advances in quality-of-life theory and research* (Vol. 4, pp.129-142). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers. "Developmental delay" refers to an ongoing, major delay in the process of a child's development in one or more areas, such as motor, language, social, or thinking skills. Developmental delay can result from genetic defects (like Down syndrome), complications during pregnancy or birth (like prematurity or infections), or unknown causes. Some delays can be easily reversed if caught early enough, such as those resulting from hearing loss due to chronic ear infections.
- 2 Verdugo, M. A., Bermejo, B., & Fuertes, J. (1995). The maltreatment of intellectually handicapped children and adolescents. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 19, 205-215.
- 3 Yu, D. & Atkinson, L. (1993). Developmental disability with and without psychiatric involvement: Prevalence estimates for Ontario. *Journal on Developmental Disabilities*, 2(1), 92-99.
- 4 Statistics Canada (2003). Population by sex and age group. Retrieved July 21, 2003 from <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/demo10a.htm>
- 5 Sobsey, D. (1994). *Violence and abuse in the lives of people with disabilities: The end of silent acceptance?* Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.
- 6 Trocmé, N., MacLaurin, B., Fallon, B., Daciuk, J., Billingsley, D., Tourigny, M., et al. (2001). *Canadian incidence study of reported child abuse and neglect: Final report*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.
- 7 Brown, I., Percy, M., & Garcin, N. (2003). Introduction to assessment, interventions and services in Ontario. In I. Brown, & M. Percy (Eds.), *Developmental disabilities in Ontario* (2nd ed., pp. 367-389). Toronto, ON: Ontario Association on Developmental Disabilities.

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