

Foster Care Disparity for Aboriginal Children in 2011

This information sheet presents data on foster children which was, for the first time, collected by the Canadian National Household Survey in 2011. We examine the numbers of foster children in different Aboriginal identity categories and compare the rates of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal foster children. Despite the fact that Aboriginal children (ages 0 to 15) make up only 7% of the child population in Canada, they represent 49.1% of the total foster child population. Depending on the Aboriginal identity category and province/territory examined, the rate of Aboriginal foster children was between 2 and 50 times higher than the rate of non-Aboriginal foster children. The overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in foster care was particularly marked for First Nations children in the western provinces, where the rate of First Nations foster children was between 17 and 34 times greater than the rate of non-Aboriginal foster children. The disparity in foster child rates was also pronounced for Inuit children; depending on the jurisdiction, the rate of Inuit foster children was between 11 and 49 times that for non-Aboriginal children.

THE NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEY (NHS-2011)

The National Household Survey (NHS-2011) is a nationally representative survey administered to 4.5 million dwellings in Canada. In 2011, for the first time, ‘foster child’ was included among responses to a question asking respondents to identify their relationship to persons regularly resident within their home. No definition of foster child was provided, and it is not clear whether respondents counted children in informal kinship care arrangements as foster children, or identified them using other response options, such as ‘grandchild’, or ‘other (specify)’ (Statistics Canada, 2011).

NHS-2011 also included three questions on Aboriginal identity. Responses to these questions allow us to categorize foster children by single-identity Aboriginal categories: ‘Non-Aboriginal’, ‘First Nations’, ‘Metis’, and ‘Inuit’. A final category, ‘other Aboriginal’ includes both those children identified with multiple Aboriginal categories and children falling into a NHS ‘other Aboriginal’ category.

Foster Child Rates and Disparity Statistics

Foster child rates represent the number of foster children with a particular Aboriginal identity category per every 1000 children in the population sharing that Aboriginal identity. These rates are calculated by dividing the number of foster children in an Aboriginal identity category by the population of children in that category, and multiplying by 1000.

Disparity statistics are used to compare Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal foster child rates. They are calculated by dividing the foster child rate for an Aboriginal identity category by the non-Aboriginal foster child rate. A disparity value of 6 indicates that the rate of foster children within a specific Aboriginal identity category is 6 times higher than the foster child rate for non-Aboriginal children.

We use these data to describe the percentage of the total population of children (ages 0-15) and the foster child population (ages 0-15) in each Aboriginal identity category. We also present the foster child rate for each Aboriginal identity category, and the disparity between the non-Aboriginal foster child rate and the foster child rate in each of the additional Aboriginal identity categories. We present each set of statistics for Canada as a whole, and also present breakdowns for Canadian provinces and territories. Note that data for any jurisdiction and category in which the population count was less than 100 children have been excluded from all tables. In addition, percentages in some rows in Tables 1 and 2 may not sum to 100% because of NHS requirements for rounding data to the nearest interval of five.

CHILD POPULATION BY ABORIGINAL IDENTITY CATEGORY

Table 1 describes the total child population (ages 0 to 15) for each province/territory and for Canada as a whole. It also describes the distributions of the child population across Aboriginal identity categories. Non-Aboriginal children make up the majority of children in all provinces /territories, the exception being Nunavut. First Nations children represented the greatest proportion of the child populations in Northwest Territories (43%), followed by the Yukon (28%), Saskatchewan (20%), and Manitoba (18%). Metis children made up the largest proportion of the population in Manitoba and Northwest territories (9% each), followed by Saskatchewan (7%). Inuit children made up the largest proportion of the population in Nunavut (95%).

TABLE 1: CHILD POPULATION (AGES 0-15), AND PERCENTAGE CHILD POPULATION BY PROVINCE/TERRITORY AND ABORIGINAL IDENTITY CATEGORY (STATISTICS CANADA, 2011)

	Child population	% child population by Aboriginal identity category				
		Non-Aboriginal	First Nations	Metis	Inuit	Other Aboriginal
NL	76,220	89.3%	5.5%	2.4%	2.1%	0.7%
PEI	23,180	97.3%	1.8%	0.4%	-	-
NS	138,115	94.1%	4.4%	1.2%	0.1%	0.2%
NB	113,400	95.0%	4.0%	0.7%	0.2%	0.1%
QC	1,257,930	97.3%	1.6%	0.6%	0.4%	0.1%
ON	2,178,125	96.6%	2.5%	0.8%	0.1%	0.1%
MB	227,400	72.4%	18.4%	8.7%	0.1%	0.3%
SK	196,255	72.6%	20.0%	7.0%	0.1%	0.3%
AB	679,240	90.2%	5.8%	3.7%	0.1%	0.2%
BC	677,615	91.0%	6.3%	2.4%	0.1%	0.2%
YK	5,825	67.0%	28.0%	3.5%	-	-
NWT	9,050	33.2%	43.4%	8.7%	14.0%	-
NU	10,445	4.5%	-	-	94.9%	-
Canada	5,592,795	93.0%	4.6%	1.9%	0.4%	0.2%

The data presented in Table 1 also allow for calculation of the number of children in any Aboriginal identity category and jurisdiction. The First Nations child population was most heavily concentrated in Ontario (with 53,850 First Nations children), followed by British Columbia (42,925 First Nations children), and Manitoba (41,955 First Nations children). The Metis child population was most heavily concentrated in Alberta (25,155 Metis children), followed by Manitoba (19,840 Metis children). The Inuit population was most heavily concentrated in Nunavut (9,912 Inuit children).

FOSTER CHILD POPULATION BY ABORIGINAL IDENTITY CATEGORY

Table 2 describes the total foster child population (ages 0 to 15) for each province/territory, and for Canada as a whole. It also describes the distribution of these foster children across Aboriginal identity categories. Across Canada, Aboriginal children made up 49.1% of children in foster care (despite representing only 7.0% of the total child population). Nationally, First Nations children accounted for 39.6% of foster children, Metis children accounted for 6.1% of foster children, and Inuit children made up 1.9% of the foster child population. There was considerable cross-jurisdictional variation in the representation of Aboriginal children in foster care. For example, First Nations children represented a large majority of the foster child population in some jurisdictions - 93.8% in Yukon, 74.4% in Saskatchewan, 69.6% in Manitoba, and 57.9% in Alberta – and a much smaller proportion in others –10.8% of foster children in Quebec, and 13.9% in Newfoundland and Labrador.

TABLE 2: FOSTER CHILD POPULATION (AGES 0-15), AND PERCENTAGE CHILD POPULATION BY PROVINCE/TERRITORY AND ABORIGINAL IDENTITY CATEGORY (STATISTICS CANADA, 2011)

	Foster child population	% foster child population by Aboriginal identity category				
		Non-Aboriginal	First Nations	Metis	Inuit	Other Aboriginal
NL	540	72.2%	13.9%	0.0%	12.0%	0.0%
PEI	60	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	-
NS	690	76.8%	23.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
NB	330	71.2%	25.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
QC	5,880	84.6%	10.8%	1.6%	3.3%	0.0%
ON	7,045	74.5%	23.0%	1.6%	0.6%	0.0%
MB	4,225	15.4%	69.6%	13.6%	0.8%	0.6%
SK	1,970	13.2%	74.4%	10.4%	0.0%	1.0%
AB	4,195	26.6%	57.9%	14.2%	0.0%	1.1%
BC	4,265	44.0%	50.6%	4.5%	0.0%	0.5%
YK	80	0.0%	93.8%	0.0%	-	-
NWT	160	6.3%	43.8%	0.0%	43.8%	-
NU	125	0.0%	-	-	100.0%	-
Canada	29,565	51.9%	39.6%	6.1%	1.9%	0.5%

FOSTER CHILD RATES BY ABORIGINAL IDENTITY CATEGORY

Table 3 describes the rate of foster children per 1000 children, ages 0 to 15, in the population, by province/territory. It also provides the rate of foster children, by Aboriginal identity category, for Canada. Data for any jurisdiction and identity category in which the total number of foster children was less than 50 have been omitted. The ‘Total foster child rate’ column shows that the overall rate of foster children was highest in Manitoba (18.6 children per 1000), followed by the Northwest Territories (17.7 children per 1000), and the Yukon (13.7 children per 1000). These elevated rates were largely driven by high foster care rates for Aboriginal children within these provinces.

The foster child rates for non-Aboriginal children were below 6 per 1,000 children in every province and territory; the national rate was 2.9 non-Aboriginal foster children for every 1,000 non-Aboriginal children in the population. In contrast, the rates of Aboriginal foster children were in the double digits across almost all jurisdictions and Aboriginal identity categories. There were also significant differences in the foster care rates for different Aboriginal categories. At the national level, First Nations children were most highly overrepresented in the foster child population; there were 45.2 First Nations foster children for every 1,000 First Nations children in the Canadian population. Stated differently, 1 in every 22 First Nations children was a foster child in 2011.

TABLE 3: RATE OF FOSTER CHILDREN (PER 1000 CHILDREN IN THE POPULATION), BY PROVINCE /TERRITORY AND ABORIGINAL IDENTITY CATEGORY (STATISTICS CANADA, 2011)

	Total foster child rate	Foster child rate by Aboriginal identity category				
		Non-Aboriginal	First Nations	Metis	Inuit	Other Aboriginal
NL	7.1	5.7	17.8	-	41.3	-
PEI	2.6	2.7	-	-	-	-
NS	5.0	4.1	26.5	-	-	-
NB	2.9	2.2	18.8	-	-	-
QC	4.7	4.1	30.8	12.5	43.9	-
ON	3.2	2.5	30.1	6.9	-	-
MB	18.6	3.9	70.1	29.0	-	-
SK	10.0	1.8	37.3	14.8	-	-
AB	6.2	1.8	61.7	23.7	-	-
BC	6.3	3.0	50.3	11.9	-	-
YK	13.7	-	46.0	-	-	-
NWT	17.7	-	17.8	-	55.1	-
NU	12.0	-	-	-	12.6	-
Canada	5.3	2.9	45.2	17.2	28.3	17.7

The rate of First Nations foster children was highest in Manitoba (70.1/1000, or 1 in 14 children) and Alberta (61.7/1000, or 1 in 16 children). Nationally, the rate of Metis foster children was 17.2 per 1000 children in the population (or 1 foster child for every 58 Metis children) and the rate of Inuit foster children was 28.3/1000 (or 1 foster child for every 33 Inuit children). The Metis foster care rate was highest in Manitoba (29/1000 or 1 foster child for every 35 Metis children), the Inuit foster care rate was highest in the North West Territories (55/1000 or 1 foster child for every 18 Inuit children).

DISPARITY IN ABORIGINAL AND NON ABORIGINAL FOSTER CHILD RATES

Table 4 presents disparities in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal foster care rates. These disparities represent the ratio of the First Nations, Metis, Inuit or other Aboriginal foster child rate in any jurisdiction to the non-Aboriginal rate in the same jurisdiction. Both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal foster child rates are required to calculate a disparity statistic, so this statistic cannot be calculated for any Aboriginal identity category and jurisdiction in which there are no foster children. Table 4 shows that there was pronounced disparity in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal foster child rates across Aboriginal identity categories and jurisdictions. For Canada as a whole, the First Nations foster rate was 15 times greater than the non-Aboriginal child foster rate, the Metis foster child rate was 6 times greater, the Inuit rate was 10 times greater, and the other Aboriginal child foster rate was 6 times greater than the non-Aboriginal child foster rate.

TABLE 4: DISPARITY IN FOSTER CHILD RATE FOR NON-ABORIGINAL AND ABORIGINAL IDENTITY CHILDREN, BY ABORIGINAL IDENTITY CATEGORY AND PROVINCE /TERRITORY (STATISTICS CANADA, 2011)

	Disparity between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal foster child rates			
	First Nations	Metis	Inuit	Other Aboriginal
NL	3.1	-	7.2	-
PEI	-	-	-	-
NS	6.5	-	-	-
NB	8.6	-	-	-
QC	7.6	3.1	10.8	-
ON	12.1	2.8	15.0	-
MB	17.8	7.3	49.3	-
SK	20.4	8.1	-	-
AB	33.9	13.0	-	-
BC	16.6	3.9	-	-
YK	-	-	-	-
NWT	5.4	-	16.6	-
NU	-	-	-	-
Canada	15.3	5.8	9.6	6.0

Table 4 also shows that there is variation in aboriginal and non-Aboriginal foster child disparity across jurisdictions. The rate of First Nations foster children ranged from a low of 3 times greater than the non-Aboriginal rate in Newfoundland Labrador to high of 34 times greater in Alberta. The Metis foster child ranged from 3 times greater than the non-Aboriginal foster child rate in Quebec to a high of 13 times greater in Alberta. The Inuit foster child rate ranged from a low of 7 times greater than the non-Aboriginal rate in Newfoundland Labrador to high of 49 times greater than the non-Aboriginal foster child rate in Manitoba. Additional research is required to understand the reasons for the pronounced variation in disparity across jurisdictions and Aboriginal identity groups.

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