

Rates and outcomes of maltreatment-related investigations: CIS-1998, CIS-2003 and CIS-2008*

*Based on Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., MacLaurin, B., Sinha, V., Black, T., Fast, E., Felstiner, C., Hélie, S., Turcotte, D., Weightman, P., Douglas, J., and Holroyd, J. (2010) "Rates of maltreatment-related investigations in the CIS-1998, CIS-2003 and CIS-2008", in Public Health Agency of Canada. *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2008: Major Findings*. Ottawa, 2010

The CIS-2008 compares rates of maltreatment-related investigations found in the 1998, 2003 and 2008 cycles of the CIS. Changes in rates of maltreatment-related investigations from 1998 to 2008 might be due to a number of factors, including: (1) changes in public and professional awareness of the problem, (2) changes in legislation or in case-management practices, (3) changes in CIS study procedures and definitions, and (4) changes in the actual rate of maltreatment. Changes in practice with respect to investigations of *risk of future* maltreatment pose a particular challenge since these cases were not specifically identified in the 1998 and 2003 cycles of the study. Findings are therefore not directly comparable to findings presented in the CIS-1998 and CIS-2003 reports.

Maltreatment-related investigations

In 1998, an estimated 135,261 investigations were conducted in Canada. In 2003, the number of investigations nearly doubled, with an estimated 235,315 investigations. In contrast, the number of investigations has not changed significantly between 2003 and 2008, where an estimated 235,842 maltreatment-related investigations were conducted across Canada.

Investigations by age of child

In 2008, children under the age of one year were the most likely to be investigated. Rates of investigations decreased with age. A similar pattern was observed in the 2003 cycle; however, a different pattern was observed in the 1998 cycle, where infants were least likely to be investigated and where there was little variation between the other age groups.¹

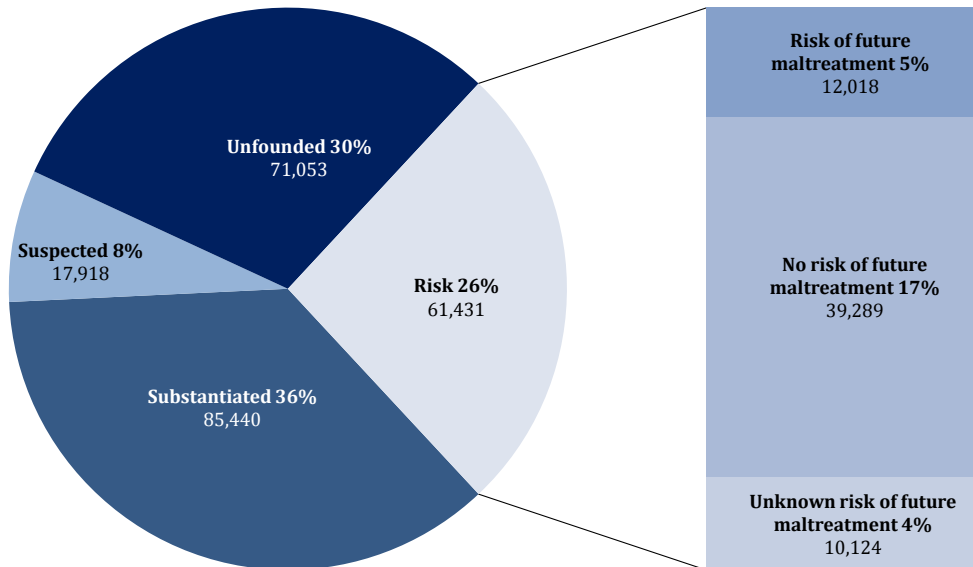
Types of investigations and substantiation decisions

Outcomes of maltreatment are classified into three levels of substantiation: (1) substantiated: the balance of evidence indicates that abuse or neglect has occurred, (2) suspected: insufficient evidence to substantiate abuse or neglect, but maltreatment cannot be ruled out, and (3) unfounded: the balance of evidence indicates that abuse or neglect has not occurred. The outcomes of *risk of future* maltreatment investigations are classified into three response categories: (1) risk of future maltreatment, (2) no risk of future maltreatment, and (3) unknown risk of future maltreatment.

¹ Comparisons between age groups should always be made on the basis of incidence rates that take into consideration variations in the age distribution in the general population, rather than on the basis of the count of investigations.

As represented in **Figure 1**, 74% of investigations focused on a concern of maltreatment (abuse or neglect) and 26% involved concerns about the *risk of future* maltreatment. For maltreatment investigations, 36% were substantiated, 8% were suspected and 30% were unfounded. For *risk of future* maltreatment cases, 17% resulted in a finding of no risk of future maltreatment, 5% were considered at risk of future maltreatment, while in 4% of investigations workers did not know whether the child was at risk of future maltreatment.

Figure 1-Type of Maltreatment Investigation and Level of Substantiation in Canada in 2008



Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect - 2008

* Total estimated number of investigations is 235,842, based on a sample of 15,980 investigations

Referral Source

In the CIS-2008, the person who contacted the child welfare site was identified as the referral source. The Maltreatment Assessment Form included 19 pre-coded referral source categories, which were collapsed into three main categories: (1) any non-professional referral (parent, child, relative, neighbor/friend), (2) any professional referral (community agency, health professional, school, mental health professional/agency, other child welfare service, police, and other referral sources), and (3) any other referral (anonymous, other not listed above). Of all CIS-2008 investigations, 68% by professional sources, 26% were referred by non-professional sources and 9% by other sources. The largest number of referrals was from schools (24%), while the second largest source was the police (22%). Custodial or non-custodial parents were the largest non-professional referral source (11%). Although there was a significant change in the distribution of referral sources between 1998 and 2003, from 2003 to 2008 it remained approximately the same.

Rates of ongoing services, placement, and court

Following a child welfare investigation three key service events can occur: (1) a decision is made to either close the case or keep it open for ongoing services, (2) a child is placed in out-of-home care, and/or (3) an application is made for a child welfare court order. The data in the CIS-2008 represents service events that occurred only during the initial investigation.

On-going Child Welfare Services

In 2008, the majority of investigations resulted in the file closing (73%). An estimated 27% of investigations remained open for on-going services, a decrease from 2003 (29%) and 1998 (35%).²

Out-of-Home Placement

In 2008, the great majority of children remained at home during the investigation (92%). Eight percent of investigations resulted in a change of residence for the child: 4% to informal kinship care and 4% to foster care or formal kinship care. Less than 1% of the investigations resulted in children placed in residential secure treatment or group homes. There has been a minimal change in placement rates across the three cycles of the CIS with the exception of a slight increase for informal placement with relatives from 2003 to 2008.

Court

Applications to child welfare court can be made for a number of reasons, including orders of supervision with the child remaining in the home, as well as temporary or permanent out-of-home placement orders. Workers chose from three possible court involvement statuses during the initial investigation: (1) no application, (2) application considered, or (3) application made. The first two categories were collapsed together and resulted the great majority of investigations (95%) resulting in no application made to child welfare court. Applications were made either during or at the completion of the initial maltreatment investigation in 5% of investigations.³

For updates and more information on the CIS-2008, visit the Child Welfare Research Portal at <http://www.cwrp.ca> and PHAC's Injury and Child Maltreatment Section: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cm-vee/public-eng.php>.

² Due to limitations with some of the 2003 data it was not possible to test the statistical significance of the changes in rates of on-going services.

³ Canada-wide estimates for court use in 1998 and 2003 could not be produced because of differences in the way court information was tracked in Québec in the CIS-1998 and CIS-2003.