



KISKISIK AWASISAK: REMEMBER THE CHILDREN

UNDERSTANDING THE OVERREPRESENTATION OF FIRST NATIONS CHILDREN IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

The first report of the First Nations Component of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2008 (FNCIS-2008), “*Kiskisik Awasisak: Remember the Children. Understanding the Overrepresentation of First Nations Children in the Child Welfare System*,” will be made publicly available in November (2011). This information sheet provides an overview of the study background, methods, and findings.

What is the FNCIS-2008?

The First Nations Component of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (FNCIS) is a study of child welfare investigations involving First Nations children, which is embedded within a cyclical national study of the reported incidence of child maltreatment: the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS). The FNCIS-2008 is the largest study of child welfare investigations involving First Nations children (living both on and off reserve) ever conducted in Canada. The study examines data which the CIS-2008 collected from 89 provincial/territorial agencies and 22 First Nations and urban Aboriginal agencies during a three-month data collection period.

How are OCAP principles operationalized in the FNCIS-2008?

The FNCIS is committed to honouring the principles of Aboriginal Ownership of, Control over, Access to, and

Possession of research conducted in Aboriginal contexts. The FNCIS-2008 is a collaboration between the CIS research team and the FNCIS-2008 advisory committee, which is composed of representatives from major organizations supporting/coordinating First Nations child welfare agencies, First Nations agencies (in provinces without coordinating organizations), and the Assembly of First Nations. The advisory committee mediates First Nations ownership of and control over the FNCIS-2008; it is mandated to ensure maximum respect for OCAP by the CIS, given that it is a cyclical study which also collects data on other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal child investigations.

What is the role of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) in the FNCIS-2008?

AFN representatives have participated in the FNCIS-2008 Advisory Committee since its founding in 2007 and AFN holds the copyright for *Kiskisik Awasisak*. In keeping with OCAP principles, the FNCIS Advisory Committee recommended that a national-level First Nations organization should hold the copyright for the report. AFN was approached about the copyright once the analyses presented in the report had already been completed.

How did the CIS-2008 collect data from participating agencies?

The CIS-2008 used a case file review procedure to collect data on new, child maltreatment-related investigations opened by sampled agencies between

October 1 and December 31, 2008. It asked investigating workers to fill in data collection forms at the point of completing initial investigations (typically 4-6 weeks long). This form was designed to collect standardized information based on a CIS definitional framework and workers’ best clinical assessments. Information provided by workers was checked for completeness and internal consistency, but cannot be independently verified. Because the CIS collects data on investigations done by child welfare agencies, it does not include information about situations not reported to child welfare agencies, reports screened out prior to an investigation, new reports on already open cases, or post-investigation outcomes/disclosures.

How is the data collected by the CIS-2008 shared with participating First Nations agencies?

Prior to public release of *Kiskisik Awasisak*, First Nations agencies included in the CIS-2008 will receive reports summarizing the data collected from their agencies; the research team has funds to support on-site presentation of agency and national level data to these First Nations agencies.

What kind of information is in the FNCIS-2008 report which will be released in November?

Kiskisik Awasisak examines differences between the child, family, household, maltreatment and service response profiles for

the child maltreatment and risk investigations involving First Nations children and non-Aboriginal children which were conducted by agencies included in the CIS-2008. Based on data for investigations opened between October 1 and December 31, 2008, the study estimates that 14,114 investigations involving First Nations children) and 83,650 investigations involving non-Aboriginal children were conducted by sampled agencies in 2008. The report presents disparities in the rates of First Nations and non-Aboriginal children investigated, retained for post-investigation services, and moved to out-of-home care during the investigation period. It also identifies caregiver and household risk factors which contribute to First Nations overrepresentation. Because of the purposive sampling of First Nations agencies by the CIS, the results cannot be generalized beyond sampled agencies or directly compared with First Nations findings from previous cycles of the CIS.

How does the report help readers understand the historical/structural context of First Nations child welfare?

The first chapter of *Kiskisik Awasisak* provides a comprehensive overview of the history and current structure of First Nations child welfare in Canada. Each data chapter in the report begins with a contextualized summary which ties major findings reported in the chapter to the information described in the introductory chapter. It is the position of the FNCIS-2008 advisory committee and the CIS-2008 research team that FNCIS-2008 findings cannot be properly interpreted without understanding of the historical/structural context of First Nations child welfare; a reminder of this position is attached to every CIS-2008 data table included in the report.

What do the findings say about the level of overrepresentation of First Nations children?

In 2008, the overrepresentation of First Nations children in the sampled child welfare agencies started at the point of initial investigation and increased with each major decision during the investigation period.

In the population served by sampled agencies, there were:

- 140.6 investigations for every 1,000 First Nations children (vs. 33.5 for every 1,000 non-Aboriginal children).
- 82.7 investigations involving referrals to outside services for every 1,000 First Nations children (vs. 17.0 for every 1,000 non-Aboriginal children).
- 53.2 cases remaining open for ongoing services for every 1,000 First Nations children (vs. 7.9 for every 1,000 non-Aboriginal children).
- 13 investigations involving court applications for every 1,000 First Nations children (vs. 1.5 for every 1,000 non-Aboriginal children).

What do the findings say about out-of-home care during First Nations child investigations?

The CIS-2008 did not collect data on out-of-home care initiated after the investigation period or on the duration of out-of-home care during the investigation period. Thus, it is not known how many out-of-home placements included in the data involved only brief out-of-home stays, after which the child returned home.

In the population served by sampled agencies, there were:

- 10.3 investigations involving informal kinship care for every 1,000 First Nations children (vs. .9 for every 1,000 non-Aboriginal

children). The term ‘informal kinship care’ is used to describe a situation in which a child was moved within a caregivers’ kinship network, but in which the child welfare authority did not take temporary custody.

- 13.6 investigations involving formal child welfare placements for every 1,000 First Nations children (vs. 1.1 for every 1,000 non-Aboriginal children).

What do the findings say about household profiles in First Nations child investigations?

Many of the families of the First Nations children investigated by sampled agencies in 2008 had limited resources which were strained by the demands of providing for multiple children. Workers identified:

- only one caregiver in the home in 47% of First Nations child investigations (vs. 38% of non-Aboriginal child investigations).
- four or more children in the home in 29% of First Nations child investigations (vs. 15% of non-Aboriginal child investigations).
- social assistance/employment insurance/other benefits as the primary household income source in 49% of First Nations child investigations (vs. 26% of non-Aboriginal child investigations).
- full time work as the primary household income source in 33% of First Nations child investigations (vs. 58% of non-Aboriginal child investigations).

What do the findings say about profiles of caregivers in First Nations child investigations?

Many of the caregivers in the First Nations child investigations conducted by sampled agencies in 2008 struggled

with issues which potentially impeded their abilities to protect and care for First Nations children. For primary female caregivers, workers identified concerns about:

- multiple risk factors in 56% of First Nations child investigations (vs. 34% of non-Aboriginal child investigations).
- domestic violence victimization in 43% of First Nations child investigations (vs. 30% of non-Aboriginal child investigations).
- alcohol abuse in 40% of First Nations child investigations (vs. 8% of non-Aboriginal child investigations).
- lack of social supports in 37% of First Nations child investigations (vs. 30% of non-Aboriginal child investigations).
- drug/solvent abuse in 25% of First Nations child investigations (vs. 10% of non-Aboriginal child investigations).
- history of foster/group home care in 13% of First Nations child investigations (vs. 5% of non-Aboriginal child investigations).

The pattern of caregiver risk factor concerns was similar for primary male caregivers.

What do the findings say about conclusions of maltreatment in First Nations child investigations?

Child welfare statutes in most jurisdictions require that professionals working with children, and the general public, report all situations in which they have concerns that a child may have been maltreated or that a child is at risk of maltreatment. The investigation phase is designed to determine whether the child was in fact maltreated.

- 27% of First Nations child investigations were risk investigations (vs. 25% of non-

Aboriginal child investigations). In these cases, there was no suspicion/allegation that maltreatment already occurred; the concern was that a child might face significant risk of future maltreatment.

- 73% of First Nations child investigations were maltreatment investigations (vs. 75% of non-Aboriginal child investigations). In these cases, workers investigated suspicions/allegations that a specific incident of maltreatment occurred.
- Suspicions/allegations of maltreatment were substantiated, meaning that the worker concluded maltreatment did occur, in 58% of First Nations child maltreatment investigations (vs. 47% of non-Aboriginal child maltreatment investigations). Workers suspected maltreatment occurred, but lacked the necessary evidence to substantiate, in an additional 10% of First Nations child maltreatment investigations (and 10% of non-Aboriginal child maltreatment investigations).

What do the findings say about the characteristics of substantiated maltreatment in First Nations child investigations?

The overrepresentation of First Nations children is driven largely by cases involving neglect; at least one form of neglect was substantiated in 52% of First Nations substantiated maltreatment investigations.

In the population served by sampled agencies, there were:

- 27.7 investigations in which neglect was the primary category of substantiated maltreatment for every 1,000 First Nations children (vs. 3.5 for every 1,000 non-Aboriginal children).
- 19.9 investigations in which exposure to intimate partner

violence was the primary category of substantiated maltreatment for every 1,000 First Nations children (vs. 4.2 for every 1,000 non-Aboriginal children).

- 5.6 investigations in which emotional maltreatment was the primary category of substantiated maltreatment for every 1,000 First Nations children (vs. 1.0 for every 1,000 non-Aboriginal children).
- 5.6 investigations in which physical abuse was the primary category of substantiated maltreatment for every 1,000 First Nations children (vs. 2.7 for every 1,000 non-Aboriginal children).
- 1.0 investigation in which sexual abuse was the primary category of substantiated maltreatment for every 1,000 First Nations children (vs. 0.4 for every 1,000 non-Aboriginal children).

What do the findings say about the physical harm, emotional harm, and child functioning concerns documented in First Nations child investigations?

Neither protection from immediate, severe emotional or physical harm, nor child functioning issues were the central concern for most of the First Nations children investigated by sampled agencies in 2008.

- Workers knew of or suspected physical harm resulting from substantiated maltreatment in 3% of the First Nations child investigations; 46% of these (1.4% of all First Nations child investigations) involved harm severe enough to require medical treatment.
- Emotional harm resulting from substantiated maltreatment was documented in 16% of the First Nations child investigations; in 57% of these (9% of all First Nations

child investigations) the child showed signs of harm requiring therapeutic treatment.

- Workers were asked to indicate whether they had concerns about a range of physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural child functioning issues which may be diagnosed during the investigation period. Workers noted no child functioning concerns in 63% of First Nations child investigations and only one child functioning concern in an additional 11% of First Nations child investigations.

What are the potential ways in which FNCIS-2008 findings might be applied/used?

FNCIS-2008 data offer a detailed portrait of the child maltreatment related investigations involving First Nations children which were conducted by a very large sample of child welfare agencies). Accordingly, study findings may be used to identify to general patterns in child, family, maltreatment and service outcome characteristics which may merit consideration in development or revision of funding and practice models.

How can I learn more about the study or report findings?

Additional information is available from: www.cwrp.ca/general-info-FNCIS-2008.

Current FNCIS-2008 Advisory Committee Members and Key Research Team Members

British Columbia

Linda Lucas & Shawn Hoey

Caring for First Nations Children Society

Saskatchewan

Shelley Thomas Prokop

Thomas Research

H. Monty Montgomery

Faculty of Social Work, University of Regina (Saskatoon)

Gail Hartsook

Saskatchewan First Nations Family & Community Institute, Inc.

Manitoba

Elsie Flette & Tara Petti

Southern First Nations Network of Care

Marlyn Bennett

First Peoples Child & Family Review Journal

Alberta

Bruce MacLaurin

School of Social Work, University of Calgary

Randy McHugh

Siksika Children's Services

Ontario

Barbara Fallon

Factor Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto

Kenn Richard

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto

Jocelyn Formsma

Assembly of First Nations

Quebec

Vandna Sinha, Nico Trocmé, and Elizabeth Fast

Centre for Research on Children & Families, McGill University

Richard Gray

First Nations of Québec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission

New Brunswick

Judy Levi

Social Development Ministry of New Brunswick