Canadian Incidence Study (CIS) of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect—2003

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Introduction

The second cycle of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-2003) began in the spring of 2003. The CIS-2003 team at the University of Toronto and the University of Calgary is currently in the stage of data analysis and report writing. The first cycle of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-1998) was the first Canada-wide study to examine the incidence of reported child maltreatment and the characteristics of children and families investigated by Canadian child welfare services. Comparisons between the CIS-1998 and CIS-2003 will provide the opportunity for the first time in Canada to examine trends in child maltreatment such as the rates of child welfare services, maltreatment types, substantiation outcomes, and severity of maltreatment. All provinces and territories participated in both the CIS-1998 and CIS-2003. The CIS-2003 is funded by Health Canada, provincial and territorial governments of Canada, Bell Canada, the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare, and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society. The primary objective of the CIS-2003 is to provide reliable estimates of the scope and characteristics of reported child abuse and neglect across Canada. Specifically, the study is designed to:

- Produce national estimates of the incidence of investigated maltreatment in Canada in 2003;
- Document changes from 1998 to 2003 and explore the reasons for change;
- Examine variations in types and severity of maltreatment; and,
- Explore the role of selected child and family characteristics on the incidence of maltreatment and on key service outcomes.

Methodology

Data Collection Instrument

Information was collected using a three-page data collection instrument (Maltreatment Assessment Form) completed by child welfare workers. The Maltreatment Assessment Form gathers information about the investigated child maltreatment, severity of maltreatment, child and caregiver functioning, substantiation, and other related outcomes. The form was kept as short and simple as possible to minimize the burden of filling it out and to ensure a high completion rate. Completion of the Maltreatment Assessment Form was linked to the written assessments that workers recorded upon the completion of intake investigations. Given that some investigations can take many months to be completed, workers were asked to complete the Maltreatment Assessment Form at the same time as their first assessment report, regardless of whether the entire investigation was complete.

As a result of the feedback received from workers on the CIS-1998, a few key changes were made to the Maltreatment Assessment Form for the 2003 cycle of data collection. For example, the CIS-1998 definition of maltreatment included 22 types of maltreatment subsumed under four categories: physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and emotional maltreatment. After the pilot testing, the 22 kinds of maltreatment were increased to 25. Specifically, the definitions of physical abuse were changed in order to better understand the inappropriate punishment category, which was the most investigated and most substantiated type of maltreatment in the CIS-1998. The physical abuse categories now include: 1) Shake, push, grab or throw; 2) Hit with hand; 3) Punch, kick or bite; 4) Hit with object; and, 5) Other physical abuse. The sexual abuse definitions were also changed to clarify some forms (e.g., “sexual activity completed” was changed to “penetration”).

Sample

The CIS-2003 team randomly sampled 62 agencies across all provinces and territories including eight First Nations agencies. Three provinces (Alberta, Ontario, and Prince Edward Island) and one territory (the Northwest Territories) elected to oversample to provide enough cases to produce provincial/territorial reports and provincial/territorial estimates of child maltreatment. At most sites, all cases opened for service between October 1, 2003 and December 31, 2003 were selected for inclusion in the study. The CIS-2003 data for the province of Quebec was extracted from an administrative database and matched to the CIS-2003 data collection instrument.
(Maltreatment Assessment Form). As the CIS collects information about maltreatment reported to child welfare authorities, it does not include undetected cases that are not reported to child welfare authorities, investigations conducted only by police, cases screened out prior to an investigation being carried out or investigations on already opened cases.

Data Collection
The CIS-2003 collected approximately 12,000 instruments (data collection forms) that provided information about the child’s family, child functioning, type of maltreatments and levels of substantiation, harm to the child, and outcomes of investigation. The information was collected directly from an estimated 1,000 child welfare workers in 62 agencies across Canada (excluding Quebec). Twenty-five site researchers were assigned to coordinate 120 half-day site training sessions. The training included a standard PowerPoint presentation through which participating child welfare workers were introduced to the CIS, key findings from the CIS-1998, the CIS-2003 sampling and case selection, data collection, and the Maltreatment Assessment Forms. Site researchers visited the CIS-2003 sites on a regular basis to collect forms, respond to questions, and monitor study progress. The forms were verified both on site and by either the University of Toronto or University of Calgary office and scanned into an electronic file. Currently, the database for the CIS-2003 is being developed by the University of Toronto and University of Calgary research teams. This database will contain close to 400 variables.

Conclusion
For the first time in Canadian history, the national incidence of reported child abuse and neglect will be compared across two points in time (CIS-1998 and CIS-2003) which will reveal important trends in child welfare services across Canada. In Ontario, three points in time will be available to compare (i.e., OIS-1993, OIS-1998, and OIS-2003). Similar to the CIS-1998 data, which Alberta used to inform and implement a child welfare Alternative Response Model, the CIS-2003 and subsequent comparison reports will allow for evidence-based practice that will influence and inform child welfare policy and research. With this knowledge, we hope to facilitate prevention and intervention efforts and help to end the cycle of violence.

The CIS-2003 team will present key findings to participating agencies upon release of the CIS-2003 Final Report. A comparison report, fact sheets, and journal articles will be published. These will be available at www.cecw-cepb.ca. In addition, Health Canada has agreed to fund some secondary analysis of this rich database, which will allow for further examination of key findings. Look for the release of the CIS-2003 this fall.

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Scope of CIS

Unsubstantiated Reports

Screened-out Reports

OIS Cases

Child Welfare Investigations

Police Investigations

Unreported Cases

Unknown Cases