Examining Caregiver and Household Characteristics in Canadian Provincial and Territorial Incidence Studies of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect

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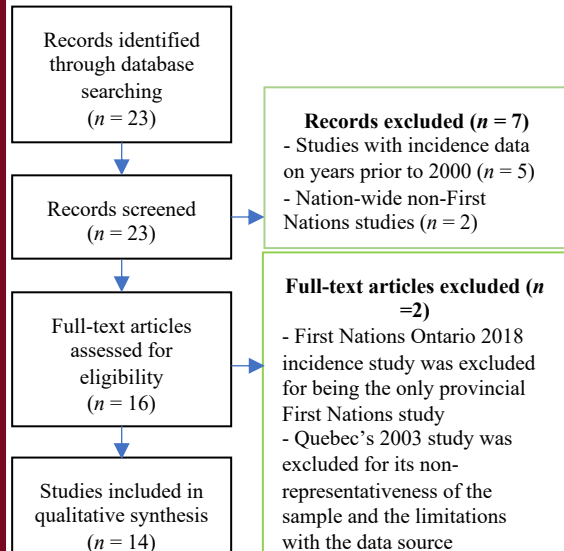Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, McGill University

BACKGROUND

- Canadian population-based rates of reported child maltreatment (CM) are estimated by the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS)

- To date, no study has conducted inter- and intra-provincial comparisons regarding the familial characteristics reported in the CIS

This study aimed to synthesize caregiver and household characteristics of families in the child welfare system per Canadian province over the past 20 years.

METHODS

Figure 1
Flow Diagram of Study Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Records identified through database searching (*n* = 23)

Records excluded (*n* = 7)
- Studies with incidence data on years prior to 2000 (*n* = 5)
- Nation-wide non-First Nations studies (*n* = 2)

Records screened (*n* = 23)

Full-text articles excluded (*n* = 2)
- First Nations Ontario 2018 incidence study was excluded for being the only provincial First Nations study
- Quebec's 2003 study was excluded for its non-representativeness of the sample and the limitations with the data source

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (*n* = 16)

Studies included in qualitative synthesis (*n* = 14)

RESULTS

Table 1
Salient Inter-provincial Comparisons for Each Cycle of the CIS

2003	2008	2013
Comparisons: Alberta, Ontario, and Northwest Territories (NWT)	**Comparisons: Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan, British Columbia**	**Comparisons: Ontario, Quebec**

• Most common primary caregiver risk factors in Ontario and Alberta:
  • **Intimate partner violence (IPV)**
  • **Low social supports**
 	
• In NWT, most common risk factors:
  • **IPV**
  • **Alcohol misuse**
 	
• **20 - 38%** of caregivers reported CM across jurisdictions
 	
• Proportions of risk factors:
  NWT > Alberta > Ontario
 	
• **25%** of families in NWT and Alberta vs. **20%** in Ontario had income insecurity
 	
• **25%** of families reported housing hazards in each province
	• Most common primary caregiver risk factors in *each province:*
	  • **IPV**
	  • **Low social support**
	
	• **Saskatchewan** documented the greatest proportions of risk factors
	
	• **25 - 50%** of the families across provinces reported income insecurity
	  • Most in **Saskatchewan**
	
	• **8 - 20%** of families reported housing hazards in each province
	  • Most in **Alberta**
		• Most common primary caregiver risk factors in *each province:*
		  • **IPV**
		  • **Low social support,**
		
		• Proportions of risk factors:
		  Ontario > Quebec
		
		• **30 - 40%** of families reported income insecurity in **both** provinces
		
		• Proportions of household health and safety risk factors:
		  Quebec > Ontario

(Fallon et al., 2005; MacLaurin et al., 2005; MacLaurin et al., 2005a)	(Fallon et al., 2010; Hélie et al., 2012; MacLaurin et al., 2011; MacLaurin et al., 2011a; MacLaurin et al., 2013)	(Fallon et al., 2015; Hélie et al., 2017)

Table 2
Intra-provincial Comparisons for Alberta, Quebec, and Ontario

Alberta: 2003 and 2008	Quebec: 2008 and 2014	Ontario: 2003, 2008, 2014, 2019

• Most common primary caregiver risk factors :
  • **IPV**
  • **Low social supports**
 	
• Proportions of risk factors for caregivers in **2003 = 2008**
  • However, ↓ few social supports
• ↑ Housing hazards
• ↑ Income insecurity
	• Most common primary caregiver risk factors :
	  • **Low social supports**
	  • **IPV**
	
	• Proportions of risk factors for caregivers in in **2008 = 2014**
	  • However, ↓ substance misuse
	• ↓ Housing hazards
	• ↑ Income insecurity
		• Most common primary caregiver risk factors :
		  • **IPV**
		  • **Low social supports**
		
		• ↑ Psychopathology from 2003 to 2019
		• ↓ Low social support from 2003 to 2019
		• ↓ Drug use from 2003 to 2019
		• ↑ Income insecurity from 2003 to 2019

(MacLaurin et al., 2005; MacLaurin et al., 2013).	(Hélie et al., 2012; Hélie et al., 2017)	(Fallon et al., 2005; Fallon et al., 2010; Fallon et al., 2015; Fallon et al., 2020).

DISCUSSION

- This study found that across Canada, most families in the child welfare system struggled with similar risk factors (e.g., IPV, social isolation, and financial instability)

- Proportions of caregiver and household risk factors persisted over time
  - Empirical evidence suggests that IPV, parental stress, income insecurity, and psychopathology can increase CM (Assink et al., 2019).
  - Further interventions targeting these risk factors could strengthen families, support caregivers, enhance the care of children, and potentially help prevent CM and child apprehension (Dworsky et al., 2007)

- Some variations were noted
  - Families in Saskatchewan and NWT documented more pervasive risk factors
  - Jurisdictional variations may account for these differences such as child welfare legislation and the services types
  - Over-representation of Indigenous families and the direct influence of colonialism and discrimination must also be considered

Limitations
- Differences in jurisdictions and CIS methodology between reports
- Unpublished studies could not be reviewed

References available upon request