

# Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving **First Nations Infants** in Canada in 2019



## Introduction

The data presented in this information sheet were collected as part of the First Nations/Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2019 (FN/CIS-2019), a data collection effort to produce estimates of the incidence of reported and investigated child maltreatment in Canada. This information sheet is a part of a series of five information sheets which represent different developmental stages and examine disparities between First Nations and non-Indigenous children. Please refer to other information sheets available on the Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal ([cwrp.ca](http://cwrp.ca)) which examine investigations involving children of different age groups. An additional information sheet, also available on the portal, summarizes disparities in service dispositions for different age groups.

The FN/CIS-2019 sample (for all regions excluding Quebec) was drawn in three stages. First, a sample of 47 mainstream and 16 First Nations agencies was selected from a sampling frame that included all child welfare agencies in Canadian jurisdictions outside of Quebec. A three-month sampling period (October 1 – December 31, 2019) was then used to select cases within these sites. The final stage involved identifying child-level investigations meeting the study criteria. Complex survey weights were used to derive an estimate of child maltreatment-related investigations conducted in Canada in 2019 from these sampled cases. In Quebec, data were extracted from information systems from all agencies able to participate (this included data from six First Nations agencies). The data presented reflect the clinical judgement of the investigating child welfare worker and are point-in-time estimates of the front-end of the child welfare service continuum. Please see the *FN/CIS-2019 Major Findings Report* for a full description of study methodology.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fallon, B., Lefebvre, R., Trocmé, N., Richard, K., Hélie, S., Montgomery, H. M., Bennett, M., Joh-Carnella, N., Saint-Girons, M., Filippelli, J., MacLaurin, B., Black, T., Esposito, T., King, B., Collin-Vézina, D., Dallaire, R., Gray, R., Levi, J., Orr, M., ... Soop, S. (2021). *Denouncing the continued overrepresentation of First Nations children in Canadian child welfare: Findings from the First Nations/Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2019*. Ontario: Assembly of First Nations.

## Infants

Overall, First Nations children (aged 0-15 years old) in Canada were 3.6 times as likely to be investigated for maltreatment-related concerns compared to non-Indigenous children in 2019. First Nations infants (children less than one year of age) were 5.3 times as likely to be the subject of a child welfare investigation in Canada compared to non-Indigenous infants, and this disparity is greater than for any other child age group. Infants are a particularly vulnerable group with respect to child welfare involvement and potential negative implications of maltreatment.<sup>2</sup> This information sheet looks specifically at the profile of child maltreatment-related investigations involving First Nations infants in Canada in 2019.

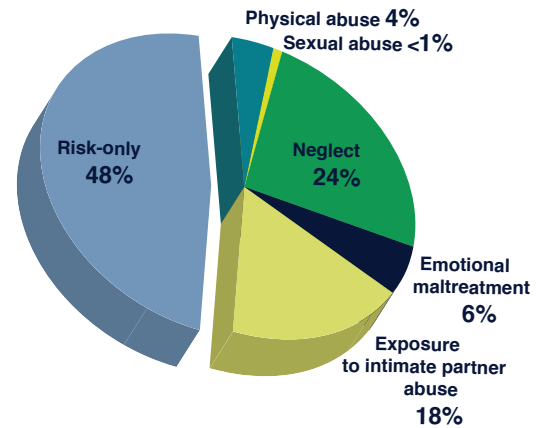
<sup>2</sup> Filippelli, J., Fallon, B., Fuller-Thomson, E., Trocmé, N. (2017). Infants investigated by the child welfare system: Exploring a distinct profile of risks, service needs, and referrals for support in Ontario. *Brain Sciences*, 7(8), 101.

### Investigation Type

Figure 1 describes the primary concern of investigations involving First Nations infants in Canada in 2019. The definition of child maltreatment-related investigations in the FN/CIS-2019 included both investigations focused on an alleged incident of maltreatment (maltreatment investigations) and investigations in which there was no specific concern of an alleged incident of maltreatment but where assessing the risk of future maltreatment for the child was the primary concern of the investigation (risk-only investigations). When workers indicated that their investigation was focused on alleged maltreatment, they could indicate one of five subtypes as the primary category of maltreatment – physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, emotional maltreatment, and exposure to intimate partner violence.

Nearly half (48 percent) of investigations involving First Nations infants were focused on assessing the risk of future maltreatment for the child. An additional 24 percent of the investigations were assessing allegations of neglect. The remaining investigations were focused on exposure to intimate partner violence (18 percent), emotional maltreatment (six percent), physical abuse (four percent), and sexual abuse (less than one percent).

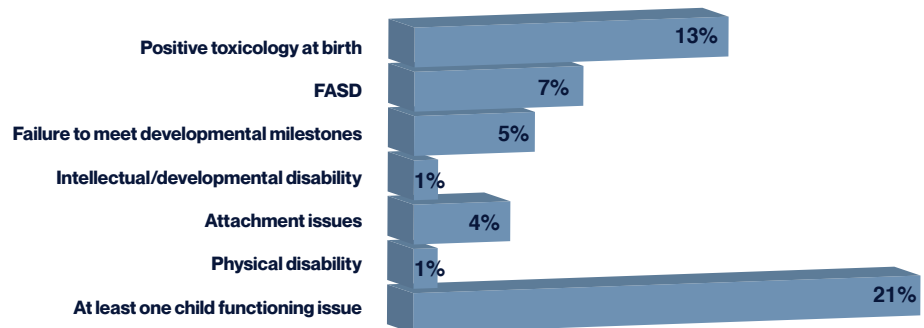
Figure 1. Primary investigation type in investigations involving First Nations infants in Canada in 2019



### Child Functioning Concerns

Participating workers were asked to indicate the investigated child's functioning on the basis of 18 concerns that would be possible to assess in the initial investigation period (see the *FN/CIS-2019 Major Findings Report* for a complete list of the functioning concerns that were captured as part of the study).<sup>3</sup> Based on their clinical judgement, workers could indicate if these concerns were confirmed, suspected, not present, or if the presence of the functioning concern was unknown by the investigating worker at the time of the child welfare investigation. Functioning concerns were considered to be noted when the investigating worker indicated that the concern was either "suspected" or "confirmed."

Figure 2. Most frequently noted child functioning concerns in investigations involving First Nations infants in Canada (excluding Quebec) in 2019



<sup>3</sup> Fallon, B., Lefebvre, R., Trocmé, N., Richard, K., Hélie, S., Montgomery, H. M., Bennett, M., Joh-Carnella, N., Saint-Girons, M., Filippelli, J., MacLaurin, B., Black, T., Esposito, T., King, B., Collin-Vézina, D., Dallaire, R., Gray, R., Levi, J., Orr, M., ... Soop, S. (2021). *Denouncing the continued overrepresentation of First Nations children in Canadian child welfare: Findings from the First Nations/Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2019. Ontario: Assembly of First Nations.*

Figure 2 presents the six most frequently noted child functioning concerns for First Nations infants in Canada in 2019 (excluding Quebec). At least one child functioning issue was noted in 21 percent of investigations involving First Nations infants in Canada in 2019. Positive toxicology at birth was the most frequently noted concern and was noted in 13 percent of these investigations.

**Ongoing Services**

Workers were asked to indicate if, after the initial child welfare investigation, the case was closed or kept open for ongoing child protection services. As shown in Figure 3, approximately half (51 percent) of the investigations involving First Nations infants were kept open for ongoing child welfare services.

**Placement**

Workers were asked to indicate whether the investigated child remained at home or was placed in out-of-home care during the child welfare investigation. Twenty-two percent of investigations involving First Nations infants involved a placement for the child (see Figure 4).

When a worker indicated that a placement was made during the child welfare investigation they were asked to specify the type of placement. Figure 5 shows the types of placements in investigations involving First Nations infants in Canada in 2019. In nearly half of investigations that involved a placement (48 percent), the infant was placed in foster care. A further 23 and 17 percent involved placements in formal kinship care and informal placements (i.e., kinship out-of-care and customary care), respectively.

Figure 3. Transfers to ongoing child welfare services in investigations involving First Nations infants in Canada (excluding Quebec) in 2019

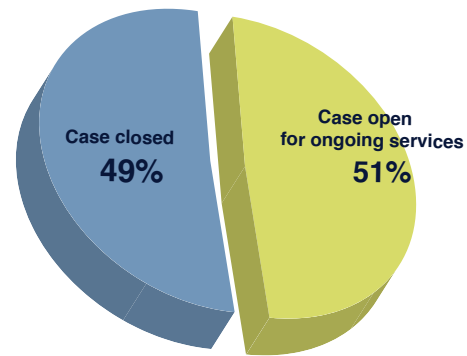


Figure 4. Placements in investigations involving First Nations infants in Canada in 2019

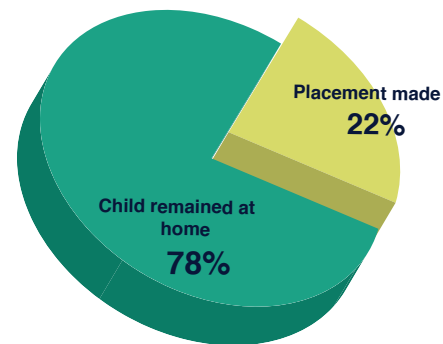
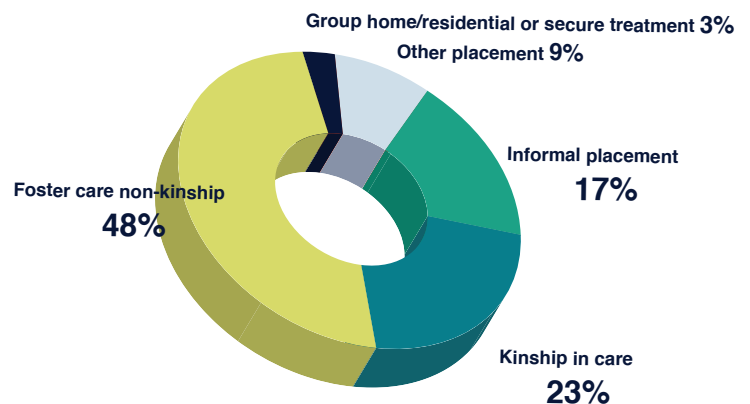


Figure 5. Placement types in investigations involving First Nations infants in Canada in 2019



**Suggested citation:** Carnella, N., Fallon, B., & Saint-Girons, M. (2021). *Child maltreatment-related investigations involving First Nations infants in Canada in 2019*. CWRP Information Sheet #220E. Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal.