Visible Minority, Aboriginal, and Caucasian Children Investigated by Canadian Protective Services

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The aim of this descriptive study was to compare the report profiles of Caucasian, Aboriginal, and other visible minority children whose cases were assessed by child protective services in Canada. The results show that children of Aboriginal ancestry and from visible minority groups are selected for investigation by child protective services 1.77 times more frequently than are children in the general population. Physical abuse is reported and substantiated more often for Asian children, whereas neglect is chiefly an issue with Aboriginal and black children. Child vulnerability factors and parental and housing risk factors alone cannot explain the higher substantiation percentages, except for Aboriginal children, for whom the risks are higher than for the other groups. The individual and family profiles of Asian and black children appear to be significantly less of a burden than those of Aboriginals and Caucasians. These results may reflect a certain degree of racial bias in the identification and reporting of maltreatment cases to child protective services and in decisions about the substantiation of maltreatment.

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In the United States, the fact that children from certain eth-
nocultural groups, especially black children, are overrepre-
sented in the child protective services (CPS) system is rela-
tively well documented (Stoltzfus, 2005). In Canada, where
little research on this question has been done, overrepresenta-
tion in the CPS system has nevertheless been observed for Abo-
riginal children (Blackstock, Trocmé, & Bennett, 2004) and for
black and Latin American children in Quebec (Bernard &
McAll, 2004; Messiers, Doray, & Parisien, 1992). It is increas-
ingly being recognized that Aboriginal and visible minority
families must overcome many systemic obstacles in seeking to
meet the needs of their family members and ensure their well-
being (Mitchell, 2005). The hardships these families face in-
clude labor market entry problems, discrimination (Statistique
Canada, 2003), high rates of poverty, single parents (Campagne
2000, 2006), physical and mental health problems, lack of access to
adequate housing (Mitchell, 2005), living in disadvantaged neigh-
borhoods, and social isolation (Hou & Picot, 2004). Problems of
this kind can often put the parents under considerable stress and
have an adverse impact on family relationships and child care
(Mitchell, 2005).

On top of these many systemic issues, immigrant parents also
face the additional challenge of adapting to their role as parents in
a context in which their values and child-rearing methods are of-
ten different from those advocated by the host culture (Saulniers,
2004). This period of adaptation can be very hard on families and
give rise to problems that put a strain on parent-child relationships
(Mitchell, 2005). Research findings show that recently immigrated
families are more likely to experience intergenerational conflicts,
especially in cases where parents' more traditional standards and
values are challenged by their children, who identify more with
the host society culture and therefore wish they had more inde-

pendence and freedom (Statistique Canada, 2003). The use of corporal punishment in this context seems to be closely tied to the shock of cultural values between parents and children and may in part explain the higher levels of physical abuse reported for some visible minority families (Tourigny & Bouchard, 1994). In addition, recourse to corporal punishment under certain circumstances may also be a major source of conflict between these families and social workers, who tend to see it as harmful to children and readily associate it with abuse (Christensen, 1989). These differences in the way physical abuse is defined go hand in hand, for these families, with an increased risk of being reported to CPS and of government intervention in their lives.

Despite the recent arrival of large numbers of visible minority immigrants (Tran, 2004) and sharp growth in Canada's Aboriginal population (Campagne, 2000, 2006), we still know relatively little about Canadian children from cultural communities and the services available to them (Bernard & McAll, 2004). The data from the *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect* (CIS 2003; Trocmé et al., 2005) provide an opportunity to explore, from a new perspective, how the Canadian CPS system responds to the needs of children from cultural communities. The purpose of our analysis was to compare the report profiles of Caucasian, Aboriginal, and other visible minority children assessed by CPS services in Canada. Aboriginal refers to those people reported being North American Indian, and/or Metis, and/or Inuit and who had registered Indian status as defined by the Indian Act of Canada or Band or Firt Nation (Blackstock et al., 2004). Visible minorities, as defined by the Employment Equity Act, are "persons, other than Aborigi-

nal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-White in colour" (Hou & Picot, 2004). The first objective of the analysis was to compare ethnocultural group children reported to CPS with those in the general population. The second was to examine the different forms of maltreatment for which children's families were investigated. The third was to compare the ethnocultural group profiles based on the form of maltreatment reported, distinguishing especially between physical abuse and other forms of maltreatment. The variables tracked were ethnic origin, forms of reported and substantiated maltreatment, children's characteristics, and parental and housing risk factors.

Method

Sample and Measurements

This analysis makes use of secondary data from the second *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect* (CIS 2003; Trocmé et al., 2005), which examines a core sample of 11,562 cases of children aged 15 and under who were investigated for suspected maltreatment in a representative sample of 63 Child Welfare Service Areas in Canada over a three-month period in the fall of 2003. Cases were selected by means of a stratified cluster sampling process adapted to suit the organization of the child protective services systems in Canada's provinces and territories (except for Quebec). The ethnocultural origin documented in the CIS corresponds to the categories used in the Canadian census. Since, in the CIS, ethnocultural origin is indicated only for the adult caring for the child under investigation, children who were not living with at least one biological parent were excluded from the study (n = 365). In the case of children with two parents of different ethnocultural origins, the research team opted for the origin of the first parent documented by child welfare workers, generally considered the primary parent. Furthermore, to facilitate comparison, children whose parents were recorded as having more than one ethnocultural origin were excluded from the study (n = 85). We

were forced to cut a further 60 cases from the sample because their ethnocultural data were incomplete. Lastly, we also excluded children reported solely for exposure to domestic violence, as this provision does not exist in the legislation of all provinces in Canada and the decision-making process in such cases differs from the one that applies for other forms of maltreatment (n = 1498). All in all, a total of 9,554 children who were reported and investigated by CPS services for suspected maltreatment made up the final sample. The instrument used in the CIS was a three-page standardized data collection form that was completed by a child welfare worker for each report assessed during the investigation period (Trocmé et al., 2005). A wide range of information was gathered as part of the research, including information on the child, his or her living conditions, caregivers, the characteristics of the forms of maltreatment reported, and the decisions made following the investigation. Each question on the form was defined in a guidebook made available to the caseworkers. Only part of the information collected was used in this study.

Variables Considered

The eight ethnocultural origins documented in the CIS were collapsed into six categories: Caucasian, Aboriginal, black, Asian, Latin American, and Arab. The characteristics of the reported cases were divided into four forms of maltreatment (physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional maltreatment). A category for cases involving more than one form of reported maltreatment was created for the purposes of the study. Each of these maltreatment situations could be classified by the caseworkers as a primary or secondary form and assessed as substantiated, nonsubstantiated, or suspected. In our study, the cases assessed corresponded to all maltreatment situations, regardless of their classification or degree of substantiation. Substantiation rates were calculated by taking the number of substantiated cases and dividing it by the number of cases assessed, for each form of maltreatment analyzed. The other variables regarding maltreatment characteristics that were tracked in the study were the suspected perpetrator, physical and emotional

harm, and the source of referral (professional vs. nonprofessional). Child-related characteristics included age and number of problems faced by the child as identified by the caseworkers at the time of the report or during the assessment, taken from a list of categories (physical health, emotional, and cognitive issues, and behavioral problems). Parent-related variables included use of corporal punishment and the number of risk factors, also identified by the caseworkers from a list of nine categories (alcohol abuse, drug abuse, criminal activity, mental health issues, physical health issues, cognitive impairment, domestic violence, lack of social supports, and maltreated as a child). Parental risks and child-functioning issues were considered to exist when the caseworkers indicated that they were known or suspected. Parental risks were added up and grouped into four categories: no risk, one, two, and three risks or more. The same strategy was adopted for child-functioning issues. Lastly, a housing problems indicator was also devised, on the basis of four variables: unsafe housing conditions, overcrowded housing, two or more moves before maltreatment reported, and family living in shelter or public housing. If any of these risks was indicated, a score of one was assigned. Scores were grouped into two categories: no or one risk, and two or more risks.

Analyses

Two types of analyses were conducted: (1) children aged 15 and under from the various ethnocultural groups included in the sample of cases reported to CPS services were compared with children of the same age and from the same groups in the general population; and (2) intergroup comparisons of the forms of reported and substantiated maltreatment and of child and family profiles by means of chi-square analysis and subsequently by post-hoc adjusted residual analysis.

Results

Intergroup differences were first examined by comparing the frequencies obtained for the study sample of children reported to CPS

TABLE 1

Representation of Ethnocultural Groups at System Intake of Canadian Child
Protective Services

ETHNOCULTURAL GROUPS	PERCENTAGE IN THE CANADIAN POPULATION*	PERCENTAGE OF REPORTS
Caucasian	82%	67%
Aboriginal	5%	18%
Black	3%	5%
Asian	9%	7%
Latino	0.5%	2%
Arabic	1%	1%

*Census of 2001 (Statistique Canada, 2006)

services with the data from the 2001 Canada census (Statistique
Canada, 2006). Children of Aboriginal ancestry and from other
visible minorities account for 18.60% of the overall Canadian pop-
ulation aged 15 and under. But Aboriginal and visible minority
children included in the study make up 32.77% of the study sam-
ple, that is, a proportion 1.77 times greater than the proportion in
the general population.

Our results show that Aboriginals constitute the group that is
the most overrepresented, followed by blacks and Latinos. Con-
versely, Caucasians are underrepresented, as are Asians and Arabs.
Interesting to note is that the situation is the opposite for Asian chil-
dren when only physical abuse is considered: Asian children re-
ported for physical abuse account for 14% of the sample, a propor-
tion that is 1.6 times greater than their proportion in the census
data. The absolute and relative proportions of the various forms of
maltreatment reported and substantiated by child welfare workers
for each ethnocultural group are shown in Table 2. Owing to the
small number of Latino and Arab children, they were grouped to-
gether in the "Other" category for analysis purposes.

With regard to the forms of maltreatment reported, the propor-

TABLE 2

Reported and Substantiated Forms of Maltreatment, by Ethnocultural Group

	CAUCASIAN N = 6398 N = 2788	ABORIGINAL N = 1690 N = 869	BLACK N = 515 N = 229	ASIAN N = 634 N = 304	OTHER N = 317 N = 137
Only physical abuse					
Reported***	20.6%⁻ (1339)	9.3%⁻ (153)	36%⁺ (173)	39.1%⁺ (242)	25.6%⁺ (78)
*Substantiated***	35%⁻ (468)	42.5% (65)	41% (71)	46.7%⁺ (113)	34.6%⁻ (27)
Only sexual abuse					
Reported*	5.5% (356)	5.8% (96)	3.5%⁻ (17)	3.1%⁻ (19)	4.9%⁻ (15)
*Substantiated*ns	21.3% (76)	20.8% (21)	11.8% (2)	5.3% (1)	6.7% (1)
Only neglect					
Reported*	30.8%⁻ (2005)	39.9%⁺ (657)	25.2%⁻ (12)	25.7%⁻ (153)	26.6%⁻ (81)
*Substantiated****	36.1% (723)	50%⁺ (329)	52.1% (63)	40.5%⁻ (62)	27.2% (22)
Only emotional maltreatment					
Reported*	11.9%⁺ (772)	8.1%⁻ (133)	10.6%⁻ (51)	8.2%⁻ (51)	7.5%⁻ (23)
*Substantiated*ns	44.8% (346)	43.6% (58)	51% (26)	45.1% (23)	27.1% (23)
Multiple forms					
Reported*	31.3%⁻ (2033)	36.8%⁺ (606)	24.6%⁻ (118)	24.9%⁻ (154)	35.4% (108)
*Substantiated*ns	57.8%⁻ (1175)	65.3%⁺ (396)	56.8%⁻ (67)	68.2%⁺ (105)	59.3%⁻ (64)

+ = adjusted residual > 1.96; − = adjusted residual ≤ 1.96.
*ns not significant; * p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01; *** p ≤ .001.*

tions vary by ethnocultural group. Physical abuse is reported more for Asians and blacks than it is for Aboriginals and Caucasians. Neglect and multiple forms of maltreatment are more prevalent among Aboriginal children. Sexual abuse is reported in similar proportions among Caucasians and Aboriginals. Emotional maltreatment is more of a problem for Caucasians than for other children. When it comes to substantiation rates, intergroup differences are no longer significant for sexual abuse and emotional maltreatment; they are still noticeable for physical abuse, which is more of a problem for Asian and black children than it is for Caucasians. The difference between these two groups and Aboriginal children is tending to disappear, however, as abuse among Aboriginals seems to be substantiated just as often as among black children. In the case of

neglect and multiple forms of maltreatment, substantiation rates are still higher for Aboriginals than for Caucasians. The differences between Aboriginals and the other visible minority groups are tending to fade. In light of the previously mentioned differences and similarities, the ethnocultural groups were analyzed by isolating cases of physical abuse (without co-occurrence) from those involving other forms of maltreatment. This approach was taken in an effort to obtain a more detailed description of the reporting of physical abuse for these different communities. Intergroup differences with respect to the characteristics of reports, children, and parents, for physical abuse cases only, excluding the "other minorities" (i.e., Latino and Arab) category, are indicated in Table 3.

Reports about children from visible minority groups came chiefly from professional referral sources, whereas those involving Aboriginals and whites originated primarily with nonprofessional sources. Results indicate that cases of physical abuse that occur in connection with corporal punishment are more frequent for all minorities, with the highest percentage being among Asians. Where physical abuse specifically is an issue in the report, it can be seen that Asians and blacks are overrepresented in the category "Hit with Object." Aboriginals are overrepresented in the category "Other Physical Abuse." The category "Shake, Push, etc." applies more to Caucasians than to Aboriginals and the other minorities. Lastly, there are hardly any intergroup differences in the categories "Hit with Hand" and "Punch, Kick, or Bite." An examination of children's ages shows that 6- to 11-year-olds are much more frequently reported among Asians and blacks than are other groups. The youngest children (0 to 5 years old) are reported more frequently in the case of Aboriginals and blacks than Caucasians or Asians. Teenagers (12 to 17 years old) are more frequently reported among Caucasians and significantly less in all the other groups. Mothers identified as having perpetrated physical abuse are more common among blacks and Asians than among Caucasians and Aboriginals. Fathers who are reported as having committed physical abuse are much more common among Asians than in the other

TABLE 3

Characteristics of Reports of Physical Abuse (Without Co-occurrence),
Parental and Housing Risk Factors, and Age of Child, by Ethnocultural Group

	CAUCASIAN N = 1339		ABORIGINAL N = 153		BLACK N = 173		ASIAN N = 242	
Age group of child*								
0–5 years	23.1%$^-$	(306)	29.6%	(47)	28.7%	(51)	23.6%$^-$	(66)
6–11 years	43.6%$^-$	(577)	48.4%$^+$	(77)	54.5%$^+$	(97)	53.9%$^+$	(151)
12–15 years	33.2%$^+$	(439)	22%$^-$	(35)	16.9%$^-$	(30)	22.5%$^-$	(63)
Abuse in connection with punishment *	46.2%$^-$	(618)	54.9%$^-$	(84)	60.1%$^+$	(104)	64.5%$^+$	(156)
Subcategories of physical abuse*								
Shake, push, grab, throw	26.7%$^+$	(358)	20.3%$^-$	(31)	11%$^-$	(19)	9.9%$^-$	(24)
Hit with hand	40.5%$^-$	(542)	35.9%$^-$	(55)	46.2%	(80)	43.4%	(105)
Punch, kick, or bite	8%	(107)	8.5%$^-$	(13)	5.8%$^-$	(10)	3.7%$^-$	(9)
Hit with object	13.5%$^-$	(181)	9.8%$^-$	(15)	31.8%$^+$	(55)	34.3%$^+$	(83)
Other physical abuse	11.3%$^-$	(151)	25.5%$^+$	(39)	5.2%$^-$	(9)	8.7%$^-$	(21)
Presumed perpetrator								
Biological father**	32.7%$^-$	(438)	31.4%$^-$	(48)	34.7%	(60)	46.3%$^+$	(112)
Biological mother***	48.2%$^-$	(645)	49%$^-$	(75)	69.4%$^+$	(120)	64%$^+$	(155)
Mother's boyfriend***	11.5%$^+$	(154)	9.8%	(15)	0.6%$^-$	(1)	2.1%$^-$	(5)
Harm								
Physical^{ns}	15.2%	(204)	15%	(23)	10.4%$^-$	(18)	14%$^-$	(34)
Emotional***	11.3%$^+$	(151)	9.8%	(15)	5.8%$^-$	(10)	2.9%$^-$	(7)
Parent-related risk factors*								
None	49%$^-$	(656)	58.4%$^-$	(74)	60%$^+$	(104)	70.2%$^+$	(150)
One only	11.6%$^-$	(155)	13.1%	(20)	8.7%$^-$	(15)	14%	(34)
Two	8.4%	(113)	10.5%	(16)	9.8%	(17)	4.5%$^-$	(11)
Three or more	31.0%$^+$	(415)	28.1%	(43)	21.4%$^-$	(37)	11.2%$^-$	(11)
Housing risk factors*								
None or one risk	99%	(1326)	94.1%$^-$	(144)	100%	(173)	100%	(242)
Two or more	1%$^-$	(13)	5.5%$^+$	(9)	nil	nil	nil	nil
Source of referral								
Professionals***	76.2%$^-$	(1020)	66%$^-$	(101)	85%$^+$	(147)	93.8%$^+$	(227)
Nonprofessionals***	19.9%$^+$	(266)	29.4%$^+$	(45)	12.1%$^-$	(21)	3.7%$^-$	(9)

$+$ = adjusted residual >1.96; $-$ = adjusted residual ≤ 1.96.
*ns not significant; * p $\leq$ .05; ** p $\leq$ .01; *** p $\leq$ .001.*

groups. Surrogate fathers, on the other hand, are almost completely absent from the Asian and black families in our sample compared with the Caucasians and Aboriginals. What may come as a surprise is that the emotional harm caused by maltreatment is identified by child welfare workers more frequently in the case of Caucasians and Aboriginals than the other minority groups. On the other hand, no difference could be seen between the groups with respect to physical harm. The analysis also shows that Asians and blacks have to struggle less with parental and housing risk factors than Aboriginals and Caucasians. Intergroup differences with respect to cases reported for other forms of maltreatment are shown in Table 4. All cases of physical abuse alone or in co-occurrence with other forms of maltreatment were excluded from the analysis.

As far as substantiation rates are concerned, neglect was substantiated in similar proportions for both Aboriginals and blacks. Sexual abuse and emotional maltreatment affected all groups equally. Lastly, multiple forms of maltreatment were substantiated much more frequently among Aboriginals than in any of the other groups. With respect to age, the youngest children were more frequently cited in reports involving Aboriginals and the other minorities, whereas 12- to 15-year-olds were more commonly reported in the case of Caucasians. An examination of child vulnerability and parental and housing risk factors revealed significant differences between the groups. Asians and blacks seem to struggle much less frequently with functioning issues than do Aboriginals and Caucasians, and are also less likely to have to cope with three or more such issues than the latter two groups. A similar tendency can be seen in the case of parental risks, with the other minorities being more frequently identified as having no parental risks. They are also less likely than Aboriginals and Caucasians to be exposed to three or more parental risks. Compared with Aboriginals and Caucasians, the parents of visible minority children have significantly fewer alcohol and drug abuse, physical and mental health, social support, and maltreatment history issues. Criminal activity appears to be the only issue for which the percentage of parents of black

TABLE 4

Characteristics of Reports of Forms of Maltreatment Other Than Physical Abuse,
Parental and Housing Risk Factors, Functioning Issues, and Age of Child,
by Ethnocultural Group

	CAUCASIAN	ABORIGINAL	BLACK	ASIAN
	N = 4213	N = 1332	N = 251	N = 271
Age group of child *				
0–5 years	35.1%$^-$ (1479)	42.8%$^+$ (570)	43% (108)	42.1% (114)
6–11 years	39.4% (1662)	36.6%$^-$ (487)	36.3%$^-$ (91)	39.9% (108)
12–15 years	25.4%$^+$ (1072)	20.6%$^-$ (275)	20.7%$^-$ (52)	18.1%$^-$ (49)
Child-functioning issues*				
None	53.3%$^-$ (2244)	51.5%$^-$ (690)	68.1%$^+$ (171)	70.1%$^+$ (190)
One only	13.1%$^-$ (554)	15.1%$^+$ (201)	10.8%$^-$ (27)	10%$^-$ (27)
Two	8.5% (360)	8.8% (117)	6%$^-$ (15)	9.2% (25)
Three or more	25%$^+$ (1055)	24.3%$^+$ (324)	15.1%$^-$ (38)	10.7%$^-$ (29)
Parent-related risk factors*				
None	25.8%$^+$ (1085)	11%$^-$ (147)	25.9% (65)	26.9% (73)
One only	17.2% (723)	11.4%$^-$ (152)	21.9%$^+$ (55)	27.3%$^+$ (74)
Two	14.6%$^+$ (614)	9.8%$^-$ (131)	19.5%$^+$ (49)	12.9%$^-$ (35)
Three or more	42.5% (1791)	67.7%$^+$ (902)	32.7%$^-$ (82)	32.8%$^-$ (89)
Housing risk factors*				
None or only one risk	95%$^+$ (4002)	87.2%$^-$ (1162)	97.6%$^+$ (245)	99.6%$^+$ (270)
Two or more	5%$^-$ (211)	12.8%$^+$ (170)	2.4%$^-$ (6)	0.4%$^-$ (1)
Forms of substantiated maltreatment				
Only sexual abuse ^{ns}	21.3% (280)	21.9% (21)	11.8%$^-$ (2)	5.3%$^-$ (1)
Neglect***	36.1%$^-$ (723)	50.1%$^+$ (329)	52.1%$^+$ (63)	40.5% (62)
Only emotional maltreatment^{ns}	44.8%$^-$ (346)	43.6%$^-$ (58)	51% (26)	45.1% (23)
Multiple forms ***	25.6%$^-$ (1080)	33.5%$^+$ (446)	24.7%$^-$ (62)	17.7%$^-$ (48)
Source of referral				
Professionals***	56.7%$^-$ (2389)	59.8% (796)	68.9%$^+$ (173)	81.9%$^+$ (222)
Nonprofessionals***	32.9%$^+$ (1388)	32.4% (431)	22.3%$^-$ (56)	11.8%$^-$ (32)

$+$ = adjusted residual >1.96; $-$ = adjusted residual ≤ 1.96.
ns not significant; * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

children (19.4%) slightly exceeds that of Caucasian parents (15.7%). Lastly, the visible minorities are also less likely than the others to be struggling with housing risks.

Discussion

The comparison of Caucasian, Aboriginal, and other visible minority children highlights some major differences between these groups with respect to disproportionate representation at the intake to Canada's CPS system as well as to the profile of reports, children, and families. The results show that compared with the general population, children from some minorities, especially Aboriginals, blacks, and Latinos, are overrepresented among the cases selected for investigation by the Canadian CPS system. Overrepresentation of Aboriginals was also noted in a previous study based on the first CIS survey (CIS-98; Blackstock et al., 2004). That study revealed that this overrepresentation also existed at the maltreatment substantiation stage and at the placement stage. Aboriginal children are similarly overrepresented in the CPS system in the United States. In an analysis of CPS data for Minnesota, Ards, Myers, Malkis, Sugrue, and Zhou (2003) estimated that cases of reported maltreatment of Aboriginal children were nearly four to five times more likely to be substantiated than their demographic weight in the general population would normally indicate. Our results respecting children from the other ethnocultural groups examined are in line with those of other, mostly U.S. studies showing that black and Latino children are overrepresented at CPS system intake in the United States, while Caucasian children are *underrepresented* (Ards et al., 2003). Asian children are a special case, because their *underrepresentation* at intake gives way to overrepresentation when reported physical abuse alone is considered. Some studies have also noted an underrepresentation of Asian children in the U.S. CPS system (Ards et al., 2003; Lu et al., 2004; Stoltzfus, 2005), but few have observed the reverse tendency. We should point out that as far as we know, no study has yet examined the question of dispropor-

tionate representation by form of reported maltreatment.

Results regarding forms of maltreatment show that physical abuse is more of a problem for children from certain visible minority groups than it is for Caucasians, both at the assessment stage and at the substantiation decision stage. Neglect and multiple forms of maltreatment are more frequent among Aboriginals at the assessment stage, but not at the substantiation decision stage, as these types of maltreatment also affect other minorities such as blacks and Asians. The frequency of neglect in the reports on Aboriginal children corroborates, in part, the results of Blackstock et al. (2004), who revealed that substantiated and suspected cases among these children were more likely to include neglect, especially a lack of supervision, than physical or sexual abuse. The same study also showed that Aboriginal children more often lived in precarious socioeconomic conditions and that their parents were more likely to be struggling with a higher number of functioning issues such as alcoholism and criminal activity. All these realities are evidence of the adverse effects that the government of Canada's assimilationist policies are having and may well be the reason why these children are overrepresented in the Canadian CPS system. The fact that neglect is just as frequently substantiated for black children as for Aboriginals suggests that substantiation decisions may also be influenced by similar risk factors.

A higher proportion of substantiated cases of reported physical abuse among visible minority groups has already been noted in a number of studies. However, these same studies also reveal that black and Hispanic children are the ones chiefly associated with this form of maltreatment, compared with Caucasians and other visible minorities (Drake et al., 1996; Tourigny & Bouchard, 1994). Intergroup comparison of cases of physical abuse enabled more precise identification of the characteristics associated with these situations. First, results showed that cases of physical abuse involving visible minority children, and especially Asian children, occur the most often in connection with corporal punishment, affect 6- to 11-year-olds the most, and are more likely to involve the

use of an object to hit the child. In addition, mothers are the ones most often identified as the perpetrators of the abuse in the case of blacks and Asians. The extent of physical abuse in visible minority families appears to be closely associated with disciplinary methods and child-rearing practices different from those advocated by the majority culture. It is well known that many visible minority groups espouse values and child-rearing philosophies which stress filial devotion, strict obedience of children, and respect for parental authority, and which condone the use of corporal punishment under certain circumstances (Legault & Roy, 2000). Even if, in some communities, resorting to this kind of disciplinary method may be done for child-rearing reasons or with an adaptive purpose in mind (Tourigny & Bouchard, 1994), such practices are increasingly deemed unacceptable by Canadian society. The level of tolerance for these practices would also appear to be quite low among community professionals, given the fact that they are primarily the ones who report these cases to Canadian CPS agencies. The major differences noted with respect to referral sources may also indicate differences in cultural attitudes between the various communities regarding how to solve parent-child conflicts. As some authors point out, the fact that some visible minorities (e.g., Asians) look to the immediate and extended family when seeking support for dealing with family problems means that the members of these communities tend not to call on CPS agencies to ensure children's safety (Maiter, Alaggia, & Trocmé, 2004). It is also possible that the differences in referral sources are attributable to differences in the way the members of these communities and professionals define situations of abuse, especially those that occur in connection with corporal punishment (Tourigny & Bouchard, 1994). Contrary to what might have been expected, caseworkers identified less emotional harm among visible minority children than among Caucasian and Aboriginal children. However, results also showed that substantiated reporting rates of physical abuse are higher for visible minorities than for Caucasians. The existence of a greater number of risk factors for these families is not sufficient to explain the higher percent-

ages either, except of course in the case of Aboriginals, for whom the risk factors appear to be much greater than for the other groups. Results revealed that the parents of black and Asian children had fewer personal issues and lived in less difficult housing environments than Aboriginals and Caucasians. These results tend to echo those of studies showing that there is a certain degree of racial bias affecting decisions about the substantiation of reported cases of maltreatment (Ards, Chung, & Myers, 1999; Ards et al., 2003; Trocmé, Knoke, Fallon, & McLaurin, 2006). An accurate picture of this phenomenon will obviously require a more comprehensive investigation, however.

Analysis of reports of other forms of maltreatment revealed that, even when physical abuse cases, which seem to be associated chiefly with a clash of child-rearing practices and cultural values, are excluded, visible minority children are still different from Aboriginal and Caucasian children with respect to risk factors. Contrary to what might have been expected, child-functioning problems or parental or housing issues are not identified by caseworkers to the same degree for visible minorities as for Aboriginal and Caucasian families. One possible explanation for this is that immigrant families, in overcoming the many obstacles and challenges they face in integrating into the host society, have developed a greater capacity to deal with stress (Tourigny & Bouchard, 1994). It is also possible that child welfare workers have more trouble identifying problems in these families than in others because they lack the cultural competency required to accurately decode the sociocultural world and family structures and dynamics of immigrants from non-Western countries.

Conclusion

This study documents the disproportionate representation of children from certain visible minority groups in the Canadian CPS system and provides a detailed description of the reports of physical abuse and other forms of maltreatment assessed by child wel-

fare workers at system intake. The study method did not make it possible, however, to identify precisely the factors responsible for this overrepresentation or for the differences noted between the groups by form of maltreatment analyzed. Albeit descriptive, our results nevertheless underscore the importance of taking into account the cultural background of the children reported to CPS agencies, when analyzing their situation, in order to get a more accurate picture of the complexity of their reality and the diversity of their families' needs. The results of our study also suggest that CPS strategies will only be effective if they are tailored to suit specific ethnocultural groups. In this respect, more prevention-oriented approaches to the issue of corporal punishment could be taken with families from certain minority groups. Moreover, from a broader perspective, there are also strong grounds for tackling the social causes that underlie parents' poverty and stress and compromise children's development and social integration.

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