



HIGHLIGHTS

# VIOLENCE AND MALTREATMENT

*Are Quebec's youngest children safe from harm?*

OBSERVATOIRE  
des tout-petits



Fondation Lucie  
et André Chagnon

If you really look  
a child, you can



into the eyes of  
see our future.



Every day in Quebec,  
Directors of Youth Protection receive  
at least **20** new substantiated  
reports of maltreatment for children  
5 years of age and under.

The rate of substantiated  
reports rose by **27%**  
between 2007-2008 and 2015-2016.

# What is maltreatment?

Child maltreatment includes all forms of neglect and abuse that could endanger a child's security, development, or physical and psychological integrity. Failure to respond to children's needs is as much a form of maltreatment as physical or psychological acts committed against them.

There are different definitions of maltreatment, depending on the expert consulted. In Quebec, cases of maltreatment under the Youth Protection Act include abandonment, neglect, psychological ill-treatment, sexual abuse and physical abuse.

To provide a clearer picture of what certain very young Quebecers are experiencing, two types of data are presented in this document:

- **Data compiled by youth protection services**
- **Data from Quebec household surveys**

It is important to specify, however, that these data may underestimate the extent of maltreatment as not all violent behaviours are reported in studies and not all situations are reported to the Directors of Youth Protection (DYPs).

# Why do we need to be concerned?

Since very young children are less exposed to public view, they may be more vulnerable to maltreatment than their older counterparts. Unlike school-aged children, they are sometimes isolated at home.

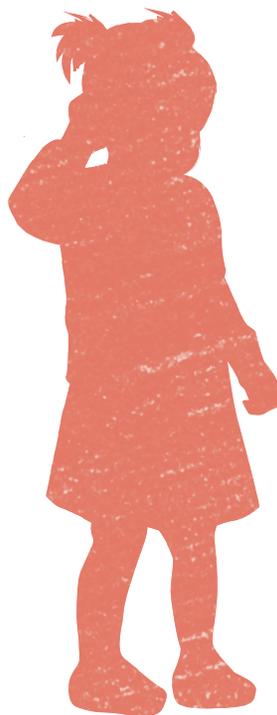
The negative effects of maltreatment can affect several aspects of a child's development.



**Cognitive development:**  
language delay, attention and memory problems.



**Emotional development:**  
depressive behaviour, anxiety, low self-esteem, difficulty controlling emotions.

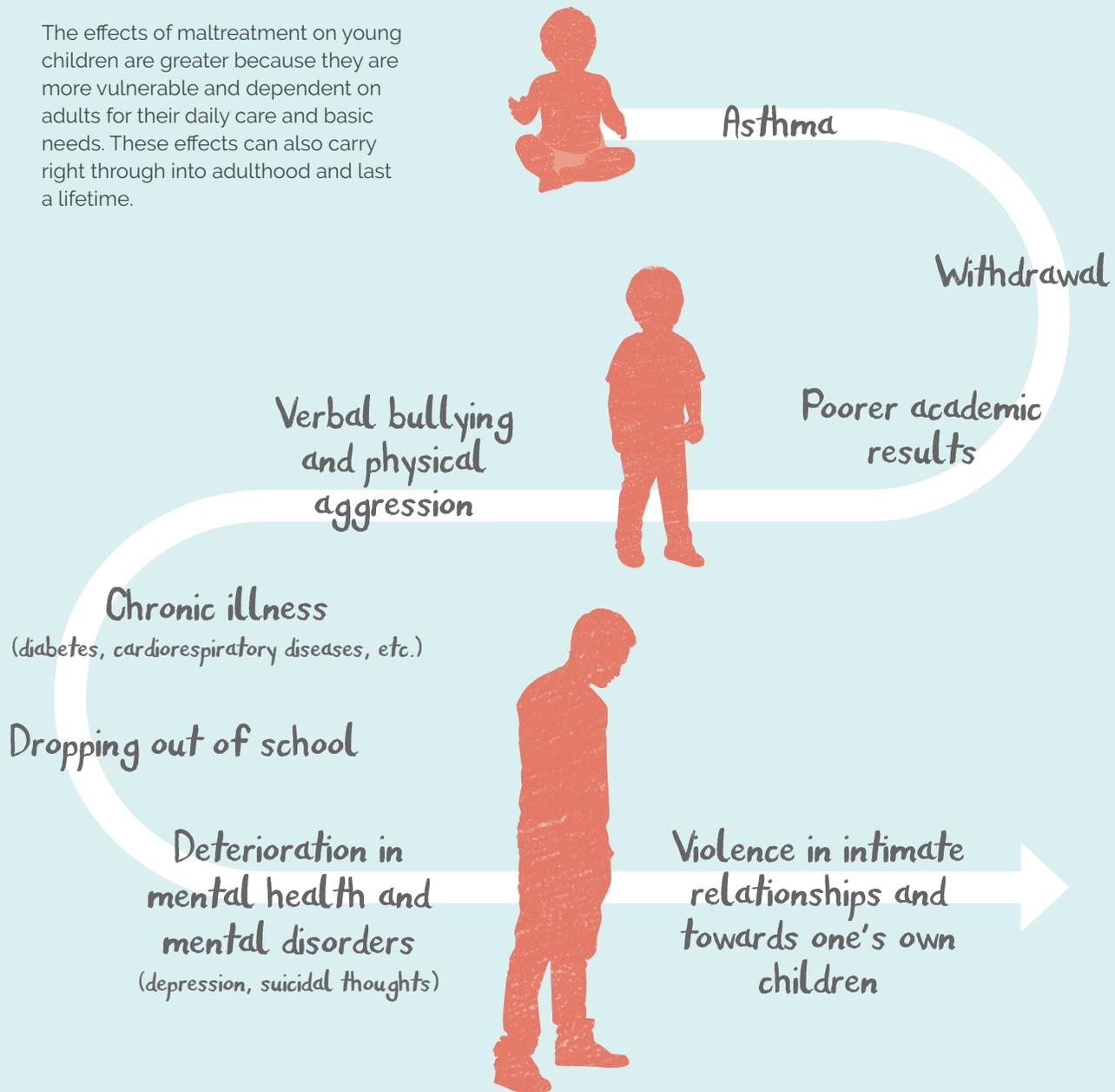


**Physical development:**  
altered brain structure, malnutrition, vision and hearing problems, dental problems, epilepsy, paralysis.



**Social development:**  
withdrawal, avoidance, anger, aggression, opposition.

The effects of maltreatment on young children are greater because they are more vulnerable and dependent on adults for their daily care and basic needs. These effects can also carry right through into adulthood and last a lifetime.



# Reports to Directors of Youth Protection: the figures

(children 5 years of age and under)

**The rate of substantiated reports in 2015-2016 increased by 27%** as compared to 2007-2008. Substantiated reports of physical abuse and psychological ill-treatment also increased significantly during the same period.

On the whole, there was a **decrease in the severity of substantiated cases**. However, **the proportion of very young maltreated children who repeatedly experienced maltreatment rose** from 65% to 72% between 2008 and 2014.

## *Report received*

Any situation reported to the Directors of Youth Protection (DYPs).

## *Substantiated report*

Based on its evaluation, the DYP considers that the details contained in the report are indicative of an actual case of maltreatment. Once the report has been substantiated, the DYP determines whether or not the child requires protection.

How many reports of situations concerning children 5 years of age and under did DYPs receive in 2015-2016?

27,946 reports

After evaluation, how many of those reports were considered to be substantiated?

7,700 reports

In how many of these cases was the child's security or development in danger, requiring intervention by the DYP?

4,101 reports

What was the primary reason for these substantiated reports?

**Neglect**

(including serious risk of neglect)

3,793 reports

**Physical abuse**

(including serious risk of physical abuse)

1,864 reports

**Psychological ill-treatment**

1,570 reports

**Sexual abuse**

(including serious risk of sexual abuse)

461 reports

**Abandonment**

12 reports

# What household surveys tell us

Household surveys provide us with data on violent parental behaviour. Even if all forms of violent behaviour do not have an impact on children's physical or psychological integrity, **they can affect their development and increase the risk of maltreatment.**

According to Quebec household surveys conducted in 2004 and 2012, although **minor physical violence is on the decline**, the proportions of very young victims of repeated psychological abuse and severe physical violence have remained relatively unchanged.

**For more information on the situation of very young children in Quebec, please consult the complete report online at [tout-petits.org/maltraitance](http://tout-petits.org/maltraitance).**

## *Minor physical violence*

Shaking (in the case of children 2 or over), spanking on the buttocks with a bare hand, slapping a hand, arm or leg, or pinching.

## *Severe physical violence*

Acts that present a high risk of injury: shaking a child under 2 years of age, hitting them on the buttocks or other part of the body with a hard object (such as a belt or stick), punching or kicking, choking, beating, throwing a child on the ground or hitting them on the face, head or ears.

## *Psychological ill-treatment*

Forms of communication that can affect a child's well-being, including shouting or screaming at a child, swearing, threatening to hit or abandon them or throw them out, or humiliating them (calling them names).

*In 2012, what proportion of children between the ages of 0 and 5 were victims of...*

*In 2012, what proportion of children were exposed to...*

*severe physical violence at least once during the previous year?*

**4.3%**

*minor physical violence at least once during the previous year?*

**47.8%**

*repeated minor physical violence (three times or more) during the previous year?*

**16.9%**

*repeated psychological abuse (three time or more) during the previous year?*

**43.8%**

*both minor physical violence and repeated psychological abuse during the previous year?*

**26.6%**

*intimate partner violence?*

**26.5%**

# Are there any known risk factors?

No single risk factor is solely responsible for maltreatment: the causes are generally multiple and closely interrelated.



## HOUSEHOLD SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Unfavourable socio-economic conditions are often associated with maltreatment. Such conditions include single parenthood, poverty and poor social support. Among the children evaluated by youth protection services whose cases were documented in a 2014 study, 65% were living with parents who had no employment income at the time of the report.



## STRESS RELATED TO PARENTING AND WORK-FAMILY BALANCE

Several studies have shown parental stress to be a risk factor for violent parental behaviour, especially stress related to reconciling work and family responsibilities.



## PARENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

Being in favour of corporal punishment increases the risk of using it. This situation is worrying: corporal punishment in the form of minor physical violence is associated with an increased risk of severe physical violence.



### **PARENTS SUFFERING FROM DEPRESSION, ANXIETY AND PERSONALITY DISORDERS**

According to one study, 13% of the children evaluated by youth protection services in 2014 had at least one parent who was dealing with a mental health disorder.



### **PARENTS' EXCESSIVE USE OF ALCOHOL OR DRUGS**

The same study shows that 9% of the children evaluated by youth protection services in 2014 were living with at least one parent with a drug use problem, and 8% were living with at least one parent with a drinking problem.

**Statistics reveal that many Quebec families are affected by one or other of these risk factors.**

Life is harder for some parents.  
Some don't have enough money.  
Some are alone. Some are just exhausted.

# How can we act collectively to prevent maltreatment?

Many programs aimed at the prevention of maltreatment are designed to support adults in their role as parents (such as Quebec's *Services intégrés en périnatalité et pour la petite enfance*, or SIPPE). These programs are only one of many strategies for preventing maltreatment. To increase their effectiveness, they must be combined with social or collective measures.

The approaches described below are examples of some interesting possibilities that have been shown to be effective or promising elsewhere around the world.

## INCREASING ECONOMIC SUPPORT FOR DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES

Children in vulnerable families that are able to benefit from a social assistance program are less likely to be the subject of a report retained by youth protection services.

## WORKING TO CHANGE SOCIAL NORMS AND PROMOTE POSITIVE PARENTING PRACTICES

Countries that have adopted a law prohibiting any form of corporal punishment have seen a decrease in the frequency of corporal punishment and an increase in the use of non-violent disciplinary measures. Such legislation can have a real impact on the reduction of maltreatment, as there is a fine line between corporal punishment and abuse. Since the risks of escalation are high, corporal punishment can rapidly evolve into severe physical violence.

## PROVIDING PRACTITIONERS WHO SUPPORT PARENTS WITH TRAINING AND TOOLS

Children who are seen by a professional who has been trained to detect signs of maltreatment and provide parents with support are less likely to be victims of maltreatment or suffer psychological and minor physical abuse.

## OFFERING EDUCATIONAL CHILDCARE SERVICES AND PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS EARLY IN CHILDREN'S LIVES

By providing children with stimulation and structure while offering parents respite and support, quality educational childcare could help reduce the risk of maltreatment.

## FACILITATING ACCESS TO QUALITY HOUSING AND LIVING ENVIRONMENTS

A relationship has been observed between overcrowded family homes and the number of times parents report having hit or slapped their children during the previous week. Studies have also made a connection between neighbourhood disadvantage and maltreatment.

Programs designed to prevent  
**maltreatment** by providing parents  
with support are **more effective**  
when combined with complementary **social**  
or **collective measures**.

### ***Do similar measures exist in Quebec?***

The following measures already exist in Quebec and should be preserved, although their implementation is not always optimal and could be improved. Further measures need to be considered.

- Quebec has set up measures aimed at improving families' economic situations. Policies like the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan help parents reconcile work and family responsibilities.
- Certain university programs that train future helping or health professionals are starting to focus on the prevention of maltreatment. Since this training is left to the discretion of the individual institution, however, it has not yet been standardized. Some community organizations working to prevent violence are tackling this subject with education professionals in schools and daycare facilities.
- In Quebec, junior kindergarten (for 4-year-olds) and educational childcare (*Services de garde éducatifs à l'enfance*, or SGEE) offer educational services for very young children. Some CLSCs and community organizations that organize early stimulation workshops for preschoolers also act as support networks for parents who want to improve their parenting skills.
- Quebec's *Politique gouvernementale de prévention en santé* addresses the question of communities, housing and living conditions. Furthermore, Quebec municipalities are currently encouraging the creation of family- and child-friendly environments.



There are **solutions**.  
Let's do everything we can  
to give all our children the best possible  
start in life.

# Acting now, acting together

The maltreatment of children remains a concern in Quebec, affecting thousands of very young children every year. Because very young children are especially vulnerable, maltreatment can have serious impacts on their present and future lives.

There *are* solutions. Several social measures have proven to be effective or promising in preventing maltreatment, but their application in Quebec has yet to be evaluated.

**Together, we can take action to prevent maltreatment against the youngest Quebecers and help each of them to develop their full potential.**

We need to work *together*  
to prevent *child maltreatment*  
and make sure all young children  
and their families have the support  
*they need.*

## The Early Childhood Observatory (*Observatoire des tout-petits*) has prepared a comprehensive report on the maltreatment of children between 0 and 5 years of age.

This special report presents the most recent data available on young Quebec children between the ages of 0 and 5 who are victims of maltreatment, looking at the impacts on their development. The document also includes a review of collective measures and public policies that have been helping to prevent the maltreatment of 0-5 year-olds. **It also includes:**



An awareness **video**

---



A comprehensive 42-page **report**

---



**Information for decision-makers:**  
*The costs of child maltreatment in Quebec*

---

To consult our complete report on the maltreatment of the very young, visit  
[tout-petits.org/maltraitance](http://tout-petits.org/maltraitance)

# OBSERVATOIRE des tout-petits

The mission of the Early Childhood Observatory is to help ensure that the development and well-being of Quebec's very youngest children has a place on the province's list of social priorities. In order to do so, the Observatory compiles the most rigorous data on 0-5 year-olds which it then disseminates to incite dialogue on collective actions in this area.

[Tout-petits.org](http://Tout-petits.org)



Fondation Lucie  
et André Chagnon