



VIOLENCE AND MALTREATMENT

Are Quebec's youngest children safe from harm?

OBSERVATOIRE
des tout-petits



Fondation Lucie
et André Chagnon

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Highlights

In 2015-2016, Quebec's Directors of Youth Protection received **27,946 reports of situations involving children 5 years of age and under**, representing an increase of 40% in the rate of reports received as compared to 2007-2008. Of all the reports received in 2015-2016, more than one out of four (28%) were substantiated. **That represents a total of 7,700 reports, or approximately 20 new situations of maltreatment every day. The rate of substantiated reports rose by 27% over 2007-2008.**

Substantiated reports in 2015-2016 concerning very young children were primarily prompted by neglect and physical abuse. Substantiated reports of physical abuse of very young children increased, as did those of psychological abuse. On the whole, there was a decrease in the severity of substantiated cases. However, the proportion of very young abused children who were repeatedly subjected to maltreatment rose from 65% to 72% between 2008 and 2014, after having declined from 83% to 65% between 1998 and 2008.

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. **In 2012, one young child out of four (27%) was subjected to both repeated psychological abuse and minor physical violence.**

The maltreatment of children remains a troubling issue in Quebec. Given the greater vulnerability of babies, toddlers and preschoolers, such situations can have serious repercussions on their security and development. In addition, **the rate of substantiated reports requiring intervention by the DYP rose by 20%** between 2007-2008 and 2015-2016.

HOW CAN WE PROTECT OUR CHILDREN?

The environments in which young children are growing up can increase their risk of being victims of maltreatment. Risk factors include socio-economic conditions, parental stress and parental mental health problems. Statistics show that many Quebec families are dealing with one or other of these situations.

Scientific literature tells us that there are various collective drivers that can have an impact on these conditions. **Several social measures have been shown to be effective or promising in preventing maltreatment:** promoting access to quality housing and living environments and offering financial assistance to families who need it, support for parents or access to quality daycare services. Together, we can take action to prevent maltreatment against the youngest Quebecers and help each of them to develop their full potential.

What is maltreatment?

The maltreatment suffered by children aged 5 and under is a serious concern for Quebec society. It affects thousands of these very young children, with potentially serious consequences for their present and future lives.

Maltreatment of children 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 report:

- **Data compiled by youth protection services:** These data concern reports of maltreatment received, substantiated reports, forms of maltreatment of very young children, application of protective measures and placement in substitute care.
- **Data from Quebec household surveys:** These data provide information on four types of violent behaviour towards children: minor physical violence, severe physical violence, repeated psychological abuse and exposure to intimate partner violence.

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.

Maltreatment of children includes all forms of neglect and abuse that could endanger a child's security, development, or physical and psychological integrity.

If you really look
a child, you can





into the eyes of
see our future.

Why do we need to be concerned?

The greater the frequency, severity and persistence of incidents of violence and maltreatment, the greater their impact on healthy childhood development. Similarly, the earlier violence and maltreatment begins in a child's life, the more serious the consequences.

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.

It is also important to remember that very young children may also be more vulnerable to maltreatment than older children because they are less exposed to public view. Unlike older school-aged children, they are sometimes isolated at home.

NUMEROUS CONSEQUENCES

Maltreatment of children can have multiple consequences.



Cognitive development:
language delay, attention and memory problems.



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



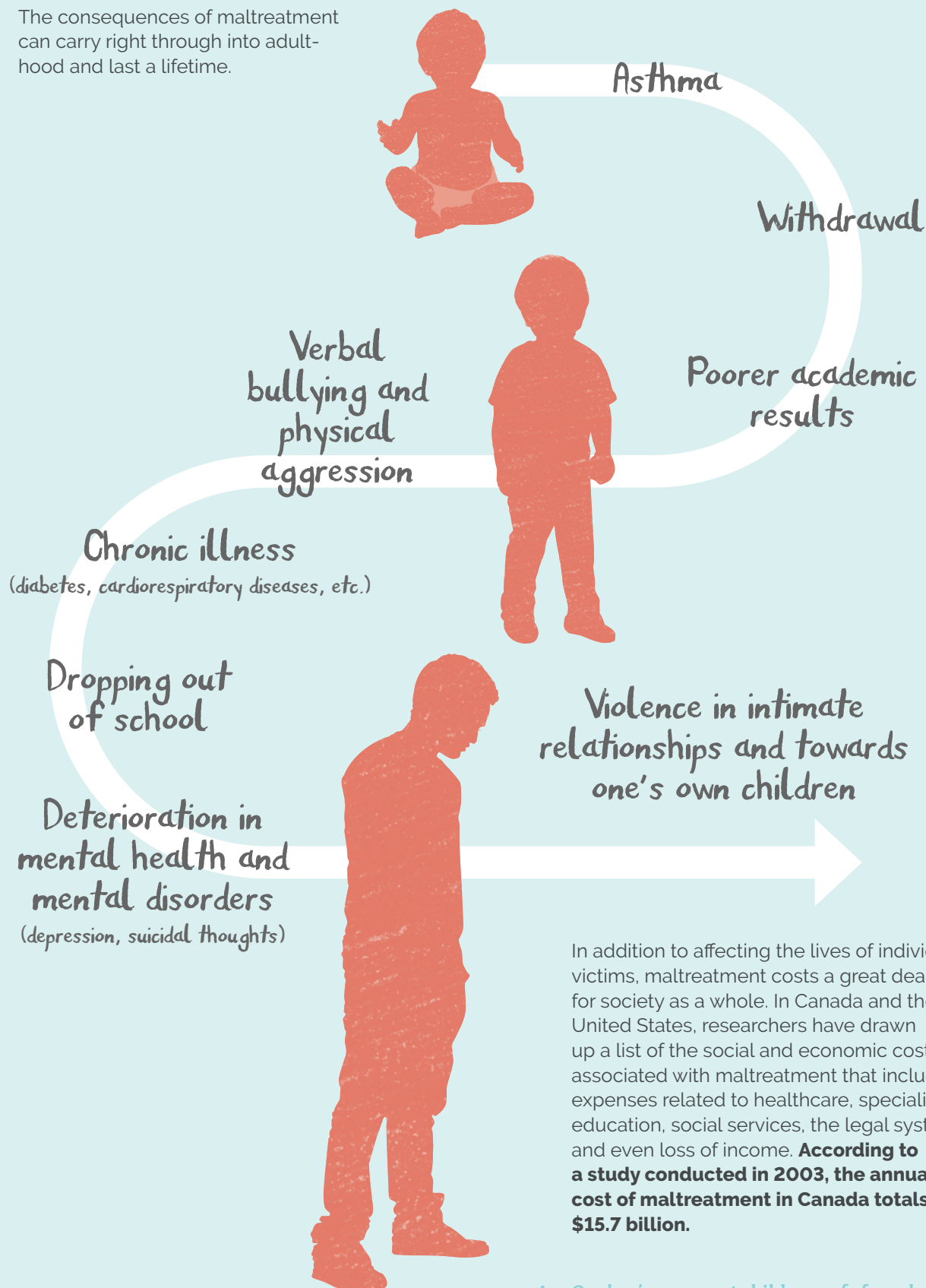
Physical development:
altered brain structure, malnutrition, vision and hearing problems, dental problems, epilepsy, paralysis.



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

PERSISTENT EFFECTS

The consequences of maltreatment can carry right through into adulthood and last a lifetime.



In addition to affecting the lives of individual victims, maltreatment costs a great deal for society as a whole. In Canada and the United States, researchers have drawn up a list of the social and economic costs associated with maltreatment that include expenses related to healthcare, specialized education, social services, the legal system and even loss of income. **According to a study conducted in 2003, the annual cost of maltreatment in Canada totals \$15.7 billion.**

WHAT ABOUT CORPORAL PUNISHMENT?

Corporal punishment is used to discipline a child without causing actual bodily harm. In Canada, use of corporal punishment is regulated under the Criminal Code. For example, corporal punishment is not considered to be maltreatment under the law when it is inflicted on a child over 2 years of age and "if the force does not exceed what is reasonable under the circumstances." Hitting a child in anger or in retaliation for something a child did is not considered reasonable and is against the law.

Although corporal punishment seems less serious than other forms of violence, it can nonetheless have significant harmful effects on a child in the short and long term.

For example, several studies have shown that corporal punishment is associated with:

- deterioration in the parent-child relationship
- development of aggressive and antisocial behaviour in the child
- mental health problems (such as anxiety and depression)
- decreased cognitive abilities (such as reading, arithmetic and memorization).

Children who are spanked as of the age of 2 are twice as much at risk of developing emotional and behavioural problems by the age of 4. Most important, the risks of escalation of corporal punishment to severe physical violence are high. Researchers have established that children who are subjected to corporal punishment are between two and ten times more at risk of suffering severe physical violence, even at a very young age.

That's why it's
important to look after us.
To help us grow up.
To treat us properly.



At what point do youth protection services come into the picture?

Quebec's *Youth Protection Act* is an emergency law for responding to exceptional situations that allows Directors of Youth Protection (DYPs) to intervene in situations that compromise a child's security or development. This Act applies particularly in cases of abandonment, neglect, psychological or emotional mistreatment, sexual abuse and physical abuse.¹ DYPs may also intervene if they consider there is a serious risk of neglect or sexual or physical abuse.

Anyone who has reasonable cause to believe that a child is a victim of maltreatment should report the situation to youth protection services. Under the law, cases of physical or sexual abuse must be reported. Professionals who work with children (employees of establishments in the health and social services network, teachers, daycare workers and police officers) are legally obligated to report any situation resembling maltreatment.

Reports are initially processed to determine the degree of urgency and whether the child's situation requires a full evaluation. They are then evaluated by trained experts, who determine whether the facts are substantiated and whether the child's security or development is compromised.

The situation of the child and his or her family warrants protective measures by youth protection services if it is established that the child's security or development is in danger. Several criteria set out in the Act provide a framework for youth protection workers in making their decisions:

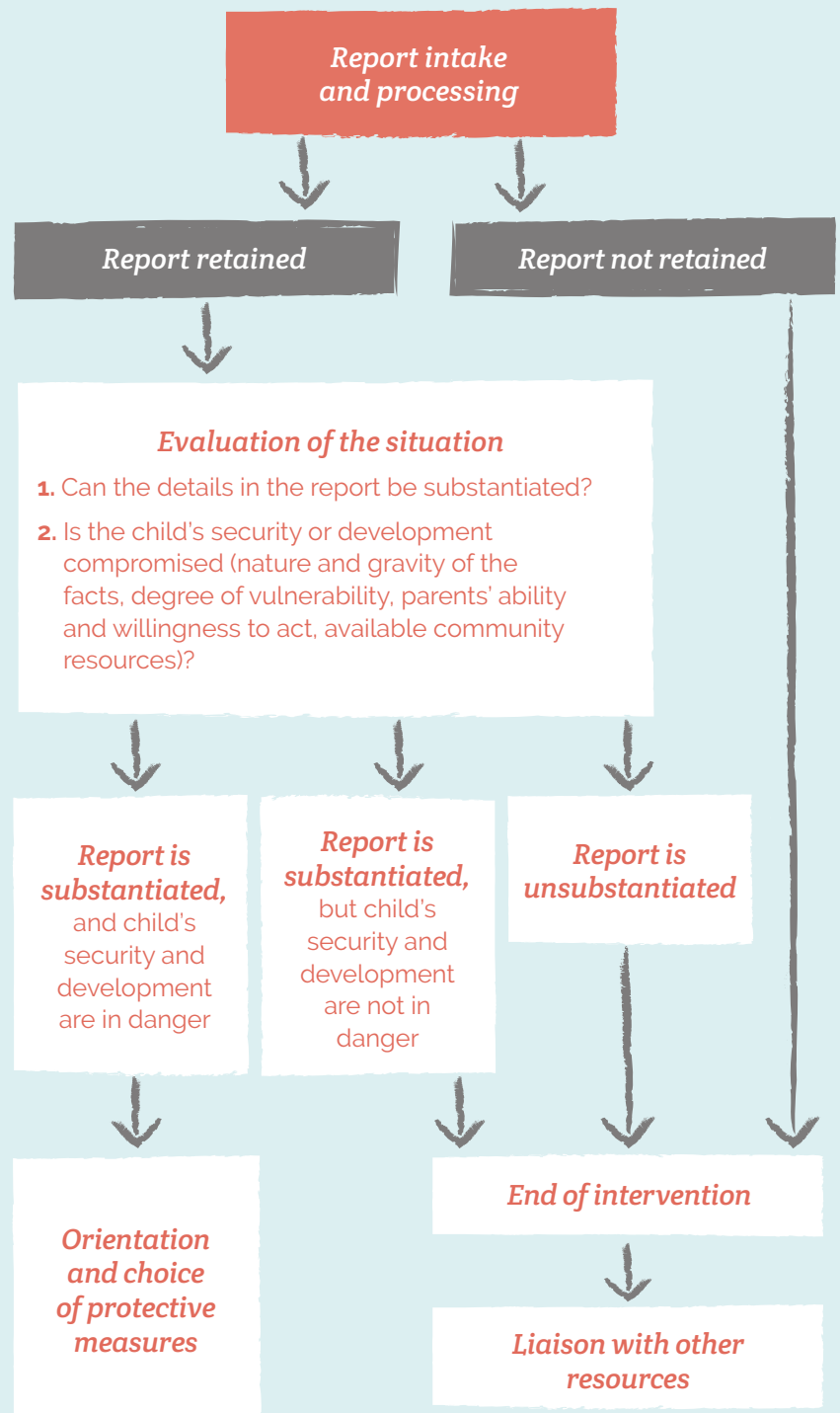
- the nature, gravity, persistence and frequency of the facts reported
- the child's age and personal characteristics
- the capacity and the will of the parents to put an end to the situation in which the security or development of the child is in danger
- the community resources available to help the child and the child's parents.

Since the *Youth Protection Act* is a law that applies to exceptional situations, the DYP will refer the child and his or her family to services in their own community whenever possible.


¹ The *Youth Protection Act* also considers a child's safety or development to be in danger if the child presents serious behavioural disturbances and the child's parents fail to take the necessary steps to put an end to the situation or, if the child is 14 or over, he or she objects to such steps. This type of situation is not covered in this report, however.

Since certain disciplinary measures of a violent nature may not necessarily compromise a child's development or security, they may not lead to protective measures. This does not mean, however, that the child and his or her parents do not need help. These reports are seen as a call for help that must be heard and responded to.

If the child's security or development is not in danger—even if the facts are substantiated—the family will be directed to community resources (such as a women's shelter, medical clinic, CLSC, food bank or psychological assistance). This would apply, for example, in cases where the child's parents are willing and able to take the necessary steps to put an end to the situation. Otherwise, services provided under the *Youth Protection Act* are implemented. Individual citizens should never hesitate to report a disturbing situation involving a child.



Based on the pamphlet entitled *Your child's situation has been reported to the DYP – What do you need to know now?* published by the Direction des communications du ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec.



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.

What youth protection data tell us

Sources for the data presented in this and the following sections are provided at the end of the document.

The analysis of data compiled by youth protection services is often used to document maltreatment. These data provide information on DYP responses to reported situations as well as the evolution of maltreatment among the population.

REPORTS RECEIVED

27,946 situations of maltreatment involving very young children were reported to the Quebec youth protection services in 2015-2016, which translates into **52.2 reports for every 1,000 children** between 0 and 5.

Report received

Any situation reported to the Directors of Youth Protection.

Report retained

Case that is judged to require evaluation further to a summary examination.

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.



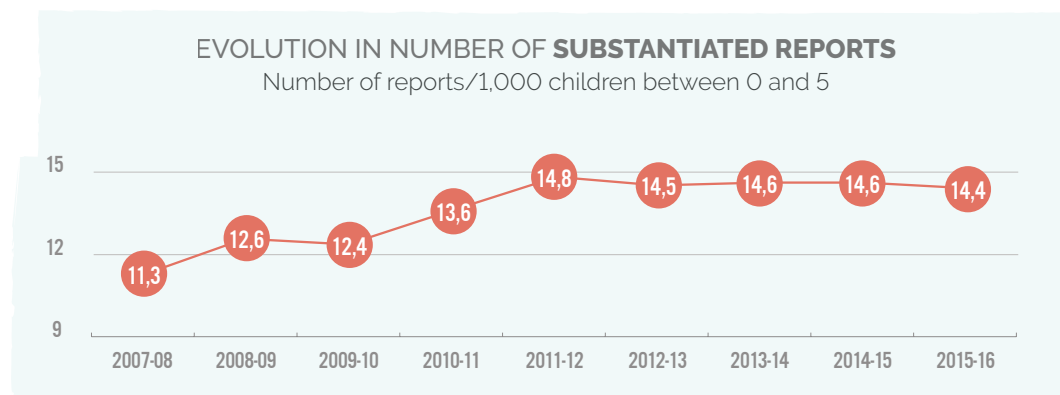
↑ 40%

The rate of reports received in 2015-2016 increased by 40% over 2007-2008.

SUBSTANTIATED REPORTS

In Quebec in 2015-2016, **more than one out of four reports received (28%)** were considered to be substantiated further to evaluation by youth protection workers, which translates into **14.4 substantiated reports for every 1,000 children** between 0 and 5.

↑ 27%



The rate of substantiated reports in 2015-2016 **increased by 27% as compared to 2007-2008**. Following an increase of 31% between 2007-2008 and 2011-2012, the rates stabilized.

SUBSTANTIATED REPORTS BASED ON FORM OF MALTREATMENT

In 2015-2016, substantiated reports concerning very young children were primarily cases of **neglect** and **physical abuse**.

FORM OF MALTREATMENT	NUMBER OF SUBSTANTIATED REPORTS/1,000 CHILDREN BETWEEN 0 AND 5
Neglect (including serious risk of neglect)	7.1
Physical abuse (including serious risk of physical abuse)	3.5
Psychological ill-treatment	2.9
Sexual abuse (including serious risk of sexual abuse)	0.86
Abandonment	0.02

An example of **serious risk of neglect** would be a mother admitted to hospital to give birth while intoxicated.

Similarly, a little girl of 3 whose big sister had been sexually abused by her mother's partner would be considered to be at **serious risk of sexual abuse** even if she had not been abused herself.

According to the *Youth Protection Act*, maltreatment includes abandonment, neglect, psychological ill-treatment and sexual or physical abuse.¹

Abandonment

A situation in which a child's parents are deceased or fail to provide for the child's care, maintenance or education and those responsibilities are not assumed by another person.

Psychological ill-treatment

A situation in which a child is seriously or repeatedly subjected to behaviour on the part of the child's parents or another person that could cause harm to the child's psychological health and his or her parents fails to take the necessary steps to put an end to the situation. Such behaviour includes indifference, denigration, emotional rejection, excessive control, isolation, threats, exploitation and exposure to conjugal or domestic violence.

Neglect

A situation in which the child's parents or the person having custody of the child do not meet the child's basic needs, failing to meet his or her basic physical needs, failing to give the child the necessary care required for his or her physical or mental health, failing to provide him or her with the appropriate supervision or support, or failing to take the necessary steps to provide the child with schooling.

Physical abuse

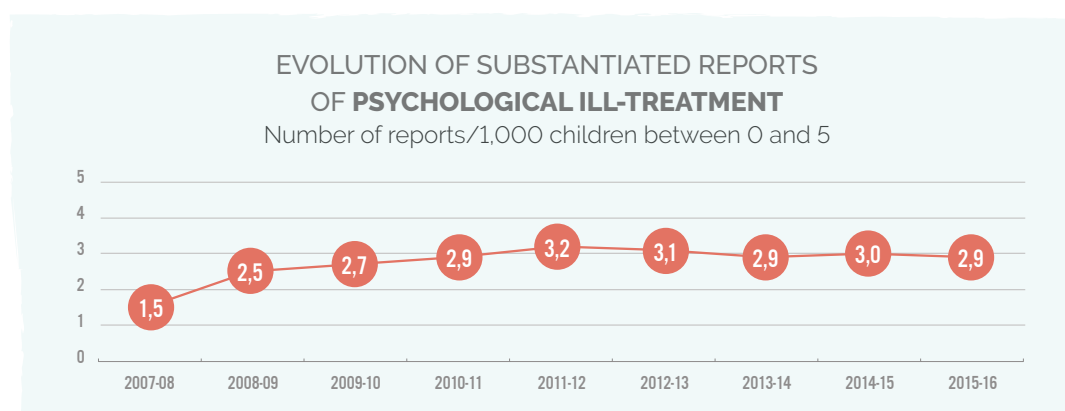
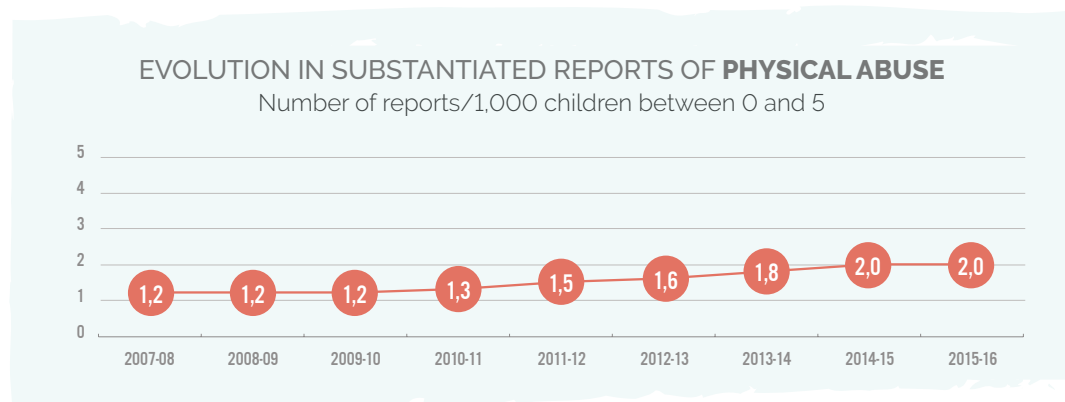
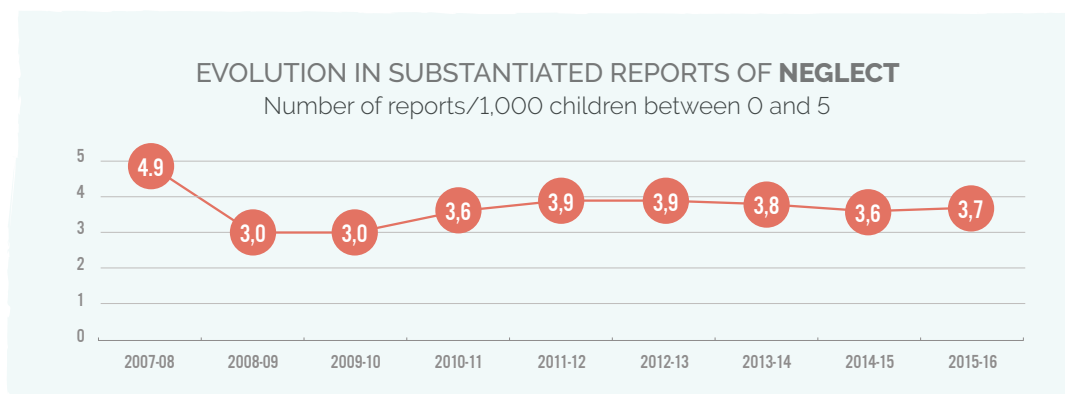
A situation in which the child is the victim of bodily injury or is subjected to unreasonable methods of upbringing by his parents or another person, and the child's parents fail to take the necessary steps to put an end to the situation.

Sexual abuse

A situation in which the child is subjected to gestures of a sexual nature by the child's parents or another person, with or without physical contact, and the child's parents fail to take the necessary steps to put an end to the situation.

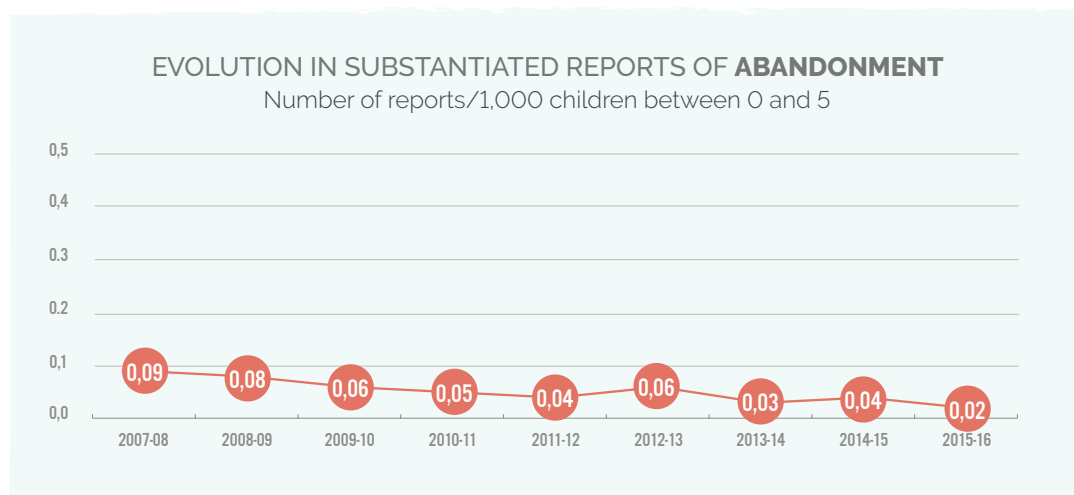
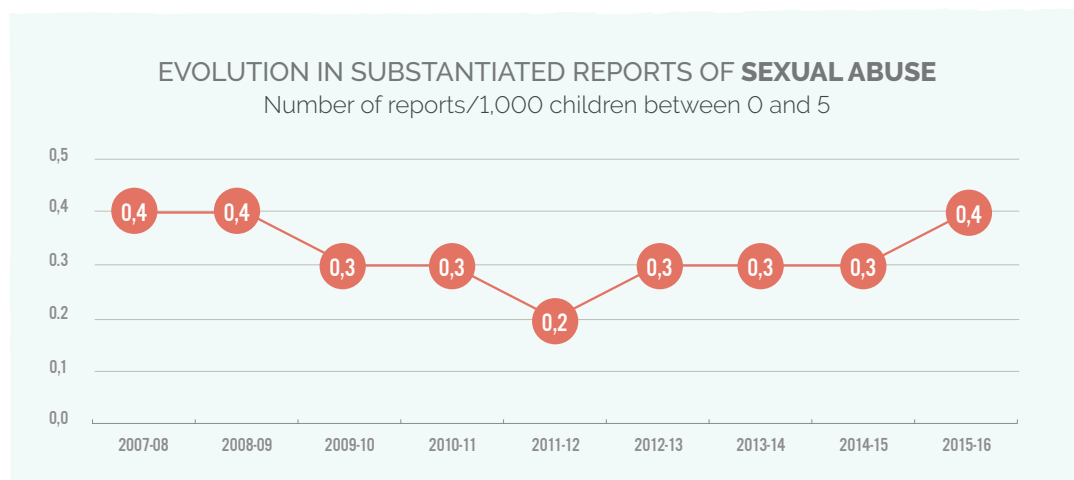
¹ The *Youth Protection Act* also considers a child's safety or development to be in danger if the child presents serious behavioural disturbances and the child's parents fail to take the necessary steps to put an end to the situation or, if the child is 14 or over, he or she objects to such steps. This type of situation is not covered in this special report, however.

Although the number of substantiated reports of neglect was lower in 2015-2016 than in 2007-2008, it fluctuated during the interval. Substantiated reports of physical and psychological abuse rose significantly during the same period¹.



¹ These data do not include serious risk of neglect, serious risk of physical abuse or serious risk of sexual abuse. Certain fluctuations observed between 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 may be partially due to changes in the definitions of forms of maltreatment in the *Youth Protection Act* that were implemented in July 2007. The revised definitions are still in effect today.

Although substantiated reports of sexual abuse and abandonment were fewer, their number also varied during this period.



These administrative data are incomplete, however, as they take into account only the form of maltreatment considered to be the most serious when the child's situation was assessed. According to the Quebec Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (*Étude d'incidence québécoise sur les situations évaluées en protection de la jeunesse*, or EIQ), if up to three forms of maltreatment to which a child may have been subjected are taken into consideration, exposure to intimate partner violence would be the second most prevalent form after neglect (including risk of neglect), with a rate of **4.3/1,000 children between 0 and 5 in 2014**.

In the above graphs and table, exposure to intimate partner violence is included with cases of psychological ill-treatment. EIQ data show that **very young children's exposure to intimate partner violence rose from 1.9/1,000 children between 0 and 5 in 1998 to 4.3/1,000 in 2014**.

1998: 1.9 out of 1000
2014: 4.3 out of 1000

APPLICATION OF PROTECTIVE MEASURES

Once youth protection services are satisfied that the details contained in the report have been substantiated, they determine if the child's security or development is in danger.

- In 2015-2016, further to evaluation by youth protection services, **7.7 reports for every 1,000 children** between 0 and 5 were considered to be substantiated and the child's security or development to be in danger. **This rate rose by 20% between 2007-2008 and 2015-2016.** To be more specific, it rose by 22% between 2007-2008 and 2011-2012, and then stabilized.

When a child's security or development is considered to be in danger, protective measures are put in place (for example, psycho-social care, parent's enrolment in an alcohol or drug abuse program, prohibition of contact, placement in substitute care).

- Between 2009-2010 and 2015-2016, the proportion of children between 0 and 5 who were offered protection by youth protection services **varied between 12.8 and 13.9 out of 1,000.**¹
- In 2015-2016, the most common reason for applying protective measures for children between 0 and 5 was **serious risk of neglect (5.1/1,000), followed by actual neglect (3.5/1,000).**

PLACEMENT

In cases where a child's security or development will be in danger if he or she stays in the family environment (regardless of support offered to the family), placement is considered.

According to data from recent studies, **54% of the children between 0 and 5 whose cases were taken in charge by youth protection services in 2009 were placed within four years of their entry into services.** That means that 3.2/1,000 of the 0-5 year-olds in Quebec whose cases were reported and assessed by youth protection services were placed in a substitute environment within four years of their entry into services. This figure includes children placed with a member of their extended family or another significant person in their lives.

¹ A large number of these children had also been being followed by youth protection for a long time; their initial report may have been made several years earlier. That is why it is not possible to make a direct comparison between the percentage of children receiving protective measures and the percentage of children whose situations were reported or assessed during the same year.

The rate of substantiated reports of situations where a child's security or development was in danger rose by **20%** between 2007-2008 and 2015-2016.

54% of the children between 0 and 5 whose cases were taken in charge by youth protection services in 2009 were placed within four years of their entry into services.

SEVERITY OF MALTREATMENT

Other research data tell us more about the severity of maltreatment suffered by children, particularly the proportion of children who are subjected to more than one form of maltreatment, those who suffer physical injuries, and those who are psychologically damaged as a result of their abuse. Data from the 2014 *Quebec Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect* show that these three indicators are on the decline.

The proportion of very young children who were repeatedly subjected to maltreatment among all those who were known to youth protection services as having been maltreated rose between 2008 and 2014 (from 65% to 72%), after having declined between 1998 and 2008 (from 83% to 65%).

SEVERITY OF MALTREATMENT AMONG VERY YOUNG CHILDREN

	1998	2008	2014
More than one form of maltreatment	30%	20%	14%
Physical injuries	20%	16%	9%
Psychological harm (emotional and mental disorders)	42%	14%	15% ¹
Chronicity (repeated incidents when the report is submitted)	83%	65%	72%

¹ Insignificant difference with 2008

The proportion of very young maltreated children who were repeatedly subjected to maltreatment rose from 65% to 72% between 2008 and 2014.

Reports to Directors

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

27,946 reports



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

7,700 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 maltreatment

1,570 reports

of Youth Protection

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

4,101 reports

Sexual abuse

(including serious risk of sexual abuse)

461 reports

Abandonment

12 reports

What household surveys tell us

Data compiled by protection services are not an accurate representation of all situations of maltreatment in the population. Since some situations will never be reported, it is useful to look at data produced by family studies that ask questions about violent parental behaviour. Even if all forms of violent behaviour do not affect children's physical or psychological integrity, they increase the risk of maltreatment.

MINOR PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

The proportion of very young children who were victims of **minor physical violence** by an adult in their household at least once during the year preceding the survey declined significantly between 2004 and 2012.



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.

In spite of this improvement, these figures still tell us that about **one out of two young children, or the equivalent of 223,000 children between the ages of 6 months and 5 years**, was the victim of this type of behaviour at least once during the year preceding the 2012 survey.

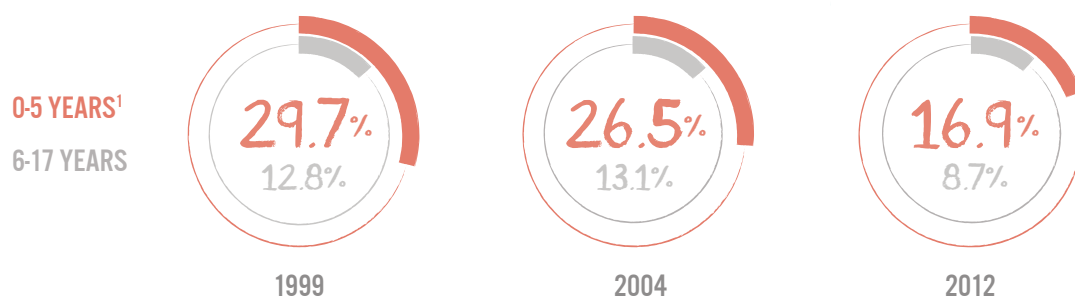
The proportion of affected children varies based on age: it is higher among children 5 and under, particularly 3-5 year-olds, than among older children.

PREVALENCE OF MINOR PHYSICAL VIOLENCE TOWARDS CHILDREN IN QUEBEC IN 2012



However, the proportion of children 5 and under who were repeatedly subjected to minor physical violence (three or more times during the 12 months preceding the survey) **was significantly lower in 2012 than in 2004 and 1999**. This proportion was higher among children 5 and under than among those between the ages of 6 and 17.

PREVALENCE OF REPEATED MINOR PHYSICAL VIOLENCE TOWARDS CHILDREN IN QUEBEC



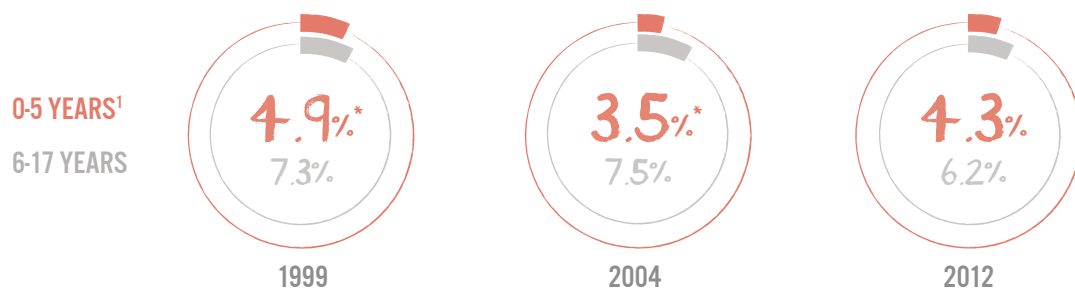
SEVERE PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

The proportion of children 5 years of age and under who were victims of severe physical violence by an adult in their household at least once during the year preceding the study **has not changed significantly since 1999, remaining stable at about 4%**. Also since 1999, proportionally speaking, fewer very young children have been subjected to severe physical violence than older children (6-17 years).

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.

PREVALENCE OF SEVERE PHYSICAL VIOLENCE TOWARDS CHILDREN IN QUEBEC



¹ 2012 data is for children between 6 months and 5 years.

* Coefficient of variation between 15 and 25%: interpret with caution.

REPEATED PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

The proportion of very young children who were subjected to repeated psychological abuse (i.e., at least three times during the year preceding the survey) did not improve significantly between 2004 and 2012.



The proportion of children affected by repeated psychological abuse varies depending on their age. In 2012, children between 3 and 5 were the most affected.

Psychological abuse

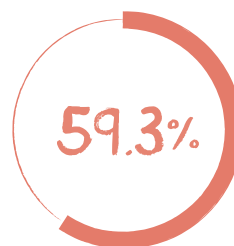
Forms of communication that can affect a child's well-being, including shouting or screaming at a child, swearing, threatening to hit or abandon them or throw them out, or humiliating them (calling them names).

Repeated psychological abuse can have the effect of terrorizing children, isolating them or leading them to believe they are worthless in the eyes of their parents. Repeated psychological abuse that affects a child's integrity is considered to be a form of maltreatment.

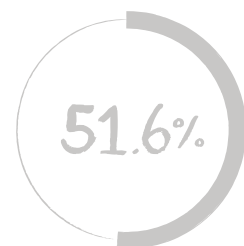
PREVALENCE OF REPEATED PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN IN QUEBEC IN 2012



6 MONTHS - 2 YEARS



3-5 YEARS



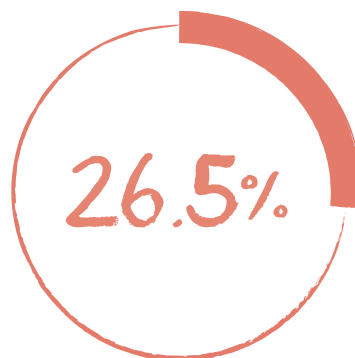
6-17 YEARS

Approximately **204,000** children between the ages of **6 months and 5 years** were victims of this type of violence during the 12 months preceding the 2012 survey.

EXPOSURE TO INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

In 2012, 26.5% of very young children were exposed to verbal, psychological or physical violence between intimate partners at least once during the previous year. This proportion is similar to that for children between 6 and 17 (27%).

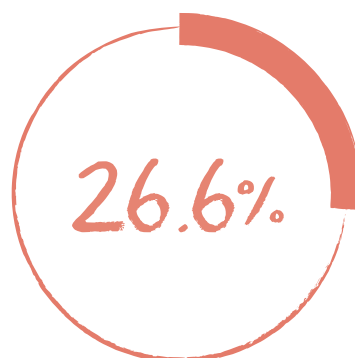
About 6% of young children witnessed this type of behaviour at least three times in 2012.



EXPOSURE TO MULTIPLE FORMS OF VIOLENCE

Exposure to multiple forms of violence is especially troubling. The more numerous the forms of violence, the greater the impact on children's development.

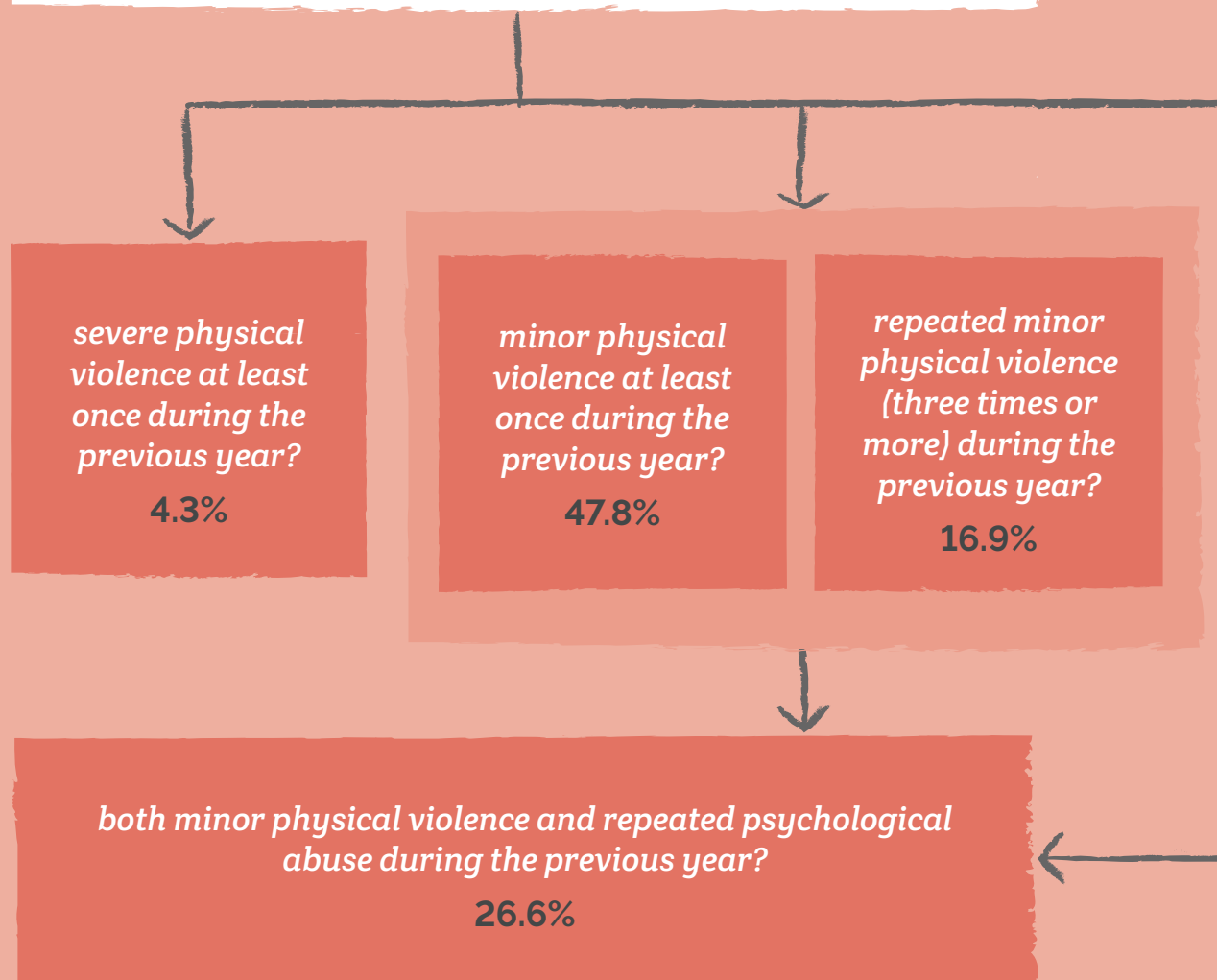
Quebec data show that **one very young child out of four (26.6%) was subjected to repeated psychological abuse and minor physical violence in 2012. This proportion was significantly higher in this age group than among 6-17 year-olds during the same year (17.1%).**



In Quebec, one very young child out of four was subjected to repeated psychological abuse and minor physical violence in 2012.

What household

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



surveys tell us

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

*repeated
psychological abuse
(three time or more)
during the previous
year?*
43.8%

*intimate partner
violence?*
26.5%

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



Are there any known risk factors?

Several studies have shown that there is not one risk factor that is solely responsible for maltreatment. The causes are generally multiple and closely interrelated. What is known, however, is that the more risk factors a child is exposed to, the greater the overall risk of violence and maltreatment.



HOUSEHOLD SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Unfavourable socio-economic conditions can be 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 EIQ-2014, 65% were living with parents who had no employment income at the time of the report. Furthermore, in the cases of 15% of those children, the youth protection worker noted that the household was regularly short of money for basic needs.



STRESS RELATED TO THE PARENTAL ROLE AND WORK-FAMILY BALANCE

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

According to the 2015 Quebec Survey on the Experience of Parents of Children Aged 0 to 5, working parents who found it more difficult to reconcile their work and family responsibilities were at greater risk of yelling, shouting or getting angry at their children between the ages of 0 and 5 at least once a day.

Parental stress can also be affected by having a child with a disability or difficult temperament.



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




PARENTS' EXCESSIVE USE OF ALCOHOL OR DRUGS

The EIQ also reports 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.

Are Quebec families affected by any of these risk factors?

- In 2013, 13% of Quebec children between 0 and 5 were living in families with a low after-tax income.
- In 2015, almost one out of four Quebec parents of children between 0 and 5 (22%) with paid employment had no access to any of the four measures aimed at reconciling work and family responsibilities: flexible working hours, paid leave for family reasons, working at home and working time adjustment/reduction.
- In 2012, close to one-third (35%) of mothers and one-quarter (23%) of fathers of children between 6 months and 5 years presented high levels of stress related to coping with work and family responsibilities.
- Between 2004 and 2012, the proportion of children 5 and under in the general population whose mothers presented high levels of stress resulting from their child's difficult temperament rose from 26% to 34%.
- In Quebec in 2012, 63% of mothers with children between 6 months and 5 years and 66% of fathers were in favour of corporal punishment.
- In 2012 in Quebec, an estimated 13% of mothers and 6% of fathers of children between 6 months and 5 years presented symptoms of moderate or severe depression.

A photograph of two children sitting on a light-colored carpet, playing with toys. The child on the left is wearing a yellow shirt, and the child on the right is wearing a green shirt. They are both out of focus. In the foreground, a yellow and blue LEGO brick is clearly visible on the carpet. Other toys are scattered around.

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

How can we act collectively to prevent maltreatment?

When people talk about preventing maltreatment, most of the interventions they propose target parents. The majority of research focuses on programs designed to help parents, such as home visits and parent skill training.

The conclusion of studies done on these programs is that they can help to reduce violent parental behaviours and situations of maltreatment observed by youth protection authorities. The effects vary, however, from one program to another.

According to the American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), **programs for parents are only one of many strategies for preventing maltreatment.** The centres suggest combining the programs with policies for social and collective action in order to make them more effective.

The approaches described below are examples of some interesting possibilities. The first three have been evaluated and proven to be effective. The potential of the other two options has yet to be confirmed.

In Quebec, the *Services intégrés en périnatalité et pour la petite enfance* (SIPPE) is one of the province's public parent support programs, intended for parents of children between 0 and 5 years of age who are living in vulnerable situations. The program includes regular home visits. The effectiveness of the program as applied in Quebec in preventing maltreatment has yet to be evaluated.

1. INCREASING ECONOMIC SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

Poverty is one of the factors associated with maltreatment because it can create an environment that is less than favourable to a child's development. Reducing poverty in families with children is one of the courses of action proposed by the CDCs.

An American study showed that financial assistance can reduce the probability that a child's situation will be reported to youth protection services. For example, **children in vulnerable families whose mothers were able to benefit from the Wisconsin Works social assistance program were 10% less likely to be the subject of a report retained by youth protection services.** Programs aimed at reducing food insecurity, like SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) also proved to be effective in reducing the risk that a child would be the subject of a substantiated report.

CDCs also propose ways to provide better economic support for families: tax credits for families with children, housing assistance and work-family balance policies.

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. The province also counts on the support of community organizations and foundations (like the *Fondation OLO*) whose actions help to reduce food insecurity.

2. WORKING TO CHANGE SOCIAL NORMS AND PROMOTE POSITIVE PARENTING PRACTICES

Since the prevention of maltreatment requires that society as a whole recognizes children's rights and their need for protection, **targeted legislative measures and media campaigns can have some influence on parental behaviours.**

In Quebec, the *Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse* (Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms) took a stand against corporal punishment in 1998. The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children followed suit in 2009. Nonetheless, the use of corporal punishment to discipline a child between the ages of 2 and 12 is still legal in Canada provided it stays within certain boundaries stipulated under the law.

In the area of media campaigns, the Marie-Vincent Foundation has run several to raise public awareness of the sexual abuse of children. The impact of these campaigns has not yet been evaluated.

According to a study done in 2009, countries that adopted a law prohibiting any form of corporal punishment saw a decrease in the frequency of corporal punishment and an increase in the use of non-violent disciplinary measures. These developments were observed in Sweden, Austria and Germany.

Elsewhere around the world, New Zealand's *Breaking the Cycle* campaign has also had positive results. Following this campaign, researchers observed a 12% increase in the number of parents who admitted that yelling or swearing at a child constituted maltreatment. They also noted a 10% increase in the number of parents who recognized that fighting or yelling in front of their children was also a form of maltreatment. Even more encouraging: 16% of parents questioned had changed their behaviour as a result of the campaign, and 44% were considering doing the same. According to researchers, **media campaigns could be an effective way to reach out to vulnerable groups in the population.**

Financial assistance can reduce
the probability that a child will be the subject
of a report to youth protection services.

Physicians who receive appropriate training are better able to spot high-risk situations.

3. GIVING PRACTITIONERS THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO HELP PARENTS BETTER FULFIL THEIR ROLE

Over the past year in Quebec, one out of three mothers asked a professional for advice on their child's behaviour or upbringing. According to the results of the 2015 *Quebec Survey on the Experience of Parents of Children Aged 0 to 5*, **25% of parents consulted health professionals or social workers and 17% asked educational personnel for information on parenting.**

Practitioners are not always equipped to advise parents in the area of discipline, however. Studies have shown that there is a link between training offered to practitioners working with families and the prevention of maltreatment.

In the United States, the Safe Environment for Every Kid (SEEK) program offers physicians training in disciplining children, spotting depression or spousal violence, and how to intervene. Program evaluation showed that when physicians did not receive training, children from high-risk families were 1.5 times more likely to be the subject of at least one retained report as compared to children followed by physicians who had received the training. Furthermore, more mothers from high-risk families who consulted a SEEK physician reported a decrease in psychological and minor physical abuse in their families than did those whose physician had not been trained under the SEEK program.

According to researchers, **physicians who receive appropriate training are better equipped to spot high-risk situations and better qualified to intervene.** This type of program could also be offered to social workers and teaching professionals.

In Quebec, certain university programs that train future social workers or health professionals are starting to focus on the prevention of maltreatment. Since this training is left to the discretion of the individual institution, it has not been standardized and varies from one program to another.

In the community, ESPACE organizations that offer workshops for children on preventing violence are also tackling this subject with education professionals in the schools and daycare facilities they visit.

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

Children with developmental delays and behaviour problems are more likely to be victims of maltreatment. The stimulation and structure offered by quality education daycare services can help these children, however, and thus reduce the risk of maltreatment. Moreover, **the facilities constitute a protective factor in and of themselves, as they provide parents with support and respite.**

So far, no studies have evaluated the extent to which educational daycare services prevent maltreatment. The American preschool programs Head Start and Child Parent Centers have been associated with a reduced number of substantiated reports to youth protection services. Since these programs include a component that provides support specifically for parents, however, it is difficult to determine the actual role of these programs' educational component in preventing maltreatment.

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. Neither the full-day junior kindergarten program in disadvantaged neighbourhoods nor the SGEEs have been evaluated in terms of preventing maltreatment.

Some CLSCs and community organization organize early stimulation workshops for preschoolers. Certain of these family community organizations also serve as support networks for parents who want to improve their parenting skills.

5. IMPROVING THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH CHILDREN ARE GROWING UP

In 1976, an American pioneer study observed **a relationship between overcrowded family homes and the number of times parents reported having hit or slapped their children during the previous week.** Other studies have also made a connection between housing characteristics (such as noise, overcrowding, constant comings and goings) and the quality of parent-child verbal interactions, parental sensitivity and sense of parenting competence.

Studies done between 1975 and 2005 have also shown **a connection between neighbourhood socio-economic level and maltreatment.** No studies have yet been able to determine, however, if improving a family's physical environment is effective in preventing maltreatment.

In Quebec, the *Politique gouvernementale de prévention en santé* addresses the question of communities, housing and living conditions. Quebec municipalities are also currently encouraging the creation of family- and child-friendly environments. Montreal's *Policy on Children* and the province's *Child-Friendly City* accreditation are part of this same movement.



There are
solutions.

We need to do everything
we can to give all our
children the best possible
start in life.

Conclusion

In 2015-2016, Quebec's Directors of Youth Protection received **27,946 reports** of situations involving children 5 years of age and under, representing **an increase of 40% in the rate of reports received** as compared to 2007-2008. Of all the reports received in 2015-2016, more than one out of four (28%) were substantiated.

Since very young children are particularly vulnerable, this situation could have a serious impact on their security and development. **The rate of substantiated reports that required intervention by the DYP rose by 20%** between 2007-2008 and 2015-2016.

Scientific literature points to the existence of various collective drivers that can prevent maltreatment. **Several social measures have already been shown to be effective** or promising in preventing maltreatment: promoting access to quality housing and living environments and offering financial assistance to families who need it, support for parents or access to quality daycare services. Some of these measures have already been implemented in Quebec and should be preserved. Others need to be considered. **Together, we can take action to prevent maltreatment against the youngest Quebecers and help each of them to develop their full potential.**

About the data presented

The information presented in this report is drawn from an analysis prepared by:

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Julie Goulet, PhD, coordinator of the *Chaire de partenariat en prévention de la maltraitance* and researcher at the *Centre de recherche sur l'adaptation des jeunes et des familles à risque* (JEFAR), Université Laval.

This analysis was produced in collaboration with the Institut de la statistique du Québec for the Early Childhood Observatory (Observatoire des tout-petits). Processing of data compiled by youth protection services was done by Marie-Claude Larrivée, Consultant for MC Larrivée recherche-intervention.

The complete analysis is available on the Observatory's website.

Data sources

WHAT YOUTH PROTECTION DATA TELL US

Administrative data on youth protection services were transmitted by the *Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux*:

- Reports received
Common database of the *Projet Intégration Jeunesse* (BDC-PIJ) and the *Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux*.
- Substantiated reports
Common database of the *Projet Intégration Jeunesse* (BDC-PIJ) and the *Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux*.
- Children taken in care (application of protective measures):
Bilan des directeurs de la protection de la jeunesse
© Association des centres jeunesse du Québec

Rates were calculated using data from the *Institut de la statistique du Québec* describing the population of children between 0 and 5 on an annual basis.

Research data presented in this section of the report were drawn from the following documents:

Hélie, S. and Clément, M-E. (2016). *Analyse scientifique sur la violence et la maltraitance envers les tout-petits*. Contextualized analysis of indicators of violence and maltreatment produced for the Early Childhood Observatory for the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation, 21 p.

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EIQ-2014 results are published in their entirety in the final report of the study:

Hélie, S., Collin-Vézina, D., Trocmé, N., Turcotte, D. and Girouard, N. (2017). *Étude d'incidence québécoise sur les situations évaluées en protection de la jeunesse en 2014 (ÉIQ-2014)*. Report submitted to the *Direction des jeunes et des familles* of the *ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux*, Montreal, *Centre intégré universitaire de santé et services sociaux-Centre sud de l'Île-de-Montréal*, 124 p.

WHAT HOUSEHOLD SURVEYS TELL US

Institut de la statistique du Québec, *La violence familiale dans la vie des enfants du Québec, 1999, 2004 et 2012*, special compilation by the ISQ.

ARE THERE ANY KNOWN RISK FACTORS?

Hélie, S., Collin-Vézina, D., Trocmé, N., Turcotte, D. and Girouard, N. (2017). *Étude d'incidence québécoise sur les situations évaluées en protection de la jeunesse en 2014 (ÉIQ-2014)*. Report submitted to the *Direction des jeunes et des familles of the Ministère de la santé et des services sociaux*, Montreal, *Centre intégré universitaire de santé et services sociaux-Centre sud de l'Île-de-Montréal*, 124 p.

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**Additional tools included in our special report on maltreatment
are available for consultation at**

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



Fondation Lucie
et André Chagnon