



FIRST NATIONS/QUEBEC INCIDENCE STUDY

of Child Maltreatment
and Serious Behaviour Problems
**Investigated by Child Protection
Services in 2019**

Report FN/QIS-2019

**The cover art is by Antoine Yanis Mestokosho, age 18,
from the community of Ekuanitshit.**

***“Our Grandmother the Moon has always watched over us
in the First Peoples’ lunar calendar. She holds a central place
in the life of the Tipishkau-pishim (First Peoples of the Moon).”***
- Antoine Yanis Mestokosho

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and Serious Behaviour Problems Investigated by Child
Protection Services in 2019
Report FN/QIS-2019*

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List of Abbreviations

- ANC** Atikamekw Nation Council
- CIS** Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect
- CISSS** Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux (integrated health and social services centre)
- CIUSSS** Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux (integrated university health and social services centre)
- FN** First Nations
- FNCFS** First Nations Child and Family Services
- FNQLHSSC** First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission
- JBNQA** James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement
- MSSS** Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (Quebec Ministry of Health and Social Services)
- NEQA** Northeastern Québec Agreement (NEQA)
- PHAC** Public Health Agency of Canada
- PIJ** Projet intégration jeunesse (Quebec child protection information system)
- QIS** Quebec Incidence Study (of child maltreatment and serious behaviour problems investigated by child protection services)
- YPA** Quebec *Youth Protection Act*



Executive Summary

Background on the Quebec Incidence Studies

Since 1998, the Quebec government has periodically commissioned studies on the concerns investigated by its child protection services. The main purpose of these studies, known as the Quebec Incidence Studies (QIS), has been to quantify and describe these child protection cases. The four previous Quebec Incidence Studies used data for 1998, 2003, 2008 and 2014.

The present study, designated FN/QIS-2019, used data for 2019 and is the first in this series to make comparisons between the First Nations children and the non-Indigenous children who became the subjects of investigations by Quebec child-protection services in the study year.

For FN/QIS-2019, because of staff shortages, the data could not be collected directly from Quebec's child protection workers, as had been done in the past. **Instead all of the data were extracted from administrative databases on all children in Quebec on whom reports of maltreatment, serious risk of maltreatment or serious behaviour problems had been received in 2019 and investigated either in that year or subsequently.** Such use of administrative data can lead to under-identification of First Nations children within the population of child protection clients, because child protection workers do not always record children's Indigenous identity in their case files, especially if the children are living outside of First Nation communities or are very young (FNQLHSSC, 2016a). Moreover, although most of the items that the workers record in these files conform to standard Quebec child protection practices, they do not necessarily always match concepts recognized by First Peoples and are not always suited to their realities.

The objectives of FN/QIS-2019 were as follows:

- To calculate and compare the rates at which First Nations children and non-Indigenous children became the subjects of child protection investigations in Quebec in 2019, according to certain characteristics of the children concerned, the concerns investigated and the steps taken to protect the children;
- To produce a number of statistics comparable to those for other jurisdictions in Canada.

“Children investigated in 2019”: When Quebec child protection services receive a report that a child is being maltreated, at serious risk of being maltreated, or displaying serious behaviour problems, that report is screened and a decision is made whether to investigate it further. The present study is based on data for all children in Quebec on whom such reports were received in 2019 and screened, approved for investigation and investigated either in that year or subsequently. For simplicity, this study often refers to “children investigated in 2019”, “children who became the subjects of investigations in 2019” or “reports received and investigated in 2019”, but in all cases, it is the reports that were received in 2019; the screening, the decision to investigate and the investigation itself may have occurred in that year or thereafter.

The findings of the present study must be understood in **the context of the legacy of colonialism, discrimination and structural inequities – such as social exclusion and poverty – that First Nations children, families and communities in Quebec have experienced**. Readers should bear in mind that a number of social determinants contribute to the overrepresentation of First Nations children in Quebec’s child protection system. These determinants include: intergenerational transmission of trauma, which is often related to time spent in residential schools and which may, in some settings, lead to highly complex family problems; the almost total lack of funding for preventive social services in First Nation communities until 2008 (FNQLHSSC, 2011); and many First Nations parents’ persistent fear of using social services because of discrimination experienced in the past. Chapter 2 provides more information on this subject.

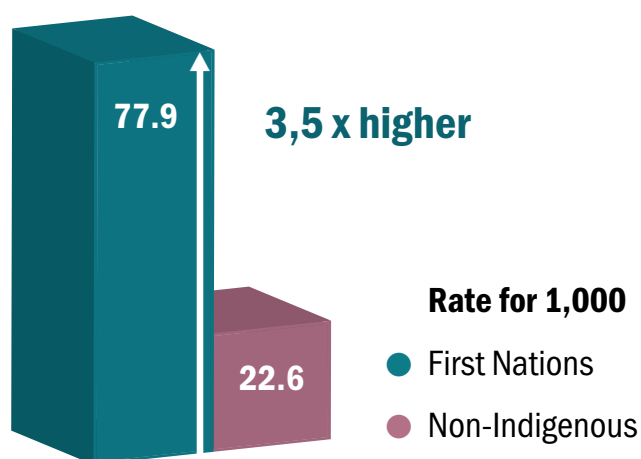
Highlights of this report

Observed overrepresentation of First Nations children in child protection investigations

In Quebec in 2019, an estimated 2,211 First Nations children became the subjects of child protection investigations—77.9 out of every 1,000 children in the First Nations population (Figure 1). That same year in Quebec, the number of non-Indigenous children who became the subjects of such investigations was 34,575, or 22.6 out of every 1,000 children in the non-Indigenous population. Thus, the overrepresentation rate was 3.5: in Quebec in 2019, **a First Nations child was 3.5 times more likely to become the subject of a child protection investigation than a non-Indigenous child**.

First Nations children were overrepresented at every stage of the child protection process examined in the present study (investigation, substantiation, court involvement, and placement). This pattern held regardless of the children’s ages, the sources of the reports to child protection services, the grounds for the reports, or the investigation findings.

Figure 1
Numbers of children investigated per 1,000, First Nations and non-Indigenous populations, Quebec, 2019*



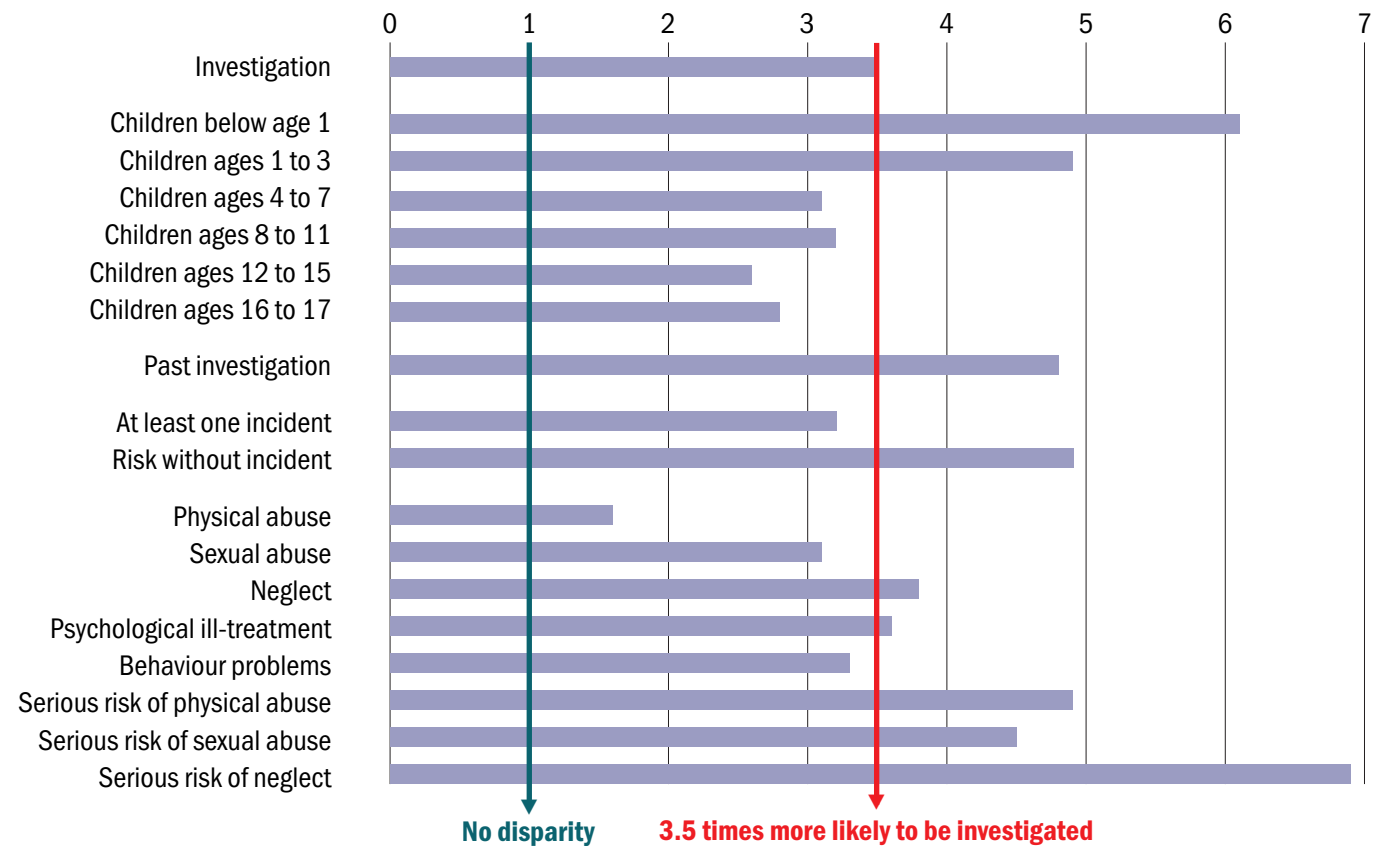
* These disparities between First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impacts of colonialism, discrimination and poverty.

The extent of overrepresentation at the investigation stage was **greatest in the following groups** (Figure 2).

- Among children below age 1, First Nations children were 6.1 times more likely to be investigated than non-Indigenous children.
- Among children investigated for serious risks of maltreatment with no reported incidents of maltreatment or of serious behaviour problems, First Nations children were 4.9 times more likely to be investigated than non-Indigenous children, especially for serious risks of neglect (6.9 times more likely to be investigated than non-Indigenous children).
- Among children who had been investigated in the past, First Nations children were 4.8 times more likely to be investigated again than non-Indigenous children. However, the percentages of past investigations in which the reported risks were substantiated were similar for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children.

Of all the population groups considered in this report, the two with the highest investigation rates were First Nations children below age 1 (190.9 children per 1,000) and First Nations children ages 1 to 3 (89.8 children per 1,000). This means that **19% of all First Nations infants and 9% of all First Nations toddlers were the subject of one or more child protection investigations in Quebec in 2019**. This pattern of higher rates among the youngest children is specific to First Nations children; among non-Indigenous children, the group with the highest investigation rate consists of children ages 4 to 15.

Figure 2
Disparity indexes between First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated in Quebec in 2019*



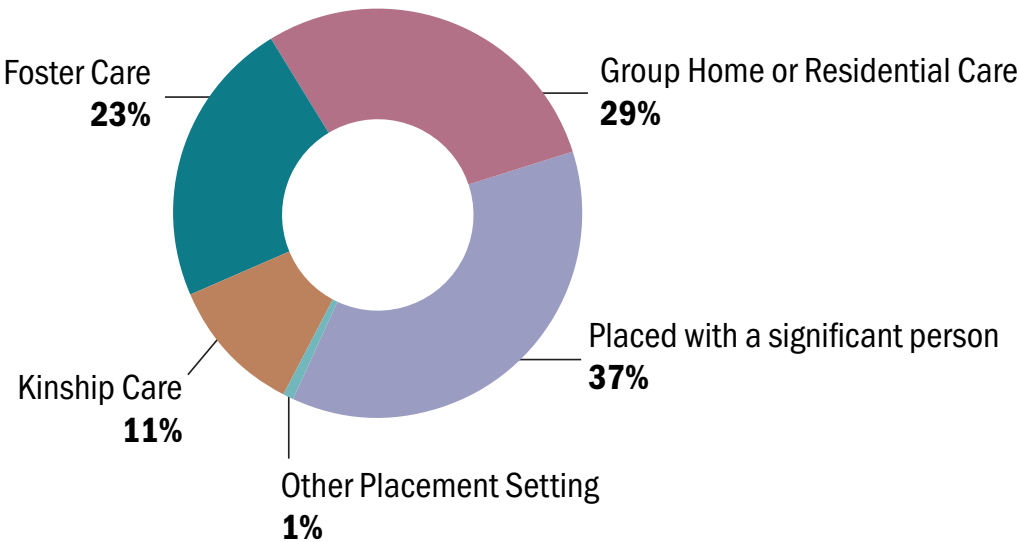
First Nations children were also overrepresented in the following aspects of the protection process.

- **Placement during investigation or protection planning:** First Nations children were 4.3 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be placed outside the home during these stages (Figure 3);
- **Court involvement during investigation or protection planning:** First Nations children were 4.4 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to have the courts become involved at these stages.

Placement settings and grounds for investigations

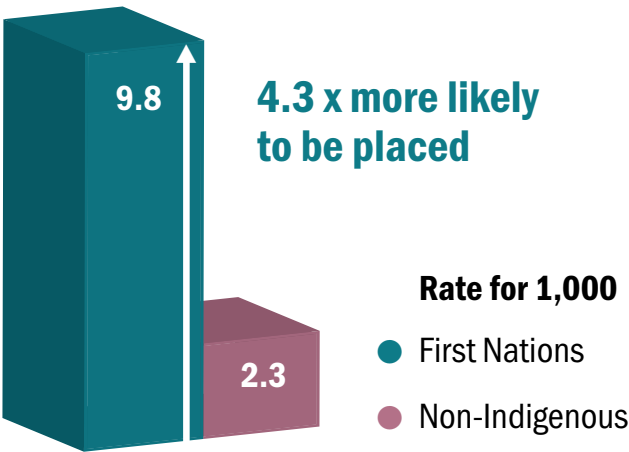
When First Nations children are placed outside the home while their cases are in the investigation or protection-planning stage, they are placed with significant persons or in kinship care more often than non-Indigenous children. Figure 4 presents the distribution of placement settings for First Nations children.¹

Figure 4
Placement settings for First Nations children placed outside the home during investigation or protection planning, Quebec, 2019*



1 In Quebec, arrangements in which children are sent to live with family or other significant persons informally—outside the context of a child protection intervention—are not counted as placements, and they are not included in the results presented here.

Figure 3
Rates of placement during investigation or protection planning stage, First Nations children and non-Indigenous children, Quebec, 2019*



* These disparities between First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impacts of colonialism, discrimination and poverty.

Among all children in Quebec who are the subject of child protection investigations, the proportion of children investigated for reports of physical abuse is lower for First Nations children than for non-Indigenous children, whereas the proportions investigated for sexual abuse, psychological ill-treatment and serious behaviour problems are similar for the two groups. Reports of incidents of neglect or of serious risk of neglect are the most common reasons for child protection investigations in First Nation communities. **The following types of incidents and risks are more prevalent** in investigations involving First Nations children than in those involving non-Indigenous children: parental substance use, parental instability, unresolved history of neglect, problems of care/supervision, inappropriate parental attitudes, and exposure to intimate-partner violence.

Discussion and future directions

The overrepresentation of First Nations children across the entire continuum of child protection services has been observed not only in Quebec, but also elsewhere in Canada (Sinha et al., 2008; Fallon et al., 2021; Crowe et al., 2021). In the rest of Canada, as in Quebec, the disparities between First Nations children and non-Indigenous children are concentrated in the very youngest age groups and in cases of child neglect. These findings show where priorities should be focused to improve the well-being of First Nations children and eventually reduce these disparities.

In Quebec, the investigated concern for which these disparities are greatest is serious risk of neglect: situations where **no actual incident of child neglect has been reported** but the report source believes a child to be at risk for this form of maltreatment. Why is the disparity between First Nations children and non-Indigenous children greatest in situations where there is a serious risk of maltreatment, and not in situations involving actual incidents of maltreatment or instances of serious behaviour problems? There are several possible explanations.

The present study found that among First Nations children, the serious risks of neglect documented chiefly involve parental substance use and parental instability, both of which are often associated with unfavourable socioeconomic conditions. Hence First Nations children may actually be in situations (such as socio-economic insecurity or parental substance dependence) that place them at greater risk of neglect than non-Indigenous children and that require intervention by child protection services. Another reason that child protection services must so often investigate serious risks of maltreatment under Quebec's *Youth Protection Act* may be the entire public system's inability to meet the needs of highly vulnerable families in any other way. Problems with cooperation between preventive services and child protection services may also tend to drive at-risk families directly to the latter, second-line services, particularly in some First Nation communities where protection services have long been the only point of access to social services in general.

But the problems of parental substance use and instability that are associated with serious risks of child neglect also reflect the more general problems observed among First Peoples, which many experts perceive as the ongoing effects of the colonialism and discrimination that these peoples have experienced. This explanation supports past findings regarding the chronic lack of front-line services in First Nation communities (FNQLHSSC, 2011) and **argues for a massive, sustained investment in front-line services that First Nations people can access.**

Still another possibility, though, is that the observed disparities reflect a lower threshold of risk tolerance for First Nations children than for non-Indigenous children—for example, that child protection workers are more concerned when a First Nations child lives with a parent who has a substance problem than when a non-Indigenous child does so. This would be a form of discrimination against First Nations children, possibly attributable to a lack of knowledge of the cultural differences between non-Indigenous

people and the various First Nations in Quebec, and of the impact of intergenerational trauma on these First Nations. In light of the announced upcoming reforms to the *Youth Protection Act* and to other family services in Quebec, these findings **demonstrate the great importance of reviewing service provision through a First Nations lens and adopting a culturally safe approach in which social service providers are trained in the realities of First Nations and intergenerational trauma.**

In conclusion, the findings of the present study underscore the importance of **ongoing monitoring** of the proportions of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children who receive protection services in Quebec every year. First of all, this information will be essential for planning service offerings and for better understanding the continuum of services, from prevention to protection. Second, because the findings of the present study were generated entirely from administrative databases to which child protection workers add new information every day, these findings can be reproduced. In this regard, First Nations should be provided with the support they need to gather, analyze and make good use of the data on their children who are receiving protective services.

Quebec and Canadian Incidence Studies over the years

Since 1998, the Quebec government has periodically commissioned studies on the concerns investigated by its child protection services. The main purpose of these studies, known as the Quebec Incidence Studies (QIS), has been to quantify and describe these child protection cases, including information on severity of maltreatment, clinical profiles and living conditions. The Quebec Incidence Studies constitute an essential tool for determining the characteristics of the children in Quebec who need protection. These studies provide a better understanding of the continuum of child protection services, the needs of families, and child protection practices.

Including the present study, five Quebec Incidence Studies have been conducted to date, using data for 1998, 2003, 2008, 2014 and 2019. The present study, designated FN/QIS-2019, is the first in this series to make comparisons between the First Nations children and the non-Indigenous children who became the subjects of investigations by Quebec child protection services in the study year. This comparison will contribute to efforts to promote a child protection system that meets the needs of First Nations families in Quebec.

For each of the past four Quebec Incidence Studies, the researchers selected a representative sample of children on whom Quebec child protection services had received reports in October, November and December of the study year and subsequently investigated them. For each child in the sample, the worker who had conducted the investigation completed an online data collection form describing the situation investigated, the child involved and the household in which the child was living at the time that the worker finished conducting the investigation or preparing the plan for the child's future protection. The research method remained very similar from one study to the next, which facilitates comparisons and tracking of changes over time. The Quebec Incidence Studies thus provide continuity in monitoring reported child maltreatment throughout Quebec.

It should be noted that the first three Quebec Incidence Studies (for 1998, 2003 and 2008) were conducted



Introduction

as part of a Canada-wide initiative, the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-1998, CIS-2003 and CIS-2008), funded mainly by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). The main purpose of these Canadian Incidence Studies was to provide a representative picture across Canada. Some provincial ministries, including Quebec's Ministry of Health and Social Services (MSSS), provided additional funding to sample a larger number of cases and thus produce representative pictures of the situations in their respective provinces. Thus, in each of these three years, in addition to contributing to the Canadian estimates, Quebec conducted its own incidence study (QIS-1998, QIS-2003 and QIS-2008).

In 2013, there was no fourth Canadian Incidence Study, but the governments of Ontario and Alberta funded their own provincial studies. In 2014, Quebec researchers followed suit, conducting the fourth Quebec Incidence Study (QIS-2014) with the support of the MSSS and two university-based child and youth services institutions. QIS-2014 represented a direct continuation of the three earlier Quebec Incidence Studies.

In the first four Quebec Incidence Studies, no distinction was made between First Nations children and non-Indigenous children. The researchers simply sampled the children for whom there were investigation files in the child protection services' administrative databases, without applying any weighting to account for the underrepresentation of certain Indigenous groups.

The present study: First Nations/Quebec Incidence Study of Child Maltreatment and Serious Behaviour Problems Investigated by Child Protection Services in 2019 (FN/QIS-2019)

How QIS-2019 became FN/QIS-2019

Some important differences between the present Quebec Incidence Study and the preceding ones should be noted. The present study was originally designated QIS-2019, because collection of data from the child protection workers was originally scheduled

for Fall 2019. But at the request of the MSSS, this work was postponed to Fall 2020 for several reasons, including staff shortages in its child protection offices, the death by maltreatment of a seven-year-old girl in Granby, Quebec, and the work of the Special Commission on the Rights of the Child and Youth Protection that was established in the wake of this tragedy. Subsequently, the COVID-19 pandemic forced data collection to be postponed again, this time indefinitely, because Quebec's health and social services system could not afford the demands that this effort would have placed on its child protection workers.

As a result of these postponements of data collection for QIS-2019, the funding that the MSSS had earmarked for this purpose was put on hold, but the funding from PHAC remained available. Meanwhile, data collection from child protection workers in Canada's other provinces had proceeded as scheduled in Fall 2019. The 2019 edition of the Canadian Incidence Study differed from past editions, however, in that it was directed by the Assembly of First Nations, with funding from PHAC, for the purpose of estimating annual rates of child protection investigations among First Nations children and non-Indigenous children throughout Canada (hence its designation, FN/CIS-2019). Quebec accordingly decided to revise the original design and objectives of QIS-2019, redesignating it FN/QIS-2019. Its new purpose was to compare the rates at which First Nations children and non-Indigenous children became the subjects of child protection investigations in Quebec in 2019. So that Quebec child protection workers would not have to fill out data collection forms, the study was instead based exclusively on data extracted from existing administrative databases on all Quebec children on whom reports of maltreatment, serious risk of maltreatment or serious behaviour problems had been received in 2019 and approved for investigation. These data were also used in the Canadian estimates produced in FN/CIS-2019, whose objectives were similar.

The main differences between QIS-2019 as originally planned and FN/QIS-2019 as actually carried out were as follows.

- As originally planned, QIS-2019, like preceding Quebec Incidence Studies, would have collected data by having child protection workers fill out detailed online forms. Instead, **in FN/QIS-2019, the participating**

health and social services institutions extracted data from children's case files in administrative databases. The information extracted from these files was more limited than the information that had been gathered with the online forms.

- As originally planned, QIS-2019, like the preceding Quebec Incidence Studies, would have sampled children about whom reports were received in the last three months of the study year. Instead, in FN/QIS-2019, data were extracted for all children about whom Quebec child protection services had received reports of maltreatment or serious behaviour problems at any time in 2019 and subsequently investigated them. Hence the various rates cited in the present report are not annual estimates; they are actual annual rates.
- The primary objective of QIS-2019 had been the same as for the preceding Quebec Incidence Studies: to estimate rates of investigation for all children in Quebec and to describe the severity of the concerns investigated and the clinical and family profiles of the children involved. **The primary objective of FN/QIS-2019 was to compare the rates at which First Nations children and non-Indigenous children became the subjects of child protection investigations in Quebec in 2019.**

Objectives and scope of FN/QIS-2019

The ultimate goal of all of the Quebec Incidence Studies **has been to gather the data needed to develop and implement programs and policies for vulnerable children in Quebec.** Better knowledge of the incidence of the problems and needs that children and their parents experience can only facilitate the development of more effective policies.

The specific goal of FN/QIS-2019 was to measure the rates at which children became the subjects of investigations by Quebec child protection services in 2019 and the characteristics of the children concerned, the concerns investigated and the steps taken to protect the children, and to capture all of this information for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children separately. By doing so, FN/QIS-2019 has attempted to respond to the calls by the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission of Canada to document the number of Indigenous children in care as a step toward reducing it.

The specific objectives of FN/QIS-2019 were:

- To calculate and compare the rates at which First Nations children and non-Indigenous children became the subjects of child protection investigations in Quebec in 2019, according to certain characteristics of the children concerned, the concerns investigated, and the steps taken to protect the children;
- To produce a number of statistics comparable to those for other jurisdictions in Canada.

“Children investigated in 2019”: When Quebec child protection services receive a report that a child is being maltreated, at serious risk of being maltreated, or displaying serious behaviour problems, that report is screened and a decision is made whether to investigate it further. The present study is based on data for all children in Quebec on whom such reports were received in 2019 and screened, approved for investigation and investigated either in that year or subsequently. For simplicity, this study often refers to “children investigated in 2019”, “children who became the subjects of investigations in 2019” or “reports received and investigated in 2019”, but in all cases, it is the reports that were received in 2019; the screening, the decision to investigate and the investigation itself may have occurred in that year or thereafter.

FN/QIS-2019 provides knowledge that is useful to Quebec and its First Nations in several respects. First, the administrative data from the participating health and social service institutions provide an exhaustive description of the services delivered under Quebec's *Youth Protection Act*, including the prevalence and characteristics of the concerns investigated by Quebec's child protection services. Second, the FN/QIS-2019 **provides a better understanding of the realities faced by First Nations children who are receiving child protection services**, in comparison with non-Indigenous children.

A third benefit of FN/QIS-2019 is that **it provides relevant information for planning future child protection services.** The data collected in the four earlier Quebec Incidence Studies were helpful in a number of respects. Their findings supported policymaking and programming in many ways,

in particular because, by documenting the problems faced by children and parents, these studies helped to identify these clients' needs. The data collected in FN/QIS-2019 will help to develop recommendations regarding the delivery of child protection services adapted to the realities faced by First Nations children and families wherever they live in Quebec.

The Quebec child protection system has some distinctive features that have made the Quebec Incidence Studies all the more informative. Quebec is one of the few Canadian provinces whose child protection system includes a formal process for screening reports before investigating them in depth. This additional filter somewhat alters the picture of the children and families at the investigation stage. Also, Quebec's *Youth Protection Act* covers not only children who are reported to have been abused or neglected, but also children who are reported to be at serious risk of such maltreatment or to have displayed serious behaviour problems. By documenting these latter situations along with reported incidents of maltreatment, the Quebec Incidence Studies provide a realistic picture of the situation in Quebec, where reports of serious risk of maltreatment or of serious behaviour problems represent a non-negligible portion of all the reports received and investigated by the province's child protection services. **FN/QIS-2019 thus provides a comprehensive, realistic picture of the incidents of child maltreatment, serious risks of maltreatment and serious behaviour problems reported in Quebec in 2019 and investigated then or thereafter, both for First Nations children and for non-Indigenous children.**

Limitations of FN/QIS-2019

The findings of FN/QIS-2019 must be interpreted in light of the limitations of studies of this kind and the methodological choices that were made in carrying it out.

First, **FN/QIS-2019 documents only those situations that were reported to and investigated in depth by Quebec's child protection services.** It does not account for any incidents of maltreatment, serious risks of maltreatment or serious behaviour problems that were not reported to child protection services or that were reported but then screened out and not investigated further.

Second, **the data used in this study were obtained exclusively by extracting them from children's case files in administrative databases, which limited the findings in various ways.** The clinical understanding of the psychosocial profiles of the children, their parents and their households was limited to what could be gleaned from such administrative data.

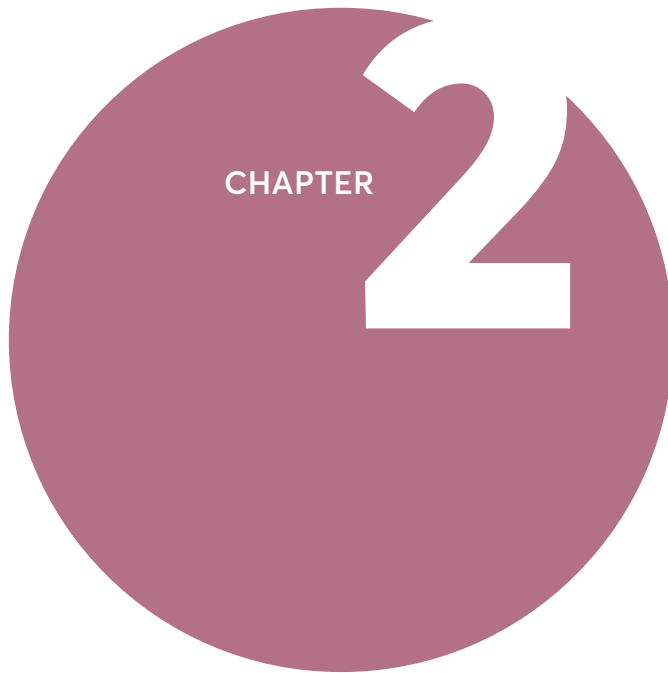
In addition, reliance on such data can lead to underestimates of the total number of First Nations children investigated. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, child protection workers do not always record children's Indigenous identity in their case files, especially if the children are living outside of Indigenous communities or are very young (FNQLHSSC, 2016a). Moreover, although most of the items that the workers record in these files conform to standard Quebec child protection practices, they do not necessarily always match the concepts recognized by First Peoples and are not always suited to their realities.

Third, **FN/QIS-2019 was first and foremost a descriptive study for a given year.** Its purpose was not to explain the phenomenon of child maltreatment, but rather to provide a picture of the reports that child protection services received and investigated in 2019 and the protective measures that they took as a result, and to calculate annual prevalence statistics of various kinds. Because of the specific objectives of FN/QIS-2019 and the methodology used to conduct it, this report does not make any comparisons with the past Quebec Incidence Studies.

Fourth, **four institutions were unable to submit any administrative data and therefore did not participate in this study:** the Inuulitsivik Health Centre and the Ungava Tulattavik Health Centre (both in Quebec Health Region 17), the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (in Quebec Health Region 18) and the Akwesasne community of Quebec. To compensate for the lack of data from these institutions and to calculate the most representative rates possible for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated by child protection services throughout Quebec, we weighted the data submitted by the 17 institutions that did participate. In doing so, we assumed that the situations of the First Nations and non-Indigenous children investigated by the non-participating institutions were similar to those of the First Nations and non-Indigenous children investigated by the participating institutions.

But it should be kept in mind that Quebec's First Nation communities are not all the same. For instance, some of these communities are signatories of the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement or the North-eastern Québec Agreement, while others are not, which affects the organization and delivery of child protection services as described later in this report. Because of the weighting that we applied, the particular characteristics of the communities served by the non-participating institutions may not have been represented accurately. (The weighting method is presented in more detail in Chapter 3 and Appendix 2.)

Fifth and finally, **the findings presented in this report must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination and poverty on Indigenous people.** The next section of this report provides the historical, social, economic and legal context that is essential to a proper understanding of the current picture of First Nations children investigated by Quebec's child protection services, compared with that of non-Indigenous children investigated by these same services.



Context

Social and historical context of Indigenous Peoples in Canada²

It is imperative for the findings in this report to be interpreted in light of the social and historical context in which Indigenous Peoples have lived in what is now known as Canada.³

For thousands of years, the cultures, practices and knowledge of these Indigenous Peoples have enabled them to effectively ensure that their children would develop and flourish from one generation to the next. Before colonization, these peoples had systems of governance adapted to their respective, diverse realities and customs, grounded in the importance of dialogue, harmony and consensus (Jaccoud, 2014). Transcending the ways in which their practices differed, all of these peoples shared a community approach to caring for their children (Carrière-Laboucane, 1997).

• • •
[Translation from French] According to tradition, children are gifts, loans or souls sent by the Creator; parents, members of extended family and the community as a whole all have the obligation to raise, protect, and guide them. (HeavyRunner and Morris, 1997, as reported in Fondation autochtone de guérison, 2003, p. 25)
• • •

But since the time of colonization, European values and philosophies, including the capitalist economic system and Christian morality, have imposed new norms on thinking about children's education, safety and welfare. These Euro-Canadian values and definitions have served to perpetuate the oppression of Indigenous children, families and communities (Blackstock and Trocmé, 2005). The intergenerational consequences of the attempts to assimilate Indigenous people are still being felt today.

2 This section of this report largely reproduces the context presented in the First Nations Component of the *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2008* (FN/CIS-2008, Sinha et al., 2008) and in the *First Nations/Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2019* (FN/CIS-2019, Fallon et al., 2021).

3 In Canada, the term "Indigenous" generally refers to First Nations, Métis and Inuit people. But it is important to note that Métis people are not legally recognized as Indigenous in Quebec. Hence, when the term "Indigenous" is used in a Quebec context, it refers to First Nations and Inuit people only.

The first instances of discrimination by European settlers against Indigenous people in Canada took the form of a failure to recognize the diversity of their economic and social structures, languages, religions and values (Bennett, Blackstock and De La Ronde, 2005, p. 11). This European world view supported the application of the concept of *terra nullius*—Latin for a land that is barren and deserted—to justify the declaration of European sovereignty and the forced takeover of the “discovered” lands now known as Canada (Bennett, Blackstock and De la Ronde, 2005; Henry et al., 2000; Miller, 1991). Similarly, the European settlers’ reductive, paternalistic view of Indigenous cultures, which they perceived as “uncivilized”, were the cornerstone of the many policies designed to subjugate them to Euro-Canadian culture.

The federal *Indian Act*, proclaimed in 1876, became one of the most intrusive laws in the lives of First Nations, and its political and social consequences are still felt today. The goal of this segregationist law was not only to create “Indian reserves” and thereby free up land for the development of the colonies and their economies,⁴ but also to undermine First Nations’ nomadic way of life and inculcate lifestyles that the European colonists deemed “superior”. Among other things, the *Indian Act* gave the federal government control over the concept of “Indian” identity—for example, by withdrawing the “Indian” status of university graduates and their descendants, and of women who married men who did not have that status (LePage, 2019). This law also enabled the federal government to control political structures and resource and economic development on Indian lands and to deny the right to vote to the people who lived on them (Bennett, Blackstock and De La Ronde, 2005; Fleras, 1996).

The *Indian Act* has been amended many times since it was first proclaimed, but is still in force today. In addition to the direct impacts that it had on First Nations as described above, this statute and its amendments were used as legal justification for subsequent assimilationist policies such as the **system of residential schools and Indian day schools**. Starting in 1880, the Crown and various Christian churches formed a partnership to establish Indigenous residential

schools throughout Canada for purposes of “civilizing” Indigenous people according to European standards and “killing the Indian in the child”. Although Christian missionaries had been involved in educating Indigenous children before this partnership was formed, the system of residential schools funded by the federal government was endorsed and strengthened by the Davin Report of 1879 (Armitage, 1995; Bousquet, 2017; Réaume and Macklem, 1994; Fournier and Crey, 1997).

Once this system had been put in place, nearly 150,000 Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities and placed in residential schools throughout Canada. In Quebec, 12 residential schools and federal hostels were opened between 1937 and 1991, and an estimated 13,000 First Nations and Inuit children lived there (Bousquet, 2017; FNQLHSSC, 2021a; Paul, 2021).⁵ Parents who refused to hand their children over to the government or who tried to remove them from residential schools ran a high risk of legal punishment, including imprisonment, as legitimized by the *Indian Act* (Bennett, Blackstock and De La Ronde, 2005; Bousquet, 2017).

Indigenous children’s isolation in residential schools deprived them of the influence of their parents, their families and their communities and of any opportunity to learn their customs, traditions and languages. Contact between children living in these schools and their parents was either prohibited or highly restricted (Bennett, Blackstock and De La Ronde, 2005). The residential schools denigrated Indigenous practices and traditions and made children feel ashamed of them (Bousquet, 2017). At the same time, these schools forced children to adopt and accept Euro-Canadian cultural standards, in particular by replacing their own languages with English or French, their spirituality with Christianity (in Quebec, either Roman Catholicism or Anglicanism), and their inherent right to the land with capitalism and a sedentary way of life (Bousquet, 2017; Réame and Macklem, 1994).

4 In this report, the term “First Nation communities” is used in preference to “Indian reserves”.

5 For more information on the impact of Indigenous residential schools in Quebec, see: First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC). (2021a). *Politiques coloniales et violences institutionnelles* [Summary sheet]. <https://files.cssspnql.com/s/yllmvCK47e2EuJA>

The residential schools and Indian day schools in Quebec and the rest of Canada were also characterized by unacceptable living conditions: physical, psychological and sexual violence were often part of the lives of the children sent to live there, some of whom were also subjected to dangerous medical experiments without their consent (Bennett, Blackstock and De La Ronde, 2005; Bousquet, 2017; FNQLHSSC, 2021a; Mosby, 2013). Most of the children sent to these schools were never able to return to their families and communities. In the past, secret burials of Indigenous children who had died from abuse or neglect or in unexplained circumstances at these schools were a matter of speculation. Now they are a recognized fact, confirmed by recent discoveries of thousands of children's unmarked graves on the former grounds of residential schools throughout Canada (Fournier and Crey, 1997; Newton, 2021).

The direct impacts of the psychological damage that the residential school system inflicted on survivors and their parents have included problems with drug and alcohol use and high rates of suicide and incarceration in First Nation communities (Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991; FNCFT, 1993; RCAP, 1996). The set of symptoms of psychological distress reported by children who were forced to attend residential schools is now commonly known as "residential school syndrome". In a study conducted in 2015 in 21 First Nation communities in Quebec, over half of the former residential school students surveyed reported negative effects on their lives, including both physical and mental problems (FNQLHSSC, 2018). These symptoms have been passed on from one generation to the next (Chrisjohn, Young and Maraun, 1994; FNQLHSSC, 2021a). In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission described the residential school system as cultural genocide. The kidnapping of Indigenous children and their placement in residential and day schools went on for more than a century, ending only in the 1990s, when the last remaining institutions were closed.

In 1951, the addition of section 88 to the *Indian Act* triggered a new form of mass apprehension of First Nations children in Canada, by extending the authority of provincial and territorial child protection agencies to people living in First Nation communities (Ghosh, 2004; NCCAH, 2017). From that year on, the imposition of this authority dealt First Nations a further blow, on top of the devastating effects of the residential school system.

In particular, non-Indigenous social workers were required to enforce child protection regulations and standards designed for the non-Indigenous majority population, without making any distinctions for First Nations people who were often suffering the consequences of colonialism, such as poverty and the intergenerational effects of the federal residential school system (Hudson, 1987; McKenzie and Hudson, 1985). The poor social and economic conditions in First Nation communities were taken as sufficient justification to place children in foster settings (Bennett, Blackstock and De La Ronde, 2005; Montambault et al., 2021). The period from the 1960s to the 1980s when this strategy of assimilation intensified came to be known as the "**Sixties Scoop**" (Sinclair, 2007), in which some children were placed in residential schools while many others were adopted by non-Indigenous families or placed in non-Indigenous foster homes (Milloy, 1999).

Once removed from their original homes, very few First Nations children ever returned to their families (Bennett, Blackstock and De La Ronde, 2005). Many of these children thus grew up in environments where they were cut off from their cultures, in addition to being targets of racism. Some also suffered physical or sexual abuse at the hands of their adoptive or foster parents. In adolescence, many of these children became runaways or turned to drugs, alcohol or crime to cope with the stress caused by these experiences (Teichroeb, 1997).

As a result of all the circumstances just described, First Nations children have been clearly seen to be overrepresented in the child protection system from the 1990s on (Blackstock and Trocmé, 2005). In Quebec, as a result of the passage of the province's *Youth Protection Act* in 1979, the percentage of First Nations children with Indian status and Inuit children who were in the child protection system nearly doubled

from 1977 to 1981 (Johnston, 1983; Public Inquiry Commission on relations between Indigenous Peoples and certain public services in Québec: listening, reconciliation and progress, 2019). It has been speculated that the reported number of Indigenous children in care would have been even higher if non-status First Nations children and Métis children had been counted (Armitage, 1995; Fournier and Crey, 1997; Johnston, 1983; Teichroeb, 1997).

It is important to note that in reaction to the transition from the colonial system of residential schools to the more recent system of placement in foster homes, Indigenous people across Canada have organized and demanded the **creation of Indigenous agencies for the protection and well-being of their children and families**. Starting in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, many First Nation communities began to establish their own child protection agencies to provide services that were holistic and culturally relevant to their lives (NCCAH, 2017). The models used in Quebec to delegate child protection responsibilities to First Nation communities are described later in this report.

The preceding pages describe the Canadian social and historical context in which the present study was carried out. To this day, Indigenous children are unquestionably still overrepresented at every stage of the child protection process throughout Canada (Sinha, Trocmé, Fallon and MacLaurin, 2013; Fallon et al., 2021), and Quebec is no exception. According to the Public Inquiry Commission on relations between Indigenous Peoples and certain public services in Quebec: listening, reconciliation and progress (also known as the Viens Commission), this overrepresentation can be explained by a combination of factors, including not only the history of colonialism and policies of assimilation described above, but also **discrimination against Indigenous families in Quebec's current child protection system** (Guay and Ellington, 2019). As stated in 2015 in the *Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (p.138):

• • •

Today, the effects of the residential school experience and the Sixties Scoop have adversely affected parenting skills and the success of many Aboriginal families. These factors, combined with prejudicial attitudes toward Aboriginal parenting skills and a tendency to see Aboriginal poverty as a symptom of neglect, rather than as a consequence of failed government policies, have resulted in grossly disproportionate rates of child apprehension among Aboriginal people.

• • •

Some authors have suggested that one of the main sources of the prejudices that child protection workers in Quebec display toward Indigenous families is a poor knowledge of the cultural foundations of the Indigenous family and the practices associated with it (Gagnon-Dion, 2014; Grammond, Guay and Vollant, 2017). According to one of these authors, this lack of familiarity may have led these workers to impose non-Indigenous models of parenting on Indigenous families (Guay, 2015), to judge Indigenous families more harshly, and to misinterpret the childcare methods used in various Indigenous cultures (Guay, 2017). The testimony of a number of Indigenous parents before the Viens Commission has since confirmed these assertions, denouncing the lack of cultural sensitivity among non-Indigenous child protection workers (Guay and Ellington, 2019).

According to the Viens Commission, the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child protection system in Quebec can be explained not only by the combined impact of assimilationist policies and cultural biases in child protection services, but also by the difficult socioeconomic conditions under which Indigenous families and communities live (Guay and Ellington, 2019). These conditions are discussed in the following section of this report.

Social and economic context of First Nation communities in Quebec



As of 2016, First Nations people accounted for 1.2% of the total population of Quebec (Statistics Canada, 2016a). In that year, 63.2% of Quebec's Status First Nations population lived in 51 communities throughout the province (see Appendix 1 for a map of their locations).

Quebec's First Nations population is younger than its non-Indigenous population. In 2016, there were 22,205 First Nations children age 14 or younger in Quebec, representing 24% of its First Nations population. In comparison, non-Indigenous children in the same age group represented 17% of Quebec's non-Indigenous population (Statistics Canada, 2016a).

As regards family structure, compared with non-Indigenous children, a higher proportion of First Nations children live in lone-parent families in Quebec. In 2016, 34% of First Nations children in Quebec lived in lone-parent families, compared with 25% of non-Indigenous children (Statistics Canada, 2016b). Among First Nations children age 17 or younger living in First Nation communities,⁶ slightly less than one-third (32%) lived in lone-parent families in 2015 (FNQLHSSC, 2018). Among First Nations children age 5 or younger living in First Nation communities, the figure jumped to 42% (FNQLHSSC, 2017a). (Note that a family can be classified as a lone-parent family and still have members of extended family living with it.)

In Quebec in 2016, a fairly high proportion of all First Nations people (44%) lived in First Nation communities. For First Nations children and youth, the proportions were even higher: 57% for children age 14 or less and 51% for youth ages 15 to 19 (Statistics Canada, 2016c). As we shall see later, First Nations people's socioeconomic conditions vary considerably according to whether or not they live in First Nation communities.



The socioeconomic inequalities between Indigenous (First Nations and Inuit) people⁷ and non-Indigenous people in Quebec have been amply documented. First of all, economic poverty is more prevalent among Indigenous people than among non-Indigenous people. In Quebec in 2016, approximately 21% of all Indigenous people and nearly one-quarter (24%) of all First Nations people lived in low-income households,⁸ compared with about 15% of non-Indigenous people (Statistics Canada, 2016d). As explained earlier, because residents of First Nation communities have suffered the effects of colonization and been deprived of opportunities for economic development, their financial situation is even more precarious. In 2015, about half (47%) of all adults in First Nation communities in Quebec lived in households that fell below the low-income threshold (FNQLHSSC, 2018). In 2018-2019, 20% of households in First Nation communities in Quebec had incomes below \$15,000, compared with 5% of all households in Quebec in 2017 (FNQLHSSC, 2021b).

As regards child poverty, a 2016 report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives stated that the poverty rate for Status First Nations children living in First Nation communities in Quebec was 37% in 2011, compared with about 24% for Indigenous children living outside of Indigenous communities and about 16% for non-Indigenous children (Macdonald and Wilson, 2016). The financial situation of some First Nations families living in First Nation communities in Quebec makes it difficult for them to pay for housing and other basic needs. One or more out of every 10 people living in such communities had difficulty in paying for housing (14%), utilities such as water and heating (10%), clothing (14%), food (14%) or transportation (13%) at some time in the course of 2018 (FNQLHSSC, 2021b).

⁶ In this report, the term "First Nation communities" is used in preference to the term "Indian reserves".

⁷ Métis people are not legally recognized as Indigenous people in Quebec. Hence, when the term "Indigenous" is used in a Quebec context, it refers to First Nations people and Inuit people only.

⁸ Based on the low-income measure after tax (LIM-AT)



Disparities in employment and education also exist between First Nations people and non-Indigenous people in Quebec. In age group 25 to 64 in Quebec in 2016, 25% of all Indigenous people and 29% of all First

Nations people had no employment income, compared with 16% of all non-Indigenous people (Statistics Canada, 2016e). Other data suggest that among First Nations people, access to jobs is easier for those who live outside of First Nation communities than for those who live in them. According to the *Quebec First Nations Regional Early Childhood, Education and Employment Survey (REEES)*, almost half (49%) of all adults living in First Nation communities in Quebec had no paid jobs in 2014-2015 (FNQLHSSC, 2017a). Band councils are the principal employers for 69% of the workers in all First Nation communities in Quebec (FNQLHSSC, 2017a).

Regarding education, in Quebec in 2016, 33% of all Indigenous people age 15 and older had no certificate, diploma or degree, compared with 19% of all non-Indigenous people in that age group (Statistics Canada, 2016f). Among First Nations people, 38% had no certificate, diploma or degree; for First Nations people living outside of First Nation communities, the figure was 28%, and for those living in First Nation communities, it was 53% (Statistics Canada, 2016f).



Some important points should also be made about living conditions and access to health and social services in First Nation communities in Quebec. These communities are facing a housing

crisis, characterized by overcrowded conditions and outdated housing stock (AFNQL, 2014). In 2014-2015, one-quarter of all households with young children in First Nation communities in Quebec were living in overcrowded dwellings, and the proportion in more remote communities was even higher (FNQLHSSC, 2017b). In 2015, one out of five First Nations adults in Quebec reported that their dwelling needed major repairs, and one out of four reported the presence of mold (FNQLHSSC, 2018). It is important to note that “(o)vercrowding, in addition to decreasing a house’s lifespan, also increases certain health and social problems such as hygiene, family tension and violence” (FNQLHSSC, 2013, p. 26).



Food insecurity is another serious issue in First Nation communities. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, “A person is food insecure when they lack regular access to enough

safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life. This may be due to unavailability of food and/or lack of resources to obtain food” (FAO, n.d.). In surveys conducted in 2015 and 2017, about one out of every five adults living in First Nation communities in Quebec reported that they were moderately or seriously food insecure (FNQLHSSC, 2018; FNQLHSSC, 2021b), and nearly one-quarter of those living with children age 11 or younger reported being in this situation (FNQLHSSC, 2018). These figures are far higher than for all other parts of Quebec, where 7% of the population is food insecure (FNQLHSSC, 2021b).



In many First Nation communities in Quebec, access to preventive and specialized social services is limited or non-existent (FNQLHSSC, 2011). The obstacles to accessing services that residents of First Nation communities men-

tioned most often included excessively long wait lists and unavailability of health care professionals (such as physicians and nurses) and services in their regions. Problems in paying for services and transportation were also reported as obstacles to accessing health care (FNQLHSSC, 2018). Many First Nation communities in Quebec have criticized the lack of funding to enable them to develop front-line services (FNQLHSSC, 2017c).

Thus, together with Canada's colonial history and assimilationist policies, and with discrimination against Indigenous families in Quebec child protection services, the socioeconomic conditions of First Nations families and First Nation communities in Quebec help to explain the overrepresentation of First Nations children in Quebec's child protection system. Part of the reason is that poverty and poorer living conditions not only bring First Nations children into this system more often but also make it harder for them to get out (Guay and Ellington, 2019; Montambault et al., 2021). Another part is that for a long time, in most First Nation communities in Quebec, the child protection system was the main way of obtaining any services, in particular because of the underfunding of preventive services (FNQLHSSC, 2017c).

Organization of child protection services for First Nations in Quebec

Section 91 of the *Constitution Act, 1867* gives the Parliament of Canada exclusive legislative authority over "Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians". However, provincial laws of general application that are currently in force also apply on such lands, unless a federal statute or regulation replaces them, or a band council adopts a regulation in this domain (Grammond, 2003). In Quebec, the *Youth Protection Act* (YPA), which came into force in 1979, established the general system for child protection throughout the province. Thus, the YPA applies to First Nations.

First Nation communities parties to the JBNQA or the NEQA

The James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA), signed in 1975, and the Northeastern Québec Agreement (NEQA), signed in 1978, empowered the Cree, Inuit and Naskapi nations to deploy and manage health and social services in their respective territories (Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, 2022). Under these agreements, the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services and the Naskapi CLSC (local community services centre) deliver child protection services with funding from Quebec's Ministry of Health and Social Services.

First Nation communities not parties to the JBNQA or the NEQA

Funding for child protection services for the other First Nation communities in Quebec is provided by the federal government. Table 1 provides details on agreements that delegate child protection responsibilities from Quebec provincial health and social service institutions to Quebec First Nation communities that are not parties to the JBNQA or the NEQA.

Table 1

Agreements delegating child protection responsibilities from provincial health and social services institutions to Quebec First Nation communities not parties to the JBNQA or the NEQA

Source: FNQLHSSC, 2021

Nation	Community	Provincial institution with which the community or Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada has an agreement ¹	Responsibilities delegated under section 32 of the Youth Protection Act (YPA)	Responsibilities delegated under section 33 of the Youth Protection Act (YPA)
Abénakise	Odanak/Wôlinak (Grand Conseil de la Nation Waban-Aki)	Centre jeunesse de la Mauricie et du Centre-du-Québec		X²
Algonquine	Kitigan Zibi	Centre jeunesse de l'Outaouais	X	X
	Lac-Simon, Kitcisakik et Pikogan, and Long Point	Centre jeunesse de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue (CJAT)	X	X
	Barriere Lake	Centre jeunesse de l'Outaouais		
	Timiskaming First Nation, and Kebaowek	Centre jeunesse de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue (CJAT)		
Atikamekw	Manawan (Atikamekw Nation Council)	Centre jeunesse de Lanaudière	X³	X³
	Opitciwan ⁴	Centre jeunesse de la Mauricie et du Centre-du-Québec		
	Wemotaci (Atikamekw Nation Council)	Centre jeunesse de la Mauricie et du Centre-du-Québec	X³	X³
Huronne- Wendat	Wendake	Centre jeunesse de Québec – Institut universitaire		X⁵
Innué	Pessamit	Centre de protection et de réadaptation de la Côte-Nord (CPRCN)		X
	Mashteuiatsh	Centre jeunesse de Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean	X	X
	Uashat mak Mani-Utenam	CPRCN		X
	Matimekush – Lac-John	CPRCN		X
	Nutashkuan	CPRCN		X
	Pakua Shipu, Unamen Shipu et Ekuanitshit (Mamit Innuat)	CPRCN		X
	Essipit	CPRCN		X⁶
Mi'gmaq	Listuguj	Centre jeunesse Gaspésie-Les Îles	X	X
	Gesgapegiag	Centre jeunesse Gaspésie-Les Îles	X	X
Mohawk	Akwesasne	CISSS de la Montérégie-Ouest	X	X
	Kahnawake	Centre jeunesse de la Montérégie	X	X
	Kanesatake	Centre jeunesse des Laurentides		
Naskapie	Kawawachikamach	This treaty community does not have an agreement with a Centre jeunesse (Youth Centre) and instead is served by the Centre de protection et de réadaptation de la Côte-Nord (CPRCN). The services are funded by Quebec. The responsibilities defined in sections 32 and 33 of the YPA are exercised by the Direction de la protection de la jeunesse and authorized employees of the CPRCN.		

1 A shaded cell indicates an agreement between the provincial institution and the community, while an unshaded cell indicates an agreement between the institution and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. The institution names are shown as of the dates of the agreements, before the integrated provincial health and social services centres (CISSS and CIUSSS) were established.

2 The Grand Conseil de la Nation Waban-Aki could assume child-protection responsibilities under section 33 of the YPA under this agreement, but does not currently have the staff to do so.

3 The Atikamekw Nation Council has concluded and is implementing a special child protection program agreement under section 37.5 of the YPA.

4 In November 2021, the community of Opitciwan passed the *Opitciwan Atikamekw Social Protection Act* in accordance with the *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*. This statute came into force on January 17, 2022.

5 The Conseil de la Nation huronne-wendat could assume child-protection responsibilities under section 33 of the YPA under this agreement, but does not currently have the staff to do so.

6 The Conseil de la Première Nation des Innus Essipit could assume child-protection responsibilities under section 33 of the YPA under this agreement, but does not currently have the staff to do so.

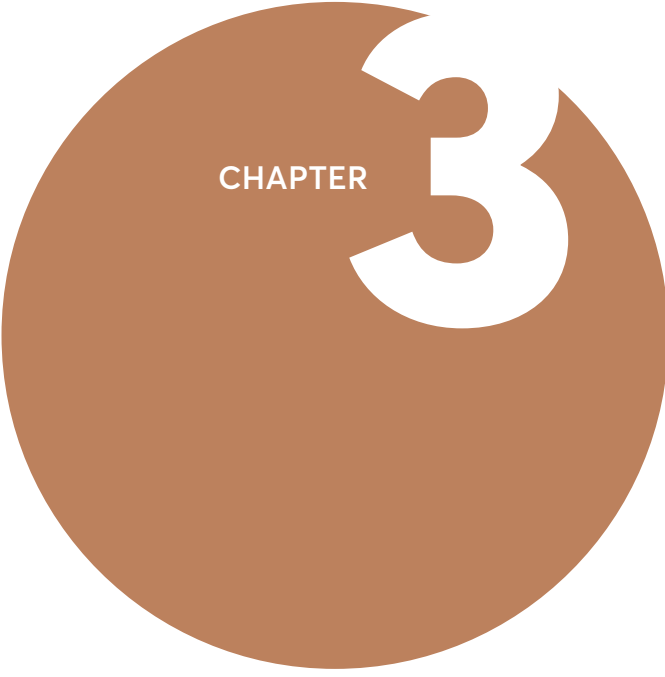
In most of the First Nation communities shown in Table 1, child protection services, as well as front-line preventive services, are delivered by First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) agencies under agreements between the communities and the provincial integrated health and social services centres (CISSS or CIUSSS) that cover their regions. There have been 16 FNCFS agencies in Quebec since they were established in the 1970s. They are funded entirely by Indigenous Services Canada and serve 23 First Nation communities in Quebec.

Under their agreements with the province, these First Nation communities can carry out most of the responsibilities set out in sections 32, 33, 37.6 and 37.7 of Quebec's *Youth Protection Act* (YPA) and section 22 of the federal *Youth Criminal Justice Act*.⁹ Nearly half of these communities have such agreements that let them investigate children's situations under section 32 of the YPA. Over three-quarters of these communities have agreements that let them implement protective measures under section 33 of the YPA. All of these communities have assumed the responsibility for front-line preventive services.

For the remaining First Nation communities that have not signed child protection agreements—even the ones that have assumed the responsibilities for front-line preventive services—the provincial integrated health and social services centres for their regions¹⁰ carry out all child protection responsibilities. This is also true for First Nations families living outside of First Nation communities.

9 Except for the following responsibilities: receiving reports regarding children, analyzing these reports briefly, and deciding whether they must be evaluated (investigated) further; acting as tutor (guardian) or, in the cases specified in the *Youth Protection Act*, applying to the court to appoint or replace a tutor; receiving the general consents required for adoption and the consents to adoption referred to in section 3 of the Quebec *Act to implement the Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption* (chapter M-35.1.3); applying to the court to declare a child eligible for adoption and deciding to submit an application for disclosure of information in accordance with the provisions of the second paragraph of section 72.5; disclosing information in accordance with the provisions of the second or third paragraph of section 72.6 or of section 72.7.

10 Specifically, the CISSS-AT for the Timiskaming and Kebaowek First Nations, the CISSS de l'Outaouais for the Algonquins of Barriere Lake, and the CISSS des Laurentides for the Mohawks of Kanesatake. In these cases, the CISSS centres are funded by Indigenous Services Canada.



Methodology

To achieve the objectives of FN/QIS-2019 as stated in Chapter 1 of this report, in the fall of 2020, we had the health and social services institutions that participated in this study extract data from their administrative databases on children who became subjects of investigations by these institutions' child protection services in 2019. This chapter describes the methods that we used to conduct this study, including preparations, recruitment of institutions, sampling and data processing, and weighting and calculation of population rates. The final section of this chapter describes the steps taken to ensure the confidentiality of the data extracted.

Preparations

The original plan for QIS-2019 called for the data to be collected directly from Quebec child protection workers, starting in the fall of 2019, and preparations for this data collection took place from January to August 2019. Presentations on this planned study were made to the directors and executive directors of child and youth protection at all integrated health and social services centres (CISSS) and integrated university health and social services centres (CIUSSS) in Quebec, who were invited to have their institutions participate in it. An ethics certificate for the study was issued by the ethics committee for research on vulnerable youth at the CIUSSS for south-central Montreal in March 2019. Requests for consent and for access to client data were sent to the institutions that agreed to participate. In parallel with these activities, the QIS-2019 research team engaged Auxilitek Services Inc. to develop a website and an online survey form for the study. The content of this form and the guide for the child protection workers who would be asked to complete it were adapted from the form that has been used in the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect ("the CIS") since 1998 and from the form used in the 2014 edition of the Quebec Incidence Study (QIS-2014).

As explained in Chapter 2, the planned data collection had had to be postponed several times, after which the original design and objectives of QIS-2019 were revised, resulting in the present study, FN/QIS-2019. A **working group** composed of representatives of First Nation communities in Quebec and the members of the research team was established to guide the study, from extraction of the data to production of the

present report. Thus the work on FN/QIS-2019 was conducted in partnership with these First Nation communities in a spirit of respect, scientific rigour, equity and reciprocity.

As a result of this change in plans, in February 2020, the research team submitted a request to amend the research-ethics certificate, whereby collection of the QIS data from the child protection workers would be postponed indefinitely and data on all children who became subjects of investigations by child protection services in Quebec in 2019 would instead be extracted from their case files in administrative databases. This amendment was approved, and in the spring of 2020, the research team notified the participating institutions of these changes and asked them to renew their consent forms and their authorizations to access their clients' data.

Recruitment of institutions

Invitations to participate in the study were sent to all institutions in Quebec that provide child protection services. At the time of this study, in the 18 health and social services regions into which Quebec is divided, these services were provided by 16 child and youth protection units (*directions de protection de la jeunesse*, or *DPJ*) operated by a CISSS or CIUSSS, by the Atikamekw Nation Council, and by the Inuulitsivik Health Centre, the Ungava Tulattavik Health Centre, and the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay. Although these last three institutions, which serve the health and social services regions of Nunavik and Terres-Cries-de-la-Baie-James, were invited to participate in FN/QIS-2019, they decided to wait until a later edition of this study, because recent restructurings of their service networks limited their ability to extract reliable data. The institution that serves the Akwesasne community in Quebec also could not participate, for lack of resources. When the data for this study were processed, weightings were applied to estimate the data for these four institutions from the data submitted by the others, so as to produce the most representative estimates possible for all First Nations children and all non-Indigenous children in Quebec. These adjustments are described briefly later in this chapter and in more detail in Appendix 2.

Most child and youth protection institutions in Quebec use a client-information system called the *Projet intégration jeunesse* (PIJ), but three First Nation communities that operate their own child and family services agencies¹¹ use a different one. For these communities, we sent an official request for consent to extraction of their administrative data to the executive director of the institution and the chief of the band council. In a spirit of transparency and collaboration, we also sent a letter explaining the planned data extractions to the executive directors of those First Nations institutions¹² whose data are maintained in the PIJ systems of the provincial institutions that participated in the study.

In 2020, the employees identified by each participating institution extracted the required data from its administrative database, using an extraction script that the research team had developed and tested previously.

Sampling

This study covered all First Nations children and non-Indigenous children about whom child protection services in Quebec received a report of maltreatment, risk of maltreatment or serious behaviour problems in calendar year 2019 and subsequently investigated this report and determined whether it was substantiated. Here are the specific criteria that had to be met for a child to be eligible for inclusion in the sample:

- Child identified as First Nations or non-Indigenous;
- Report on child received by child protection services between January 1 and December 31, 2019 and approved for investigation;
- Valid substantiation decision made following the investigation: report unfounded; report substantiated but child's security and development not in danger; report substantiated and child's security and development in danger. Children were excluded from the study in the following cases that made

11 Atikamekw Nation Council, community of Kahnawake, community of Akwesasne.

12 The institutions for the communities of Mashteuiatsh, Opitciwan, Listuguj and Gesgapegiag.

it impossible for the investigation to determine whether the report was substantiated: investigation terminated because of inability to proceed; case transferred to another child protection agency before a decision was made; child died while the investigation was under way; case closed without a decision for any other reason.

A child was identified as First Nations if the administrative data concerning that child satisfied at least one of the following conditions:

- 1) A value of “North American Indian” for the variable *Ethnicity*;
- 2) A value of “Indigenous on reserve” for the variable *Indigenous status*;
- 3) A valid value entered for the variable *Indian band*;
- 4) At least one of the two parents self-identifying as “North American Indian” or having an Indian band number;
- 5) A postal code associated with a place of residence in a First Nation community;
- 6) A value of “Indigenous off reserve” or “Indigenous under agreement” for the variable *Indigenous status* but no value of “Inuit” or “Métis” for the variable *Ethnicity*.

Children who were identified as Inuit or Métis, or who were identified as Indigenous but for whom it was impossible to determine whether they were First Nations, Inuit, or Métis (n=108) were also excluded from the study. According to the working group, the realities of such children’s lives might differ from those of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children. Because this was such a small group, a reliable picture of these children could not be obtained. All of the remaining children were classified as “non-Indigenous”.

By combining several different administrative variables, the identification of First Nations children among child protection services clients can be optimized, but the number of First Nations children identified in this study may nevertheless be an underestimate. One reason is that child protection workers in Quebec,

especially in large urban areas, may not always record their clients’ ethnicity in their files. It should also be noted that in the present study, the designation “First Nations” includes not only those First Nations that are party to the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement or the Northeastern Québec Agreement, but also those that are not.

In total, 35,914 children met the inclusion criteria for this study: 1,440 First Nations children and 34,474 non-Indigenous children. The weighting described later in this report was applied to this sample in order to estimate the data for those institutions that could not submit any. The resulting weighted sample is regarded as representative of all First Nations children and non-Indigenous children about whom one or more reports were received by Quebec child protection services in 2019 and subsequently investigated.¹³ **This weighted sample consists of 2,211 First Nations children and 34,575 non-Indigenous children.**

Data processing

The data used in this study were extracted from two components of the databases maintained by the health and social services institutions that use the PIJ client information system. These components are the *Système Clientèle Jeunesse* (SCJ) and the *Système d’Information sur les Ressources Intermédiaires et de Type Familial* (SIRTF).

The extraction script and a list of the data to be extracted were sent to each of the participating institutions. (Note that for purposes of FN/QIS-2019, the unit of record and analysis is the investigated child. Thus, in some cases the study may have included more than one child from the same family.)

The following administrative data were extracted for each child on whom Quebec child protection services received a report in 2019 and subsequently approved it for investigation:

13 The number of First Nations children identified in the present study may be an underestimate. The data processing used to determine whether a child was a member of a First Nation is described later in this report.

- Report source (professional, non-professional, other);
- Investigation (type of maltreatment, serious risk of maltreatment or serious behaviour problem investigated; substantiation decision);
- Protective measures taken during either the investigation stage or the protection-planning stage of the child protection process (placement, reunification, court involvement);
- Non-nominal data on the investigated child (client number, date of birth, postal code, gender, ethnicity of child and parents, Indigenous status of child and parents, band number of child and parents, if recorded).

Two of the First Nation communities that participated in this study maintain their client information in their own databases rather than in the PIJ system used by other child protection services in Quebec. These two communities worked with the research team to identify the variables corresponding to the desired data in their databases, then used adapted scripts to extract these data from them.

Once the research team had received all of the data tables, we proceeded with data processing (extraction, conversion to SPSS format, aggregation, and labelling). We then carried out an exhaustive cleaning of the database to eliminate possible inconsistencies, to process outliers, and to make methodological decisions about how to handle variables. In addition, we took the data from the two First Nation communities that do not use the PIJ system and converted these data to match those in the PIJ system. We then used the resulting clean database to perform the provincial statistical analyses on which the present report is based.

Weighting and calculation of population rates

All of the results reported in Chapter 4 are based on the **weighted** sample. As discussed earlier, we weighted our sample to compensate for missing data from non-participating institutions. According to the 2016 Census of Canada, the population of the regions served by these institutions is exclusively or almost exclusively First Nations or Inuit. The population of the Terres-Cries de la Baie James region is approximately 95% First Nations and 5% non-Indigenous. The population of the Akwesasne community in Quebec is entirely First Nations. The population of Nunavik is 90% Inuit, 1% First Nations and 9% non-Indigenous. As a result, in the unweighted sample, the number of First Nations children was underrepresented,¹⁴ while the number of non-Indigenous children was also underrepresented, but only very slightly.

Accordingly, in the weighted sample, each First Nations child received a weight of 1.5, while each non-Indigenous child received a weight very slightly greater than 1. The exact weights are based on an estimate of the number of additional children who would have been included in the sample if the non-participating regions had been able to submit their data. The specific numbers of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children expected from Region 17 and from the Akwesasne community were determined from the total number of children investigated there in 2019 and the percentages of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children ages 0 to 17 in their populations (as supplied by the institutions).

For Region 18, the institution was unable to provide the total number of children investigated in 2019, and at the request of the institution's managers, we did not use the number from its annual statistical report, which they considered unreliable. Instead, after consulting the working group, we chose another region of Quebec that, like Region 18, is remote and has a large First Nations population. We then applied the rates of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated in this other region to the First

¹⁴ The unweighted sample also underestimates the numbers of Inuit and Métis children, but they are not included in the analyses in the present report.

Nations and non-Indigenous populations ages 0 to 17 in Region 18 according to the 2016 Census, thus estimating the numbers of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated in this region in 2019. (This approach assumes that the characteristics of the missing cases are similar to those of the cases submitted by the participating institutions. Details of the method used to calculate the weighting are presented in Appendix 2.)

The rates per 1,000 given in the present report represent the frequency of the characteristics of interest within the populations of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children in Quebec. These rates show the proportions of children who became the subjects of investigations by child protection services in Quebec in 2019, expressed as numbers of children per 1,000 children, and are reported for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children separately.

Table 2 shows the size of the populations of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children ages 0 to 17 in Quebec in 2019, by age group. The population figures in this table have been used as the denominators in calculating the population rates. The data on the populations of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children come mainly from the 2016

census conducted by Statistics Canada. However, because some Indigenous communities did not participate in the 2016 census, we used Indigenous Services Canada data on the population of First Nations children to fill in the gaps.

Steps taken to protect confidentiality

The ethics certificates for the Quebec Incidence Studies (QIS) were first issued by the research-ethics committees of the Centre jeunesse de Montréal-Institut universitaire in Montreal in July 2014 and the Centre jeunesse de Québec-Institut universitaire in Quebec City in September 2014. The annual renewal requests for these certificates have been submitted on July 23 of every year since 2015. In addition, the final approval of the changes to the plans for QIS-2014, including in particular the plans for a fifth edition of the QIS in 2019, was obtained on July 26, 2019.

No information that would enable the children included in the present study or their families to be identified by name was compiled at any stage in this study. To ensure compliance with the rules of ethics set out in Quebec's *Act respecting Access to documents*

Table 2

Populations of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children in Quebec by age group, 2019

	First Nations Children	Non-Indigenous Children
Age Group	n	n
Less than 1 year	1 456	82 565
1 to 3 years	4 599	259 820
4 to 7 years	6 543	364 895
8 to 11 years	6 474	344 615
12 to 15 years	6 367	318 655
16 to 17 years	2 937	162 250
Total population of children ages 0 to 17 in Quebec in 2019	28 376	1 532 800

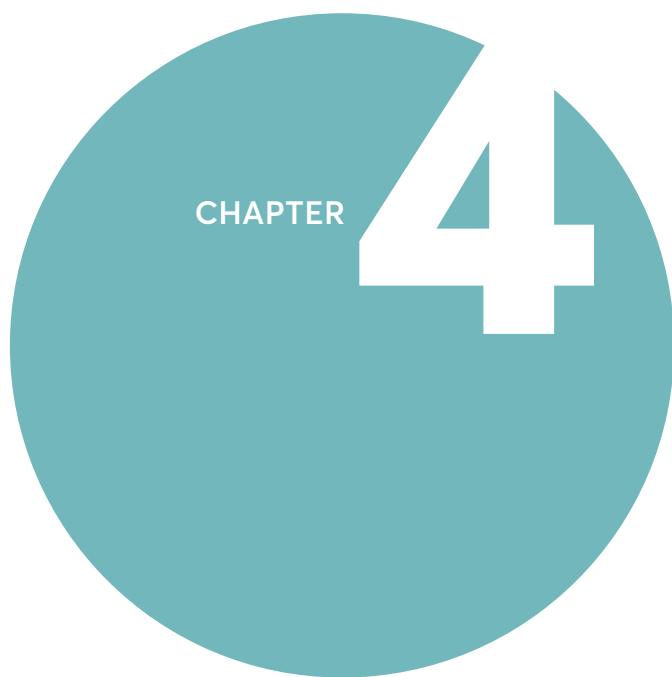
held by public bodies and the Protection of personal information, and with the provisions for protection of personal information in Quebec's *Youth Protection Act*, the research team took a number of steps regarding accessing, collection, processing, analysis and communication of nominative information.

Access to certain information stored in the administrative databases of the institutions that participated in this study was authorized by their executive directors. No name of any child was extracted from the administrative databases. Each child's client number was used to identify that child uniquely throughout the data collection process.

Before data collection began, the researchers, the coordinator and all members of the research team who had worked with the QIS forms and data signed a confidentiality agreement, at the request of the ethics committee for research on vulnerable youth at the CIUSSS Centre-Sud de l'Île-de-Montréal.

The research team took the extracted data files from each participating institution and converted them to SPSS format to create the FN/QIS-2019 database, and then proceeded with data cleaning. Access to this database for any further verification was restricted to research team members duly authorized by the ethics committee just mentioned.

Once analysis of the data from the FN/QIS-2019 database has been completed, the data file will be anonymized. Each child's client number and the name of the institution will be moved from this database into a separate personal-information file. The anonymized data file, containing no client numbers or institution names, may be used for future secondary analyses. These analyses will be conducted only at the level of the province as a whole. If an Indigenous institution or community so requests, some results may be transmitted in the form of internal summary reports. However, information related to any institution's clients will not be shared with other institutions without the authorization of that institution.



Portrait of First Nations Children and Non-Indigenous Children Investigated by Child Protection Services in Quebec in 2019

In this chapter, we compare the First Nations children investigated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019 with the non-Indigenous children investigated by these services in that same year. For each characteristic of interest, we present our findings in four forms: the number of children with the characteristic and the percentage, population rate and disparity index calculated from that number. Since the primary objective of this report is to compare the situation of First Nations children with that of non-Indigenous children, we have calculated and presented each of these values for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children separately. The methods that we used to calculate these values are explained in the following sections.

Statistics provided for each characteristic

Percentage

The percentage shows what proportion of all children investigated in Quebec in 2019 had the characteristic of interest. In this study, we calculated the percentages for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children separately.

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{\text{Number of children investigated in 2019 who had the characteristic}}{\text{Total number of children investigated in 2019}} \times 100$$

Population rate (rate per 1,000)

The population rate shows the number of children investigated in Quebec in 2019 who had the characteristic of interest, as a proportion of the total population of children in Quebec that year. This rate is expressed as the number of investigated children with the characteristic per 1,000 children in the population and thus represents the frequency of the characteristic within the population. In this study, we calculated the population rates for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children separately.

$$\text{Population rate} = \frac{\text{Number of children investigated in 2019 who had the characteristic}}{\text{Total number of children in the population of Quebec in 2019}} \times 1,000$$

Disparity index

For any given characteristic, the disparity index is the ratio of the population rate for First Nations children investigated in 2019 to the population rate for non-Indigenous children investigated in 2019. This index thus measures the disparity between these population rates for the characteristic in question. For example, a disparity index of 1.0 means that there is no difference between the two population rates. But an index

greater than 1.0 means that the characteristic is more prevalent among First Nations children than among non-Indigenous children. Disparity indexes are not given in the tables in this report but are mentioned throughout it.

$$\text{Disparity index} = \frac{\text{Population rate for First Nations children}}{\text{Population rate for non-Indigenous children}}$$

Characteristics of investigated children

First Nations or non-Indigenous identity

In Quebec in 2019, an estimated 2,211 First Nations children became the subjects of child protection investigations—77.9 out of every 1,000 children in the First Nations population. That same year in Quebec, the number of non-Indigenous children who became the subjects of such investigations was 34,575, or 22.6 out of every 1,000 children in the non-Indigenous population (Table 3). Thus, in Quebec in 2019, a First Nations child was 3.5 times more likely to become the subject of a child protection investigation than a non-Indigenous child.

Table 3
First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019

	First Nations Children		Non-Indigenous Children	
	n	Rate per 1 000	n	Rate per 1 000
Total children investigated	2 211	77.9	34 575	22.6

The differences between the rates for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination and poverty.

Age

As Table 4 shows, in Quebec in 2019, the two lowest age groups accounted for higher percentages of all children investigated among First Nations children than among non-Indigenous children. The disparity was especially marked among infants (age less than 1 year). This age group accounted for 13% of all First Nations children investigated, but 7% of all non-Indigenous children investigated. A large disparity was also seen in the population rates: 190.9 per 1,000 First Nations infants and 89.8 per 1,000 First Nations toddlers (ages 1 to 3) were investigated, compared with 31.2 per 1,000 non-Indigenous infants and 18.3 per 1,000 non-Indigenous toddlers.

Thus, in Quebec in 2019, very young First Nations children were far more likely to be investigated by child protection services than very young non-Indigenous children, at a rate **6.1 times higher for First Nations infants and 4.9 times higher for First Nations toddlers**. In contrast, children age 4 and older accounted for a smaller percentage of all First Nations children who were investigated than of all non-Indigenous children who were investigated (68% compared with 79%). Nevertheless, in 2019, First Nations children age 4 and older were almost 3 times more likely to be investigated by child protection services than non-Indigenous children in that same age range.

Gender

Among First Nations children investigated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019, the proportions of females and males were almost the same: 52% girls and 48% boys. Among non-Indigenous children who were investigated, the pattern was the reverse: 53% boys and 47% girls. These findings are presented in Table 5.

Previously investigated by child protection services

As Table 6 shows, the proportion of children investigated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019 who had been investigated by these services in the past was higher among First Nations children than among non-Indigenous children (59%, compared with 43%). As mentioned previously, in 2019, 77.8 out of every 1,000 First Nations children in the Quebec population were investigated. Out of these 77.8 children, 46.3 had been investigated before. Among non-Indigenous children, the corresponding rates were 22.6 per 1,000 and 9.7 per 1,000. Thus, among all children in Quebec in 2019, **First Nations children were 4.8 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to have been the subject of investigations in the past**.

Table 4

First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019, by age group

Age group	First Nations Children			Non-Indigenous Children		
	n	Rate per 1 000 children in age group	%	n	Rate per 1 000 children in age group	%
Less than 1 year	278	190.9	13%	2 576	31.2	7%
1 to 3 years	413	89.8	19%	4 746	18.3	14%
4 to 7 years	488	74.6	22%	8 886	24.4	26%
8 to 11 years	525	81.1	24%	8 739	25.4	25%
12 to 15 years	391	61.4	18%	7 383	23.2	21%
16 to 17 years	112	38.1	5%	2 246	13.8	7%
Total children investigated	2 208	77.8	100%	34 574	22.6	100%

The differences between the rates for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination and poverty.

Table 5

First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019, by gender

Gender	First Nations Children			Non-Indigenous Children		
	n	Rate per 1 000*	%	n	Rate per 1 000*	%
Male	1 056		48%	18 197	31.2	53%
Female	154		52%	16 363	18.3	47%
Total children investigated	2 211	77.8	100%	34 560	22.6	100%

* Population rates by children's gender could not be calculated, because the number of First Nations children by gender was not available in certain communities that do not participate in the census.

The differences between the rates for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination and poverty.

Table 6

First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019 who had been investigated by these services previously

Previously investigated?	First Nations Children			Non-Indigenous Children		
	n	Rate per 1 000	%	n	Rate per 1 000	%
No	895	31.5	41%	19 696	12.8	57%
Yes	1 313	46.3	59%	14 879	9.7	43%
Finding of previous investigation						
Unfounded	301		23%	3 665		25%
Substantiated	998		77%	11 212		75%
Total children investigated	2 208	77.8	100%	34 575	22.6	100%

The differences between the rates for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination and poverty.

Among those children investigated in 2019 who had been investigated previously, the percentages of children for whom the prior investigations substantiated the reported concerns were similar for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children (77% compared with 75%).

Characteristics of investigations

Sources of reports

Table 7 shows the numbers of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019 according to the source of the report that led to the investigation. Among First Nations children, the source of the report was a professional 83% of the time. Among non-Indigenous children, the proportion was slightly lower (79%).

Reports of incidents versus reports of serious risks

The reports investigated by child protection services in Quebec can involve two main types of concerns: 1) reports of one or more incidents, either of maltreatment (such as physical or sexual abuse, neglect, abandonment, or psychological ill-treatment) or of serious behaviour problems; 2) reports of one or more serious risks of maltreatment, but not of actual incidents of maltreatment or of serious behaviour problems.

Table 8 shows the numbers of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019 according to whether the reports investigated involved incidents or serious risks. The proportion of children for whom the reports investigated involved one or more serious risks of maltreatment but no actual incidents¹⁵ was higher among First Nations children than among non-Indigenous children: 20%, compared with 14%.

In 2019, 15.8 out of every 1,000 First Nations children in the Quebec population were investigated for serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment, while the

corresponding rate for non-Indigenous children was 3.2 per 1,000. Thus, **First Nations children were 4.9 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be investigated for reports of serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment.**

Substantiation decisions

When investigating reports about children, child protection workers must determine whether the reported concerns are substantiated. Table 9 shows the numbers of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019 according to whether the investigation determined the concerns to be substantiated or unfounded. The proportion of children for whom the concerns were determined to be substantiated was slightly higher among First Nations children than among non-Indigenous children (76%, compared with 72%). In Quebec in 2019, a child protection investigation substantiated a concern for 55.6 out of every 1,000 children in the First Nations population, compared with 16.2 of every 1,000 children in the non-Indigenous population. Thus, at the population level in 2019, **First Nations children were 3.4 times more likely to have a concern substantiated than non-Indigenous children.**

Appendix 3 provides further results for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children for whom serious risks of maltreatment without incidents were reported to child protection services in Quebec in 2019, investigated, and substantiated.

15 Throughout this report, “without incidents” should be taken to mean “without incidents either of maltreatment or of serious behaviour problems”.

Table 7

Sources of investigated reports for all First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019

Source of report	First Nations Children			Non-Indigenous Children		
	n	Rate per 1 000	%	n	Rate per 1 000	%
Non-professional	286	10.1	14%	6 463	4.2	19%
Professional	1 650	58.1	83%	27 296	17.8	79%
Other	45	1.6	2%	816	0.5	2%
Total children investigated	1 980*	69.8	100%	34 575	22.6	100%

* Data missing for about 10% (230) of the First Nations children.

The differences between the rates for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination and poverty.

Table 8

First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated for incidents and for serious risks by child protection services in Quebec in 2019

Concern reported and investigated	First Nations Children			Non-Indigenous Children		
	n	Rate per 1 000	%	n	Rate per 1 000	%
One or more incidents of maltreatment or of serious behaviour problems	1 764	62.2	80%	29 663	19.4	86%
One or more serious risks of maltreatment without incidents of maltreatment or of serious behaviour problems	447	15.8	20%	4 912	3.2	14%
Total children investigated	2 211	77.9	100%	34 575	22.6	100%

The differences between the rates for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination and poverty.

Table 9

Substantiation decisions for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019

Substantiation decision	First Nations Children			Non-Indigenous Children		
	n	Rate per 1 000	%	n	Rate per 1 000	%
Substantiated	1 577	55.6	76%	24 768	16.2	72%
Unfounded	508	17.9	24%	9 807	6.4	28%
Total children investigated	2 085*	73.5	100%	34 575	22.6	100%

* Data missing for about 6% (126) of the First Nations children.

The differences between the rates for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination and poverty.

Categories of incidents and serious risks investigated

Table 10 shows the numbers of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019 according to the categories of incidents or serious risks reported and investigated. Because the Quebec Incidence Study is an epidemiological study, Table 10 shows the numbers for each category not only for all children investigated in Quebec in 2019 (the left side of the table), but also, separately, for those children for whom the investigations determined the reported incidents or risks to be substantiated (the right side). The latter statistics are more readily comparable with

those reported elsewhere in the world. (Note that any one child can have up to three categories of incidents or serious risks recorded in their file.)

First, we will review our findings for all children investigated. Among First Nations children, the category with the highest prevalence was serious risks of neglect (40%, 31.5 per 1,000), followed by incidents of neglect (38%, 29.2 per 1,000), incidents of psychological ill-treatment (34%, 26.1 per 1,000), incidents of physical abuse (12%, 8.9 per 1,000), incidents of serious behaviour problems (11%, 8.7 per 1,000), serious risks of sexual abuse (9%, 7.2 per 1,000), serious risks of physical abuse (6%, 4.4 per 1,000), and lastly, incidents of sexual abuse (5%, 4.0 per 1,000). Among non-Indigenous children, the prevalence figures for the

Table 10

Categories of incidents and serious risks investigated for a) all First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019, and b) all such children for whom the investigation substantiated the reported incidents or risks

Category of incidents or serious risks	All children investigated						All children for whom the investigation substantiated the incidents or risks					
	First Nations Children			Non-Indigenous Children			First Nations Children			Non-Indigenous Children		
	n	Rate per 1 000	%	n	Rate per 1 000	%	n	Rate per 1 000	%	n	Rate per 1 000	%
Neglect	829	29.2	38%	11 678	7.6	34%	631	22.2	40%	8 952	5.8	36%
Physical abuse	253	8.9	12%	8 426	5.5	24%	137	4.8	9%	4 736	3.1	19%
Sexual abuse	114	4.0	5%	1 978	1.3	6%	71	2.5	5%	1 080	0.7	4%
Serious behaviour problems	247	8.7	11%	3 950	2.6	11%	170	6.0	11%	3 227	2.1	13%
Abandonment	11		1%	68	0.04	< 1%	9		1%	52	0.03	< 1%
Psychological ill-treatment	740	26.1	34%	11 170	7.3	32%	583	20.5	37%	9 127	6.0	37%
Serious risks of neglect	893	31.5	40%	7 005	4.6	20%	732	25.8	46%	5 758	3.8	23%
Serious risks of physical abuse	126	4.4	6%	1 403	0.9	4%	77	2.7	5%	832	0.5	3%
Serious risks of sexual abuse	203	7.2	9%	2 431	1.6	7%	132	4.7	8%	1 716	1.1	7%
Total children investigated	2 211	77.9	Δ	34 575	22.6	Δ	1 577	55.6	Δ	24 768	16.2	Δ

Δ Up to 3 categories of incident or risk can be recorded in a child's file, so the percentages for the incident and risk categories total more than 100%. The differences in the rates for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination and poverty.

For categories with unweighted frequencies of less than 15 among First Nations or non-Indigenous children, the rates per 1,000 are not shown, and the results shown must be interpreted cautiously.

various categories were somewhat different. The main difference was for serious risks of neglect, which ranked fourth (20%) among all incident and risk categories for all non-Indigenous children investigated, but first among all First Nations children investigated.

When the population rates for all First Nations children investigated are compared with those for all non-Indigenous children investigated, the greatest disparities are found in the three categories of serious risks of maltreatment. Compared with non-Indigenous children, First Nations children were **6.9 times more likely to be investigated for serious risks of neglect, 4.9 times more likely to be investigated for serious risks of physical abuse and 4.5 times more likely to be investigated for serious risks of sexual abuse.**

Both for First Nations children and for non-Indigenous children, neglect was the category of incident most frequently investigated. Compared with non-Indigenous children, First Nations children were **3.8 times more likely to be investigated for reported incidents of neglect.**

Now we will review our findings for all children investigated in 2019 for whom the investigations determined the reported incidents or risks to be substantiated (the right-hand side of Table 10). The patterns are similar here. Within this group, First Nations children were **6.9 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to have serious risks of neglect substantiated, 5.0 times more likely to have serious risks of physical abuse substantiated, and 4.2 times more likely to have serious risks of sexual abuse substantiated.** Compared with non-Indigenous children, First Nations children were **3.8 times more likely to have incidents of neglect substantiated.**

One interesting finding not obvious in Table 10 relates to the distinction made in Quebec child protection case files between primary grounds and secondary grounds for investigations. All of the categories of incidents and risks shown in Table 10 were recorded either as primary grounds or as one of the first two secondary grounds for the investigations in the children's files. But one of these categories—neglect—was recorded as a secondary ground more often for First Nations children than for non-Indigenous children. For example, among the 631 First Nations children for whom an investigation substantiated neglect, 250 (40%) had neglect shown as a secondary ground in their files. In contrast, among the 8,952 non-Indigenous children for whom an investigation substantiated neglect, neglect was shown as a secondary ground for 31%. Appendix 4 provides population statistics based solely on the primary grounds for investigation entered in the children's files.

Subcategories of incidents and serious risks investigated

This section examines the detailed subcategories of maltreatment, serious risks of maltreatment, and serious behaviour problems that Quebec child protection workers investigated in 2019. Again, it is important to note that the differences in the rates for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination and poverty. To facilitate such interpretation, we invite readers to review Chapter 2, which describes the social, historical and economic background of First Nations in Quebec and their living conditions today.

Table 11

Subcategories of incidents and serious risks investigated by child protection services in Quebec, First Nations children and non-Indigenous children, 2019

Subcategory of incidents or serious risks	First Nations Children			Non-Indigenous Children		
	n	Rate per 1 000 children	%	n	Rate per 1 000 children	%
Abandonment						
Parent or parents absent	9		< 1%	50	0.03	< 1%
Parents abandon child following placement	0		0%	2		< 1%
Neglect						
Failing to meet child's basic needs	197	6.9	10%	2 603	1.7	8%
Failing or refusing to provide child with physical health care	78	2.7	4%	853	0.6	3%
Failing or refusing to provide child with mental health care	18		1%	556	0.4	2%
Failing to provide child with supervision or support	244	8.6	12%	1 785	1.2	8%
Failing to take necessary steps to provide child with schooling	144	5.1	7%	1 605	1.0	5%
Inappropriate parental attitudes	247	8.7	13%	4 887	3.2	14%
Reacting inappropriately to child's behaviour	83	2.9	4%	2 901	1.9	8%
Tolerating inappropriate behaviour by third parties	91	3.2	5%	1 024	0.7	3%
Failing to provide child with stimulation	15		1%	516	0.3	2%
Psychological ill-treatment						
Separation conflict	89	3.1	5%	3 097	2.0	9%
Spousal conflict	137	4.8	7%	1 932	1.3	6%
Custody conflict	2		< 1%	24	0.02	< 1%
Isolation	2		< 1%	33	0.02	< 1%
Role reversal	18		1%	261	0.2	1%
Indifference	14		1%	251	0.2	1%
Threats	15		1%	720	0.5	2%
Disparagement	37	1.3	2%	1 269	0.8	4%
Emotional rejection	18		1%	521	0.3	2%
Exposure to intimate-partner violence	347	12.2	18%	4 114	2.7	12%
Exposure to family violence	61	2.1	3%	1 366	0.9	4%
Overcontrolling	0		0%	335	0.2	1%
Exploitation	2		< 1%	13		< 1%
Mental health problem	18		1%	1 076	0.7	3%
Sexual abuse						
Actions of a sexual nature (with or without physical	95	3.3	5%	1 948	1.3	6%
Indicators of sexual abuse	2		< 1%	61	0.04	< 1%
Physical abuse						
Bodily injuries	107	3.8	5%	4 306	2.8	13%
Unreasonable methods of upbringing	103	3.6	5%	4 130	2.7	12%
Other forms of physical abuse	11		1%	120	0.1	< 1%
Unexplained injuries	18		1%	352	0.2	1%
Serious behaviour problems/Running away						
	187	6.6	10%	3 931	2.6	11%
Serious risk of neglect						
Substance-use problems	735	25.9	37%	4 089	2.7	12%
Excessive-gambling problems	17		1%	62	0.04	< 1%
Instability problems	129	4.5	7%	1 167	0.8	3%
Social adjustment problems	18		1%	330	0.2	1%
Mental health problems	137	4.8	7%	3 010	2.0	9%
Physical health problems	15		1%	140	0.1	< 1%
Intellectual-deficit problems	5		< 1%	152	0.1	1%
Unresolved past issues of neglect	121	4.3	6%	955	0.6	3%
Serious risk of physical abuse						
Threats	9		1%	446	0.3	1%
Unresolved past issues of violence	26	0.9	1%	352	0.2	1%
Other risky behaviours	12		1%	197	0.1	1%
Exposure to family violence	51	1.8	3%	1 161	0.8	3%
Exposure to intimate-partner violence	69	2.4	4%	589	0.4	2%
Serious risk of sexual abuse						
Risk of sexual abuse by minors	75	2.6	4%	971	0.6	3%
Risk of sexual abuse by adults	2		< 1%	37	0.02	< 1%
Inappropriate climate	8		< 1%	338	0.2	1%
Sexual abuse risk indicators	6		< 1%	129	0.08	< 1%
Total children investigated	1 980*	69.8	Δ	34 575	22.6	Δ

Δ The same child can have more than one subcategory of incident or risk recorded in their file for each investigation.

* Data missing for about 10.4% (230) of the First Nations children.

The differences between the rates for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination and poverty.

For categories with unweighted frequencies of less than 15 among First Nations or non-Indigenous children, the rates per 1,000 are not shown, and the results shown must be interpreted cautiously.

Table 11 spotlights the subcategories of incidents and serious risks that accounted for the highest percentages of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019. For all First Nations children investigated in 2019, the incident or risk subcategory most frequently recorded by child protection workers consisted of substance-use problems experienced by the child’s parental figures, which are considered a subcategory of serious risk of neglect. This subcategory accounted for fully 37% of all First Nations children investigated.

The incident or risk subcategory recorded second most often for First Nations children was exposure to intimate-partner violence, which is considered a subcategory of psychological ill-treatment and accounted for 18% of all First Nations children investigated. The other subcategories most often recorded for First Nations children were various forms of neglect, such as parental attitudes that were deemed inappropriate (13%), problems with supervision or support (12%), and failing to meet children’s basic needs for clothing, housing, food and hygiene (10%). Some of these subcategories are associated with socio-economic problems and unstable living conditions.

Court involvement during investigation or protection-planning stage

Table 12 shows the numbers of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated in Quebec in 2019 according to whether the courts became involved during either the investigation stage or the protection-planning stage of the child protection process. As this table shows, the courts became involved with 17% of the First Nations children who were investigated, just slightly higher than the percentage for non-Indigenous children (13%). At the population level, 13.2 out of every 1,000 First Nations children in Quebec were investigated and had the courts become involved during one of these stages, compared with 3.0 out of every 1,000 non-Indigenous children. Thus, **First Nations children were 4.4 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to have been the subjects of child protection processes in which the courts became involved.**

Table 12
Court involvement during investigation or protection-planning stage for all First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019

Court involvement?	First Nations Children			Non-Indigenous Children		
	n	Rate per 1 000	%	n	Rate per 1 000	%
No	1 836	64.7	83%	29 980	19.6	87%
Yes	375	13.2	17%	4 595	3.0	13%
Total children investigated	2 211	77.9	100%	34 575	22.6	100%

The differences between the rates for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination and poverty.

Placement and reunification during investigation or protection-planning stage

Table 13 shows the numbers of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated in Quebec in 2019 according to a) whether they were placed outside the home during either the investigation or the protection-planning stage of the child protection process, b) the settings in which they were placed, and c) whether they were reunified with their families

during either of these stages. In 2019, 13% of all First Nations children who were investigated were placed outside the home, which is slightly higher than the figure of 10% for non-Indigenous children. In terms of population rates, 9.8 out of every 1,000 First Nations children in Quebec were investigated and placed outside the home during the investigation or protection-planning stage, compared with 2.3 out of every 1,000 non-Indigenous children. Thus, **First Nations children were 4.3 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to have been placed outside the home during one of these stages.**

Table 13

Placement outside the home and family reunification during investigation or protection-planning stage for all First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019

Placement?	First Nations Children			Non-Indigenous Children		
	n	Rate per 1 000	%	n	Rate per 1 000	%
No placement	1 933	68,1	87%	31 079	20,3	90%
At least one placement	278	9,8	13%	3 496	2,3	10%
Placement setting						
Informal placement	101		37%	933		27%
Kinship care	31		11%	40		1%
Foster care	64		23%	1 280		37%
Group home or residential centre	80		29%	1 160		33%
Other substitute setting	2		1%	83		2%
Reunified with family after placement?*						
No	100	3,5	55%	742	0,5	38%
Yes	81	2,9	45%	1 234	0,8	62%
Total children investigated	2 211	77,9	100%	34 575	22,6	100%

* Data missing for about 4.4% (97) of the First Nations children and 4.4% (1520) of the non-Indigenous children.

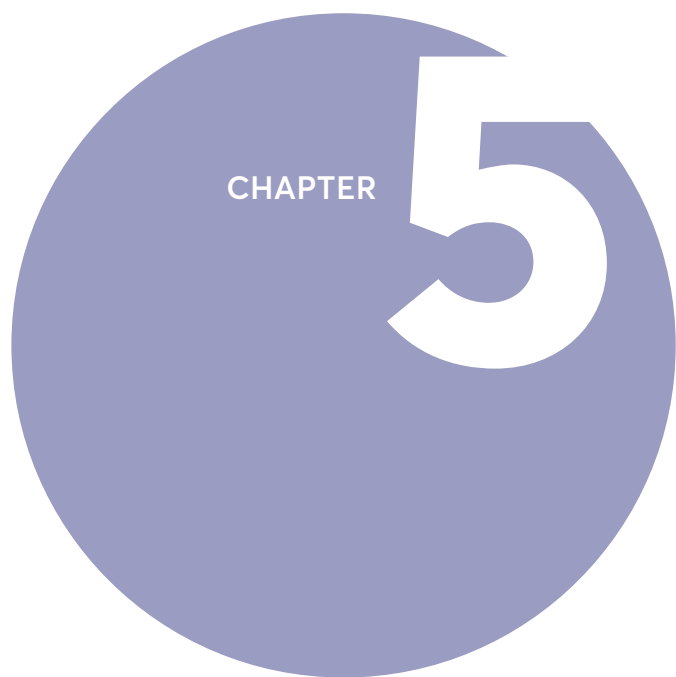
The differences between the rates for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination and poverty.

For categories with unweighted frequencies of less than 15 among First Nations or non-Indigenous children, the rates per 1,000 are not shown, and the results shown must be interpreted cautiously.

Among all children investigated in Quebec in 2019 who were placed outside the home during investigation or protection planning, the total percentage of children who went to informal placement settings or kinship care settings was far higher among First Nations children than among non-Indigenous children (48%, compared with 28%); broken down, this 48% figure means that 37% of all First Nations children who were placed went to informal settings and 11% went to kinship care settings.¹⁶ The proportions of children placed in the other types of settings were far lower for First Nations children than for non-Indigenous children: 23% versus 37%, for placements with regular foster families, and 29% versus 33% for placements in group homes and residential centres.

Lastly, the percentage of placed children who were reunified with their families before the investigation or protection-planning stage was completed was significantly lower for First Nations children than for non-Indigenous children. Slightly less than half (45%) of the First Nations children placed were reunified with their families before the end of protection planning, compared with almost two-thirds (62%) of the non-Indigenous children.

¹⁶ Settings in which a person who is significant to the child is recognized and paid as a kinship care provider



Discussion and Future Directions

The overrepresentation of First Nations children at every stage of the child protection process has been observed not only in Quebec but also in the rest of Canada (Sinha et al., 2008; Fallon et al., 2021; Crowe et al., 2021). In the rest of Canada, as in Quebec, the disparities between First Nations children and non-Indigenous children are concentrated among the very young and in situations where children are exposed to serious risks of neglect or to intimate-partner violence. These findings show where priority action should be taken to improve the well-being of First Nations children and eventually reduce these disparities.

The phrase “serious risks of neglect” refers to **situations where an investigation has not substantiated an actual incident of child neglect but has substantiated that a child is at serious risk of this form of maltreatment**. The question arises: why is the disparity between First Nations children and non-Indigenous children greater where serious risks of maltreatment, rather than actual incidents of maltreatment or of serious behaviour problems, have been found?

In the present study, most of the documented risks of neglect among First Nations children in Quebec were found to involve parental substance use or parental instability, both of which are often associated with unfavourable socioeconomic conditions.

There are a number of possible explanations for this finding. One may be that in Quebec, compared with non-Indigenous children, First Nations children are more often in situations that place them at serious risk of neglect (for example, living in socioeconomically precarious conditions or having parents with dependence problems) and that force child protection services

to intervene. But this need for child protection services to intervene frequently by enforcing the *Youth Protection Act* may itself reflect the inability of Quebec's public health and social services system to meet the needs of highly vulnerable families in any other way. Difficulties with cooperation between front-line preventive services and second-line child protection services may also tend to drive at-risk families directly to the latter, especially in some First Nation communities where child protection services have long been the only point of access to the social services system.

Another part of the explanation, however, is that the problems of parents' substance use and instability that are associated with serious risks of child neglect reflect the social, historical and economic circumstances discussed in Chapter 2, which many experts identify as effects of the colonialism and discrimination that First Peoples have experienced. This explanation supports past findings regarding the chronic lack of front-line services in First Nation communities (FNQLHSSC, 2011) and **calls for a massive, sustained investment in front-line services that members of First Nation communities can access.**

Yet another possible explanation for the observed disparities is that they reflect a lower threshold of risk tolerance for First Nations children than for non-Indigenous children—for example, that child protection workers are more concerned when a First Nations child lives with a parent who has a substance problem than when a non-Indigenous child does so. In other words, this may be a form of discrimination against First Nations children, possibly attributable to a lack of knowledge of the cultural differences in First Nation communities and the impact of intergenerational

trauma on First Nations people. In light of the announced upcoming reforms to the *Youth Protection Act* and to other family services in Quebec, these findings **demonstrate the great importance of reviewing the entire service offering through a First Nations lens and adopting a culturally safe approach in which service workers are trained in the realities of First Nations and intergenerational trauma.**

In conclusion, the findings of the present study underscore the importance of **ongoing monitoring** of the proportions of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children who receive protection services in Quebec every year. First of all, this information will be essential for planning service offerings and better understanding the continuum of services, from prevention to protection. Second, because the findings of the present study were generated entirely from administrative databases to which child protection workers add new information every day, these findings can be reproduced. In this regard, the ability of First Nations to gather, analyze and make good use of the data on the children in their communities who are receiving protection services should be supported.

Figure 5



Appendix 2

Detailed weighting method

The target population of FN/QIS-2019 consisted of all First Nations children and all non-Indigenous children who were investigated by child protection services in Quebec as the result of a report received in calendar year 2019. For 15 of the 18 health and social services regions into which Quebec is divided, the sample for this study included all such children; the research team received administrative data on these children from the 17 health and social service institutions that serve these regions. But the institutions serving the three other regions were unable to submit administrative data to the research team. These regions were Nunavik (Region 17), Terre-Crie de la Baie James (Region 18), and the region served by Akwesasne Child and Family Services. Because the populations of these regions are primarily First Nations or Inuit, this lack of data meant that First Nations children were heavily underrepresented in the unweighted sample for Quebec as a whole, while non-Indigenous children were just slightly underrepresented.

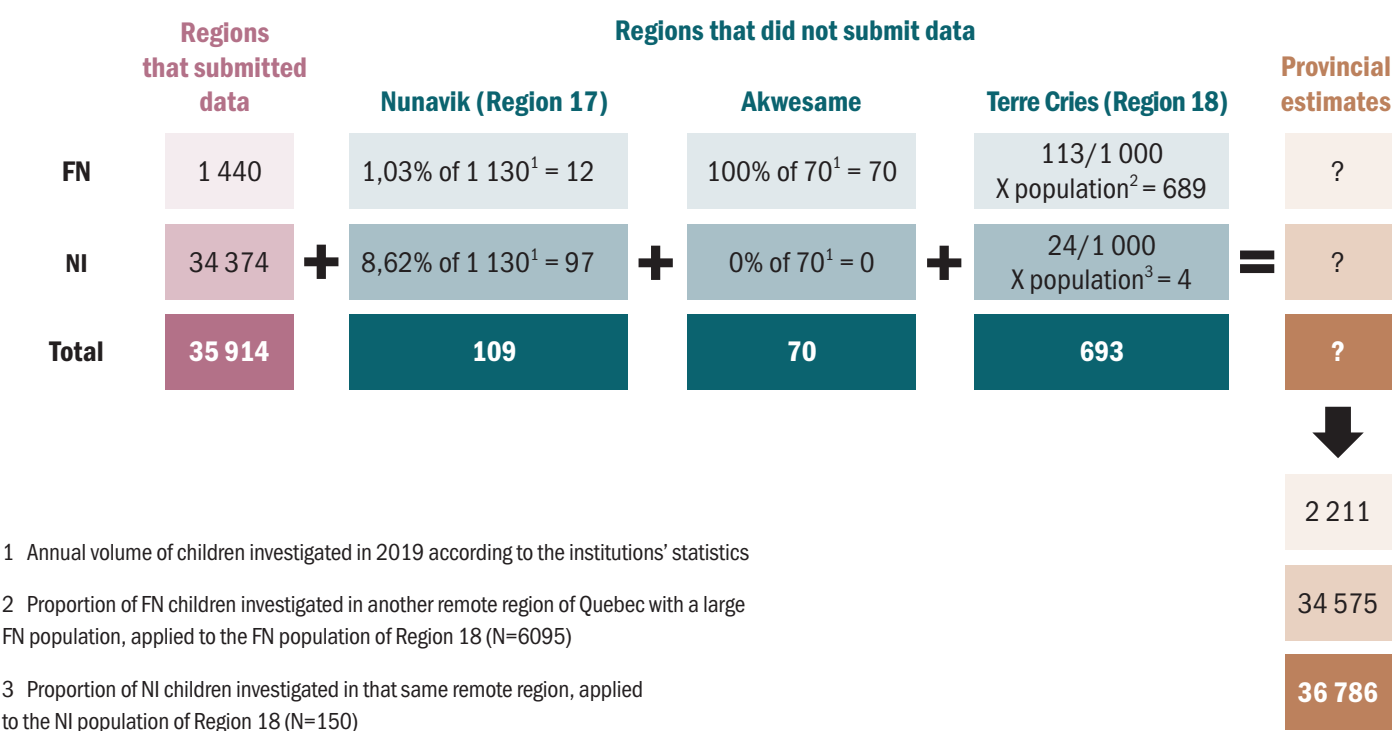
The research team therefore decided to weight the sample according to the children’s First Nations

or non-Indigenous identity so as to compensate for the missing data and better represent each of these two groups. Thus, in the **weighted** sample, each First Nations child received a weight of 1.535, while each non-Indigenous child received a weight of 1.003. The following paragraphs describe the method that we used to calculate these two weighting coefficients.

The exact value of the weighting coefficients was based on our estimate of the number of additional children who would have been included in the sample if the non-participating regions had been able to submit their data. To calculate the value of these coefficients, we proceeded in two steps. First, we estimated, for First Nations children and for non-Indigenous children separately, the total number of investigated children that would have been included in the sample if all of the institutions had submitted data; these two totals constituted the provincial estimates. Second, we used these provincial estimates to derive the weights that should be applied.

Figure 6 illustrates the **first step**: calculating the provincial estimates (the estimated total numbers of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated in Quebec in 2019) on the basis of known data. These known data were the numbers of First

Figure 6
Method of calculating provincial estimates for numbers of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated in Quebec in 2019



Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated in the regions that did submit data (in pink in Figure 6) and the numbers of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated in the regions that did not submit data (in turquoise in Figure 6).

For Nunavik (Region 17) and the Akwesasne community in Quebec, the total numbers of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated were determined from the annual volume for 2019 and the percentages of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children in the population ages 0 to 17 (as supplied by the institutions). Thus, by applying the percentages of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children to the annual volume of children investigated in each of these two regions, we obtained the numbers that, when added, allowed us to establish the provincial estimates.

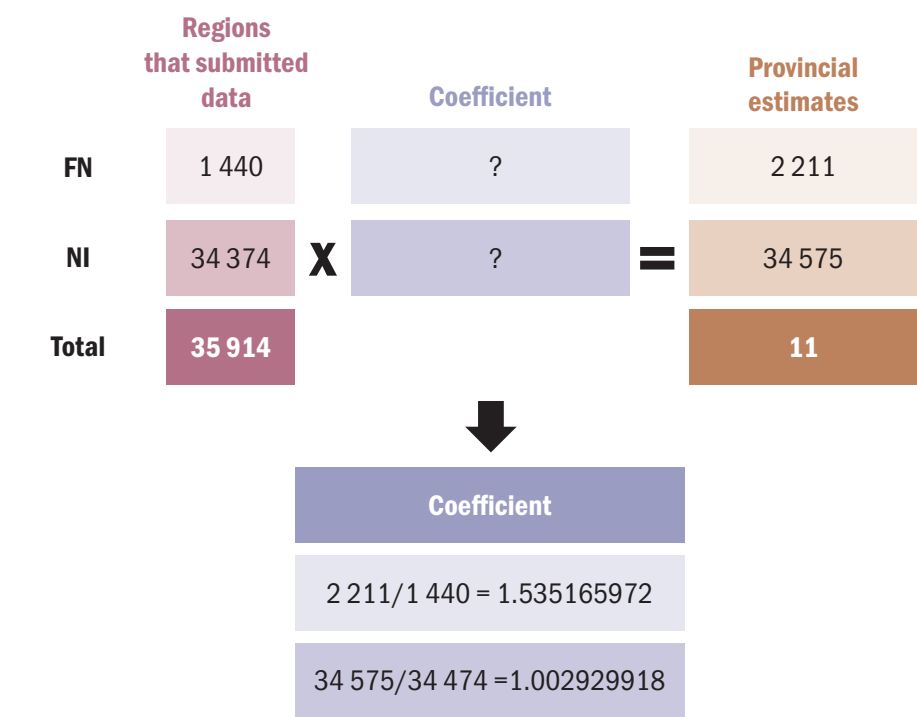
For Terre-Crie de la Baie James (Region 18), the institution was unable to provide the annual volume of children investigated in 2019, and at the request of the institution’s managers, we did not use the number from its annual statistical report, which they considered unreliable. Instead, after consulting the working group, we chose another region of Quebec that, like Region 18, is remote and has a large First Nations population. We then applied the rates of

First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated in this other region to the First Nations and non-Indigenous populations ages 0 to 17 in Region 18 according to the 2016 Census, thus estimating the numbers of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated in this region.

The weighting method used in this study assumed that the characteristics of the First Nations children investigated in Region 17, Region 18 and the Akwesasne community were similar to those of the First Nations children investigated in the 15 regions served by the institutions that did submit data.

Figure 7 illustrates the **second step** in calculating the weighting coefficients. In this step, we used the provincial estimates calculated in the first step to derive the coefficients that we then applied to the numbers of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated, based on the data from the participating regions.

Figure 7
Method of calculating weighting coefficients



Appendix 3

First Nations children and non-Indigenous children investigated in Quebec in 2019 for whom serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment were substantiated

Chapter 4 revealed an especially large disparity between First Nations children and non-Indigenous children whom child protection services in Quebec investigated in 2019 for reported serious risks of maltreatment with no reported incidents of maltreatment or of serious behaviour problems. This disparity was seen not only among all children investigated for such risks, but also among the portion of these children for whom the investigations determined these risks to be substantiated (see Table 10). This appendix takes a closer look at these disparities between First Nations children and non-Indigenous children for whom child protection services in Quebec investigated and substantiated such risks in 2019.

Child’s First Nations or non-Indigenous identity

For Quebec as a whole, an estimated 325 First Nations children were investigated by child protection services in 2019 for serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment that the investigation subsequently substantiated. This figure is equivalent to 11.5 out of every 1,000 children in the First Nations population of Quebec. In contrast, among non-Indigenous children, the corresponding total for that same year was 3,517, and the corresponding rate was 2.3 per 1,000 children (Table 14). Thus, the population rate for First Nations children was 5.0 times higher than the population rate for non-Indigenous children.

Table 14

First Nations children and non-Indigenous children for whom child protection investigations in Quebec in 2019 substantiated serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment

	First Nations Children		Non-Indigenous Children	
	n	Rate per 1 000	n	Rate per 1 000
Total children with serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment investigated and substantiated	325	11.5	3 517	2.3

The differences between the rates for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination and poverty.

Child's age

As Table 15 shows, in Quebec in 2019, among all children for whom serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment were reported to and subsequently investigated and substantiated by child protection services, children less than 1 year old accounted for a higher proportion of First Nations children than of non-Indigenous children (37%, compared with 29%). Out of all the age groups of First Nations children, these infants had by far the highest rate of substantiated reports of risks without incidents: 82.4 for every 1,000 children this age in the First Nations population. In comparison, the rate for non-Indigenous infants was 12.4 per 1,000. Although infants accounted for the highest proportion of children with substantiated risks among First Nations children and non-Indigenous children alike, the difference between this age group and the others was smaller among non-Indigenous children. Among all children **less than 1 year old** in Quebec in 2019, First Nations children were **6.7 times more likely than non-Indigenous children** to have serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment reported, investigated and substantiated by child protection services.

Child's gender

As Table 16 shows, among all First Nations children for whom serious risks (but not incidents) of maltreatment were reported, investigated and substantiated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019, the proportions of boys and girls were very close, with just slightly more boys (51% versus 49%). Among non-Indigenous children, the proportions of boys and girls were equal (50% each).

Sources of reports

As Table 17 shows, for 85% of the First Nations children for whom serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment were reported to and investigated and substantiated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019, the source of the report was a professional. The corresponding proportion for non-Indigenous children was slightly lower: 81%.

Table 15

First Nations children and non-Indigenous children for whom child protection investigations in Quebec in 2019 substantiated serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment, by age group

Age group	First Nations Children			Non-Indigenous Children		
	n	Rate per 1 000	%	n	Rate per 1 000	%
Less than 1 year	120	82.4	37%	1 022	12.4	29%
1 to 3 years	63	13.7	19%	708	2.7	20%
4 to 7 years	60	9.2	18%	776	2.1	22%
8 to 11 years	58	9.0	18%	581	1.7	17%
12 to 15 years	23	3.6	7%	342	1.1	10%
16 to 17 years	2		1%	88	0.5	3%
Total children with serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment investigated and substantiated	325	11.5	100%	3 517	2.3	100%

The differences between the rates for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination and poverty.

For categories with unweighted frequencies of less than 15 among First Nations or non-Indigenous children, the rates per 1,000 are not shown, and the results shown must be interpreted cautiously.

Table 16

First Nations children and non-Indigenous children for whom child protection investigations in Quebec in 2019 substantiated serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment, by gender

Gender	First Nations Children			Non-Indigenous Children		
	n	Rate per 1 000	%	n	Rate per 1 000	%
Male	167		51%	1 756		50%
Female	158		49%	1 758		50%
Total children with serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment investigated and substantiated	325	11,5	100%	3 514	2,3	100%

The differences between the rates for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination and poverty.

Table 17

Sources of reports of serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment that were substantiated by child protection investigations in Quebec, First Nations children and non-Indigenous children, 2019

Source of report	First Nations Children			Non-Indigenous Children		
	n	Rate per 1 000	%	n	Rate per 1 000	%
Non-professional	45	1.6	14%	581	0.4	17%
Professional	278	9.8	85%	2 848	1.9	81%
Other	3		1%	88	0.1	3%
Total children with serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment investigated and substantiated	325	11.5	100%	3 517	2.3	100%

The differences between the rates for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination and poverty.

For categories with unweighted frequencies of less than 15 among First Nations or non-Indigenous children, the rates per 1,000 are not shown, and the results shown must be interpreted cautiously.

Court involvement during investigation or protection-planning stage

As Table 18 shows, among all First Nations children for whom serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment were investigated and substantiated by Quebec child protection services in 2019, slightly more than 1 in 5 children (21%) had the courts become involved in their cases during the investigation or protection-planning stage. The corresponding percentage for non-Indigenous children was exactly the same. Nevertheless, among all children in Quebec in 2019, First Nations children were **4.9 times more likely** than non-Indigenous children to have **reports of serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment investigated and substantiated and have the courts become involved in their cases** (rate of 2.4 per 1,000 First Nations children compared with 0.5 per 1,000 non-Indigenous children).

Placement outside the home during the investigation or protection-planning stage

As Table 19 shows, among all First Nations children for whom serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment were investigated and substantiated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019, about 1 out of every 10 children (11%) was placed outside the home during the investigation or protection-planning stage of the child protection process. The corresponding proportion for non-Indigenous children was slightly higher (13%).

Even though this placement percentage was lower for First Nations children, the fact remains that at the population level, compared with non-Indigenous children, First Nations children were far more likely to have serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment reported, investigated and substantiated and to be placed outside the home in the process. The placement rate was 1.3 per 1,000 First Nations children, compared with 0.3 per 1,000 non-Indigenous children. Thus, compared with non-Indigenous children, First Nations children were **4.3 times more likely to have serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment reported, investigated and substantiated and to be placed outside the home in the process.**

Table 18

Court involvement during investigation or protection-planning stage for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children for whom child protection investigations in Quebec substantiated serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment in 2019

Court involvement?	First Nations Children			Non-Indigenous Children		
	n	Rate per 1 000	%	n	Rate per 1 000	%
No	258	9.1	79%	2 773	1.8	79%
Yes	68	2.4	21%	744	0.5	21%
Total children with serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment investigated and substantiated	325	11.5	100%	3 517	2.3	100%

The differences between the rates for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination and poverty.

Table 19

Placement outside the home during the investigation or protection-planning stage for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children for whom child protection investigations in Quebec substantiated serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment in 2019

Placements	First Nations Children			Non-Indigenous Children		
	n	Rate per 1 000	%	n	Rate per 1 000	%
No placement	289	10.2	89%	3 057	2.0	87%
At least one placement	37	1.3	11%	460	0.3	13%
Total children with serious risks (without incidents) of maltreatment investigated and substantiated	325	11.5	100%	3 517	2.3	100%

The differences between the rates for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination and poverty.

Appendix 4

Primary grounds for child protection investigations of First Nations children and non-Indigenous children in Quebec in 2019

Tableau 20

Primary grounds for investigations a) for all First Nations* children and non-Indigenous children investigated by child protection services in Quebec in 2019, and b) for all such children for whom the investigated incidents or risks were substantiated

Primary ground for investigation	All children investigated						All children for whom investigated incidents or risks were substantiated					
	First Nations Children			Non-Indigenous Children			First Nations Children			Non-Indigenous Children		
	n	Rate per 1 000	%	n	Rate per 1 000	%	n	Rate per 1 000	%	n	Rate per 1 000	%
Neglect	542	19.1	25%	8 092	5.3	23%	381	13.4	24%	6 146	4.0	25%
Physical abuse	218	7.7	10%	7 792	5.1	23%	118	4.2	8%	4 271	2.8	17%
Sexual abuse	94	3.3	4%	1 889	1.2	6%	57	2.0	4%	1 005	0.7	4%
Serious behaviour problems	184	6.5	8%	2 824	1.8	8%	117	4.1	7%	2 317	1.5	9%
Abandonment	11		1%	58	0.04	< 1%	9		1%	44	0.03	< 1%
Psychological ill-treatment	431	15.2	20%	7 209	4.7	21%	338	11.9	21%	6 032	3.9	24%
Serious risk of neglect	500	17.6	23%	3 871	2.5	11%	425	15.0	27%	3 184	2.1	13%
Serious risk of physical abuse	91	3.2	4%	1 133	0.7	3%	54	1.9	3%	652	0.4	3%
Serious risk of sexual abuse	138	4.9	6%	1 703	1.1	5%	78	2.7	5%	1 115	0.7	5%
Total children investigated	2 209	77.8	100%	34 571	22.6	100%	1 577	55.6	100%	24 766	16.2	100%

*The information systems used by the Kahnawake First Nation community and the Atikamekw Nation Council make no distinction between primary and secondary grounds for investigations, so we simply selected the first ground listed in the children's files in these systems.

The differences between the rates for First Nations children and non-Indigenous children must be interpreted in light of the ongoing impact of colonialism, discrimination and poverty.

For categories with unweighted frequencies of less than 15 among First Nations or non-Indigenous children, the rates per 1,000 are not shown, and the results shown must be interpreted cautiously.

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