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National incidence study of child abuse and neglect

In her recent editorial "Child Abuse: a community problem" (*CMAJ* 1998;158[10]:1301-2), Dr. Harriet L. MacMillan contends that research into the causes and prevention of child maltreatment has been lacking. To strengthen its knowledge in this area, Health Canada is developing the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect. Expert consultations with public health authorities, provincial/territorial child-protection officials, native child welfare organizations and others were held in 1997.

The objectives of the study are to develop national estimates on the incidence of child maltreatment and to monitor trends and develop baseline data concerning the reporting of maltreatment. We also want to improve our understanding of the types and severity of child maltreatment and generate strategies for directing resources to at-risk children. Finally, we want to produce information to help develop targeted programs and policies.

A multistage cluster-sampling strategy will be used to address 4 principal types of maltreatment: physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect. Data will be collected directly from child welfare workers; the data source will be participating provincial/territorial child welfare agencies selected randomly across Canada.

The study will build on the methodologies used in US and Ontario incidence studies.^{1,2} Standard

operational definitions of maltreatment will help ensure the consistency, quality and rigour of the data. A standard data-collection instrument will be used to minimize the response burden and ensure data quality. Data collection will end next spring, and data analysis will be completed early in 2000. Information and analysis stemming from the study will be disseminated widely.

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References

1. Sedlak AJ, Broadhurst DD. *The Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-3)*. Washington: US Department of Health and Human Services; 1996.
2. Trocmé N, McPhee D, Tam KK, Hay T. *Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect*. Toronto: Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse; 1994.

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