

National Child's Day — Children and Violence

National Child's Day, celebrated on November 20, was established by the Parliament of Canada upon the adoption of the *Declaration of Child Rights* (1959) and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1993). The Convention on the Rights of the Child is one of the most internationally accepted agreements from the United Nations. It has been ratified by every member of the United Nations with a functioning government, save one.

To this end, we as Canadians should be looking at how our country addresses the issues of child abuse and neglect. Canada does not have a good record, at least not a record we could find. Searching for statistics, we find that Canada does not maintain a system for tracking or measuring the incidences or reasons for child abuse — very important in ensuring the issues are addressed. There is neither consistency in treatment, nor in reporting, from one municipality to the next.

Canada has recently started produced some statistical studies on the police reports in child abuse situations that show that, alarmingly, Canada is turning its back on many of its abused children.

The United States of America maintains much better statistics. Included in this are reports from a majority of their child protective service agencies (what we generally call Children's Aid Societies, or the "CAS", in Ontario).

For example, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services produced a report entitled **Child Maltreatments 1996: Reports From the States to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System**. This is a summary of information from 1996 provided by the child protective services agencies in the 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Armed Services. The U.S. study looked at people who are in, or potentially in, a caretaker roll.

The U.S. statistics indicate the approximately 77% of the perpetrators of child abuse and neglect were care giver parents. A further 11% were other relatives of the victims, and 12% were not related to the child.

The U.S. study also breaks down the type of maltreatment by the sex of the perpetrator, and the following table is extracted from that study:

Type of Maltreatment by Sex of Perpetrator, DCDC

Sex	Physical Abuse	Neglect	Medical Neglect	Sexual Abuse	Emotional Maltreatment	Totals
Male	17,590 (44.7%)	20,617 (28.1%)	1,893 (21.7%)	16,448 (71.5%)	2,586 (43.0%)	59,134 (39.3%)
Female	21,757 (55.3%)	52,675 (71.9%)	6,818 (78.3%)	6,571 (28.5%)	3,429 (57.0%)	91,250 (60.7%)
Totals	39,347 (100.0%)	73,292 (100.0%)	8,711 (100.0%)	23,019 (100.0%)	6,015 (100.0%)	150,384 (100.0%)

As can be seen from this report, and as shown in many other reports, the incidence of sexual abuse of children (27.8% of the total abuse and neglect cases) is the one category that has a higher level of male perpetrators (71.5% versus 28.5% of female perpetrators). In all other

categories, the female perpetrators are more common than the male ones — a female is about 25% more likely than a male to physically abuse children. Over all, a woman is about 50% more likely than a man to neglect or abuse children (including physical and sexual abuse).

Canada does not collect statistics on the incidences of child abuse. Canada, in a Statistics Canada report entitled *Family Violence in Canada: a Statistical Profile 1998*, did look at the incidence of police reports on abuse over a sample of the police forces in Canada. It should be noted that a police report is produced in situations in which the police decided to take action (e.g. arrest) — a not so subtle difference with the detailed examinations of the professional U.S. child protection agencies. Many people's personal experiences will tell you that those situations that the police completed a report on, not the incidences that were reported to police, are not large — the police seem to go out of their way not to write reports on many incidents.


The Canadian report limits itself to dealing with physical and sexual abuse. The U.S. report also deals with neglect, medical neglect and emotional maltreatment. The Statistics Canada study of police reports states that 22% of incidents involving children related to violent crime, while the U.S. study indicates 24% suffered physical abuse. The distributions here are close. The Canadian and U.S. studies also indicate that of the perpetrators that were related to the child, a similarly high proportion (90%) were caregiver parents.

However, when discussing the sex of the perpetrator, things do become quite different. Fathers had police reports in 73% of the physical assaults and mothers 27%, while the U.S. child protection agencies investigations show that this proportion is wildly out of whack. In addition, the Statistics Canada report says that police reports indicated that in sexual assault fathers were deemed responsible in 98% of the cases and mothers only 2%, very much different from what the detailed child protection agency studies show. Again note that Statistics Canada report's uses police "reports" and not on identified incidents.

What does this indicate? It shows that police action, and presumably the CAS-induced intervention, in the child assault and neglect cases is extremely gender biased. Canadian police are about 3.5 more likely to charge a father with physical abuse than a mother based on a similar incident. This rises to over 20 times more likely when dealing with sexual abuse. Clearly, the police are simply not dealing with serious crimes committed by women until we read of the headlines of "MOTHER SHOTS TRIPLETS" and "WOMAN BEATS STEP-SON TO DEATH".

Perhaps this is a result of the mistaken representation that depicts men as the only fallible human beings, while women can do no wrong in child-rearing. This type of attitude endangers our children by leaving them with dangerous abusers. It also denies these abusing women the help that they need to deal the types of mental illnesses that characterise child abusers. No-one is helped by ignoring reality.

On National Child's Day, it is important that all Canadians insist and ensure that our children can grow up in an environment safe from abuse and neglect.

	<p>Fathers Are Capable Too Supporting a child's right to both parents Telephone: 416-410-FACT (3228)</p>	<h1>F.A.C.T.</h1>
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