

Available online at [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

## Public Health

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/puhe](http://www.elsevier.com/puhe)

## Original Research

## Prevalence and risk factors of child neglect in the general population

M.-È. Clément<sup>a,\*</sup>, A. Bérubé<sup>b</sup>, C. Chamberland<sup>c</sup><sup>a</sup> Département de psychologie et de psychoéducation, Université du Québec en Outaouais, Campus de Saint-Jérôme, 5 rue Saint-Joseph, Saint-Jérôme, Québec, J7Z 0B7, Canada<sup>b</sup> Département de psychologie et de psychoéducation, Université du Québec en Outaouais, Campus de Gatineau, Canada<sup>c</sup> École de service social, Université de Montréal, Canada

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 25 November 2015

Received in revised form

14 March 2016

Accepted 19 March 2016

Available online 23 April 2016

## Keywords:

Prevalence

Child neglect

Epidemiology

Risk factors

## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** Child neglect is a major public health problem. It is the most frequently reported and substantiated form of maltreatment in youth protective services, and its effects are the most harmful to children. Yet, very few studies have documented its extent and risk factors in the general population. This study aims at documenting the annual prevalence and risk factors of child-neglect behaviours in the general population according to child age and parental gender.

**Study design:** Cross-sectional population survey.

**Methods:** A sample consisting of 3298 mothers and 1104 fathers of children between six months and 15 years old responded to a telephone survey. The prevalence of neglect was documented using the short version of the Parent-Report Multidimensional Neglectful Behaviour Scale for three child-age categories.

**Results:** Annual prevalence rates vary between 20.6% (95% CI 18.2–23.1) and 29.4% (95% CI 26.6–32.4) depending on the children's age. Although statements do not vary by parent gender, the factors associated with neglect depend on whether they are reported by the mother or the father. Mothers present more mental health problems, while fathers struggle more commonly with difficulties related to their life context.

**Conclusions:** Measuring neglect in the population presents numerous challenges. Nonetheless, this study made it possible to document the extent of neglectful behaviours in the general population. The results confirm that the risk factors related to neglectful behaviours are similar to those documented in studies concerning situations of neglect reported to the authorities. Other studies are needed to better understand how this phenomenon is manifested in the population.

© 2016 The Royal Society for Public Health. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [Marie-eve.clement@uqo.ca](mailto:Marie-eve.clement@uqo.ca) (M.-È. Clément), [Annie.Berube@uqo.ca](mailto:Annie.Berube@uqo.ca) (A. Bérubé), [Claire.chamberland@umontreal.ca](mailto:Claire.chamberland@umontreal.ca) (C. Chamberland).<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2016.03.018>

0033-3506/© 2016 The Royal Society for Public Health. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## Introduction

Child neglect is a major public health problem. It is the form of maltreatment most frequently reported to youth protective services, and its many consequences for a child's development are often detrimental. In the most severe cases, it can cause major physical and cognitive developmental delays, as well as irreversible impacts on the brain, including delayed development of the prefrontal cortex affecting the executive functions that are necessary for attention, decision making and problem solving.<sup>1</sup> With regard to socio-emotional and behavioural development, it can lead to insecure or disorganised attachment, depressive disorders, aggressiveness, substance use problems and dissociative symptoms that persist in adolescence.<sup>2,3</sup> Finally, like other forms of maltreatment, the impacts of neglect may vary according to the moment when it occurs in the child's life, its chronicity and the presence of other forms of maltreatment.<sup>2</sup>

To date, the extent of neglect has been studied mainly in child protective services. However, the number of children exposed to neglectful behaviours in the general population can be estimated based on a few surveys. The studies concerned are characterised by their use of cross-sectional designs where adults from the general population are most often interviewed to document the lifetime prevalence of parental neglect.<sup>4–6</sup> In other studies, researchers document the prevalence over a shorter period, usually 12 months, with parents from the general population<sup>7–9</sup> or the youth themselves.<sup>10,11</sup> As could be expected, the reported rates are generally lower than those in the studies on lifetime prevalence due to the shorter period covered. From a methodological standpoint, however, these studies are often more rigorous than those pertaining to lifetime prevalence, which present a great risk of memory bias and may produce estimates based on non-validated questionnaires.

In the USA, the surveys conducted with parents from the general population report annual rates of neglect varying from 1% to over 20%. These variations depend on numerous factors, such as the number of items, the forms of neglect documented, as well as the period covered by the measure. In the surveys by Finkelhor et al., the annual prevalence of physical neglect, based on one single item, is estimated at approximately 2%.<sup>11</sup> Similar results were reported in the study conducted by Theodore et al. with a large sample of American parents.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, in another population-based survey, Straus et al. obtained much higher rates, with 27% of the children being victims of one of the five forms of neglect documented over the year, each item of their questionnaire documenting one form of child neglect, the most common being lack of supervision (19%).<sup>7</sup>

Neglect stems from a series of personal, family-related and environmental factors. By its very nature, it affects young children most particularly because of their greater vulnerability and the extent of their developmental needs.<sup>2</sup> Parents' depression, addiction and mental health problems are often among the array of family-level factors that contribute to neglectful parenting.<sup>4,12</sup> Parental stress and conjugal violence are also associated with the occurrence of child neglect.<sup>2,4</sup> Finally, environmental factors, such as

poverty and social isolation, are associated with neglect, even more so than the physical and psychological forms of family violence.<sup>13</sup>

This study aims at estimating the annual prevalence of child-neglect behaviours in the general population in Quebec. It also explores which factors are associated with contexts of neglect by parent gender.

## Methods

### Participants

The data from this study were collected through a telephone survey conducted by the Quebec Institute of Statistics (ISQ) in 2012 using a representative sample of 5371 Quebec households (province of Canada).<sup>14</sup> To participate in this survey, parents had to live at least 40% of the time with a child between six months and 17 years old. The sample selection originated from a database derived from Quebec's child assistance plan. Only one child per household was randomly selected, so that the questions asked would correspond to the child's characteristics. Since the measure of neglect used in the survey concerns only children aged 15 years or under, 969 children aged 16–17 years were not considered. The analyses were thus conducted on 3298 mothers and 1104 fathers, for a total of 4402 children, distributed as follows: 1498 children between six months and four years old; 1235 children between five and nine years old and 1669 children between 10 and 15 years old.

The majority of these children are from two-parent families (75%); the others live in single-parent (16%) or blended (9%) families. The responding parents consider the family income to be generally sufficient or high (92%), and a small proportion consider themselves poor or very poor (8%). On average, the respondents were 31 years old (SD: five years and five months) when their child was born and the majority had a college or university education (79%). Finally, the children are evenly distributed by gender (girls = 49%). This survey and the resulting analyses were approved by the research ethics committees of the ISQ and of the authors' universities.

### Measures of child neglect

The short version of the Parent-Report Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale (MNBS) was selected for measuring child neglect<sup>15</sup> and translated into French with the authors' permission. Each item, which varies according to the child's age, covers four forms of neglect: emotional; cognitive; supervision and physical. The answer choices are based on a four-point scale expressing how frequently the situation occurs (1 = never to 4 = most of the time/all the time). While the items in the original version of the MNBS concern the responding parent as the perpetrator, the questions proposed in the survey refer to 'any adult in the home'. Furthermore, the reference period used in the survey is the past 12 months, rather than the past 6 months indicated in the MNBS. [Table 1](#) presents each item regarding child neglect and its threshold/cut-off point as suggested by the authors of the questionnaire.<sup>15</sup>

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1313371>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1313371>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)