

## Failure to supervise and injuries in the Canadian child welfare system

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Mónica Ruiz-Casares, PhD<sup>a, c</sup>

Nico Trocmé, PhD<sup>b, c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *McGill University, Department of Psychiatry, Montreal, Quebec, Canada*

<sup>b</sup> *McGill University, School of Social Work, Montreal, Quebec, Canada*

<sup>c</sup> *McGill University, Centre for Research on Children and Families, Montreal, Quebec, Canada*

Child welfare services frequently investigate cases in which children were left unsupervised or inadequately supervised. Children left unsupervised or inadequately supervised may sustain physical, mental, or social negative outcomes (Aizer, 2004; Morrongiello, Pickett et al., 2008; Theodore, Runyan, & Chang, 2007). Meanwhile, there is increasing evidence that caregiver supervision may reduce the risk and severity of childhood injuries (Damashek, et al., 2009; Schwebel & Brezausek, 2008) and protect children who have injury risk factors (e.g., hyperactivity) (Schwebel, Brezausek, Ramey, & Ramey, 2004).

For over a decade, the Canadian Incidence Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS) have revealed that supervisory neglect is the largest type of neglect in Canada (Schumaker, Fallon, & Trocmé, in press). The CIS, the only national source of data on child maltreatment in Canada, track cases in which a child was harmed or endangered as a result of the caregivers' failure to supervise or protect the child adequately. Like in previous cycles, the most recent cycle of the CIS (2008) documented nature and severity of physical harm suspected or known to have been caused by the investigated maltreatment. Although cases substantiated for neglect exhibited fewer injuries than other categories of maltreatment (6%), those tended to require medical treatment. Household risks such as accessible drugs, chemicals or solvents, and other home injury hazards were noted in 2008 for the first time.

This paper examines the nature and severity of injuries resulting from supervisory neglect and identifies factors associated with injury risk in the context of inadequate supervision within the Canadian child protection system. Ultimately, this paper raises questions about investigating workers' understanding of what constitutes 'unacceptable' patterns of child care which justify child welfare intervention.