



# THE COSTS OF CHILD MALTREATMENT IN QUEBEC

OBSERVATOIRE  
des tout-petits

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A close-up photograph of a child's face, focusing on the eyes and nose. The child has dark, expressive eyes and a soft, innocent expression. The skin is fair and smooth. The text is overlaid in the upper left quadrant in a white, handwritten-style font.

If you really look  
into the eyes of a child,  
you can see our future.



# Maltreatment of the very young in Quebec

## What can we learn from data from youth protection services?

- In 2015-2016, **7,700 substantiated reports** of maltreatment for children 5 years of age and under were reported to Quebec's Directors of Youth Protection (DYP)—the equivalent of **20 new situations every day**.
- In 2015-2016, substantiated reports were primarily cases of **neglect** and **physical abuse**.

## How has the situation evolved over the past years?

- The rate of substantiated reports **rose by 27%** between 2007-2008 and 2015-2016.
- Among children who were already victims of maltreatment, the proportion that were subjected to repeated maltreatment **increased between 2008 and 2014**.

These data may even underestimate the extent of maltreatment, as not all cases are reported to the Directors of Youth Protection.

# The human costs: multiple and persistent consequences for very young children

Since very young children are less exposed to public view, they may be more vulnerable to maltreatment than their older counterparts. Unlike school-aged children, they are sometimes isolated at home.

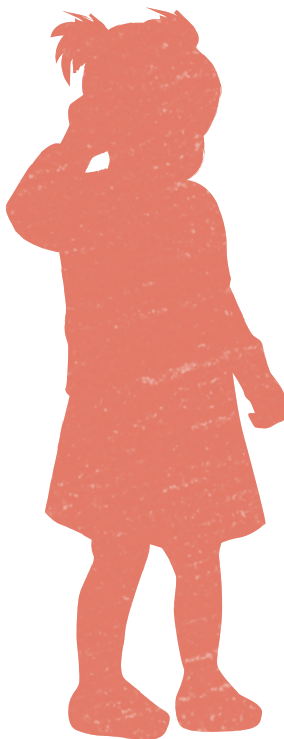
The negative effects of maltreatment can affect several aspects of a child's development.



**Cognitive development:**  
language delay, attention  
and memory problems.



**Emotional development:**  
depressive behaviour,  
anxiety, low self-esteem,  
difficulty controlling  
emotions.



**Physical development:**  
altered brain structure,  
malnutrition, vision and  
hearing problems, dental  
problems, epilepsy,  
paralysis.



**Social development:**  
withdrawal, avoidance,  
anger, aggression.

The effects of maltreatment on young children are greater because they are more vulnerable and dependent on adults for their daily care and basic needs. These effects can also carry right through into adulthood and last a lifetime.



Asthma

Withdrawal



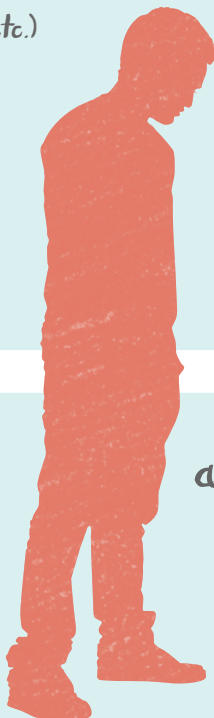
Verbal bullying  
and physical  
aggression

Poorer  
academic  
results

Chronic illness

(diabetes, cardiorespiratory diseases, etc.)

Dropping out  
of school



Deterioration in  
mental health and  
mental disorders

(depression, suicidal thoughts)

Violence  
in intimate  
relationships  
and towards one's  
own children

That's why it's  
important to look after us.  
To help us grow up.  
To treat us properly.



# Social and economic costs

In addition to affecting the lives of individual victims, maltreatment costs a great deal for society as a whole. In Canada and the United States, researchers have drawn up a list of the social and economic costs associated with maltreatment.

According to the most recent study available (2003), the annual cost of maltreatment in Canada totals \$15.7 billion.

In 2012, American researchers estimated that the total costs of maltreatment over a lifetime are comparable to those associated with type 2 diabetes.

The annual cost of maltreatment in Canada totals \$15.7 billion.

## Health

Medical care for injuries, mental health care, medication, treatment of chronic diseases.

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## Education

Specialized educational services for children and youth with behavioural and learning disorders.

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## Social services

Protection services, social housing, support for families, violence prevention, youth offender programs, detox centres, residences for homeless adolescents, victim assistance organizations, shelters for youth in difficulty.

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## Legal system

Police services, trials, legal aid, incarceration costs for aggressors and for their victims, who present a greater risk of run-ins with the law.

(In the United States, 27% of maltreated children are arrested during adolescence, as compared to 17% of other children. When they reach adulthood, 42% of maltreated children have a criminal record, as compared to 33% of other children.)

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## Employment

Lost income (approximately \$5,000 less annually, according to U.S. data).

# Known risk factors

No single risk factor is solely responsible for maltreatment: the causes are generally multiple and closely interrelated.

Here are some of the factors that can affect a child's risk of being a victim of maltreatment:



**HOUSEHOLD SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS**



**STRESS RELATED TO PARENTING AND WORK-FAMILY BALANCE**



**PARENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS CORPORAL PUNISHMENT**



**PARENTS SUFFERING FROM DEPRESSION,  
ANXIETY OR PERSONALITY DISORDERS**



**PARENTS' EXCESSIVE USE OF ALCOHOL OR DRUGS**

**Many Quebec families are affected by one or other of these factors.**

For example:

- In 2013, 13% of Quebec children between 0 and 5 were living in families with a low after-tax income.
- In 2012, close to one-third (35%) of mothers and one-quarter (23%) of fathers of children between 6 months and 5 years presented high levels of stress related to coping with work and family responsibilities.



Life is harder for  
some parents. Some don't  
have enough money.  
Some are alone. Some are just  
exhausted.



# Acting collectively to prevent maltreatment

Many programs aimed at the prevention of maltreatment are designed to support adults in their role as parents (such as Quebec's *Services intégrés en périnatalité et pour la petite enfance*, or SIPPE). These programs are only one of many strategies for preventing maltreatment. To increase their effectiveness, **they must be combined with social or collective measures.**

The approaches described below are examples of some interesting possibilities that have been proven to be effective or promising elsewhere around the world.

## INCREASING ECONOMIC SUPPORT FOR DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES

Children in vulnerable families that are able to benefit from a social assistance program are less likely to be the subject of a substantiated report to youth protection services.

## WORKING TO CHANGE SOCIAL NORMS AND PROMOTE POSITIVE PARENTING PRACTICES

Countries that have adopted a law prohibiting any form of corporal punishment have seen a decrease in the frequency of corporal punishment and an increase in the use of non-violent disciplinary measures. Such legislation can have a real impact on the reduction of maltreatment, as there is a fine line between corporal punishment and abuse. Since the risks of escalation are high, corporal punishment can rapidly evolve into severe physical violence.

## PROVIDING PRACTITIONERS WHO SUPPORT PARENTS WITH TRAINING AND TOOLS

Children who are seen by a professional who has been trained to detect signs of maltreatment and provide parents with support are less likely to be victims of maltreatment or suffer psychological and minor physical abuse.

## OFFERING EDUCATIONAL CHILDCARE SERVICES AND PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS EARLY IN CHILDREN'S LIVES

By providing children with stimulation and structure while offering parents respite and support, quality educational childcare could help reduce the risk of maltreatment.

## FACILITATING ACCESS TO QUALITY HOUSING AND LIVING ENVIRONMENTS

An relationship has been observed between overcrowded family homes and the number of times parents report having hit or slapped their children during the previous week. Studies have also made a connection between neighbourhood disadvantage and maltreatment.

### ***Do similar measures exist in Quebec?***

The following measures already exist in Quebec and should be preserved, although their implementation is not always optimal and could be improved. Further measures need to be considered.

- Quebec has set up measures aimed at improving families' economic situations. Policies like the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan help parents reconcile work and family responsibilities.
- Certain university programs that train future helping or health professionals are starting to focus on the prevention of maltreatment. Since this training is left to the discretion of the individual institution, however, it has not yet been standardized. Some community organizations working to prevent violence are tackling this subject with education professionals in schools and daycare facilities.
- In Quebec, junior kindergarten (for 4-year-olds) and educational childcare (*Services de garde éducatifs à l'enfance*, or SGEE) offer educational services for very young children. Some CLSCs and community organizations that organize early stimulation workshops for preschoolers also act as support networks for their parents who want to improve their parenting skills.
- Quebec's *Politique gouvernementale de prévention en santé* addresses the question of communities, housing and living conditions. Quebec municipalities are also currently encouraging the creation of family- and child-friendly environments.

# Acting now, acting together

The maltreatment of children remains a concern in Quebec, affecting thousands of very young children every year. Because very young children are especially vulnerable, maltreatment can have serious impacts on their present and future lives.

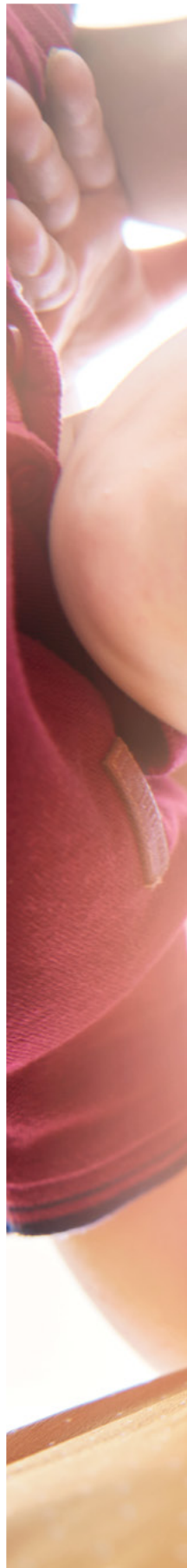
In addition to affecting the lives of individual victims, maltreatment costs a great deal for society as a whole. It is therefore crucial that we as a society take collective action to prevent maltreatment.

There are solutions. Several social measures have proven to be effective or promising in preventing maltreatment, but their application in Quebec has yet to be evaluated.

**Together, we can take action to prevent maltreatment against the youngest Quebecers and help each of them to develop their full potential.**

**For more information on the data presented in this document, please consult our complete report on maltreatment at [tout-petits.org/maltraitance](http://tout-petits.org/maltraitance).**

There are *solutions*.  
Let's do everything  
we can to give all our  
children the best possible  
start in life.





## The Early Childhood Observatory (*Observatoire des tout-petits*) has prepared a comprehensive report on the maltreatment of children between 0 and 5 years of age.

This special report presents the most recent data available on young Quebec children between the ages of 0 and 5 who are victims of maltreatment, looking at the impacts on their development. The document also includes a review of collective measures and public policies that have been helping to prevent the maltreatment of 0-5 year-olds. **It also includes:**



An awareness **video**



A comprehensive 42-page **report**



**Highlights** from the special report

**To consult our complete report on the maltreatment  
of the very young, visit**

*[tout-petits.org/maltraitance](http://tout-petits.org/maltraitance)*

# OBSERVATOIRE des tout-petits

The mission of the Early Childhood Observatory is to help ensure that the development and well-being of Quebec's very youngest children has a place on the province's list of social priorities. In order to do so, the Observatory compiles the most rigorous data on 0-5 year-olds which it then disseminates to incite dialogue on collective actions in this area.

[Tout-petits.org](http://Tout-petits.org)



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