



**CANADIAN CHILD
INTERVIEWING RESEARCH
TEAM**

COVID-19 & CHILD MALTREATMENT WORKERS

**KEY FINDINGS FROM A
NATIONAL SURVEY**

JULY 2020

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IMPACT OF COVID-19

PANDEMIC #COVID19



87% WORRIED

ABOUT COVID-19

Most respondents reported being slightly (**29%**), moderately (**45%**), or extremely worried (**13%**) about COVID-19.

Most (**81%**) reported worry about lifting physical distancing measures.

39% reported that their employer has plans for when physical distancing measures are lifted.

82% ADHERED

TO COVID-19 MEASURES

See pages 3 and 4 for details of how recommendations are implemented.

85% FELT SAFE

IN THE WORKPLACE

Most respondents reported feeling very (**39%**) or moderately (**46%**) safe at work.

76% SATISFIED

WITH THEIR EMPLOYER'S RESPONSE

Most respondents reported being either extremely (**31%**) or somewhat (**45%**) satisfied with employer response to COVID-19.

69% STRESSED

SINCE COVID-19

Many respondents reported increased stress (**69%**) in the workplace and an increase in perceived stress for children & families (**86%**).

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT



Most (**72%**) respondents reported that their employers provided mental health support during COVID-19.

However, most (**61%**) feel more mental health support is needed.

MALTREATMENT INVESTIGATORS

ALL PROFESSIONALS INVOLVED IN CHILD MALTREATMENT INVESTIGATIONS



Many investigators commented on their concern for children's safety due to reduced contact with children.

84% CONTINUED CASE-RELATED INTERVIEWS

Most investigators reported changing interview methods (60%).

For alleged perpetrators: in-person (**96%**), phone (**43%**), or virtual (**15%**) methods were reported.

For family members: in-person (**67%**), phone (**77%**), or virtual (**18%**).

For school officials: in-person (**24%**), phone (**90%**), or virtual (**21%**).

See next page for details on child interviews.

43% REPORTED REDUCED CASELOADS

Most reported reduced (**43%**) or similar (**43%**) caseload since COVID-19.

CONCERN ABOUT REDUCED REPORTING


In response to COVID-19 concerns, **15%** indicated creating new reporting methods for victims and witnesses.

New methods reported: using code words, creating new telephone lines, or creating online reporting tools.

GEOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

- More rural investigators indicated increased levels of stress since COVID-19 (**78%**), compared to urban investigators (**61%**).
- Urban investigators more frequently reported a decrease in caseload (**55%**) than rural investigators (**13%**); Rural investigators more frequently reported an increase in caseload (**31%**) than urban investigators (**7%**).
- More rural investigators reported creating new reporting methods for victims and witnesses (**31%**) compared to urban investigators (**9%**).

FORENSIC INTERVIEWERS



Many forensic interviewers believe that COVID-19 precautionary measures affect rapport building (63%) and children's willingness to disclose (44%)

100% CONTINUED

IN-PERSON INTERVIEWS

90% of forensic interviewers reported modifications, including: physical distancing (82%), a mask (25%), or gloves (8%).

Most reported discussing using masks (75%) or gloves (61%) with their team, despite only some implementing those modifications.

Few reported using virtual (20%) or telephone (8%) interviews.

RESPONDENT SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE INTERVIEWS:

Reliable access to PPE, larger rooms to allow distancing, virtual interviews, and talking with children about COVID-19 precautions.

55% REPORTED

REDUCED INTERVIEWS

55% reported a reduction in forensic interviews conducted since COVID-19.

Half (50%) of respondents indicate that their agency has begun prioritizing specific cases such as: severe cases and current (not historical) cases.

GEOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

- More rural interviewers indicated stress since COVID-19 (78%), compared to urban interviewers (55%).
- While a decrease in forensic interviews was the most common response overall, more rural interviewers reported an increase in the number of forensic interviews conducted since COVID-19 (25%) compared to urban interviewers (2%).
- Fewer rural interviewers reported making COVID-19 modifications to in-person interviewing (73%) compared to urban interviewers (95%).

MOVING FORWARD



SUPPORT

FOR PROFESSIONALS



Most respondents were satisfied with the support they were receiving from their employers. However, there was an increase in stress and a desire for more mental health support.

Respondents indicated a clear concern about children's safety and not having regular face-to-face contact.

- Strategies for increasing professional 'eyes-on' children are needed to identify at-risk children. Consider partnering with local school boards to provide strategies for teachers to have 'virtual eyes' on children.
- Suggestions for how teachers can talk to children can be found on the [CCIRT website](#) under "Resources".

TELE-FI



TELE-FORENSIC INTERVIEWS

Most investigators indicated concern about building rapport or disclosure rates due to COVID-19 precautionary measures.

Recommendation: There is strong emerging evidence that tele-forensic interviews, when paired with evidence-based interview strategies (e.g., [Ten-Step](#) or [NICHD](#) Interview protocols), can be effective with children 5 years of age and older.

Benefits:

- Protects both the child and interviewer.
- Can be done from the child or interviewer's home or in two separate rooms at existing interview locations (e.g., CYACs or police stations).
- Technology requirements are minimal and allows for the recording of the child and interviewer's face (i.e., masks are unnecessary).
- Emerging findings report no reduction in details reported, disclosure rates, or ability to build rapport compared to face-to-face interviews.
- May help overcome concerns about prioritizing some cases over others.

For recommendations on **setting up** tele-forensic interviews (equipment and Zoom settings), ensuring **confidentiality**, and tele-forensic **interview protocols** visit <https://brocku.ca/ccirt/main/tele-forensic-interviewing-resources/>

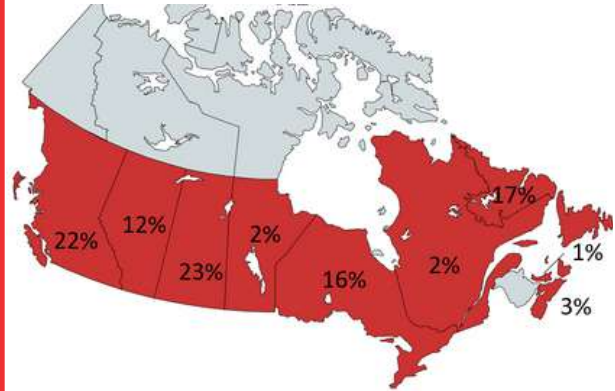
TAKE HOME MESSAGE

FOR PROFESSIONALS AND EMPLOYERS

COVID-19 has impacted how child maltreatment professionals do their jobs. While some expressed concern about their own well-being, most expressed concern about the impact COVID-19 is having on children. Moving forward, respondents expressed a need for clear communication, expectations, and guidelines for working during the pandemic that prioritize the child.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

WHO RESPONDED?



- Overall, 79 child maltreatment workers responded to the survey.
 - 13 identified only as a forensic interviewer, or a professional who conducts forensic interviews with children
 - 19 identified only as a maltreatment investigator, or professionals involved in child maltreatment investigations
 - 47 identified as a professional who conducts both maltreatment investigations and forensic interviews
- Across both investigators and interviewers, most identified as law enforcement (42%) or social workers (42%) with 5-20 years experience (58%). Other respondents included 3 mental health workers, 4 child and youth advocates, and 2 crisis workers.
- Most (77%) work in urban areas

ABOUT THE SURVEY

These data were gathered from a national bilingual survey circulated across Canada from May 7th to July 20th, 2020. Survey respondents were anonymous. The survey was reviewed by all affiliated university research ethics boards. Research funding was provided by the President's Research Fund (Luther College, University of Regina), Internal SSHRC Grant (McGill University), and CRISS Research Award (Brock University). Researchers are listed alphabetically by surname.

For further information about the survey, the data collected, or the researchers, please email **Heather Price** (hprice@tru.ca) or **Shanna Williams** (shanna.williams@mcgill.ca) or visit www.brocku.ca/ccirt/.