Centre for Research on Children and Families: Lecture Series
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The Canadian Child Welfare System Response to Exposure to Domestic Violence Investigations

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Prevalence of Domestic Violence

- In Canada: According to the 2004 General Social Survey (GSS), 7% of women experienced violence in the previous five years
- Around the world: The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that in forty-eight surveys from around the world, 10-69% of women stated that they had been physically assaulted by an intimate partner at some point in their lives (Krug, et al., 2002).

References: Statistics Canada (2006). Measuring violence against women: Statistical trends 2006. Statistics Canada: Ottawa, Ontario.

Krug et al. (2002). World report on violence and health. World Health Organization: Geneva, Switzerland.

Effects of Exposure to Domestic Violence

- Well-developed body of literature that examines the negative effects of exposure to domestic violence on children (e.g., Edleson, 1999b; Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999; Kitzman, Gaylord, Holt & Kenny, 2003; Margolin, 1998; Onyskiw, 2003; Rossman, 2001; Wolfe, Crooks, Lee, McIntyre-Smith & Jaffe, 2003).
- Two meta-analyses conducted in 2003 demonstrate that children's EDV was related to emotional and behavioural problems (Kitzman et al., 2003; Wolfe et al., 2003).
- However, there is evidence that not all children exposed to domestic violence experience these problems (Hughes, Graham-Bermann & Gruber, 2001).

Controversy about EDV as a form of Child Maltreatment

- Some jurisdictions include EDV as a separate child maltreatment typology while others consider exposure to domestic violence as a form of neglect or emotional maltreatment.
- Minnesota changed its legislation to include EDV as a form of maltreatment. The unintended consequence was an unmanageable workload burden on the child welfare system, which resulted in the legislation being rescinded only months later (Edleson, 2001; Weithorn, 2001).
- New York City was found to be violating mothers' constitutional rights as a result of their interventions in cases of children exposed to domestic violence. A federal court judge ruled that removal of children from their mothers' custody solely due to the mothers' victimization was unconstitutional (*Nicholson v. Williams*, 2002).

Literature Review

- The most recent quantitative literature indicates that the child welfare system's response to cases involving exposure to domestic violence do not necessarily result in higher levels of intervention
- DV alone is not strongly associated with whether the child was placed or not (odds ration = 0.94)

Reference: Kohl, P. L., Edleson, J. L., English, D. J. & Barth, R. P. (2005). Domestic violence and pathways into child welfare services: Findings from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being. *Children and Youth Services Review, 27(11),* 1167-1182.

Literature Review

- Cases in one state and found that children from families with evidence of domestic violence were no more likely to be placed in out-of-home placements than families with no known domestic violence present (21.4% vs. 18.2%)

Reference: Beeman, S. K., Hagemeister, A. K. & Edleson, J. L. (2001). Case assessment and service receipt in families experiencing both child maltreatment and woman battering. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 16, 437-458.

Literature Review

- DV is a significant issue in a high percentage of cases referred to child welfare services but a relatively small number of cases with domestic violence identified reach an intrusive level of service (e.g., child placement).

Reference: English, D. J., Edleson, J. L., & Herrick, M. E. (2005). Domestic violence in one state's child protective caseload: A study of differential case dispositions and outcomes. *Children and Youth Services Review, 27(11),* 1183-1201.

Qualitative Study

- Survivor: "…if [women] report something child welfare will be called and my child or children will be taken away."
- Lawyer: "Don't get CAS involved. They will take your children away"
- Implications for practice: See if findings play out in a larger, representative sample of child welfare investigations in Canada

Reference: Alaggia, R., Jenney, A., Mazzacu, J. & Redmond, M. (2007). In whose best interest? A Canadian case study of the impact on child welfare policies in cases of domestic violence. *Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention*, 1-16.

Why am I doing this research?

- Dramatic increase in EDV cases (259%)
- Women fear apprehension of their children
- Rapidly emerging body of research in the area
- Gap in the literature about the response of the Canadian child welfare system to EDV
- Different from EDV in the United States
  - EDV is not investigated as a separate form of child maltreatment
  - This study will distinguish between co-occurring cases and cases involving EDV only

The Debate

- Exposure to domestic violence is a relatively new type of maltreatment investigations
- There is debate about how the child welfare sector should deal with these cases
- Assumption in the field about the intrusiveness of child welfare in cases of exposure to domestic violence
- Results from new studies from the United States further analyzed this assumption
- Now let’s look at Canadian data…

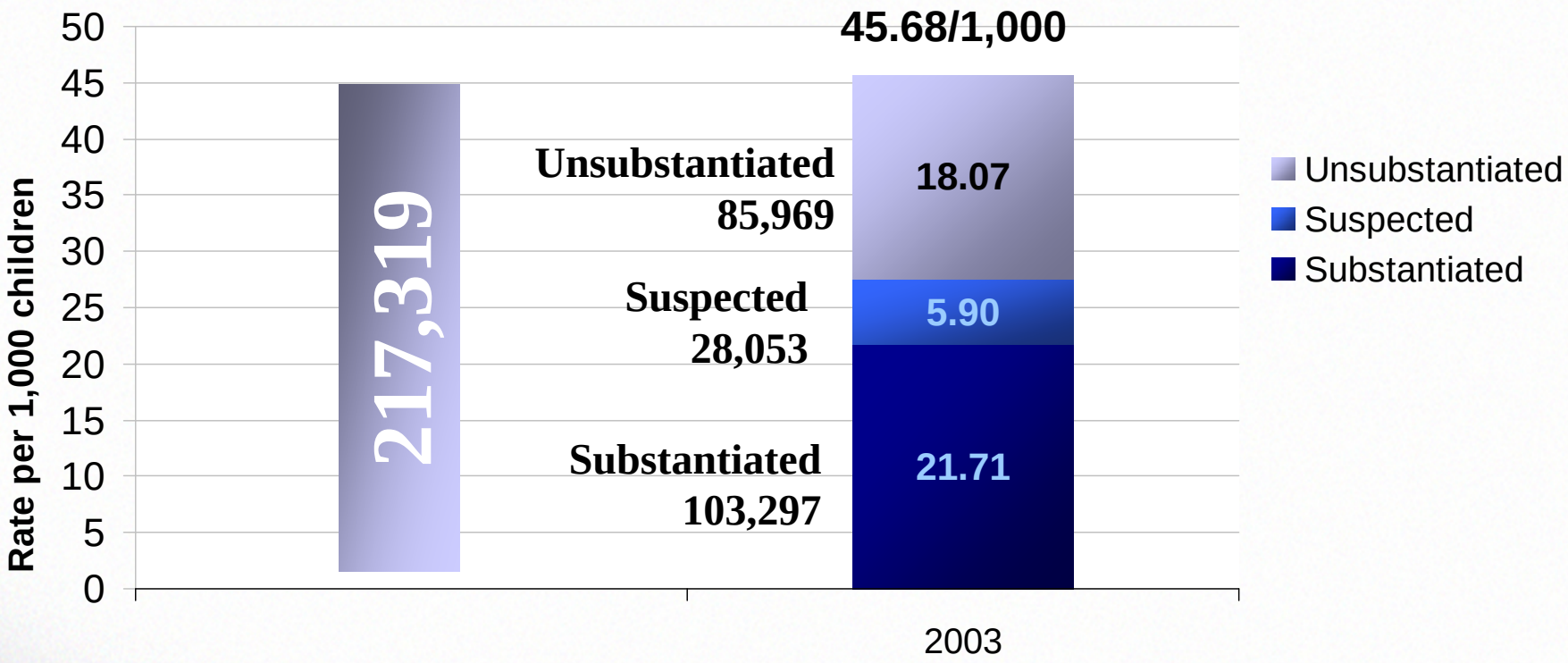
CIS 2003 Background

- Second national study examining the incidence of reported child abuse and neglect.
- Part of the Public Health Agency of Canada national child health surveillance system (Injury and Child Maltreatment Section of the Health Surveillance and Epidemiology Division).
- Funded through a partnership of PHAC, provincial and territorial governments, the First Nations Child and family Caring Society, and Bell Canada.
- Conducted by a team of researchers from the Universities of McGill, Toronto, Calgary, Quebec, and Memorial.

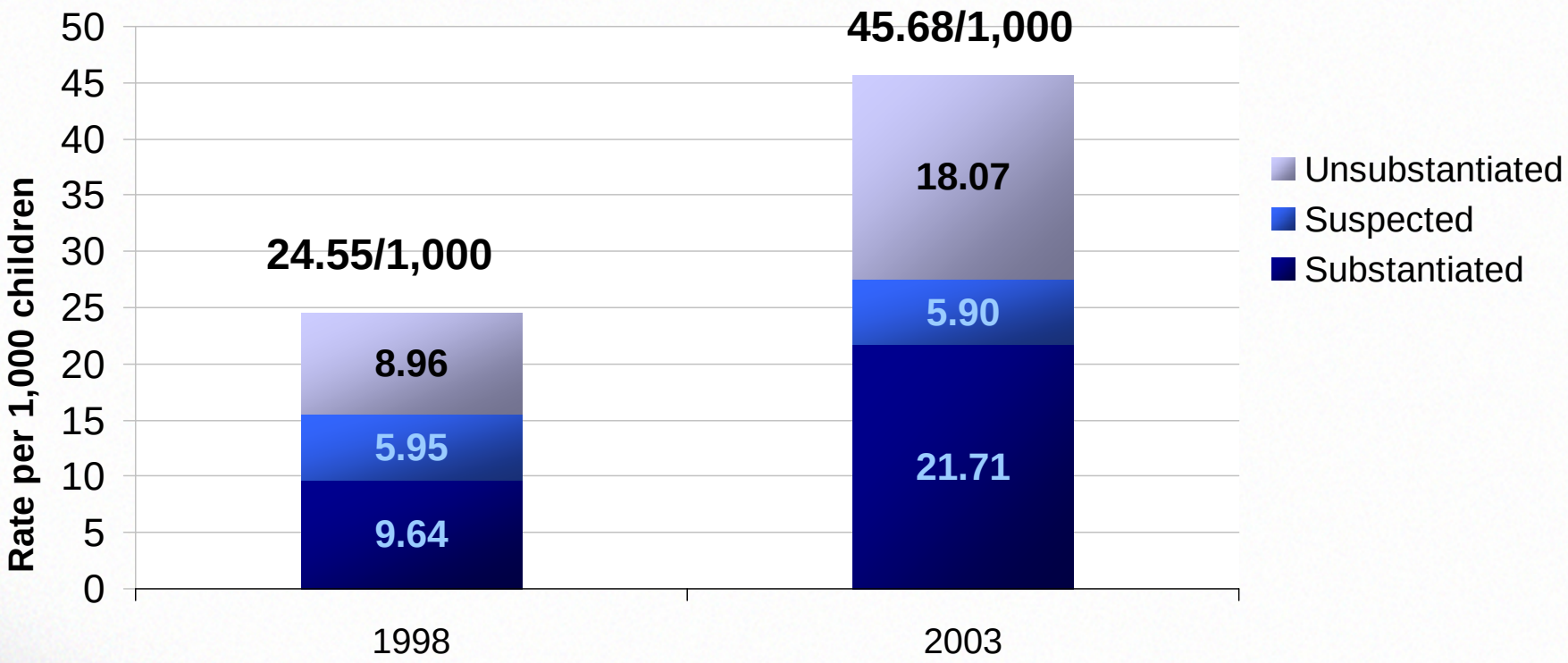
CIS 2003 Methods

- Used a modified version of the CIS-1998 instrument to document nature of maltreatment, key child and family characteristics and post-investigation services.
- Data collected directly from investigating social workers (except administrative data used in Quebec).
- **Sample:**
  - 11,562 child investigations conducted by 936 child welfare workers in 55 sites across Canada +
  - administrative data on 2,638 investigations in 6 sites in Quebec.
- **Limits:**
  - Limited to reports investigated by child welfare services.
  - Most data from Quebec could not be directly included.
  - Study not designed to make regional comparisons.
  - No follow-up beyond investigation

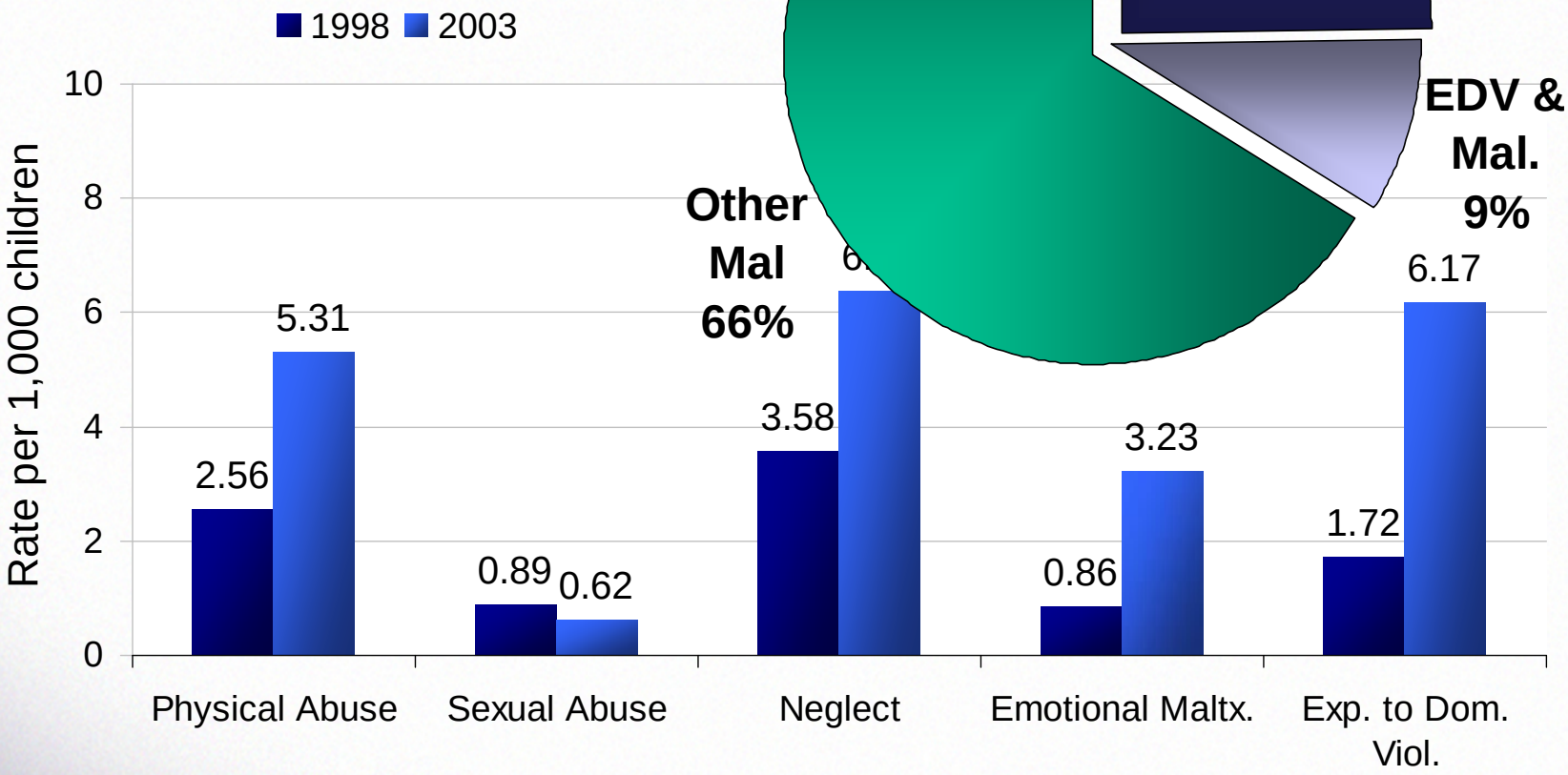
Rates and numbers of reported & substantiated investigations (CIS 2003, excluding Quebec)

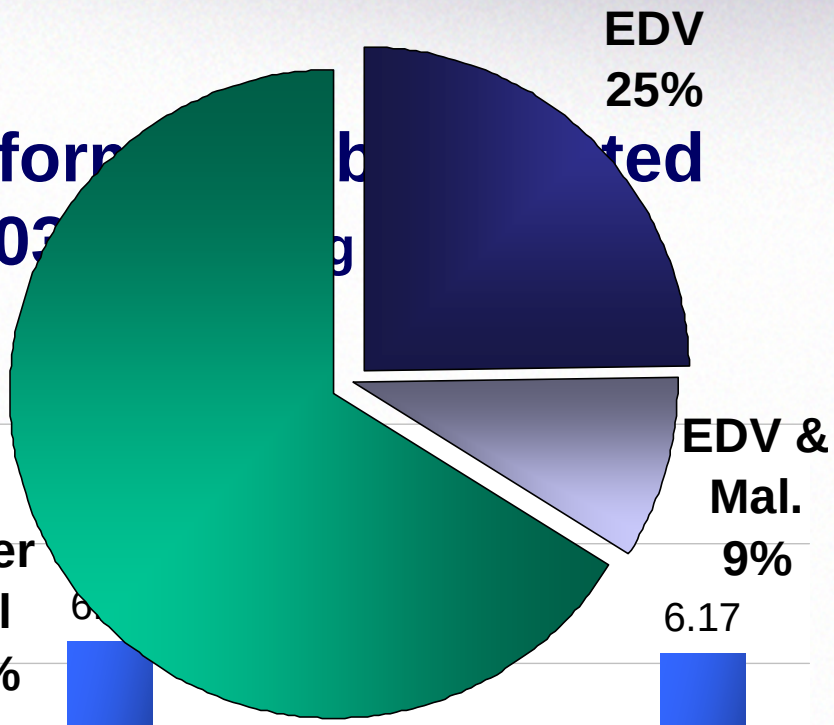


Increasing rates of reports & substantiated investigations (CIS 98-03, excluding Quebec)



Differential trends by form b ted maltreatment: CIS 98/03 g





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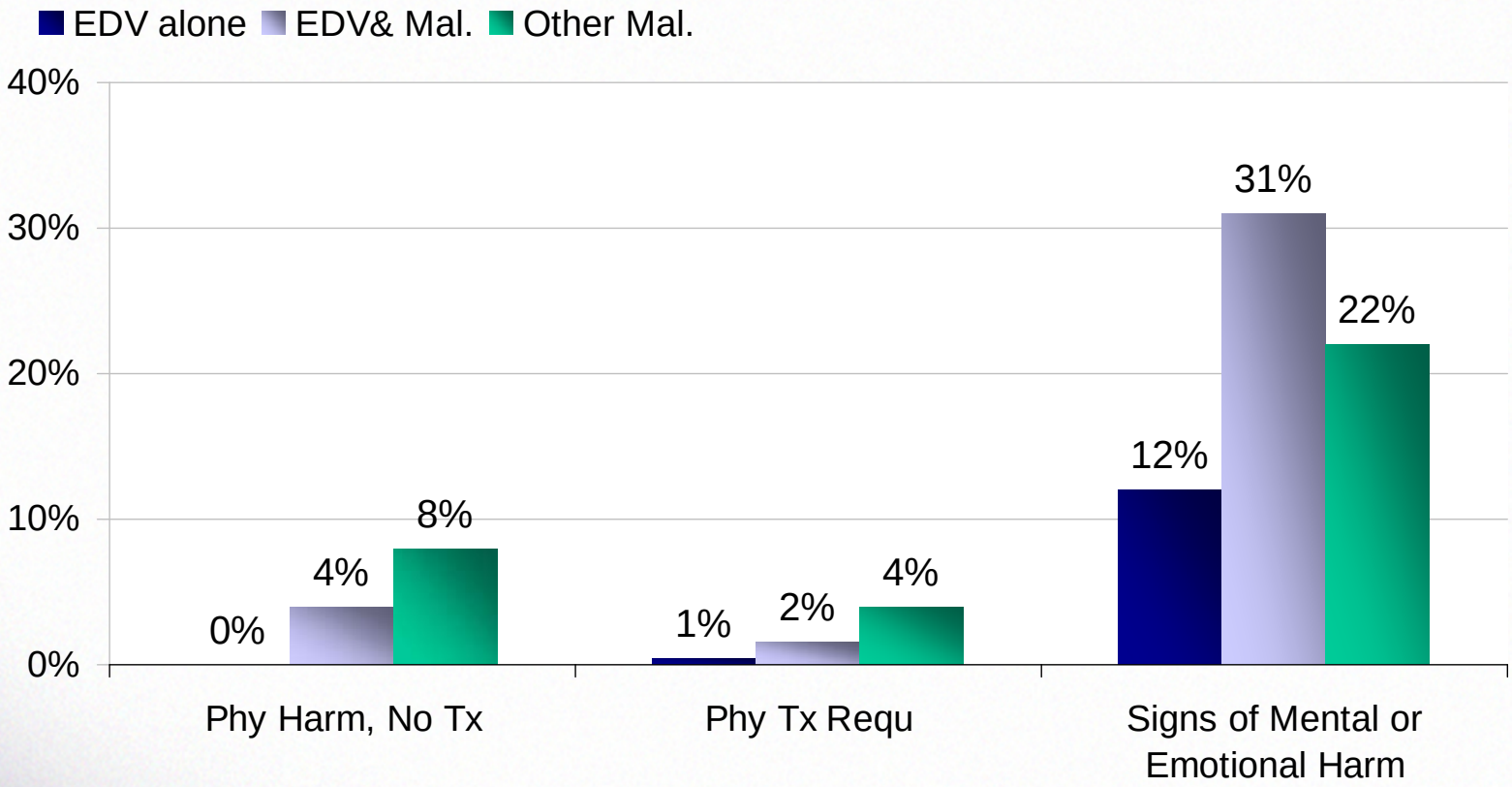
Physical and Emotional Harm

CIS 2003, excluding Quebec



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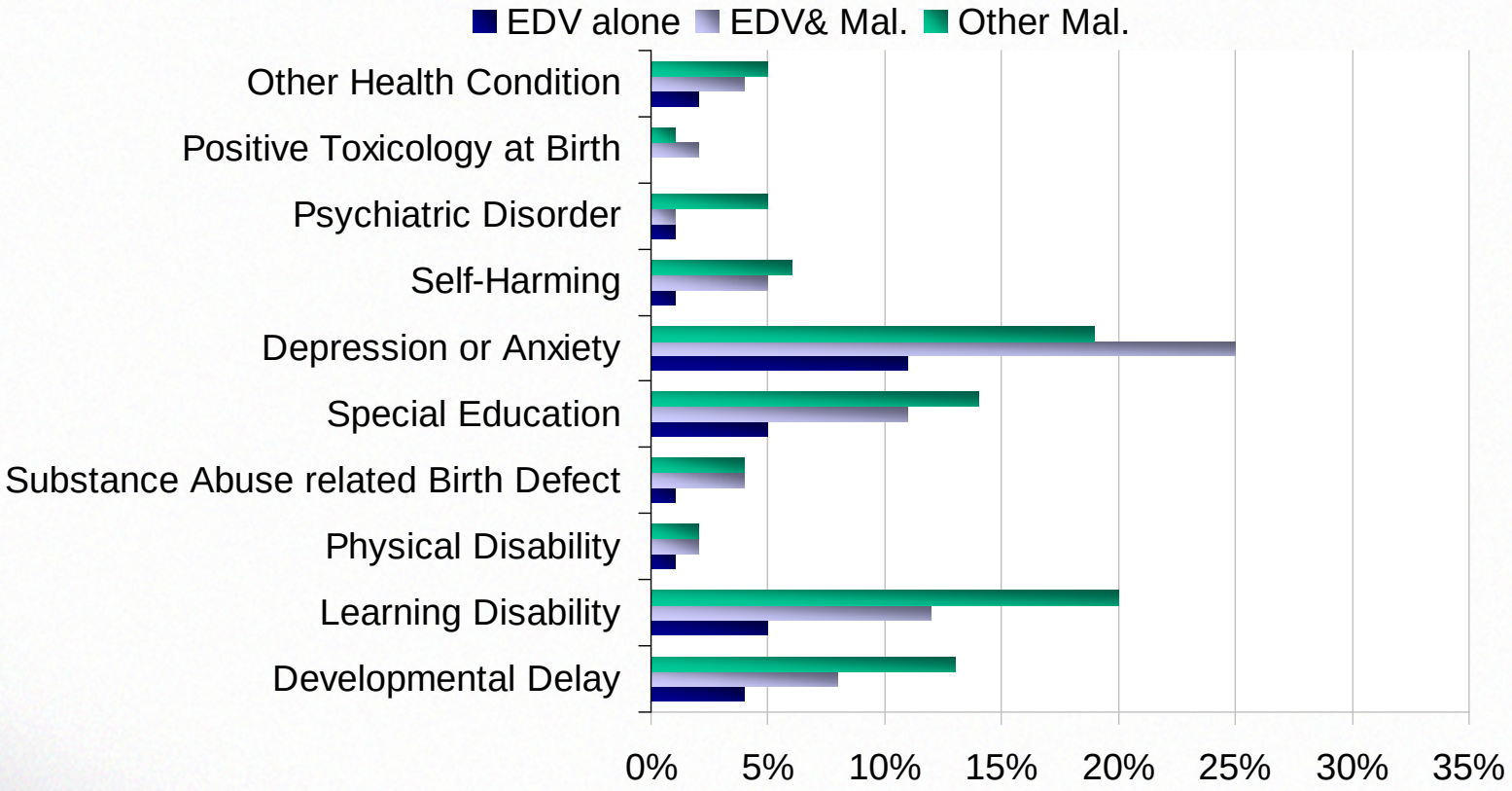
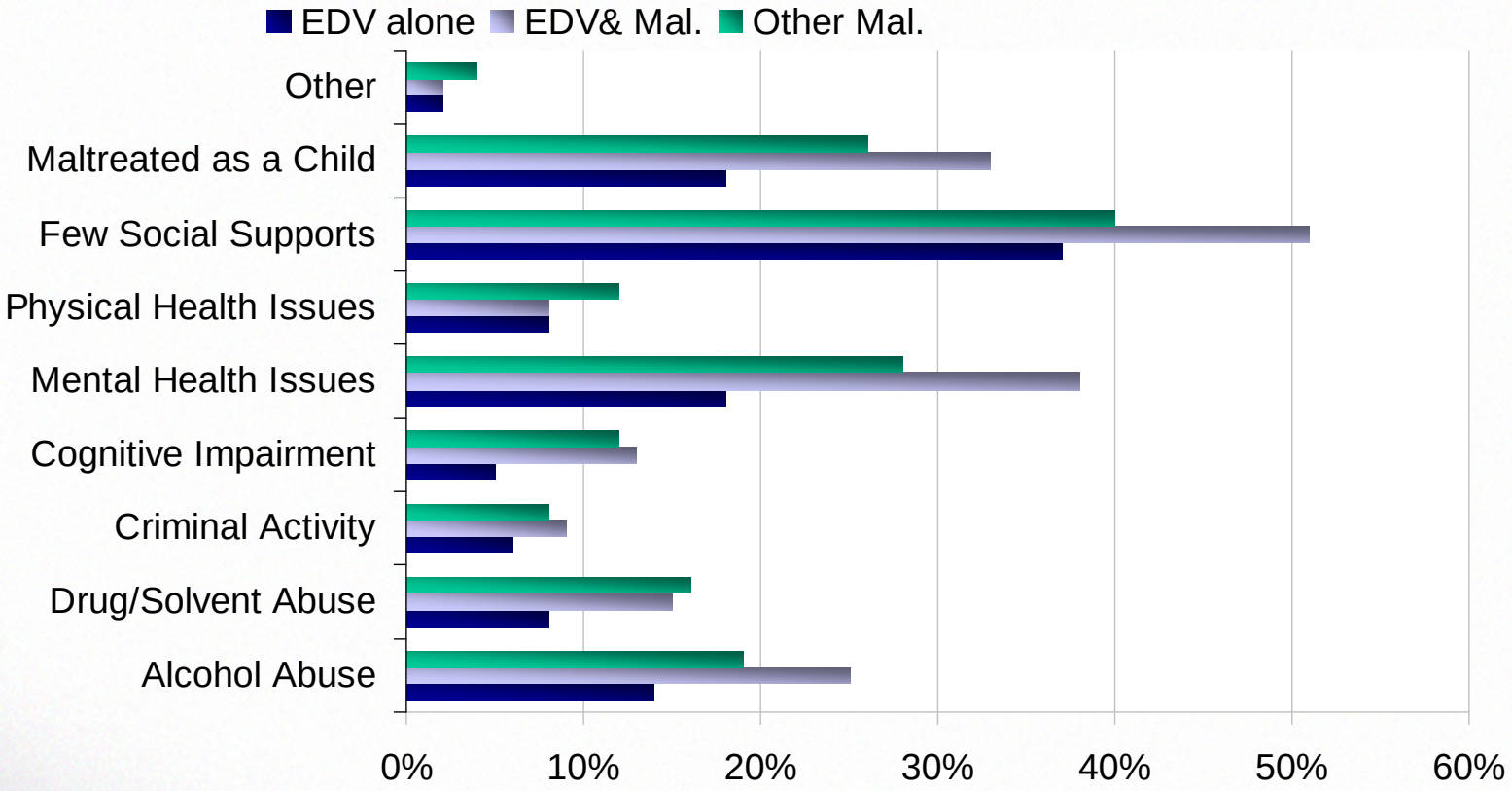
Child Functioning (Physical, Emotional, and Cognitive)

CIS 2003, excluding Quebec



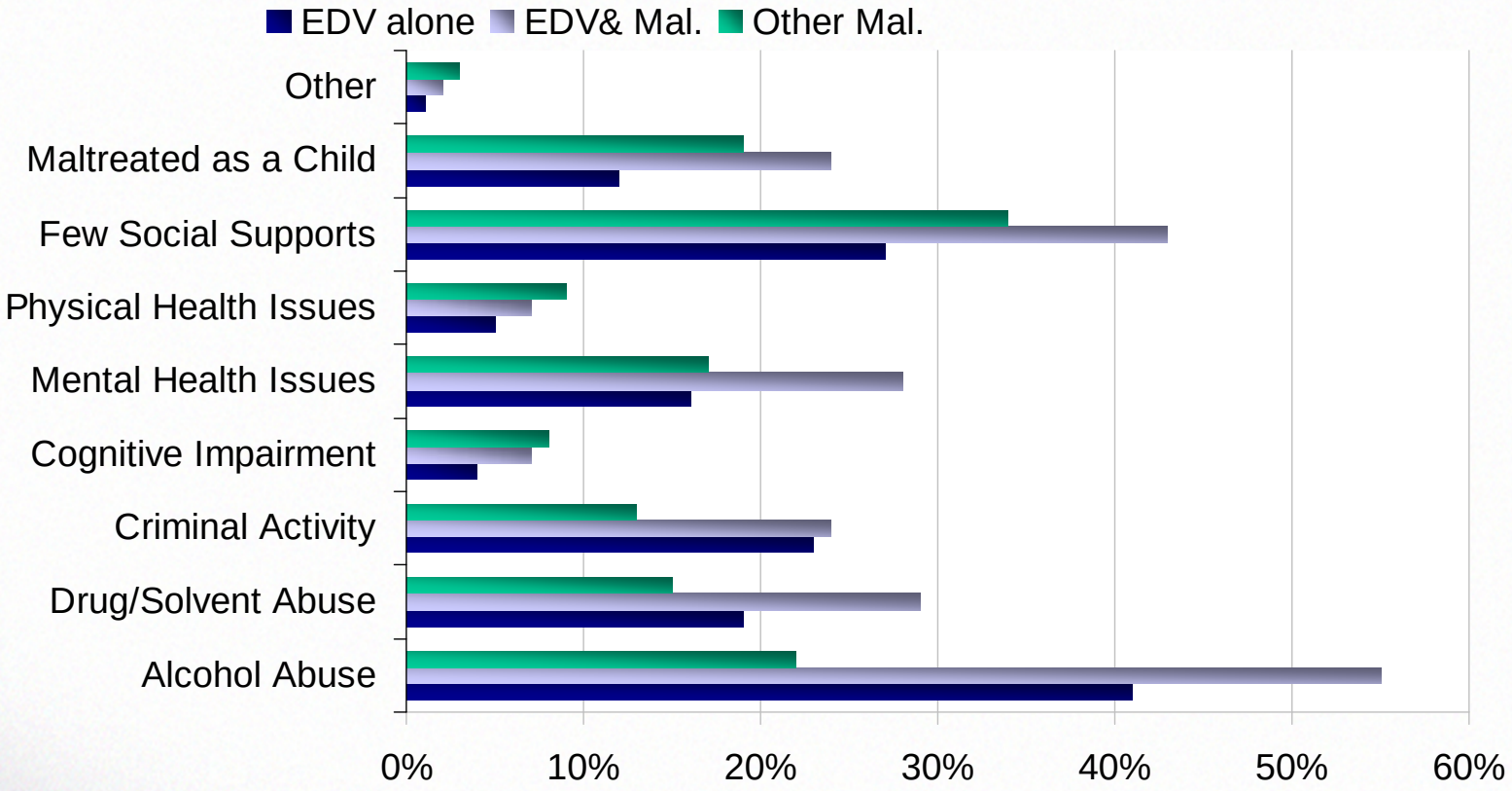
Child Functioning (Behavioural)

CIS 2003, excluding Quebec



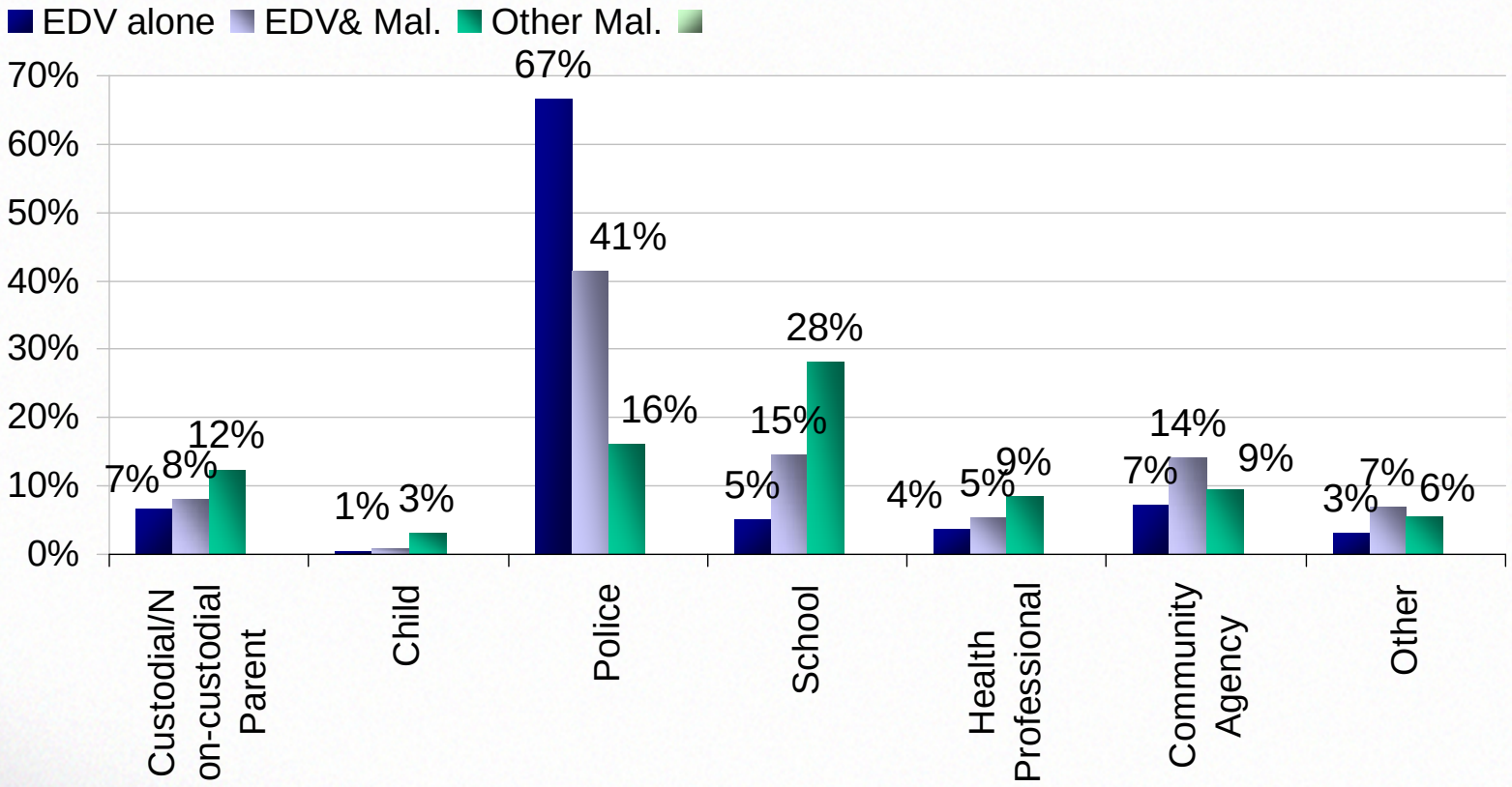
Female Caregiver Functioning Issues

CIS 2003, excluding Quebec



Source of Referral

CIS 2003, excluding Quebec



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Child Welfare Responses

CIS 2003, excluding Quebec

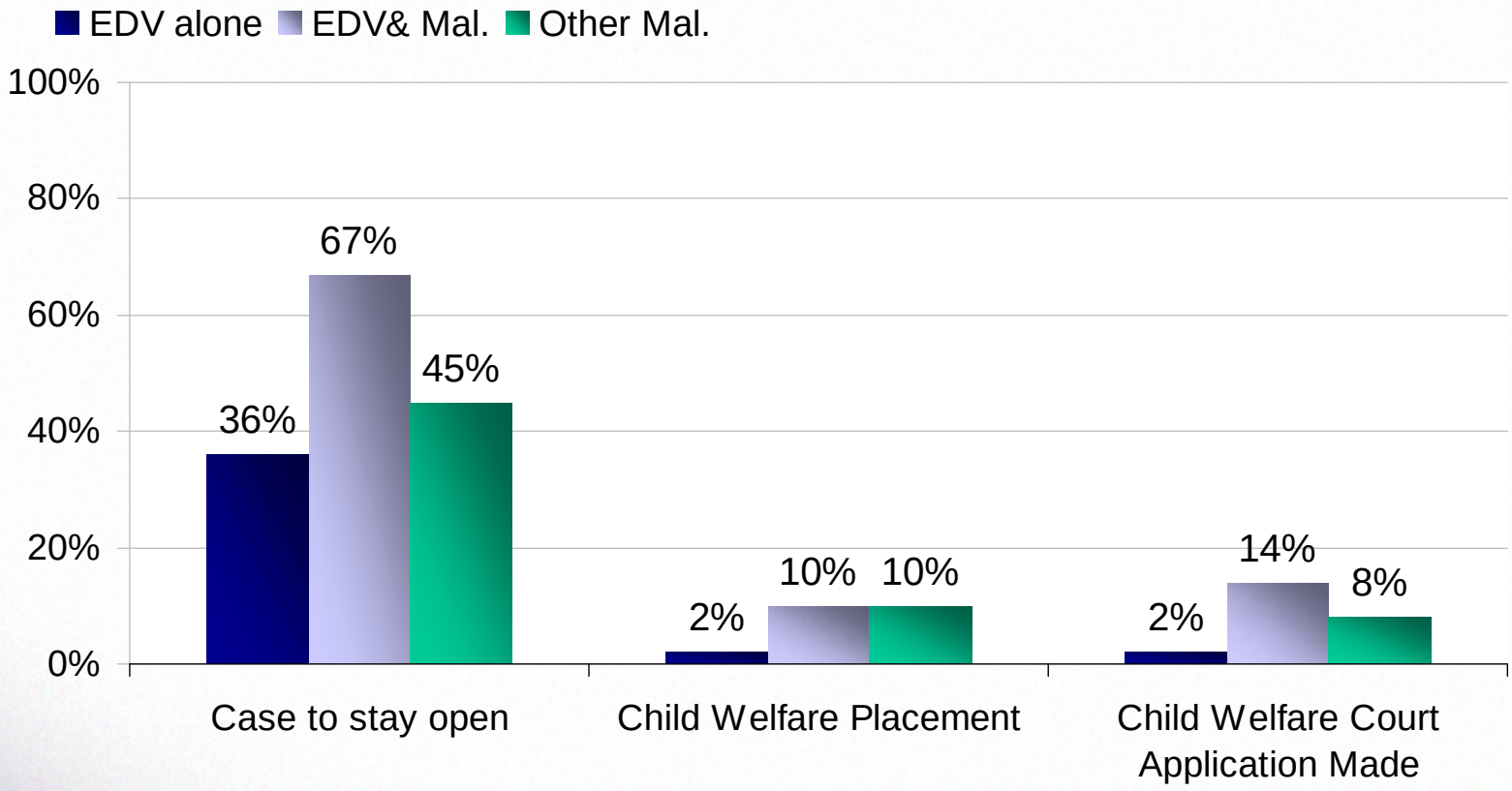

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Table 4: Logistic Regression Predicting Child Welfare Placement using Weighted Data

Block 1 (Child)	**B**	**S.E.**	**Odds Ratio**
Emotional Harm	0.987	0.12	2.68***
Any Child Functioning Concern	0.185	0.13	1.20
Only Domestic Violence (Reference)			(***)
Co-Occurring Domestic Violence	1.354	0.26	3.87***
Other Substantiated Maltreatment	1.629	0.21	5.10***
Single Incident (Reference)			(***)
Less than 6 months	0.301	0.17	1.35
More than 6 months	0.547	0.14	1.73***
Unknown	0.775	0.17	2.17***
Age	-0.012	0.01	0.99

Nagelkerke R^2=.107

Block 2 (Family)			
No Moves (Reference)			(***)
One Move	-0.007	0.16	0.99
Two or More Moves	0.888	0.14	2.431***
Unknown Moves	0.446	0.13	1.56***
Female Caregiver Mental Health Issues	0.693	0.11	2.00***
Female Caregiver Few Social Support	0.084	0.12	1.09
Male Caregiver Alcohol Abuse	0.079	0.14	1.08
Male Caregiver Few Social Supports	0.068	0.14	1.07
No previous openings (Reference)			(**)
One previous opening	0.389	0.12	1.47***
Two or more previous openings	0.459	0.43	1.58

****p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05*

Nagelkerke R^2=.055

DISCUSSION

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