

## 1. Executive Summary

The Toronto Perinatal and Child Health Survey project was conducted as part of the Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care Perinatal and Child Health Survey Strategies Initiative. The overall purpose of this telephone survey was to provide representative data on the prevalence of risk and protective factors related to child health and development outcomes of children aged 0-6 years in the City of Toronto. This information was needed to fill data gaps identified by Toronto Public Health in various areas of application. Topics for which information was gathered include childhood injury due to falls, breastfeeding initiation and duration, physical activity participation, smoking restrictions in the home, parenting practices, child food security, parental depression, and dental health.

The telephone survey was initiated on March 1, 2003 and completed on April 7, 2003. Respondents were randomly selected by random-digit-dialing procedures. One thousand parents with children aged 0-6 years residing in the city of Toronto participated in this survey.

Data analysis was primarily descriptive in nature (frequency tables and cross-tabulations). However, where information on statistical significance was required, chi-square and t-test analyses were performed. In addition, correlation analyses were performed to measure the strength of the association between different variables, where appropriate. Data were analyzed using SPSS/PC statistical software.

Data gathered from the survey can be used to inform and support programs that are designed to improve the health of Toronto's children aged 0-6 years. Raw data were provided to Toronto Public Health to facilitate further analysis and reporting.

### Highlights of Results and Analysis

- Description of Respondents and Child Health Status
  - The majority of parents who responded to the survey were female (74.2%), over 30 years of age (82.5%), married or living common-law (84.0%), part of a two-parent family (84.1%), and lived in a house (59.7%) or apartment (35.1%). Although less than half of surveyed parents were born in Canada (44.0%), 70.2% of the total sample was comprised of those who were not recent immigrants, having been born in Canada or having immigrated 11 or more years ago. About half of the surveyed parents reported English as a first language (51.6%). In addition, 60.3% of parents reported having a post-secondary certificate, and over two-thirds (69.4%) were in the middle/high income category. However, 23.1% of the sample did not provide information about their annual income.

- Although less than half of parents reported that they were born in Canada, 90.0% of the reference children were born in Canada. Ninety-eight percent of these children were reported to be in excellent, very good, or good health, and 85.6% were reported to have no long-term health conditions. The most frequently reported long-term conditions were asthma (6.8%) and allergies (5.9%).
- Childhood Injury Due to Falls
  - A total of 6.1% of parents who responded to the Toronto Perinatal and Child Health Survey indicated that their child sustained injuries due to a fall within the last year that were serious enough to require medical attention. Most of these children were reported to have fallen only once as a result of a trip or stumble on the same level (31.8%) or a fall from a bed, chair, or other furniture (21.2%).
- Breastfeeding
  - The overall breastfeeding initiation rate was 94.3%. Mothers who were older at the time of their child's birth, mothers with higher levels of education, mothers who were not born in Canada, and those who were recent immigrants (in Canada 10 years or less) at the time of their child's birth were more likely to report that breastfeeding was initiated. Children in two parent families were more likely to be breastfed than children in lone parent families.
  - Almost three-quarters of parents reported that they made a decision about breastfeeding before pregnancy (73.0%). Mothers who were older at the time of their child's birth, parents with higher levels of education, and those who were born in Canada were more likely to report making a decision before pregnancy rather than during or after pregnancy.
  - Almost 90% (89.7%) of parents reported that their baby was breastfed for at least one week, about three-quarters (76.6%) reported breastfeeding for 3 months or more, over half (58.3%) reported breastfeeding for 6 months or more, and about one-quarter (25.6%) reported breastfeeding for 12 months or more.
  - Further analysis revealed that just over three-quarters (78.6%) of all healthy term babies were exclusively breastfed for 2 weeks or more, over two-thirds (68.1%) were exclusively breastfed for 2 months or more, less than half (48.8%) were exclusively breastfed for 4 months or more, and less than 1 in 5 (18.0%) were exclusively breastfed until 6 months.

- Physical Activity
  - The majority of parents (87.4%) reported that one parent and child participated together in some form of physical activity 2 or more times per week, and over half (57.7%) reported participating 4 or more times per week, although there was some variation due to child's age.
  - About three-quarters of parents (76.5%) reported that their children spend 0-2 hours per day on sedentary activities such as watching TV or playing video games.
- Smoking Restrictions in the Home
  - The majority of surveyed parents (92.8%) reported that they do not allow smoking in their homes at any time. However, younger parents (< age 25) were somewhat less likely than older parents to favour rules which prohibit smoking in the home.
- Parenting Practices
  - For children aged 0-23 months, the majority of parents reported engaging in few or no ineffective interactions with their children.
  - For children aged 2-6 years, average Ineffective Parenting Scale scores and Rational Parenting Scale scores indicated that parents reported engaging in few ineffective or aversive interactions with their children. Mothers reported significantly more ineffective interactions than fathers.
  - For parents of children aged 2-6 years, scores for the Ineffective and Rational Parenting Scales were positively associated such that parents who reported more ineffective interactions with their children also reported using more aversive parenting practices.
- Child Food Security
  - Using the criterion of 5 Children's Food Security Scale items affirmed as an indicator of hunger, a very low level of child hunger was identified (0.5%) in the current sample. However, although a substantial proportion of respondents (23%) did not provide information about income, comparisons with 2001 census data suggest the possibility that this survey may have slightly undersampled families in the low income category, which could account for the relatively low observed rate of child hunger.
  - A total of 16.1% of parents did provide responses to affirm 1 to 4 of the food security items, and, of these, 67.5% affirmed one item, 21.0% affirmed two items, 5.7% affirmed three items, and 5.7% affirmed four items.

- Parental Depression

- Although depression scores overall were quite low, mothers, lone parents, and parents in the low household annual income category reported a greater extent of depressive tendencies than fathers, parents in two-parent families, and parents in the higher income categories, respectively.
- Depression scores were significantly related to the two parenting scale scores such that parents who reported more depressive tendencies also tended to report more ineffective and aversive parenting practices.

- Dental Health

- Just over 5% of surveyed parents reported that their children have been diagnosed with early childhood tooth decay. Older children and children not born in Canada were more likely to receive this diagnosis.
- Over half of all children (53.2%) over the age of 9 months were reported to have had a dental visit within the past year, while 42% have never had a dental visit at all. Older children, children from the middle/high income category, and children of lone parents were more likely to have seen a dentist within the past year. For children who had not seen a dentist within the past year, parents most often reported that this was because the child was too young to go or did not need to go.
- The majority of children were reported to have their teeth or gums cleaned one or more times per day (83.6%), with frequency of teeth cleaning increasing with age of the child. Of those children whose teeth were cleaned, over half (59.0%) used toothpaste with fluoride, including a substantial number under the age of three. In addition, almost 1 in 5 (19.0%) children were reported to be using too much toothpaste.