

## Stressed parents at “loggerheads” with children, report says

A new report has issued a warning about the mental health of Canadian children. The research, published in *The Health of Canada's Children* ([www.cich.ca/resource.htm](http://www.cich.ca/resource.htm)), indicates that 20% of Canadian children are experiencing emotional problems requiring treatment.

Parents are at “loggerheads with their kids,” says Dr. Graham Chance, chair of the Canadian Institute of Child Health (CICH) committee that compiled the report. Surveys of how parents view their children aged 4 to 11 years revealed that 70% of children “argue a lot” and 50% are “stubborn, sullen or irritable.” In addition, the parents thought 51% of the boys and 35% of the girls had concentration problems, while 51% of the boys and 37% of the girls were considered restless or hyperactive. Another study is under way to see how teachers view these same children.

Chance, a retired pediatrician, says the parental view is an “alarming surprise” that “raises the question of whether society expects too much of a child.” He added that “it also reflects the intolerable tensions on the family.” Other research shows that 66% of parents are experiencing severe or high degrees of family tension because they have to juggle work with family commitments and child care.

“Children's mental health now requires the same level of public focus that was used to cut the number of SIDS cases in half between 1988 and 1996,” says Dawn Walker, the CICH executive director. Chance says physicians, with their unique knowledge of health and the family's specific situation, play an essential role in counselling families about many of these mental health issues. Unfortunately, he said, “they're also damned hard pressed for time.” — *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*