

A Nationwide survey of child interviewing practices in Canada

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Background



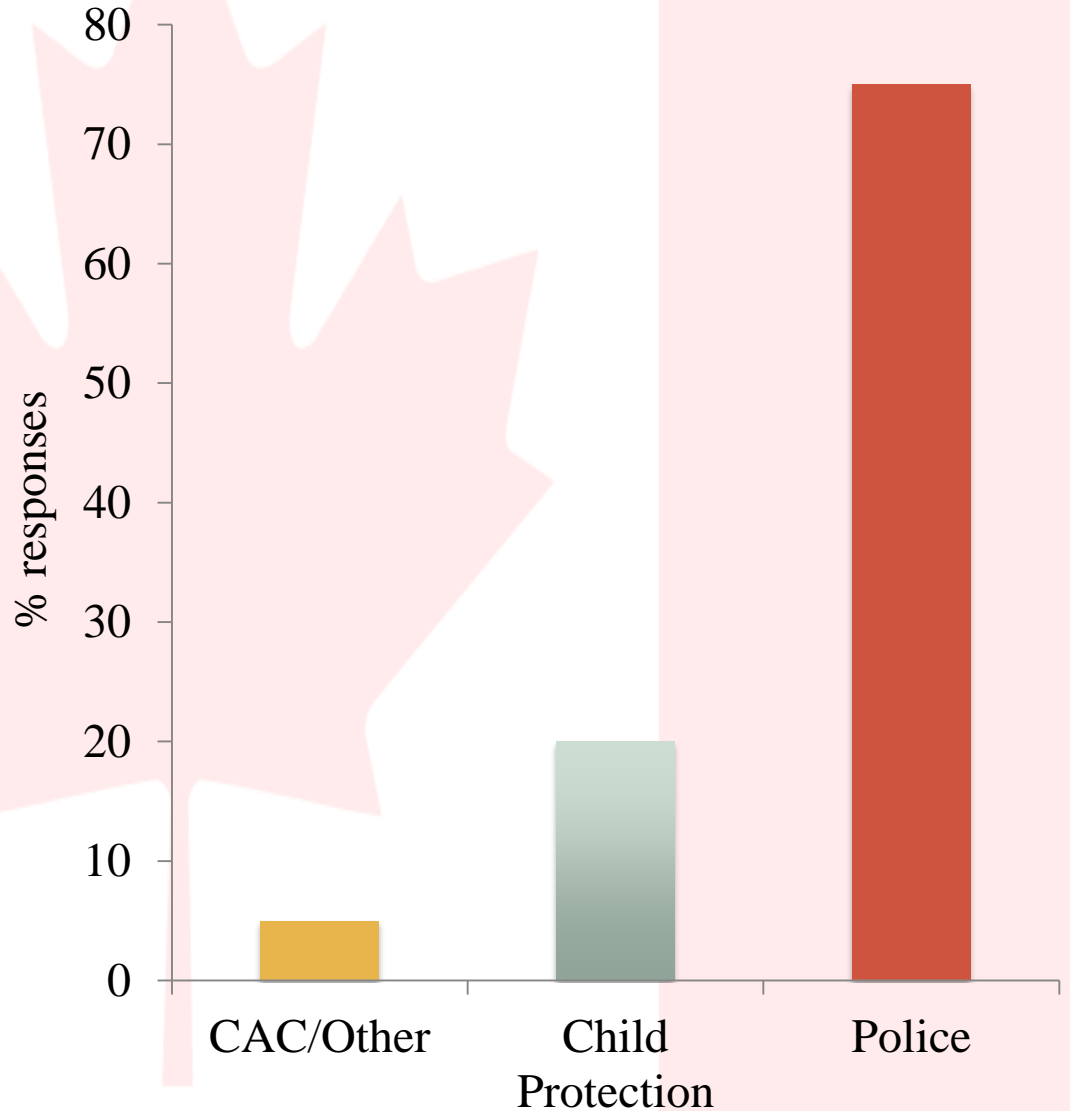
- Child interviewing practices vary widely across Canada
- Little is known about:
 - Type of training
 - Frequency
 - Duration
 - Training providers
 - Needs & challenges

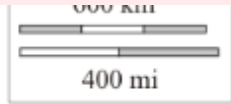
Goal of research

To create awareness for professionals about the degree of consensus and consistency in the interview techniques that ultimately influence child victims' experiences and progression through the legal system in Canada.

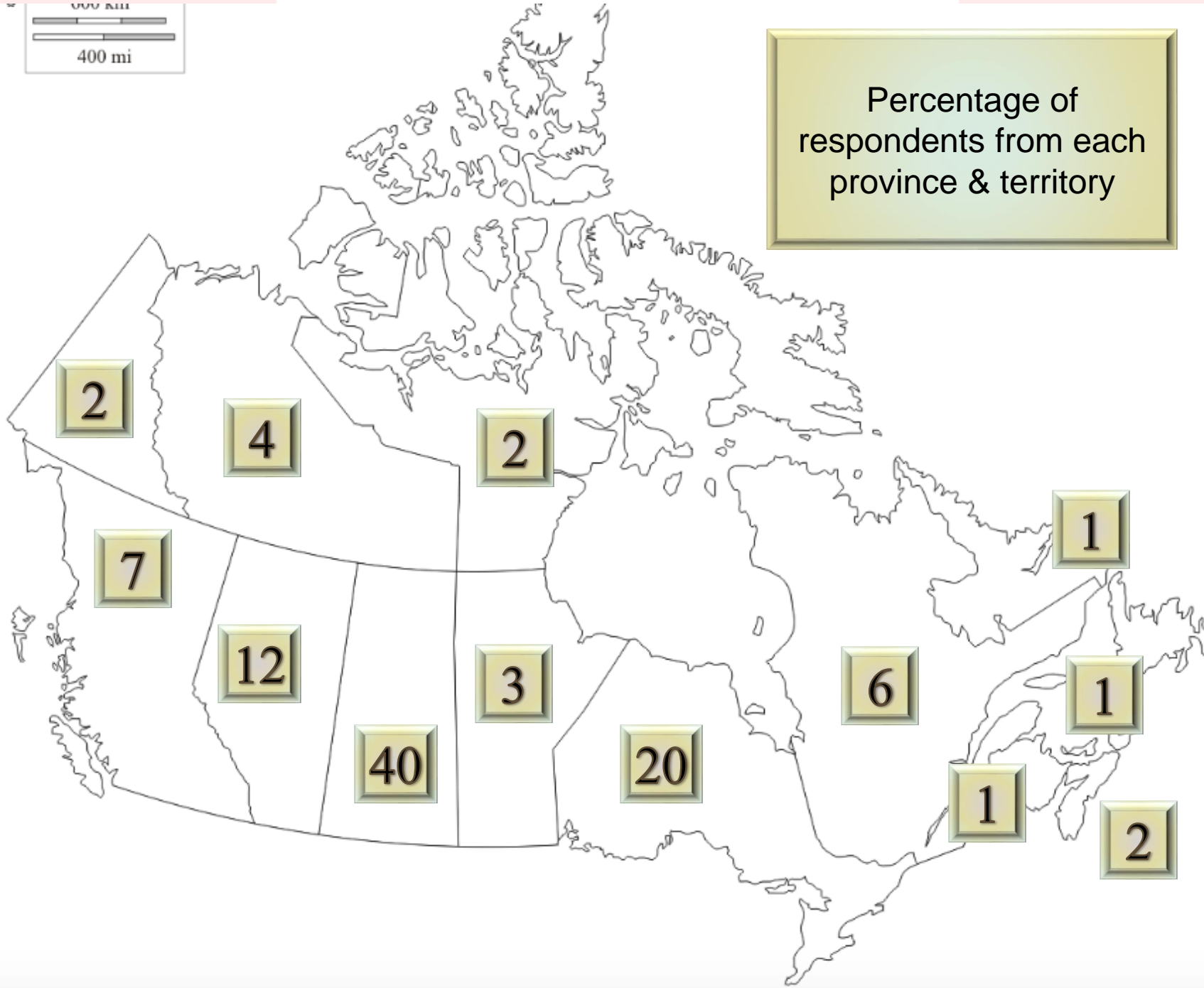
Recruitment & Respondents

200
professionals
completed an
online survey

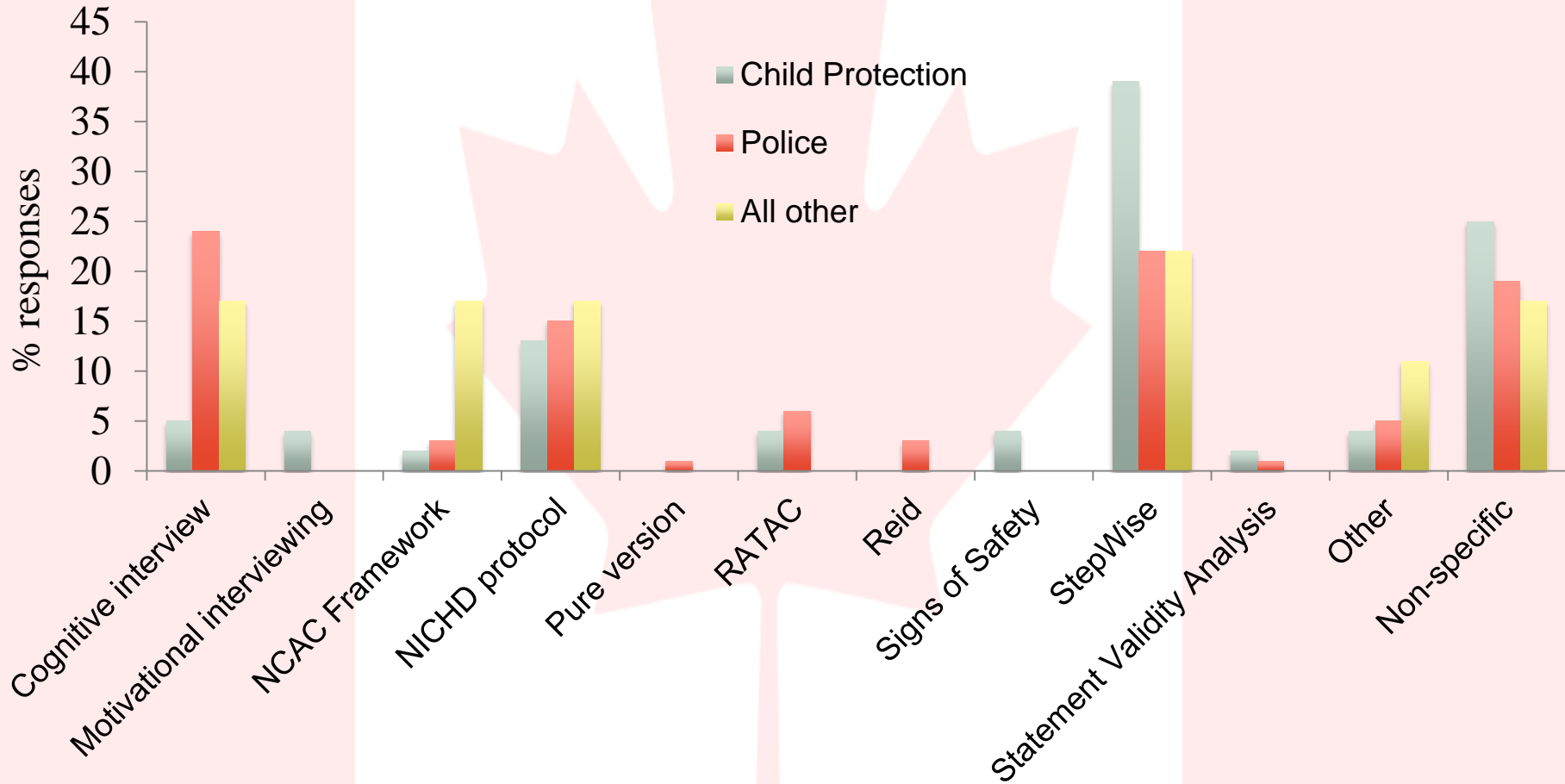




Percentage of respondents from each province & territory



What Guidelines/Protocols are being trained?



**Additionally, 34% of police respondents reported having received training from a private company, using a protocol not reported elsewhere.*

General training topics

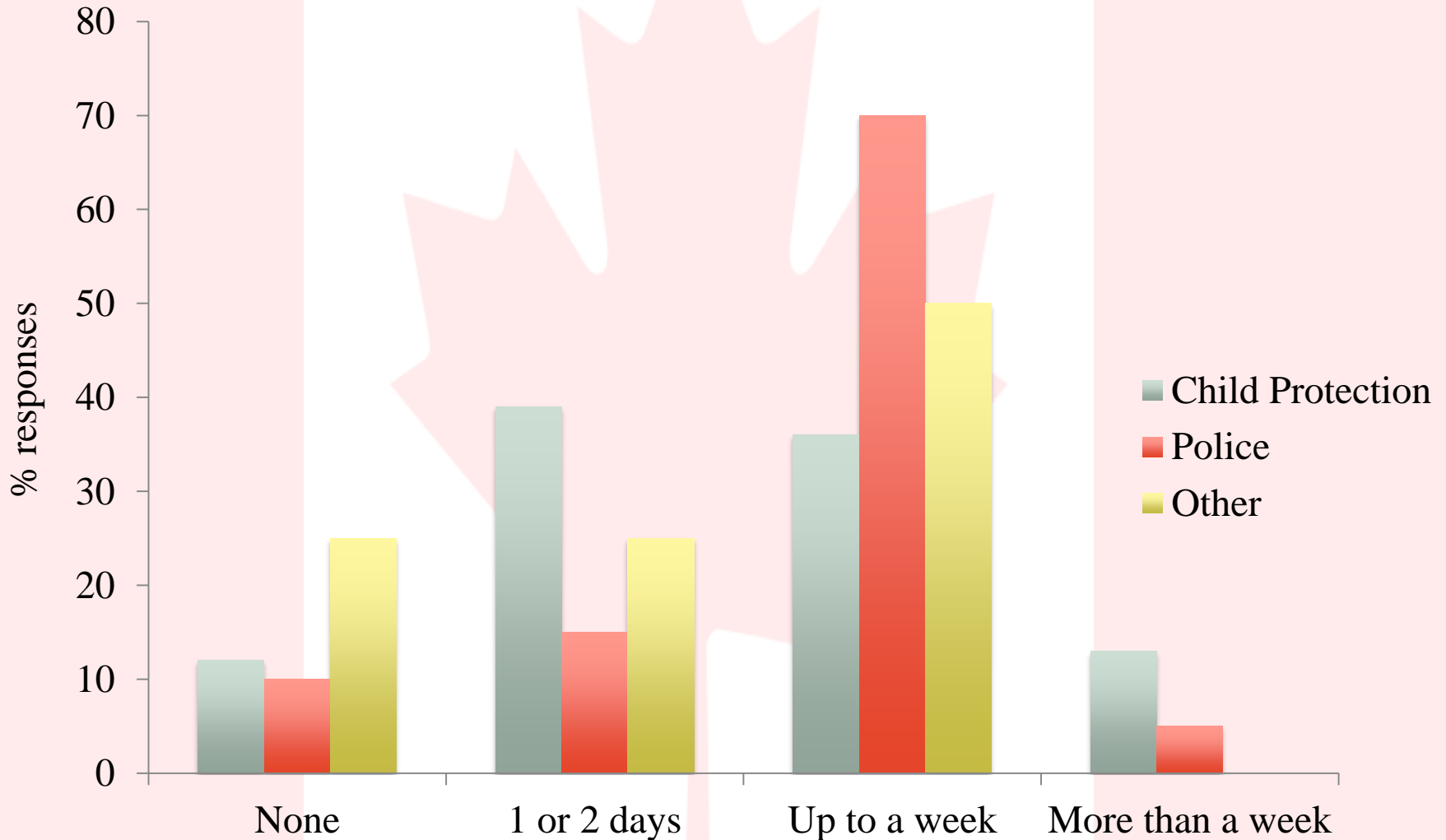


- Interview itself (58%)
 - E.g., use open-ended questions
- *Non-verbal aids* (23%)
 - E.g., use of body diagrams
- *Developmental considerations* (13%)
 - E.g., age-appropriate language
- *Development of a safety plan* (6%)
 - E.g., if child discloses information that may require a joint investigation

Who provided training?

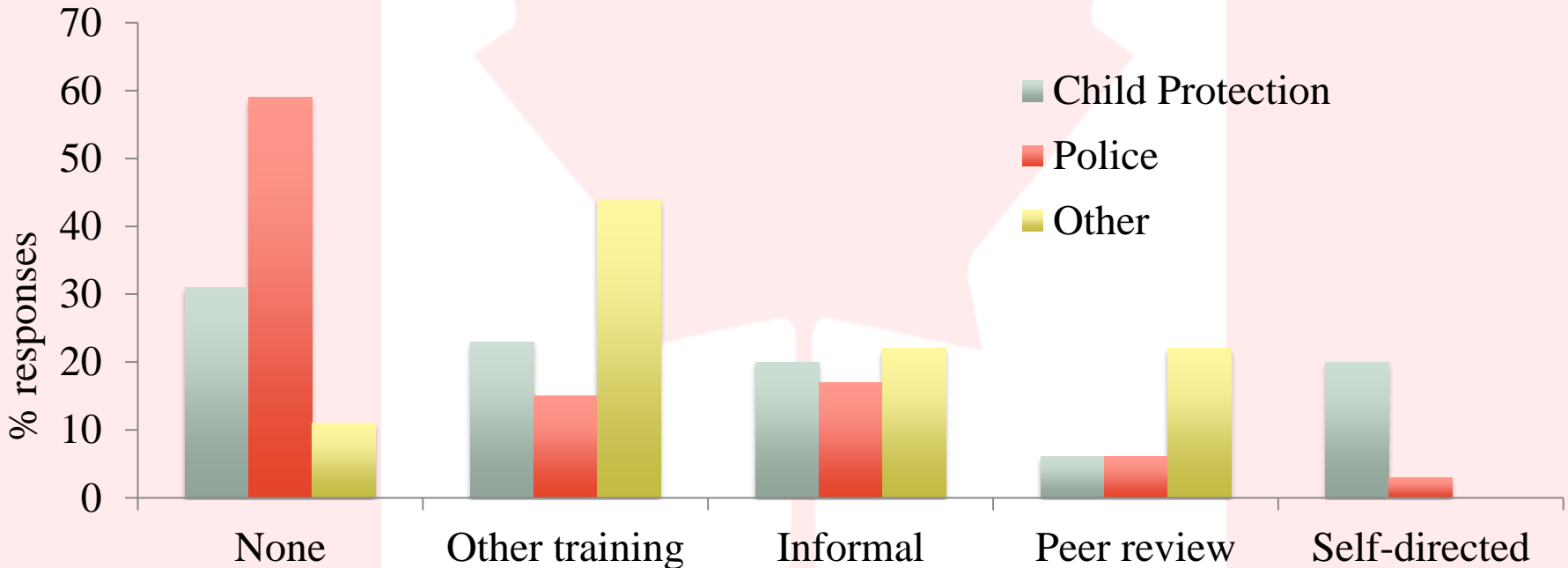
- Tremendous variety in responses with respect to who provided the training.
- Police colleges, local and provincial children's aid/child & family services, in-house trainers and colleagues, RCMP, Academics, The Forensic Alliance, Canadian Child Abuse Association, Forensic interviewing consultants, conferences and workshops.

How long was the training?



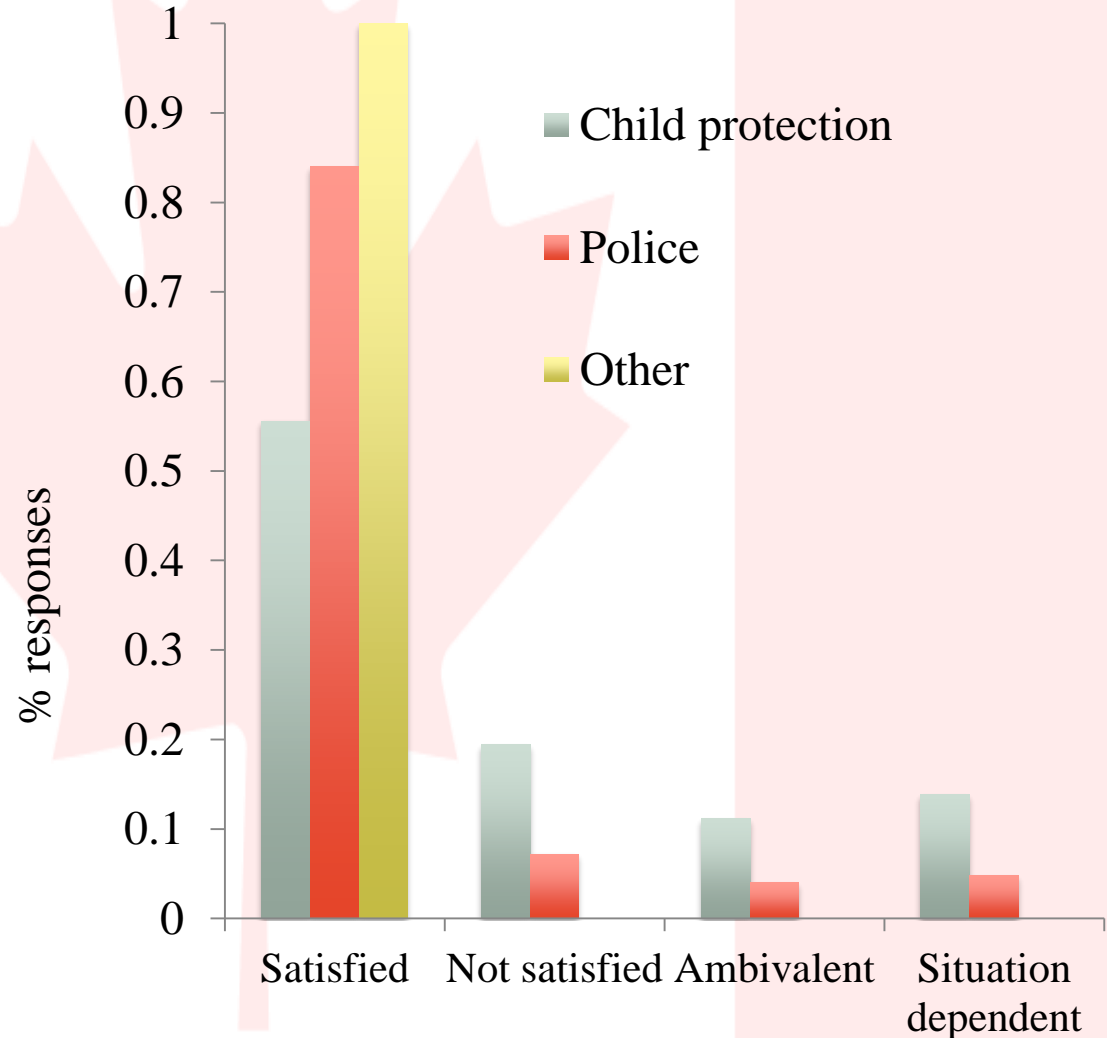
Do interviewers get Follow-up /Refresher training?

- Half the sample (49%) → *no* follow-up training
- For those who did, follow-up training fell into 4 categories:



What are the interviewing arrangements?

- 74% → alone
- 26% → team



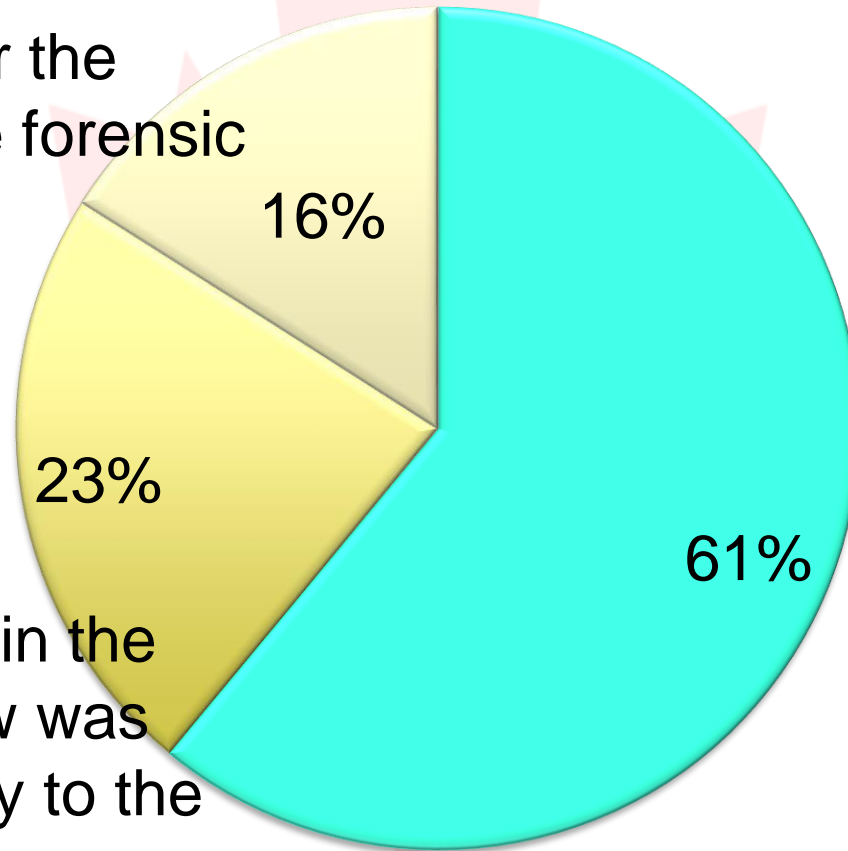
Interview arrangements - 2

- The most frequent reason given for the interview arrangement was related to child factors (33%).
- Respondents who interviewed individually:
 - child factors, followed by *practical constraints* (17%)
- Respondents who interviewed in teams:
 - *reasons of collaboration* (34%)

How/when is risk assessed?

Separately, by conducting another interview immediately after the conclusion of the forensic interview

risk assessment in the forensic interview was confined primarily to the presenting issue



All types of child maltreatment risk were assessed in the forensic interview.

What do interviewers find challenging about interviewing kids?

- The children themselves (30%)
 - Overcoming communication barriers (17%)
 - Interviewing procedures (14%)
 - Not enough training (10%)
- 

Challenges - 2



- Legal applications of interviews (8%)
- Possibility of external influences (8%)
- Organizational issues (7%)
- Self (interviewer) factors (3%)

What do interviewers want to learn more about?

Category	Child Protection %	Police %
Interviewing protocols/guidelines	25	25
Follow-up training	18	23
Child development – diversely able	15	8
Court-associated topics	0	11
Credibility assessment	15	6
Developing rapport	3	8
Child development – normative	3	7
Unique situations	5	4
Types of abuse	5	3
Interviewing reluctant children	3	4
Becoming certified	5	0
Cultural considerations	5	0
Historical abuse	0	1

Summary: Interview Guidelines

- Variability was just as likely within organizations and regions as across.
- Most interviewers (79%) had been exposed to one or more widely recognised guidelines in training. There was much variety in the type
 - The use of interview guidelines or a semi-scripted protocol is known to aid interviewers in adhering to best practice recommendations.

Summary: Training Content

- Training/advice relevant to investigative interviews with *any* target group
 - Only 13% of responses mentioned training in child developmental topics
 - Not salient in training?
 - Nearly a quarter reported training in using non-verbal aids
 - Requires understanding of developmental literature

Interview Training: Who & How Long?

- Wide variety in who delivered the training.
- 1-week, classroom-based training standard
 - Research suggests that traditional, blocked learning is less effective than spaced learning
- Half the sample did not receive follow-up/refresher training
 - Of those who did, largely informal
 - Regular, formal refresher training and feedback is key

Desire for knowledge

- Regardless of organization, interviewers clearly expressed the need to have more education and training relating to *communicating with children, children's memory and suggestibility, and children's understanding of the interview process.*
- Respondents also seek information related to peer review, and/or other follow-up training.

Overall conclusions



- Lack of consensus nationwide on the strategies used for interviewing children, and on the frequency and delivery of training.
- Interviewers find interviewing children to be a specialized and challenging skill.
- The majority desire more training, in terms of length, frequency, and topics, including knowledge of multiple protocols and guidelines.

Recommendations - 1

- Development of a national policy statement with a clear and consistent message on the joint training of police and child protection workers on protection of children and to promote best practices and maintain the integrity of the process.

Recommendations - 2

Contemporary best-practice interview protocols share features, are flexible, and continually change in accordance with new research and practical developments. Small differences across interviewing guidelines are not necessarily a problem.

- We recommend **a specific and comprehensive national policy developed by a body of stakeholders** (front-line police and child protection interviewers, trainers, academics, and relevant government officials) **that outlines the necessary and sufficient features of child interview guidelines and associated training.**

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