



Ongoing Child Welfare Services and Referrals to Services by Primary Form of Substantiated Maltreatment in Ontario in 2013

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Introduction

The Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2013 (OIS-2013) is the fifth provincial study to examine the incidence of reported child maltreatment and the characteristics of children and families investigated by child welfare authorities in Ontario. This Information Sheet examines the estimated number of investigations that are transferred to ongoing child welfare services and referrals to services that are either internal or external to a child welfare agency.

Findings

There were an estimated 125,281 maltreatment-related investigations conducted in Ontario in 2013. There were an estimated 97,951 investigations involving an incident of maltreatment and an estimated 27,330 risk-only investigations. At the end of the initial investigation, 34% of maltreatment investigations were substantiated (an estimated 43,067 investigations).

The OIS-2013 also asked workers to indicate whether the investigation would be transferred to ongoing child welfare services. As shown in Table 1, transfers to ongoing child welfare services varied by primary form of substantiated maltreatment. Substantiated neglect investigations were most likely to stay open for ongoing child welfare services (59%), followed by substantiated sexual abuse investigations (44%), substantiated exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV) investigations (42%), physical abuse investigations (42%). Only one third of substantiated emotional maltreatment investigations were transferred to ongoing child welfare services.

Table 1.

Ongoing child welfare services by primary form of substantiated maltreatment in Ontario in 2013[^]

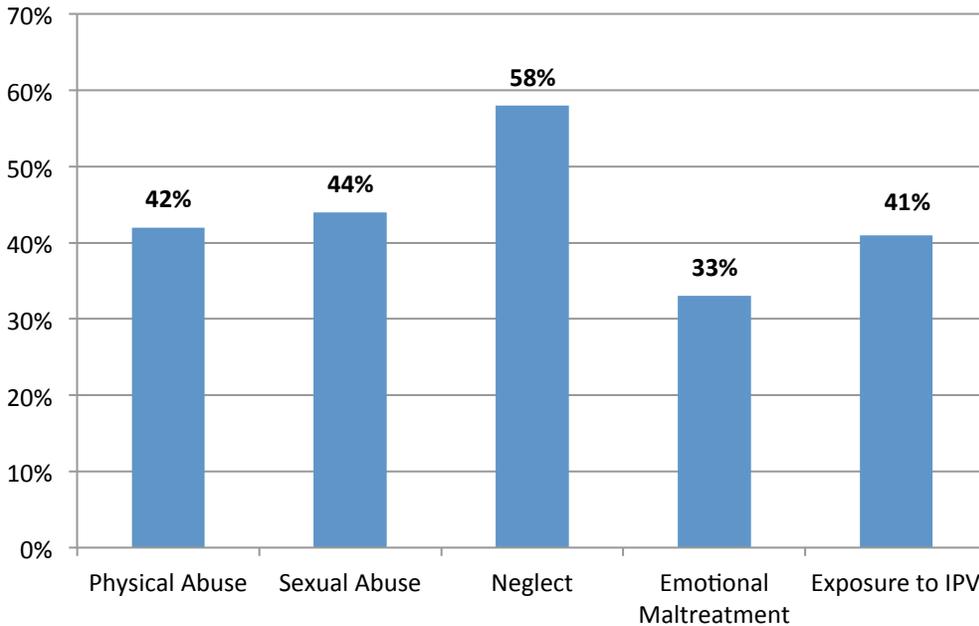
| | Primary Form of Maltreatment | | | | | | | | | | Total | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|--------------|------------|---------------|------------|------------------------|------------|-----------------|------------|---------------|------------|
| | Physical Abuse | | Sexual Abuse | | Neglect | | Emotional Maltreatment | | Exposure to IPV | | | |
| Ongoing Child Welfare Services | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| Yes | 2,311 | 42 | 362 | 44 | 5,946 | 59 | 1,885 | 34 | 8,474 | 42 | 18,978 | 45 |
| No | 3,178 | 58 | 454 | 56 | 4,158 | 41 | 3,722 | 66 | 11,969 | 59 | 23,481 | 55 |
| Total | 5,489 | 100 | 816 | 100 | 10,104 | 100 | 5,607 | 100 | 20,443 | 100 | 42,459 | 100 |

[^] Based on a sample of 1,811 substantiated child maltreatment-related investigations with information about ongoing child welfare services. Percentages are column percentages, and may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Please see Figure 1 for a visual representation of these findings.

Figure 1.

Ongoing child welfare services by primary form of substantiated maltreatment in Ontario in 2013



Workers were also asked to indicate whether they made a referral to either a service internal or external to child welfare. These findings are shown in Table 2. In the majority of substantiated maltreatment investigations, a referral to services was made for either the family or child. Investigations where the primary form of substantiated maltreatment was sexual abuse were most likely to be referred for services (84%), followed by substantiated exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV) investigations (65%), substantiated neglect investigations (60%), substantiated

physical abuse investigations (57%), and substantiated emotional maltreatment investigations (54%).¹

Table 2.

Referrals to services beyond the parameters of ongoing child welfare services by primary form of substantiated maltreatment in Ontario in 2013[^]

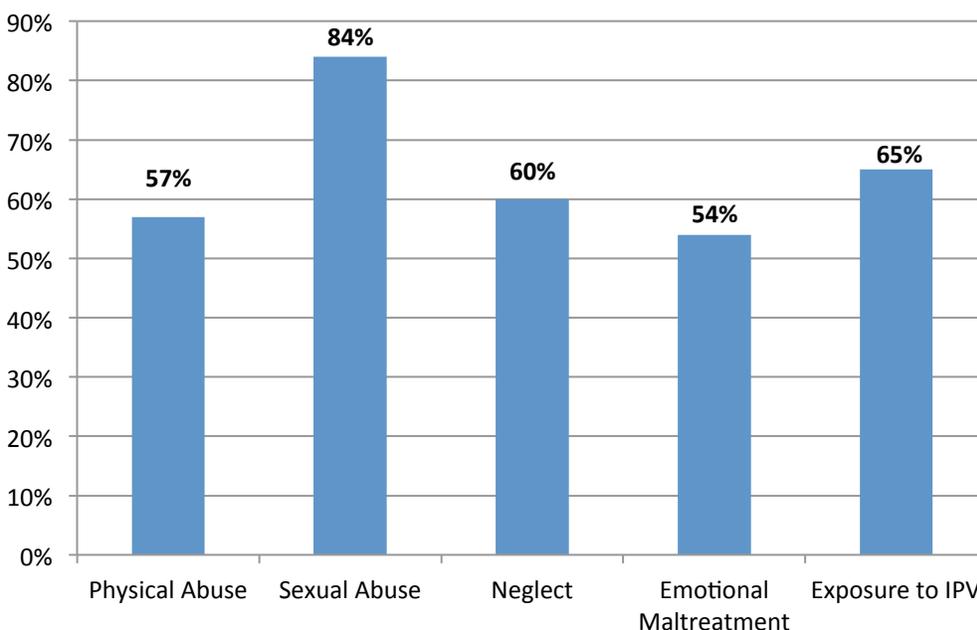
| | Primary Form of Maltreatment | | | | | | | | | | Total | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|------------|--------------|------------|---------------|------------|------------------------|------------|-----------------|------------|---------------|------------|
| | Physical Abuse | | Sexual Abuse | | Neglect | | Emotional Maltreatment | | Exposure to IPV | | | |
| Referral to Services Made | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| Yes | 3,115 | 57 | 685 | 84 | 6,062 | 60 | 3,037 | 54 | 13,212 | 65 | 26,111 | 62 |
| No | 2,374 | 43 | 131 | 16 | 4,042 | 40 | 2,570 | 46 | 7,231 | 35 | 16,348 | 38 |
| Total | 5,489 | 100 | 816 | 100 | 10,104 | 100 | 5,607 | 100 | 20,443 | 100 | 42,459 | 100 |

[^] Based on a sample of 1,811 substantiated child maltreatment-related investigations with information about ongoing child welfare services. Percentages are column percentages, and may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Please see Figure 2 for a visual representation of these findings.

Figure 2.

Referrals to services beyond the parameters of ongoing child welfare services by primary form of substantiated maltreatment in Ontario in 2013



¹ A detailed breakdown can be found in the OIS 2013 Major Findings Report

Background

Due to changes in investigation mandates and practices over the last 15 years, the OIS-2008 and OIS-2013 differed from previous cycles in that they tracked both risk-only investigations and maltreatment investigations. Risk-only investigations were those in which a specific past incident of maltreatment was not suspected or alleged to have occurred, but rather a constellation of factors lead to concerns that a child may be maltreated in the future (e.g., caregiver with a substance abuse issue).

Methodology

The OIS-2013 used a multi-stage sampling design to select a representative sample of 17 child welfare agencies in Ontario and then to select a sample of cases within these agencies. Information was collected directly from child protection workers on a representative sample of 5,265 child protection investigations conducted during a three-month sampling period in 2013. This sample was weighted to reflect provincial annual estimates. After two weighting procedures were applied to the data, the estimated number of maltreatment-related investigations (i.e., maltreatment and risk-only investigations) conducted in Ontario in 2013 was 125,281.

For maltreatment investigations, information was collected regarding the primary form of maltreatment investigated as well as the level of substantiation for that maltreatment (substantiated, suspected, or unfounded). Thirty-two forms of maltreatment were listed on the data collection instrument, and these were collapsed into five broad categories: physical abuse (e.g., hit with hand), sexual abuse (e.g., exploitation), neglect (e.g., educational neglect), emotional maltreatment (e.g., verbal abuse or belittling), and exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV) (e.g., direct witness to physical violence). Workers listed the primary concern for the investigation, and could also list secondary and tertiary concerns.

For each risk investigation, workers determined whether the child was at risk of future maltreatment. The worker could decide that the child was at risk of future maltreatment (confirmed risk), that the child was not at risk of future maltreatment (unfounded risk), or that the future risk of maltreatment was unknown.

Workers were asked to provide information on various other aspects of their investigation, including the characteristics of the household, caregivers, and child subject of the investigation, the history of previous child welfare case openings, and the short-term child welfare service dispositions.

Limitations

The OIS collects information directly from child welfare workers at the point when they completed their initial investigation of a report of possible child abuse or neglect, or risk of future maltreatment. Therefore, the scope of the study is limited to the type of information available to them at that point. The OIS does not include information about unreported maltreatment nor about cases that were investigated only by the police. Also, reports that were

made to child welfare authorities but were screened out (not opened for investigation) were not included. Similarly, reports on cases currently open at the time of case selection were not included. The study did not track longer-term service events that occurred beyond the initial investigation.

Three limitations to estimation method used to derive annual estimates should also be noted. The agency size correction uses child population as a proxy for agency size; this does not account for variations in per capita investigation rates across agencies in the same strata. The annualization weight corrects for seasonal fluctuation in the volume of investigations, but it does not correct for seasonal variations in types of investigations conducted. Finally, the annualization weight includes cases that were investigated more than once in the year as a result of the case being re-opened following a first investigation completed earlier in the same year. Accordingly, the weighted annual estimates represent the child maltreatment-related investigations, rather than investigated children.

Comparisons across OIS reports must be made with caution. The forms of maltreatment tracked by each cycle were modified to take into account changes in investigation mandates and practices. Comparisons across cycles must in particular take into consideration the fact that the OIS-2008 was the first to explicitly track risk-only investigations.

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