



# Educational Neglect in Ontario

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## Introduction

The Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2013 (OIS-2013)<sup>1</sup> 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 characteristics of children who experience educational neglect and the child welfare service response to this form of maltreatment. Educational neglect is a serious form of child maltreatment that can have devastating consequences.

## Findings<sup>2</sup>

Information on eight subtypes of neglect was gathered in the OIS-2013, including:

- (1) failure to supervise, physical harm;
- (2) failure to supervise, sexual abuse;
- (3) permitting criminal behaviour;
- (4) physical neglect;
- (5) medical neglect;
- (6) failure to provide psychological treatment;
- (7) abandonment;
- (8) educational neglect.

Failure to supervise, physical harm was the most commonly investigated subtype of neglect, as shown in Figure 1. In 41% of neglect investigations, the worker was investigating failure to supervise, physical harm (an estimated 11,066 investigations). Physical neglect represented the next most commonly investigated subtype of neglect (29%, an estimated 7,869 investigations).

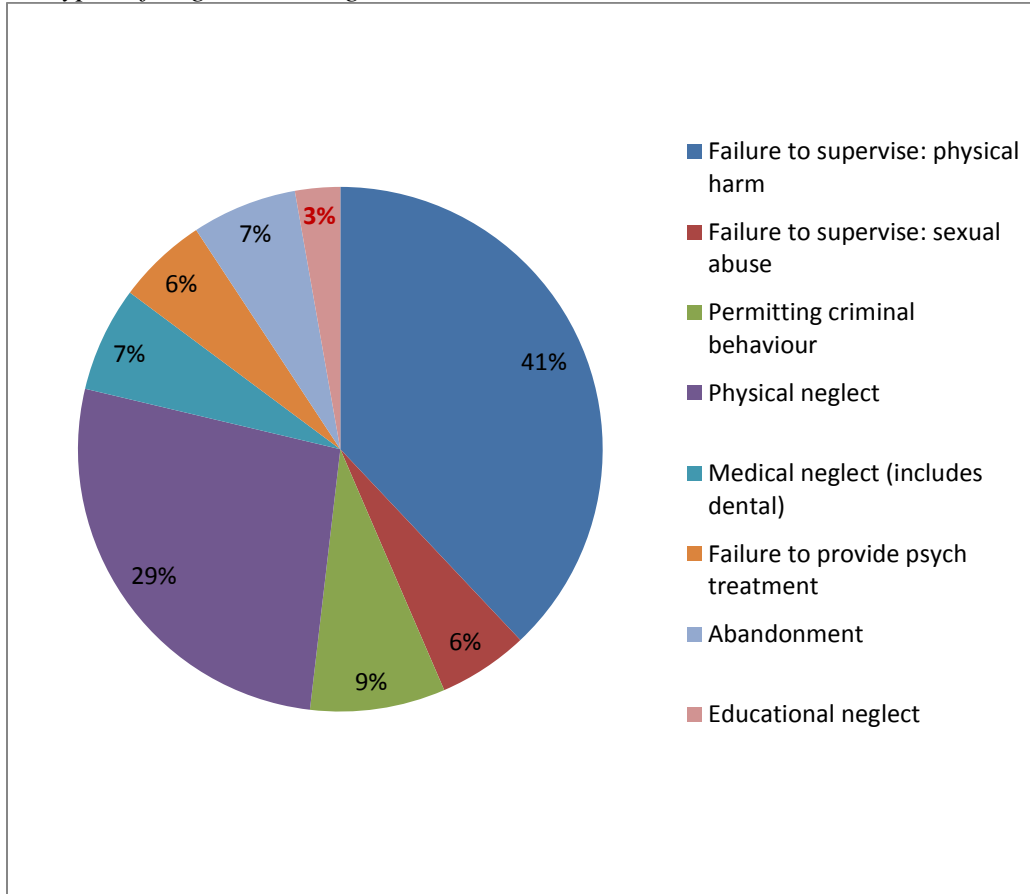
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<sup>1</sup> Fallon, B., Van Wert, M., Trocmé, N., MacLaurin, B., Sinha, V., Lefebvre, R., et al. (2015). *Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2013 (OIS-2013)*. Toronto, ON: Child Welfare Research Portal.

<sup>2</sup> Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding. Estimates may not add up to totals due to missing data. Estimates under 100 are not reported because they are unreliable (as indicated by a dash).

Only a small proportion of neglect investigations focused on educational neglect (3%, an estimated 808 investigations).

Figure 1  
*Subtypes of neglect investigated in Ontario in 2013*



The OIS-2013 tracked 19 sources of referral. Workers indicated all of the individuals and organizations who contacted the child protection service to report an allegation of maltreatment. Figure 2 displays the primary source of referral in neglect investigations, comparing investigations of educational neglect to investigations of other subtypes of neglect. Almost three quarters of allegations of educational neglect were referred by the school (74% or an estimated 597 investigations).

Figure 2

Sources of referral in neglect investigations in Ontario in 2013

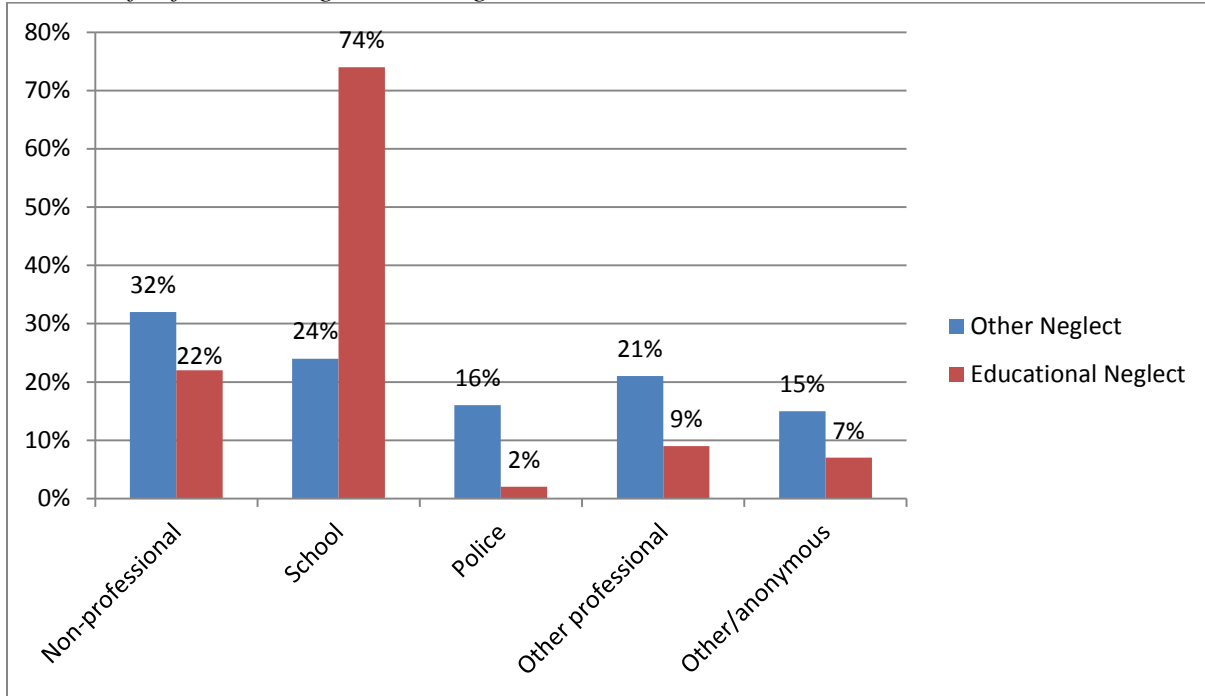


Table 1 displays the substantiation level within educational neglect investigations compared to investigations of other types of neglect. Compared to investigations of other subtypes of neglect, educational neglect investigations were more likely to be substantiated. Two-thirds of investigations focused on educational neglect were substantiated (an estimated 532 investigations), compared to only 38% of investigations focusing on other subtypes of neglect (an estimated 9,854 investigations).

Table 1

Substantiation level in educational neglect investigations in Ontario in 2013

	Other Subtype of Neglect		Educational Neglect	
	n=25,959 (97%)		n=808 (3%)	
	#	%	#	%
Unfounded	15,033	58%	168	21%
Suspected	1,072	4%	108	13%
Substantiated	9,854	38%	532	66%

Following the initial investigation, workers could decide to open the case for ongoing child welfare services, provide a referral to specialized services for the child or family, and/or place the child in out-of-home care. Table 2 compares these case dispositions in educational neglect investigations to investigations involving other subtypes of neglect. Investigations focused on educational neglect were more likely to be opened for ongoing services. While only 28% of investigations of other subtypes of neglect were opened (an estimated 6,995 investigations), 62%

of educational neglect investigations were opened to receive ongoing child welfare services following the initial investigation (an estimated 501 investigations). Likewise, educational neglect investigations were more likely to receive a referral to a specialized service provider (51% versus 41%). However, investigations of other subtypes of neglect were more likely to result in placement for the child.

Table 2

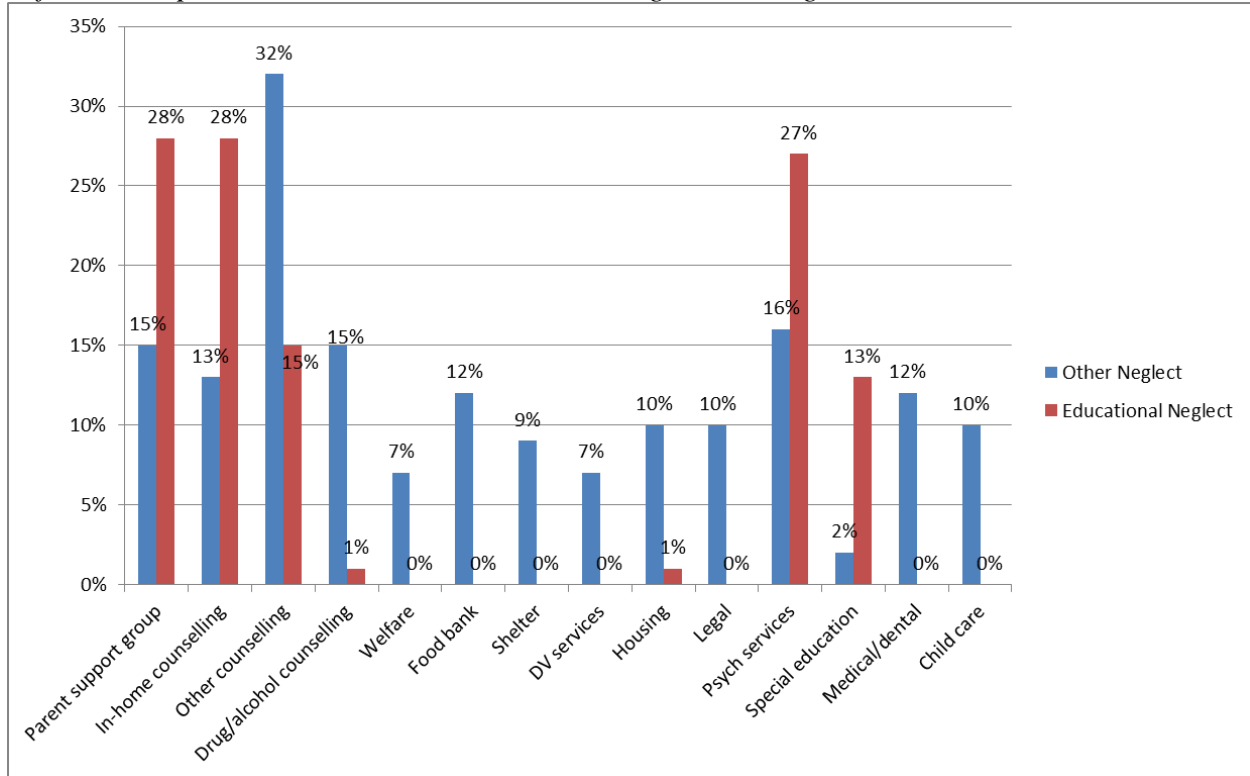
*Case opening, referrals to specialized services, and placement in educational neglect investigations in Ontario in 2013*

	Other Subtype of Neglect		Educational Neglect	
	n=25,959 (97%)		n=808 (3%)	
	#	%	#	%
Case opened	6,995	28%	501	62%
Referral to services	10,356	41%	413	51%
Placement	2,136	8%	-	-

Figure 3 depicts the referrals to specialized services among educational neglect investigations and investigations focusing on other subtypes of neglect. Educational neglect investigations were more likely to result in a referral to a parent support group, in-home counselling, psychological/psychiatric services, and special education. Investigations focused on other subtypes of neglect more commonly resulted in a referral to other counselling, drug and alcohol counselling, welfare, food bank, shelter services, domestic violence services, housing, legal, medical or dental services, and child or day care.

Figure 3

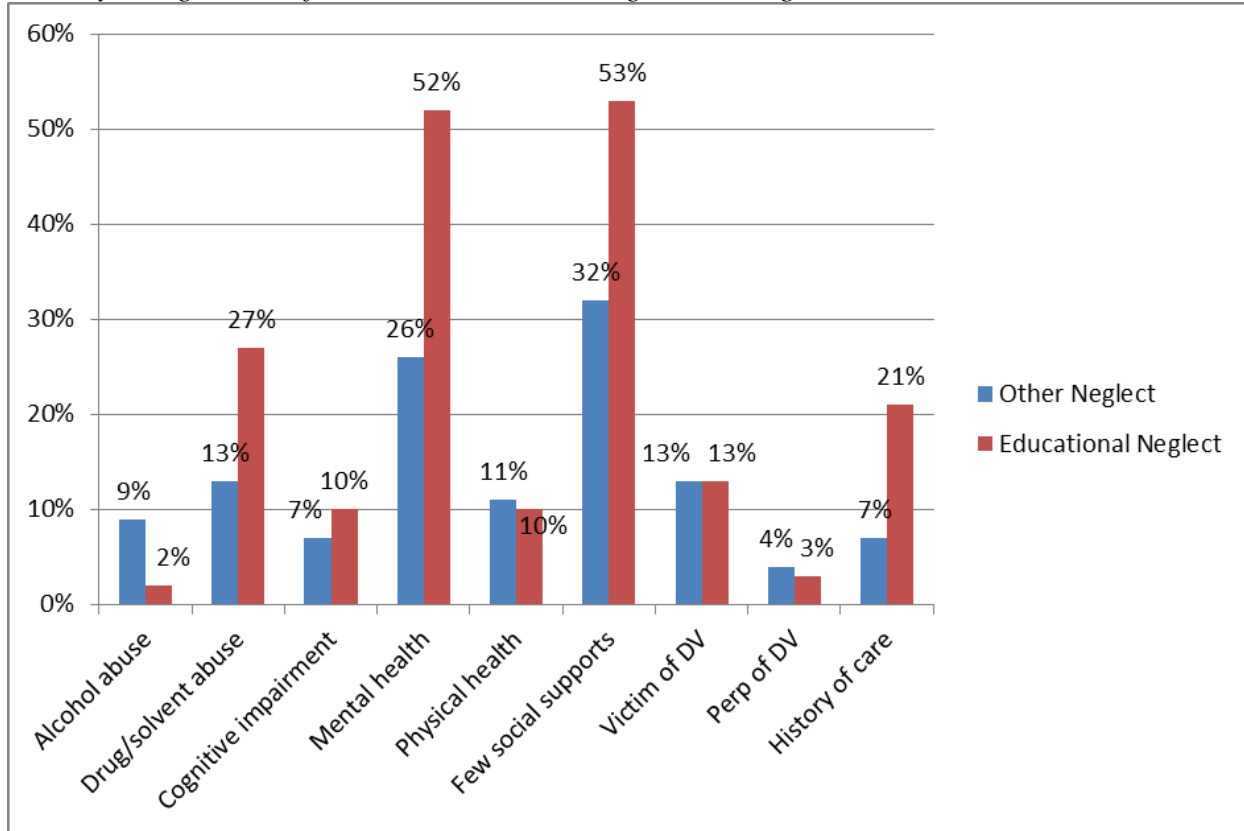
*Referrals to specialized services in educational neglect investigations in Ontario in 2013*



Workers documented caregiver risk factors for the OIS-2013. Figure 4 displays a comparison of primary caregiver risk factors in educational neglect investigations versus investigations of other subtypes of neglect. Clear differences emerged across specific risk factors. Investigations focusing on educational neglect were more likely to document drug/solvent abuse, mental health issues, few social supports, and a history of foster care or group home in the caregiver’s childhood.

Figure 4

Primary caregiver risk factors in educational neglect investigations in Ontario in 2013



Workers also documented various child characteristics, including age, ethno-racial status, and functioning concerns. Table 3 compares the child characteristics noted in educational neglect investigations to the characteristics documented in investigations of other subtypes of neglect. Educational neglect investigations were more likely to involve adolescents age 12 to 15 (41% versus 23%), and less likely to involve children under the age of four. Few differences appeared in the ethno-racial status of children involved in educational neglect investigations and investigations of other subtypes of neglect. Children who were subject of educational neglect investigations were more likely to demonstrate internalizing issues and developmental or other disabilities, compared to investigations of other forms of neglect.

Table 3

*Child functioning issues in educational neglect investigations in Ontario in 2013*

		Other Subtype of Neglect		Educational Neglect	
		n=25,959 (97%)		n=808 (3%)	
		#	%	#	%
<b>Child age</b>					
	Under 1 year	1,618	6%	-	-
	1-3 years	4,423	17%	-	-
	4-7 years	7,655	30%	294	36%
	8-11 years	6,318	24%	149	18%
	12-15 years	5,945	23%	329	41%
<b>Child ethno-racial</b>					
	White	18,182	70%	566	70%
	Black	1,280	5%	-	-
	Aboriginal	3,598	14%	-	-
	Asian	1,399	5%	-	-
	Arab	242	1%	-	-
	Latin American	340	1%	-	-
	Multiple	918	4%	-	-
<b>Child functioning</b>					
	Internalizing issues	4,403	17%	290	36%
	Externalizing issues	3,980	15%	115	14%
	ADD/ADHD	3,466	13%	-	-
	Attachment issues	2,960	11%	102	13%
	Developmental/other disability	4,731	18%	217	27%
	Substance abuse	1,263	5%	-	-

## Summary

- A small proportion of neglect investigations focus on educational neglect.
- Typically educational neglect investigations are referred by school professionals.
- Educational neglect investigations are more likely to be substantiated than investigations of other forms of neglect. These investigations are also more likely to be opened for ongoing child welfare services and result in a referral to a specialized service provider, but less likely to result in placement for the child. When referrals to specialized service providers are offered, it is usually to in-home counselling, special education, parent support groups, and psychological or psychiatric services. Other subtypes of neglect more commonly receive referrals to services that address indicators of poverty (e.g., welfare, food bank, shelter).

- Investigations of educational neglect are more likely to note caregiver risk factors such as mental health issues and few social supports as well as child functioning concerns such as internalizing issues and developmental disabilities.

## 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.

Workers were asked to provide information about the maltreatment-related allegations and the characteristics of the investigated child and family. Workers also provided information on several short-term investigation outcomes including referrals to specialized services, ongoing child welfare services, and placement in out-of-home care.

Maltreatment investigations and risk of future maltreatment investigations were tracked separately. 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.

The present analysis focused only on maltreatment investigations in which the primary form of alleged maltreatment was neglect (unweighted n=1,229). These analyses *do not* include maltreatment investigations in which the primary form of alleged maltreatment was physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional maltreatment, or exposure to intimate partner violence, nor do the



analyses include risk investigations. When weights were applied to the 1,229 neglect investigations captured in the OIS-2013, the estimated number of investigations focused on neglect in Ontario in 2013 is equal to 26,767.

## **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.

**Suggested Citation:** Fallon, B., & Van Wert, M. (2017). Educational Neglect in Ontario. CWRP Information Sheet 183E. Toronto, ON: Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal.