



# Sexual Abuse Substantiation by Subtype and Outcomes of Sexual Abuse Investigations by Gender

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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 sexual abuse substantiation by subtype and how boys and girls investigated by the child protection system for alleged sexual abuse compare on the likelihood of a transfer to ongoing services.

There is a dearth of literature on differential outcomes and on child protection services by gender. Specifically, the differential outcomes experienced by boys and girls on child protection services to address their needs are not well researched.

## Findings

Among the estimated 125,281 maltreatment-related investigations conducted in Ontario in 2013, 78 percent were maltreatment investigations which focused on a concern of abuse or neglect (an estimated 97,951 child maltreatment investigations) and 22 percent of investigations were concerns about risk of future maltreatment (an estimated 27,330 investigations).

Of the 97,951 maltreatment investigations, 4,261 (4%) were conducted for a primary maltreatment concern of sexual abuse. Thirty-four percent of all maltreatment investigations (an estimated 43,067 investigations) were substantiated. Specifically, 848 of these investigations were substantiated for a primary maltreatment concern of sexual abuse (2% of all substantiated child maltreatment investigations).

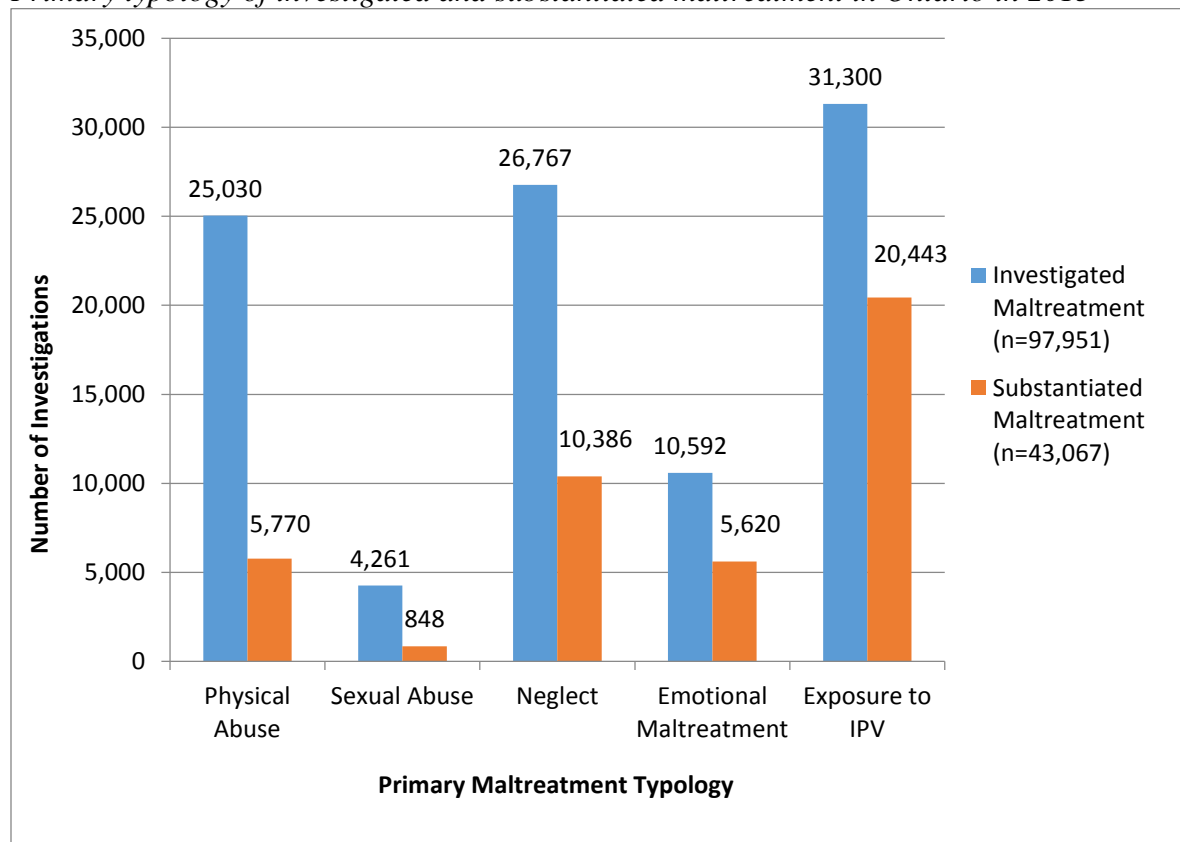
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<sup>1</sup> Fallon, B., Van Wert, M., Trocmé, N., MacLaurin, B., Sinha, V., Lefebvre, R., et al. (2015). *Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2013 (OIS-2013)*. Toronto, ON: Child Welfare Research Portal.

Figure 1 displays the number of investigated and substantiated maltreatment investigations by primary maltreatment typology. Of note, sexual abuse investigations were the least likely to be substantiated of any type of maltreatment.

Figure 1.

*Primary typology of investigated and substantiated maltreatment in Ontario in 2013*



As seen in Table 1, there were differences in substantiation rates by subtype of sexual abuse. Sexual abuse investigations involving non-contact (i.e., sex talk, voyeurism, exhibitionism and exploitation) had the highest rate of substantiation (36% of all non-contact sexual abuse investigations were substantiated). Investigations focusing on other sexual abuse allegations (e.g., the child was referred to a child protection agency for a concern of sexual abuse as a result of their behaviour or contact with a known perpetrator) were the least likely to result in a substantiated finding; only 8% of these investigations were substantiated.

Table 1.

*Level of substantiation by subtype of investigated sexual abuse in Ontario in 2013*

Subtype of Sexual Abuse	Unfounded	%	Suspected	%	Substantiated	%	Total	%
Penetration / Attempted Penetration / Oral Sex / Fondling	945	61%	157	10%	448	29%	1,550	100%
Sex Talk / Voyeurism / Exhibitionsim / Exploitation	353	56%	50	8%	223	36%	626	100%
Other Sexual Abuse	1,776	85%	133	6%	177	8%	2,086	100%
Total	3,074	72%	340	8%	848	20%	4,262	100%

A logistic regression was conducted to predict transfers to ongoing child welfare services among investigations involving a primary maltreatment concern of sexual abuse, looking at whether gender would be a significant predictor of that decision. Table 2 depicts the findings from the final model. With the exception of the child's previous referral to a child protection agency, each of the predictors was significantly related to the decision to provide ongoing child welfare services when controlling for all the clinical concerns of the investigation. Investigations were over five times more likely to be transferred to ongoing services when emotional harm to the child was noted. Additionally, investigations involving a concern for aggression and depression in the child were also more likely to be transferred to ongoing services. **Gender of the child remained highly significant when controlling for the clinical characteristics of the investigation; boys were over two and half times more likely to be transferred to ongoing services.** The predictors in the final model explained 38% of the variance in the decision to transfer to ongoing child welfare services, and the model had an overall classification rate of 76%.

Table 2.  
*Predictors of Transfers to Ongoing Child Welfare Services for Investigations involving a Primary Concern of Sexual Abuse (n=4,261)*

	B	S.E.	O.R.
<b>Child Level</b>			
Age**	-.039	.013	.961
Male***	.958	.111	2.605
Depression***	1.416	.145	4.119
Attachment issues*	-.484	.201	.616
Aggression***	1.104	.168	3.017
Academic Difficulties***	-.973	.154	.378
<b>Caregiver</b>			
At least one Primary Caregiver Functioning Concern***	.587	.114	1.798
Single Caregiver Household*	.236	.100	1.266
<b>Maltreatment</b>			
Sexual Abuse: Contact			
Non Contact***	.587	.136	1.798
Other Sexual Abuse***	-1.019	.119	.361
Emotional Harm Noted***	1.703	.128	5.492
Child Previously Investigated	.019	.113	1.019
<b>2 Log likelihood</b>			2903.416
<b>Nagelkerke R Square</b>			0.384

\* p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001

Classification 76%

## 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 (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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