



Primary Caregiver Characteristics Among Investigations Involving Latin American Children in Ontario in 2023

Henry Parada, Leyco Wilson, Tara Black, Barbara Fallon, Samantha Irwin & Rachael Lefebvre
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Introduction

The Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2023 (OIS-2023)¹ is the seventh provincial study examining the incidence of reported child maltreatment-related investigations² and the characteristics of children and families investigated by child welfare authorities in Ontario. This information sheet describes primary caregiver characteristics identified in child maltreatment-related investigations involving a Latin American child in Ontario in 2023. Findings are compared with investigations involving a white child to examine similarities and differences in caregiver circumstances identified during child welfare investigations.

Findings

An estimated 125,879 maltreatment-related investigations involving children and youth 0–17 years of age were conducted by child welfare authorities in Ontario in 2023. Of these, an estimated 2,814 investigations involved a Latin American child.

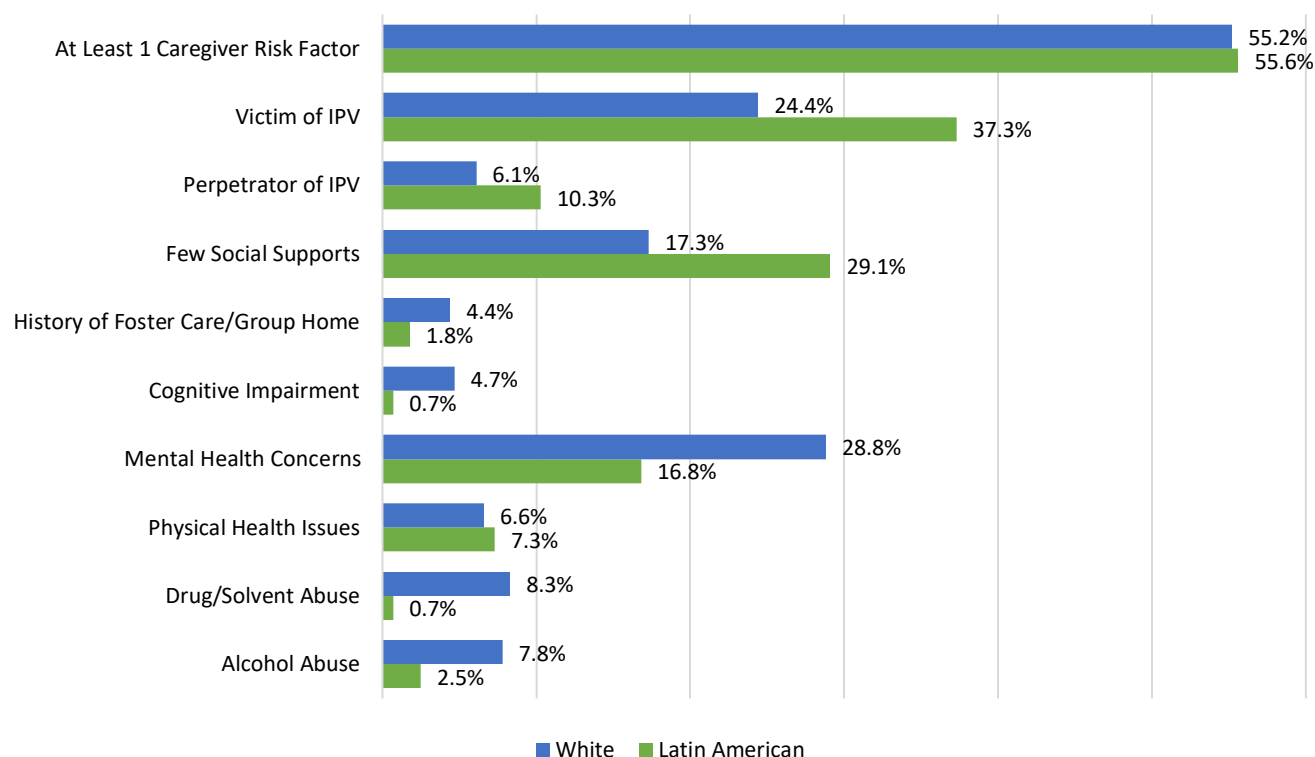
At least one primary caregiver functioning concern was identified in 55.6% of investigations involving a Latin American child (35.94 per 1,000 children). This was similar to investigations involving a white child, where at least one caregiver concern was identified in 55.2% of investigations (24.12 per 1,000 children). Among investigations involving a Latin American child, the most frequently identified primary caregiver concern were victimization by intimate partner violence, few social supports, and mental health concerns. A similar pattern was observed among

¹ Fallon, B., Black, T., Lefebvre, R., Trocmé, N., Hélie, S., Crowe, A., Miller, M., Budau, K., Houston, E., King, B., Esposito, B., Fluke, J., Collin-Vézina, D., Parada, H., Provençal, J., Chhabra, N., Sawh, P., Chan, P., Bonnie, N., ... Wilson, L. (2025). Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2023 (OIS-2023). Toronto, ON: Child Welfare Research Portal.

² A maltreatment-related investigation refers to both maltreatment and risk-only investigations. Risk-only investigations are 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).

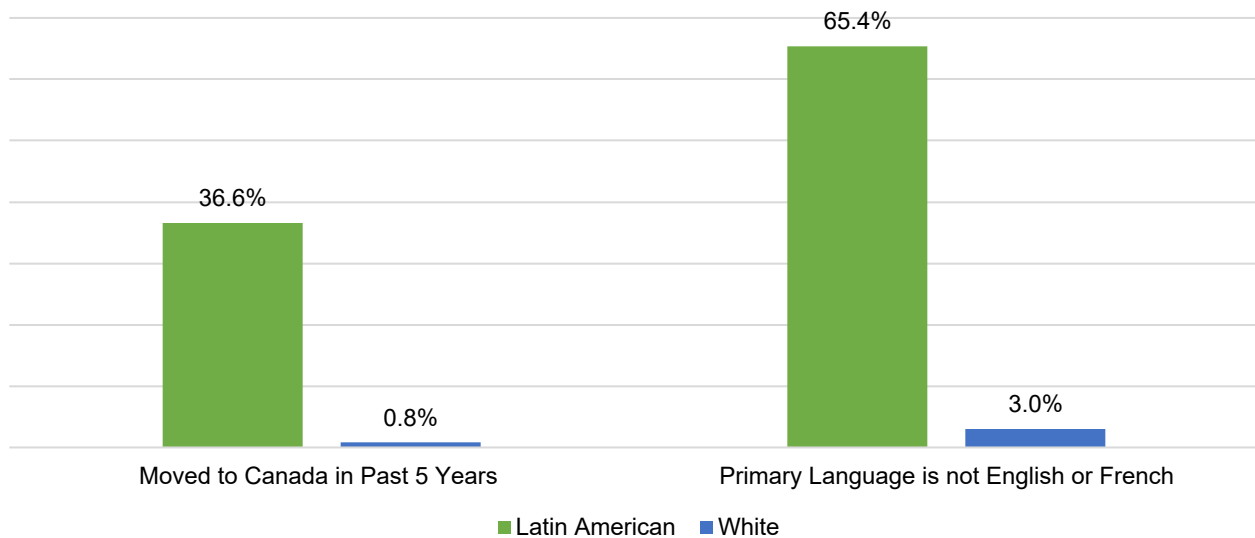
investigations involving a white child, where caregiver victimization by intimate partner violence was also the most frequently identified concern, followed by mental health concerns, and few social supports. Compared with investigations involving a white child, however, caregiver victimization by intimate partner violence was more frequently identified among investigations involving a Latin American child (37.3% vs. 24.4%). Similarly, few social supports were more frequently identified among investigations involving a Latin American child (29.1% vs. 17.3%). In contrast, caregiver mental health concerns were less frequently identified among investigations involving a Latin American child relative to investigations involving a white child (16.8% vs. 28.8%). Figure 1 presents primary caregiver concerns identified by investigating workers in child maltreatment-related investigations involving a Latin American child and investigations involving a white child.

Figure 1. *Primary Caregiver Functioning in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving Latin American and White Children in Ontario in 2023*



Notably, among investigations involving a Latin American child, households where English or French was not the primary language were identified in 65.4% of investigations (42.25 per 1,000 children). This was substantially higher than investigations involving a white child, where a primary language other than English or French was identified in only 3.0% of investigations (1.30 per 1,000 children). In 36.6% of investigations involving a Latin American child, investigating workers also noted that the primary caregiver had moved to Canada within the previous five years (23.65 per 1,000 children). This was compared with 0.8% of investigations involving a white child (0.37 per 1,000 children). These findings are illustrated in Figure 2. The findings highlight the importance of considering the broader social and structural contexts in which families interact with child welfare systems.

Figure 2. *Primary Caregiver Migration and Language Characteristics in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving Latin American and White Children in Ontario in 2023*



Methodology

The OIS-2023 used a multi-stage sampling design to select a representative sample of 20 child welfare agencies in Ontario and then to select a sample of cases within these agencies. Information was collected directly from child welfare workers on a representative sample of 6,799 child protection investigations involving children 0–17 years of age that were conducted during a three-month sampling period in the fall of 2023. 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 2023 was 125,879. Population-based rates were calculated by dividing the estimated number of investigations involving Latin American and/or white children by the corresponding child population in Ontario and multiplying by 1,000.

Information regarding caregiver characteristics and functioning concerns was collected from investigating workers. Workers were asked to identify whether nine primary caregiver functioning factors were present at the conclusion of the investigation. These included alcohol abuse, drug/solvent abuse, cognitive impairment, mental health concerns, physical health issues, few social supports, caregiver victimization by intimate partner violence, perpetration of intimate partner violence, and history of foster care/group home placement. Where applicable, the reference period for caregiver concerns was the previous six months. A concern was considered identified when the investigating worker indicated that the concern was confirmed or suspected.

Limitations

The OIS-2023 collects information directly from child welfare workers at the point when they complete 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 information available to investigating workers at that time. The OIS-2023 does not include information about unreported maltreatment, cases investigated exclusively by police, reports screened out before an investigation was opened, or new reports involving children already receiving child welfare services.

Caregiver concerns reflect information known to investigating workers through available records, direct observation, caregiver disclosure, and professional judgement. The caregiver concern checklist is not a validated assessment measure and may not capture all experiences of caregiver stress, adversity, or support needs. Differences between groups may reflect differences in identification, disclosure, documentation practices, or access to services rather than differences in the underlying prevalence of caregiver circumstances. Findings reflect caregiver characteristics and concerns identified during the investigation period and do not represent the prevalence of these characteristics among all Latin American or white families in Ontario.

Three other limitations of the estimation procedures should also be noted. The agency size correction uses service volume as a proxy for agency size and does not account for variation in investigations across agencies. The annualization weight corrects for seasonal fluctuations in investigation volume but not seasonal variation in investigation type. Finally, because annual estimates include investigations involving children whose cases may have been reopened within the same year, the weighted estimates represent investigations rather than individual children.

Comparisons across OIS reports must be made with caution. The forms of maltreatment tracked by each cycle were modified to consider 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. Age groupings have also varied across OIS cycles and should be considered when interpreting comparisons over time, as estimates may reflect differences in the age composition of the samples included in each report.

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