

Primary Maltreatment Concern Among Investigations Involving Latin American Children in Ontario in 2023

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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 examines the primary maltreatment concerns identified in investigations involving a Latin American child, with comparisons to investigations involving a white child, in Ontario in 2023.

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. Eighty-two (82.6) percent of investigations involving a Latin American child were maltreatment investigations (i.e., focusing on an alleged specific incident of child maltreatment), and 17.4% involved concerns about risk of future maltreatment (risk-only investigations). For investigations involving a white child, 76.2% of investigations were focused on concerns of prior or ongoing maltreatment, whereas 23.8% were focused on assessing the risk of future maltreatment.

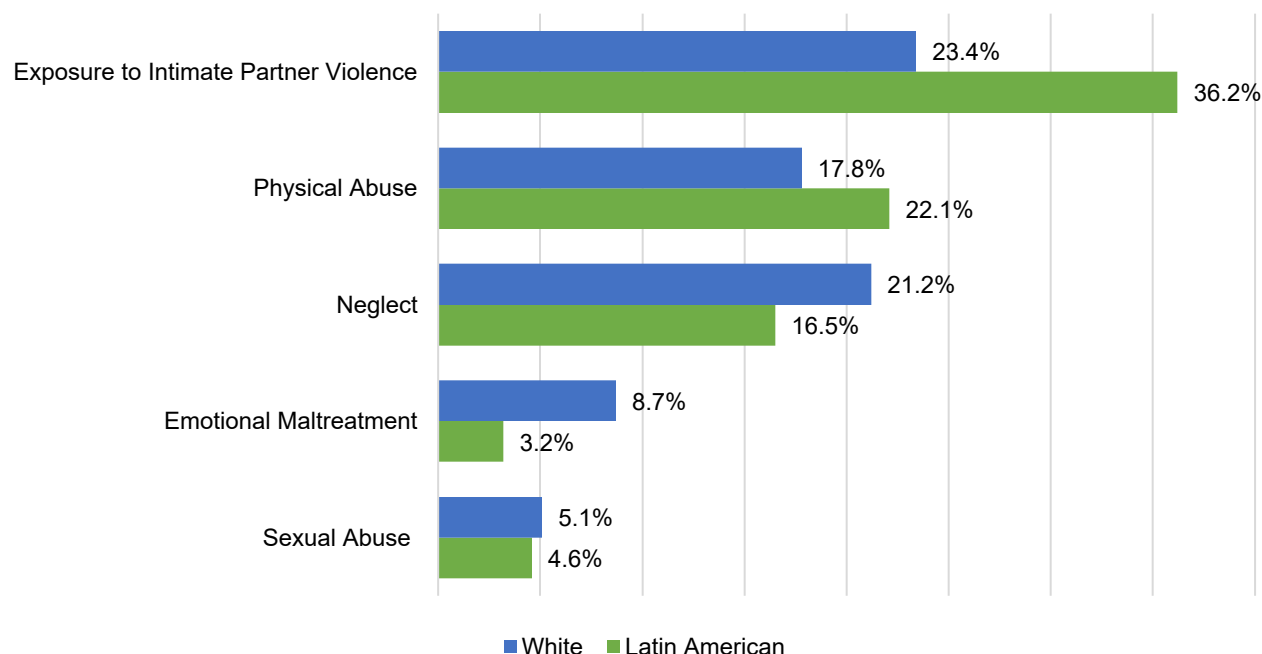
The OIS-2023 definition of child maltreatment includes 33 forms of maltreatment subsumed under five categories: physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, emotional maltreatment, and exposure to

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).

intimate partner violence (IPV). Figure 1 presents the primary maltreatment concern identified in investigations involving a Latin American child or a white child under 18 years of age in Ontario in 2023.

Figure 1. *Primary Maltreatment Concern Among Investigations Involving Latin American and White Children (0-17 Years) in Ontario in 2023*



Among investigations involving a Latin American child, exposure to IPV was the most common primary maltreatment concern, identified in 36.2% of investigations. This was followed by physical abuse (22.1%) and neglect (16.5%) being the next most identified primary maltreatment concerns for investigations involving a Latin American child. A similar pattern was observed for investigations involving a white child, with exposure to IPV also representing the most common primary maltreatment concern (23.4%). However, among white children, neglect was the second most common concern (21.2%), followed by physical abuse (17.8%). The distribution of primary investigation concerns therefore differed somewhat between the two groups, with exposure to IPV comprising a larger proportion of investigations involving a Latin American child, while neglect represented a larger proportion of investigations involving a white child.

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. Based on the OIS-2023 weighted estimates, there were an estimated 2,814

maltreatment-related investigations involving a Latin American child and 68,322 investigations involving a white child in Ontario in 2023.

Workers identified the primary maltreatment concern associated with each investigation, and could also list secondary and tertiary concerns. The OIS-2023 categorizes primary maltreatment concerns into five major types: physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, emotional maltreatment, and exposure to IPV.

Limitations

The OIS-2023 captures information available to investigating child welfare workers at the completion of the initial investigation. As a result, the study does not include incidents of maltreatment that were not reported to child welfare authorities, reports that were screened out before an investigation was opened, new reports on cases already open to child welfare services, or cases investigated exclusively by police. The OIS-2023 also does not capture longer-term child welfare service outcomes beyond the initial investigation period.

Because provincial estimates are derived using sampling and weighting procedures, findings should be interpreted as provincial estimates rather than exact counts. The estimates presented for investigations involving a Latin American child are based on a relatively small sample of investigations and may not reflect regional variation across 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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