

Socioeconomic Circumstances of Latin American Families Involved in Child Welfare Investigations 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 household socioeconomic circumstances for Latin American families involved in child maltreatment-related investigations in Ontario in 2023. Findings are compared with investigations involving a white child to examine similarities and differences in family socioeconomic circumstances identified during child welfare investigations.

Findings

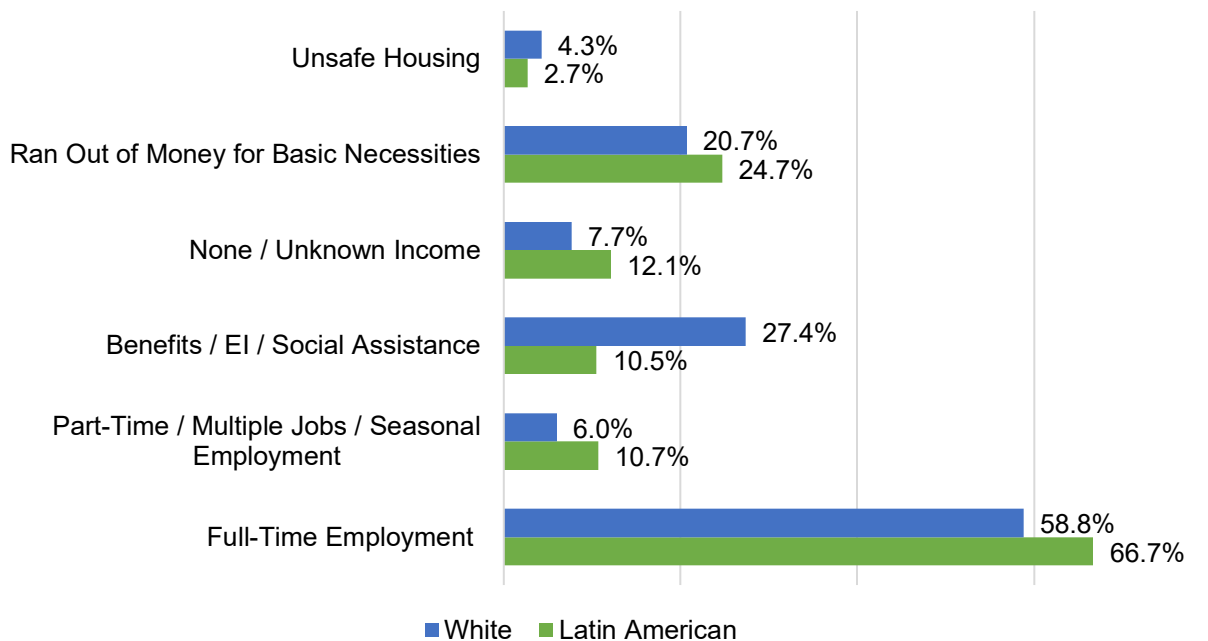
There was an estimated 125,879 maltreatment-related investigations in Ontario in 2023 involving children and youth under 18 years of age. Of these, an estimated 2,814 investigations involved a Latin American child. The socioeconomic characteristics of the households involved in these investigations provide additional context for understanding the circumstances of children and families who came into contact with Ontario child welfare services.

Household socioeconomic characteristics differed between investigations involving a Latin American child and investigations involving a white child. This is illustrated in Figure 1.

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).

Figure 1. *Household Socioeconomic Characteristics in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving Latin American and White Children (0-17 Years) in Ontario in 2023*



Investigations involving a Latin American child were more likely to involve households whose primary source of income was full-time employment compared with investigations involving a white child (66.7% vs. 58.8%). Conversely, investigations involving a white child were more likely to involve households receiving benefits, employment insurance, or social assistance (27.4% vs. 10.5%). A household concern related to insufficient funds for basic necessities was identified in 24.7% of investigations involving a Latin American child compared with 20.7% of investigations involving a white child. Housing concerns were uncommon among both groups. However, investigations involving a Latin American child were less likely to involve unsafe housing concerns compared with investigations involving a white child (2.7% vs. 4.3%).

Overall, Latin American families involved with child welfare investigations were not consistently characterized by greater socioeconomic disadvantage compared with white families. In some areas, including full-time employment, Latin American families demonstrated similar or more favourable socioeconomic circumstances. These findings highlight the importance of considering a broader range of factors when examining patterns of child welfare involvement.

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.

Workers were asked to identify the primary source of household income, including employment, benefits, employment insurance, social assistance, or no/unknown income. For the purposes of this analysis, income sources were grouped into four categories: full-time employment; part-time, multiple jobs, or seasonal employment; benefits/employment insurance/social assistance; and no/unknown income. Workers were also asked whether the household experienced difficulty paying for basic necessities, including food, housing, utilities, telephone/cell phone, or transportation, during the six months prior to the investigation. Housing concerns included overcrowding, unsafe housing conditions, or moving two or more times within the previous year.

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. Socioeconomic circumstances reported here reflect information documented during the child welfare investigation and may be influenced by the availability of information, caregiver disclosure, worker assessment, and documentation practices. The absence of a documented concern does not necessarily indicate the absence of a challenge or unmet need.

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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