



Out of Home Placements 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 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 out-of-home placements in 2023, including placement type and the age of the child involved in the investigation.

Findings

In Ontario in 2023, an estimated 125,879 maltreatment-related investigations² were conducted in response to child maltreatment-related concerns involving children under the age of 18. Ninety-seven percent of these investigations did not result in an out-of-home placement. This analysis will focus on 3% of child protection investigations which resulted in out-of-home placements (an estimated 4,261 child investigations).

An estimated 4,261 of these investigations (3%) led to an out-of-home placement. Placement categories include informal kinship, formal kinship, non-kin foster care, group home/residential or secure treatment, and other placements (see table 1).

¹ Fallon, B., Black, T., Lefebvre, R., Trocmé, N., Hélie, S., Crowe, A., Miller, M., Budau, K., Houston, E., King, B., Esposito, T., Fluke, J., Collin-Vézina, D., Parada, H., Provençal, J., Chhabra, N., Sawh, P., Chan, P., Chowdhury, R., ... 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).

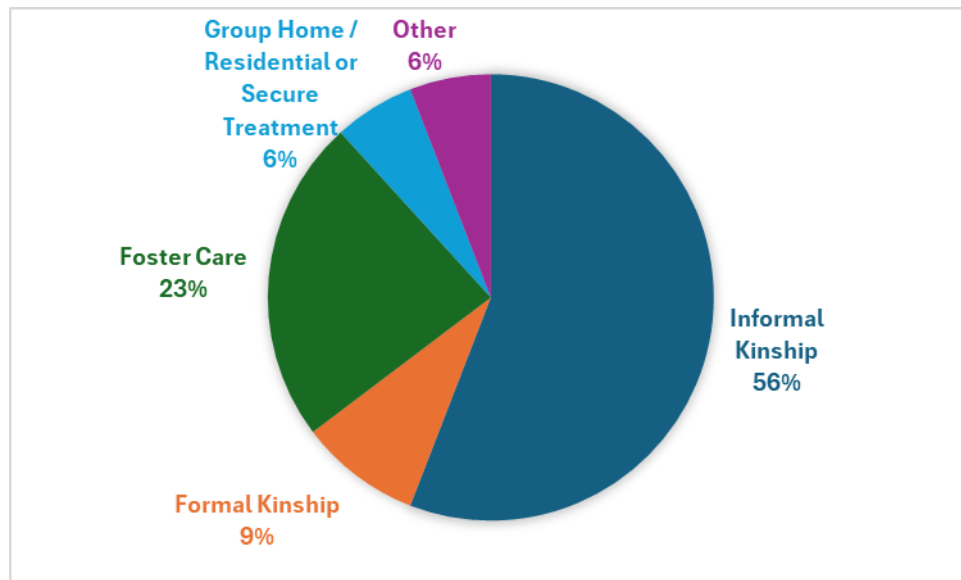
Table 1: Definitions of Out-of-Home Placement Types

Placement Type	Definition
Informal Kinship Care	Refers to an arrangement within the family support network, where the child welfare authority does not have temporary custody.
Formal Kinship Care	Refers to an arrangement within the family support network, where the child welfare authority has temporary or full custody and is paying for the placement.
Foster Care	Any non-kin family-based care, including foster homes, specialized treatment foster homes, and assessment homes.
Group Homes	Out-of-home placements in a structured group living setting.
Residential/Secure Treatment	Therapeutic residential treatment centres to address the needs of the child.

Note. For more information, please see *OIS-2023 Guidebook: Appendix E*

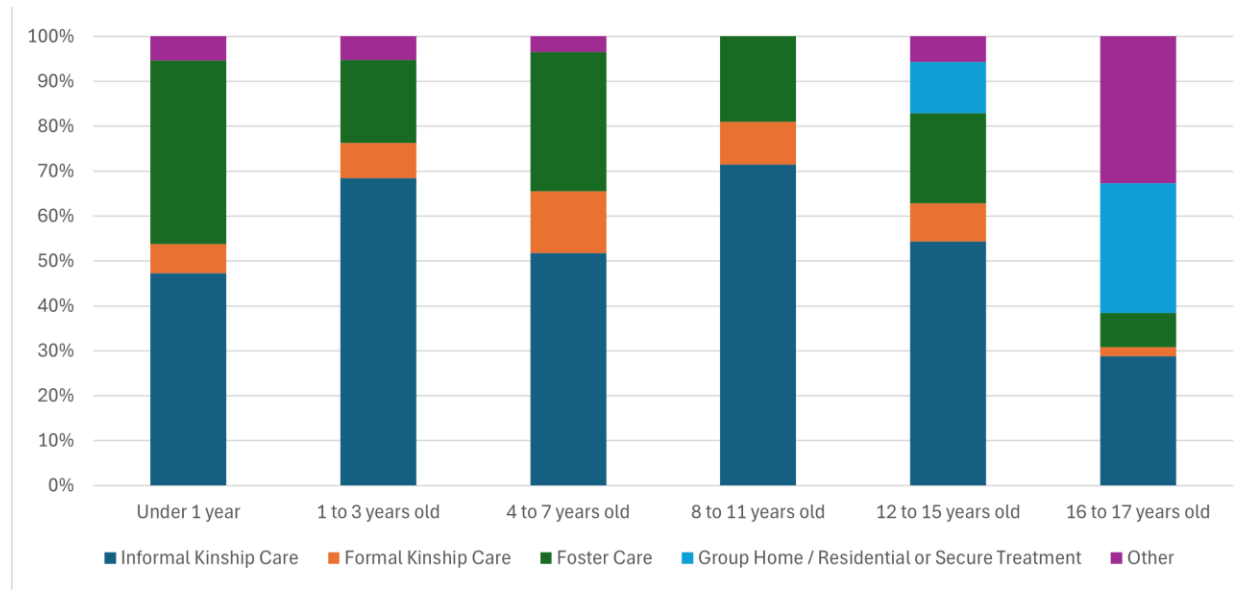
Informal kinship care was the most common out-of-home arrangement, accounting for 2,399 child investigations (56%). This was followed by non-kin foster care, which involved an estimated 1,031 child investigations (23%). Formal kinship care was less common, with an estimated 346 child investigations (9%). An estimated 255 child investigations (6%) included other placements, including hotel/shelters, and Voluntary Youth Service Agreements. The least common out-of-home arrangement was group homes/residential or secure treatment which included an estimated 231 child investigations (6%).

Figure 1: Investigations Involving Out-of-Home Placement by Placement Type in Ontario in 2023



The types of out-of-home placements during child investigations by age group are shown in figure 2. Forty-one percent of infants that experienced an out-of-home placement during the investigation were placed in foster care. Children 1-3 and 8-11 years of age had the highest proportion of children living in informal kinship arrangements at the time of investigation, accounting for 70% of their out-of-home arrangements. Children 16-17 years of age had the lowest proportion of children living in kinship care (both formal and informal) and foster care at the time of investigations. Instead, they had the highest proportions of children living in other arrangements (26%) and in group homes (24%) during the time of investigation.

Figure 2: Proportion of Out-of-Home Placement Types by Age Group 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.

For maltreatment investigations, information was collected regarding the primary form of maltreatment investigated as well as the level of substantiation for that maltreatment. Thirty-three 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.

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; history of previous child welfare case openings; and short-term child welfare service dispositions (e.g., out of home placement)

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. For example, this limitation affected the ability to assess placement that occurred following the investigation.

Three limitations of the estimation method used to derive the annual provincial estimates should also be noted. The agency size correction uses service volume as a proxy for agency size; this does not account for potential variations in investigations across agencies. The annualization weight corrects for seasonal fluctuation in the volume of investigations, but it does not correct for seasonal variations in the types of investigations conducted. Finally, the annualization weight includes cases that were investigated more than once in the year because of the case being re-opened following a first investigation completed earlier in the same year. Accordingly, the weighted annual estimates represent 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 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.

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