



A Profile of Investigation Type by Child Age in Ontario in 2013

Joanne Filippelli, Brenda Moody, & Barbara Fallon
March 2016

Introduction

The Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2013 (OIS-2013)¹ 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 the estimated number of investigations by type and by the age of the child.

Findings

There were an estimated 125,281 maltreatment-related investigations conducted in Ontario in 2013. There were an estimated 97,951 investigations involving an incident of maltreatment and an estimated 27,330 risk-only investigations. Please see Table 1 and Figure 1 for further details and a visual representation of these findings.

The age-specific descriptive analysis suggests that when compared to older children, investigations involving infants (less than one year of age) are more likely to assess the risk of maltreatment only. In contrast, investigations involving early school aged (4-7 year olds) and preadolescents (12-15 years of age) are least likely to assess risk of future maltreatment.

¹ 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.

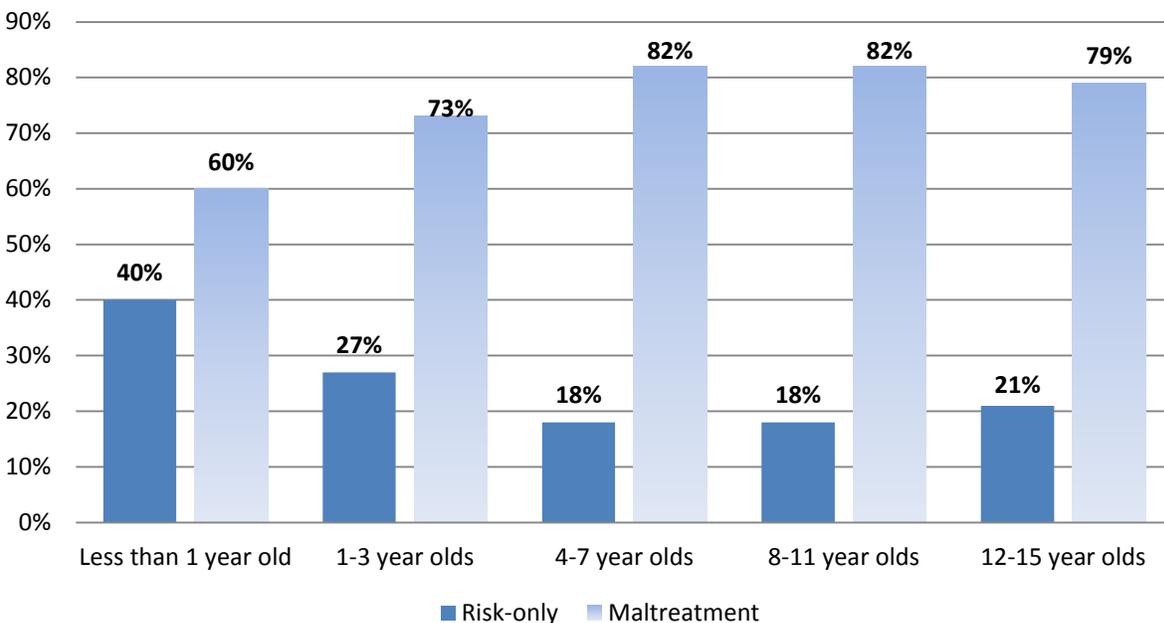
Table 1.

Investigation type by child age in Ontario in 2013

| | Child Age | | | | | | | | | | Total | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-----|---------------|-----|---------------|-----|----------------|-----|-----------------|-----|---------|-----|
| | Less than 1 year old | | 1-3 year olds | | 4-7 year olds | | 8-11 year olds | | 12-15 year olds | | | |
| Type of investigation | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| Risk-only | 3,150 | 40 | 5,959 | 27 | 6,604 | 18 | 5,474 | 18 | 6,143 | 21 | 27,330 | 22 |
| Maltreatment | 4,765 | 60 | 15,842 | 73 | 30,126 | 82 | 24,433 | 82 | 22,785 | 79 | 97,951 | 78 |
| Total | 7,915 | 100 | 21,801 | 100 | 36,730 | 100 | 29,907 | 100 | 28,928 | 100 | 125,281 | 100 |

Figure 1.

Profile of investigation type by child age in Ontario in 2013



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 (IPV) (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 reopened 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.

Suggested Citation: Filippelli, J., Moody, B., & Fallon, B. (2015). A Profile of Investigation Type by Child Age in Ontario in 2013. CWRP Information Sheet #169E. Toronto, ON: Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal.