



A Profile of Investigations with a Noted Child Functioning Concern of FAS/FAE in Ontario in 2008

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Introduction

The Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2008 (OIS-2008)¹ is the fourth 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 characteristics of investigations where a worker noted that the child had Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effect (FAS/FAE).

Findings

Of the estimated 128,748 maltreatment-related investigations² conducted in Ontario in 2008, there was a noted child functioning concern of FAS/FAE in an estimated 1,611 investigations (1%). Figure 1 shows the primary caregiver functioning concerns for these investigations. Few social supports was noted in 48% of investigations in which FAS/FAE was identified, alcohol abuse in 38%, and mental health issues in 31%. Overall, most of the primary caregiver functioning concerns were more likely to be noted in investigations where a worker noted FAS/FAE as a child functioning concern.

Figure 2 displays the number of previous child welfare openings in investigations with a noted child functioning concern of FAS/FAE. Investigations where a worker noted FAS/FAE as a child functioning concern were slightly more likely to have been previously opened 1 to 3 times and much more likely to have been previously opened more than 3 times.

¹ Please see Fallon, B., Trocmé, N., MacLaurin, B., Sinha, V., Black, T., Felstiner, C., et al. (2010). *Ontario*

² A “maltreatment-related investigation” refers to both maltreatment and risk-only investigations.

Figure 1

Primary caregiver functioning concerns in maltreatment-related investigations with a noted child functioning concern of FAS/FAE in Ontario in 2008

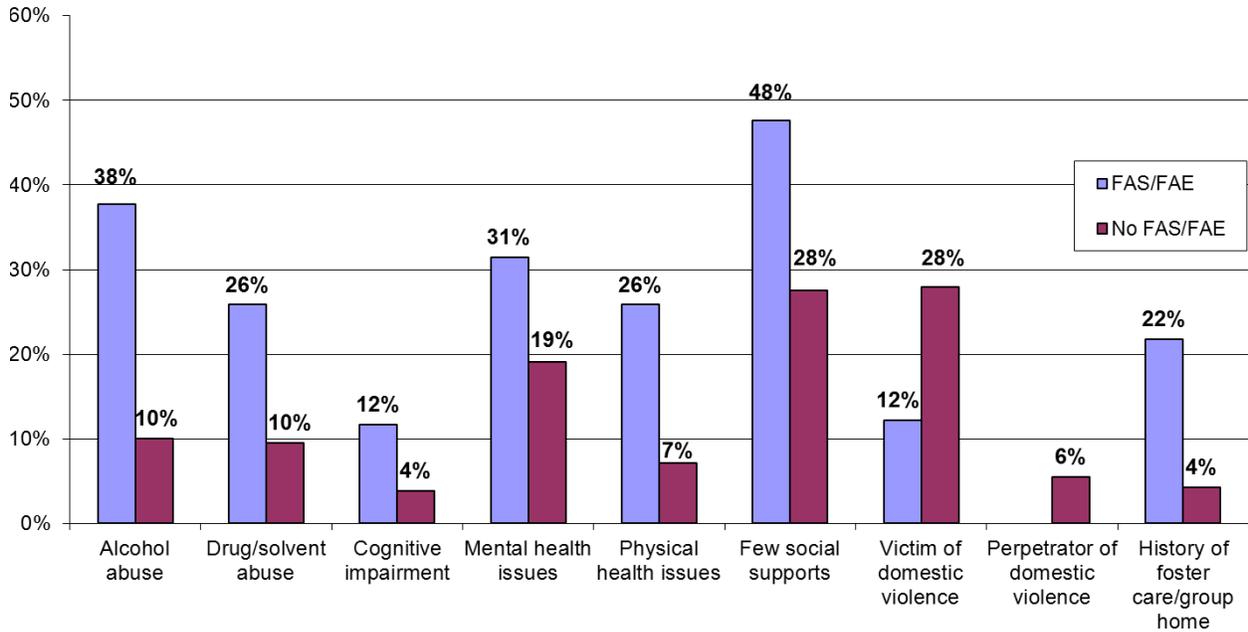
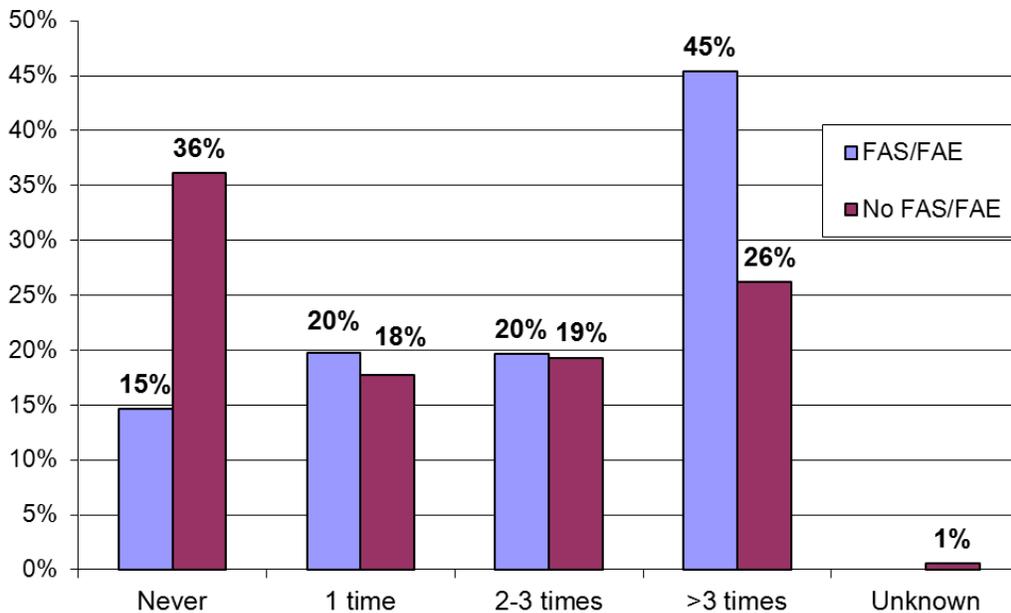


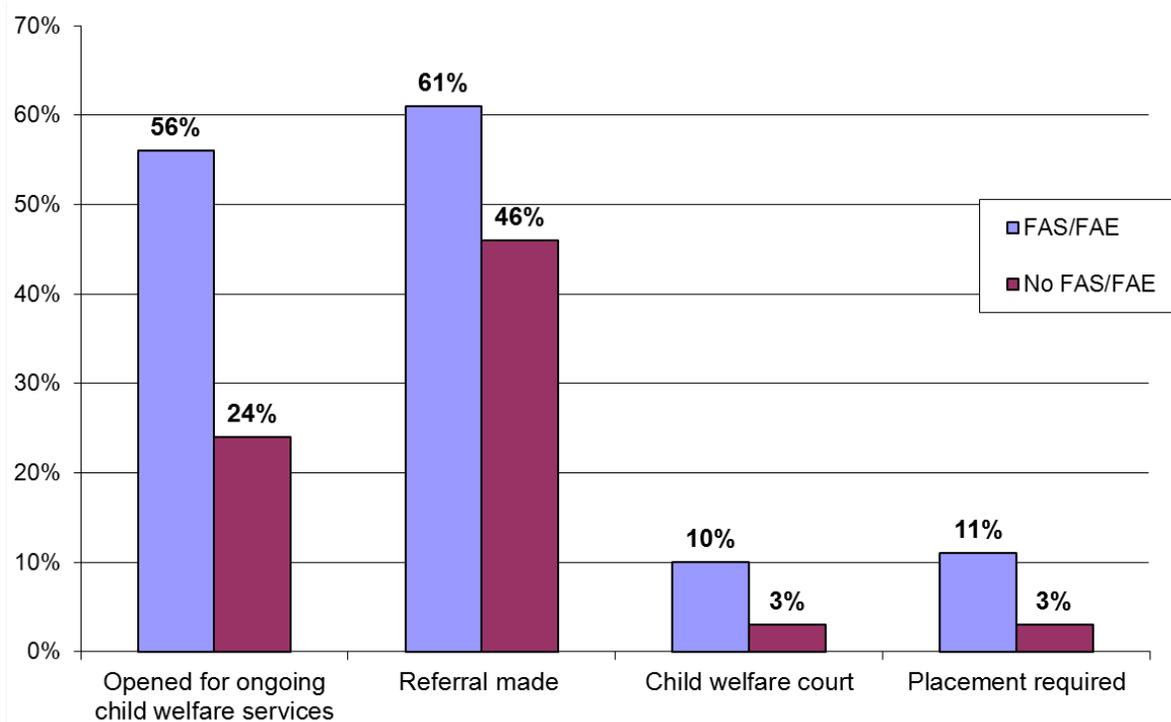
Figure 2

Previous child welfare case openings in maltreatment-related investigations with a noted child functioning concern of FAS/FAE in Ontario in 2008



Service provision in investigations with a noted child functioning concern of FAS/FAE is outlined in Figure 3. Investigations with a noted child functioning concern of FAS/FAE were much more likely to remain open for ongoing child welfare services (56% vs. 24%). These investigations were also more likely to have a referral made to services beyond the parameters of ongoing child welfare services (61%), have an application to child welfare court considered or made (10%), and require an out-of-home placement (11%).

Figure 3
Child welfare service provision in maltreatment-related investigations with a noted child functioning concern of FAS/FAE in Ontario in 2008



Background to the OIS-2008

Due to changes in investigation mandates and practices over the last 10 years, the OIS-2008 differed from previous cycles in that it 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-2008 used a multi-stage sampling design to select a representative sample of 23 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 7,471 child protection investigations conducted during a three-month sampling period in 2008. 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 2008 was 128,748.

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 of the OIS-2008

The OIS-2008 does not include information about unreported maltreatment, or cases that were only investigated by police. Reports that were made to child welfare authorities but screened out before they were investigated are not included, and reports on cases currently open at the time of case selection are also not included. The study does not track longer service events that occur beyond the initial investigation.

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