



# Child abuse and neglect investigations in Ontario: Comparing 1998 and 2003 data<sup>1</sup>

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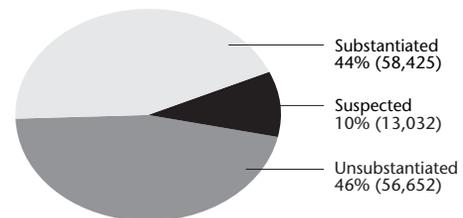
The 1998 and the 2003 Ontario Incidence Studies of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (OIS-1998 and OIS-2003)<sup>2,3</sup> are province-wide studies that examine the incidence of reported child maltreatment and the characteristics of the children and families investigated by Ontario child welfare services. In the fall of 1998, the OIS-1998 tracked 3,053 child maltreatment investigations<sup>4</sup> in a representative sample of 13 child welfare service areas across Ontario and in the fall of 2003, the OIS-2003 tracked 7,172 investigations in a representative sample of 16 child welfare service areas. Child welfare workers completed a three-page standardized data collection form. Weighted provincial annual estimates were derived based on these investigations.

## Investigated and substantiated maltreatment

In 2003, an estimated 128,108 investigations of child maltreatment were conducted in Ontario. Forty-four percent of these investigations were substantiated (Figure 1), involving an estimated 58,425 children, for an incidence rate of 24.44 substantiated investigations per 1,000 children. In a further 10% of investigations, there was insufficient evidence to substantiate maltreatment but maltreatment remained suspected by the investigating worker. Forty-six percent of investigations were unsubstantiated.<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 1: Child maltreatment investigations in Ontario (OIS-2003)**

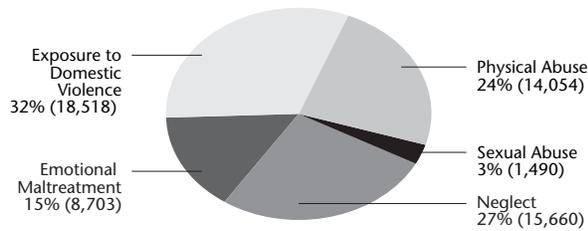
Estimates based on a sample of 7,172 child maltreatment investigations



Source: OIS-2003 Major Findings Report, Table 3-1.

Figure 2 presents the primary categories of substantiated maltreatment in Ontario in 2003. Exposure to domestic violence was the most frequently substantiated category of maltreatment. Nearly one-third (32%) of all substantiated investigations (an estimated 18,518 investigations) involved exposure to domestic violence. Neglect was the second most common form of substantiated maltreatment (an estimated 15,660 child investigations), followed closely by physical abuse (an estimated 14,054 child investigations). Emotional maltreatment was the primary category of substantiated maltreatment in 15% of cases (an estimated 8,703 child investigations) while sexual abuse cases represented only 3% of all substantiated investigations (an estimated 1,490 child investigations).

**Figure 2: Primary category of substantiated maltreatment in Ontario (OIS-2003)**  
 Estimates based on a sample of 3,193 substantiated child maltreatment investigations.



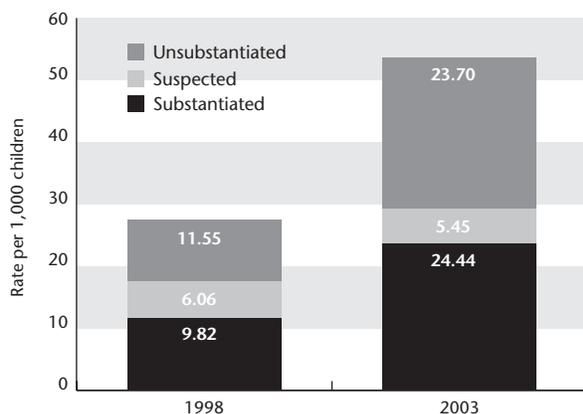
Source: OIS-2003 Major Findings Report, Table 3-3.

### 1998-2003 OIS comparisons

The rate of substantiated maltreatment in the OIS sample has increased 320%, from 9.82 substantiated cases per 1,000 children in 1998 to 24.44 in 2003 (Figure 3). This increase in documented maltreatment may be explained by improved and expanded reporting and investigation procedures, such as:

- 1) changes in case substantiation practices
- 2) more systematic identification of victimized siblings, and
- 3) greater awareness of emotional maltreatment and exposure to domestic violence.

**Figure 3: Child maltreatment investigations in Ontario (OIS-1998 and OIS-2003)**  
 Estimates based on a sample of 3,053 (OIS-1998) and 7,172 (OIS-2003) child maltreatment investigations

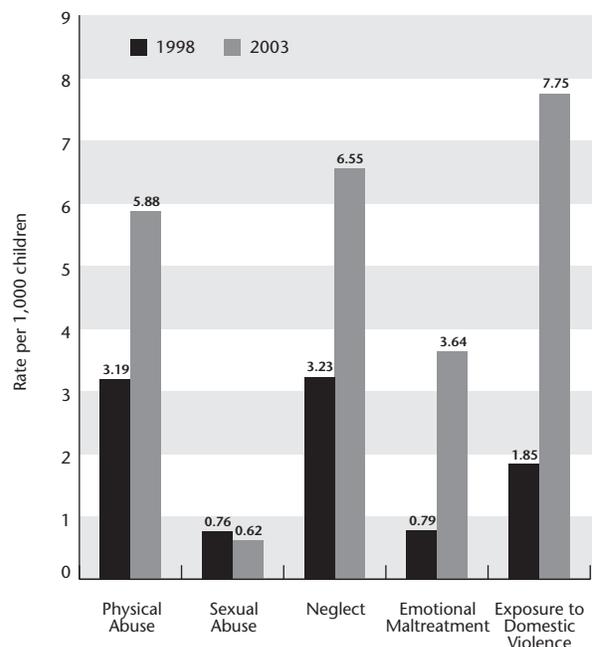


Source: OIS-2003 Major Findings Report, Table 9-1.

Part of the increase in substantiated cases seems to reflect a shift in the way child welfare workers classify cases, with a much smaller proportion of cases being classified as suspected (10% in 2003 compared with 22% in 1998). The introduction of

structured assessment tools and new competency-based training programs may account for part of this shift. Better identification of victimized siblings is a second factor explaining the overall increase in substantiated child maltreatment investigations. The average number of investigated children per family has increased from 1.36 to 1.71.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the number of investigated children has increased at a faster rate than the number of investigated families, which have increased 57.3% from an estimated 47,581 investigated families in 1998 to 74,857 in 2003. The third and most important factor driving the increase in maltreatment cases is the dramatic increase in cases of exposure to domestic violence and emotional maltreatment (Figure 4). The rate of exposure to domestic violence increased 319%, from 1.85 substantiated cases per 1,000 to 7.75. The rate of emotional maltreatment increased 359% from 0.79 to 3.64 substantiated cases per 1,000. In 1998, these two forms of maltreatment accounted for 27% of substantiated cases. In 2003, they accounted for 47% of substantiated cases. These differences reflect a shift in awareness and, in some cases, in legislation with respect to the impact on children of emotional maltreatment and exposure to domestic violence.

**Figure 4: Categories of substantiated child maltreatment in Ontario (OIS-1998 and OIS-2003)**  
 Estimates based on a sample of 1,055 (OIS-1998) and 3,193 (OIS-2003) substantiated child maltreatment investigations



Source: OIS-2003 Major Findings Report, Table 9-3.

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- 1 This information sheet is based on the following report: Fallon, B., Trocmé, N., MacLaurin, B., Knoke, D., Black, T., Daciuk, J., & Felstiner, C. (2005). *Ontario incidence study of reported child abuse and neglect, OIS-2003: Major Findings Report*. Toronto, ON: Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare. Retrieved August 28, 2008 from: [http://www.cecw-cepb.ca/home\\_e.html](http://www.cecw-cepb.ca/home_e.html)
  - 2 Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., MacLaurin, B., Daciuk, J., Bartholomew, S., Ortiz, J., Thompson, et al. (2002). *1998 Ontario incidence study of reported child abuse and neglect (OIS-1998)*. Toronto, ON: Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare. Retrieved August 28, 2008 from: [http://www.cecw-cepb.ca/home\\_e.html](http://www.cecw-cepb.ca/home_e.html)
  - 3 Fallon, B., Trocmé, N., MacLaurin, B., Knoke, D., Black, T., Daciuk, J., & Felstiner, C. (2005). *Ontario incidence study of reported child abuse and neglect, OIS-2003: Major Findings Report*. Toronto, ON: Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare. Retrieved August 28, 2008 from: [http://www.cecw-cepb.ca/home\\_e.html](http://www.cecw-cepb.ca/home_e.html)
  - 4 The OIS does not track incidents that were not reported to child welfare services, reported cases that were screened out before being fully investigated, or cases that were investigated only by the police.
  - 5 This rate of unsubstantiated cases is similar to or lower than rates reported in most jurisdictions and reflects laws that require the public and professionals to report all cases where they suspect maltreatment may have occurred. Most unsubstantiated cases are indeed reports made in good faith, only 5% of reports tracked by OIS-2003 were considered to have been made with malicious intent. See Table 8-2(a) in *OIS-2003 Major Findings Report*.
  - 6 See Table 9-2 in *OIS-2003 Major Findings Report*

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