



Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving Infants in Ontario in 2018

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April 2020

Introduction

The Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2018 (OIS-2018)¹ is the sixth 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 profile of child maltreatment-related investigations involving infants investigated by the Ontario child welfare system in 2018. Concerns have emerged about the child welfare system's ability to respond to families' needs amid the COVID-19 pandemic.² Not only is there likely an increase in child maltreatment occurring, but the system will also be limited in its ability to provide supportive services to families that might mitigate risks including future child maltreatment.³ Previous analyses using data from the Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2013 (OIS-2013) found child welfare-involved infants and their families to be a uniquely vulnerable group with respect to risks and service needs.⁴ Over 70 percent of investigations involving infants in the OIS-2013 were for concerns of risk of future maltreatment or exposure to intimate partner violence.⁵ In order to understand the nature of child maltreatment-related investigations involving infants that are investigated by child welfare agencies, this Information Sheet describes child maltreatment-related investigations involving infants in Ontario in 2018, including: the referral source, the nature of the concern, risk factors for the primary caregiver, household income source, child age categories, transfers to ongoing services, and referrals made to internal or external services at the conclusion of the investigation.

¹ Fallon, B., Filippelli, J., Lefebvre, R., Joh-Carnella, N., Trocmé, N., Black, T., ... Stoddart, J. (2020). Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2018 (OIS-2018). Toronto, ON: Child Welfare Research Portal.

² Sistovaris, M., Fallon, B., Miller, S., Birken, C., Denburg, A., Jenkins, J., Levine, J., Mishna, F., Sokolowski, M. & Stewart, S. (2020). Child Welfare and Pandemics. Toronto, Ontario: Policy Bench, Fraser Mustard Institute of Human Development, University of Toronto.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Filippelli, J., Fallon, B., Fuller-Thomson, E., & Trocmé, N. (2017). Infants investigated by the child welfare system : Exploring a distinct profile of risks, service needs, and referrals for support in Ontario. *Brain Sciences*, 7(101). <https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci7080101>

⁵ Ibid.

Findings

An estimated 158,476 children 0-17 years of age were referred to a child welfare authority in Ontario in 2018 for a child maltreatment-related concern. Five percent of these investigations, or an estimated 8,488 investigations, involved infants (children younger than one year of age).

One quarter of investigations involving infants were referred by police (an estimated 2,162 investigations). Another 24 percent of these investigations were referred by hospital personnel (an estimated 2,032 investigations). See Table 1.

Table 1.

Source of Referral in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving Infants in Ontario in 2018

Referral Source	Estimate	Percent
<i>Non-Professional</i>		
Custodial or Non-Custodial Parent	705	8%
Child (Subject of Referral)	-	1%
Relative	440	5%
Neighbour/Friend	421	5%
<i>Professional</i>		
Community, Health, or Social Services	904	11%
Hospital (Any Personnel)	2,032	24%
School	1,179	14%
Other Child Welfare Service	484	6%
Day Care Centre	-	0%
Police	2,162	25%
Other	232	3%
<i>Anonymous</i>		
Anonymous	427	5%
Total Infant Investigations	8,488	100%
Based on a sample of 430 investigations involving infants with information about the source of referral. Columns do not add to totals because investigating workers could indicate more than one source of referral.		
-Estimate was <100 investigations.		

More than half of child maltreatment-related investigations involving infants conducted in Ontario in 2018 were focused on assessing risk of future maltreatment (55 percent of investigations involving infants, or an estimated 4,708 investigations). A further 22 percent of investigations involving infants (an estimated 1,859 investigations) were for concerns related to exposure to intimate partner violence, and 13 percent of investigations involving infants (an estimated 1,068 investigations) were focused on possible neglect. See Table 2.

Table 2.

Primary Concern of Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving Infants in Ontario in 2018

Primary Concern	Estimate	Percent
Physical Abuse	597	7%
Sexual Abuse	-	0%
Neglect	1,068	13%
Emotional Maltreatment	239	3%
Exposure to Intimate Partner Violence	1,859	22%
Risk of Future Maltreatment	4,708	55%
Total Infant Investigations	8,488	100%
Based on a sample of 430 investigations involving infants with information about the primary concern of the investigation. Percentages are column percentages. - Estimate was <100 investigations.		

Approximately two-thirds of child maltreatment-related investigations involving infants (an estimated 5,690 investigations) involved primary caregivers with at least one risk factor noted by the investigating worker. The most frequently noted concerns were mental health issues (noted in an estimated 2,983 investigations or 35 percent of investigations involving infants), victim of intimate partner violence (noted in an estimated 2,920 investigations or 34 percent of investigations involving infants), and few social supports (noted in an estimated 2,407 investigations or 28 percent of investigations involving infants). See Table 3.

Table 3.

Primary Caregiver Risk Factors in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving Infants in Ontario in 2018

Primary Caregiver Risk Factor	Estimate	Percent
Alcohol Abuse	777	9%
Drug/Solvent Abuse	1,320	16%
Cognitive Impairment	833	10%
Mental Health Issues	2,983	35%
Physical Health Issues	301	4%
Few Social Supports	2,407	28%
Victim of Intimate Partner Violence	2,920	34%
Perpetrator of Intimate Partner Violence	776	9%
History of Foster Care/Group Home	870	10%
At Least One Primary Caregiver Risk Factor	5,690	67%
Total Infant Investigations	8,488	100%
Based on a sample of 430 investigations involving infants with information about primary caregiver risk factors. Percentages are column percentages. Columns may not add to totals because investigating workers could identify no or multiple primary caregiver risk factors.		

In 42 percent of child maltreatment-related investigations involving infants (an estimated 3,605 investigations) the family relied on social assistance, employment insurance, or another benefit as their primary income source. In 37 percent of these investigations (an estimated 3,105 investigations) the household's primary income source was from full-time work. See Table 4.

Table 4.

Household Income Source in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving Infants in Ontario in 2018

Table 4. Household Source of Income in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving Infants in Ontario in 2018		
Household Source of Income	Estimate	Percent
Full-Time	3,105	37%
Part-Time/Seasonal/Multiple Jobs	896	11%
Social Assistance/Employment Insurance/Other Benefit	3,605	42%
Unknown	345	4%
None	537	6%
Total Infant Investigations	8,488	100%
Based on a sample of 430 investigations involving infants with information about household income source. Percentages are column percentages. Columns may not add to totals due to rounding.		

Investigating workers made referrals to internal or external services in 43 percent of investigations involving infants in Ontario in 2018. Parent education or support services were the most frequently made referrals (made in 24 percent of investigations involving infants or 1,996 investigations), followed by family or parent counselling (made in 14 percent of investigations involving infants or 1,228 investigations). See Table 5.

Table 5.

Five Most Frequently Made Service Referrals in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving Infants in Ontario in 2018

Type of Referral	Estimate	Percent
Parent Education or Support Services	1,996	24%
Family or Parent Counselling	1,228	14%
Psychiatric/Mental Health Services	947	11%
Intimate Partner Violence Services	946	11%
Drug/Alcohol Counselling or Treatment	472	6%
At Least One Service Referral Made	3,684	43%
Total Infant Investigations	8,488	100%
Based on a sample of 430 investigations involving infants with information about service referrals. Percentages do not add to totals because investigating workers could indicate that no or multiple service referrals were made.		

Seventy percent of child maltreatment-related investigations involving infants were closed following the initial investigation (an estimated 5,911 investigations). The remaining 30 percent of investigations (an estimated 2,578 investigations) remained open to provide the family with ongoing child welfare services. See Table 6.

Table 6.

Provision of Ongoing Services in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving Infants in Ontario in 2018

Provision of Ongoing Services	Estimate	Percent
Case to Stay Open for Ongoing Services	2,578	30%
Case to Be Closed	5,911	70%
Total Infant Investigations	8,488	100%
Based on a sample of 430 investigations involving infants with information about the provision of ongoing services. Percentages are column percentages. Columns may not add to totals due to rounding.		

Methodology

The OIS-2018 used a multi-stage sampling design to select a representative sample of 18 child welfare agencies across Ontario and then to sample cases within these agencies. Information was collected directly from child protection workers on a representative sample of 7,590 child protection investigations conducted during a three-month sampling period in 2018. 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 2018 was 158,476.

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-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.

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 about concerns related to caregiver risk factors. Where applicable, the reference point for identifying these concerns was the previous six months. This information only documents problems that were known to investigating child welfare workers. Workers were asked to indicate problems that had been confirmed by a diagnosis, directly observed by the investigating worker or another worker, and/or disclosed by the caregiver, as well as issues that they suspected were problems but could not fully verify at the time of the investigation.

Workers were asked to provide information on various other aspects of their investigations, including the characteristics of the household, caregivers, and children; history of previous child welfare case openings; and short-term child welfare service dispositions, including transfers to ongoing services and referrals made to internal and external services.

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 the estimation method used to derive provincial annual estimates should also be noted. The agency size correction uses service volume as a proxy for agency size; this does not account for potential variation 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 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 re-opened 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., Joh-Carnella, N., Allan, K., & Fallon, B. (2020). Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving Infants in Ontario in 2018. CWRP Information Sheet #197E. Toronto, ON: Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal.