



# Children with Noted Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations in Ontario in 2018

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## Introduction

The Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2018 (OIS-2018)<sup>1</sup> 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. An estimated 158,476 child maltreatment-related investigations involving children aged 0-17 were conducted by child welfare authorities in 2018. Ten percent of these investigations (an estimated 16,178 investigations) involved a child with a noted disability, including physical and intellectual/developmental disabilities. This Information Sheet examines the profile of the estimated 15,169 child maltreatment-related investigations specifically involving children with noted intellectual or developmental disabilities investigated by Ontario child welfare authorities in 2018.

For many parents, caring for children with disabilities presents unique challenges. The added stressors of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to control the spread of disease can be particularly detrimental to children with disabilities and their families. For example, the closure of community supports, including schools, some medical practices, and other social agencies can leave children without important social interactions, therapy and other treatments.<sup>2</sup> Additional restrictions on being outside and guidelines outlining physical distancing can make it

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> American Psychological Association. (2020). *Advice for caregivers of children with disabilities in the era of COVID-19*. <https://www.apa.org/research/action/children-disabilities-covid-19>

extraordinarily difficult for caregivers to maintain their children's regular routines.<sup>3,4</sup> Physical distancing may also result in fewer formal and informal supports for caregivers. Child welfare-involved children with disabilities represent an especially vulnerable group. To understand the nature of the cases involving children with disabilities that are brought to the attention of Ontario child welfare agencies, this Information Sheet describes child maltreatment-related investigations involving children with noted intellectual or developmental disabilities conducted in Ontario in 2018, including: the source of referral, the primary concern of the investigation, risk factors for the primary caregivers, transfers to ongoing child welfare services, referrals made to internal or external services, and reasons for not making referrals at the conclusion of the investigation.

Child maltreatment-related investigations represented in this Information Sheet include those in which investigating child welfare workers noted intellectual/developmental disabilities for the investigated children. Please see the Methodology section for more information on child functioning concerns in the OIS-2018.

## Findings

Forty-two percent of investigations involving children with noted intellectual/developmental disabilities in Ontario in 2018 were referred by a school source (an estimated 6,349 investigations). Fifteen percent of these investigations were referred by police, and 14 percent of these investigations were referred by the child's parent (an estimated 2,296 and 2,055 investigations, respectively). See Table 1.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> McSheffrey, E. (2020, April 1). N.S. mother shares ‘overwhelming’ experience of caring for kids with autism during COVID-19. *Global News*. <https://globalnews.ca/news/6761133/n-s-mother-shares-overwhelming-experience-of-caring-for-kids-with-autism-during-covid-19/>

Table 1.

*Referral Source in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving Children with Noted Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities in Ontario in 2018*

Referral Source	Estimate	Percent
<b><i>Non-Professional</i></b>		
Custodial or Non-Custodial Parent	2,055	14%
Child (Subject of Referral)	215	1%
Relative	371	2%
Neighbour/Friend	753	5%
<b><i>Professional</i></b>		
Community, Health, or Social Services	1,435	9%
Hospital (Any Personnel)	747	5%
School	6,349	42%
Other Child Welfare Service	341	2%
Day Care Centre	142	1%
Police	2,296	15%
Other	979	6%
<b><i>Anonymous</i></b>		
Anonymous	564	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,169</b>	<b>100%</b>
Based on a sample of 720 investigations involving children with noted intellectual or developmental disabilities with information on the referral source. Percentages are column percentages. Columns may not add to totals because multiple referral sources could be noted.		

In 29 percent of investigations (an estimated 4,425 investigations) involving children with noted intellectual/developmental disabilities, the investigating worker was primarily focused on assessing the risk of future maltreatment. Twenty-six percent of investigations were focused on a concern for physical abuse (an estimated 3,940 investigations), and another 24 percent of investigations were focused on neglect (an estimated 3,569 investigations). See Table 2.

Table 2.

*Primary Concern in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving Children with Noted Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities in Ontario in 2018*

<b>Primary Concern</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Physical Abuse	3,940	26%
Sexual Abuse	701	5%
Neglect	3,569	24%
Emotional Maltreatment	1,232	8%
Exposure to Intimate Partner Violence	1,302	9%
Risk of Future Maltreatment	4,425	29%
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,169</b>	<b>100%</b>

Based on a sample of 720 investigations involving children with noted intellectual or developmental disabilities with information on the primary concern of the investigation. Percentages are column percentages. Columns may not add to totals due to rounding.

Sixty-two percent of investigations involving children with noted intellectual or developmental disabilities involved a primary caregiver for whom the investigating worker noted at least one risk factor. Mental health issues for the primary caregiver were noted in approximately one third of investigations involving children with noted intellectual or developmental disabilities (an estimated 4,958 investigations). Thirty-one percent of these investigations (an estimated 4,508 investigations) involved a primary caregiver with few social supports, and in 23 percent of investigations involving children with noted intellectual or developmental disabilities (an estimated 3,344 investigations), the primary caregiver was noted to be a victim of intimate partner violence. See Table 3.

Table 3.

*Primary Caregiver Risk Factors in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving Children with Noted Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities in Ontario in 2018*

<b>Primary Caregiver Risk Factor</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Alcohol Abuse	972	7%
Drug/Solvent Abuse	929	6%
Cognitive Impairment	1,582	11%
Mental Health Issues	4,958	34%
Physical Health Issues	1,722	12%
Few Social Supports	4,508	31%
Victim of Intimate Partner Violence	3,344	23%
Perpetrator of Intimate Partner Violence	1,062	7%
History of Foster Care/Group Home	939	6%
At Least One Noted Primary Caregiver Risk Factor	9,020	62%
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,486</b>	<b>100%</b>

Based on a sample of 690 investigations involving children with noted intellectual or developmental disabilities with information on primary caregiver risk factors. Percentages are column percentages. Columns may not add to totals because multiple or no primary caregiver risk factors could be noted.

This question was not applicable for a sample of 29 investigations involving children with noted intellectual or developmental disabilities in which the case was opened under a community caregiver and one investigation in which the youth was living independently. A community caregiver is defined as anyone providing care to a child in an out-of-home setting (e.g., institutional setting).

Approximately three-quarters of investigations involving children with noted intellectual or developmental disabilities were closed following the initial investigation (an estimated 11,469 investigations). The remaining 24 percent of cases (an estimated 3,700 investigations) were kept open for the family to receive ongoing child welfare services. See Table 4.

Table 4.

*Transfers to Ongoing Services in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving Children with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities in Ontario in 2018*

Case Opened for Ongoing Services	Estimate	Percent
Case to Stay Open for Ongoing Services	3,700	24%
Case to be Closed	11,469	76%
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,169</b>	<b>100%</b>
Based on a sample of 720 investigations involving children with intellectual or developmental disabilities with information on whether the case was opened for ongoing services. Percentages are column percentages.		

Investigating workers made referrals to internal or external services in 38 percent of investigations involving children with noted intellectual or developmental disabilities. The most frequently made referrals in these investigations were: parent education or support services (made in 15 percent of investigations or an estimated 2,287 investigations); psychiatric/mental health services (made in 14 percent of investigations or an estimated 2,063 investigations); and family or parent counselling (made in 13 percent of investigations or an estimated 1,981 investigations). See Table 5.

Table 5.

*Five Most Frequently Made Service Referrals in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving Children with Noted Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities in Ontario in 2018*

Service Referral	Estimate	Percent
Parent Education or Support Services	2,287	15%
Psychiatric/Mental Health Services	2,063	14%
Family or Parent Counselling	1,981	13%
Intimate Partner Violence Services	541	4%
Medical or Dental Services	415	3%
At Least One Service Referral Made	5,756	38%
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,169</b>	<b>100%</b>
Based on a sample of 720 investigations involving children with noted intellectual or developmental disabilities with information on referrals made to internal or external services. Percentages are column percentages. Columns may not add to totals because multiple or no service referrals could be made.		

Service referrals were not made in 62 percent of investigations involving children with noted intellectual or developmental disabilities. The most frequently noted reason for a worker not making a referral was because the family was already receiving services (noted in 40 percent of these investigations or an estimated 6,055 investigations). In 18 percent of investigations (an estimated 2,732 investigations), the worker did not make a referral to services because they determined that services were not needed. See Table 6.

Table 6.

*Reasons for Service Referrals Not Being Made in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations Involving Children with Noted Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities in Ontario in 2018*

<b>Reason for No Service Referral</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Percent</b>
At Least One Service Referral Made	5,756	38%
No Service Referral Made	9,413	62%
Already Receiving Services	6,055	40%
Service Not Available in the Area	-	0%
Ineligible for Service	116	1%
Services Could Not Be Financed	-	0%
Service Determined Not to be Needed	2,732	18%
Refusal of Services	816	5%
There is an Extensive Waitlist for Services	158	1%
No Culturally Appropriate Services	-	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,169</b>	<b>100%</b>

Based on a sample of 720 investigations involving children with intellectual or developmental disabilities with information on referrals made to internal or external services. Percentages are column percentages. Columns may not add to totals because multiple reasons for not making a referral could be noted.

## 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 child functioning. 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 or child, as well as issues that they suspected were problems but could not fully verify at the time of the investigation. The definition of an intellectual/developmental disability used in the study was: “Characterized by delayed intellectual development, it is typically diagnosed when a child does not reach his or her developmental milestones at expected times. It includes speech and language, fine/gross motor skills, and/or personal and social skills (e.g., Down syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorder).”<sup>5</sup>

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

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<sup>5</sup> 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.

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