



Household Composition 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)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 household composition² of families investigated for a child maltreatment-related concern in Ontario in 2018.

Findings

Ninety-three percent of child maltreatment-related investigations in Ontario in 2018 involved children living with at least one biological parent. In 36 percent of investigations, or an estimated 56,148 investigations, the child was living with both of their biological parents, and in 34 percent of investigations, or an estimated 53,950 investigations, the child's lone caregiver was their biological parent. In an additional 23 percent of investigations, or an estimated 35,755 investigations, the child was living with two caregivers, one of whom was their biological parent and one of whom was not (e.g., child was living with their biological parent and their parent's partner, their biological parent and their grandparent, or their biological parent and their aunt or uncle). See Table 1.

Concerns about grandparents living with their grandchildren, both as caregivers and in inter-generational homes, amid the COVID-19 pandemic have been raised.³ Two percent of child

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 Workers were asked to provide information about the child's *primary* household.

³ Bahrapour, T., & Schmidt, S. (2020, March 18). Millions of U.S. grandparents care for young kids — and are high risk for covid-19. *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/millions-of-us-grandparents-care-for-young-kids--and-are-high-risk-for-the-coronavirus/2020/03/18/6e91888c-6878-11ea-9923-57073adce27c_story.html

maltreatment-related investigations in Ontario in 2018 involved children living with at least one grandparent as a primary or secondary caregiver. This number does not include grandparents who were kin foster parents or adoptive parents and is not specifically outlined in Table 1 below. In an additional nine percent of investigations, there was a grandparent living in the child's home who was not their primary or secondary caregiver (see Table 2).

Table 1.

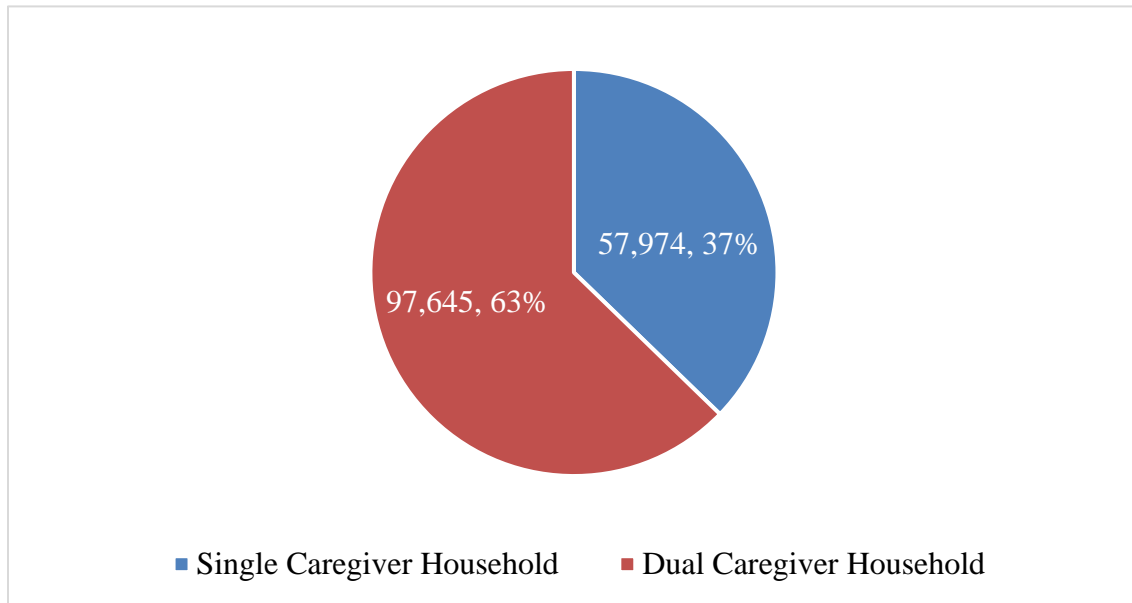
Household Composition in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations in Ontario in 2018

Household Composition	Estimate	Percent
Lone Biological Parent	53,950	34%
Lone Foster or Adoptive Parent	1,215	1%
Lone Other Caregiver	2,809	2%
Subtotal: Single Caregiver Households	57,974	37%
Two Biological Parents	56,148	36%
Two Caregivers, One of Whom is a Biological Parent	35,755	23%
Two Caregivers, At Least One of Whom is a Foster or Adoptive Parent	2,731	2%
Two Other Caregivers	3,011	2%
Subtotal: Dual Caregiver Households	97,645	63%
Total Investigations	155,618	100%
Based on a sample of 7,460 investigations with information about household composition. Percentages are column percentages.		
This question was not applicable for a sample of 110 investigations in which the case was opened under a community caregiver and 18 investigations 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). The estimated number of community caregiver investigations is 2,465, and the estimated number of investigations in which the youth was living independently is 362.		

Most child maltreatment-related investigations (63 percent, or an estimated 97,645 investigations) involved children who were living in households with two caregivers. In thirty-seven percent of investigations (an estimated 57,974 investigations), the child was primarily living with only one caregiver. See Figure 1. Additional analyses (not captured in Table 1 or Figure 1) revealed that there was no difference in the percentage of single- and dual-caregiver households kept open to receive ongoing child welfare services at the conclusion of the initial investigation.

Figure 1.

Number of Caregivers in Children's Primary Households in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations in Ontario in 2018



In most child maltreatment-related investigations (81 percent of investigations or an estimated 126,615 investigations), there were no adults living in the children's homes other than their primary or secondary caregivers. When there were other adults living in the children's primary homes, they were most likely grandparents (in nine percent of investigations or an estimated 14,637 investigations) or children over the age of 17 (in six percent of investigations or an estimated 8,949 investigations). See Table 2.

Table 2.

Other Adults Living in Children's Primary Households in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations in Ontario in 2018

Other Adults in the Home	Estimate	Percent
No Other Adults in the Home	126,615	81%
Child Over 17	8,949	6%
Grandparent	14,637	9%
Other Adult Relative	3,687	2%
Caregiver's Partner (Not in Caregiving Role)	1,968	1%
Family Friend	441	0%
Tenant or Roommate	676	0%
Other	678	0%
Total Investigations	155,649	100%
Based on a sample of 7,460 investigations with information about household composition. Percentages are column percentages. Columns may not add to totals because of rounding.		
This question was not applicable for a sample of 110 investigations in which the case was opened under a community caregiver and 18 investigations 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). The estimated number of community caregiver investigations is 2,465, and the estimated number of investigations in which the youth was living independently is 362.		

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.

Workers were asked to provide information on various aspects of their investigations, including the primary concern of the investigation; substantiation of the concern; characteristics of the household, caregivers, and children who were the subject of the investigation as well as history of previous child welfare case openings and short-term child welfare service dispositions.

Workers were asked to provide information about the child's primary household (i.e., the household where the child was mostly living at the time of the referral to a child welfare agency). Workers could provide information about up to two caregivers living in the home, including their gender, age, and relationship to the child.

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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