



Housing Conditions 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 housing conditions in child maltreatment-related investigations conducted by the Ontario child welfare system in 2018. Safe and stable housing is a known contributor to the health and wellbeing of children. Associations have been identified between inadequate housing conditions and involvement in the child welfare system^{2,3,4}. Child welfare-involved families experiencing unsafe living conditions and/or housing instability may benefit from innovative services that target housing needs³. This Information Sheet examines the following housing conditions which were described by the investigating child welfare worker: the type of housing, frequency of family moves in the past year, presence of overcrowding in the home, and housing safety.

Findings

An estimated 158,476 children 0-17 years of age were investigated for a child maltreatment-related concern by a child welfare authority in Ontario in 2018. Of these, an estimated 156,011 investigations involved a caregiver from an in-home (i.e., excluding community caregiver

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 Courtney, M. E., McMurtry, S. L., & Zinn, A. (2004). Housing problems experienced by recipients of child welfare services. *Child Welfare, 83*(5).

³ Collins, C. C., Bai, R., Fischer, R., Crampton, D., Lalich, N., Liu, C., & Chan, T. (2020). Housing instability and child welfare: Examining the delivery of innovative services in the context of a randomized controlled trial. *Children and Youth Services Review, 108*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.104578>.

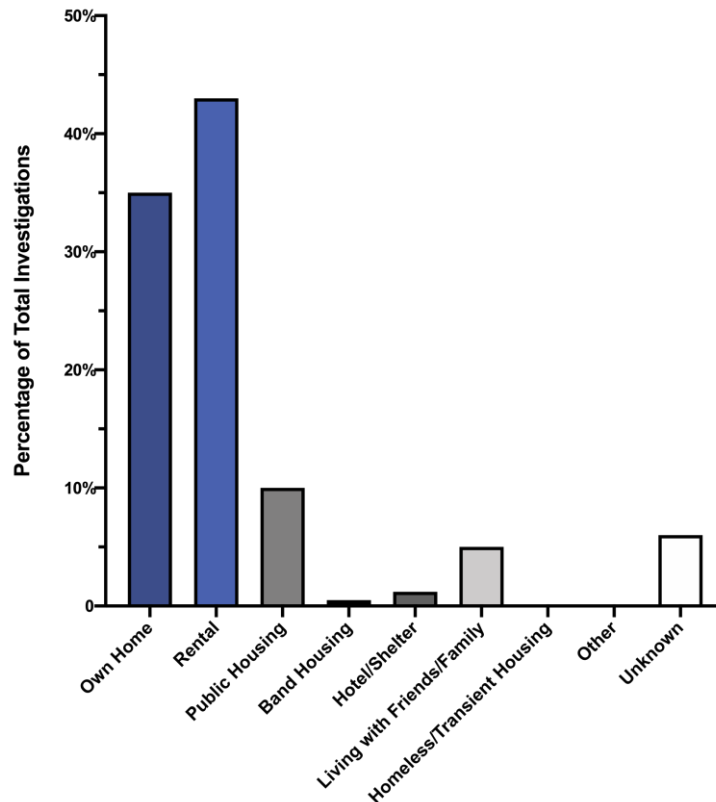
⁴ Hirsch, B. K., Yang, M.-Y., Font, S., & Slack, K. S. (2015). Physically hazardous housing and risk for child protective services involvement. *Child Welfare, 94*(1), 87-104.

investigations⁵). For each of these investigations, the investigating worker was asked to identify the housing category that best described the child’s living environment. Forty-three percent of investigations (an estimated 67,297 investigations) involved families that were noted by the worker to be residing in rental properties, including private houses, townhouses or apartments. Just over one third (an estimated 53,777 investigations) involved families that lived in a house, townhouse or condominium they purchased and owned. See Table 1 and Figure 1.

In 10 percent of child maltreatment-related investigations, the housing accommodation was identified as public housing. This included any unit in a public rental-housing complex, for example those in which rent was subsidized or government-owned property, or a house, townhouse or apartment on a military base. An estimated 723 investigations, less than one percent of the cases investigated across Ontario, involved families living in band housing: Indigenous housing built, managed and owned by the band. An estimated 1,797 investigations involved families living in a hotel or shelter (one percent), and an estimated 7,194 investigations involved families living with friends or family at the time of the investigation (five percent). In an estimated 158 investigations the worker indicated the family was homeless or transient (less than 1 percent). Finally, the living situation for a small number of cases (less than one percent) was categorized as “other,” while in six percent of investigations, the family’s housing accommodations was unknown. See Figure 1 and Table 1.

Figure 1.

Type of Housing in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations in Ontario in 2018



⁵ A community caregiver is defined as anyone providing care to a child in an out-of-home setting (e.g., institutional setting)

Table 1.

Type of Housing in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations in Ontario in 2018

Housing Type	Number of Investigations	Percent of Investigations
Own Home	53,777	35%
Rental	67,297	43%
Public Housing	15,300	10%
Band Housing	723	<1%
Hotel/Shelter	1,797	1%
Living with Friends/Family	7,194	5%
Homeless/Transient Housing	158	<1%
Other	-	<1%
Unknown	9,681	6%
Total Investigations	156,011	100%

Based on a sample of 7,480 child maltreatment-related investigations with information on the type of housing. Columns may not add to totals due to rounding.

- Estimate was <100 investigations.

This question was not applicable to a sample of 110 investigations in which the case was opened under a community caregiver. A community caregiver is defined as anyone providing care to a child in an out-of-home setting (e.g., institutional setting).

Twenty-three percent of child maltreatment-related investigations conducted by child welfare authorities in Ontario in 2018 involved families that had experienced at least one household move in the year prior to the investigation. The majority of investigations (57 percent) involved households that did not move in the past year, and in 20 percent of the investigations the number of household moves was unknown by the investigating worker. See Table 2.

Table 2.

Family Moves Within the Last Year in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations in Ontario in 2018

Frequency of Family Moves	Number of Investigations	Percent of Investigations
No Moves in the Last Year	89,094	57%
One Move	26,604	17%
Two or More Moves	8,943	6%
Unknown	31,369	20%
Total Investigations	156,011	100%

Based on a sample of 7,480 child maltreatment-related investigations with information on the number of household moves. Columns may not add to totals because of rounding.

This question was not applicable to a sample of 110 investigations in which the case was opened under a community caregiver. A community caregiver is defined as anyone providing care to a child in an out-of-home setting (e.g., institutional setting).

A small minority of the households investigated by child welfare authorities across Ontario in 2018 were identified as overcrowded (six percent of investigations or an estimated 9,304 investigations, Table 3) or as having unsafe conditions (three percent of investigations or an estimated 4,899 of investigations, Table 4).

Table 3.

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

Overcrowding in the Home	Number of Investigations	Percent of Investigations
Present	9,304	6%
Absent	142,472	91%
Unknown	4,234	3%
Total School-Based Investigations	156,011	100%

Based on a sample of 7,480 child maltreatment-related investigations with information on the primary concern of the investigation. Columns may not add to totals because of rounding.

This question was not applicable to a sample of 110 investigations in which the case was opened under a community caregiver. A community caregiver is defined as anyone providing care to a child in an out-of-home setting (e.g., institutional setting).

Table 4.

Housing Safety in Child Maltreatment-Related Investigations in Ontario in 2018

Unsafe Housing Conditions	Number of Investigations	Percent of Investigations
Present	4,899	3%
Absent	146,454	94%
Unknown	4,658	3%
Total School-Based Investigations	156,011	100%

Based on a sample of 7,480 child maltreatment-related investigations with information on the presence of unsafe housing conditions. Columns may not add to totals because of rounding.

This question was not applicable to a sample of 110 investigations in which the case was opened under a community caregiver. A community caregiver is defined as anyone providing care to a child in an out-of-home setting (e.g., institutional setting).

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 to provide information on the characteristics of the families' household including the housing type, number of moves in the past year, whether or not the home was overcrowded, and if there were any unsafe housing conditions present. Workers were additionally asked about various other aspects of their investigations, including the characteristics of the caregivers and children; history of previous child welfare case openings; and short-term child welfare service dispositions.

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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