

# Investigations Involving Latin American Children 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. This information sheet examines rates of investigations for Latin American children (0-15) in Ontario using 2016 Census information. It also compares these rates to white children for investigations, substantiation, and transfer to ongoing services, assessing for both disproportionality and disparity.

## Findings

There was an estimated 148,539 maltreatment-related investigations in Ontario in 2018 involving children 0-15 years of age. Investigations involving Latin American children accounted for 2.8 percent (4,179) of those investigations, while those involving white children accounted for 55.4 percent (82,279). Approximately 133.8 Latin American children per 1,000 were investigated in 2018 compared to 57.8 white children per 1,000.

According to 2016 Census data, Latin American children constituted 1.3 percent of the Ontario child population (aged 0-15), while white children represented 60.3 percent. These findings are depicted in Figure 1 and indicate that Latin American children were overrepresented in the Ontario child welfare system, while white children were underrepresented.

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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.

**Figure 1: Differences in Child and Investigation Populations**

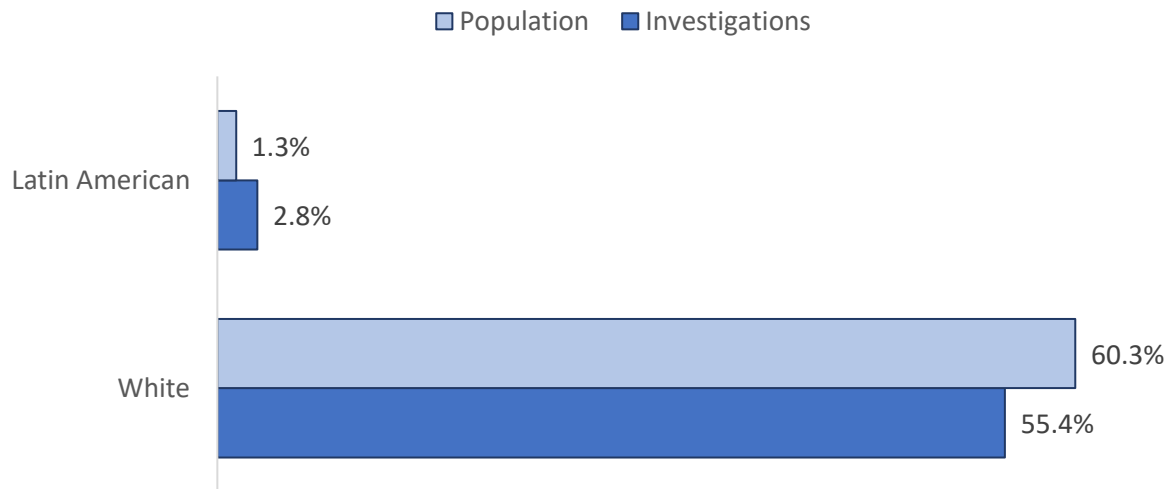
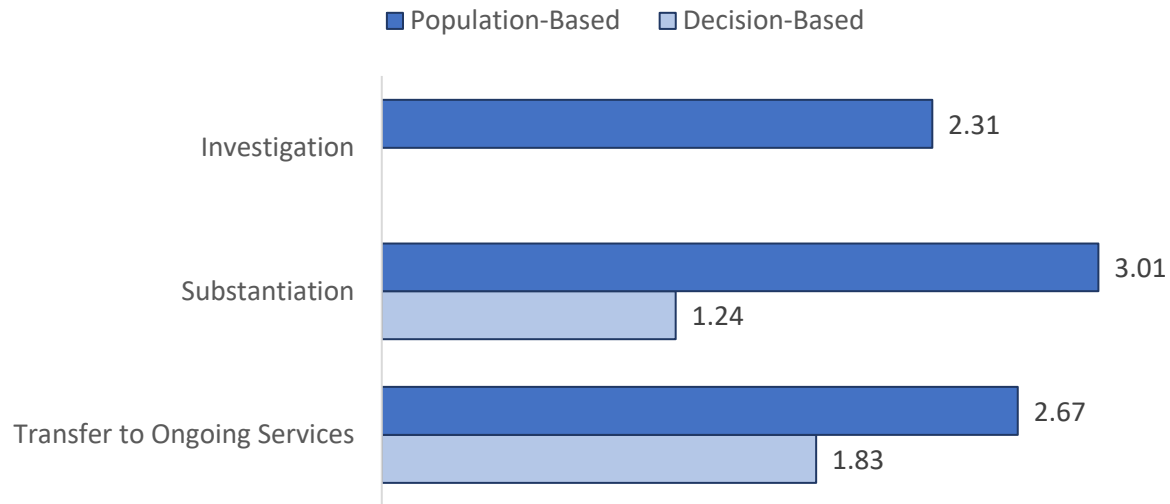


Figure 2 compares rates of investigations involving Latin American children (aged 0-15) to rates involving white children based on each group’s representation in the population (population-based disparity). It also compares rates of substantiated maltreatment allegations and transfers to ongoing services using the same method. Latin American children in Ontario were 2.3 times as likely as white children to be investigated in Ontario. Investigations involving Latin American children were also three times more likely to be substantiated as white children. Latin American children were 2.7 times as likely as white children to be transferred to ongoing services. These findings indicate that Latin American children in Ontario experience disparate involvement in the child welfare system and that these differences are substantial.

Figure 2 also compares rates of investigations resulting in substantiation and transfer to ongoing services based on the population of children that experience an investigation (decision-based disparity). There were differences in substantiation and transfer to ongoing services among investigated cases. Compared to investigations involving white children, those involving Latin American children were 24 percent more likely to be substantiated and 83 percent more likely to be transferred to ongoing services.

**Figure 2: Latin American Population- and Decision-Based Disparities**



The findings of this analysis indicate that Latin American children in Ontario experience disproportionate and disparate contact with the Ontario child welfare system compared to white children. And while much of that disparity is concentrated at the investigation stage, the decision-based disparity calculations indicate that it persists during investigative decision-making.

## 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 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.

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