



# Maltreatment-related Investigations Involving Primary Caregivers with a History of Being in Foster Care and/or Group Home Care in Ontario in 2008

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## Introduction

The Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2008 (OIS-2008)<sup>1</sup> is the fourth 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 primary caregiver risk factors and source of income in maltreatment-related investigations in which the primary caregiver had a history of being in foster care and/or group home care in Ontario in 2008.

## Findings

There was an estimated 128,748 maltreatment-related investigations<sup>2</sup> conducted in Ontario in 2008, of which an estimated 5,812 (4.5%) had a primary caregiver who was in foster care and/or group home care during his or her childhood.

Table 1 outlines primary caregiver risk factors by primary caregiver history of foster care and/or group home care. The investigating worker noted alcohol abuse in 23% of investigations involving primary caregivers with a history of being in foster care and/or group home care, and drug and/or solvent abuse in 26% of these investigations. The investigating worker also noted that 14% of primary caregivers with a history of being in foster care and/or group home care as a child had a cognitive impairment, while 43% experienced mental health issues, and 18% were living with physical health issues. Thirty-four percent of this group was identified by the investigating worker as having previously been the victim of domestic violence, and 10% were identified as having perpetrated domestic violence. Over half (56%) of primary caregivers with a history of being in foster care and/or group home care as a child were noted to have few social supports. The investigating worker noted all of the caregiver risk factors more often for primary

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<sup>1</sup> Please see Fallon, B., Trocmé, N., MacLaurin, B., Sinha, V., Black, T., Felstiner, C., et al. (2010). *Ontario incidence study of reported child abuse and neglect 2008 (OIS-2008): Major findings*. Toronto, Ontario: Child Welfare Research Portal.

<sup>2</sup> “Maltreatment-related investigations” refers to both maltreatment and risk-only investigations.

caregivers with a history of foster care and/or group home involvement compared to primary caregivers who did not have a history of being in foster care and/or group home care.

Table 1

*Primary caregiver risk factors by primary caregiver history of foster care and/or group home care in maltreatment-related investigations Ontario in 2008*

Caregiver Risk Factors	History of Foster Care/Group Home			
	No		Yes	
	#	%	#	%
Alcohol abuse	12,047	10%	1,347	23%
Drug/solvent abuse	11,030	9%	1,515	26%
Cognitive impairment	4,236	3%	803	14%
Mental health issues	22,270	18%	2,488	43%
Few social supports	32,483	26%	3,274	56%
Physical health issues	8,433	7%	1,055	18%
Victim of domestic violence	33,740	27%	1,945	34%
Perpetrator of domestic violence	6,492	5%	588	10%
<b>Total maltreatment-related investigations</b>	<b>122,936</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>5,812</b>	<b>100%</b>

^Based on a sample of 7,471 child maltreatment-related investigations. Columns are not additive because investigating workers could identify more than one primary caregiver risk factor or no primary caregiver risk factors.

Please see Figure 1 for a visual representation of these findings.

Figure 1

*Primary caregiver risk factors by primary caregiver history of foster care and/or group home care in maltreatment-related investigations Ontario in 2008*

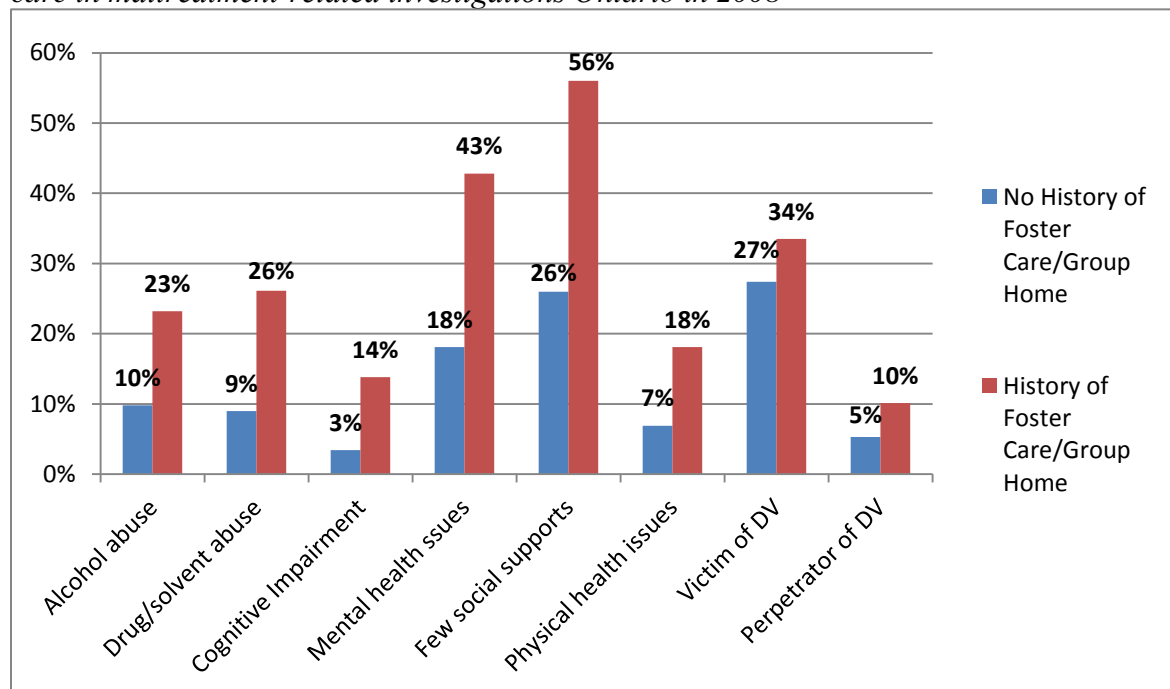


Table 2 displays primary source of income in maltreatment-related investigations with a primary caregiver with a history of foster care and/or group home care. Primary caregivers who had a history of foster care and/or group home care were less likely to have an income from full-time employment (18% vs. 38%). The majority of these primary caregivers received their income from social assistance, E.I. or another benefit (64%). In comparison, only one third (33%) of primary caregivers without a history of foster care/group home care were receiving their income from these sources.

Table 2

*Primary source of income by primary caregiver history of foster care and/or group home care in maltreatment-related investigations Ontario in 2008*

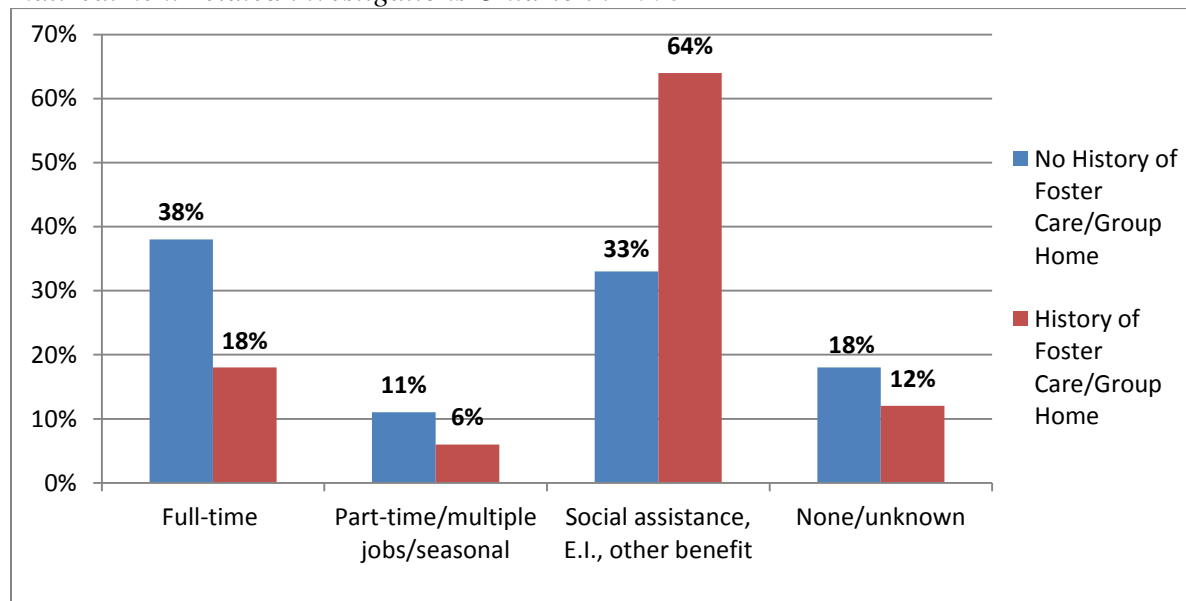
Primary Source of Income	History of Foster Care/Group Home			
	No		Yes	
	#	%	#	%
Full-time employment	46,132	38%	1,048	18%
Part-time employment, multiple jobs, or seasonal employment	13,722	11%	347	6%
Social assistance, employment insurance (E.I.), or other benefit	40,484	33%	3,701	64%
None/unknown	22,598	18%	717	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>122,936</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>5,813</b>	<b>100%</b>

^Based on a sample of 7,471 child maltreatment-related investigations. Percentages are column percentages.  
 - Estimates under 100 are not reported as they are unreliable; however, they are included in the total.

Please see Figure 2 for a visual representation of these findings.

Figure 2

*Primary source of income by primary caregiver history of foster care and/or group home care in maltreatment-related investigations Ontario in 2008*



## Background

From 1998 to 2003, the OIS found that rates of investigated maltreatment had doubled. This pattern may reflect changes in detection, reporting, and investigation practices rather than an increase in the number of children being abused and neglected. Four changes are particularly important to consider: increased reporting by professionals, increased reports of emotional maltreatment and exposure to intimate partner violence, more children investigated in each family, and increased substantiation rates. These changes are consistent with shifts in the context of Ontario child welfare.

Due to changes in investigation mandates and practices over the last 10 years, the OIS-2008 differed from previous cycles in that it tracked both risk-only investigations and maltreatment investigations. Risk-only investigations were those in which a specific past incident of maltreatment was not suspected or alleged to have occurred, but rather a constellation of factors lead to concerns that a child may be maltreated in the future (e.g., caregiver with a substance abuse issue).

## Methodology

The OIS-2008 used a multi-stage sampling design to select a representative sample of 23 child welfare agencies in Ontario and then to select a sample of cases within these agencies. Information was collected directly from child protection workers on a representative sample of 7,471 child protection investigations conducted during a three-month sampling period in 2008. 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 2008 was 128,748.

For maltreatment investigations, information was collected regarding the primary form of maltreatment investigated as well as the level of substantiation for that maltreatment. Thirty-two 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 form of maltreatment listed, workers assigned a level of substantiation. Maltreatment could be substantiated (i.e., balance of evidence indicated that the maltreatment had occurred), suspected (i.e., maltreatment could not be confirmed or ruled out), or unfounded (i.e., balance of evidence indicated that the maltreatment had not occurred).

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.

## 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 estimation method used to derive annual estimates should also be noted. The agency size correction uses child population as a proxy for agency size; this does not account for variations in per capita investigation rates across agencies in the same strata. 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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