



Mental or Emotional Harm by Primary Form of Substantiated Maltreatment in Ontario in 2013

Rachael Lefebvre, Kate Allan, Serena Goel & Barbara Fallon
May 2015

Introduction

The Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2013 (OIS-2013) is the fifth 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 presence of mental or emotional harm as a result of maltreatment.

Findings

There were an estimated 125,281 maltreatment-related investigations conducted in Ontario in 2013. There were an estimated 97,951 investigations involving an incident of maltreatment and an estimated 27,330 risk-only investigations. At the end of the initial investigation, 34% of maltreatment investigations were substantiated (an estimated 43,067 investigations).

Workers were asked to indicate whether the child was showing signs of mental or emotional harm (e.g., nightmares, bed wetting, or social withdrawal) as a result of the maltreatment incident(s). If the worker indicated that the child had been emotionally harmed, workers were asked whether the child required therapeutic treatment to manage the symptoms of the harm.

In just under two thirds of substantiated maltreatment (65%), there was no mental or emotional harm documented. As shown in Table 1, rates of emotional harm did vary by primary form of substantiated maltreatment. Mental or emotional harm was identified in 61% of substantiated sexual abuse investigations and most of these cases were severe enough to require treatment. Other forms of maltreatment had similar rates of emotional harm documented by the investigating worker: 36% in substantiated physical abuse investigations; 37% in substantiated exposure intimate partner violence (IPV) investigations; 36% in substantiated emotional maltreatment investigations and 29% in substantiated neglect investigations.

Table 1.

Mental or emotional harm by primary form of substantiated maltreatment in Ontario in 2013[^]

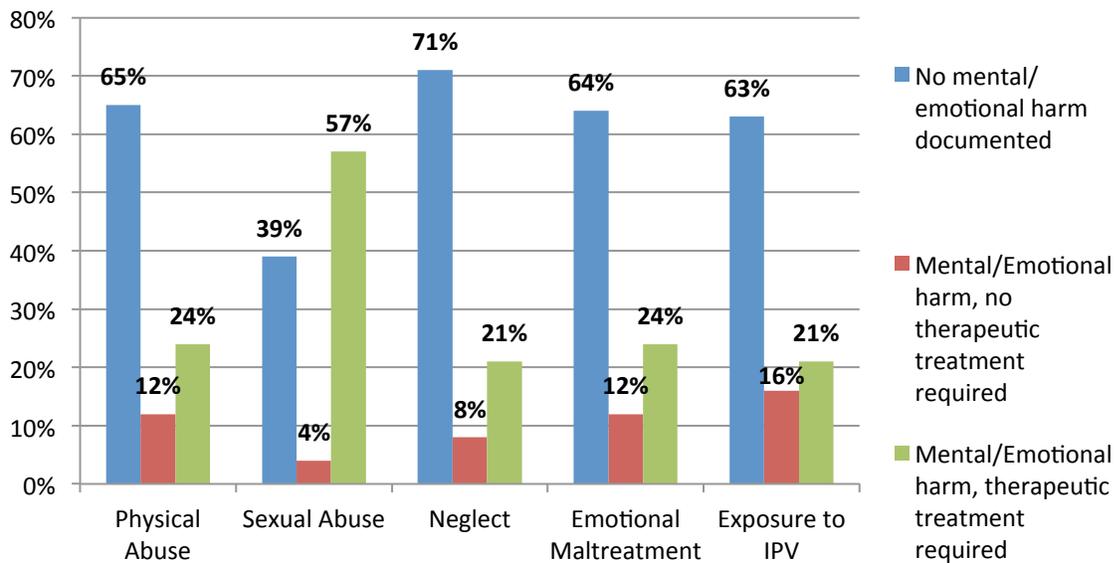
Mental/Emotional Harm	Primary Form of Maltreatment											
	Physical Abuse		Sexual Abuse		Neglect		Emotional Maltreatment		Exposure to IPV		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
No mental/emotional harm documented	3,728	65	329	39	7,401	71	3,604	64	12,848	63	27,910	65
Mental/Emotional harm, no therapeutic treatment required	668	12	-	-	782	8	690	12	3,348	16	5,524	13
Mental/Emotional harm, therapeutic treatment required	1,374	24	484	57	2,203	21	1,327	24	4,172	21	9,560	22
Total	5,770	100	849	100	10,386	100	5,621	100	20,368	100	42,994	100

[^] Based on a sample of 1,830 substantiated child maltreatment-related investigations with information about mental or emotional harm. Percentages are column percentages, and may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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

Figure 1.

Mental or emotional harm by primary form of substantiated maltreatment in Ontario in 2013



Background

Due to changes in investigation mandates and practices over the last 15 years, the OIS-2008 and OIS-2013 differed from previous cycles in that they 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-2013 used a multi-stage sampling design to select a representative sample of 17 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 5,265 child protection investigations conducted during a three-month sampling period in 2013. 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 2013 was 125,281.

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-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 (IPV) (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 investigation, including the characteristics of the household, caregivers, and child subject of the investigation, the history of previous child welfare case openings, and the 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 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.

Suggested citation: Lefebvre, R., Allan, K., Goel, S., & Fallon, B. (2015). Mental or Emotional Harm by Primary Form of Substantiated Maltreatment in Ontario 2013. CWRP Information Sheet #160E. Toronto, ON: Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto.