



Household Source of Income by Primary Category of Substantiated Maltreatment in Ontario in 2023

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Introduction

The Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2023 (OIS-2023)¹ is the seventh 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 household source of income and struggling to pay for basic necessities by the primary category of substantiated maltreatment in Ontario in 2023.

Findings

Of the estimated 125,879 maltreatment-related investigations² conducted in Ontario in 2023, the investigating worker identified an estimated 96,158 investigations involving an incident of maltreatment and an estimated 29,721 risk-only investigations. At the end of the initial investigation, 44 percent of maltreatment investigations were substantiated (an estimated 41,887 investigations).

Child welfare workers were asked to indicate the income source that best described the primary income for the household. Household source of income for substantiated maltreatment investigations is displayed in Table 1.

¹ Fallon, B., Black, T., Lefebvre, R., Trocmé, N., Hélie, S., Crowe, A., Miller, M., Budau, K., Houston, E., King, B., Esposito, T., Fluke, J., Collin-Vézina, D., Parada, H., Provençal, J., Chhabra, N., Sawh, P., Chan, P., Chowdhury, R., ... Wilson, L. Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2023 (OIS-2023). Toronto, ON: Child Welfare Research Portal.

² A maltreatment-related investigation refers to both maltreatment and risk-only investigations. Risk-only investigations are 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).

The majority of substantiated physical abuse investigations (70%) and substantiated exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV) investigations (57%) involved families with full time employment as their primary source of income. Half of substantiated sexual abuse investigations (50%) and 47% of substantiated emotional maltreatment investigations involved families with full time employment as their primary source of income. In substantiated neglect investigations, the household source of income most often noted was social assistance, employment insurance or other benefits which represented the household income source for half (50%) of these investigations.

Table 1.

Household source of income by primary category of substantiated maltreatment in Ontario in 2023[^]

	Primary Category of Substantiated Maltreatment											
	Physical Abuse		Sexual Abuse		Neglect		Emotional Maltreatment		Exposure to IPV		Total	
Household Source of Income	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Full-time	3,590	70%	566	50%	3,585	34%	2,082	48%	11,343	57%	21,166	52%
Part-time<30hrs/seasonal	402	8%	-	6%	550	5%	359	8%	1,732	9%	3,110	8%
Social assistance/EI/other benefits	681	13%	403	36%	5,182	50%	1,406	32%	5,171	26%	12,843	31%
Unknown source	277	5%	-	2%	544	5%	432	10%	830	4%	2,103	5%
No source of income	170	3%	-	7%	568	5%	-	2%	846	4%	1,738	4%
Total Substantiated Investigations	5,120	100%	1,129	100%	10,429	100%	4,360	100%	19,922	100%	40,960	100%

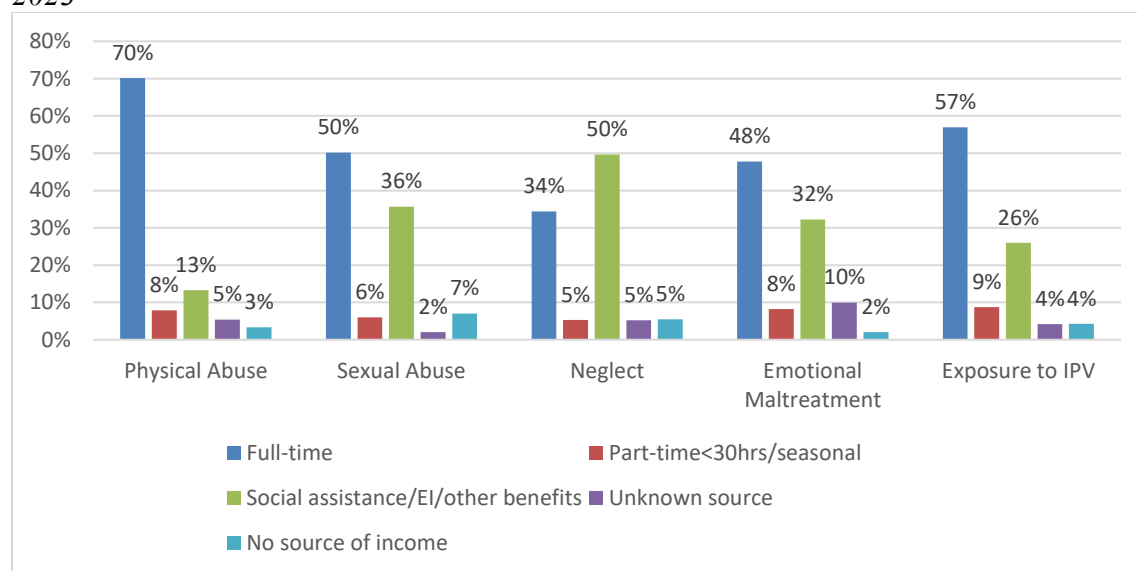
[^] Based on a sample of 2,287 substantiated maltreatment investigations with information about household source of income. This question was not applicable for a sample of 34 substantiated community caregiver investigations and 6 substantiated maltreatment investigations involving a youth living independently. Percentages are column percentages and may not add to 100% because of rounding.

“-” Estimates of less than 100 are not shown, but are included in the total

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

Figure 1

Household source of income by primary category of substantiated maltreatment in Ontario in 2023[^]



Workers were asked to indicate whether the household struggled to pay for food, housing, utilities, transportation, a telephone/cell phone, and/or medical care in the last six months. These findings are shown in Table 2. Substantiated neglect investigations were the most likely to have a worker note that the household struggled to pay for all included basic necessities: food (37%), housing (24%), utilities (17%), telephone/cell phone (16%), transportation (16%), and medical care (9%). Substantiated sexual abuse investigations were the least likely to have a worker indicate that the household struggled to pay for any of the basic necessities in the last six months. It was most common for households to struggle to pay for food with the worker noting this to be a concern in 23% of the overall sample of substantiated investigations.

Table 2.

Household struggled to pay for basic necessities by primary category of substantiated maltreatment in Ontario in 2023[^]

	Primary Category of Substantiated Maltreatment											
	Physical Abuse		Sexual Abuse		Neglect		Emotional Maltreatment		Exposure to IPV		Total	
Household Struggled to Pay For	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Food	802	16%	-	8%	3,860	37%	679	16%	4,136	21%	9,563	23%
Housing	635	12%	-	4%	2,466	24%	437	10%	3,229	16%	6,814	17%
Utilities	363	7%	-	1%	1,815	17%	342	8%	1,612	8%	4,146	10%
Telephone/cell phone	341	7%	-	3%	1,719	16%	280	6%	1,018	5%	3,392	8%
Transportation	355	7%	-	5%	1,709	16%	344	8%	1,299	7%	3,760	9%
Medical care	245	5%	-	1%	985	9%	-	2%	539	3%	1,880	5%
Total Substantiated Investigations	5,120	100%	1,129	100%	10,429	100%	4,360	100%	19,922	100%	40,960	100%

[^]“-” Estimates of less than 100 are not shown, but are included in the total.

Methodology

The OIS-2023 used a multi-stage sampling design to select a representative sample of 20 child welfare agencies in Ontario and then to select a sample of cases within these agencies. Information was collected directly from child welfare workers on a representative sample of 6,799 child protection investigations involving children 0-17 years of age that were conducted during a three-month sampling period in the fall of 2023. 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 2023 was 125,879.

For maltreatment investigations, information was collected regarding the primary form of maltreatment investigated as well as the level of substantiation for that maltreatment. 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.

Workers were asked to provide information on various other aspects of their investigation, including the characteristics of the household (e.g., primary income source; paying for basic

necessities), caregivers, and child subject of the investigation; history of previous child welfare case openings; and short-term child welfare service dispositions (e.g., level of substantiation).

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 provincial estimated should also be noted. The agency size correction uses service volume as a proxy for agency size; this does not account for potential variations 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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