



# Ongoing Child Welfare Services and Referrals to Services by Primary Form of Substantiated Maltreatment in Ontario 2018

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July 2020

## 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 transfers to ongoing services and referrals to internal and external services by primary form of substantiated maltreatment in Ontario in 2018.

## Findings

In an estimated 158,476 maltreatment-related investigations<sup>2</sup> in Ontario in 2018, the investigating worker identified an estimated 99,615 investigations involving an incident of maltreatment and an estimated 58,861 risk-only investigations. At the end of the initial investigation, 40 percent of maltreatment investigations were substantiated (an estimated 40,221 investigations).

Forty percent of investigations were transferred to ongoing services at the conclusion of the initial investigation. As shown in Table 1, transfers to ongoing child welfare services varied by primary form of treatment. Substantiated neglect investigations were most likely to stay open for ongoing child welfare services (58 percent), followed by substantiated physical abuse (37 percent), substantiated exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV) (36 percent), and emotional maltreatment (33 percent) investigations. Only one in five substantiated sexual abuse investigations were transferred to ongoing child welfare services.

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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.

<sup>2</sup> A “maltreatment-related investigations” refers to both maltreatment and risk investigations of all substantiation levels.

Table 1.

*Ongoing Child Welfare Services by Primary Form of Substantiated Maltreatment in Ontario in 2018*

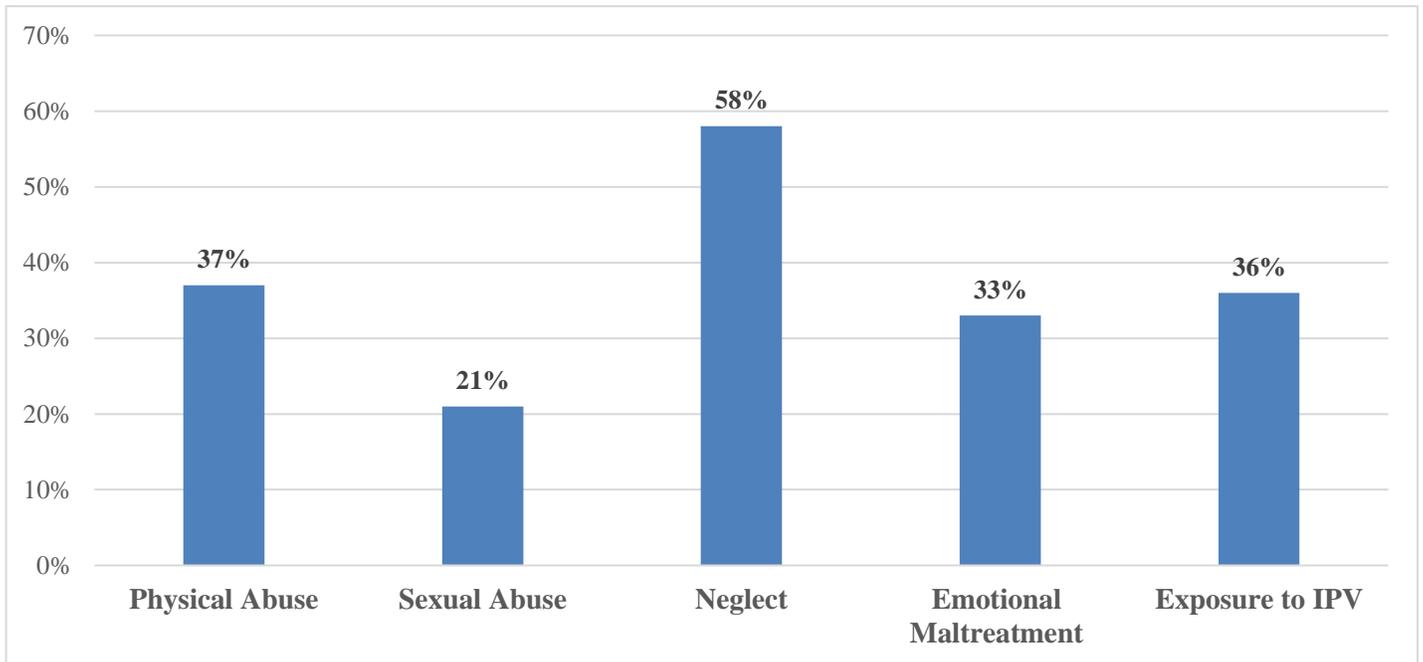
	Primary Form of Maltreatment										Total	
	Physical Abuse		Sexual Abuse		Neglect		Emotional Maltreatment		Exposure to IPV			
Ongoing Child Welfare Services	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Yes	2,805	37%	266	21%	5,112	58%	1,664	33%	6,263	36%	16,110	40%
No	4,763	63%	975	79%	3,726	42%	3,361	67%	11,286	64%	24,111	60%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,568</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,241</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>8,838</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>5,025</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>17,549</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>40,221</b>	<b>100%</b>

Based on a sample of 1,918 substantiated child maltreatment investigations with information about primary form of maltreatment and transfers to ongoing child welfare services. Percentages are column percentages. Columns may not add to totals because of rounding.

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

Figure 1.

*Provision of Ongoing Child Welfare Services by Primary Form of Substantiated Maltreatment in Ontario in 2018*



Workers were also asked to indicate whether they made a referral to a service internal or external to child welfare that was not ongoing child welfare services. These findings are shown in Table 2. In most substantiated maltreatment investigations (54 percent of substantiated investigations), a referral to services was made for either the family or child. Investigations where the primary form of substantiated maltreatment was sexual abuse were most likely to be referred for services (81 percent), followed by substantiated emotional maltreatment (64 percent), substantiated exposure to IPV (56 percent), substantiated physical abuse (51 percent), and substantiated neglect (45 percent).

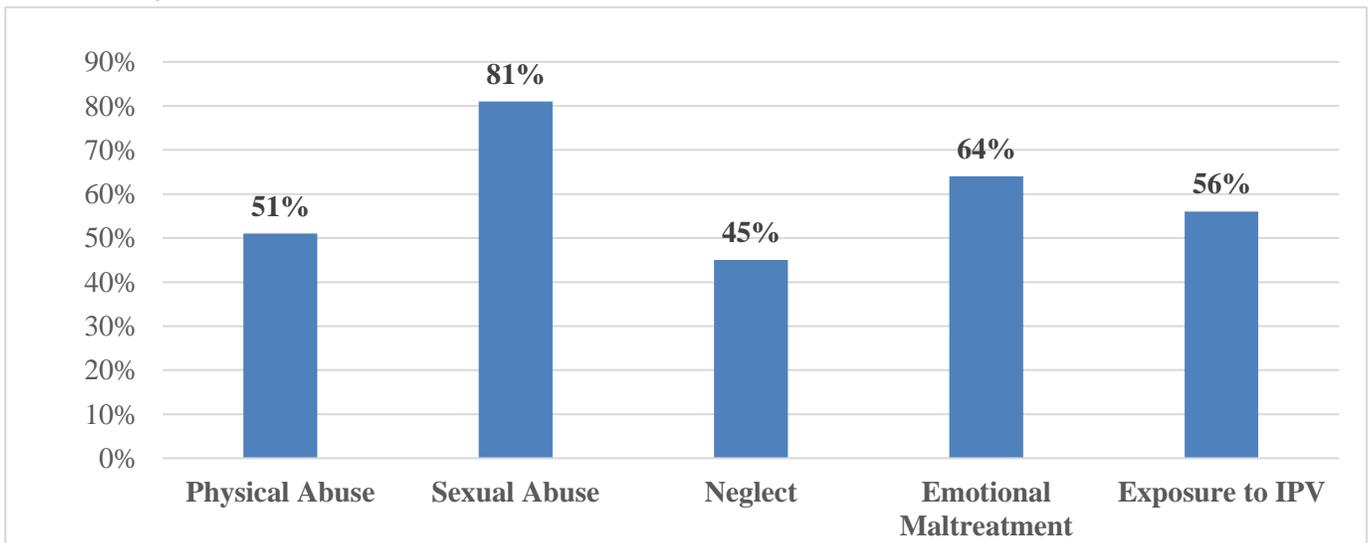
Table 2.  
*Referrals to Services Beyond the Parameters of Ongoing Child Welfare Services by Primary Form of Substantiated Maltreatment in Ontario in 2018*

	Primary Form of Maltreatment										Total	
	Physical Abuse		Sexual Abuse		Neglect		Emotional Maltreatment		Exposure to IPV			
Service Referral	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Yes	3,889	51%	1,004	81%	3,963	45%	3,199	64%	9,860	56%	21,915	54%
No	3,679	49%	237	19%	4,875	55%	1,826	36%	7,689	44%	18,306	46%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,568</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,241</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>8,838</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>5,025</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>17,549</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>40,221</b>	<b>100%</b>

Based on a sample of 1,918 substantiated child maltreatment investigations with information about the primary form of maltreatment and referrals to services. Percentages are column percentages. Columns may not add to totals due to rounding.

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

Figure 2.  
*Referrals to Services Beyond the Parameters of Ongoing Child Welfare Services by Primary Form of Substantiated Maltreatment in Ontario in 2018*



## **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.

Workers could indicate whether an investigation involved an allegation related to an event of maltreatment or a concern about circumstances presenting a future risk of maltreatment. 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.

Workers were asked to provide information on various other aspects of their investigation, including the characteristics of the household, caregivers, and children who were the subject of the investigation; history of previous child welfare case openings; and short-term child welfare service dispositions, including transfers to ongoing services and referrals to internal or 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.

**Suggested Citation:** Davidson, L., Joh-Carnella, N., & King, B. (2020). Ongoing Child Welfare Services and Referrals to Services by Primary Form of Substantiated Maltreatment in Ontario 2018. CWRP Information Sheet #204E. Toronto, ON: Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal.