



Characteristics of Placements in Out of Home Care During the Investigation in Ontario in 2018

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Introduction

The Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2018 (OIS-2018)¹ 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 the characteristics out-of-home care placements in 2018, including placement type and reunification with primary caregivers during the investigation. These characteristics were also compared by the age of the child involved in the investigation.

Findings

In Ontario in 2018, there were an estimated 158,476 child protection investigations for a maltreatment-related concern involving children aged 0-17. For the purpose of this analysis, investigations involving youth living independently and community caregiver² investigations were excluded, resulting in a sample of 155,650 investigations.

An estimated 4,385 investigations (2.8%) resulted in an out-of-home care placement, while the child remained in the home in 151,265 investigations. Figure 1 presents the placement type among investigations involving children who were placed in out of home care. Placement types depicted in figure 1 include kinship out of care and kinship in care (kin care, formal and informal), non-kin foster care, and group/residential care. A substantial proportion of investigations involving children who were placed in out of home care ended up with kin

¹ 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.

² A community caregiver is defined as anyone providing care to a child in an out-of-home setting (e.g., institutional setting).

(63.6%), both formal and informal. The next largest group was those who were placed in non-kin foster care, at 32.2%, whereas alternate placements such as group homes or residential settings only constituted 4.2% of investigations involving children who were placed in out of home care. Figure 2 presents investigations involving children who were reunified with their families during the investigation compared to those where children were still in care at the conclusion of the investigation. Of the 4,385 investigations involving children who were placed in out of home care in Ontario in 2018, the vast majority (83.7%) remained in care at the conclusion of the investigation. Another 16.3% of investigations involving children who were placed in out of home care were reunified with their caregiver(s) during the investigation.

Figure 1: Placement Type

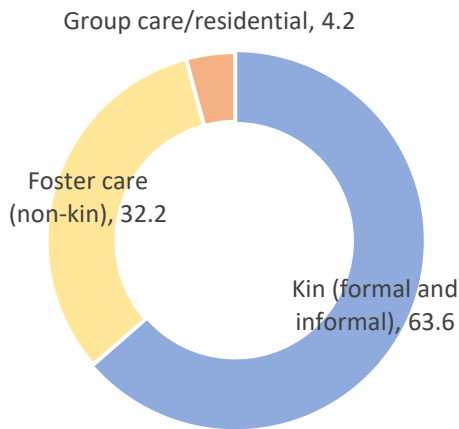


Figure 2: Reunification

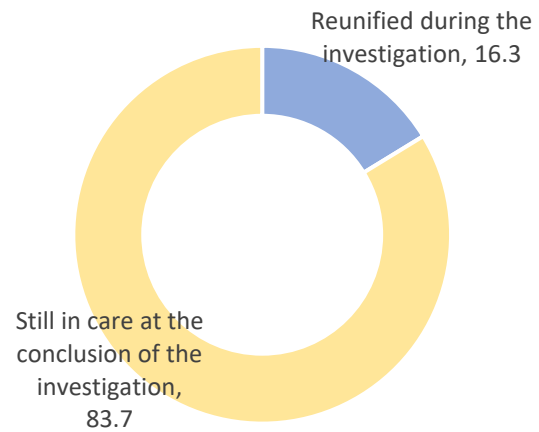


Figure 3: Placement Type, By Age

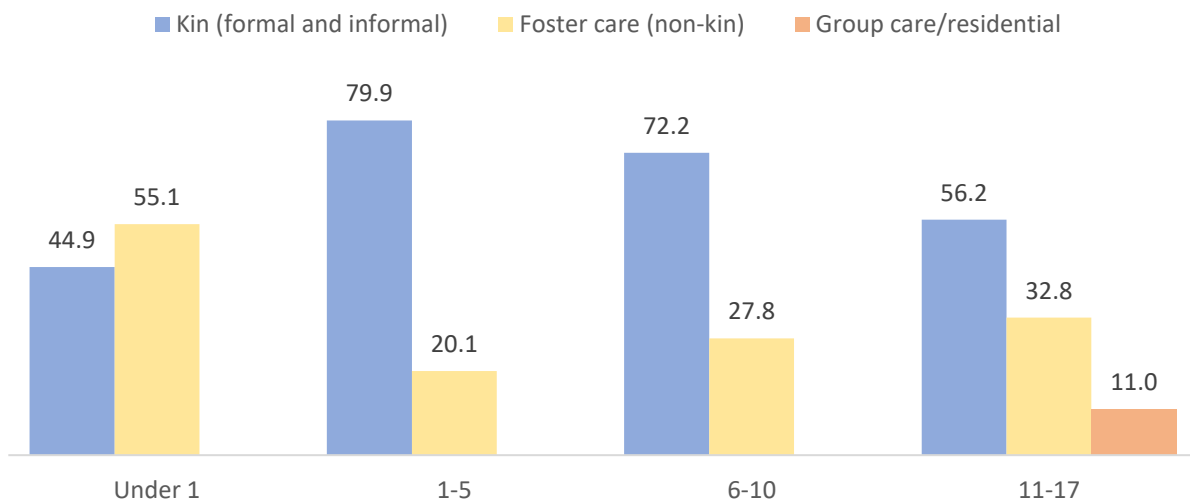


Figure 3 represents the placement type according to the age of the child involved in investigations where there was a placement in out of home care. Among investigations involving infants who were placed in out of home care, a substantial proportion (55.1%) were placed in non-kin foster care. This group was most likely to be placed with non-relative caregivers. Among investigations involving children ages 1-5, most (nearly 4 out of 5) were placed with kin (formal and informal). This finding was similar for the next age group; among investigations involving children ages 6-10, most were placed with kin (72.2%). Among investigations involving adolescents, just over half were placed with kin and just under a third were placed with non-kin foster caregivers. Importantly, 11% of investigations involving adolescents placed in out of home care were placed in group homes or residential treatment centres, and this was the only age group who experienced this placement type.

Figure 4: Reunification, by Age

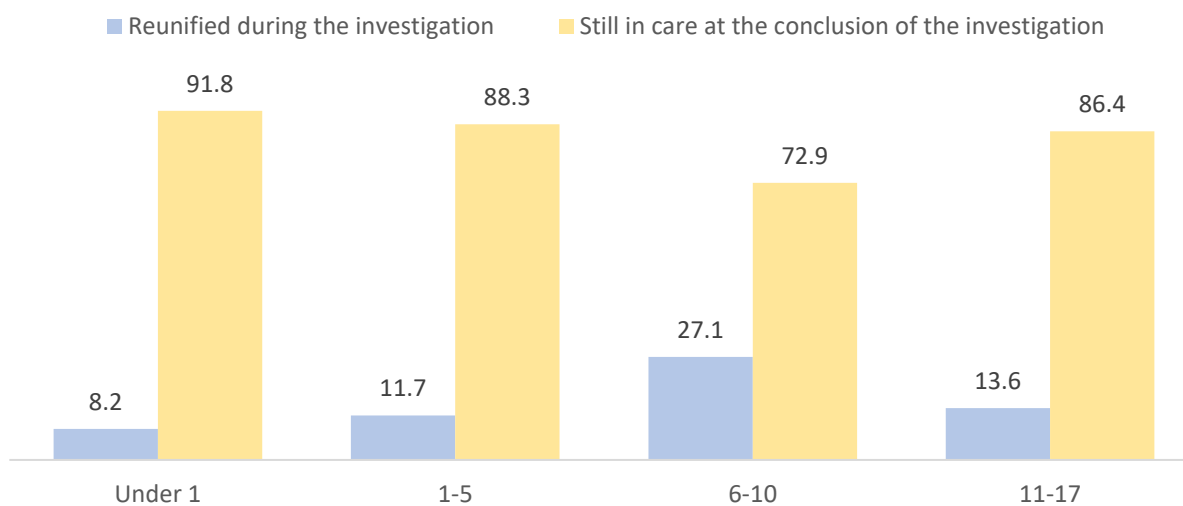


Figure 4 compares those who reunified during the investigation vs. those who remained in care at the conclusion of the investigation by age group. Consistent among all age groups was the fact that more children remained in care at the conclusion of the investigation compared to those who were reunified with their families. Among investigations involving infants, more remained in care (91.8%) than any other age group. Investigations involving children between the ages of 6 and 10 had the largest proportion of cases resulting in children reunifying with their families before the conclusion of the investigation (27.1%).

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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