



Previous Case Openings by Primary Form of Substantiated Maltreatment 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 previous case openings by the primary form of substantiated maltreatment in Ontario in 2018.

Findings

In an estimated 158,476 maltreatment-related investigations² 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)

Workers were asked to indicate whether the family's case had been previously opened for investigation. An estimated 10,851 (27 percent) investigations had never been opened. As shown in Table 1, the number of previous openings for investigations varies by primary form of substantiated maltreatment. Most substantiated neglect investigations (80 percent), emotional maltreatment investigations (79 percent), physical abuse investigations (69 percent), exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV) investigations (67 percent), and sexual abuse investigations (57 percent), had at least one previous case opening. Substantiated emotional maltreatment investigations were the most likely to have more than three previous case openings (49 percent of substantiated emotional maltreatment investigations).

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 "maltreatment-related investigations" refers to both maltreatment and risk investigations of all substantiation levels.

Table 1.

Previous case openings for investigation by primary form of substantiated maltreatment in Ontario in 2018

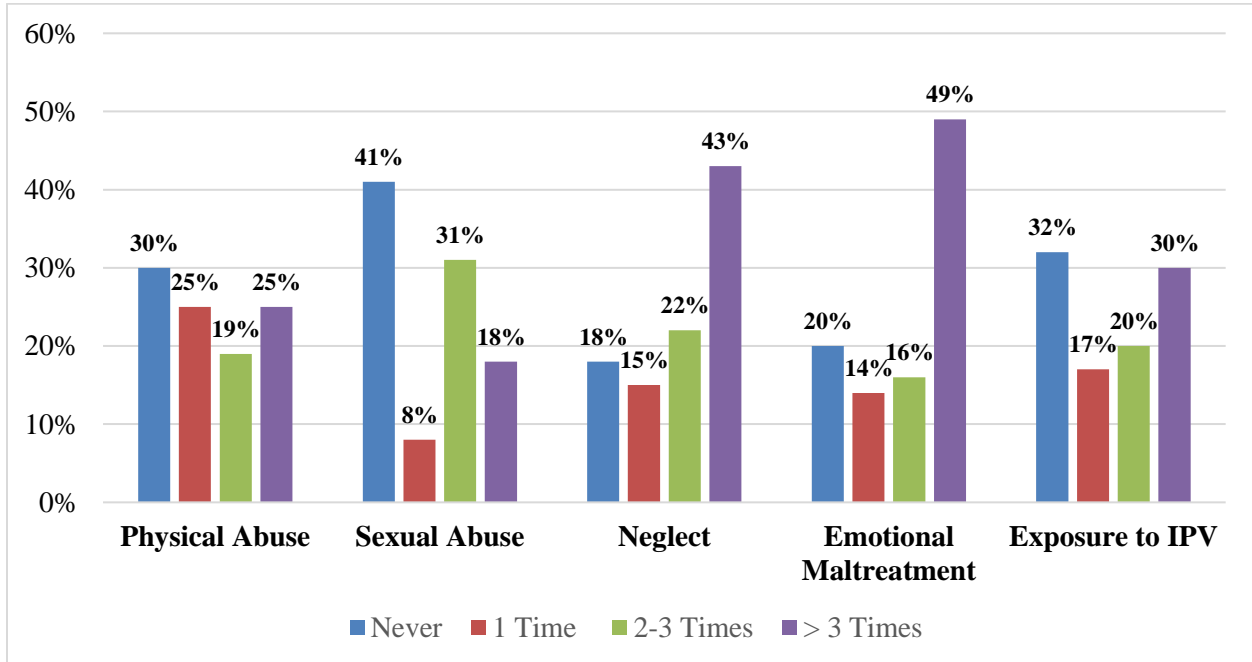
Previous Case Openings	Primary Form of Maltreatment										Total	
	Physical Abuse		Sexual Abuse		Neglect		Emotional Maltreatment		Exposure to IPV		#	%
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%		
Never	2,234	30	483	41	1,548	18	1,007	20	5,579	32	10,851	27
1 Time	1,854	25	-	8	1,332	15	725	14	3,008	17	7,009	18
2-3 Times	1,379	19	367	31	1,871	22	800	16	3,541	20	7,958	20
> 3 Times	1,877	25	217	18	3,706	43	2,480	49	5,326	30	13,606	34
Unknown	-	<1	-	3	186	2	0	0	-	1	350	1
Total	7,379	100	1,190	100	8,643	100	5,012	100	17,550	100	39,774	100

Based on a sample of 1,918 substantiated child maltreatment-related investigations with information about previous case openings. This question was not applicable for a sample of 19 substantiated community caregiver investigations. Percentages are column percentages. Columns may not add to totals because of rounding.
 - Estimate was <100 investigations.

Please see Figure 1 for visual representation of these findings.

Figure 1.

Previous case openings for investigation by primary form of substantiated maltreatment in Ontario in 2018



For investigations with a previous child welfare investigation, Table 2 describes the time since the case was previously closed.

Table 2.

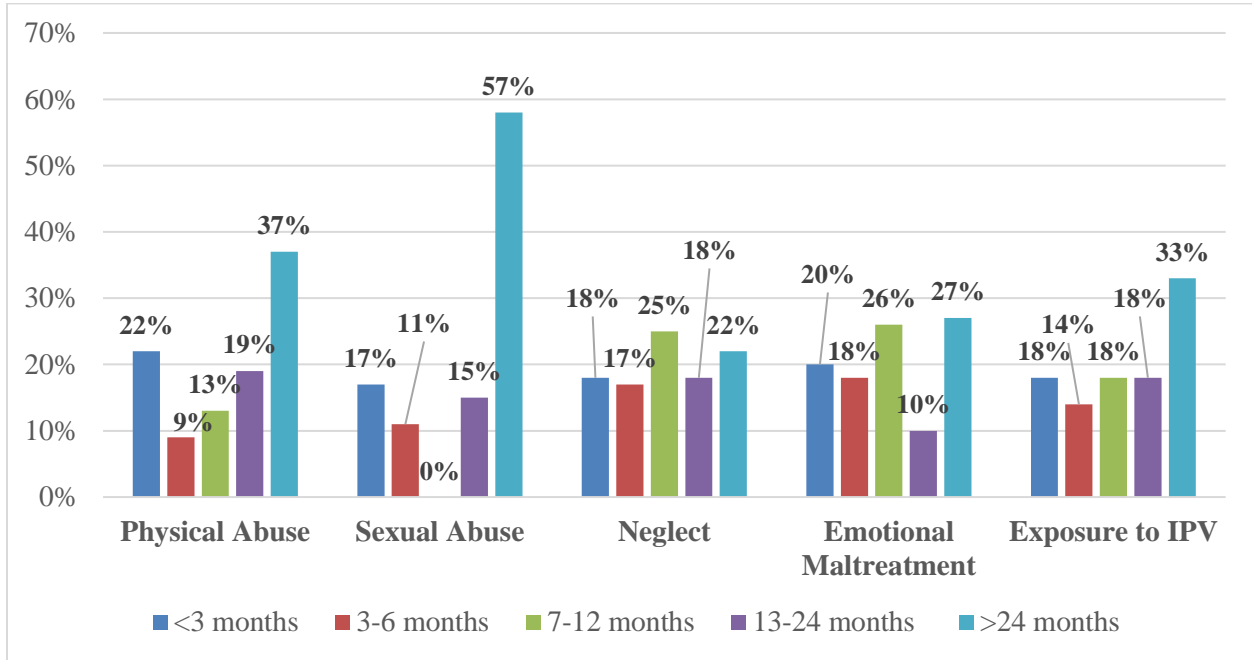
Time since case was previously closed by primary form of substantiated maltreatment in Ontario in 2018

	Primary Form of Maltreatment										Total	
	Physical Abuse		Sexual Abuse		Neglect		Emotional Maltreatment		Exposure to IPV			
Previous Case Openings	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
< 3 Months	1,124	22	112	17	1,239	18	781	20	2,112	18	5,368	19
3-6 Months	453	9	-	11	1165	17	735	18	1,608	14	4,033	14
7-12 Months	663	13	0	0	1729	25	1,031	26	2,159	18	5,582	20
13-24 Months	993	19	103	15	1235	18	393	10	2,093	18	4,817	18
>24 Months	1,878	37	388	57	1,541	22	1,065	27	3,903	33	8,775	31
Total	5,111	100	675	100	6,909	100	4,005	100	11,875	100	28,575	100
Based on a sample of 1,383 substantiated child maltreatment-related investigations with information about previous case openings. This question was not applicable for a sample of 19 substantiated community caregiver investigations. Percentages are column percentages. Columns may not add to totals due to rounding.												

Among substantiated investigations that had previous case openings, less than 12 months had passed since a previous case opening in 64 percent of emotional maltreatment investigations, 60 percent of neglect investigations, 50 percent of exposure to IPV investigations, 44 percent of physical abuse investigations and 28 percent of sexual abuse investigations. Please see Figure 2 for a visual representation of these findings.

Figure 2.

Time since case was previously closed 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.

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 child subject of the investigation; history of previous child welfare case openings; and 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 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). Previous Case Openings by Primary Form of Substantiated Maltreatment in Ontario in 2018. CWRP Information Sheet #206E. Toronto, ON: Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal.