

Maltreatment-related Investigations with a Grandparent as a Primary Caregiver in Ontario in 2008

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Introduction

The Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2008 (OIS-2008)¹ is the fourth 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 maltreatment-related investigations with a grandparent as the primary caregiver in Ontario in 2008.

Findings

There was an estimated 128,748 maltreatment-related investigations conducted in Ontario in 2008, of which an estimated 2,517 (2%) involved a grandparent as the primary caregiver.

Table 1 displays primary caregiver risk factors in investigations where a grandparent is the primary caregiver compared to those investigations with a different type of primary caregiver (e.g., biological parent, parent's partner, foster parent, etc.). Overall, workers were less likely to note risk factors for grandparent primary caregivers, with the exception of physical health issues and cognitive impairments. Workers were less likely to note alcohol abuse (5% vs. 11%), drugs or solvent abuse (0% vs. 10%), mental health issues (10% vs. 19%), few social supports (28% vs. 21%), and domestic violence victimization (6% vs. 28%).

¹ Please see Fallon, B., Trocmé, N., MacLaurin, B., Sinha, V., Black, T., Felstiner, C., et al. (2010). *Ontario incidence study of reported child abuse and neglect 2008 (OIS-2008): Major findings*. Toronto, Ontario: Child Welfare Research Portal.

Table 1

Primary caregiver risk factors in maltreatment-related investigations where a grandparent is the primary caregiver[^]

Primary Caregiver Risk Factor	Grandparent as the Primary Caregiver			
	Yes		No	
	#	%	#	%
Alcohol abuse	136	5%	13,258	11%
Drug or solvent abuse	-	-	12,523	10%
Cognitive impairment	186	7%	4,852	4%
Mental health issues	263	10%	24,496	19%
Physical health issues	572	23%	8,916	7%
Few social supports	526	21%	35,231	28%
Victim of domestic violence (DV)	138	6%	35,547	28%
Total maltreatment-related investigations	2,517	100%	126,231	100%

[^] Based on a sample of 7,471 maltreatment-related investigations. Columns are not additive because investigating workers could identify more than one primary caregiver risk factor or no primary caregiver risk factors.
 - Estimates under 100 are not reported as they are unreliable; however, they are included in the total.

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

Figure 1

Primary caregiver risk factors in maltreatment-related investigations where a grandparent is the primary caregiver

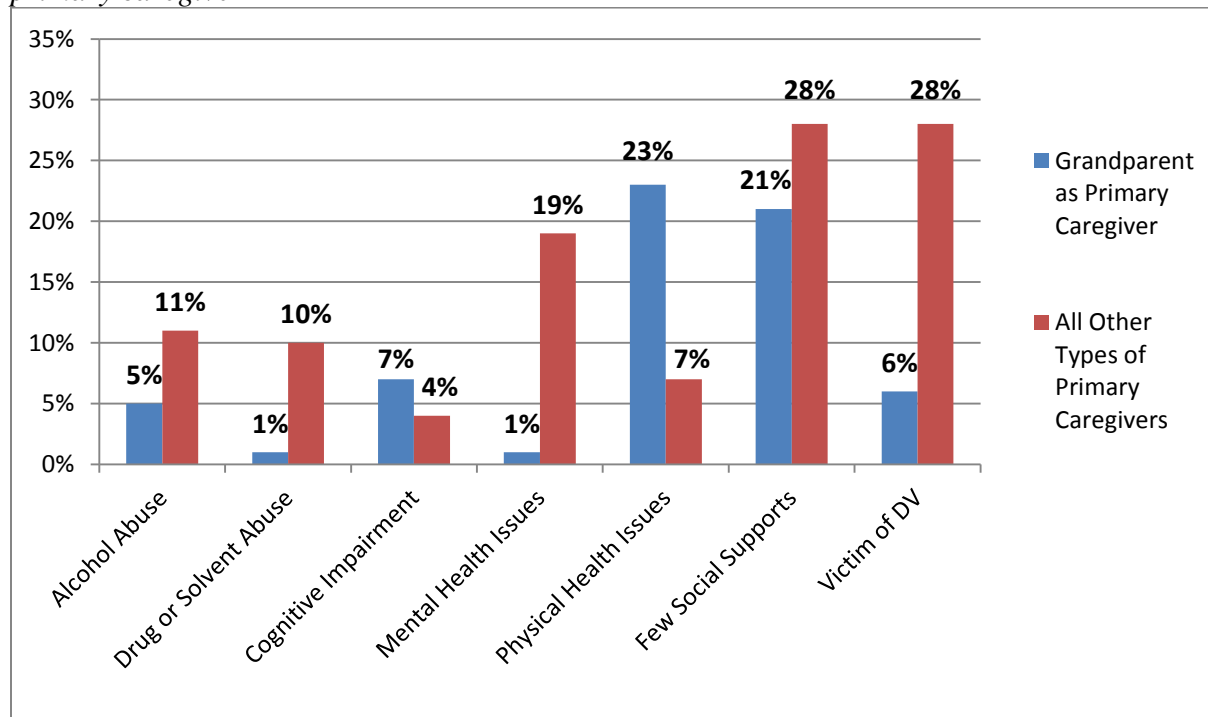


Table 2 displays previous case openings in investigations where a grandparent is the primary caregiver in Ontario in 2008. Overall, grandparents as primary caregivers were more likely to have had a previous case opening. Almost three-quarters of grandparent caregivers had a previous opening, compared with less than two-thirds of other caregivers.

Table 2

Previous case openings in maltreatment-related investigations where a grandparent is the primary caregiver

	Grandparent as the Primary Caregiver			
	Yes		No	
Case Previously Opened	#	%	#	%
Never	658	26%	45,501	36%
1 time	418	17%	22,472	18%
2 – 3 times	536	21%	24,320	19%
More than 3 times	838	33%	33,212	26%
Unknown	-	-	669	1%
Total	2,517	100%	126,174	100%

^ Based on a sample of 7,471 maltreatment-related investigations with information about previous case openings. Columns are not additive because investigating workers could identify more than one child functioning concern or no child functioning concerns.

- Estimates under 100 are not reported as they are unreliable; however, they are included in the total.

Table 3 displays child functioning concerns in maltreatment-related investigations where a grandparent is the primary caregiver. Children in households headed by grandparents were more likely to be identified by the investigating worker to have all of the functioning concerns displayed in Table 3. Close to half of all children with a grandparent as a primary caregiver were noted to have externalizing and internalizing behaviours, compared to roughly one quarter of children exhibiting these symptoms with another type of primary caregiver.

Table 3

Child functioning concerns in maltreatment-related investigations where a grandparent is the primary caregiver

Child Characteristic	Grandparent as the Primary Caregiver			
	Yes		No	
	#	%	#	%
Internalizing behaviour	1,037	41%	21,073	17%
Externalizing behaviour	1,134	45%	32,209	26%
Intellectual/developmental disability	495	20%	10,910	9%
Failure to meet developmental milestones	327	13%	5,576	4%
FAS/FAE	336	13%	1275	1%
Total maltreatment-related investigations	2,517	100%	126,231	100%

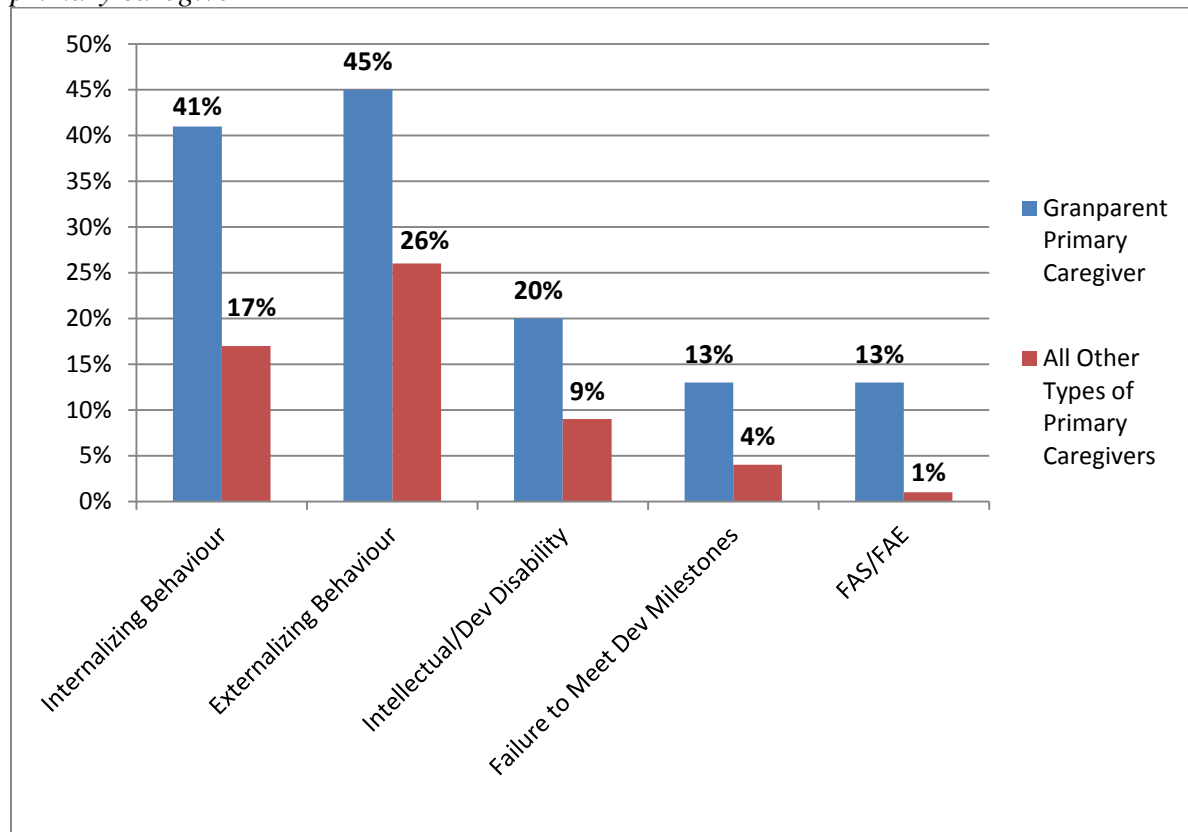
^ Based on a sample of 7,471 maltreatment-related investigations. Columns are not additive because investigating workers could identify more than one child functioning concern or no child functioning concerns.

- Estimates under 100 are not reported as they are unreliable; however, they are included in the total.

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

Figure 2

Child functioning concerns in maltreatment-related investigations where a grandparent is the primary caregiver



Background

Due to changes in investigation mandates and practices over the last 10 years, the OIS-2008 differed from previous cycles in that it 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-2008 used a multi-stage sampling design to select a representative sample of 23 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 7,471 child protection investigations conducted during a three-month sampling period in 2008. 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 2008 was 128,748.

Workers were asked to provide information about whether there was an ongoing child custody/access dispute at the time of the initial child welfare investigation. This only included custody/access disputes in which a court application had been made or was pending. Workers could choose “yes”, there was a custody/access dispute, “no”, there was not a custody/access dispute, or “unknown”, meaning the worker did not know whether there was a custody/access dispute.

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: Hollingshead, M., Lefebvre, R., Van Wert, M., & Fallon, B. (2014). Maltreatment-related Investigations with a Grandparent as a Primary Caregiver in Ontario in 2008. CWRP Information Sheet #172E. Toronto, ON: Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal.