



Characteristics of Investigations Involving First Nations Children Compared to White Children in Ontario in 2013

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Introduction

The Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2013 (OIS-2013)¹ is the fifth 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 investigations involving First Nations children and investigations involving White children, comparing identified child, caregiver, and household characteristics.

Findings

In an estimated 115,318 maltreatment-related investigations involving children aged 14 and under in Ontario in 2013, the investigating worker identified 8,437 First Nations children (approximately 7%) and 74,463 White children (approximately 65%).

There are differences in the types of child functioning concerns identified for both groups of children. In comparison to White children, workers were more likely to identify the following concerns for First Nations children: FAS/FAE (6.1% vs. 1.2%), alcohol abuse (2.4% vs. 0.3%), multiple incidents of running (5.9% vs. 1.3%), drug/solvent abuse (4.0% vs. 0.9%), academic difficulties (23.9% vs. 16.4%), intellectual/developmental disabilities (14.4% vs. 11%), and suicide risk (4.7% vs. 2.5%). Overall, multiple child functioning issues were identified in a greater proportion of investigations involving First Nations children (29.4%) compared to investigations involving White children (23.4%). Please see Table 1 for these findings.

¹ Fallon, B., Van Wert, M., Trocmé, N., MacLaurin, B., Sinha, V., Lefebvre, R., et al. (2015). *Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2013 (OIS-2013)*. Toronto, ON: Child Welfare Research Portal.

Table 1.

Confirmed and suspected child functioning issues for investigations involving First Nations and White children in Ontario in 2013

Child functioning issue	First Nations child investigations		White child investigations	
	N	%	N	%
FAS/FAE***	517	6.1%	867	1.2%
Positive toxicology at birth	140	1.7%	684	0.9%
Alcohol abuse***	200	2.4%	231	0.3%
Running (multiple incidents)***	496	5.9%	954	1.3%
Drug/solvent abuse***	338	4.0%	667	0.9%
Physical disability	---	---	684	0.9%
Failure to meet developmental milestones	630	7.5%	4,558	6.1%
Youth criminal justice act involvement	103	1.2%	641	0.9%
Attachment issues	832	9.9%	6,567	8.8%
Intellectual/developmental disability*	1,217	14.4%	8,210	11.0%
Inappropriate sexual behaviour	141	1.7%	2,396	3.2%
Aggression	1,072	12.7%	8,131	10.9%
Academic difficulties***	2,013	23.9%	12,179	16.4%
Depression/anxiety/withdrawal	958	11.4%	10,067	13.5%
Suicidal thoughts*	395	4.7%	1,847	2.5%
Self-harming behaviour	392	4.6%	2,299	3.1%
ADD/ADHD	1,058	12.5%	9,913	13.3%
Other child functioning issues	276	3.3%	2,994	4.0%
Number of child functioning concerns***				
None	5,219	61.9%	46,318	62.2%
One	737	8.7%	10,746	14.4%
Multiple	2,481	29.4%	17,398	23.4%
Multiple child functioning issues unknown***	1,269	15.0%	6,841	9.2%

Note. Based on an unweighted sample of 3,757 child maltreatment investigations involving 573 First Nations children and 3,184 White children in 2013.

--- Weighted estimate was less than 100 child maltreatment investigations.

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

Overall, workers identified multiple risk factors for caregivers of First Nations children compared to White children. The most frequently identified risk factors among caregivers of First Nations children were substance abuse (approximately 48.4%), domestic violence victimization/perpetration (approximately 43.7%), health issues (approximately 42.8%), and few social supports (approximately 41.3%). Caregivers of First Nations children were significantly more likely to have a history of foster care/group home experience (21.2% of investigations involving First Nations children compared to 5.6% of investigations involving White children). Please see Table 2 for these findings.

Table 2.

Confirmed and suspected primary and/or secondary caregiver risk factors for investigations involving First Nations and White children in Ontario in 2013

Caregiver risk factor concerns	First Nations child investigations		White child investigations	
	N	%	N	%
Substance abuse (alcohol, drug/solvents)***	4,080	48.4%	15,534	20.9%
History of foster care/group home***	1,788	21.2%	4,190	5.6%
Domestic violence (victimization/perpetration)***	3,686	43.7%	20,549	27.6%
Few social supports***	3,484	41.3%	20,435	27.4%
Health issues (physical, mental, cognitive)***	3,609	42.8%	25,439	34.2%
Number of risk factors***				
None	1,886	22.3%	29,339	39.4%
One	1,473	17.5%	19,131	25.7%
Multiple	5,079	60.2%	25,992	34.9%
Multiple caregiver risk factors unknown***	1,391	16.5%	7,111	9.5%

Note. Based on an unweighted sample of 3,757 child maltreatment investigations involving 573 First Nations children and 3,184 White children in 2013.

--- Weighted estimate was less than 100 child maltreatment investigations.

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

Across household risk factors, workers noted concerns for a greater proportion of First Nations families compared to White families. The most frequently identified household risk factors among First Nations investigations were low income (approximately 62.4%) and caregiving resource strain (approximately 44.2%). Please see Table 3 for these findings.

Table 3.

Confirmed and suspected household risk factors for investigations involving First Nations and White children in Ontario in 2013

Household risk factors	First Nations child investigations		White child investigations	
	N	%	N	%
Low income***	5,269	62.4%	26,407	35.5%
Housing problems***	2,257	26.7%	9,800	13.2%
Caregiving resource strain**	3,728	44.2%	27,528	37.0%
Number of household risk factors***				
None	1,855	22.0%	32,042	43.0%
One	2,575	30.5%	24,234	32.5%
Multiple	4,008	47.5%	18,186	24.4%

Note. Based on an unweighted sample of 3,757 child maltreatment investigations involving 573 First Nations children and 3,184 White children in 2013.

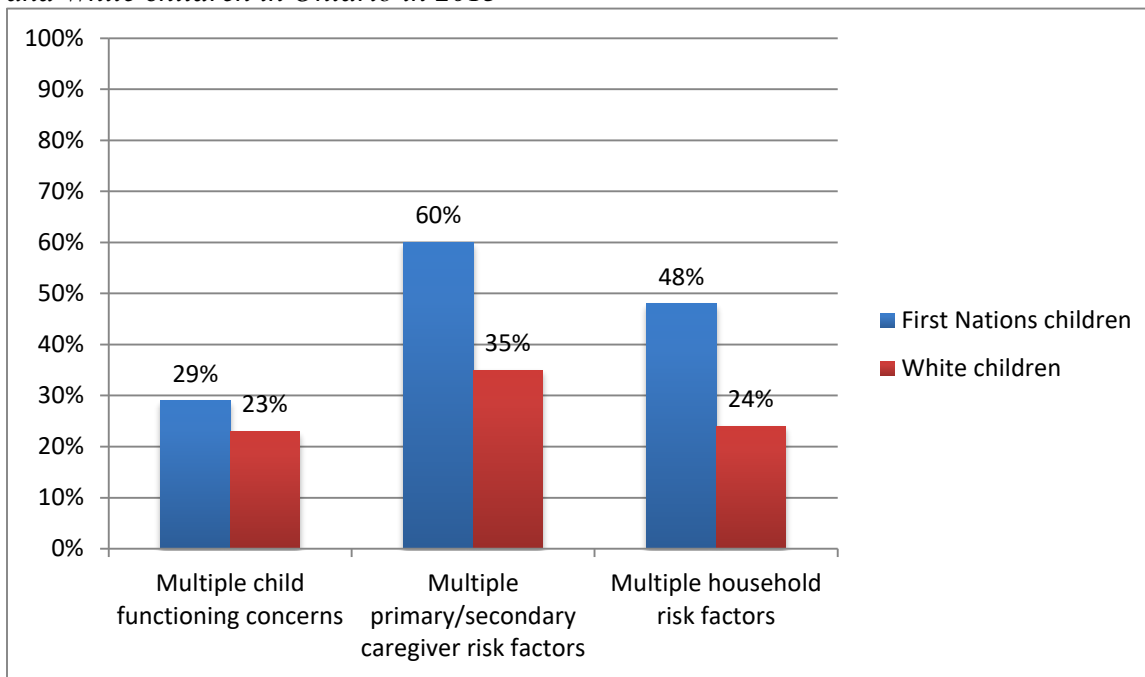
--- Weighted estimate was less than 100 child maltreatment investigations.

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

Multiple child functioning issues were more likely to be identified for First Nations children compared to White children. Similarly, workers identified a significantly higher proportion of multiple confirmed or suspected risk factors in First Nations investigations (approximately 60.2%) compared to White investigations (approximately 34.9%). In addition, workers identified multiple household risk factors in approximately 47.5% of First Nations investigations compared to approximately 24.4% of White investigations. Please see Figure 1 for a visual representation of these findings.

Figure 1.

Multiple child, caregiver, and household risk factors for investigations involving First Nations and White children in Ontario in 2013



Methodology

The OIS-2013 used a multi-stage sampling design to select a representative sample of 17 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 5,265 child protection investigations conducted during a three-month sampling period in 2013. 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 2013 was 125,281. The current analysis excluded children aged 15, as it is part of a larger analysis that assessed the relationship to the population. The *NHS 2011* was used to calculate the incidence rates. The *NHS* data grouped children aged 15 with youth aged 16 to 24.

Workers were asked to identify functioning concerns for children and their caregivers, household income source, and housing information at the time of the initial child welfare investigation.

Workers could indicate whether the concern had been confirmed, suspected, was not present or it was unknown to the worker. For the current analysis, concerns that were suspected or confirmed were considered ‘noted’ and not present or unknown concerns were considered ‘not noted.’ Household risk factors comprised various concerns collapsed into three categories. Low income status included: households that regularly ran out of money for food, housing, and/or utilities in the last six months and/or household income comprised of EI, social assistance, other benefits, or not known. Housing problems included: at least two moves in the past year, overcrowded home, and/or unsafe housing conditions. Lastly, caregiving resource strain included: households with four or more children and/or no other caregiver in the home.

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). Workers listed the primary concern for the investigation, and could list secondary and tertiary concerns. Workers were asked to provide information on other aspects of the investigation, including the history of previous child welfare case openings and short-term child welfare service dispositions.

Limitations

The OIS collects information directly from child welfare workers when they have completed an initial investigation of a report of possible child maltreatment or risk of future maltreatment. Therefore, the study is limited to the type of information available at that point in time. 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 (i.e., not opened for investigation) were excluded. Likewise, reports on cases currently open at the time of case selection were excluded. The study did not track longer-term service events occurring beyond the initial investigation.

Lastly, three limitations related to the estimation method used to derive annual estimates should 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.

Suggested Citation: Richard, K., Ma, J. & Fallon, B. (2018). Characteristics of investigations involving First Nations children compared to White children in Ontario in 2013. CWRP Information Sheet #192E. Toronto, ON: Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal.