



# Ontario incidence study of reported child abuse and neglect 1993/1998

## Maltreatment rates

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### OIS background

Child welfare caseloads are increasing across Canada but the factors driving this increase are poorly understood. This is one in a series of fact sheets highlighting key findings from Ontario-wide studies of child welfare investigations conducted in 1993 and 1998.

The 1993 *Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (OIS 1993)*<sup>1</sup> was the first survey conducted in Canada to examine the characteristics of children and families investigated by child welfare authorities. The *1998 Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (OIS 1998)*<sup>2</sup> was conducted as part of the *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS)*<sup>3</sup> OIS 1993 collected information on a sample of 2,447 child maltreatment investigations conducted by 17 children's aid societies in Ontario. OIS 1998 was based on a sample of 3,053 child maltreatment investigations. Figures presented here are weighted estimates and do not include maltreated children who were not reported to a children's aid society.

### Substantiated maltreatment doubled

Between 1993 and 1998, the estimated number of child maltreatment investigations increased 44% in Ontario, from 44,900 to 64,800. The number of substantiated cases doubled, from 12,300 in 1993 to 24,400 in 1998 (Figure 1).

### Forms of substantiated maltreatment

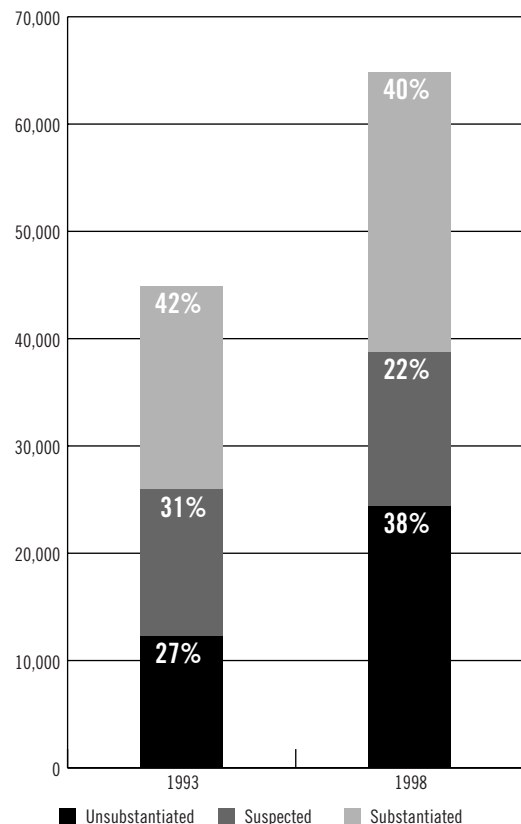
The increase in substantiated maltreatment documented by the *OIS 1993* and *OIS 1998* varies considerably by form of maltreatment.

Figure 2 describes changes in four major categories of maltreatment. Because many cases involved more than one form of maltreatment, the totals in Figure 2 add up to more than 24,400 (the total number of substantiated maltreatment investigations).

### 90% increase in physical abuse

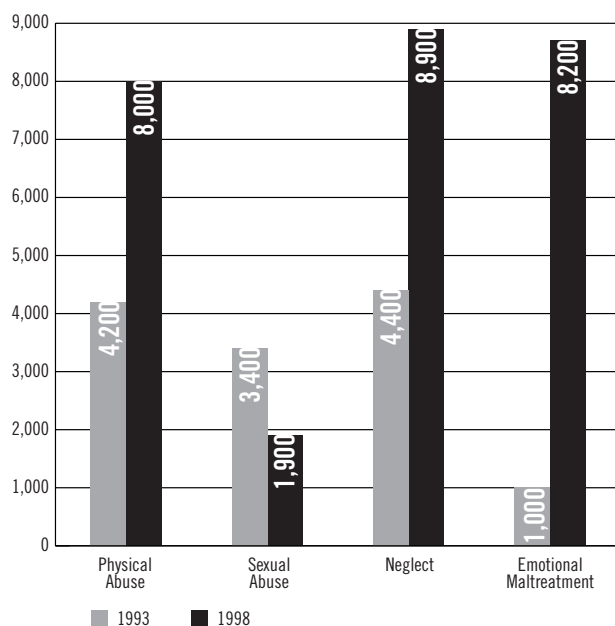
The number of substantiated cases of physical abuse nearly doubled, from an estimated 4,200 in 1993 to 8,000 in 1998. In 1998, 72% of substantiated investigations of physical abuse involved inappropriate punishment. In fact, nearly one-quarter of *all* substantiated cases of child maltreatment involved physical abuse caused by inappropriate punishment in 1998.

Figure 1  
Child maltreatment investigations  
by level of substantiation in Ontario, 1993/1998



Source: OIS 1993/1998, Table 1

Figure 2  
Major forms of substantiated maltreatment in Ontario, 1993/1998



Source: OIS 1993/1998, Tables 2a–2d

#### 44% Decrease in substantiated sexual abuse

The number of substantiated investigations of sexual abuse decreased by 44%, from 3,400 in 1993 to 1,900 in 1998. This is consistent with decreases reported across the United States.<sup>4</sup> Such a dramatic decrease requires careful analysis. While it could indicate that sexual abuse prevention programs and criminal charging policies may have acted to effectively deter sexual abusers, it is also possible these same policies are causing victims and their parents to be less willing to disclose and report sexual abuse.

#### Neglect cases have doubled

The number of substantiated investigations of neglect doubled between 1993 and 1998, from an estimated 4,400 investigations to 8,900. Increases were noted across all forms of neglect tracked by the OIS 1998, particularly in cases involving inadequate supervision, medical neglect and permitting maladaptive or criminal behaviour.

#### Emotional maltreatment up 870%

The most dramatic increase tracked has been with respect to investigations of emotional maltreatment. A nearly nine-fold increase brought the number of substantiated emotional maltreatment investigations from 1,000 investigations in 1993 to 8,700

investigations in 1998. Emotional maltreatment was recorded in 36% of *all* investigations of substantiated child maltreatment in 1998.

This increase has been largely driven by investigations involving exposure to domestic violence, a category not specifically included in the 1993 study. Exposure to domestic violence is not specifically mentioned in Ontario's *Child and Family Services Act*; however, the dramatic increase in these investigations reflects an important shift in public and professional attitudes towards the effects of domestic violence on children. This increase requires the development of services and inter-agency protocols designed to meet the needs of these children without further compromising the victimized parent.

- 1 Trocmé, N., McPhee, D., Tam, K.K., & Hay, T. (1994). *Ontario incidence study of reported child abuse and neglect (OIS 1993)*. Toronto: Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse.
- 2 Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., MacLaurin, B., Bartholomew, S., Ortiz, J., Thompson, J., Helfrich, W., & Daciuk, J. (2002). *The 1998 Ontario incidence study of reported child abuse and neglect (OIS 1998)*. Toronto: Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare, Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto.
- 3 Trocmé, N., MacLaurin, B., Fallon, B., Daciuk, J., Billingsley, D., Tourigny, M., Mayer, M., Wright, J., Barter, K., Burford, G., Hornick, J., Sullivan, R., & McKenzie, B. (2001). *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect*. Ottawa, ON: National Clearinghouse on Family Violence.
- 4 Jones, A. M., Finkelhor, D., & Kopiec, K. (2001). Why is sexual abuse declining? A survey of state child protection administrators. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 25, 1139-1158.

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This information sheet and the full report, entitled *The changing face of child welfare investigations in Ontario: The 1993 and 1998 Ontario incidence studies of reported child abuse and neglect*, can be downloaded from [www.cecw-cepb.ca/infosheets](http://www.cecw-cepb.ca/infosheets)



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