



Subtypes of Exposure to Intimate Partner Violence Investigated by Child Welfare Authorities 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 the characteristics of children and families and the service decisions across three distinct subtypes of exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV): direct witness to physical violence, indirect exposure to physical violence, and exposure to emotional violence. Exposure to intimate partner violence is the most investigated and substantiated form of maltreatment in Ontario. Child welfare service providers witnessed an explosion of reports of exposure to IPV in the early 2000s, likely due to growing awareness of the harmful impact of exposure to IPV on child development. While most research to date has examined exposure to IPV as a unified type of maltreatment, this information sheet examines in more detail subtypes of this form of maltreatment.

Findings²

Figure 1 displays the proportion of exposure to IPV investigations that focused on the three subtypes. The majority (54% or an estimated 16,860 investigations) of exposure to IPV investigations focus on exposure to emotional violence, while approximately one-third (32% or an estimated 9,884 investigations) involved a concern that a child had directly witnessed physical violence.

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.

² Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding. Estimates may not add up to totals due to missing data. Estimates under 100 are not reported because they are unreliable (as indicated by a dash).

Figure 1

Investigated subtypes of exposure to intimate partner violence in Ontario in 2013 (n=31,301)

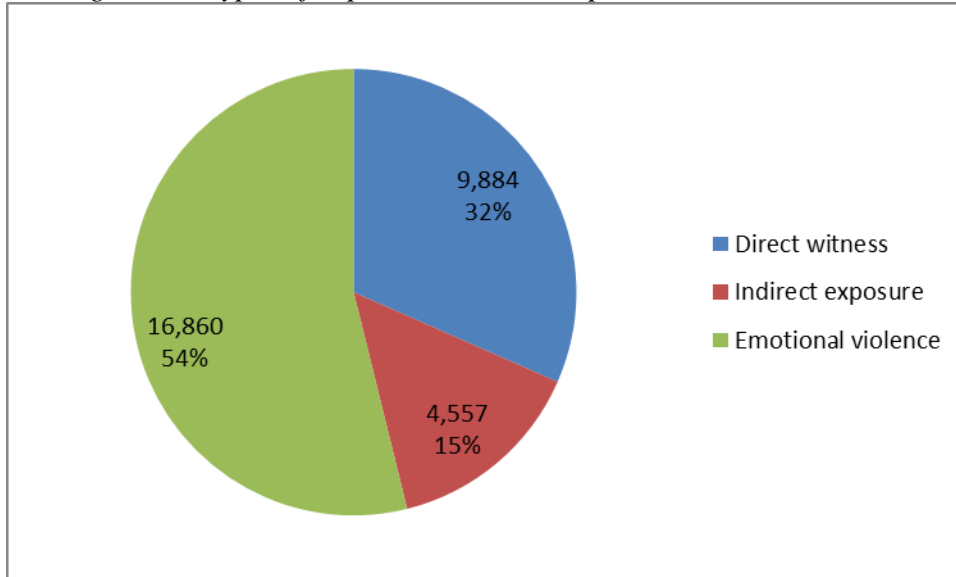


Table 1 presents a comparison of the demographic information of primary caregivers involved in investigations of the three subtypes of exposure to IPV, and Table 2 compares the demographics of children involved in these investigations. Several significant differences emerged. Investigations of emotional violence were significantly more likely to involve White children and White caregivers who primarily spoke English at home. Investigations of children directly witnessing physical violence, on the other hand, were more likely to involve children and primary caregivers of diverse ethnic backgrounds (Arab, West Asian, South Asian, Chinese, Southeast Asian, and other East Asian). Almost one-quarter of investigations of directly witnessing physical violence involved a caregiver whose primary language was neither English nor French (22%, an estimated 2,162 investigations).

Table 1

Primary caregiver demographics in all exposure to IPV investigations in Ontario in 2013 (n=31,301)

	Direct witness (n=9,884)		Indirect exposure (n=4,557)		Emotional violence (n=16,860)			
	Estimate	Column %	Estimate	Column %	Estimate	Column %	Chi-Square	Sig
Primary Caregiver Demographics								
Age								
Under 21	394	4%	255	6%	436	3%	23.81	0.022
22-30	3,094	31%	1,626	36%	4,921	29%		
31-40	4,137	42%	2,068	45%	7,038	42%		
41-50	2,054	21%	513	11%	3,985	24%		
51-60	142	1%	-	-	297	2%		
60 and over	-	-	-	-	170	1%		
Gender								
Male	721	7%	217	5%	1,200	7%	1.52	0.469
Female	9,163	93%	4,340	95%	15,660	93%		
Ethno-racial status								
White	4,967	50%	2,824	62%	11,783	70%	76.74	<.001
Black	1,033	10%	309	7%	1,051	6%		
Aboriginal	706	7%	271	6%	928	6%		
Latin American	393	4%	185	4%	1,031	6%		
Arab, West Asian & South Asian	1,326	13%	599	13%	1,100	7%		
Chinese & South East/East Asian	1,228	12%	369	8%	542	3%		
Primary language								
English	7,673	78%	3,779	83%	15,183	90%	41.03	<.001
French	-	-	-	-	217	1%		
Other	2,162	22%	716	16%	1,459	9%		
If p<.05, there is a statistically significant difference among the three subtypes of IPV on the variable of interest. Significant p-values are bolded.								

Table 2

Child demographics in all exposure to IPV investigations in Ontario in 2013 (n=31,301)

	Direct witness (n=9,884)		Indirect exposure (n=4,557)		Emotional violence (n=16,860)			
	Estimate	Column %	Estimate	Column %	Estimate	Column %	Chi-Square	Sig
Child Demographics								
Age								
Under 1	949	10%	345	8%	1,174	7%	7.27	0.508
1-3	2,067	21%	1,183	26%	3,568	21%		
4-7	2,872	29%	1,301	29%	4,779	28%		
8-11	2,306	23%	987	22%	3,860	23%		
12-15	1,690	17%	742	16%	3,478	21%		
Gender								
Male	5,569	56%	1,858	41%	7,884	47%	15.33	<.001
Female	4,303	44%	2,685	59%	8,889	53%		
Ethno-racial status								
White	4,748	48%	2,481	54%	11,260	67%	75.6	<.001
Black	1,144	12%	628	14%	1,378	8%		
Aboriginal	761	8%	495	11%	1,225	7%		
Latin American	321	3%	185	4%	663	4%		
Arab, West Asian & South Asian	1,313	13%	426	9%	1,078	6%		
Chinese & South East/East Asian	1,156	12%	219	5%	487	3%		
If p<.05, there is a statistically significant difference among the three subtypes of IPV on the variable of interest. Significant p-values are bolded.								

The primary caregiver, second caregiver, and household risks are compared across investigations of exposure to IPV in Table 3. Investigations of indirect exposure to violence were significantly more likely to note risk factors for the primary caregiver (e.g., drug abuse, few social supports) and the second caregiver (e.g., alcohol abuse, drug abuse), as well as socioeconomic risks (e.g., public housing, housing transience, running out of money for basic necessities). Investigations of emotional violence tended to be less likely to note such risk factors, with one exception: custody disputes were significantly more likely to be noted in exposure to emotional violence investigations. In fact, one quarter (25%, an estimated 4,169 investigations) of these investigations involved a child custody dispute.

Consistent with the finding that exposure to emotional violence investigations more commonly involved custody disputes, these investigations were significantly more likely than other forms of IPV to be referred to child protection authorities by a custodial or non-custodial parent to the child (see Table 4). Direct witness to physical violence and indirect exposure to violence investigations were more likely to be referred to child protection by police. Indirect exposure to violence investigations were most likely to involve a police investigation and charges in addition to the child welfare investigation. However, there was no significant difference in the substantiation level of the child welfare investigation across the three subtypes of IPV.

Families involved in investigations of emotional violence were significantly more likely than families involved in other types of IPV investigations to have recurrent involvement in the child welfare system. Approximately two-thirds of families investigated for exposure to emotional violence had at least one previous family investigation (see Table 4).

Table 3

Household risks in all exposure to IPV investigations in Ontario in 2013 (n=31,301)

	Direct witness (n=9,884)		Indirect exposure (n=4,557)		Emotional violence (n=16,860)		Chi-Square	Sig
	Estimate	Column %	Estimate	Column %	Estimate	Column %		
Household Risks								
Primary Caregiver Risks								
Alcohol abuse	1,211	12%	517	11%	1,459	9%	4.94	0.085
Drug abuse	390	4%	438	10%	488	3%	16.72	<.001
Cognitive impairment	244	2%	-	-	197	1%	4.36	0.113
Mental health issue	1,931	20%	918	20%	2,756	16%	2.64	0.267
Few social supports	2,426	25%	1,728	38%	3,398	20%	26.33	<.001
History of foster/group care	575	6%	473	10%	721	4%	10.88	0.004
Second Caregiver Risks								
Alcohol abuse	2,008	20%	1,253	27%	2,470	15%	18.41	<.001
Drug abuse	1,279	13%	899	20%	1,438	9%	20.15	<.001
Cognitive impairment	189	2%	202	4%	365	2%	3.29	0.193
Mental health issue	1,461	15%	609	13%	2,124	13%	1.03	0.598
Few social supports	1,814	18%	740	16%	1,823	11%	13.01	0.001
History of foster/group care	246	2%	-	-	126	1%	7.22	0.027
Family Risks								
Child custody dispute	995	10%	191	4%	4,169	25%	68.86	<.001
Socioeconomic Risks								
Public housing/living w family	1,697	17%	1,189	26%	2,308	14%	16.83	<.001
Home overcrowding	1,128	11%	550	12%	860	5%	18.5	<.001
Transience (at least one move)	2,660	27%	1,603	35%	3,837	23%	12.31	0.002
Ran out of money	787	8%	620	14%	1,220	7%	7.11	0.029
Social assistance/no income	3,106	31%	1,375	30%	4,491	27%	3.42	0.198
If p<.05, there is a statistically significant difference among the three subtypes of IPV on the variable of interest. Significant p-values are bolded.								

Table 4

Investigation characteristics in all exposure to IPV investigations in Ontario in 2013 (n=31,301)

	Direct witness (n=9,884)		Indirect exposure (n=4,557)		Emotional violence (n=16,860)		Chi-Square	Sig
	Estimate	Column %	Estimate	Column %	Estimate	Column %		
Referral source								
Custodial parent	556	6%	126	3%	2,999	18%	55.87	<.001
Non-custodial parent	-	-	-	-	785	5%	21.27	<.001
Relative/neighbour/friend	181	2%	439	10%	668	4%	18.79	<.001
Community service prof	342	3%	-	-	1,579	9%	26.13	<.001
Health professional	522	5%	136	3%	468	3%	4.76	0.093
School	1,277	13%	300	7%	1,219	7%	12.04	0.002
Other child welfare	455	5%	151	3%	711	4%	0.68	0.711
Police	6,156	62%	3,259	72%	8,885	53%	25.34	<.001
Recurrence								
Prev. family investigation	5,560	56%	2,759	61%	10,917	65%	8.07	0.018
Prev. substantiated child investigation	3,593	36%	1,622	36%	5,926	35%	0.169	0.919
Service Outcomes								
Case transfer	3,245	33%	1,960	43%	4,352	26%	22.29	<.001
At least one referral	5,938	60%	3,061	67%	8,738	52%	17.38	<.001
Placement	162	2%	-	-	190	1%	1.98	0.74
Substantiation and charges								
Substantiation								
Unfounded	2,567	26%	990	22%	4,742	28%	8.92	0.063
Suspected	603	6%	330	7%	1,625	10%		
Substantiated	6,714	68%	3,237	71%	10,492	62%		
Police involvement								
None	2,853	29%	1,016	22%	9,962	59%	295.16	<.001
Investigation	5,215	53%	2,066	45%	1,560	9%		
Charges	1,761	18%	1,439	32%	5,179	31%		
If p<.05, there is a statistically significant difference among the three subtypes of IPV on the variable of interest. Significant p-values are bolded.								

Table 5 focuses exclusively on *substantiated* IPV investigations (n=20,433) and describes various characteristics of the maltreatment experience. Across all IPV types, most investigations only substantiated the one form of IPV and did not substantiate co-occurring forms of maltreatment (e.g., physical abuse). Exposure to emotional violence investigations were more likely to list the primary and secondary caregivers as perpetrators, whereas direct witness and indirect exposure to physical violence investigations typically identified the second caregiver or another individual (e.g., a boyfriend who lives outside the home) as the perpetrator. Only a small proportion of direct and indirect exposure to physical violence investigations identified the primary caregiver as a perpetrator. Emotional violence investigations were also more likely to involve repeated incidents as opposed to a single incident of violence, and more likely to note that the child displayed mental or emotional harm as a result of maltreatment. Further, emotional violence investigations were significantly more likely to note that the child was at risk of future maltreatment.

Table 5

Maltreatment characteristics in substantiated exposure to IPV investigations in Ontario in 2013 (n=20,443)

	Direct witness (n=6,714)		Indirect exposure (n=3,237)		Emotional violence (n=10,492)		Chi-Square	Sig
	Estimate	Column %	Estimate	Column %	Estimate	Column %		
Perpetrators								
Primary caregiver	1,708	25%	440	14%	4,589	44%	54.30	<.001
Second caregiver	3,981	59%	2,254	70%	5,174	49%	20.00	<.001
Other	2,334	35%	869	27%	5,112	49%	26.23	<.001
Duration								
Single incident	3,448	51%	2,066	64%	3,120	30%	64.06	<.001
Multiple incidents	3,266	49%	1,167	36%	7,345	70%		
Co-occurring forms								
Only substantiated IPV	6,306	94%	2,843	88%	9,435	90%	5.54	0.063
Multiple substantiated types	408	6%	394	12%	1,057	10%		
Harm								
Mental/emotional	2,341	35%	722	22%	4,457	42%	19.38	<.001
Physical	-	-	-	-	158	2%	4.46	0.108
Risk of Future Maltreatment								
No	3,522	52%	1,603	50%	4,050	39%	16.54	0.002
Yes	2,298	34%	1,106	34%	4,191	40%		
Unknown	895	13%	527	16%	2,251	21%		

If $p < .05$, there is a statistically significant difference among the three subtypes of IPV on the variable of interest. Significant p-values are bolded.

Table 6 presents a comparison of child functioning concerns in investigations of exposure to IPV. This analysis focused more narrowly on *substantiated* IPV investigations involving children *age five and older* (n=13,159), because functioning concerns were rarely identified in children under age five. There were few significant differences in functioning issues across the three subtypes of IPV with one exception: children exposed to emotional violence were more likely to suffer from internalizing concerns (i.e., depression, anxiety, withdrawal, suicidal thoughts, self-harming behaviour, attachment issues).

Table 6

Functioning issues in children age 5 and older involved in substantiated IPV investigations in Ontario in 2013 (n=13,159)

	Direct witness (n=4,055)		Indirect exposure (n=1,673)		Emotional violence (n=7,431)		Chi-Square	Sig
	Estimate	Column %	Estimate	Column %	Estimate	Column %		
Internalizing concerns	602	15%	229	14%	1,946	26%	11.28	0.004
Externalizing concerns	380	9%	-	-	759	10%	2.52	0.283
Developmental issues	335	8%	115	7%	858	12%	2.11	0.349
ADD/ADHD	542	13%	170	10%	762	10%	1.25	0.535
Academic difficulties	659	16%	232	14%	1,424	19%	1.35	0.510

If $p < .05$, there is a statistically significant difference among the three subtypes of IPV on the variable of interest. Significant p-values are bolded.

At the bivariate level, investigations focusing on exposure to emotional violence were less likely to be transferred to ongoing child welfare services and less likely to result in a referral to a specialized service provider (see Table 4). To better understand this finding, a logistic regression analysis was conducted predicting case transfer (see Table 7). Only substantiated IPV investigations were included in the analysis for greater specificity (n=20,443). The findings indicate that even after controlling for police involvement, case history, ethno-racial status of the child, and child and family risks, emotional violence investigations were significantly less likely to be transferred to ongoing child welfare services.

Table 7
Logistic regression predicting case transfer in substantiated IPV investigations in Ontario in 2013 (n=20,443)

	B	S.E.	Wald	Odds Ratio	Sig
Police involvement					
Police referral to CW	-0.06	0.18	0.11	0.94	0.735
No police investigation (reference)					
Investigation only	-1.13	0.25	20.36	0.32	<.001
Charges	-0.94	0.24	14.97	0.39	<.001
Case history					
At least one previous family invest	0.70	0.17	16.43	2.01	<.001
Ethno-racial status					
White (reference)					
Black	0.03	0.30	0.01	1.04	0.909
Aboriginal	-0.28	0.32	0.79	0.76	0.376
Latin American	-0.66	0.40	2.76	0.52	0.097
Arab, West Asian & South Asian	-0.41	0.37	1.21	0.67	0.272
Chinese & South East/East Asian	-0.29	0.33	0.79	0.75	0.375
Child and family risks					
PC few social supports	0.67	0.17	14.91	1.96	<.001
Public housing/living w family	0.24	0.23	1.05	1.27	0.306
Home overcrowding	0.30	0.27	1.24	1.35	0.266
Transience (at least one move)	0.90	0.18	25.82	2.45	<.001
Custody dispute	-0.28	0.22	1.58	0.76	0.209
Child internalizing problems	0.35	0.22	2.41	1.41	0.120
IPV subtypes					
Direct witness (reference)					
Indirect exposure	-0.26	0.24	1.17	0.77	0.280
Emotional violence	-0.94	0.23	17.42	0.39	<.001

If p<.05, the odds ratio is significant. Significant p-values are bolded.

Background

Due to changes in investigation mandates and practices over the last 15 years, the OIS-2008 and OIS-2013 differed from previous cycles in that they 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-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.

Workers were asked to provide information about the maltreatment-related allegations and the characteristics of the investigated child and family. Workers also provided information on several short-term investigation outcomes including referrals to specialized services, ongoing child welfare services, and placement in out-of-home care.

Maltreatment investigations and risk of future maltreatment investigations were tracked separately. 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.

The present analysis examined only maltreatment investigations that focused exposure to IPV (n=1,293). When weights were applied to the sample of 1,293 investigations, there were an estimated 31,301 exposure to IPV investigations involving children age zero to 15 in Ontario in 2013.

Chi-square analysis was used to test whether there were statistically significant differences among the three subtypes of exposure to IPV. Logistic regression analysis was used to examine

differences in service provision for the three subtypes when controlling for the clinical concerns of the case.

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: Fallon, B., & Van Wert, M. (2017). Subtypes of Exposure to Intimate Partner Violence Investigated by Child Welfare Authorities in Ontario in 2013. CWRP Information Sheet 185E. Toronto, ON: Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal.