

# Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 1993/1998

## Source of Referrals

Prepared by Nico Trocmé, Teresa Neves, Barbara Fallon, Bruce MacLaurin and Sue Sullivan

### OIS Background

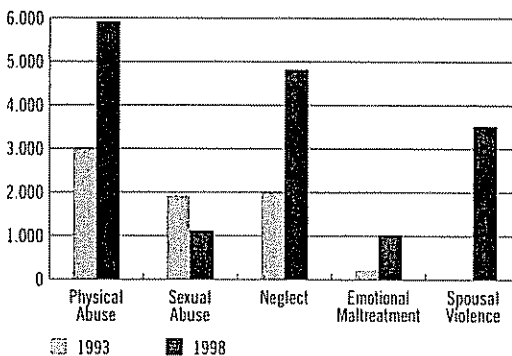
Child welfare caseloads are increasing across Canada but the factors driving this increase are poorly understood. This is one in a series of fact sheets highlighting key findings from Ontario-wide studies of child welfare investigations conducted in 1993 and 1998.

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 15 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.

Between 1993 and 1998, the estimated number of investigations of child maltreatment substantiated by children's aid societies (CASs) in Ontario nearly doubled, rising from 12,300 to 24,400. Analysis of reporting patterns underlying this increase points to a significant shift in reporting practices by professionals. Figures 1 and 2 examine the increase in major forms of substantiated maltreatment as a function of referrals from professionals compared to referrals from parents, victims, relatives and family acquaintances.

Figure 3 provides a detailed breakdown of substantiated investigations by source of referral in Ontario in 1998. Referrals from schools and the police accounted for 45% of substantiated cases.

Figure 1  
Reports from Professionals in Substantiated Child Maltreatment Investigations in Ontario, 1993/1998

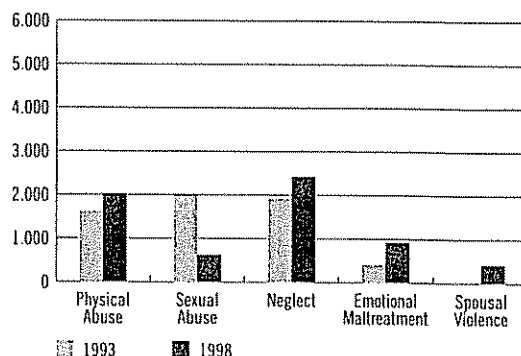


Source: OIS 1998, Table 8-1

### Reports from Professionals

In 1993, reports from professionals accounted for just over half of the all substantiated investigations of child maltreatment, compared with nearly three-quarters of substantiated investigations in 1998. Across all forms of maltreatment, other than child sexual abuse, reports from professionals account for the majority of new cases of substantiated maltreatment being served by CASs in Ontario. In cases of sexual victimization, reports from both sources have decreased significantly, with the decrease in cases reported by parents, victims, relatives and family acquaintances being most pronounced at 70%.

Figure 2  
Reports from Family, Relatives or Acquaintances in Substantiated Child Maltreatment Investigations in Ontario, 1993/1998

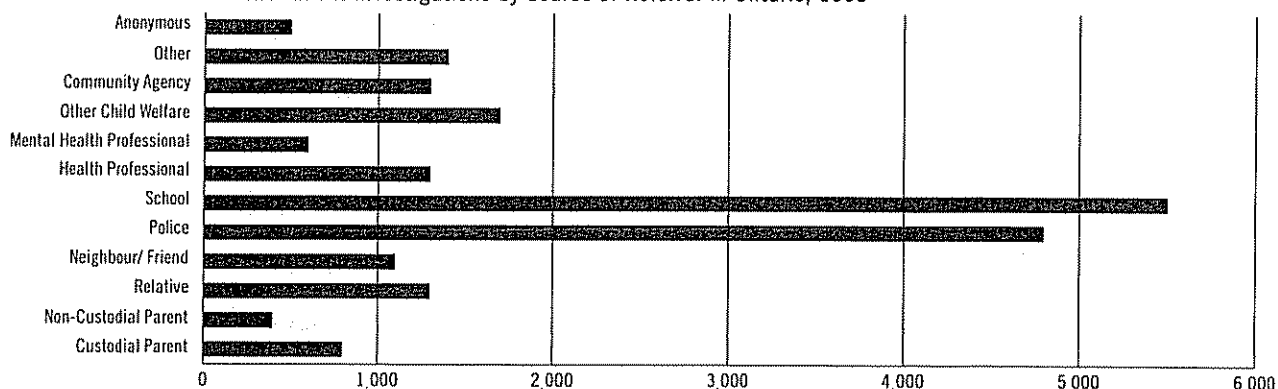


Source: OIS 1998, Table 8-1



Figure 3

Substantiated Child Maltreatment Investigations by Source of Referral in Ontario, 1998



Source: OIS 1998, Table 8-1

### Domestic Violence Cases

The most significant change in child welfare caseloads between 1993 and 1998 has been the emergence of exposure to domestic violence as a leading form of child maltreatment. Nearly half of the additional investigations of substantiated maltreatment documented in the *OIS 1998* are cases involving exposure to family violence. Reports from professionals account for nearly 90% of these cases. As with the recognition of sexual abuse in the 1980s, there is an increased understanding and awareness of the harmful effects on children of exposure to family violence.<sup>4</sup>

### Neglect Cases

Neglect is the second fastest growing form of substantiated maltreatment being served by Ontario CASs. Substantiated investigations of neglect reported by family, relatives and acquaintances increased 26% from 1993 to 1998. During the same period, the number of reports from professionals increased 140%, from 2,000 to 4,800. The significant increase in rates of neglect may be a result of a growing awareness on the part of professionals, driven in part by a series of tragic inquests focusing on child neglect. A more explicit reference to neglect in Ontario's child welfare legislation and the introduction of neglect-specific eligibility standards in the provincial risk assessment model could also be factors.

- 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., Bater, 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 Fantuzzo, J. W., & Mohr, W. K. (1999). Prevalence and effects of child exposure to domestic violence. *The Future of Children*, 9, 21-32.

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### Responsibility to Report a Child in Need of Protection, *Child and Family Services Act (CFSA)*

The CFSA states that members of the public, including professionals who work with children, have an obligation to report any suspected child abuse or neglect to a children's aid society.

Section 72 of the *Child and Family Services Amendment Act (Child Welfare Reform), 1999* requires that any person who suspects that a child is in need of protection must report their suspicion. The duty to report requires that the report be made *directly* to a CAS, and that any *new* incidents be reported even if a previous report has been made.



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# Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 1993/1998

## Outcomes of Investigations

Prepared by Nico Trocmé, Jasmine Siddiqi, Barbara Fallon, Bruce MacLaurin and Sue Sullivan

### 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 15 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.

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. In both the *OIS 1993* and the *OIS 1998*, information was collected about interventions that occurred during the investigation.

### Previous CAS Contact in 58% of Investigations

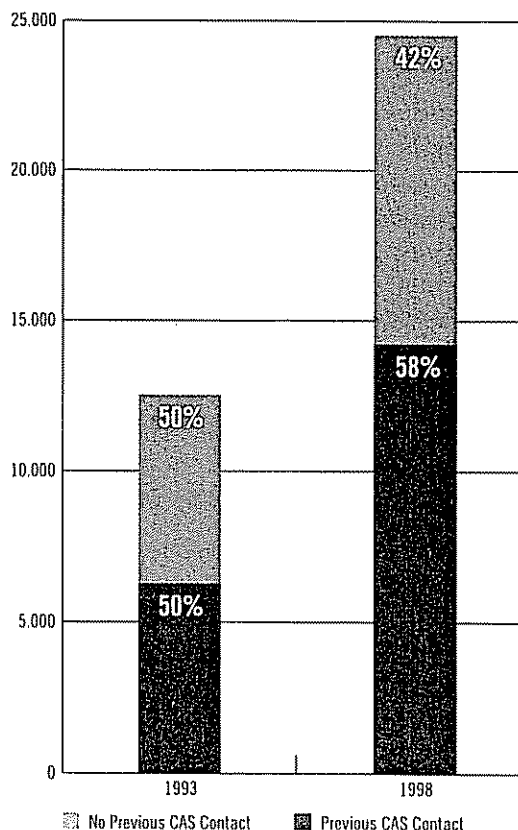
Between 1993 and 1998, there was a significant increase in the number of victims of maltreatment whose families had previous involvement with a children's aid society (CAS). The number of substantiated investigations with families who had previously been involved with a CAS increased 129%, from 6,200 in 1993 to 14,200 in 1998 (Figure 1).

Previous contact does not necessarily mean the child had been previously abused or neglected, as the investigation may have been unsubstantiated or involved a sibling.

### Increase in Ongoing Services

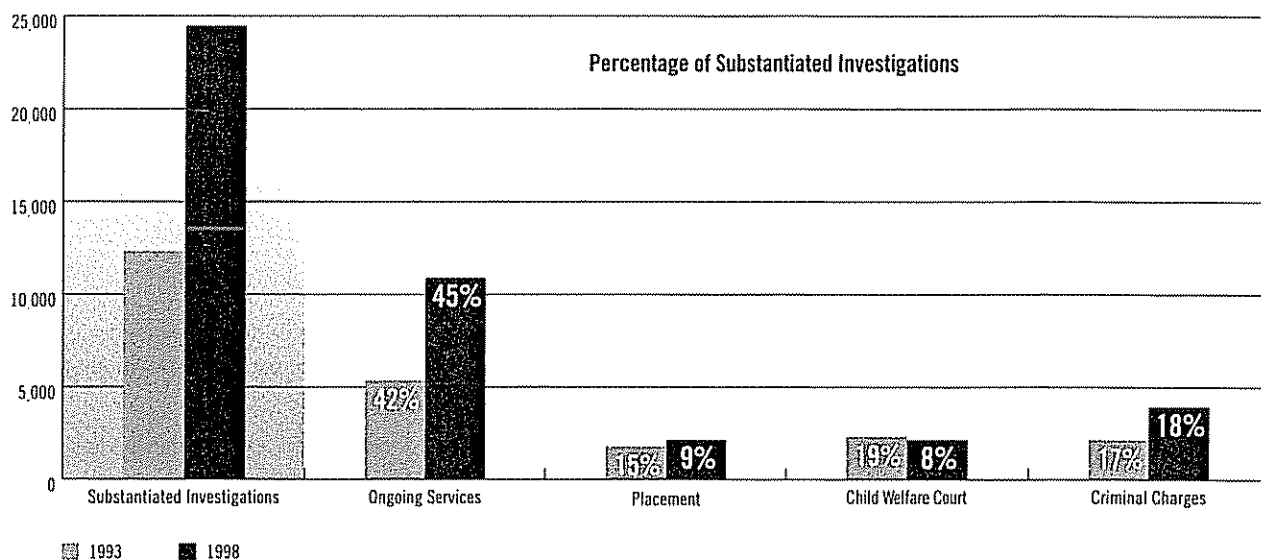
Between 1993 and 1998, the number of substantiated child maltreatment investigations resulting in a decision to provide ongoing

Figure 1  
Substantiated Child Maltreatment Investigations with Previous CAS Contact in Ontario, 1993/1998



Source: *OIS 1993/1998*, Table 5

Figure 2  
Outcomes for Substantiated Child Maltreatment Investigations in Ontario, 1993/1998



Source: OIS 1993/1998, Table 6

services doubled, from 5,200 to 10,900. In 1998, 45% of all substantiated investigations led to ongoing services (Figure 2).

### Placement in Care

The OIS 1993 and the OIS 1998 also tracked out-of-home placements and court activities during the investigations. During 1993, 1,800 substantiated investigations led to children being placed in out-of-home care, compared to 2,200 in 1998.

Considering the significant increase in cases of substantiated maltreatment, the proportion of victims placed in care actually decreased, from 15% in 1993, to 9% in 1998. It is important to note that since 1998, the number of children placed in care has increased dramatically. After a period of relative stability, the number of children in care has increased from an average of 10,000 on any given day, to over 16,000 in 2002.<sup>4</sup>

### Increasing Use of Criminal Courts

The number of investigations resulting in child welfare court proceedings decreased from 2,300 in 1993 to 2,000 in 1998. In contrast, the use of criminal courts increased significantly. The number of investigations leading to criminal charges increased from 2,100 in 1993 to 4,000 in 1998.

- 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., Bater, 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 See Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., Nutter, B., MacLaurin, B., & Thompson, J. (1999). *Outcomes for child welfare services in Ontario*. Toronto: Bell Canada Child Welfare Research Unit, Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto; and Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies' Web site: <http://www.oacas.org/resources/casstats.htm>

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

## Maltreatment rates

Nico Trocmé, Jasmine Siddiqi, Barbara Fallon, Bruce MacLaurin, and Sue Sullivan

### 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

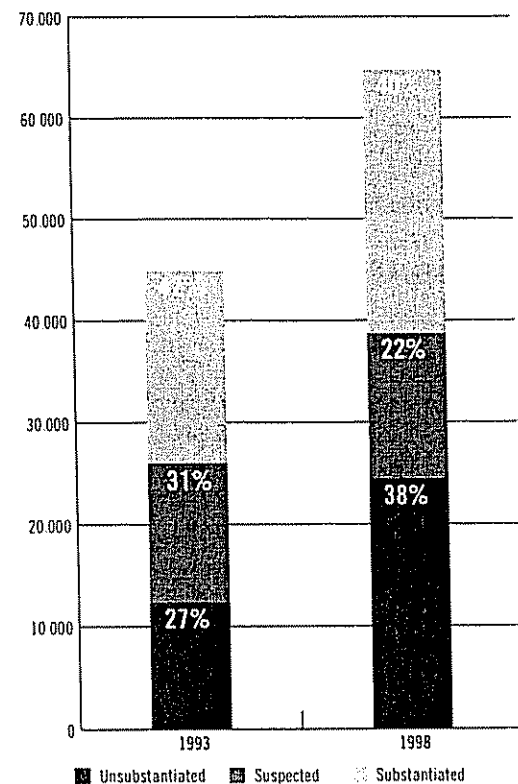
The increase in substantiated maltreatment documented by the *OIS 1993* and *OIS 1998* varies considerably by form of maltreatment.

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

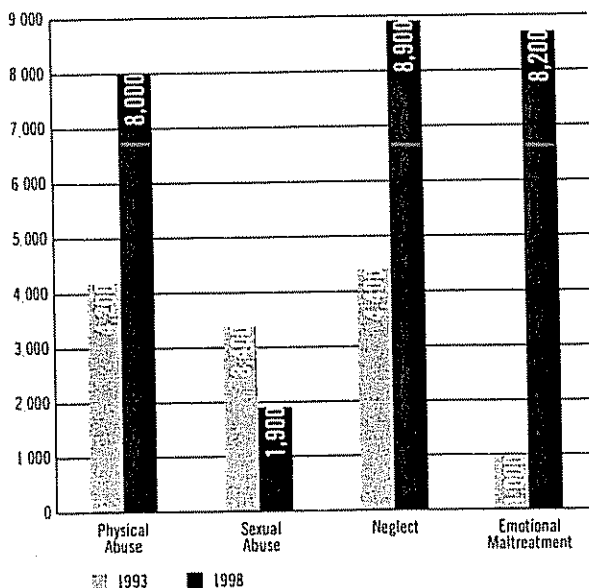
The number of substantiated cases of physical abuse nearly doubled, from an estimated 4,200 in 1993 to 8,000 in 1998. In 1998, 72% of substantiated investigations of physical abuse involved inappropriate punishment. In fact, nearly one-quarter of *all* substantiated cases of child maltreatment involved 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](http://www.cecw-cepb.ca)



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maltreatment. The resulting singular emphasis on reporting and investigation seems to occur even in societies in which a majority of children lack adequate nutrition and shelter.

### The Consequences of a Policy Without Reason

Whatever the basis, though, for the initial misjudgments about the nature and frequency of child abuse and neglect, the result has been a formal child protection system that is increasingly ill-matched to the needs of the children and families who enter it. This point can be illustrated by imagining a prototypical case in Child Protective Services. Ms. Jones calls CPS and makes the following report:

I'm calling because I'm very concerned about the Williams children, who are aged 8 and 5 and who live next door. Their mother is single, and she is an unskilled assembly-line worker at a nearby factory. When Ms. Williams goes to work at about 6:00 every morning, she leaves the children alone until it is time for them to go to school. There are times when they show up at my doorstep. From the way that they eat the snacks that I give them, I suspect that they're not getting enough to eat. It's been cold, but the only outer garments that they've worn have been tattered thin sweaters.

I doubt if Ms. Williams makes more than seven or eight dollars an hour. She recently went for weeks without any work at all, because the plant furloughed many of the workers in response to low sales of the goods made there. I don't know Ms. Williams very well, but she seems to have some chronic health problems, and she often appears depressed. I don't think that she has any relatives nearby.

Ms. Jones's reason for calling CPS is straightforward: she wants help for the Williams family. She undoubtedly imagines that the social worker who takes the call will be able quickly to arrange some basic services: child care a few hours a day, some food, perhaps an emergency income subsidy, and a sympathetic ear for Ms. Williams.

But what actually happens? The call is treated as an allegation of wrongdoing, not a concerned neighbor's plea for help. The social worker's principal legal obligation is to collect evidence to determine whether neglect has occurred. If the decision is made that there was no neglect, the case will be closed. Even if neglect is substantiated, there is a good chance that no further "service" will be offered. If there is, it will often be a required parent education class, which will also be viewed as an opportunity to gather evidence—simply checking off whether Ms. Williams attends the classes—and which will also bear little if any relation to the particular threats to safety that her children may be experiencing.

Meanwhile, Ms. Jones takes no other action to help the family—not even checking to see how they're doing—because she is satisfied that she has fulfilled her legal and moral obligation. Moreover, she believes that the social worker is an expert who will ensure that necessary services are delivered. Indeed, Ms. Jones is apt to think that any further action on her part may interfere with the help that she understands that CPS is supposed to give.

In short, there is no logical relation between the problems presented and the response undertaken. *The United States and other societies that have adopted the central tenets of U.S. child protection policy have an enormously successful calamitous system* that has neither a realistic scientific foundation nor well articulated normative underpinnings. On the one hand, millions of people pick up the telephone each year to let public authorities know about their concerns about particular children and families. Any policy that elicits that much citizen involvement would ordinarily be perceived to be a great success. On the other hand, failures abound in the child protection system—so much so that the U.S. Advisory Board proclaimed a national emergency more than a decade ago on the basis of the crisis it identified.

throughout the child protection system, broadly defined.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, the situation today is only marginally better.<sup>11</sup>

In diagnosing “chronic and critical multiple organ failure”<sup>12</sup> within the U.S. child protection system, the U.S. Advisory Board made clear that the principal origins of the problem lay in neither a failure of will (although the Board did call for greater collective and personal exercise of responsibility to address the crisis) nor a dearth of resources (although the Board did note inadequate funding in some domains, notably research). Instead, the Board held that the recurring crisis in the child protection system is the product of errors in design—specifically, making mandated reporting and investigation the centerpieces of the system:

The most serious shortcoming of the nation’s system of intervention on behalf of children is that it depends upon a reporting and response process that has punitive connotations and requires massive resources dedicated to the investigation of allegations. State and County child welfare programs have *not* been designed to get immediate help to families based on voluntary requests for assistance. As a result, it has become far easier to pick up the telephone to report one’s neighbor for child abuse than it is for that neighbor to pick up the telephone and receive help before the abuse happens.<sup>13</sup>

*The result of the current design of the child protection system is that investigation often seems to occur for its own sake, without any realistic hope of meaningful treatment to prevent the recurrence of maltreatment or to ameliorate its effects, even if the report of suspected maltreatment is validated.*<sup>14</sup>

After decades of injunctions to report cases of suspected child maltreatment to CPS, both the general public and the relevant professions equate child protection with reporting and investigation. Child protection is perceived, therefore, as primarily the responsibility of CPS. This perception ironically and tragically diminishes the safety of children, given (a) the multiplicity of problems (and, therefore, the need for diverse sources of help) that typically are present in child maltreatment (especially neglect) cases, (b) the impossibility of constant monitoring of families by CPS, and (c) the probable reduction in direct action by the general public and by professionals outside CPS to reduce risk to children. Child protection is now perceived by most adults as a coercive dramatic act, not a part of everyday life.

CPS itself is diverted from the task of increasing the safety of children. It is largely engaged instead, as a matter of legal obligation, in evidence gathering and preparation of actual or potential court cases.<sup>15</sup> Vast human and fiscal resources that could be spent in prevention or treatment are instead

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<sup>10</sup>U.S. ADVISORY BOARD ON CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT, CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT: CRITICAL FIRST STEPS IN RESPONSE TO A NATIONAL EMERGENCY (1990).

<sup>11</sup>See generally Gary B. Melton, *Chronic Neglect of Family Violence: More than a Decade of Reports to Guide U.S. Policy*, 26 CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT 569 (2002).

<sup>12</sup>U.S. ADVISORY BOARD, *supra* note 10, at 2.

<sup>13</sup>*Id.* at 80.

<sup>14</sup>U.S. ADVISORY BOARD, *supra* note 9, at 10-11.

<sup>15</sup>Analogous effects may occur on health professionals’ attention. A panel of the Institute of Medicine concluded that mandated reporting laws may increase consideration of child maltreatment in professional education but that this increased coverage often reflects a “focus on required reporting



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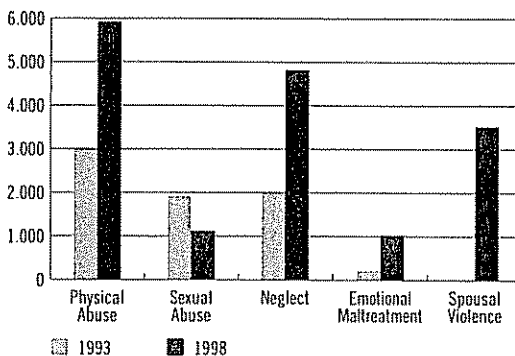
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Figure 3 provides a detailed breakdown of substantiated investigations by source of referral in Ontario in 1998. Referrals from schools and the police accounted for 45% of substantiated cases.

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Reports from Professionals in Substantiated Child Maltreatment Investigations in Ontario, 1993/1998

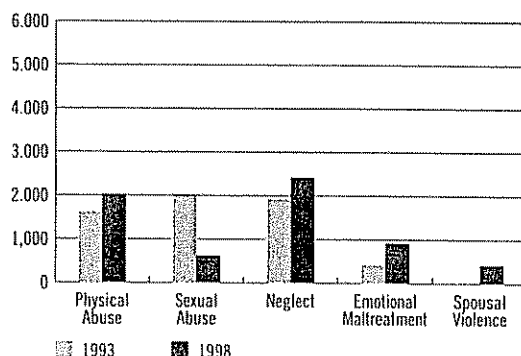


Source: OIS 1998, Table 8-1

### Reports from Professionals

In 1993, reports from professionals accounted for just over half of the all substantiated investigations of child maltreatment, compared with nearly three-quarters of substantiated investigations in 1998. Across all forms of maltreatment, other than child sexual abuse, reports from professionals account for the majority of new cases of substantiated maltreatment being served by CASs in Ontario. In cases of sexual victimization, reports from both sources have decreased significantly, with the decrease in cases reported by parents, victims, relatives and family acquaintances being most pronounced at 70%.

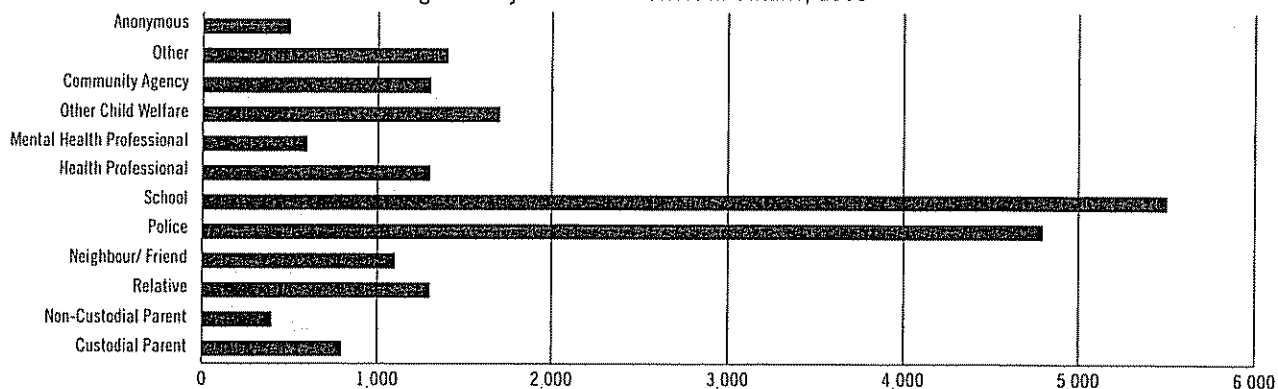
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Reports from Family, Relatives or Acquaintances in Substantiated Child Maltreatment Investigations in Ontario, 1993/1998



Source: OIS 1998, Table 8-1

Figure 3

Substantiated Child Maltreatment Investigations by Source of Referral in Ontario, 1998



Source: OIS 1998, Table 8-1

### Domestic Violence Cases

The most significant change in child welfare caseloads between 1993 and 1998 has been the emergence of exposure to domestic violence as a leading form of child maltreatment. Nearly half of the additional investigations of substantiated maltreatment documented in the *OIS 1998* are cases involving exposure to family violence. Reports from professionals account for nearly 90% of these cases. As with the recognition of sexual abuse in the 1980s, there is an increased understanding and awareness of the harmful effects on children of exposure to family violence.<sup>4</sup>

### Neglect Cases

Neglect is the second fastest growing form of substantiated maltreatment being served by Ontario CASs. Substantiated investigations of neglect reported by family, relatives and acquaintances increased 26% from 1993 to 1998. During the same period, the number of reports from professionals increased 140%, from 2,000 to 4,800. The significant increase in rates of neglect may be a result of a growing awareness on the part of professionals, driven in part by a series of tragic inquests focusing on child neglect. A more explicit reference to neglect in Ontario's child welfare legislation and the introduction of neglect-specific eligibility standards in the provincial risk assessment model could also be factors.

- 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, Bater, 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 Fantuzzo, J W, & Mohr, W K. (1999). Prevalence and effects of child exposure to domestic violence. *The Future of Children*, 9, 21-32.

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### Responsibility to Report a Child in Need of Protection, *Child and Family Services Act (CFSA)*

The CFSA states that members of the public, including professionals who work with children, have an obligation to report any suspected child abuse or neglect to a children's aid society.

Section 72 of the *Child and Family Services Amendment Act (Child Welfare Reform), 1999* requires that any person who suspects that a child is in need of protection must report their suspicion. The duty to report requires that the report be made *directly* to a CAS, and that any *new* incidents be reported even if a previous report has been made.



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# Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 1993/1998

## Outcomes of Investigations

Prepared by Nico Trocmé, Jasmine Siddiqi, Barbara Fallon, Bruce MacLaurin and Sue Sullivan

### 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 15 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.

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. In both the *OIS 1993* and the *OIS 1998*, information was collected about interventions that occurred during the investigation.

### Previous CAS Contact in 58% of Investigations

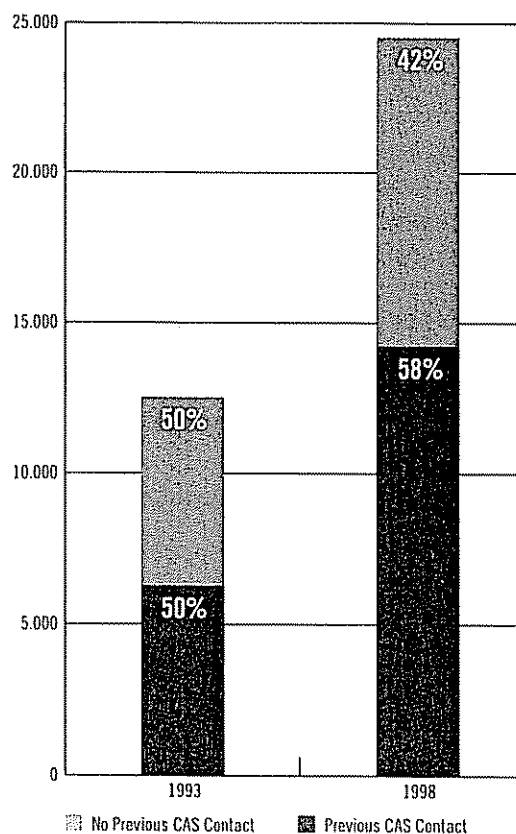
Between 1993 and 1998, there was a significant increase in the number of victims of maltreatment whose families had previous involvement with a children's aid society (CAS). The number of substantiated investigations with families who had previously been involved with a CAS increased 129%, from 6,200 in 1993 to 14,200 in 1998 (Figure 1).

Previous contact does not necessarily mean the child had been previously abused or neglected, as the investigation may have been unsubstantiated or involved a sibling.

### Increase in Ongoing Services

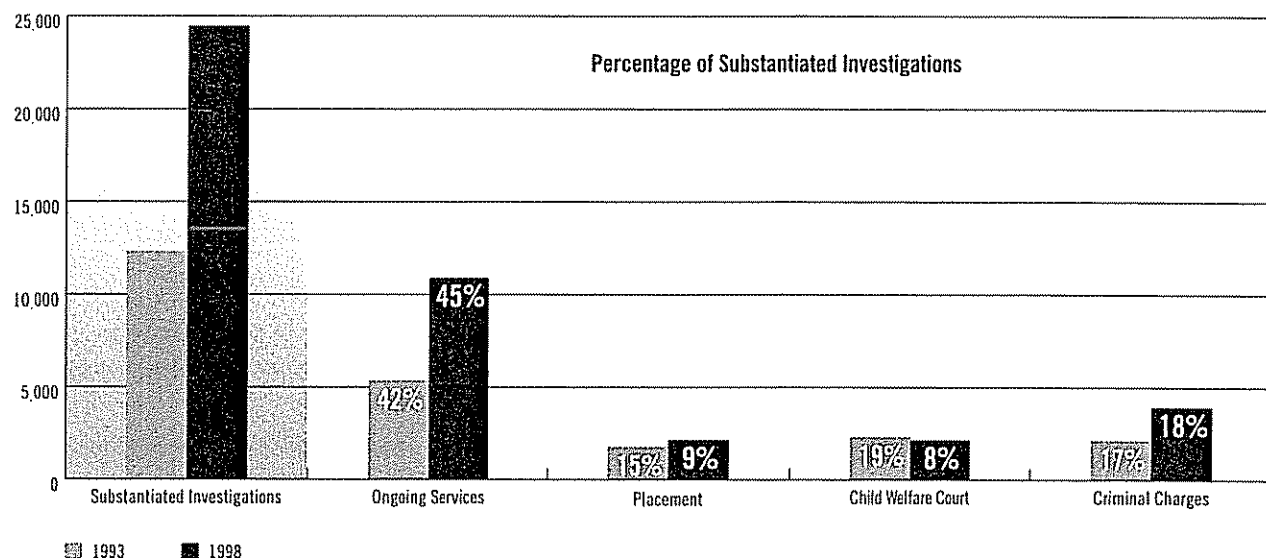
Between 1993 and 1998, the number of substantiated child maltreatment investigations resulting in a decision to provide ongoing

Figure 1  
Substantiated Child Maltreatment Investigations with Previous CAS Contact in Ontario, 1993/1998



Source: *OIS 1993/1998*, Table 5

Figure 2  
Outcomes for Substantiated Child Maltreatment Investigations in Ontario, 1993/1998



Source: OIS 1993/1998, Table 6

services doubled, from 5,200 to 10,900. In 1998, 45% of all substantiated investigations led to ongoing services (Figure 2).

### Placement in Care

The *OIS 1993* and the *OIS 1998* also tracked out-of-home placements and court activities during the investigations. During 1993, 1,800 substantiated investigations led to children being placed in out-of-home care, compared to 2,200 in 1998.

Considering the significant increase in cases of substantiated maltreatment, the proportion of victims placed in care actually decreased, from 15% in 1993, to 9% in 1998. It is important to note that since 1998, the number of children placed in care has increased dramatically. After a period of relative stability, the number of children in care has increased from an average of 10,000 on any given day, to over 16,000 in 2002.<sup>4</sup>

### Increasing Use of Criminal Courts

The number of investigations resulting in child welfare court proceedings decreased from 2,300 in 1993 to 2,000 in 1998. In contrast, the use of criminal courts increased significantly. The number of investigations leading to criminal charges increased from 2,100 in 1993 to 4,000 in 1998.

- 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., Bater, 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 See Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., Nutter, B., MacLaurin, B., & Thompson, J. (1999). *Outcomes for child welfare services in Ontario*. Toronto: Bell Canada Child Welfare Research Unit, Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto; and Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies' Web site: <http://www.oacas.org/resources/casstats.htm>

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

## Maltreatment rates

Nico Trocmé, Jasmine Siddiqi, Barbara Fallon, Bruce MacLaurin, and Sue Sullivan

### 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

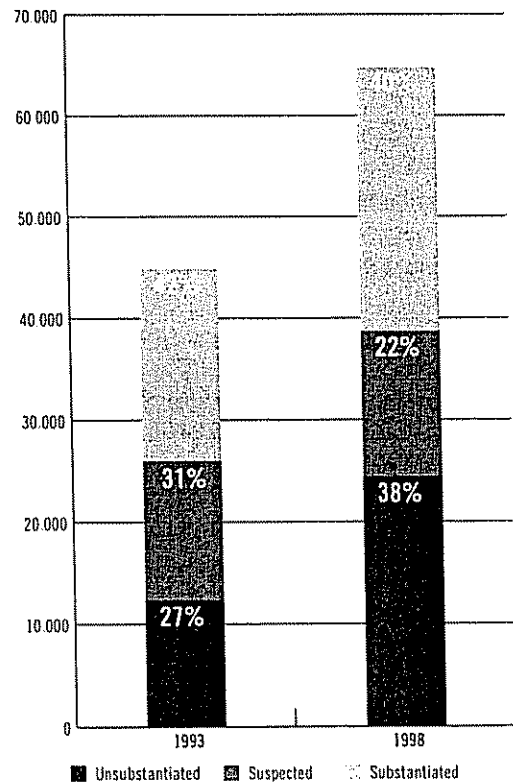
The increase in substantiated maltreatment documented by the *OIS 1993* and *OIS 1998* varies considerably by form of maltreatment.

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

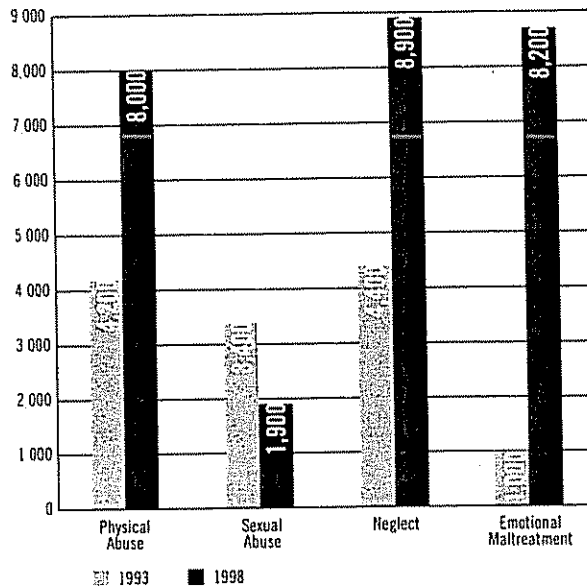
The number of substantiated cases of physical abuse nearly doubled, from an estimated 4,200 in 1993 to 8,000 in 1998. In 1998, 72% of substantiated investigations of physical abuse involved inappropriate punishment. In fact, nearly one-quarter of *all* substantiated cases of child maltreatment involved 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
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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](http://www.cecw-cepb.ca)



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