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Feature Article Part 3:

Associated Factors of Investigations Involving Intimate Partner Violence and Other Forms Of Maltreatment: Child, Family, Household, and Case Characteristics

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Introduction

Intimate partner violence is noted in a child maltreatment investigation when a child is exposed to an incidence of verbal or physical aggression between 2 or more adults in the home³. The co-occurrence of intimate partner violence (IPV) and child maltreatment intensifies the trauma experienced by children, compared with children who experience IPV alone³. IPV is linked to many negative developmental outcomes^{2,7}. Children exposed to IPV are at risk for more social challenges⁸, emotional issues^{1,8}, attachment issues³, behavioural disorders³, and academic challenges^{3,8}. Some researchers state that the involvement of child welfare services in matters related to IPV result in overly intrusive interventions, such as the removal of a child from their home, or increased involvement with child welfare services. Other research suggests that

children exposed to IPV alone do not receive more intrusive intervention, but require comparable support as children experiencing other forms of maltreatment^{2,4,6}.

The Alberta Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2008 (AIS-2008) is a provincial study examining the characteristics of reported child abuse and neglect⁵. The AIS-2008 dataset provides the opportunity to examine characteristics of children and families involved in IPV child investigations, as well as the short term outcomes. This analysis examines evidence supporting or challenging the use of child welfare services for children and families experiencing IPV in Alberta in 2008.

Methods

The AIS-2008 is the second provincial study on child abuse and neglect to be conducted in Alberta for children 17 years and younger⁵. This article presents select comparisons of child, family, household and case factors across 3 groups of substantiated child

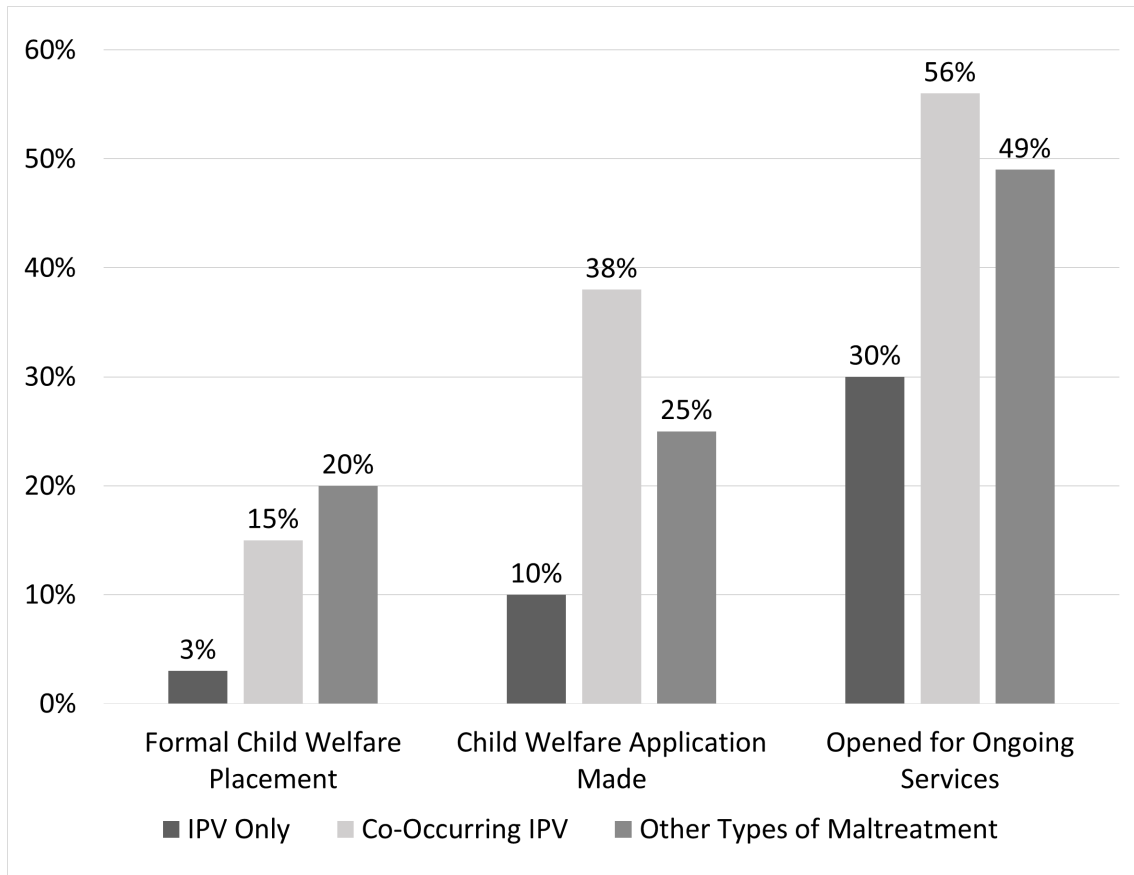


Figure 1:

Percentages of case characteristics include 14,404 child maltreatment substantiated investigations. This includes 3,898 IPV only investigations (27%), 2,302 co-occurring investigations (16%), and 8,204 other forms of maltreatment investigations (57%).

investigations. This includes: 1) IPV only child investigations where IPV was noted as the single child maltreatment concern; 2) co-occurring child investigations where IPV and at least one other form of child maltreatment (physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and emotional maltreatment) was noted; and 3) other forms of maltreatment child investigations involving other forms of child maltreatment excluding concerns of IPV. Child welfare services define IPV as a form of maltreatment if a child had allegedly been a direct witness to physical violence, had indirect exposure to physical violence, and/or exposure to emotional violence (including verbal abuse). The analyses presented in this article are based on annual and regionally weighted estimates of substantiated child investigations examining a total of 14,404 substantiated child maltreatment investigations. This includes 3,898 IPV only investigations (27%), 2,302 co-occurring investigations (16%), and 8,204

other forms of maltreatment investigations (57%). Bivariate analyses and Pearsons chi-squared tests were used to compare IPV investigations with co-occurring investigations and other forms of maltreatment investigations. For further information on the methodology of the AIS-2008 refer to Chapter 2 of the full report ⁵.

Results

Child welfare workers were asked to report on 9 caregiver risk factors at the time of the investigation. Victim and/or perpetrator of domestic violence was excluded as a household caregiver risk factor. Caregiver risk factors varied considerably between IPV only investigations, co-occurring investigations, and other forms of maltreatment investigations. For IPV only investigations, this included alcohol abuse (58%), few social supports (49%), and mental health

issues (35%). For co-occurring investigations, alcohol abuse (79%), mental health issues (56%), and few social supports (54%) were the top three concerns that were noted. Other forms of maltreatment investigations identified few social supports (45%), mental health issues (41%), and alcohol abuse (34%).

The level of harm was significantly lower for IPV only investigations than both co-occurring investigations and other forms of maltreatment investigations as observed in the following factors. Fifteen percent of IPV investigations noted severity of emotional harm requiring treatment, compared with 39% of co-occurring investigations, and 26% of other forms of maltreatment investigations. Estimates of severity of physical harm were too low to report for IPV only investigations. Sixty-six percent of IPV only investigations involved multiple maltreatment incidents, 88% in co-occurring investigations, and 70% in other forms of maltreatment investigations. Child investigations resulting in out-of-home placement greatly varied by each comparison group. Three percent of IPV only investigations noted formal child welfare placement, 15% in co-occurring investigations, and 20% in other forms of maltreatment investigations. Workers referred 30% of IPV only investigations to ongoing services compared to 56% of co-occurring, and 49% of other forms of maltreatment.

Discussion

The AIS-2008 dataset provides child, caregiver, household, and case factors associated with IPV only investigations, co-occurring investigations, and other forms of maltreatment investigations. While there is concern that the involvement of child welfare in IPV investigations will result in more intrusive interventions⁶, findings from this analysis support Black et al. (2008)¹ who recognized that IPV as a single concern does not necessarily result in more intrusive outcomes. Co-occurring investigations noted the highest severity of harm, compared to IPV only investigations and other forms of maltreatment investigations. Subsequent analyses will build on this work in order to examine specific risk and protective factors that are predictive of child welfare placement and the provision of ongoing services.

Limitations

While the AIS-2008 dataset provides a unique opportunity to examine the child welfare response to reported maltreatment in Alberta, a number of considerations for this secondary analysis must be made when interpreting these findings. The AIS-2008 dataset; 1) only tracked reports investigated by child welfare services and did not include reports that were screened out, only investigated by police, and never reported; 2) is based on the assessments provided by the investigating child intervention workers and could not be independently verified; 3) is weighted using annual estimates which included counts of children investigated more than once during the year, therefore the unit of analysis for the weighted estimates was a child investigation; 4) as weighted estimates provided some instances where sample sizes were too small to derive publishable estimates⁵.

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