

**A STUDY OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL'S PREPARATION
AND TRAINING TO RECOGNIZE AND REPORT CHILD
MALTREATMENT**

Honors Thesis

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Bachelor of Social Work**

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By

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FRONT MATTER

Abstract

The topic of my honors thesis is child maltreatment in school settings, specifically the training and preparation that school personnel have received to respond and report this maltreatment. Using survey methods, this project surveyed teachers and other school staff (N= 87) at public schools in Massachusetts. Findings indicate that most participants have only received Mandated Reporter training, but many said they wished they would have received more training before a student disclosed to them. In conclusion, these findings demonstrate that teachers and other school staff want and need supplemental training for recognizing and reporting child maltreatment

BODY OF THE THESIS

Methods

This research project reported on the preparation and training of school personnel to recognize and report child maltreatment. This research study used an anonymous survey to gather information from school personnel about their individual training and their feelings of confidence when dealing with disclosures of child abuse and/or neglect. Participants were at least 18-years of age and either volunteer or work in a school setting. Following the Institutional Review Board's approval on October 25, 2023, the researcher shared an informational email that included an introduction to the researcher, a brief description of the research study and why it is being studied, and the link to the online anonymous survey. Data was collected via an anonymous survey using Survey Monkey software. The survey requested participants to answer questions about how they have been trained and prepared to recognize and report child maltreatment, it asked participants to answer questions about their confidence when being confronted with a child disclosure, and the survey asked demographic questions that pertained to the school district and the participant's career in school settings. These questions included three multiple choices, one checkbox, one agree/disagree, and four open-ended questions. Along with the informational email, an informational social media post was created and an informational flyer, with a brief description of the research study, why it is being studied, and the anonymous survey link. The social media post with the survey link was posted to public social media pages for teachers. The informational flyer with the survey

link was sent to the Massachusetts Teachers' Association via email and asked to be shared with their members.

Findings

The sample consisted of school staff (N=87). The participants resided in Massachusetts. The specific role of the participants varied from administration personnel (n=5), to classroom teachers (n=52), to school nurses (n=2), to social workers and guidance counselors (n=3), to educational team leaders (n=3), to school specialists (n=3), to pull-out personnel (n=9), and to paraprofessionals (n=8).

The average number of years spent working in a school setting was 16. Many participants (n=45, 51.7%) had experienced a child's disclosure of child maltreatment. Nearly all (n=80) of the participants work in an urban school district.

Mandated Reporting Training

There were 74 participants of whom reported that they received mandated reporter training. Receiving professional development training through the school was reported by 40 participants, and 9 reported that they received professional development training outside of the school. A total of 6 professionals have received no training at all to prepare them to identify and report child maltreatment.

Confidence and Skills

Overall, participants were confident in their knowledge and skills. Most participants, 79.3% (n=69), agreed that they were confident in their ability to recognize signs of child abuse. For the statement: "I am confident that I can recognize signs of child abuse" 12.6% (n=11) of participants strongly agreed that they felt this way. The next statement, "I am confident that I can recognize signs of child neglect," was also strongly

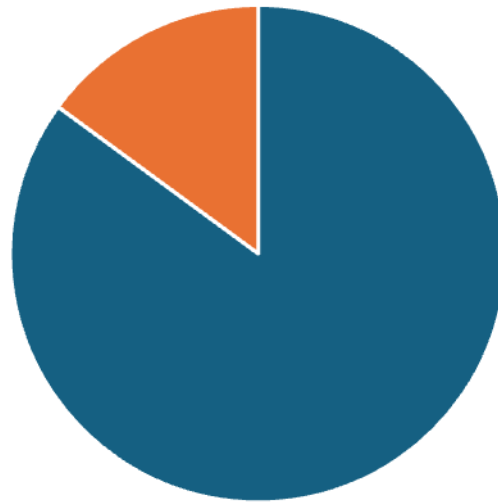
agreed upon by 12.6% (n=11) of the participants. The statement of: “I need to learn more about recognizing the signs of child abuse,” was strongly agreed upon by 23% (n=20) of the responding participants. There was a similar response to the statement: “I need to learn more about recognizing signs of child neglect,” which was strongly agreed upon by 25.3% (n=22) of the survey participants. The statement of, “I know how to respond when a student discloses child abuse and/or neglect to me,” was strongly agreed upon by 21.8% (n=19) participants. The final statement of, “I want more training on how to respond when a student discloses child abuse and/or neglect to me,” was strongly agreed upon by 27.6% (n=24) of the survey participants.

*See Table 1 for more information. *

Table 1
Confidence and Skills of Participants

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Confident in ability to recognize signs of child abuse	n=0 (0%)	n=3 (3.4%)	n=16 (18.4%)	n=56 (64.4%)	n=11 (12.6%)
Confident in ability to recognize signs of child neglect	n=0 (0%)	n=4 (4.6%)	n=14 (16.1%)	n=58 (66.7%)	n=11 (12.6%)
I need to learn more about recognizing signs of child abuse	n=2 (2.3%)	n=19 (21.8%)	n=14 (16.1%)	n=31 (35.6%)	n=20 (23%)
I need to learn more about recognizing signs of child neglect	n=3 (3.4%)	n=16 (18.4%)	n=14 (16.1%)	n=32 (36.8%)	n=22 (25.3%)
I know how to respond when a student discloses child abuse and/or neglect to me	n=1 (1.1%)	n=4 (4.6%)	n=11 (12.6%)	n=52 (59.8%)	n=19 (21.8%)
I want more training on how to respond when a student discloses child abuse and/or neglect to me	n=2 (2.3%)	n=16 (18.4%)	n=8 (9.2%)	n=35 (40.2%)	n=24 (27.6%)

Mandated Reporter Training for MA School Personnel



■ Mandated Reporter training ■ No Mandated Reporter Training

Role in School Setting



■ Administration Personnel ■ Teachers
■ Nurse ■ Social Worker/Guidance Counselor
■ Educational Team Leader ■ Specialist
■ Pull-out personnel ■ Paraprofessional

Discussion

These findings suggest that many school staff are confident in their ability to perform as a mandated reporter, echoing the findings of earlier research, when two researchers “intensely studied the child protective service agencies in six states and concluded that reports of child abuse rose sharply directly after implementation of state mandated reporting laws, with continual, yet more gradual yearly increases from then on” (Greytak, 2009, p.10). However, even though participants were confident in their skills, 58.6-69% (n=51-60) still wanted more training on being a mandated reporter. These findings support earlier research suggesting that many mandated reporters do not receive sufficient training.

Implications

The information gathered from the survey taken by participants who work and/or volunteer in a school setting has important implications for schools, social work, and training both future educators and social workers. Based on earlier research that has been done and, on the data collected from my survey, I would recommend that school staff attend yearly mandated reporter training held by DCF workers. This training should be free. I also recommend that school staff participate in virtual interactive child maltreatment training. The training will provide updated information on intervention skills for emotional situations, trauma-informed care, and reminders of the role school personnel play in reporting child maltreatment. This training will not allow the viewer to open other tabs while taking this training and will not allow the viewer to move on in the training until they answer a question about what was previously discussed in the training. This training should require school staff to be engaged in the material and participate in a

small group discussion after. School staff should also be required to attend a seminar every other year at a local college, where a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW) or a licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) speaks on child maltreatment.

Based on the earlier research and the data collected from the survey, I recommend that social workers attend yearly trainings on various topics involving child maltreatment, including the lasting impact it has on an individual, the issue of failing to report, and new techniques on how to engage vulnerable groups who have been impacted by trauma. I recommend that social workers attend monthly training courses on trauma informed care interventions and techniques.

Based on prior research done and, on the data collected in my survey, training future educators must change. I recommend that the topic of child maltreatment be taught in the first year of education courses in colleges and universities. Future educators must learn early in their education journey about child maltreatment and the importance of identifying and reporting it. The topic of child maltreatment should be covered in depth throughout education courses in higher education.

The information gathered from previous research and from the data collected by my survey participants leads me to recommend some changes in how future social workers are educated and prepared for the helping profession field. I recommend that future social workers begin learning about trauma informed care and trauma focused interventions in the second semester of their first year. The importance of dealing with clients who have experienced some sort of trauma needs to be conveyed very early on in social work education. I also recommend that future social workers be required to attend

a child abuse and neglect course before they graduate. This course should be taught by a representative of the Department of Children and Families.

The gathering of previous research and the conducting of my own research has led me to recommend these additions and changes to schools, the field of social work, and the way both future educators and social workers are educated and trained for their future professions. These recommendations will provide better care training and preparation for identifying, reporting, and working with child maltreatment. These recommendations will also help to better serve the future children who experience child maltreatment.

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