

APSSAC ALERT



Volume #12 Issue #3

Special Points of Interest:

- *There are many notable gaps in state-sponsored mandated reporter training curricula.*
- *Only a few trainings identified reasons why reports should be made, only about one fourth included a definition, indicators, and examples of each type of maltreatment, the average number of suggestions for responding to a disclosure made by a child was three, and few curricula addressed barriers to reporting or the impact of reporting on the reporter.*
- *The trainings as a whole are not currently providing mandated reporters with the types of information they need to adequately discharge their duty, but this can be remedied by some relatively simple reforms to the content of training curricula and monitoring of its implementation.*

State-Sponsored Mandated Reporter Training: An Analysis of the Curriculum

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Child abuse and neglect is a public health epidemic that is associated with significant negative effects for children as well as their families and society at large (Stoltenborgh et al., 2015). Since the 1960s, mandated reporting laws have been passed requiring key professionals who suspect child maltreatment to inform the appropriate authorities. In this way, mandated reporters play a vital role in prevention and intervention, identifying the

majority of substantiated cases of child maltreatment (United States Department of Health and Human Services [US DHHS], 2021). However, child maltreatment is still under-reported and many mandated reporters do not report known and suspected cases. This is partly because child maltreatment is a complex phenomenon that has legal, medical, social, and behavioral elements. In addition, different forms of child maltreatment have different definitions, manifestations, indicators, and types of associated harm. Thus, to be effective in discharging their duties and protecting children, mandated reporters require proper education and training to develop cognitive knowledge and appropriate affective dispositions.

However, research consistently finds that professionals feel they have not had sufficient training about essential domains including the indicators of different types of child abuse and neglect, the nature and scope of the reporting duty, and how to comply with the duty (e.g., Kenny, 2004; Mathews, 2011; Hawkins & McCallum, 2001).

Current Study

The current study was designed to examine the content of training for mandated reporters in U.S. state-sponsored online training curricula to identify key gaps and areas for improvement. To do this, we conducted a deductive qualitative content analysis of documents using publicly available electronic data (Krippendorff & Bock, 2008; Walsh et al., 2013). The

trainings were located through an electronic search, allowing for the harvesting and analysis of comparable data across states. In all, 44 state-sponsored mandated reporter curricula were accessed. A coding and evaluation matrix was created based on a review of the literature and consultation with experts in the field. We identified ten thematic domains informed by theory and research about the required elements of mandated reporter training (Carter et al., 2006; Hawkins & McCallum, 2001; Mathews, 2015; Mathews, 2017; Rheingold et al., 2015; Smeekens et al., 2011). Each curriculum was coded for each variable dichotomously and independently by two of the authors, with 93.6% percent agreement ($\kappa=.83$). All differences were resolved through discussion between the two coders.

Table 1. Proportion of curricula that covered each topic.

Theme 1:

Reporting Legalities

- Who is a mandated reporter (100%)
- Failure to report is a crime (77.3%)
- Laws to protect tribal status (18.2%)
- Reporting is confidential (84.1%)
- Immunity for good faith reporting (86.4%)
- Criminal penalties for not reporting (27.3%)
- Licensure penalties for not reporting (25.9%)
- Reputational damage for not reporting (0%)

Theme 2: The Role of the Mandated Reporter

- To protect children (61.4%)
- Prevent damage to children (4.5%)
- Promote well-being of children (6.8%)
- Change the family (0%)

Theme 3: Reasons to Report

- Child maltreatment is a form of trauma (20.5%)
- Child maltreatment is an ACE (20.5%)
- Child maltreatment affects brain development (25%)
- Mentioned all three (9.1%)

Theme 4A: Child Maltreatment: Physical Abuse

- Definition (88.6%)

- Examples (47.7%)
- Child indicators (90.%)
- Parent indicators (22.7%)
- Included all four (20.5%)
- Corporal punishment versus abuse (54.5%)
- Accidental versus non-accidental injuries (56.8%)
- Photographs of injuries (22.7%)

Theme 4B: Child Maltreatment: Sexual Abuse

- Definition (84.1%)
- Examples (79.5%)
- Child indicators (79.5%)
- Parent indicators (36.3%)
- Included all four (definition, examples, child indicators, and parent indicators) (25%)
- Sex trafficking (70.5%)
- Grooming (11.4%)

Theme 4C: Child Maltreatment: Psychological Maltreatment

- Definition (72.7%)
- Examples (52.3%)
- Child indicators (70.5%)
- Parent indicators (27.3%)
- Included all four (definition, examples, child indicators, and parent indicators)(11.4%)

Theme 4D: Child Maltreatment: Physical Neglect

Definition (86.4%)
 Examples (81.8%)
 Child indicators (81.8%)
 Parent indicators 34.1%
 Included all four (definition, examples, child indicators, and parent indicators) (25%)
 Neglect versus poverty (43.2%)

Theme 5: Dos and Don'ts When Children Disclose

What types of questions to ask (59.1%)
 Do not investigate (70.5)
 Do not make promises to the child (56.8%)
 Do not judge the child (15.9%)
 Do not share information unless necessary (29.5%)
 Believe the child (25%)
 Show care for the child (11.4%)
 Stay calm (59.1%)
 Average number of suggestions: 3.3 (SD=2.1)

Theme 6: Barriers to Reporting

Parent would find out and become angry at the reporter (38.6%)
 Uncertainty that the situation was actually abuse (59.1%)
 Parent will retaliate against the child (20.5%)
 Reporting will disrupt clinical work with the family (06.8%)

Theme 7: Mechanisms of Reporting

To whom to make the report (88.6%)
 When to make the report (79.5%)
 What information is required in a report (93.2%)
 When a child would be removed from home (54.5%)
 What happens once a report is made (77.3%)
 Categories of findings (43.2%)
 Who is notified of findings (63.6%)

Theme 8: Impact on Mandated Reporter

Reporting can be stressful (2.3%)
 Coming into contact with child maltreatment can be traumatic (2.3%)
 Coming into contact with child protection services can be stressful (0%)

Theme 9: Helping Families

It is important to help families when parenting problematic but not abusive (4.5%)
 How to help families (4.5%)

Theme 10: Mechanics of the Training

Included videos (61.4%)
 Embedded links for additional information (81.8%)
 Self-assessments (75.0%)
 Narrated text (38.6%)
 Animations (0%)

As these data clearly illustrate, there are many notable gaps in state-sponsored mandated reporter curricula. Specifically, only a few trainings identified motivating reasons why reports should be made; only about one fourth included a definition, indicators, and examples of each type of maltreatment; the average number of suggestions for responding to a disclosure made by a child was three; and few curricula addressed barriers to reporting or the impact of reporting on the reporter. It can be concluded that the trainings as a whole are not providing mandated reporters with the types of information and skills they need to adequately discharge their duty. Comprehensive information about definitions, examples, and indicators of the

major types of childhood maltreatment was missing. In addition, the trainings lack the kinds of information that would motivate reporters to see their role as part of society's effort to protect children, and they are failing to adequately address reluctance about reporting. Additionally, mandated reporters are rarely provided training on the dos and don'ts to provide a trauma-informed response to a child's disclosure. Fortunately, improvements are possible.

Recommendations

We recommend an immediate and concerted effort to upgrade the content of curricula so that

mandated reporters will be well-informed, motivated, and able to optimally participate in the protection of children from all forms of child maltreatment as part of a broader child protection system. APSAC members can take a leadership role in reviewing their state's curriculum and suggesting ways to upgrade and enhance it through the proper state-level child advocacy channels. In addition, until current trainings are upgraded, all child maltreatment professionals can supplement their own training using the rubric provided here to ensure that they are familiar with all forms of maltreatment definitions, examples, child indicators, and parent indicators. They should ensure that they are informed regarding the multiple ways that maltreatment negatively impacts children, families, and society and be aware of their duty and to report suspected cases and the mechanisms for doing so.

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December 14-16, 2021

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2. **Sexual Behavior Problems in Children and Adolescents**
3. **Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Children and Families**
4. **Child Sexual Exploitation Investigation and Prosecution**



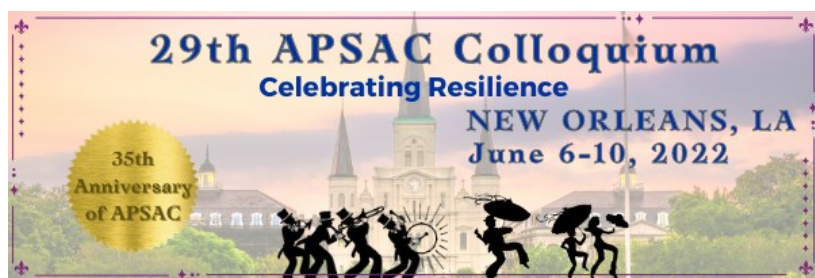
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APSAC is excited to announce the Call for Proposals for the 29th APSAC Colloquium to be held in New Orleans, LA, June 6-10, 2022. APSAC's 29th Colloquium will bring high-quality learning opportunities to child maltreatment researchers and practitioners across experience levels and professions. Sessions will be designated as beginning, intermediate, or advanced level content. The deadline to submit is November 18, 2021.



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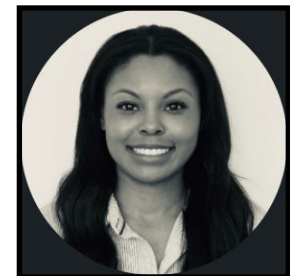
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