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PROTESTANT CHURCH WORKERS' KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD ABUSE REPORTING AND REPORTING BEHAVIOR

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PROTESTANT CHURCH WORKERS' KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD ABUSE
REPORTING AND REPORTING BEHAVIOR

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Rachel Juedes
May 2024

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ABSTRACT

Child abuse is a prevalent problem on many levels. Mandated reporting laws exist to promote earlier intervention. Studies have shown that mandated reporters are more likely to report if they receive effective training. Protestant church workers interact with many children and need to have enough knowledge to detect and report child abuse. This study utilized a quantitative online survey to answer the question: What are Protestant clergy and church workers' knowledge about child abuse reporting? Child abuse reporting knowledge was measured in categories of victimization, detection, and reporting. A convenience sample was obtained from attendees at a church conference. Correlational analysis and ANOVA tests were used to detect any association between child abuse knowledge and suspicions, and child abuse knowledge and reporting. This study's results showed no significant correlation between knowledge and reporting behavior. The results from this study may be useful for social workers, particularly those working in child welfare systems, who work with church workers. Child welfare social workers could address any concerns or knowledge gaps that church workers may have. They may also make changes to child abuse reporting trainings and department policies.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Formulation

Child abuse is a prevalent problem that has long-term negative impacts on individuals and communities. Early intervention is critical, yet much of child abuse is underreported. Mandated reporting laws were enacted so that professionals are on alert to report early signs of child abuse (Goldenburg, 2013). Clergy and church workers are mandated reporters who have a large impact on reporting child abuse. Church workers have a strong pulse on their community. They are entrusted with relationship and mental health issues, not excluding child abuse (Leer-Salveson, 2018).

Child abuse numbers are high. In the most recent Child Annual Report from 2020, there were 618,000 child abuse victims in the United States. Almost three-quarters were victims of neglect, sixteen percent were victims of physical abuse, 9% were sexually abused, and 0.2% were sex trafficked. Almost two thousand children died from their abuse (Children's Bureau, 2020). In California, between July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022, there were 438,462 California children reported as neglected or abused. As of July 1, 2022, there were 53,701 children in California foster care (Center for Social Services Research: University of California at Berkeley, 2022). However, the prevalence of child abuse is much

likely higher, because many cases are unreported (Greco, Guilera & Pereda, 2017).

Child abuse has consequences on micro, mezzo and macro levels. On the micro level, child abuse disturbs a child's development, causing problems throughout their life. They may have difficulty forming interpersonal relationships and healthy self-esteem. As adults, they may struggle with PTSD, low self-esteem, depression, and lower relationship satisfaction. They are more likely to have lower physical health, low income, or leave school (Fergusson et al., 2013). On the mezzo level, families, classmates and friends may be negatively affected. On the macro level, many dollars are spent on protection programs. Per victim, costs average \$210,012 for non-fatal child abuse (Peterson et al, 2018).

Mandated reporters can decrease the levels of child abuse. Some mandated reporters are more likely to notice possible abuse because they are around the children often. Church workers may have contact with children on a more regular basis than even teachers, possibly a few times a week throughout the year (Parkinson, 2014). During difficult times like the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers did not see students. Many churches met in person sooner than schools did. Because of their frequent contact with children and entrusted status with families, church workers are an important ally to early child abuse intervention. Church workers need to be able to identify signs of abuse and take action to report them.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this project is to study Protestant church workers' knowledge about child abuse reporting and its impact on reporting behavior. This study can build upon previous research findings about mandated reporter knowledge. Previous research assessed mandated reporter barriers and church reporting behavior. Subjects of the studies included teachers, doctors, Catholic priests, and church attendees (Greco et al., 2017; Leer-Salveson, 2018; Pietrantonio et al., 2013). However, there have not been any studies on Protestant church worker knowledge of child abuse reporting.

Mandated reporters are more likely to report if they receive effective training. If church workers do not have enough knowledge to detect and report, the child may not get help and they may endure more abuse. Social workers need reports and collaboration with community members to carry out their work. It is important for social workers to learn how to communicate well with community partners and help them develop positive regard toward social services. Feedback from the church worker community will help social workers consider how to create a united team against child abuse.

This study will utilize the method of quantitative survey to assess the child abuse reporting knowledge and reporting behavior of Protestant church workers. The sample of church workers will be obtained by convenience and snowball sampling at a church conference in an effort to reach a sizeable portion of the population. Survey results will be analyzed quantitatively to detect if there are

any common knowledge gaps or concerns that church workers have about reporting.

Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

This project will have significance for social work on multiple levels within the generalist intervention process. At a macro level, the results can be assessed to improve the working relationship between Child Welfare and church workers. Child Welfare could address any concerns or knowledge gaps that church workers may have. They may also make changes to child abuse reporting trainings and department policies. Child Welfare could plan and implement better mandated reporter training for the church worker population. Trainings could be revised to include more about laws that apply to their work, information to assist detection of child abuse, and effects of victimization. With the improved training curriculum and policy, it is more likely that church workers will detect and report child abuse at an earlier stage.

At the micro level, a social worker will be able to address child abuse promptly, and the child will be more likely to have a better individual outcome. Simultaneously, the child's family and support system will benefit on a mezzo level. The child, family and community will interact in a healthier way. Social work practice will shift from reactive to more preventative. In turn, the macro system will benefit as a great deal of government money is saved on foster care. Therefore, the question stands: What are Protestant church workers' knowledge about child abuse reporting and what is its impact on reporting behavior?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to mandated reporting knowledge and reporting behavior. This will provide background to assist with the question: What are Protestant church workers' knowledge about child abuse reporting and what is its impact on reporting behavior? The subsections include mandated reporting laws affecting church workers, victimization, and detection knowledge among mandated reporters, and reporting behavior in churches. The last subsection describes the Ecosystems Theory, which guided this project.

Mandated Reporting Laws Affecting Church Workers

Mandated reporters are professionals who encounter children in their work and are required by law to report suspected or known instances of abuse. Since the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) was enacted in 1974, every state in the United States has written their own mandated reporting laws. Eighteen states require every adult to report. Other states only require certain professionals to report. These professionals often include social workers, medical workers, teachers, law enforcement and childcare providers. These professionals must call the police or child protective services to report suspected child abuse, or they may face consequences. In California, mandated reporters

could face a misdemeanor (California Penal Code Section 11166 [c]). However, they also cannot be held civilly or criminally liable for anything that they report, and their name is kept confidential (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019).

In 28 states including California, mandated reporters include clergy and childcare workers within church. Clergy is the only category that has an exemption to report child abuse in situations of clergy-penitent privilege. Clergy-penitent privilege refers to confidential communication between clergy and the person who is consulting the clergy. Situations in which this is allowed vary from state to state. New Hampshire, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Texas, and West Virginia are states that deny clergy-penitent privilege. Other states do not specifically include or exclude this privilege, while others specifically grant it, such as California (Goldenburg, 2013).

Victimization and Detection Knowledge Among Mandated Reporters

With knowledge about victimization and its signs, mandated reporters can detect and report abuse. Mandated reporters have expressed that they feel their training was not sufficient to detect child victimization (Greco et al., 2017; Pietrantonio et al., 2013). In 2021, Baker et al. searched online for mandated reporter training sponsored by each of the 50 US states. They found 44 state-sponsored trainings, including California's <http://mandatedreporter.ca.com>, and analyzed the content. Only about a fourth of the trainings defined child abuse and explained signs of child abuse. Not many discussed reasons to report or barriers

in reporting (Baker et al., 2021). In a survey of 184 school staff in Spain, they found a link between lack of knowledge and less reporting (Greco et al., 2017).

There are barriers to reporting that training could address. Almost 15% of the Spanish school workers said they thought child protective services is not good for a child's welfare, while almost 50% said that they didn't know (Greco et al., 2017). In 2012, Taiwan researchers qualitatively interviewed 18 teachers, social workers, and healthcare personnel. They expressed fear that child protective services would not ultimately benefit the child and family (Feng et al., 2012). Increased child abuse knowledge through training has been shown to mitigate these barriers (Greco et al., 2017).

Reporting Behavior in Churches

Within Catholic churches, there has been a notable lack of child abuse reporting. A mixed-methods study of 53 Norwegian priests suggested that clergy are confused and don't have much knowledge of child abuse reporting (Leer-Salvesen, 2018, p 13). Without proper knowledge of mandated reporting laws, these clergy were more likely to report abuse after judging the situation for themselves. They valued being trusted and did not want to report unless they felt the situation was serious or had enough evidence. Only a few based their decisions on the law (Leer-Salvesen, 2018).

Furthermore, church members are less likely to report signs of abuse than non-church members (Harper et al., 2020, Minto et al., 2016). Minto et al. (2016)

provided vignettes to a group of Catholic church members and a group of non-Catholics in Australia. Harper (2020) provided a similar vignette to a group of Church of England members and a non-religious group. They suggested the disparity could stem from psychological factors, such as in-group mentality, grooming, or lack of trust in external systems (Harper et al., 2020, Minto et al., 2016).

Religious rhetoric can be used to groom victims and people around them, making them less likely to recognize abuse. Raine and Kent (2019) evaluated a handful of case studies and found that obedience, reverence, and spiritual fears have been used against children to keep them compliant. Manipulating religious beliefs to forgive rather than report, or view the abuse as normal, is compounded by the authority of church workers or attendees. The authors noted that religious leaders, youth workers, and the child's family have been perpetrators (Raine and Kent, 2019). Qualitative interviews of 39 child advocacy center (CAC) directors and interviewers in the US had some similar findings (Tishelman & Fontes, 2017).

Although there were CAC cases of abuse by church workers and suppressed disclosures, there were also CAC cases where clergy and church workers were an integral piece in unearthing abuse. Church workers were there to encourage disclosure and provide emotional support. Church workers were reporters, rescuers, and supporters during the child protective services

investigation (Tishelman & Fontes 2017). Church workers' knowledge in identifying signs of possible abuse is important to these reports being made.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

The theory that guided this study was the ecological theory, which focuses on the transactions between people and their environment. The ecological theory is an approach to social issues that considers how people and their environment influence each other. The main concepts of the theory include social environment, transactions, coping, adaptation, and person-in-environment fit (Hepworth et al., 2017).

The theory can apply on micro, mezzo, and macro levels. On a micro level, the social environment of a child may be influenced by teachers, family members, other children, and community members like church workers. The energy given and received by each of these players is described as transactions. If a child feels a negative influence about reporting abuse from a parent or church worker, the child may feel pressured to keep any abuse to themselves. The child may follow coping methods that they have learned from these influences, such as denial, ascribing scripture, or other unhealthy behaviors, rather than speaking up. They may adapt to an environment where certain topics are not discussed (Raine & Kent, 2019). Once this happens, the child has more of a person-in-environment fit, although it is maladaptive.

On a mezzo level, an entire family may feel pressure in transactions from the church members or workers, creating an unsupportive social environment for a child abuse victim. A family may be groomed against recognizing abuse. Or they may learn to put more trust in authority figures like church rather than social services and believe that attending church is better than reporting a child's disclosure of abuse (Raine & Kent, 2019). If these things happen, a reporting transaction from the family to social services or church workers may not occur, and the abuse may continue (Tishelman & Fontes, 2017). The systems of the church and family will have adapted to each other, coping through the issue alongside one another, but not reaching out for help from social services.

On a macro level, child welfare services and the state government may be completing the transaction of reaching out to church workers, but church workers may have a different social environment. Church workers may not be adapted to the social services or government environment (Leer-Salveson, 2018). It would benefit child welfare services to evaluate child abuse knowledge of church workers, so that mandated reporter training for church workers can be developed with best environmental fit. This will help ensure that child abuse cases are recognized within the church community and reported to child welfare services.

Summary

Church workers have a large influence in the community. Despite mandated reporting laws, there have been cases where abuse went unreported

or was covered up (Harper & Perkins, 2018). However, the link between knowledge in detecting and reporting child abuse gives great hope for church workers to have a positive impact in child welfare. Many mandated reporters, such as teachers, feel that their training was insufficient to provide this knowledge (Greco et al., 2017). This study will provide insight into the child abuse reporting knowledge and reporting behavior of Protestant church workers.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This study was conducted to assess Protestant church workers' child abuse reporting knowledge and reporting behavior. In this chapter, the study design and methodology are discussed. The study obtained quantitative data from a survey of Protestant church workers. Subsections include Study Design, Sampling, Data Collection and Instruments, Procedures, Protection of Human Subjects, and Data Analysis.

Study Design

The association between mandated reporter knowledge and reporting behaviors has been indicated in a handful of studies (Greco, 2017; Leer-Salveson, 2018; Pietrantonio et al, 2013). Because this problem has been initially investigated, there is no need to continue exploratory study. However, this concept has not been thoroughly examined, especially in the mandated reporter category of church workers. Therefore, this study is descriptive rather than explanatory regarding the correlation between reporting knowledge and reporting behavior. Furthermore, the data in this study could be considered exploratory regarding the child abuse reporting knowledge and reporting behavior of church workers.

This study employed a quantitative design that utilized a survey of church workers. The strength of the design is the capability to analyze rate and prevalence. The data can be compared to similar studies and generalized to the rest of the population. The weakness of this study is how the answers are limited for respondents. This may not allow full display of the respondents' knowledge and reporting experiences. This study aspired to contribute to existing research to promote further understanding of child abuse reporting knowledge and the reporting of child abuse. This study also explored mandated reporting knowledge and reporting behavior of the particular mandated reporter category of church workers.

Sampling

Non-probability sampling was used to gain a representative sample of Protestant church workers. The researchers gathered 38 respondents to assist the sample's generalizability to the rest of the Protestant church worker population. The respondents for this survey were contacted in a number of ways. Convenience sampling was utilized as attendees at a 2023 church conference were randomly informed of the study by the researcher with a flyer in the exhibitor hall. Snowball sampling was utilized as the survey online link was passed on from one church worker to another.

At the beginning of the survey, respondents confirmed that they were members of the population of interest. Church workers were able to select their

role at the church, Clergy/Pastor/Minister/Reverend, Deacon, Elder/Board/Committee member, Child/Youth worker, Worship team, and administrative role. Selection criteria removed all other respondents from the data set. This study's limitations include that these sampling methods cannot guarantee that respondents are truthfully reporting that they are church workers. It is also possible that if respondents choose to fill out the questionnaire quickly, they may not have provided accurate information. Furthermore, any association between the variables cannot be interpreted as causality.

Data Collection and Instruments

The independent variable was child abuse reporting knowledge. Two dependent variables were used to represent reporting behavior. The first dependent variable was the number of child abuse suspicions during the church worker's career. The second dependent variable was the number of child abuse reports made during the church worker's career.

The survey was created to assess school-based mandated reporters by Greco et al. (2017). The questionnaire has strength because it incorporated many sources into guiding its creation. The survey was compiled and pre-tested by a focus group. It was based on six previous similar studies in an effort to create validity by measuring the defined variables. Methodology and other conventional guidelines were adopted from three other previous studies to make the survey consistent and precise and obtain reliability. The questionnaire has

limitations because it has not been used in its exact form by other studies (Greco et al., 2017). The findings from this current study may provide additional support to the questionnaire's credibility.

Greco et al. (2017) categorized survey statements into knowledge and reporting behavior. Some survey items were modified in this study to apply to church workers. The independent variable of child abuse reporting knowledge was assessed with statements about child abuse that are true or false. A Likert scale was used with three intervals of "yes," "no," and "I don't know," to statements in three categories: victimization, detection and reporting. These answers were combined and scored to create the independent variable. A respondent with correct answers was assumed to be knowledgeable about child abuse reporting knowledge.

For the dependent variables, respondents answered questions assessing their reporting behavior. Respondents indicated the number of suspicions that they had during their career for the first dependent variable. For the second dependent variable, they indicated the number of times that they have made a report during their career. Participants were also asked for demographic information, including age, gender, income, years of experience, denomination affiliation, and the amount of reporting training that they completed.

Procedures

Respondents were recruited at a 2023 Protestant church conference in southern California. The researcher sat at an exhibitor booth and handed out flyers requesting that church workers go to an online link to fill out a survey. Potential respondents were informed that participation was voluntary but appreciated. The flyer noted that data collected in this study aims to inform social workers' working relationship with church workers. The flyer also stated, "This study has been approved by the CSUSB IRB." Potential participants were encouraged to pass along the online survey link to other Protestant church workers that they know. Survey data was accepted until there was a sufficient number of participants.

The online survey outlined informed consent at the beginning. The informed consent explained the purpose of the study: to learn about church workers' child abuse reporting knowledge and reporting behavior. The informed consent also outlined the risks of the study. It further explained that the survey was voluntary and could be stopped at any time. Participants clicked "I agree" to consent before they were directed to the survey. If a respondent selected "I do not agree," they were redirected to the end of the survey where they were thanked for their time.

Protection of Human Subjects

The survey was electronically self-administered to keep it anonymous from the researcher and other participants. Respondents did not disclose their

name or the name of their church. There was an informed consent disclosure that participants must agree to in order to complete the survey. They were advised that they were not required to answer all or any questions. This protected subjects from sharing more information than they might desire to share.

The survey used the Qualtrics platform to collect data. The data were stored on a secured website. Data files were password protected and accessible only by the primary and secondary researchers. The data will be maintained on the secured site for three years. It will then be permanently deleted by the researchers.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies and with correlational analysis techniques. The independent variable of number of correct responses to child abuse knowledge was compared with the dependent variable 1, the number of suspicions that a church worker had during their career. The independent variable of number of correct responses to child abuse knowledge was compared with the dependent variable 2, the number of reports a church worker made in their career. These tests assessed any potential correlation between child abuse knowledge and suspicions and reporting. The number of child abuse suspicions and number of reports made are used to measure a church worker's reporting behavior.

Summary

This study used a quantitative survey to describe church workers' knowledge and reporting behavior. The church worker sample was obtained by passing out flyers at a church conference. Snowball sampling was enabled when respondents shared the survey with other church workers. This survey was previously used for school-based mandated reporters. It was available online and included an informed consent. It kept respondents' identities and responses anonymous.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter describes the results of this study on Protestant church workers. From convenience sampling and snowball sampling, 38 respondents were obtained. After applying criteria for respondents to fill out half of the survey core questions, 28 respondents remained. The subsections of this chapter are Demographics, Responses to Survey Questions, Victimization Questions, Detection Questions, Reporting Questions, Suspensions, Reporting, and Correlations.

Demographics

Almost two-thirds (18) of the respondents were male. The remaining 10 respondents were female. Respondents' ages ranged: 17.9% were 25-34 years old, 7.1% were 35-44 years old, 17.9% were 45-54 years old, 25% were 55-64 years old, and 32.1% were 65+ years old. Almost two-thirds of respondents (18) were white, 3 were Black or African American, 6 were Latino, and 2 were Asian. Three respondents identified their political affiliation as Democrat and fourteen identified as Republican. Thirteen respondents stated that they have theological and related college degrees, five disclosed psychology and related degrees, and eight respondents noted other college degree. Two disclosed "other" degree as chemistry and accountant.

Half (50%) of respondents stated their role as Clergy/Pastor/Minister/Reverend. Four respondents reported Child/Youth worker, two identified as Worship team, and five noted administrative roles. One respondent identified in each of the categories of Bookstore manager, Chaplain, Consultant, Mission prayer team, Elder/Board/Committee member, and Women's Ministry Overseer / Pastors wife. Thirteen respondents (46.4%) said their role is unpaid. Four respondents indicated that they made below 30,000 USD/year, two described their income as below 50,000 USD/year, three made below 70,000 USD/year, four made below 100,000 USD/year, and two made above 100,000 USD/year.

Most respondents (75%) said their church is nondenominational. Two respondents belonged to Lutheran, one to Pentecostal, and 4 to other Protestant denominations. Of the respondents that listed "other", two input Calvary Chapel, one stated Evangelical Free, and one input Non-Denominational (Charismatic). Fifty percent of respondents' churches were in California, one was in Illinois, one was in Michigan, one was in Tennessee, one was in Mexico, and one was in the United Kingdom. Eight respondents described their church location as urban, 18 as suburban, and two as rural. Two respondents indicated that their church attendance was "Below 100", two indicated "100-300", four indicated "300-500", nine indicated "500-700", four stated "700-1000", five stated "1000-2000", one stated "2000-3000", and two stated "3000+" people.

Respondents varied in how many years of experience they had working with minors, from zero to 50 years. Four respondents (14.3%) said they had below five years of experience working with minors, five respondents had between five and 10 years, five respondents had between 10 and 15 years, two had twenty years, six had 30 to 35 years, four had 40-45 years, and two had 50 years' experience.

Twenty-three respondents (82.1%) stated that their role requires them to report child abuse, while the remaining five respondents stated that they did not. Twenty-one (75%) respondents stated that they have had training on child victimization while the remaining 25% stated that they did not have training. Fifty percent of respondents reported five or fewer hours of training, three respondents had between five and ten hours, five respondents had between 15 and 20 hours, three had 20 to 30 hours, three had 50 to 100 hours, and one respondent had 500 hours of training. Sixteen respondents (57.1%) described some of their training as mandated reporter training. Some respondents specified where they received training. Six respondents stated they received training from Seminary/University/College, six stated their current place of work, and seven from a Non-profit organization.

Responses to Survey Questions

The survey statements in this study cover three categories within child abuse: victimization, detection, and reporting. The statements about child abuse

are true or false. Respondents select one out of three intervals within a Likert scale of “yes,” “no,” and “I don’t know.”

Victimization Questions

Twenty-eight (100%) respondents answered yes, which is correct, to the statement, “Child victimization can affect the minor’s neurological development.”

Twenty-seven (96.4%) of respondents answered yes, which is correct, to the statement, “A minor who has suffered victimization is more likely to develop depression as an adult.”

Ten respondents (35.7%) answered no, the correct response, to the statement, “Minors and adults are equally vulnerable to violence.”

Zero respondents answered no, the correct response, to the statement, “If a behavior is harmful to the minor we consider it victimization, regardless of its intention.”

Twenty-five respondents (89.3%) answered no, the correct response to the statement “We only consider victimization in a situation in which the minor’s physical health is in immediate danger.”

Eighteen respondents (64.3%) answered no, the correct response, to the statement, “Most parents who victimize their children are mentally or psychologically ill.”

Eighteen respondents (64.3%) answered no, the correct response, to the statement, “Physical maltreatment is the most frequent type of victimization.”

Fourteen respondents (50%) answered no, the correct response, to the statement, “Fewer than 1 in 7 children have experienced child abuse or neglect in the past year in the United States.”

Ten respondents (35.7%) answered no, the correct response, to the statement, “A minor who has been victimized usually develops a feeling of rejection towards the perpetrator.”

Detection Questions

Six respondents (21.4%) answered yes, which is correct, to the statement, “Only if I see more than one sign at a time can I suspect that a minor might be being victimized.”

Twenty-six respondents (92.9%) answered yes, which is correct, to the statement, “Protecting minors’ well-being is a legal obligation, even if it means getting involved in situations outside the church context.”

Seven respondents (25%) answered yes, which is correct, to the statement, “The frequency of aggressive behavior is crucial to suspecting whether a minor is being victimized or not.”

Fifteen respondents (53.6%) answered yes, which is correct, to the statement, “A minor growing up in a one-parent family is more likely to experience victimization.”

Twenty-three respondents (82.1%) answered yes, which is correct, to the statement, “A minor with low self-esteem is more likely to experience victimization.”

Sixteen respondents (57.1%) answered yes, which is correct, to the statement, “A isolated family is considered more likely to perpetrate victimization.”

Twenty respondents (71.4%) answered no, the correct response, to the statement, “Most signs of the childhood victimization are directly observable.”

Twenty-three respondents (82.1%) answered no, the correct response, to the statement, “If the minor belongs to a culture that is more tolerant regarding abuse, we should not get involved.”

Ten respondents (35.7%) answered no, the correct response, to the statement, “A family that shows excessive protection towards their minors is associated with stronger precaution regarding victimization.”

Twenty respondents (71.4 %) answered no, the correct response, to the statement, “It is easy to define whether a behavior can be considered abuse or not.”

Reporting Questions

Twenty-one respondents (75%) answered yes, which is correct, to the statement, “In case of abuse, the first institution outside the church that should be notified is child welfare services.”

Twenty-one respondents (75%) answered no, the correct response, to the statement, "We should only report a case if we know for sure that the minor is being victimized."

Sixteen respondents (57.1%) answered no, the correct response, to the statement, "In most cases, child welfare services interventions are not good for the minor's well-being."

Two respondents (7.1%) answered no, the correct response, to the statement, "If the informant wishes to report anonymously, he/she may do so."

Twelve respondents (42.9%) answered no, the correct response, to the statement, "A report makes a judge aware of the case."

Eighteen respondents (64.3 %) answered no, the correct response, to the statement, "If suspicions turn out not to be true, the family is entitled to sue the informant."

Eighteen respondents (64.3 %) answered no, the correct response, to the statement, "Too many reports make the system collapse."

Eight (28.6 %) respondents answered no, the correct response, to the statement, "Reporting is up to the informant: the person who has the suspicion decides whether to report it."

Twenty-one respondents (75%) answered no, the correct response, to the statement, "The church leader's consent must be obtained before reporting."

Suspicions

When asked, “Have you had any suspicions that a minor might be being victimized?”, 57% (16) respondents answered no suspicions, and 43% (12) answered having at least one suspicion.

When asked, “How many times during your career did you suspect that a minor might be being victimized?” 46.4% (13) respondents answered 1 to 5 times, 17.9% (5) respondents answered 6-10 times, and 7.1% (2) respondents answered more than 10 times.

Reporting

When asked, “In your church work, have you reported a child abuse suspicion?” 32.1% (9) respondents answered they have reported a suspicion, and (19) respondents answered they have not reported a suspicion.

When asked, “How many times did you report a child abuse suspicion?” 32.1% (9) respondents answered that they have reported a suspicion 1-2 times, and 7.1% (2) respondents answered 3-5 times.

Correlations

Correlational analysis and ANOVA tests were used to detect any association between child abuse knowledge and suspicions, and child abuse knowledge and reporting. Role, church size, years working with minors, were assessed for any statistical significance, but none was found. Child abuse knowledge and the number of times that a respondent suspected child abuse

had no significant correlation (N=28, $p = .750$, .063 Pearson correlation). Child abuse knowledge and number of times that they reported also had no significant correlation (N=28, $p = .665$, Pearson $-.086$). This study did not show any significant correlation between knowledge and reporting behavior.

The results indicated a significant correlation between the number of times that a respondent suspected child abuse, and the number of times that they reported (N=28, $p = .002$, .562 Pearson correlation).

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the results of this study, which sought to address the following research question: What are Protestant church workers' knowledge about child abuse reporting and what is its impact on reporting behavior? First, the results from this study are compared to prior research on the topic. Second, the study's limitations are outlined. Third, implications for social work practice, policy, and research are described.

Comparison to Literature

The results from this study are both consistent with and inconsistent with results from prior studies. The paragraphs below discuss the study's results in detail and compare those results to the existing literature. First, participants' knowledge of and misconceptions related to child abuse reporting are described. Since no prior studies used this particular survey with church workers, few connections to the literature can be made.

Participant Knowledge

Some commonly correct answers suggest that church workers are aware of the importance of emotional support, aligning with a finding from Tishelman and Fontes (2017). All of the respondents answered yes to the statement, "Child

victimization can affect the minor's neurological development." Almost all of respondents answered yes to the statement, "A minor who has suffered victimization is more likely to develop depression as an adult." The majority of respondents answered yes to the statement, "A minor with low self-esteem is more likely to experience victimization." Other encouraging correct responses include most respondents answered no to the statement "We only consider victimization in a situation in which the minor's physical health is in immediate danger." The majority of respondents answered no to the statement, "If the minor belongs to a culture that is more tolerant regarding abuse, we should not get involved."

Participant Misconceptions

Some common misconceptions include that the majority of respondents did not give the correct response to the statement, "Minors and adults are equally vulnerable to violence." Zero respondents answered no, the correct response, to the statement, "If a behavior is harmful to the minor, we consider it victimization, regardless of its intention." The majority of respondents did not give the correct response to the statement, "A minor who has been victimized usually develops a feeling of rejection towards the perpetrator." The majority of respondents did not give the correct response to the statement, "Only if I see more than one sign at a time can I suspect that a minor might be being victimized." The majority of respondents did not give the correct response to the statement, "The frequency of aggressive behavior is crucial to suspecting whether a minor is being

victimized or not.” The majority of respondents did not give the correct response to the statement, “A family that shows excessive protection towards their minors is associated with stronger precaution regarding victimization.” Almost all of the respondents did not give the correct response to the statement, “If the informant wishes to report anonymously, he/she may do so.” The majority of respondents did not give the correct response to the statement, “Reporting is up to the informant: the person who has the suspicion decides whether to report it.”

Participant Reporting Decisions

The respondents seemed more likely to base their decisions on the law than the priests whose responses were addressed by the Leer-Salvesen (2018) study. Most respondents answered yes to the statement, “Protecting minors’ well-being is a legal obligation, even if it means getting involved in situations outside the church context.” The majority of respondents answered yes to the statement, “In case of abuse, the first institution outside the church that should be notified is child welfare services.” Participants in this study appear to show more openness to external systems, which is inconsistent with studies by Harper et al. (2020) and Minto et al. (2016). Furthermore, this study’s results are inconsistent with Raine and Kent’s (2019) study about obedience and spiritual fears toward the authority of church workers. The majority of respondents answered no to the statement, “The church leader’s consent must be obtained before reporting.”

Relationship between Knowledge and Reporting Behavior

The results of this study show no statistically significant relationship between knowledge and reporting behavior for Protestant church workers. This means that child abuse knowledge may or may not be related to the number of suspicions or number of times that a church worker reports their suspicions. This study's results are inconsistent with findings from the literature which suggest a clear relationship between knowledge and reporting (Greco et al., 2017).

Relationship between Number of Suspicions and Reporting Behavior

The study's results indicate a statistically significant correlation between the number of times that a respondent suspected child abuse, and the number of times that they reported. This means that the more suspicions a church worker had, the more likely they were to report. This finding is inconsistent with the findings from prior studies such as the priests in the study by Leer-Salvesen (2018), who would judge the situation for themselves. Further, the majority of respondents answered no to the statement, "We should only report a case if we know for sure that the minor is being victimized," suggesting the participants in this study believed a report should be made even if they could not say for certain victimization took place. This contrasts with Greco et. al (2017), whose school-based respondents tended to have the misconception that they need to be sure that a child is being abused before they can make a report.

Although the correlation between the number of times that a respondent suspected child abuse, and the number of times that they reported is positive, it suggests barriers to reporting. The correlation shows that respondents are 56.2%

likely to report if they have a suspicion. Most respondents were aware that their role requires them to report child abuse, and the majority stated that they had training on child victimization. Therefore, other factors could be affecting their decision to report a suspicion.

Other researchers have focused more on psychological factors correlating with reporting behavior (Harper et al., 2020, Minto et al., 2016). Similar to Greco et al. (2017), respondents were almost split in half in regard to the statement, "In most cases, child welfare services interventions are not good for the minor's well-being." Perhaps a barrier to reporting for church workers is the same as the Feng et al. (2012) study where mandated reporters feared that child protective services would not ultimately benefit the child and family.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include the small sample size, method of data collection, lack of participant demographic diversity, and utilizing a survey that has not been thoroughly validated, especially for church workers. Data was collected in one location in Southern California, by convenience and snowball sampling. The short time frame of data collection and the voluntary completion of the survey limited the sample size. The small sample size along with the specific location of data collection contributed to the lack of participant demographic diversity. These factors hinder the generalizability of the findings.

Furthermore, the survey itself has not been utilized in many studies. It is possible that the survey's validity and reliability could be improved. In this researcher's opinion, some of the survey statements could be confusing to respondents. The following statements almost encourage a reporter to consider investigating themselves, rather than reporting their suspicion so that professional social workers can investigate: "Only if I see more than one sign at a time can I suspect that a minor might be being victimized." "If a behavior is harmful to the minor we consider it victimization, regardless of its intention." "The frequency of aggressive behavior is crucial to suspecting whether a minor is being victimized or not." It is also possible that the following statements were not clear about whether the informant is a mandated reporter: If the informant wishes to report anonymously, he/she may do so." "Reporting is up to the informant: the person who has the suspicion decides whether to report it."

Implications for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research

Further research could be done with the Protestant church worker population. It would be beneficial to use a larger sample size with a greater demographic range. This would enable more generalizability of results. Further research could also expand upon the correlation that this study found between number of suspicions and number of times reporting.

It is possible that the survey used in this study could be improved through further research. The validity and reliability of this measure could be tested more.

Researchers could reevaluate the survey statements that had a low rate of being answered correctly. There may also be a better measure than this survey to evaluate this population and other reporters.

Practice implications for social workers are to continue to encourage reporting and be aware of barriers that church workers may have. Social workers can collaborate with community members such as church workers, and help them develop positive perceptions toward social services. Social workers can utilize a team perspective in working with reporters.

Social workers can be encouraged that progress has been made with the mandated reporter population of church workers. Previous studies and news have cast a bad light on this population. This study shows that the majority of Protestant church workers know that they need to report their suspicions.

Although this population of reporters has better reporting behavior than previous studies, education is still needed. One quarter of respondents stated that they did not have child victimization training. Fifty percent of respondents reported five or fewer hours of training. Only about half of respondents described some of their training as mandated reporter training. A quarter of respondents did not know "In case of abuse, the first institution outside the church that should be notified is child welfare services." Also, 25% of respondents agreed that "We should only report a case if we know for sure that the minor is being victimized." It is important for church workers to know that they do not need to be sure of a suspicion in order to report to Child Welfare. Considering Baker et al., 2021,

perhaps mandated reporter trainings could be updated to discuss reasons to report or barriers in reporting.

One suggestion to improve trainings would be to have a collaboration between Child Welfare and church workers. This would ensure that church workers receive training appropriate for mandated reporters. Child Welfare could address any concerns or knowledge gaps that church workers may have. Child Welfare social workers who regularly work in investigating could share what services they are able to provide and how their involvement impacts families. Church workers would be able to easily provide feedback to Child Welfare. They could also share how they as a church can support families. Child Welfare could use church worker feedback to improve child abuse reporting trainings and department policies. This collaboration would improve trust and create a team between Child Welfare and church workers, so that vulnerable children and families can help the help they need in a timely manner.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify if there is a relationship between Protestant church workers' knowledge about child abuse reporting and reporting behavior. The hypothesis of the study was not supported. However, a significant and encouraging finding emerged which showed that the more suspicions a church worker had, the more likely it was for them to report. This study suggests

that Child Welfare address any outstanding barriers that Protestant church workers may have to reporting child abuse.

APPENDIX A
SURVEY

Gender:

Male

Female

Other

Age: (qualtrix dropdown menu)

Race:

White

Black or African American

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

My role at the church (select all that apply):

Clergy/Pastor/Minister/Reverend

Deacon

Elder/Board/Committee member

Child/Youth worker

Worship team

Administrative

Other

I do not work or volunteer at a church

Denomination of church:

Baptist

Methodist

Nondenominational

Lutheran

Presbyterian

Pentecostal

Anglican/Episcopalian

Restorationist

Congregational

Holiness

Reformed

Adventist

Anabaptist

Pietist

Other

Size of church:

Below 100

100-300

300-500

500-700

700-900

Above 900

Location of church:

Urban

Rural

Suburban

Country: (qualtrix dropdown menu)

If United States, Select State: (qualtrix dropdown menu)

My income through this role:

0/unpaid

Below 30,000 USD/year

Below 50,000 USD/year

Below 70,000 USD/year

Below 100,000 USD/year

Above 100,000 USD/year

My education level and area of college degrees (select all and any that apply):

Theological and related degrees Associate/Bachelor/Master/Doctorate

Psychology and related degrees Associate/Bachelor/Master/Doctorate

Political affiliation:

Republican

Democrat

Other

Years of experience working with minors:_____

In your role, are you mandated to report child abuse?

Yes

No

I don't know

Victimization

Have you received any training regarding child victimization?

Yes

No

How many hours of training have you received? ____

Have you completed Mandated Reporter training?

Yes

No

I don't know

Where did you receive training regarding child abuse?

Child welfare agency

Seminary/University/College

Current place of work

Non-profit organization

Other

I did not receive training

Child victimization can affect the minor's neurological development

Yes

No

I don't know

A minor who has suffered victimization is more likely to develop depression as an adult

Yes

No

I don't know

Minors and adults are equally vulnerable to violence

Yes

No

I don't know

If a behavior is harmful to the minor we consider it victimization, regardless of its intention

Yes

No

I don't know

We only consider victimization in a situation in which the minor's physical health is in immediate danger

Yes

No

I don't know

Most parents who victimize their children are mentally or psychologically ill

Yes

No

I don't know

Physical maltreatment is the most frequent type of victimization

Yes

No

I don't know

Fewer than 1 in 7 children have experienced child abuse or neglect in the past year in the United States

Yes

No

I don't know

A minor who has been victimized usually develops a feeling of rejection towards the perpetrator

Yes

No
I don't know

Detection

In your church work, have you had any suspicions that a minor might be being victimized?

No suspicion
Had at least one suspicion

How many times during your career did you suspect that a minor might be being victimized? ____

Only if I see more than one sign at a time can I suspect that a minor might be being victimized

Yes
No
I don't know

Protecting minors' well-being is a legal obligation, even if it means getting involved in situations outside the church context

Yes
No
I don't know

The frequency of aggressive behavior is crucial to suspecting whether a minor is being victimized or not

Yes
No
I don't know

A minor growing up in a one-parent family is more likely to experience victimization

Yes
No
I don't know

A minor with low self-esteem is more likely to experience victimization

Yes
No
I don't know

An isolated family is considered more likely to perpetrate victimization
Yes
No
I don't know

Most signs of childhood victimization are directly observable
Yes
No
I don't know

If the minor belongs to a culture that is more tolerant regarding abuse, we should not get involved
Yes
No
I don't know

A family that shows excessive protection towards their minors is associated with stronger precaution regarding victimization
Yes
No
I don't know

It is easy to define whether a behavior can be considered abuse or not
Yes
No
I don't know

Reporting

In your church work, have you reported a child abuse suspicion?
Yes
No

How many times did you report a child abuse suspicion? ____

In case of abuse, the institution outside the church that should be notified is child welfare services

Yes

No

I don't know

We should only report a case if we know for sure that the minor is being victimized

Yes

No

I don't know

In most cases, child welfare services interventions are not good for the minor's well-being

Yes

No

I don't know

If the informant wishes to report anonymously, he/she may do so

Yes

No

I don't know

A report makes a judge aware of the case

Yes

No

I don't know

If suspicions turn out not to be true, the family is entitled to sue the informant

Yes

No

I don't know

Too many reports make the system collapse

Yes

No

I don't know

Reporting is up to the informant: the person who has the suspicion decides whether to report it

Yes

No

I don't know

The church leader's consent must be obtained before reporting

Yes

No

I don't know

Would you like to be a part of future research to improve the working relationship between Child Welfare and the church?

Yes

No

I don't know. (Survey developed by Greco et al., 2017. Modified by Juedes, 2023)

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

June 21, 2023

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Administrative/Exempt Review Determination

Status: Determined Exempt

IRB-FY2023-265

Carolyn McAllister Rachel Juedes
CSBS - Social Work
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Carolyn McAllister Rachel Juedes:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Protestant Church Workers' Knowledge of Mandated Reporting" has been reviewed and determined exempt by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of CSU, San Bernardino. An exempt determination means your study had met the federal requirements for exempt status under 45 CFR 46.104. The CSUSB IRB has weighed the risks and benefits of the study to ensure the protection of human participants.

This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional campus approvals which may be required including access to CSUSB campus facilities and affiliate campuses. Investigators should consider the changing COVID-19 circumstances based on current CDC, California Department of Public Health, and campus guidance and submit appropriate protocol modifications to the IRB as needed. CSUSB campus and affiliate health screenings should be completed for all campus human research related activities. Human research activities conducted at off-campus sites should follow CDC, California Department of Public Health, and local guidance. See CSUSB's [COVID-19 Prevention Plan](#) for more information regarding campus requirements.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following as mandated by the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) federal regulations 45 CFR 46 and CSUSB IRB policy. The forms (modification, renewal, unanticipated/adverse event, study closure) are located in the Cayuse IRB System with instructions provided on the IRB Applications, Forms, and Submission webpage. Failure to notify the IRB of the following requirements may result in disciplinary action. The Cayuse IRB system will notify you when your protocol is due for renewal. Ensure you file your protocol renewal and continuing review form through the Cayuse IRB system to keep your protocol current and active unless you have completed your study.

- **Ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study.**
- **Submit a protocol modification (change) if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your study for review and approval by the IRB before being implemented in your study.**
- **Notify the IRB within 5 days of any unanticipated or adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research.**
- **Submit a study closure through the Cayuse IRB submission system once your study has ended.**

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the Research Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval number IRB-FY2023-265 in all correspondence. Any complaints you receive from participants and/or others related to your research may be directed to Mr. Gillespie.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

King-To Yeung

King-To Yeung, Ph.D., IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to describe child abuse knowledge and reporting of Protestant church workers. The study is being conducted by Rachel Juedes, a graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. Carolyn McAllister, Director of the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSUSB.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to describe child abuse knowledge and reporting of Protestant church workers.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be given some statements on the victimization of child abuse, the detection of child abuse, the reporting of child abuse, and some demographics.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in the study is totally voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your responses will remain confidential and data will be reported in group form only.

DURATION: It will take 5 to 10 minutes to complete the survey.

RISKS: Although not anticipated, there may be some discomfort in answering some of the questions. You are not required to answer and can skip the question or end your participation.

BENEFITS: There will not be any direct benefits to the participants. However, findings from the study will contribute to our knowledge in this area of research.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. McAllister at (909) 537-5559.

RESULTS: Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2024.

I understand that I must be 18 years of age or older to participate in your study, have read and understand the consent document and agree to participate in your study.

Place an X mark here

Date

APPENDIX C
RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

My name is Rachel Juedes, I am Christian and a Master of Social Work student at CSUSB. I am asking for your participation in a research study I am conducting to learn about church workers' child abuse reporting knowledge. The data collected in this study aims to improve Child Welfare's working relationship with church workers. The eligibility criteria for this study are to currently be or have recently been a church worker 18 years of age or older. I would greatly appreciate your participation in this anonymous electronic survey. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from participation at any time throughout the survey with no consequences. This survey should only take approximately 10-15 minutes of your time.

Please utilize the link below or scan the QR code to participate in this study.

The CSUSB Institutional Review Board and the director of social work have approved this research study.

The project's supervisor and primary investigator of this project is Dr. Carolyn McAllister, cmcallis@csusb.edu, should you have any questions.

Thank you for your time,
Rachel Juedes
008064349@coyote.csusb.edu

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