

Professional attitudes and knowledge towards corporal punishment and child abuse reporting in primary care settings

Marie-Ève Clément, PhD

Chaire de recherche du Canada sur la violence faite aux enfants
Département de psychoéducation et de psychologie
Université du Québec en Outaouais, CANADA

Sarah Dufour, PhD

École de psychoéducation
Université de Montréal, CANADA



UQO

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de Montréal



Project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

ISPCAN International conference, Wednesday, September 5th, 11:15 - 13:15, South Hall 2B

Context

Primary care professionals (psychosocial, health and education sectors)

- An important proportion of parents consult professionals on disciplinary practices, including corporal punishment (Clément et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2012; Walsh, 2002)
- Understudied topic in primary care settings, especially with psychosocial professionals (Clément et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2012; Walsh, 2002)

Legal context regarding the use of corporal punishment of children (Quebec, Canada)

- **Criminal Code of Canada** (section 43)

“Every parent (...) is justified in using force by way of correction toward a (...) child (...) who is under his care, if the force does not exceed what is reasonable under the circumstances” **with criteria** that define reasonable force

- **Youth Protection Act**

Protect children against maltreatment, including physical abuse mandatory reporting for professionals

Research objectives

1) To describe professionals' attitudes and knowledge

- Attitudes towards parental use of Corporal Punishment (CP);
- Knowledge about legislation;
- Willingness to report;
- Training needs about parenting disciplinary practice.

2) To explore differences between professionals according to their academic training (psychosocial, health or education sectors)

Method

•Online Survey

- Conducted between April and November 2017

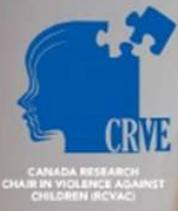
•In the province of Quebec (Canada)

•Participants

- Primary care professionals who devote at least 20 % of their time with children (0-17 years) or with their parents
- Recruited mostly through
 - professional orders or associations
 - social media and workplaces

•Questions about:

- General attitudes towards CP and its impact on children
- Legal knowledge about CP
- Sense of competence in mandatory reporting to CPS
- Willingness to report situations to CPS
- Training needs



YOUR OPINION MATTERS

DO YOU WORK WITH CHILDREN
(0-17 YEARS) OR THEIR PARENTS?
PARTICIPATE IN OUR
PROVINCIAL SURVEY



w3.uqo.ca/crve/survey-2017

This study focuses on your perceptions of parental discipline and your family support practices.

THIS STUDY HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE OF UQO AND IS FUNDED BY THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH COUNCIL (435-2016-0027).
CONTACT : CRVE@UQO.CA

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Participants



Total of 1 758 professionals:

- **Psychosocial** sector (PS) (n=1 187)
- **Health** sector (HS) (n=272)
- **Education** sector (ES) (n=299)

Place of birth

- 94% Canada • 6% Elsewhere

Age

Between 20 to 75 years old (mean age 40 years old)

Working experience with families

Between 1 to 50 years (mean of 14 years)

Professional order membership

- 62 % Yes • 38 % No

Results: attitudes of professionals concerning CP

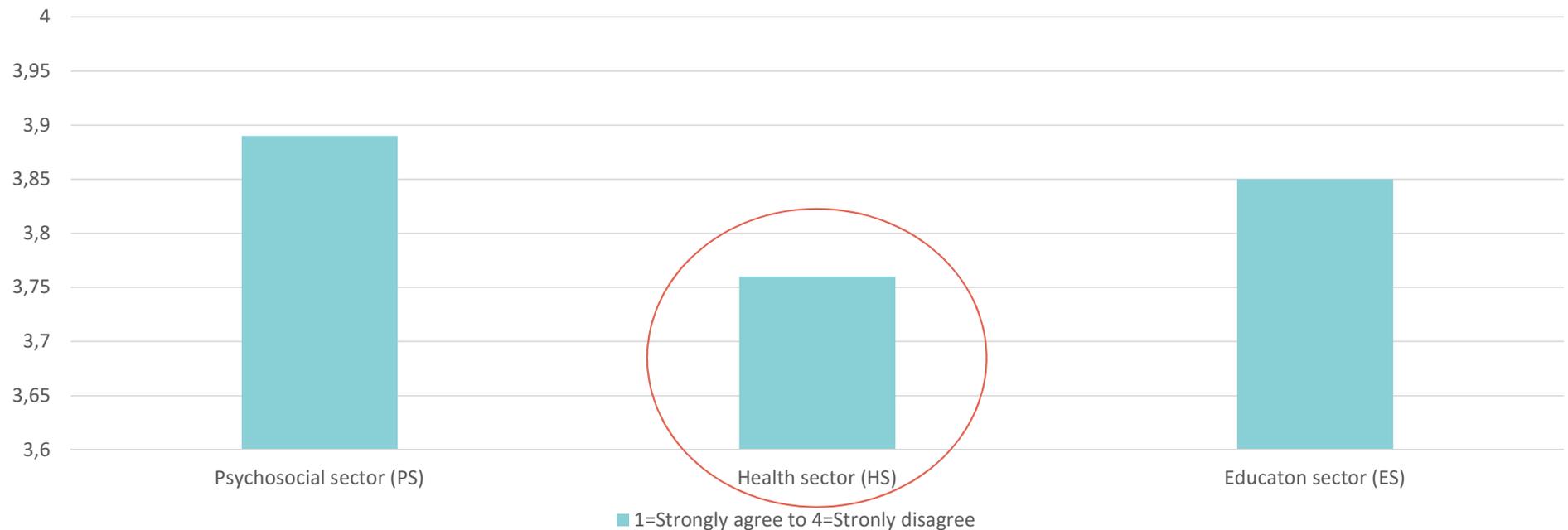
		All Professionals N=1 758	
		Agree n (%)	Disagree n (%)
General attitudes			
<i>There should be a law allowing parents to use force to discipline their children.</i>		18 (1%)	1 740 (99%)
<i>Some children need to be slapped so that they will learn a lesson.</i>		43 (2%)	1 715 (98%)
<i>Spanking is an effective way of disciplining children.</i>		12 (1%)	1 746 (99%)
<i>It would be acceptable for a parent to slap a child if he has provoked it.</i>		26 (2%)	1 732 (98%)
<i>It would be acceptable for a parent to slap a child if he is being disobedient.</i>		29 (2%)	1 729 (98%)
<i>It would be acceptable for a parent to slap a child if he is being violent.</i>		37 (2%)	1 721 (98%)
Perceived impact on children			
<i>Corporal punishment may have physical or emotional consequences for children.</i>		1 698 (96%)	60 (4%)

**Almost everyone
Strongly disagrees with CP
Perceive negative consequences**

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Results: professionals' disagreement towards CP (mean score)

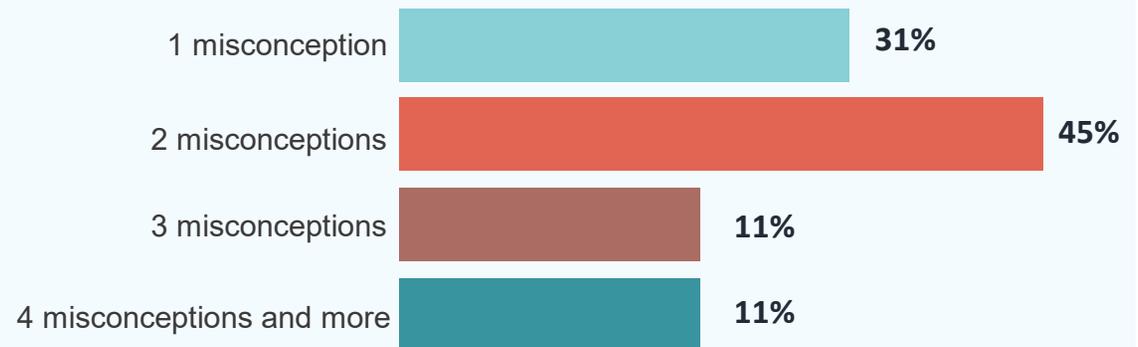


Health professionals agree significantly more with parental use of CP than **psychosocial professionals** [$F(2, 1755) = 10.41, p = 0.00$]

Results: misconceptions about Section 43 (Canadian Criminal Code)

Only 2%

know all criteria of a correction of “reasonable force”



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know all criteria of a correction of “reasonable force”

BUT



Health and education professionals have more misconceptions compared to **psychosocial professionals**

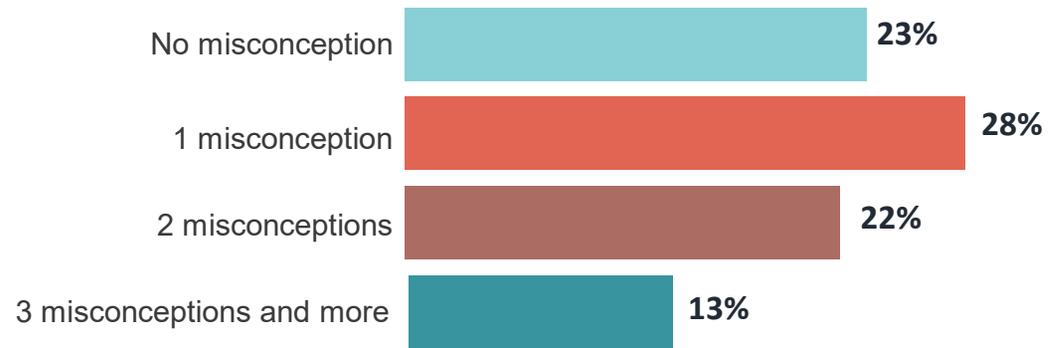
[F (2,1 755) = 14,95, $p = 0001$]

Results: misconceptions about mandatory reporting

94%

Are aware of their duty to report any suspicion of abuse to CPS

BUT



Psychosocial professionals have less misconceptions than **health** and **education and professionals** [$F(2,1755) = 175,89, p = 0001$]

Results: Examples of misconceptions on mandatory reporting

<i>(think so or don't know)</i>	Psychosocial (PS) n (%)	Health (HS) n (%)	Education (ES) n (%)	χ^2	Post-hoc
<i>To report a child to CPS, I must be able to prove that the facts have occurred.</i>	133 (11%)	46 (17%)	111 (37%)	116,5***	PS<HS<ES
<i>My responsibility to report to CPS may be delegated to another person in my organization</i>	504 (43%)	156 (55%)	224 (75%)	107,1***	PS<HS<ES

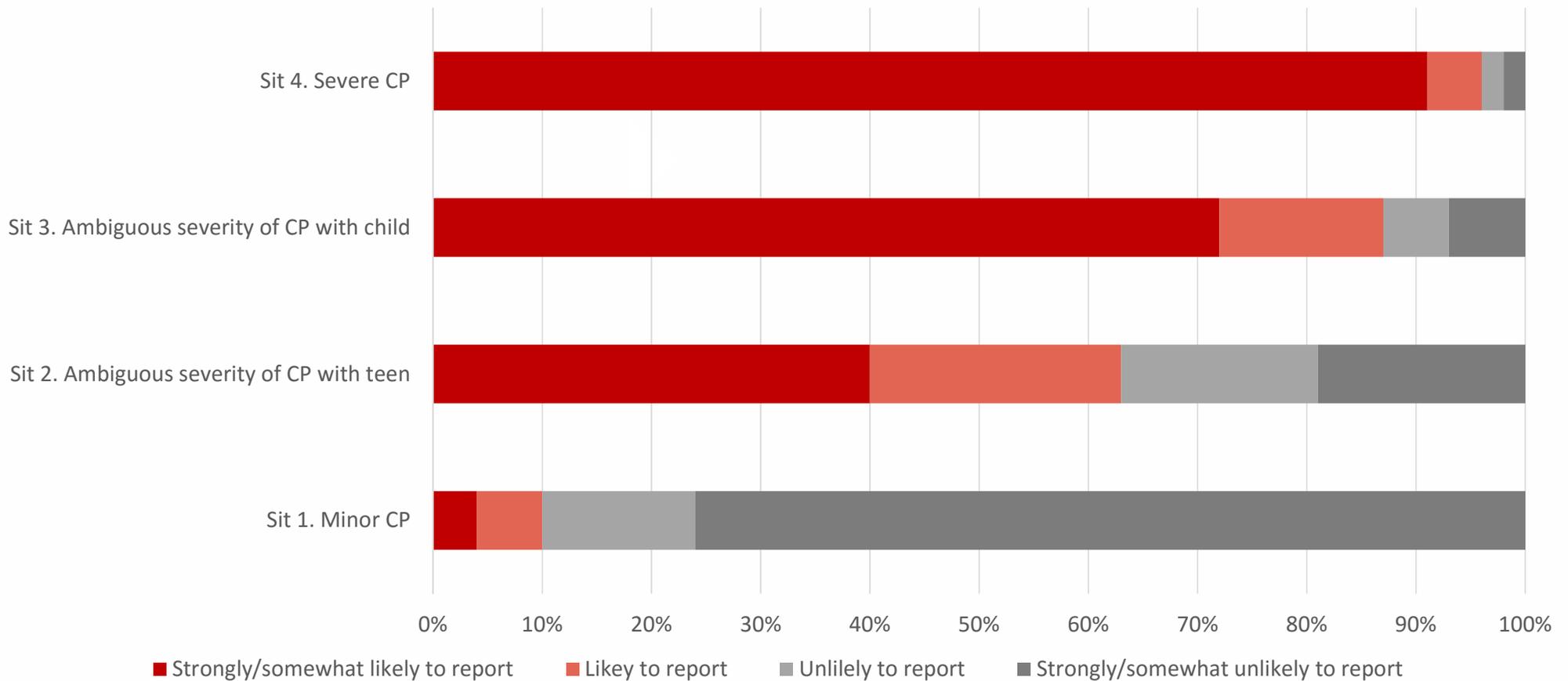
Psychosocial professionals have less misconceptions about CPS reporting than **health and education professionals**

Results: Sense of competence, mandatory reporting

<i>(Strongly or somewhat agree)</i>	Psychosocial (PS) n (%)	Health (HS) n (%)	Education (ES) n (%)	χ^2	<i>Post-hoc</i>
<i>I am confident that I can recognize the signs of physical abuse to a child.</i>	1 045 (88%)	203 (75%)	236 (79%)	38,49***	PS>(HS=ES)
<i>The difference between reasonable and unreasonable physical punishment is clear to me.</i>	634 (54%)	120 (44%)	159 (53%)	7,88**	PS>HS

Psychosocial professionals have a **higher sense of competence** about CPS reporting than **health and education professionals**

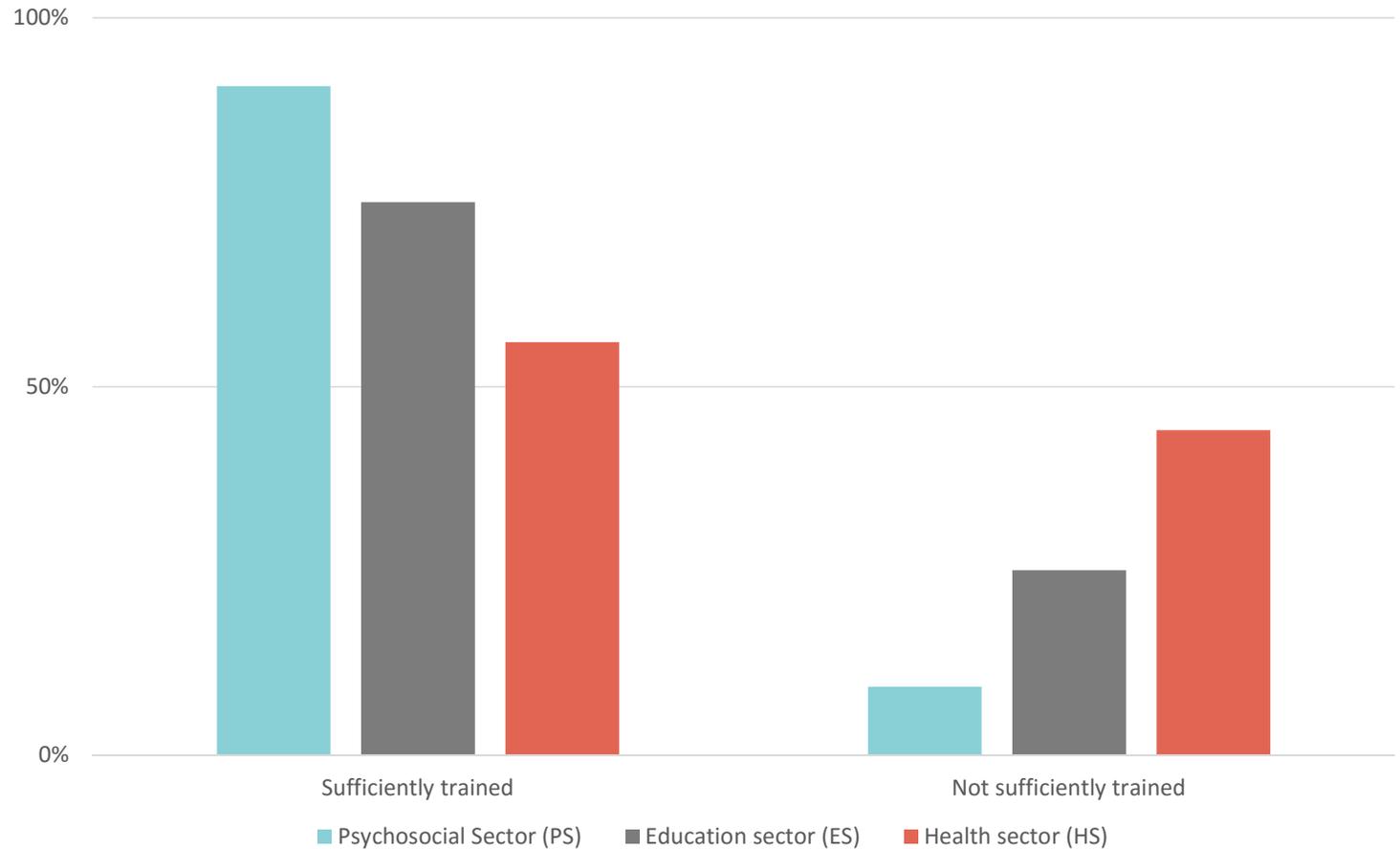
Results: willingness to report situation to CPS



Results: parenting practices training needs

17%

Consider themselves **not sufficiently trained**

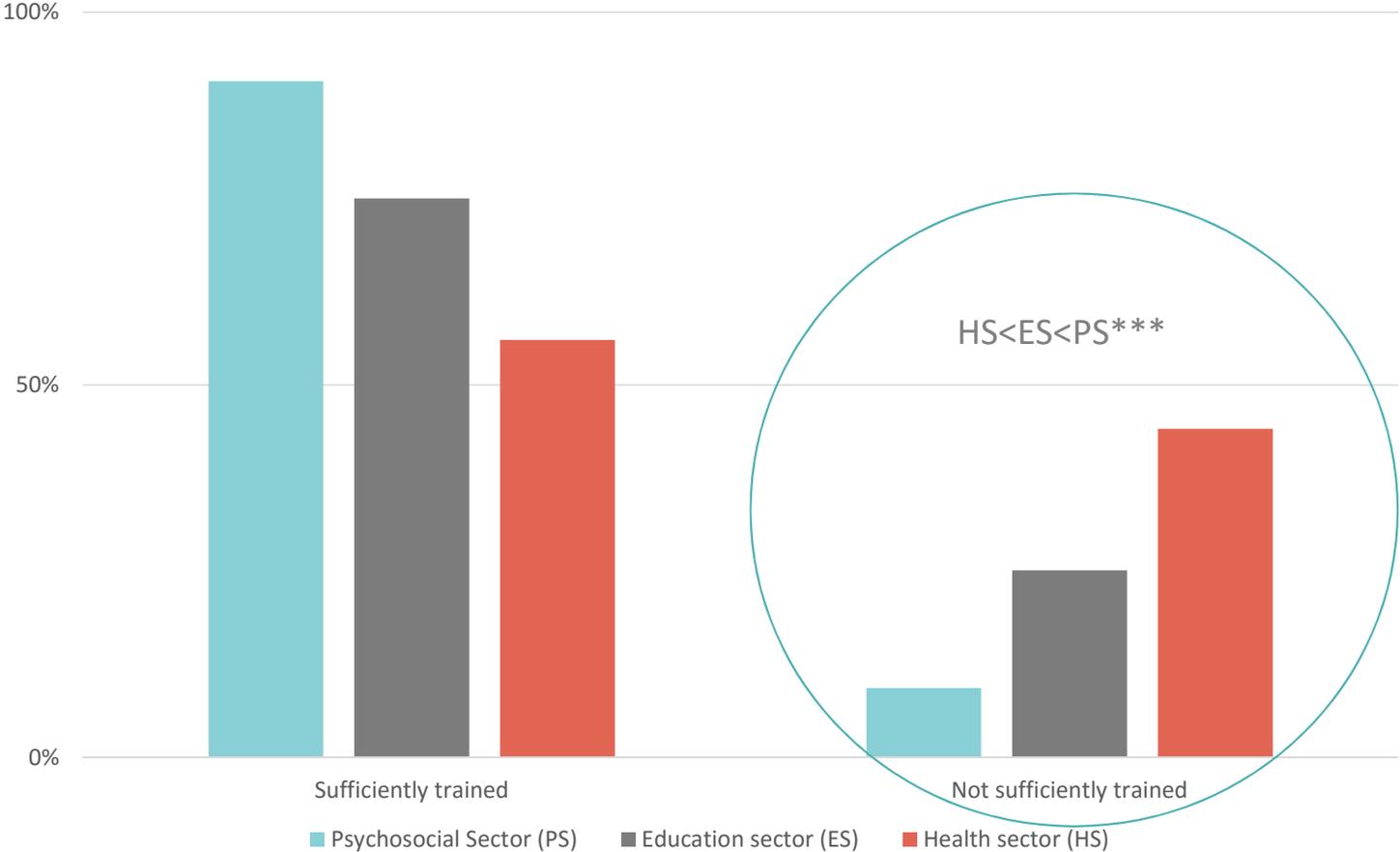


*** $p < 0,001$

Results: parenting practices training needs

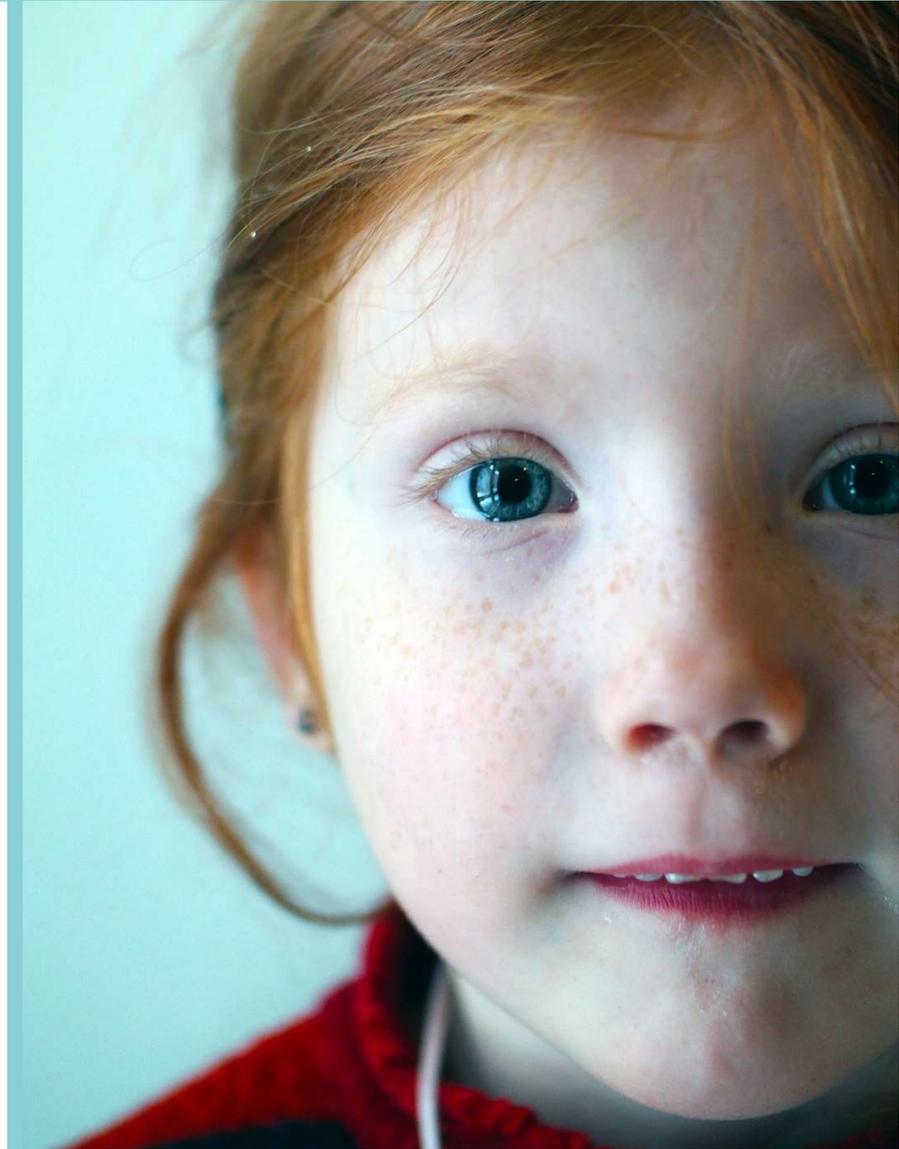
17%

Consider themselves **not sufficiently trained BUT**



***p < 0,001

Discussion



In sum

In the province of Quebec, professionals working with children and families

- Strongly disagree with CP (health sector professionals tend to agree more);
- Are aware of their obligation to report CP. Psychosocial professionals have a better sense of competence compared to other sectors;
- Have a few misconceptions about legal requirements, especially in health and education sectors;
- Willingness to report CP tends to increase with their degree of violence, even though some individuals would report minor CP (ex : slaps on the hand) to CPS.
- A fair proportion of professionals consider themselves not sufficiently trained to face these issues (especially in the health sector)

Important results because...

About 30% of parents have already asked for professional advice on child discipline

(Clément et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2014; Young et al., 1998)

.Health professionals > education > psychosocial professionals (Clément et al., 2017; Keller & McDade, 2000; Rodrigo et al., 2007; Taylor et al., 2010; Walsh, 2002)

Sources of information for primary care professionals

- .Professionals are insufficiently trained to advise parents or report suspected child abuse to Child Protective Services (Herendeen et al., 2014; Lynne et al., 2015).
- .Professionals rely on television, newspapers or their own experience as the main sources of their knowledge on CP issues (Lawrence et al., 2009; Stipanivic & Boisvert, 2013)

Consequences on parental support and advice

- .Parental disciplinary practices are often avoided in health sector primary care settings (Regalado et al., 2010)
- .Professionals in favor of CP are more inclined to recommend it (Bélanger Sabourin, 2011; Labbé et al., 2012)
- .Professionals' knowledge of legal frameworks influences their tendency to report abuse to CPS (Herendeen et al., 2014)

Implications

- Need for better initial and continuous training, especially within health care and education professional groups;
- Need to better inform professionals about the distinction between corporal punishment and physical abuse, to shed light on this gray zone, and list the best practices according to situations (reasonable or unreasonable use of force);
- Need to better inform professionals about existing resources in order to refer parents when needed, before any suspicion of physical abuse in a disciplinary context arise;
- On a political level, to pursue efforts to withdraw Section 43 of the Criminal Code.

Thank you!

