Social care professionals’ beliefs toward mandatory reporting of child abuse

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In Quebec (Canada), the **Youth Protection Act** protects children against maltreatment, including physical abuse.

Professionals and citizens who have reasonable grounds to believe that the security or development of a child is, or may be, considered to be in danger because of physical abuse are required to report the situation to **Child Protection Services (CPS)**;

- Failure to report child abuse is associated with greater risk of future maltreatment (Alvarez et al., 2005)

Social care professionals are privileged witnesses of parental use of corporal punishment and physical abuse towards children

- Their attitudes and beliefs about child abuse report to CPS is however an understudied topic in primary care settings; it has mainly been studied with teachers and health professionals.
Factors influencing professionals’ report of child abuse to authorities:

(Alvarez, 2004; Ashton, 2004; Feng et al., 2010; Feng & Levine, 2005; McTavish et al., 2017; Pecnik et al., 2005; Tirosh et al., 2005)

- Corporal punishment in childhood and attitudes in favor of this practice
- Lack of knowledge of child abuse signs
- Lack of training/knowledge in reporting procedure
- Misinterpretation or ignorance of child abuse law (e.g. believing report is a breech of confidentiality)
- Negative view of CPS (e.g. delays in investigations)
- Fear of negative consequences resulting from the report (e.g. harm to the child, removal of the child, damage to the relation with child victim and families)
Research objectives

To describe social care professionals':

• Knowledge of their duty to report to Child Protection Services (CPS);

• Beliefs about mandatory report to CPS; and

• Willingness to report situations of parental use of minor to severe corporal punishment to CPS.

To predict social care professionals’ willingness to report situations to CPS.
Method

Online Survey
- Conducted between April and November 2017
- In the province of Quebec (Canada)

Participants
- 1187 professionals working in the social care sector
- Who devote at least 20% of their time with children (0-17 years) or with their parents. Recruited mostly through:
  - professional order or association
  - social media and workplaces

Questions about:
- Legal knowledge about CPS mandatory reporting
- Beliefs about CPS mandatory reporting
- Willingness to report situations involving corporal punishment to CPS
Participants

Place of birth
- 94% Canada • 6% Elsewhere

Age
Between 20 to 75 years old (M=39 years old)

Race
- 96% White • 4% Other than White

Working experience with families
Between 1 to 50 years (M=13 years)

Professional order membership
- 30% No • 70% Yes

Professional membership:
- 32% Psycho-educator
- 29% Social work
- 6% Psychologist
- 3% Criminologist
Results: misconceptions about mandatory reporting

94% would know **what to do to report** a child for abuse to CPS.

**But**

- No misconception: 30%
- 1 misconception: 31%
- 2 misconceptions: 21%
- 3 misconceptions and more: 16%
Results: misconceptions about mandatory reporting

Misconceptions about mandatory reporting that are more frequent:

“*My responsibility to report to CPS may be delegated to another person in my organization*” (43%)

“I *must agree with the team decision to report a child to CPS or not*” (24%)

“After I report a child to CPS, I *will (not) be notified of the decision to accept the report for evaluation*” (21%)

“To report a child to CPS, I *must be able to prove that the facts have occurred*” (11%)
## Results: beliefs about child abuse report to CPS (n=1187)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative impact of report</th>
<th>Strongly agree (%)</th>
<th>Somewhat agree (%)</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree (%)</th>
<th>Strongly disagree (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am concerned that the child’s situation may get worse if I make a report.</td>
<td>3,5</td>
<td>27,6</td>
<td>47,5</td>
<td>21,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am concerned that the child may be removed from his / her family if I make a report.</td>
<td>1,4</td>
<td>18,1</td>
<td>52,3</td>
<td>28,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I may lose my alliance with the family if I make a report.</td>
<td>4,0</td>
<td>38,3</td>
<td>42,9</td>
<td>14,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I may do more harm than good to the family if I make a report.</td>
<td>0,9</td>
<td>6,7</td>
<td>48,8</td>
<td>43,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am concerned about my own safety after making a report.</td>
<td>1,8</td>
<td>10,7</td>
<td>37,2</td>
<td>50,3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Positive impact of report                                                                 |                     |                    |                      |                      |
| Reporting to the CPS is helpful and necessary.                                           | 48,9                | 44,3               | 5,1                  | 1,7                  |
| Reporting to the CPS can make a difference in the child’s life.                          | 62,6                | 33,8               | 1,8                  | 1,9                  |
| As a precaution, a situation should be reported to the CPS if there is the slightest doubt. | 28,1                | 44,9               | 24,3                 | 2,6                  |

| Difficulty in CPS report                                                                 |                     |                    |                      |                      |
| CPS does not have the necessary resources to evaluate received reports in depth.         | 8,1                 | 25,4               | 40,0                 | 26,5                 |
| CPS would not take my reports seriously.                                                 | 2,4                 | 11,1               | 43,6                 | 42,9                 |
| CPS reacts exaggeratedly or inappropriately to received reports.                          | 1,4                 | 9,5                | 49,7                 | 39,4                 |
| The processing of my report varies according to the CPS’s worker who receives it.       | 15,2                | 29,4               | 39,7                 | 15,7                 |

| Confidence in reporting                                                                  |                     |                    |                      |                      |
| I cannot intervene successfully in situations of child abuse without having to report to CPS. | 49,4                | 38,1               | 10,3                 | 2,3                  |
| I am confident that I can recognize the signs of physical abuse to a child.               | 27,2                | 60,4               | 10,9                 | 1,1                  |
| If I must report a child to the CPS I will know what to do.                               | 78,7                | 15,3               | 3,4                  | 2,6                  |
Results: willingness to report situation to CPS

- Slap on a child's hand
  - Sit 1. Minor CP

- Slapping a teen in the face
  - Sit 2. Ambiguous severity of CP with teen

- Hitting a child
  - Sit 3. Ambiguous severity of CP with child

- Hitting a child with an object
  - Sit 4. Severe CP

Legend:
- Strongly/somewhat likely to report
- Likely to report
- Unlikely to report
- Strongly/somewhat unlikely to report
### Results: Prediction of professional’s willingness to report to CPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Minor CP</th>
<th>CP of ambiguous severity (w child)</th>
<th>CP of ambiguous severity (w teen)</th>
<th>Severe CP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes toward CP (against)</td>
<td><strong>0.07</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>0.17</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>0.14</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>0.12</strong>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misconception about CPS reporting (sum)</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.08**</td>
<td>-0.10***</td>
<td>-0.08**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived negative impact of report</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived difficulty of CPS process</td>
<td>-0.08*</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived positive impact of report</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td><strong>0.09</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>0.17</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>0.10</strong>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in reporting</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td><strong>0.13</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>0.10</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>0.14</strong>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working experience in CPS</td>
<td><strong>0.07</strong>*</td>
<td>0.06*</td>
<td><strong>0.13</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>0.10</strong>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion
Discussion

1. **Willingness to report situations to CPS** tends to increase with the severity of violence, even though some would report **minor CP** (ex: slaps on the hand).

2. Professionals **are aware of their duty** to report child abuse to CPSC, although 70% have at **least one misconception** about mandatory reporting;
   - Similar of previous studies with nurses and teachers (Beck et al., 1994; Feng & Levine, 2005);
   - Misconceptions are associated with decrease in willingness to report situations to CPS.

3. An important proportion hold some **beliefs about negative impact of CPS report** and about **difficulties in reporting**.
   - These factors are not associated with child abuse report in case of ambiguous and severe CP;
   - In social care services, professionals might tend to prevent negative impact of child abuse report before doing it by different strategies (Tufford, et al., 2014)
4. Professionals’ **disagreement about CP** increases their willingness to report the situation to CPS

- Consistent with previous studies (Asthon, 2001; Feng & Levine, 2005; Tirosh et al., 2003)

- Importance of training about corporal punishment (impact on children, ineffectiveness, when it is considered child abuse, etc.)

5. Perceived **positive impact of report, confidence and experience in the CPS system** increases the willingness to report the situation:

- Training in social care services should address the importance of CPS report for child and family (positive impact) as well as the CPS laws and system (mandatory obligation of report child abuse, positive impact of report, CPS report system, etc.)
Thank you!


