12-18-2020

Child Protection Services: An Evaluation of the Current System and Recommendations for Preventing Instances of Abuse

Sarah Varian
skatvarian@gmail.com

Recommended Citation

Child Protection Services: An Evaluation of the Current System and Recommendations for

Preventing Instances of Abuse

Sarah K. Varian

Concordia University, St. Paul

MA in Early Childhood Education

ED590 Course Instructor: Dr. Kelly Sadlovsky

Second Reader: Elizabeth Amirahmadi

December 10th, 2020

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Abstract

Millions of children are reported to Child Protective Services every year, and the services those

children receive differ greatly between each state depending on the laws and regulations set in

place and what community programs may or may not exist to support them. Research about what

factors influence child abuse occurrences and which services best meet the needs of at-risk

families is vital to determine the best ways to provide support for families reported for cases of

abuse or neglect (Palmer, Maiter, & Manji, 2006; Solomon & Asber, 2012). A review of

literature on this topic concluded that currently, Child Protective Services offices throughout the

United States vary greatly in the effectiveness and consistency of support services. More funding

to support necessary services that meet the actual and not perceived needs of families is needed

to aid in reducing the number of cases reported (Maguire-Jack & Bowers, 2014). Suggestions for

future studies to continue studying effective intervention methods are also addressed in this

paper.

   Keywords: Child Protection Services, child maltreatment, abuse, intervention methods

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2018, approximately 4.3 million referrals were made to Child Protection Services

(CPS) in the United States (Children's Bureau, 2018). Of those 4.3 million referrals, 21.1% of

them were made by teachers and daycare providers (Children's Bureau, 2018). Early childhood

educators are in a unique position to be able to advocate for children who may be suffering from

abusive situations. A young child can spend up to 40 hours a week or more in the care of an early

childhood educator which can lead to trusting relationships between the child and teacher. These

factors can make teachers a strong support and advocate for a child who may be in an abusive

situation; especially if the child is too young to advocate for themselves (Nguyen-Vu, 2018).

Teachers are also able to observe and record aspects of a child's development, appearance, and

behaviors on a daily basis (Nguyen-Vu, 2018). As outlined in the Federal Child Abuse

Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), all states in the United States are required to have

professionals mandated to report child abuse if it is suspected, and in many states, this includes

teachers and early childhood educators (Children's Bureau, 2019). While each state is allowed to

make state specific laws and regulations regarding child abuse, the federal government provides

guidelines about what constitutes as abuse to aid states in creating definitions of abuse

(Children's Bureau, 2019b).

What is Abuse?

In the United States, the federal government defines abuse as any action taken by a parent

or other adult taking on caregiving roles, or lack of care that results in serious physical or

emotional harm, sexual harm or exploitation, or puts the child at a serious risk for injury

(Children's Bureau, 2019b). This broad definition laid down by the federal government is a

framework for states to draft their own laws and legislature regarding child abuse (Children's

Bureau, 2019b). Each state varies in their specific definitions of what acts qualify as abuse; for instance, some states identify acts of domestic violence witnessed by a child to be a form of abuse, while others do not (Children's Bureau, 2019b). Though the details slightly vary from state to state, there are broad definitions to allow for general understanding of what constitutes as abuse.

Types of Abuse

The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act defines child abuse in the simplest of terms as an act or failure to act when caring for a child that puts the child at serious risk of harm (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). Within this broad definition, more specific types of abuse can be defined as well. Physical abuse refers to when a parent or caregiver acts in a way that causes intentional physical harm to a child (Children's Bureau, 2019b). Physical abuse can be identified by a variety of signs, including unexplained or conflicting explanations for a child's injuries, child is afraid of a parent or caregiver, abuses animals, or has anxious, depressed, or aggressive behaviors (Children's Bureau, 2019b). Any act on the part of a caregiver that causes physical harm to a child is considered to be abuse regardless of whether the act was intentional or not (Childhelp, n.d.). Emotional abuse is very nearly the opposite of physical abuse, as it takes effect on a child's mental well-being rather than their physical well-being (Children's Bureau, 2019b). Emotional abuse refers to acts that take effect on a child's self-worth and mental well-being, such as threats, withholding of love or support, or excessive criticism (Children's Bureau, 2019b). While physical abuse leaves a child with visible injuries, emotional abuse is more difficult to identify and prove and generally occurs over a long period of time (Childhelp, n.d.; Children's Bureau, 2019b). Sexual abuse refers to when a child is a victim of rape, indecent exposure, molestation, prostitution, or partakes or

witnesses any other type of sexual act (Children's Bureau, 2019b). Sexual abuse may also occur when an older child uses another child as a source of sexual excitement or fulfillment (Childhelp, n.d.).

The most common type of abuse is neglect which encompasses any time a parent or caregiver fails to provide for a child's basic needs (Children's Bureau, 2019b). As neglect is defined as a failure to act rather than the manifestation of an act, neglect can be very difficult to identify or prove with concrete evidence (Turner, Vanderminden, Finkelhor, & Hamby, 2019). Neglect can be made more difficult to appropriately identify in situations where a family is experiencing poverty or homelessness or has cultural values that are difficult for others to understand (Children's Bureau, 2019b). Different types of neglect may occur on their own or alongside other types of abuse or neglect. Physical neglect refers to situations in which a caregiver fails to provide basic physical needs for a child, such as medical or dental care, appropriate hygiene care, or appropriate nutritional needs (Turner et al., 2019). Educational neglect refers to situations in which a caregiver or parents fails to provide a child with access to learning and education (Children's Bureau, 2019b).

Not defined as such by the federal government, many states also specify abandonment to be a form of neglect or abuse (Children's Bureau, 2019b). Abandonment occurs when a parent or guardian is not in contact with the child and has left the child in a situation that shows a serious disregard and care for the child's health and safety (Children's Bureau, 2019b). Another state specific form of abuse is parent substance abuse, defined as exposing children to legal or illegal drugs, manufacturing or selling drugs within the presence of a child, giving drugs or alcohol to a child, or using a legal or illegal substance excessively to the point that it impairs the caregiver's ability to care for the child (Children's Bureau, 2019b). Human trafficking, when involving

children, is another act that many states include in their definitions of child abuse (Children's

Bureau, 2019b).

History of Child Protection Services

In 1875, animal protection advocate Henry Bergh and attorney Elbridge Gerry, founded

the world's first organization dedicated to protecting the rights and safety of children (Melamed

& Myers, 2006). The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was born

when the two men realized the need for such an organization after working together on a court

case (Melamed & Myers, 2006). The results of this case removed nine-year-old Mary Ellen

from her home, having suffered severe physical abuse and neglect (Melamed & Myers, 2006).

This later led to the creation of many other private organizations committed to protecting

children's safety. Throughout the 1960's and 1970's many laws were created that became the

steppingstones to a federal government led organization focused on the same goals (Melamed &

Myers, 2006). The federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974 provided funds

dedicated to state laws preventing child abuse and maltreatment, but it wasn't until 1976 that

every state in the United States had these laws in place (Bergman, A.B., 2010; Melamed &

Myers, 2006). Because each state determines its own child protection laws, definitions of abuse

and the actions that result from a report being made vary from state to state (Nguyen-Vu, 2018).

States also vary greatly in identifying which individuals and professionals are classified as

mandated reporters (Nguyen-Vu, 2018). When mandated reporting laws were first written, only a

handful of states included teachers (Nguyen-Vu, 2018). It wasn't until 1977 that nearly every

state in the United States included teachers as mandated reporters (Nguyen-Vu, 2018).

Child Protection Services Today

There have been many factors that influenced how CPS functions as the system has grown over time. Awareness of the signs of abuse as well as mandated reporting laws have changed the standard picture of what one may look for in an abused child; instances of physical abuse are becoming less frequent, while neglect reports currently make up nearly 75% of CPS cases (Bergman, 2010). One study focused on children ages four to eight years who were found to be at risk for abuse and neglect and compared those who had received CPS services to those who had not, and the results showed no distinguishable difference between the two groups (Bergman, A. B., 2010). Those children who had received services had no noticeable changes in a variety of areas including child behavioral issues, maternal education, family functioning and poverty, or social support, which suggests that the CPS interventions they received took no effect on the families (Bergman, 2010).

Research has also shown there to be a disproportionate number of children of color involved in CPS cases than white children in the United States (Meiners & Tolliver, 2016). Data shows that low-income families of color are much more likely to be reported for instances of abuse or neglect and are also more likely to be taken on as a case within the CPS system (Meiners & Tolliver, 2016). Researchers offer up a comparison of two mothers who made similar parenting choices in regard to the supervision of their nine-year-old children and were treated in vastly different ways (Meiners & Tolliver, 2016). One parent allowed her daughter to play in a nearby park alone while working at a minimum wage job (Meiners & Tolliver, 2016). This parent could not afford childcare. The other parent was a journalist who wrote an article on allowing her son to ride the subway home alone (Meiners & Tolliver, 2016). Both mothers made choices about children, who were the same age, that led to the children being unsupervised for an

extended period of time (Meiners & Tolliver, 2016). The journalist, a white woman, was

regarded as being forward thinking, while the mother who could not afford childcare, an African-

American woman, was reported to CPS, received jail time, and nearly lost her job as a result

(Meiners & Tolliver, 2016). This incident is a prime example of how a person's personal bias

may have impact on the decision to report a child to CPS; not all situations may be considered

and reported equally by mandated reporters.

Mandated Reporters

As a part of the guidelines laid out by CAPTA, all states are required to identify persons

responsible for reporting potential occurrences of child abuse, known as mandated reporters

(Children's Bureau, 2019a). Each state varies in their descriptions of who is a mandated reporter,

but the majority of states include teachers, childcare providers, health care workers, social

workers, mental health professionals, and law enforcement officers in their mandate (Children's

Bureau, 2019a). Other common professionals identified as reporters include photograph

processors, parole officers, volunteers or employees providing any type of organized youth

activity, animal control workers, computer technicians, and higher education employees

(Children's Bureau, 2019a). The variation in state's determination of who is a mandated reporter

is one of the clearest distinctions in how child abuse laws and regulations can vary from state to

state. For example, while 28 states in the United States identify members of clergy as mandated

reporters, Minnesota specifies that ministers are only reporters when the information was

reported while working or providing ministerial support (Children's Bureau, 2019a). 18 states

specify that any person who suspects abuse is mandated to report, whereas Rhode Island only

identifies healthcare workers as individuals charged with this responsibility (Children's Bureau,

2019a).

Hospitals, schools, or other organizations that employ mandated reporters may have individual rules and regulations regarding the reporting process (Children's Bureau, 2019a). When a mandated reporter is making a report using an internal process where the head of an organization may be making the report on the individual's behalf, this is known as institutional reporting (Children's Bureau, 2019a). Some states specify in their mandated reporting laws that employers are not to discourage employees from making reports, or that employees are not to incur any type of disciplinary action in the workplace if they chose to file a report (Children's Bureau, 2019a). These types of laws only exist in less than half of the states in the U.S., which can cause mandated reporters to seriously consider whether or not to make a report (Children's Bureau, 2019a).

Reporting Process

Research found that the decision to report a family to CPS is not one taken lightly by educators or other reporting professionals. Research has shown that teachers may not report child abuse for a variety of reasons: the fear of that the reports will be inaccurate; fear that there will be negative consequences for making a report; are worried about cultural misunderstandings with the family; do not have a full understanding of how to properly report abuse (Nguyen-Vu, 2018). Research has also shown that teachers' emotions and connections with children also play an important part in the decision to make a CPS report, and fears of what effects a CPS investigation could have on a family were the teachers choose to make a report (Nguyen-Vu, 2018). While teachers may struggle with the decision-making process about if a report is warranted, it is also important to consider that there are legal consequences as well if a report is not made (Meiners & Tolliver, 2016; Nguyen-Vu, 2018). Failure to report a case of child abuse could result in the loss of a license to work in a professional capacity or other legal repercussions

(Krase, n.d.). Waiting too long or choosing not to report a case is determined to be "willful failure" and can lead to criminal penalties that vary depending on the severity of the type of abuse involved (Krase, n.d.). There are many professionals who are required to make reports, and failure to do so may also result in a loss of license to work in the failed reporters professional capacity (Krase, n.d.). While the results for failing to report child abuse can be severe, it is very seldom that any prosecution is brought to those who fail to comply with mandated reporting laws (Meiners & Tolliver, 2016).

Conclusion

Research analyzed for this paper revealed that 44% of the 4.3 million referrals made to CPS in 2018 were not considered for services (Children's Bureau, 2018). The lack of services was due to not obtaining enough information to warrant consideration, the referral was not determined to be an abusive situation, CPS was not the appropriate agency to handle the reported situation, or the children in the report were over the age of 18 (Children's Bureau, 2018). While CPS may have determined that those 44% are not in need of services, there is a possibility that those children and families would benefit from some type of intervention to improve their well-being and increase the chances of having a successful future. Research shows that early intervention practices provide lasting effects on a child's health and well-being, the first five years of a child's life being the optimal time to establish healthy life practices (Lung, Tsang, & Heung, 2013). This leads to the topic that will be explored throughout this paper, the question of is CPS and effective system, and how can early childhood educators work to prevent instances of abuse.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There are many factors at play when considering what causes abuse and the best ways to serve a family experiencing abuse. Socio-economic status, homelessness, and access to quality early childhood education programs can all play an important part in what causes an instance of child abuse to occur (Henschel, de Bruin, & Möhler, 2014). As noted in the previous chapter, each state varies in their determination of what constitutes as abuse, and therefore it is important to note that the abuse response can vary from state to state as well. Determining the most effective methods for addressing families in abusive situations is vital to a child's development. Children's brain development is occurring most rapidly in early childhood, and childhood maltreatment can have damaging chemical effects on a child's brain development (American Human Association, Center for the Study of Social Policy, Child Welfare League of America, Children's Defense Fund, & Zero to Three, 2011). Just as a child's brain is can be damaged the most at an early age, intervention to correct these negative effects also must occur at an early age. In a 2019 study, researchers found that children who experienced maltreatment were at an elevated risk for arrest as an adult due to lower levels of cognitive flexibility, executive functioning skills, and nonverbal reasoning (Nikulina & Widom). These findings show that providing as much support as possible to prevent occurrences and reoccurrences of abusive and neglectful situations is critical to a child's development.

Factors that Influence Child Abuse

To understand what the best methods are for preventing abuse, it is first important to understand what factors increase the likelihood of childhood abuse. In a 2019 case-control study, researchers examined if socioeconomic factors had a link to child neglect cases (Turner, Vanderminden, Finkelhor, & Hamby). Information was taken from the 2011 and 2014 reports of

the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence which includes data collection on child

abuse and neglect cases for children ages 2-17 years old (Turner et al., 2019). Interviews were

conducted with caregivers and one child in the household to obtain more demographic

information about families chosen to participate in the study, were paid $20 for participation, and

were given the option of being interviewed in either English or Spanish (Turner et al., 2019).

Interviewers were trained in how to respond to any disclosure of victimization that may occur,

and participants who shared any such information were connected with counseling support

(Turner et al., 2019).

      Results of the study showed that parents with less than a high school education were

twice as likely to participate in acts of supervisory neglect compared to parents with a college

education, but no link was found between parent education and other forms of abuse (Turner et

al., 2019). Household income showed no link between any forms of abuse, however interviews

showed that perceived financial strain on the part of caregivers did have an association with acts

of physical abuse (Turner et al., 2019). Parental or caregiver history of job loss showed

significant associations across all forms of abuse compared to those whose employment histories

were more consistent (Turner et al., 2019). Findings also showed that the rates of physical

neglect were very similar between older and younger children, and rates of supervisory neglect

were much higher for older children (Turner et al., 2019). These findings suggest that while

Child Protective Services (CPS) statistics tend to show higher rates of neglect and abuse among

younger children, it is possible that in reality, the numbers may be much more similar due to the

fact that cases with younger children tend to be reported more than those involving older

children (Turner et al., 2019). Researchers also discussed how this study was limited in the fact

that neglect is a difficult thing to assess and track with a uniform set of measures and because of

this, it is possible for cases of neglect to be underreported to CPS (Turner et al., 2019). Another

limitation to the study may have occurred in bias from the participants, as all participants were

offered a monetary incentive for participating in the study (Turner et al., 2019).

In addition to socioeconomic status, whether or not parents experienced abuse as a child

can have an effect on the likelihood to abuse a child. Researchers assessed 87 mothers of

preschool children using the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire which provides ratings for

different types of abuse that one may have experienced (Henschel et al., 2014). The mothers with

high scores in areas of sexual or physical abuse were considered for the study, and those with

low scores in the same area were used as a control group (Henschel et al., 2014). Participants

were also given a Self-Control Scale and Child Abuse Potential Inventory questionnaires to rate

the participants self-control abilities and child abuse potential respectively (Henschel et al.,

2014). The children of the mothers participating in the study were given the Effortful Control

Battery test to assess the children's self-regulation skills and gain insight into the parenting styles

and educational demands of the mothers (Henschel et al., 2014).

Results of this cross-sectional study showed that mothers who experienced childhood

abuse were significantly more likely to abuse a child than the control group, despite parenting

intentions (Henschel et al., 2014). Researchers also hypothesized that mothers' self-control

abilities would be reflected in children's self-regulation skills, but the results did not strongly

support this theory and more research would need to be done on this relationship (Henschel et

al., 2014). Additional results that were obtained during this study and not previously

hypothesized by researchers showed that older children had higher self-regulation scores than

younger children and working mothers had higher self-control scores compared to non-working

mothers (Henschel et al., 2014). Single mothers were also shown to be at a higher risk of abuse

acts compared to mothers in a relationship (Henschel et al., 2014). Limitations of this study

include the need for improved measures of self-control in children, as well as the need to focus

on older children to be able to fully understand the importance of developing these skills in early

childhood (Henschel et al., 2014).

Effectiveness of the Current System in the United States

There is a body of research in the United States that indicates the introduction of support

services to families do not have an impact on the recurrences of child maltreatment instances

within that family (Russell, Kerwin, & Halverson, 2018). It is difficult to discern what factors

affect these cases, but one such study reported that a child who receives services is up to 35%

more likely to be reported a second time (Russell et al., 2018). Kang conducted a study in 2018

to determine if the services a family received as a result of a CPS case matched the needs of the

family as well as to explore the impact those services had on the families. 373 guardians from the

Illinois CPS system were interviewed by phone and asked questions regarding what type of

services were received, what emotional support was provided, whether the services they received

adequately met the families' needs, and how those services had an effect on the family's

perceived levels of stress (Kang, 2018). These factors were chosen for this process-model study

as researchers identified past studies to be lacking in this area of research (Kang, 2018). The

families that participated in the study voluntarily chose to participate upon completing an exit

survey at the completion of their CPS services and were offered a $15 Walmart gift card for

completing the survey (Kang, 2018). All families that participated were reported to CPS for

instances of neglect and of these families, over 90% were female, more than 50% had some

college or higher education, and approximately half received an annual income of less than

$10,000 (Kang, 2018).

Results of the study showed significant indication that emotional support had a strong impact on decreasing the likelihood of child maltreatment occurrences (Kang, 2018). Results also showed that alongside this emotional support, occurrences also decreased when caregiver's levels of perceived stress aligned with the services received that allowed for the feelings of a sense of control over the situation (Kang, 2018). This study was limited by including only caregivers who qualified for a specific project area of the Illinois CPS system, and voluntarily chose to participate in the study (Kang, 2018). Because of the specific population surveyed in this study, it is not possible to make generalized conclusions about all families receiving CPS services. Because participants were offered a monetary incentive for participating, this may have had an additional effect on the population of families involved with the study (Kang, 2018). This study was also limited in its use of an unstandardized unit of measurement for determining levels of emotional support and perceived match of received services, and it is suggested that better units of measurement be used for these areas in future studies (Kang, 2018).

Solomon and Asber (2012) also researched the effectiveness of CPS services in eliminating recurrences of abuse, also known as recidivism. Archival data from CPS case files were used in this cohort study, using only studies in which abuse was conclusively determined to have occurred (Solomon & Asber, 2012). All cases chosen occurred between 2007 and 2008 in the southern United States and were looked at by family units rather than by individual children (Solomon & Asber, 2012). Researchers considered data such as the amount of time between CPS cases, child and parent characteristics such as age, gender, and relationship status, type of abuse, and situational characteristics such as number of children in the household, or presence of alcohol or substance abuse (Solomon & Asber, 2012). Types of interventions received from

social services were also considered when reviewing data and assessing results (Solomon &

Asber, 2012).

Results of this study showed that 50.8% of cases experienced recidivism following an

abuse or neglect report to CPS (Solomon & Asber, 2012). When broken down among the

different types of reports, neglect cases experienced a reoccurrence of abuse in 53.2% of cases,

physical abuse recurred in 44.4% of cases, and domestic violence experienced recidivism in

55.7% of cases (Solomon & Asber, 2012). Children who were given out of home placements

away from parents for a period of time were significantly more likely to experience a second

occurrence of abuse (Solomon & Asber, 2012). Researchers suggest that following a family for

longer periods of time post-reunification may bring about a positive impact in reducing the

likelihood of abuse for out of home placement situations (Solomon & Asber, 2012). Results of

the study also showed that parents that were provided therapy had a noticeably lower rate of

recidivism, which suggests that providing support for psychological problems such as stress and

depression may have an impact on occurrences of child maltreatment (Solomon & Asber, 2012).

Limitations of this study can be found in the limited sample size available, and the use of

archival data meant the researchers did not have input on which data and interventions were to be

used for the study (Solomon & Asber, 2012). A final limitation occurs in the demographic of the

participants, as the majority of the sample used were of Caucasian descent, and therefore

generalizations cannot be made about other populations of families (Solomon & Asber, 2012).

In another case report study of the CPS system, Russell et al. (2018) discuss that the

perceived ineffectiveness of the interventions made may be affected by over-reporting, leading to

an alarming workload, and under-reporting of cases that are of a legitimate concern. Researchers

studied cases that occurred in between July 1, 2010 and June 30, 2011 (Russell et al., 2018). If

families had more than one case, the first reported case was used in this study (Russell et al., 2018). Cases that were included in the study had been reported to CPS, were screened for in-person investigation, a substantial report was determined, and was opened for post-investigation services (Russell et al., 2018). All cases required a pre- and post-services risk-assessment evaluation which the researchers then studied the scores of to determine if CPS services had an effect on the likelihood of abuse reoccurrence (Russell et al., 2018). Researchers were then able to sort cases into four comparable groups of high-risk families. The first group one group was provided recommendation to be opened for services by following policy recommendations and the second group was not recommended (Russell et al., 2018). The third and fourth groups were structured similarly, but for cases in which workers had not followed policy recommendations (Russell et al., 2018).

Researchers compared the groups using various methods and controls to determine if opening a case and providing services had a direct effect upon the likelihood of further maltreatment cases and determined there was no relationship found (Russell et al., 2018). Researchers also discussed that when focusing on certain aspects of a CPS response, families who interact with response workers that provide emotional support were more likely to have support needs met, and the decreased stress level led to a decrease in recurrences of maltreatment (Russell et al., 2018). This suggests that more research including these variables must be done to truly understand the effects of CPS services has on high-risk families (Russell et al., 2018). Limitations were also found in that researchers were able to compare cases that were similar in type but were unable to further investigate why certain decisions were made, the experience level of the workers involved and if that impacted the decisions made, or the quality of services provided (Russell et al., 2018). Researchers further speculate that due to the fact that the majority

of cases pertain to neglect rather than abuse this could have had an impact on the overall results

(Russell et al., 2018).

Parent Perceptions

In a 2006 study, researchers interviewed parents who had worked with CPS about

experiences parents had with the investigation process (Palmer, Maiter, & Manji). Parents were

recruited from two CPS agencies in mid-sized cities in Ontario, Canada, and were randomly

selected to be asked to participate (Palmer et al., 2006). Parents who chose to participate were

interviewed in a semi-structured manner in the family's own home and answers were both

audiotaped and transcribed by research assistants (Palmer et al., 2006). Of the 61 families

participating in the study, only one interview was conducted with both a mother and father

present, the remaining 60 interviews were done by only one parent: 57 and three mothers and

fathers respectively (Palmer et al., 2006). While data about families income or financial situation

were not collected, many families commented about financial strain during the interview (Palmer

et al., 2006). Broad questions were asked encompassing information about the family's daily

lives, involvement with CPS, and the results of the interaction had with CPS; if parents chose to

discuss additional topics researchers did not redirect the topic of conversation (Palmer et al.,

2006). Interviews were reviewed once completed and themes were identified, such as parent

views of helpful and unhelpful CPS interventions and the natures of parents' daily lives (Palmer

et al., 2006).

Results of this study were broken down into two categories. The first discussed the

positive support families received from CPS workers. When asked to reflect on positive

interactions, parents reported having received necessary help with emotional support and

concrete help with finding appropriate services such as childcare, counselling, treatment centers,

or psychological assessment as most helpful (Palmer et al., 2006). Parents reported being grateful

for workers who were non-judgmental when listening to the parents' feelings about the situation

and providing useful feedback to address the problems and concerns that were expressed (Palmer

et al., 2006). Parents also reported that CPS workers who showed respect towards the parents and

provided choices in how to move forward with the intervention process also aided in having had

a significantly positive impact on the parent's CPS experience (Palmer et al., 2006).

   The second area explored in the results of this exploratory, qualitative study were the

negative experiences parents had with CPS, including harassment, unfair treatment, inadequate

services, and traumatizing removal of children from the home (Palmer et al., 2006). Parents

expressed frustration in situations where help was requested and the received services that did

not meet the parent's needs, or parents ineligible or had to wait to receive services (Palmer et al.,

2006). One mother recalled a situation in which she called wanting help and stated that she was

going to hurt her child and did not know how to keep herself under control (Palmer et al., 2006).

The only help that this mother received in this situation was a few phone numbers, and the

mother further commented that, "If you weren't beating your kid they didn't have time for you"

(Palmer et al., 2006, p. 817). Parents also expressed difficulty in receiving aid for children with

special needs, and communication with workers was difficult as well (Palmer et al., 2006). One

parent reported surprise that upon the return of her children to her home, a CPS worker did not

visit the home or check in with the family for five months following the children's return

(Palmer et al., 2006). Other parents reported feeling criticized or judged by workers, and high

turnover between workers on their case made them feel depersonalized and misled or betrayed

by the withholding of information about children taken from the home (Palmer et al., 2006).

Overall, the implications of this study show a need for emotional support during CPS investigations. While this study provided much insight into parents' perceptions of the CPS process, it is limited in the demographic of the participants due to the location chosen for research (Palmer et al., 2006). This also limits the transferability of the results to other populations (Palmer et al., 2006). One final limitation was present in the participants, as the majority of interviewees were mothers, and female and male perceptions may vary, as may the perceptions of couples when interviewed together.

Child Abuse Interventions

Current research shows that children whose parents are involved in their education are more likely to graduate from high school, have better attendance records, more positive mental and emotional health, and better academic achievement (Oakes, Maier, & Daniel, 2017). Research that identifies effective methods for promoting these outcomes is necessary in decreasing the chances of childhood maltreatment. Parent education and home visits are two the of most common methods for preventing child abuse and neglect cases, while other proven methods will also be discussed.

Parent Education

In 2016, Ansari and Gershoff researched the effectiveness that the parent involvement component of Head Start programs had on parents and children. Children who had participated in a Head Start program at ages three and four were chosen for this program and were also required to keep the same chosen evaluation language over the two years studied (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). Children were chosen from classrooms in centers across the United States to give a wide, national sized sample (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). The majority of parent respondents for the study identified themselves to be the mother of the child participating, one-

third of which had less than a high school education and 44% of which were unemployed (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). Surveys were completed by parents, caregivers, teachers, and center directors to regarding information such as teacher and staff training, involvement support and obstacles, parent involvement and discipline strategies, children behavior problems and approaches to learning, and the children's literacy and math skills (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016).

Data was then evaluated, and researchers found that intervention with parents may have long-term positive effects on a child's development (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). Teacher and staff training in parent involvement showed to have a positive impact on parent involvement rates within the center (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). Research also showed that while parent involvement did not take effect on changes with children behavior, it did have positive effects on parenting behavior (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). The reasons why parents may not be involved with the parent outreach programs were also considered, and it was noted that issues such as scheduling conflicts with work or other children's activities have a large impact on the involvement of parents in a young child's development (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). This longitudinal study was limited in that since only children with a consistent language preference were chosen, minority and dual-language speakers were likely not included in the sample for this study (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). Using parent reports also limited the researchers, as researchers only considered overall involvement rather than specific types of involvement (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). Researchers also did not take into consideration cultural climates of centers or other existing parent involvement factors that may have been in place before the study began that could have had an impact on results (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016).

Graybill et al. (2016) also conducted a similar study in 2016, focusing on low-income families with children at centers within the research area. Children were given an assessment and

found to be in "at-risk" or "typical" areas of development (Graybill et al., 2016). All participants

of the study identified themselves to be either 'mother' or 'father,' with 90% of the participants

identifying themselves as 'mother' (Graybill et al, 2016). Researchers provided the parents of

these families with a "Milestones Moments" booklet, developed by the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention's Learn the Signs/Early Act initiative (Graybill et al., 2016). The booklet

detailed the milestones children should reach in development, signs of concern, and activities

parents can do with children at home (Graybill et al, 2016). Along with the booklet, parents

participated in six weeks of home-visits focused on educating parents about child interactions

and development (Graybill et al, 2016). Families were evaluated at three points throughout the

study; a Week One baseline assessment, a Week Seven post-assessment, and a Week 19 follow-

up assessment (Graybill et al, 2016). Assessments were studied to determine if the intervention

provided any improvement upon parent's general knowledge of child development, the rate at

which parents express concern over potential developmental delays, the rate at which a parent

reaches out to a professional for information about a child's development, and the parents'

perception of the Milestones Moments booklet that was provided (Graybill et al., 2016).

At the conclusion of this mixed method, randomized controlled trial, parents reported

learning much about the different stages of child development with emphasis on how very young

children vary in terms of what age children hit particular milestones (Graybill et al., 2016). Other

parents in the study reporting having felt a sense of empowerment in having a greater

understanding of child development, allowing parents to better advocate for their children when

observing something that might be a concern (Graybill et al., 2016). Results showed a

statistically significant improvement in parents' understanding of child development, and

positive perceptions of the use of the Milestones Moments booklet (Graybill et al., 2016). While

the study yielded positive results, it was not without its limitations. All children in the study were recruited from a childcare company that provided screening for all children upon program entry and referred those identified with concerns were referred to appropriate services to meet each child's developmental needs (Graybill et al., 2016). As these children were already receiving services, they were excluded from the study, thus meaning that those left participating in the study did not experience more significant or later onset delays (Graybill et al., 2016).

Home Visits

In a 2017 retrospective cohort study, researchers studied children born between 2003 and 2009 that were identified to be at-risk and were eligible for the Families First Home Visiting (FFHV) program (Chartier et al.) A child was considered to be eligible for FFHV if they were in an at-risk situation as outlined by a series of factors and screening results, and age five or younger (Chartier et al., 2017). Researchers followed both families who did and did not participate in the program over a span of one to five years and took into consideration different variables such as if the child spent time in child welfare care, whether the child was ever hospitalized for injuries related to maltreatment occurrences, or if the child was considered to be below the typical developmental standard in any way (Chartier et al., 2017). Results of the study showed that children who participated in the FFHV program were 0.4% less likely to be hospitalized for maltreatment related injuries compared to peers who did not participate in the program, and the author's hypothesis that home visits have a positive effect on the likelihood of child maltreatment was supported (Chartier et al., 2017). The results highlight that children who experience maltreatment and do not receive substantial support are more likely to struggle in school, have an arrest record, or have physical or emotional health conditions (Chartier et al., 2017).

This study was limited in that researchers were not able to control for outside factors that influenced families who did not participate in the FFHV program (Chartier et al., 2017). While control families were not receiving services from FFHV, researchers were not able to account for any services that families received from other sources that may have had an impact on the results (Chartier et al., 2017). Researchers were also unable to control the length of time that families participated in the FFHV program which could allow for variability in the results as well (Chartier et al., 2017). This variability may also be found within the families themselves, as researchers cannot speculate the effects on home-visiting services for families that did not choose to participate in the program, as participation was voluntary for all families (Chartier et al., 2017).

In a 2020 study, West et al. looked at research involving families with substance exposed newborns and examined the effectiveness of interventions intended to reduce the risk of abuse. After clarifying search terms for this systematic review, researchers included studies that met a list of five points of criteria (West et al., 2020). The criteria used specified that the study was published in English, included participants of mothers with children ages 0-12 months, the study design was experimental, quasi-experimental, or pre-experimental, and the intervention used in the study was home- or community-based (West et al., 2020). Studies that were unpublished reports, included foster or adoptive parents, were non-intervention studies, were not available in a full-text format, or did not specifically study the substance exposed newborns as a participant group (West et al., 2020). Studies that did not meet the criteria were excluded from review. Of the 10,593 potential articles found, fifteen articles were chosen for review (West et al., 2020). Results of this review showed that families with substance exposed newborns may benefit from services tailored to meet specific needs had by families with substance exposed newborns, and

that this must be considered over a 'one size fits all' type of approach that generally occurs

(West et al., 2020). Mothers and caregivers of infants have specific support needs that differ

from those of preschoolers or older children and are likely to be more motivated to change their

behavior during this period of time in which they are new to parenting (West et al., 2020). In the

case of substance exposed newborns, substance abuse treatment that works with other

intervention methods is vital to obtaining positive outcomes (West et al., 2020). This review was

limited in the exclusion factors chosen when reviewing studies to include (West et al., 2020).

While there were studies that met some of the criteria guidelines, those that did not specifically

focus on the desired population were excluded, regardless of the potential positive results the

study may have shown (West et al., 2020).

International Studies

Countries outside of the United States have also conducted studies to learn how to

improve parent confidence with young children, what other benefits arise from parent education,

and what methods are best for doing so. In Tajikistan, a program called Getting Ready for School

was developed to provide parents with activities to do at home with children in the year before

children began formal schooling (Whitsel & Lapham, 2014). Families who participated in the

Getting Ready for School program were considered for this study and evaluated at three points of

time; the first was in the fall before beginning the program, the second was in the summer once

the program was completed, and the third was the summer one year later after the child had

completed first grade (Whitsel & Lapham, 2014). Prior to doing the activities at home with their

children, parents would meet with teachers on a regular basis to discuss children's progress and

ask any questions the parents may have (Whitsel & Lapham, 2014). During these regular

meetings, parents reported gaining a sense of confidence and understanding about child

development, which led to parents sharing information learned with peers and family members

outside of the study (Whitsel & Lapham, 2014). Results of the study showed that parents gained

a sense of empowerment about how children learn and had a better understanding of a

caregiver's vital role in preparing a child for school (Whitsel & Lapham, 2014). The community

in which the Getting Ready for School Program was conducted also yielded some positive results

that were noted in this study and were not anticipated by researchers prior to examining results.

The program and study were conducted in the Tajik language which was not the primary

language of all the participants (Whitsel & Lapham, 2014). Minority families that participated

reported that due to the program, minority children have gained a better understanding of the

Tajik language, and children and parents alike have made new friends in the community, and

these relationships would not have been made without the program (Whitsel & Lapham, 2014).

One limitation of the study is that the results of the study cannot be generalized for all countries

that may use the Getting Ready for School Program. The program was developed for several

East European countries and piloted in Tajikistan (Whitsel & Lapham, 2014). More research

would need to be done in other countries and communities to gain a full understanding of the

positive effects of the program, and to determine if the positive results can be replicated in other

communities.

Similar to the program in Tajikistan a 2013 pilot investigation conducted was in China by

Lung, Tsang, and Heung and focused on providing support to preschool children's parents who

were considered to be disadvantaged. This study included families of preschool children who

were in single parent homes, low-income families, or were recent immigrants to the country

(Lung et al., 2013). Researchers focused on what effects a home visiting program would have on

children's academic development as well as behavior, dental and health practices within the

home, and changes with injury prevention (Lung et al., 2013). Lung et al. (2013) also looked at

the effects the program had upon parent's stress levels and self-confidence, predicting that being

provided with an opportunity for a social support system would bring about positive effects in

these areas. Researchers chose to deliver the program via home visits to allow for maximum

schedule flexibility with the families participating (Lung et al., 2013). Participants in the study

were contacted by brochure and verbal advertisement via workers at a social services center

(Lung et al., 2013). Children participating in the study were evaluated by their teachers in areas

of motivation, school readiness, and academic competence prior to beginning the study and upon

its completion (Lung et al., 2013). Trained parent assistants, who were recruited in a similar

manner as the participants, conducted the home visits and worked with teachers to appropriately

deliver the program content (Lung et al., 2013).

Results of the study showed that parent participants reported feeling less stressed, noticed

fewer exhibits of negative child behaviors, and noted feelings of having a stronger support

system due to the connections made with the parent assistants delivering the program (Lung et

al., 2013). Children also were shown to have improved kindergarten-readiness scores, teeth

brushing frequency, and were also reported to have fewer at home injuries due to parents' gained

knowledge on how to prevent such occurrences (Lung et al., 2013). As this was a pilot study,

researchers were limited in gaining a full understanding of the positive effects this program may

have on families, and further research would need to be conducted for this purpose (Lung et al.,

2013). Researchers were also limited in the use of evaluation measures, as some of the children

participating in the study were younger than the recommended age range for the chosen

evaluation methods (Lung et al., 2013). This study did also not take into account the effect the

children's preschool programs may take on a child's growth and development nor the impact of

fathers or other significant caregivers as the focus was solely on mothers (Lung et al., 2013).

Effective Methods

In a 2014 quasi-experimental study, researchers reached out to families who had been

referred to and screened out of CPS in central Wisconsin (Maguire-Jack & Bowers). Families

were contacted by a social worker that works in CPS and given the opportunity to participate in a

community program that provides voluntary support services for families that had been reported

to CPS, but no case for abuse was found (Maguire-Jack & Bowers, 2014). The community

outreach program worked to prevent future cases of abuse by providing families with a variety of

services that meet specific needs, such as transportation options, guidance with parenting or

employment, or access to basic needs or healthcare (Maguire-Jack & Bowers, 2014). Participants

of this study included families who had been referred to CPS within Marathon County in

Wisconsin from September 2008 to May 2014 (Maguire-Jack & Bowers, 2014). Families were

placed into three groups for comparison. These groups contained families who had received

services from the community outreach program, families who had declined services, and families

who had been waitlisted and were not contacted and offered services (Maguire-Jack & Bowers,

2014). Researchers compared whether or not the families had any new CPS referrals for any type

of abuse or neglect, if any new cases were opened for ongoing services, or if any out of home

placements occurred (Maguire-Jack & Bowers, 2014).

Results of this study showed that families that were accepted into the community

outreach program had significantly lower rates of new referrals or new out of home placements

(Maguire-Jack & Bowers, 2014). These results stayed consistent when compared to families who

chose not to participate in the program as well (Maguire-Jack & Bowers, 2014). This suggests

cost savings for the county as there are less out of home placement, medical, and court costs to pay for with less instances of abuse occurring (Maguire-Jack & Bowers, 2014). Findings also suggest the potential to have fewer families on the wait-list and lower numbers of cases reported were the community program to hire additional staff to meet the needs of all cases referred to the program (Maguire-Jack & Bowers, 2014). Limitations of this study include the nature of the control group chosen for the study. The control group was chosen from those families who were wait-listed for the community program, and therefore were not chosen at random (Maguire-Jack & Bowers, 2014). Researchers were also limited in their small sample sizes and the data available, and more research would need to be conducted that addresses these limitations (Maguire-Jack & Bowers, 2014).

Similar to the community action program focused on by Maguire-Jack and Bowers, researchers Baggett et al. (2014) focused on the effectiveness a technology-based intervention program has on decreasing the risk of child maltreatment. Low-income English and Spanish speaking mothers of infants were chosen to participate from early-intervention service providers to participate in this randomized controlled trial (Baggett et al., 2014). Researchers chose an Internet-based, remote coaching intervention program called Baby-Net, which was adapted from the in-home PALS program (Baggett et al., 2014). Mothers and infants participated in 11 sessions which included time devoted to self-directed learning, creating an action plan to practice the learned skills, a five-minute video-recorded practice of mothers interacting with infants using the skills learned, and a 30-minute video call with a coach to review the videos made by the mothers to provide feedback and support (Baggett et al., 2014). Pre- and post-assessments were taken to evaluate maternal, infant, and family characteristics and behavior, conducted via two-hour home visit sessions (Baggett et al., 2014).

Results of the study showed that when comparing low- and high-risk mothers, there was no significant difference in their level of engagement with the Baby-Net program, while high-risk mothers showed a larger increase in positive parents behavior (Baggett et al., 2014). High-risk mothers also showed a large reduction in the potential for child abuse during post-assessment evaluations (Baggett et al., 2014). No significant findings occurred when comparing the mother's satisfaction with the Baby-Net program (Baggett et al., 2014). While this study yielded positive results for using an internet-based intervention program, it was not without its limitations. This study encompassed an efficacy trial of the Baby-Net program, and more research would need to be done to obtain the full scope of its effects (Baggett et al., 2014). The use of research-based coaches to provide support to the mothers participating in the study may also have taken an effect on the results, as community program workers may not have access to the same types of training were the study to be replicated (Baggett et al., 2014). One final aspect that limits the use of the Baby-Net program is that the program is limited to those with access to a computer and internet access or a smartphone and reliable cell service (Baggett et al., 2014). While this did not affect the present study as wireless capable laptops were provided for all participants, it is an issue that may likely come about with those attempting to replicate the study or referring families to the Baby-Net program (Baggett et al., 2014).

A 2020 randomized clinical trial set out to determine if preventative interventions had an effect on compliance in children who had been referred to CPS (Lind, Bernard, Yarger, & Dozier). Children younger than two years old who were living with a biological parent following CPS involvement were recruited to participate in the study (Lind et al., 2020). Further inclusion criteria outlined that children must be participating in a city program intended to divert children from foster care (Lind et al., 2020). Both the research and control groups participated in ten

home visit sessions that were similar in duration and structure (Lind et al., 2020). The experimental intervention aimed to increase parent sensitivity and nurturing behavior and decrease parents' frightening behavior with the help of parent coaches (Lind et al., 2020). Parents were also provided with research and videos that reenforced the intended behavioral outcomes and in the moment feedback was provided during the sessions to aid parents in understanding parental behavior towards children (Lind et al., 2020). The control intervention focused on promoting children's cognitive, language, and motor skills, and parent coaches worked to teach parents how to best help children in reaching the desired milestone for a particular skill (Lind et al., 2020). Video feedback was used in the control intervention as well to discuss with parents the skills that children gained during the interventions. Post-intervention, home visit assessments occurred prior to the start of the study at one month after the interventions were complete and yearly until the child turned 48 months old (Lind et al., 2020).

Researchers compared aspects of parent sensitivity and child compliance and compared the results of the one month and 36-month assessments (Lind et al., 2020). The experimental intervention group showed significantly higher rates of parent sensitivity at the one-month assessment mark, however by the 36-month assessment the gap between the control was notable but no longer statistically significant (Lind et al., 2020). When comparing the groups on rates of child compliance, three indicators were measured: whether or not a child touched the presented toys, the overall amount of time children touched the presented toys, and the latency to the child touching the toys (Lind et al., 2020). Both the one-month and 36-month results showed that the children in the experimental intervention group were less likely to touch the presented toys and spent less time touching them over the control group peers (Lind et al., 2020). While the results

of the study proved the researchers hypothesis, the study was limited by the lack of pre-

assessment data to compare the results to (Lind et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Research has shown that many factors contributing to child maltreatment are problems

that can be solved if a family is provided the appropriate and necessary services. When families

are not provided the services needed, or encounter difficulties when reaching out for support, the

risk of abuse is elevated. Community programs that address issues such as poverty,

homelessness, employment strain, and mental health needs aid parents in obtaining the support

necessary to care for themselves and children. Studies have also shown that CPS oftentimes does

not adequately provide the appropriate services parents are in need of or that the services are not

executive in an effective manner. Alongside the problems that occur with the effectiveness of

CPS, parents in at-risk situations often show low levels of self-control, a skill which develops in

early childhood, and this indicates an increased risk to react inappropriately to stressful situations

(Henschel et al., 2014). Measures to provide parents the necessary support they need, and to

provide children that have experienced abuse the opportunity to develop these important skills

will be discussed in the next chapter of this paper.

Chapter 3: Discussion

The review of literature for this paper sought to answer the question of is Child Protective Services (CPS) effective and how can educators work to prevent instances of abuse. The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) of 1974 was created with the intent of promoting the prevention of child abuse and separated the work of maltreatment prevention into its own jurisdiction (Meiners & Tolliver, 2016). Previously paired with anti-poverty programs, researchers Meiners and Tolliver (2016) argue that "with CAPTA, children's wellbeing was policed, but not supported, and all the structural factors that shape child welfare, including, for example, parent's income, were rendered invisible" (p. 108). Research into the effectiveness of the current CPS system show that services are successful only if particular circumstances occur. Meiners and Tolliver's argument towards the necessity of addressing all factors that influence a child's wellbeing is supported in the positive results yielded from studies investigating the effectiveness of home visits and parent education interventions.

Insights Gained from Research

Research into the effectiveness of parent education and home visits as a tool for supporting at-risk families showed results that aligned positively with studies that investigated effective methods in preventing recurrences of child maltreatment. Parent perceptions of experiences receiving these types of services also reflected positively with the effects of the studies discussed. In addition to discussing the insights gained from the research analyzed, suggestions for improvements to the existing CPS system are made as well.

Parent Education and Home Visits as a Tool

Samuels (2013) shares perspectives of teen parents of young children who participated in home visits, and the overwhelming response was that after participating in the visits, teen

mothers felt a greater sense of calmness when dealing with frustrating behaviors having obtained

a better understanding of how the behavior was necessary to a child's development. Furthermore,

these parents were also more capable of succeeding in school, grew in their feelings of

empowerment, and were able to go from being in a low-income household situation to being in a

financially stable environment (Samuels, 2013). Samuels' (2013) interviews with teen mothers

highlights what research in the previous chapter supports, which is that parent education is

important and necessary to the prevention of instances of child maltreatment. Samuels (2013)

also highlights a key factor to the importance of parent education during an interview with a

teacher. In this interview, the teacher states that she is only with the child for a small amount of

time during the day while the rest of the day is up to the parents (Samuels, 2013). Therefore, the

more teachers are able to influence parents and caregivers on appropriate child development, the

greater the potential for healthy development (Samuels, 2013). Studies show that using home

visits and parent education as a tool to lower the risk of child maltreatment to be successful,

however it is important to note that the training of staff in home visit programs may have an

effect on the quality of services provided (Chartier et al., 2017). This important factor highlights

the importance of providing families easy access to high quality early childhood education and

parent or family support programs. As stated in the research done by Palmer, Maiter, and Manji

(2006), parents attest to the benefits of being provided access to the services they need as a vital

key to the effectiveness of their interactions with CPS.

Effectiveness of Child Protective Services

Studies conducted by Russel, Kerwin, and Halverson (2018), Kang (2018), Solomon and

Asber (2012), and Palmer et al. (2009) all report that CPS is effective when emotional support is

provided to parents, and the parents feel perceived needs are being met. Russel et al. (2018)

further report that the intervention of services had no effect on child's likelihood to experience a

recurrence of abuse, except in instances in which emotional support was provided. Solomon and

Asber (2012) reported that children taken from homes during a CPS investigation were in fact

more likely to be victims a second time. However, when parents participated in therapy sessions

families were found to be less likely to be involved in a second case of maltreatment (Solomon

& Asber, 2012). This research suggests that the current CPS model in itself is ineffective in

preventing occurrences and reoccurrences of child maltreatment unless there is evidence of

quality emotional support provided to the parents and caregivers involved.

Recommendations for Improved Effectiveness

Based upon the results of research reviewed for this paper, there are several suggestions

for improvements to the CPS system. The first set of recommendations are related to the staff

working in CPS. Improvements to the training requirements for workers interacting directly with

families to ensure the families receive appropriate care is one of the most important issues

identified by parents (Palmer et al., 2006). CPS workers must have the capability to be non-

judgmental in any situation encountered and to view circumstances from the parent's point of

view. Case workers must also have flexibility when working with families to provide services

that meet the parent's needs and have a working knowledge of appropriate community resources

available to recommend to families.

In addition to addressing improvements for staff, CPS as an organization has areas in

which improvements could be made as well. Improving relationships with community

organizations that aim to provide support for at-risk families may lead to more families receiving

necessary support, regardless of if an investigation is made. Creating relationships with other

organizations in the community where mandated reporters work may also lead to greater

understanding of what being a mandated reporter means, but more research would need to be done to evaluate this relationship. CPS generally comes with the stigma of negativity; the work that is done in the organization is to take children away from bad parents. Working with the public to promote the valuable work CPS does to support families and provide them with services to aid families in improving quality of life may aid in parent's perceptions of CPS and may lead to less stressful encounters. While all of these improvements may lead to more productive encounters between CPS and families, none of it is possible without funding. Allocating the funds needed for CPS offices to have an optimal number of staff and the time and resources for sufficient training is a necessity to allow for an effective and efficient organization.

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Addressing and Advocating for Children's Rights

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Just as early childhood educators have the enormous responsibility of caring for children and being mindful of and reporting suspected abuse, teachers are also accountable for setting children up for future success. Teaching children self-regulation and coping skills in early childhood will provide children a good foundation for learning and development in the years to come. In addition to this, understanding a child's rights and knowing how to best support a children and families in a difficult situation are key skills that every early childhood educator must be equip with.

Social-Emotional Learning

Often overlooked in favor of a strong math and literacy focus, social-emotional learning is the key component to a child's future educational success. Dr. Becky Bailey (2013) developed the Conscious Discipline behavior model to address the need for positive social-emotional learning in the classroom, and to help children living in stressful situations to be more successful. This research-based program focuses on changing how educators can approach discipline in a

way that also teaches children positive core values that shape the way they view the world around them. Some of the values taught in Conscious Discipline include the understanding that a person is able to make individual own decisions and make personality changes, that a person is responsible for actions and those actions have consequences, and that mistakes and conflict are an opportunity to learn and grow (Bailey, 2014). Research shows that the use of Conscious Discipline improves the quality of interactions between students and teachers, reduces aggression, improves social-emotional behavior of both students and teachers, decreases impulsivity and hyperactivity, and enhances the effectiveness of parenting skills (Bailey, 2014). Parents of children in Conscious Discipline classrooms report positive feelings towards their school community, "even when they do not feel safe where they live" (Bailey, 2014, p. 18).

To further support Dr. Bailey's logic of teaching children appropriate social-emotional skills, Dr. Todd May, professor of Philosophy at Clemson University, argues that teaching children about morals and philosophy is a necessity. In an interview in which he was asked how early was too early to start teaching children these concepts, his response was "too early is before they can speak, any time after that is fine" (Jackson, 2020). As children grow and develop, questions are posed about why things are the way they are to create a frame of reference for how the world around them functions. It is the job of early childhood educators to aid children in creating this frame of reference and teach them the basic concepts of moral philosophy. Adult brains are wired to revert back to the reactions learned from key authority figures as a child (Conscious Discipline, 2020). If early childhood educators make a deliberate effort to teach children the basics of moral philosophy and appropriate self-regulation skills, children will have a better chance of success in the future if met with challenging situations.

Advocacy for Children

While social-emotional learning has the potential to provide large amounts of support to children, there may still come a time when an educator faces the decision of if a report to CPS is necessary. Educators must be armed with the knowledge of the responsibilities of a mandated reporter and be familiar with, and able to recognize the signs of abuse in young children. If training opportunities are not readily available, educators must also take personal responsibility to seek out resources to learn how to approach conversations with children and parents in circumstances where there is suspect of abuse or neglect. Building relationships with parents, and being able to recognize the signs of poverty, homelessness, or financial straining alongside with being familiar with community support programs to share with families is another way that educators can actively work to prevent occurrences of child maltreatment.

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Future Studies

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While there is much positive research into effective methods to prevent occurrences of child abuse more research must be done to be able to gain a full understanding of how to best promote effective utilization of CPS services. Research to determine if the current provided funding towards CPS meets the actual needs of services that must be provided is necessary to understand how much work is necessary to advocate for additional resources. In addition to researching the funding needs of CPS, training opportunities provided to staff must also be addressed. Studies focused on what types of trainings provide the skills necessary to be effective supporters for families and advocates for children will help to identify what is lacking in the current system and what areas need improvement. Another suggested study is the investigation of conscious pairing of CPS workers to particular age groups or types of abuse to promote more positive interactions with families. By pairing CPS workers that are experts working with certain

ages of children or types of abuse it can be hypothesized there is potential for more successful interventions as the workers will have specialized knowledge of the best methods to support families in specific situations.

Another suggestion is to further investigate mandated reporters definitions of abuse and neglect. As discussed in a doctoral dissertation by Nguyen-Vu (2018), educators vary greatly in personal definitions of what constitutes as abuse or neglect. Research that investigates ways to negate the disparity in definitions of maltreatment may have impacts of the rates of over- or under-reporting of abuse by mandated reporters. A final suggestion for future research is to continue evaluating parent perceptions of the CPS system and their involvement with CPS services. By researching parent's experiences and views on the effectiveness of the interactions had with CPS, evaluations for changes to the effectiveness of the system can better fit the needs of the families the system aims to benefit. In addition, understanding parent's perceptions of CPS, both by families who are at a high or low risk of potential involvement with CPS, workers will have a better understanding of the preexisting expectations parents and caregivers have regarding the actions CPS takes. Obtaining an understanding of parent perceptions of the system, case workers will more easily be able to empathize with families and establish a positive connection during an investigation.

Conclusion

Childhood abuse has the potential to incur lifelong impacts upon its victims. Children who experience abuse may experience developmental, cognitive, or emotional delays and are more likely to become perpetrators of abuse as adults (Children's Bureau, 2019b). There are approximately 26 different reported interventions as a response towards child maltreatment, and among those researched to be successful include home visits, parent education, and emotional

support, (Children's Bureau, 2018; Graybill et al., 2016; Kang, 2018; Solomon & Asber, 2012). International studies have also shown to have positive results with parent education interventions in providing parents with a sense of confidence about child development, leading to healthier parent-child relationships and the unintended consequence of the sharing of information about child development between adult peers (Whitsel & Lapham, 2014). In addition to understanding the most effective methods for preventing occurrences or recurrences of child maltreatment, parents and CPS workers must establish a trusting relationship to ensure the needs of families are being met and resulting in a positive outcome of an investigation (Palmer et al., 2006). Future studies are essential to the continued improvement of the current CPS system, to guarantee that all children have an equal opportunity for healthy development. Educators, especially those working within an early childhood capacity, must be informed of the knowledge of signs of abuse and responsibilities of a mandated reporter. Children undergo an immense amount of cognitive development in early childhood, and quality care from both educators and parents is essential to establish a positive framework for development. Positive interventions in situations of abuse are necessary to allow children the greatest prospect possible for healthy development. Changes to the current CPS system must be made to ensure that children and families are provided the support necessary to ensure that all children are provided the opportunity to grow into functioning members of society and lessen occurrences of abuse and neglect.

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