

# Perceived Preparedness of School Practitioners to Identify and Report Child Maltreatment

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*Child maltreatment continues to be a significant problem across the globe. Despite the many negative outcomes of child maltreatment documented in the literature, there is limited research on how school practitioners are prepared for identifying and reporting cases of maltreatment. This study examined school practitioners' preparedness for reporting and identifying child maltreatment. Participants were a random sample of 141 school practitioners from California and Pennsylvania. Data were collected over a 6-week period via an anonymous internet survey. Overall, results indicate that most school practitioners had mixed perceptions about their ability to identify and report maltreatment. Interpretations of the data are provided with recommendations for collaborative preservice training and in-service training approaches. Implications and recommendations for future research are provided.*

**Keywords:** *child maltreatment, school practitioners, preparedness, reporting, United States of America*

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## **Perceived Preparedness of School Practitioners to Identify and Report Child Maltreatment**

Child maltreatment continues to be a serious economic, health, and social problem across the globe (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). According to WHO (2020), one out of two children between the ages of 2 and 17 from all socio-economic, religious, cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds experience some form of maltreatment. Children who experience maltreatment are at greater risk of negative physical, mental, emotional, and social development (Clark et al., 2020; Hepp, Schmitz, Urbild, Zauner, & Niedtfeld, 2021; Rochford, Zeiger, & Peek-Asa, 2023). Carr, Duff, and Craddock (2018) and Kim, Drake, and Jonson-Reid (2020) noted that maltreatment is a broad term that encompasses all forms of abuse and neglect. For the purposes of this study, we used a general definition of child maltreatment developed by the Center for Diseases Control (CDC, 2022) as any act or a series of acts by a parent or caregiver that may be harmful or pose potential harm to a child. These acts may include physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, exploitation, and/or neglect (Carr et al., 2018; Chitiyo & Pietrantoni, 2019).

According to the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS, 2022), in 2019 there were 656,000 children who were victims of child maltreatment. This represents a rate of 9 victims per 1,000 children in the population (DHHS, 2022). Data from the DHHS (2022) revealed that of the reported maltreatment cases in 2019, infants had the highest rate of victimization and girls were victimized more than boys. The same report estimated that 1,840 infants died from maltreatment (DHHS, 2022). Child maltreatment continues to be one of the most serious public health problems in the U.S. (Rochford et al., 2023).

### Literature Review

The United States passed the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) in 1974 that requires all states to promote the safety of children and their families through prevention and treatment of child maltreatment (Corr & Santos, 2017). Thus, individual states were tasked with developing definitions and procedures for addressing maltreatment (DHHS, 2022). This has led to individual states creating dissimilar definitions of maltreatment while recognizing different types of maltreatment and utilizing different processes and procedures for reporting. These contrasting approaches to addressing child maltreatment have complicated practices for educator preparation training programs. All states require that school personnel are mandated to report suspicion of child maltreatment but not all states require mandated training in recognition and response training (Rochford et al., 2023). Therefore, it is important that educator preparation training programs understand how educators are trained in child maltreatment identification and reporting to ensure that educators are adequately prepared to address the child maltreatment epidemic (Chitiyo & Pietrantoni, 2019).

Rochford et al. (2023) conducted a study to understand how state-level education policies that require recognition and response training on child maltreatment

are related to the number of reported cases of child maltreatment. The authors found a positive relationship between the presence of state-level education policies that require recognition and response training on maltreatment and the number of reported cases of suspected child maltreatment (Rochford et al., 2023). Rochford et al. (2023) found that school practitioners reported approximately 20% of suspected child maltreatment cases. These findings are similar to Thomas, Anurudran, Robb, and Burke (2020) who found that school practitioners reported around 20% of child maltreatment cases. Rochford et al. (2023) also found that school practitioners are more likely to report cases of maltreatment for children than for adolescents. This could be because some states only require recognition and response training for specific age groups (Rochford et al., 2023).

Regarding training experiences, Tillman et al. (2015) conducted a survey asking 398 practicing school counselors from across the United States to respond to one of six different vignettes of child maltreatment with a different race, socioeconomic status, and severity of abuse. They found that the vignette mean scores of school counselors who would report abuse was higher than the mean score of school counselors who suspected abuse (Tillman et al., 2015). These results suggested that school counselors are more likely to report even if suspicion is low (Tillman et al., 2015). However, responding to a vignette does not mean that school counselors would respond in a similar way if presented with a situation in person. These findings are consistent with findings from Kenny and Abreu (2016) who found that school practitioners reported feeling unprepared to identify maltreatment. Alvarez, Kenny, Donohue, and Carpin (2004) noted that a lack of adequate knowledge of warning signs and reporting procedures of child maltreatment might deter professionals from making reports to the appropriate authorities. School practitioners who fail to report suspicion of child maltreatment places children and adolescents at greater risk of continued maltreatment (Alvarez et al., 2004), while reporting with low suspicion might increase the number of cases of maltreatment and can slow down the investigation process.

Kenny and Abreu (2016) developed a self-paced online training program for mandated reporters and had participants complete a pre-/post-test before and after completing the training. They found that 100% of participants agreed and strongly agreed that their confidence in identifying and reporting child maltreatment increased after taking this online training program (Kenny & Abreu, 2016). Furthermore, Kenny and Abreu (2016) found that the post-test scores were higher than pre-test scores. Increase in confidence does not mean that participants would accurately be able to identify and/or report a suspected case of maltreatment. Pietrantonio and Glance (2019) found that preservice school practitioners' perceptions of their ability might be different from their actual ability.

In working to end child maltreatment, one area that is worth mentioning and investment of resources is ensuring that professionals who work with children and adolescents are competent in identifying and reporting child maltreatment. Educators constitute about 20% of all reporting (Rochford et al., 2023; Thomas et al., 2020) and are well positioned to identify, report, and prevent child maltreatment as they see students daily. Unfortunately, research is limited on school

practitioners' preparedness to identify and report cases of maltreatment. This research gap places children and adolescents at risk of experiencing maltreatment that goes unreported. This impedes the ability of schools to provide proactive and preventative approaches to ensure every child is safe from maltreatment.

### Purpose of the Present Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the preparedness of school practitioners to identify and report child maltreatment in schools. Furthermore, this study intends to understand a social development issue central to the rights of children, which are protected by law in the United States and many other nations across the globe (Mathews & Kenny, 2008). Understanding preparedness of school practitioners to identify and report child maltreatment is an essential component to prevention, intervention, and postvention in addressing child maltreatment, capacity-building, and protecting the rights of children (Pietrantonio, Chitiyo, Chen, McDaniel, & Bhuptani, 2023).

This study addresses the following five research questions:

1. To what extent do school practitioners believe they were trained to identify child maltreatment?
2. To what extent do school practitioners believe they are prepared to address child maltreatment?
3. Is there a difference in perceived preparedness between school practitioners (i.e., teacher, school counselor, administrator, school nurse, school psychologist, school worker)?
4. What is the relationship between years of experience and reporting child maltreatment?
5. What factors (i.e., education level, years of experience, gender, race, location of school, and training) contribute most to child maltreatment preparedness in school practitioners?

### Method

The aim of this study is to examine school practitioners' perceived attitudes, knowledge, and training experiences in identifying and reporting child maltreatment. We used a survey method design to allow participants an anonymous self-assessment of their attitudes, knowledge, and training experiences. This study was approved by our university's institutional review board (i.e., an ethics committee) prior to data collection.

### Procedures

The data were collected from a random sample of all schools in California and Pennsylvania via an internet survey. We chose to sample from California and

Pennsylvania because we are most familiar with their laws about child maltreatment. All school districts in California and Pennsylvania were assigned a number and we used a random number generator to identify sampled school districts. After we randomly sampled school districts, we sent an email with a cover letter and link to the survey to all sampled school practitioners within all schools in the district encouraging them to complete the survey. School practitioners self-selected by agreeing to participate in the study after reading the cover letter and electronically signing an informed consent before they were allowed to complete the survey. All participants received two follow-up email requests. After 2 weeks, we randomly sampled a new pool of school districts and then sent an email with a cover letter and link to the survey to all sampled school practitioners within all schools in the district encouraging them to complete the survey. We collected data from the survey for 6 weeks. Data were collected from March 21, 2022, to April 29, 2022.

### Instrumentation

We used a modified version of the Educators and Child Abuse Questionnaire (ECAQ) developed by Kenny (2001b) to measure self-reported attitudes, knowledge, and training experiences of identifying and reporting child maltreatment for school practitioners. The ECAQ consisted of four sections (1) demographic information (i.e., race, age, gender identity, state of employment, job position), (2) knowledge of child maltreatment (i.e., perceived knowledge of maltreatment such as warning signs and risk factors), (3) attitudes and beliefs (i.e., maltreatment in school and at home), and (4) training experiences (i.e., preservice and in-service training of maltreatment). Kenny (2004) found that the ECAQ measured four factors: (1) awareness, (2) knowledge, (3) attitudes, and (4) seriousness. The Cronbach alpha range was 0.85–0.64 (Kenny, 2004).

Our survey consisted of 44 questions that were modified from the ECAQ to ensure that the wording was general and could be used with multiple school practitioners. All edits to the survey were made in consultation with a group of experts in teacher preparation, school counselor preparation, and school psychology preparation. We piloted the modified questions with graduate students studying to become school practitioners and made necessary adjustments to the wording of questions prior to sending the questionnaire to school practitioners. The survey took approximately 10 min for participants to complete.

### *Data analysis*

We used SPSS 28.0.0.0 to analyze the data set.

### Training experience

This research question addressed to what extent do school practitioners believe they were trained to identify child maltreatment? Frequencies and percentages were used to determine the extent to which school practitioners believe they were trained to

identify child maltreatment. We analyzed their preservice (i.e., training received while in a school practitioner training program) and in-service (i.e., training received after hired as a school practitioner) training experience to answer this question.

### Preparedness

This research question addressed to what extent do school practitioners believe they are prepared to address child maltreatment? Frequencies and percentages were used to determine the extent to which school practitioners believe they are prepared to address child maltreatment.

### Difference in preparedness

This research question addressed whether there is a difference in perceived preparedness between school practitioners (i.e., teacher, school counselor, administrator, school nurse, school psychologist, school worker)? An independent-samples *t*-test was used to determine the differences in the mean scores of preparedness between instructional and support school practitioners.

### Relationship between experience and reporting

This research question addressed what is the relationship between years of experience and reporting child maltreatment? A Pearson's (*r*) Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the relationship between year of experience and reported and failure to report cases of child maltreatment. Our criteria to determine the relationship between these two variables were based on Cicchetti (1994): less than 0.39 (poor), 0.40–0.59 (fair), 0.60–0.74 (good), and 0.75–1.00 (excellent).

### Factors contributing to preparedness

This research question addressed what factors (i.e., education level, years of experience, gender, race, location of school, and training) contribute most to child maltreatment preparedness in school practitioners? A stepwise linear regression was used to determine the model of best fit for child maltreatment preparedness in school practitioners with the fewest number of predictors.

## Results

### Response Rates

The survey request was sent to 4,000 in-service school practitioners from a random sample of all schools in California and Pennsylvania. We received 171 responses (4.3% response rate) after the 6-week data collection period. All data were reviewed and cleaned using a listwise deletion of data that contained less

than 50% of a completed response. This resulted in deleting 30 responses that were missing 50% or more of their responses. This reduced our completed and useable surveys to a total of 141 (82% useable rate).

### *Participants*

School practitioners consisted of 113 (80%) teachers, 9 (6%) school counselors, 5 (3.5%) school psychologists, 5 (3.5%) administrators, 5 (3.5%) school nurses, 1 (0.7%) school social worker, and 3 (2%) participants chose not to respond. One hundred and four (73.7%) school practitioners were from California and 35 (24.8%) were from Pennsylvania, and 3 (2%) participants chose not to respond. One hundred and two (72%) participants worked in suburban schools, 29 (21%) worked in urban schools, and 11 (8%) worked in rural schools.

### Race, gender, and age

The participants identified as members of seven racial groups: (1) 107 (75.8%) identified as White or European American, (2) 20 (14%) identified as Hispanic or Latine, (3) 4 (2.8%) identified as Asian, (4) 3 (2%) identified as multiracial, (5) 2 (1.4%) identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native, (6) 2 (1.4%) identified as Black or African American, (7) 1 (0.7%) identified as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and (8) 3 (2%) participants chose not to respond. Hundred and four participants (73.7%) identified as female and 37 (26.2%) identified as male. Our participants had an average age of 46.2 with a range of 23–73.

### *Education level and years of experience*

The participants had the following education levels: 88 (62.4%) had a Master's degree, 40 (28.3%) had a Bachelor's degree, 6 (4.3%) had a Doctorate degree,

**Table 1** School practitioners

Job position	Number of responses	Percentage
Teacher	113	80
School counselor	9	6
School psychologist	5	3.5
Administrator	5	3.5
School nurse	5	3.5
School social worker	1	0.7
Not specified	3	2.1

**Table 2** State

State	Number of responses	Percentage
California	104	73.7
Pennsylvania	35	24.8
Not specified	3	2.1

**Table 3 Race**

Race	Number of responses	Percentage
White or European American	107	75.8
Hispanic or Latine	20	14
Asian	4	2.8
Multiracial	3	2
American Indian or Alaskan Native	2	1.4
Black or African American	2	1.4
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	0.7
Not specified	3	2.1

**Table 4 Gender identity**

Gender identity	Number of responses	Percentage
Female	104	73.7
Male	37	26.2
Not specified	0	0

3 (2.1%) had an Educational Specialist degree, 1 (0.7%) had no degree, and 3 (2.1%) participants chose not to respond. Our participants had an average of 17.4 years of experience working in schools with a range of 0–43.

**Data Analysis**

*Training experience*

Participants indicated that their preservice maltreatment training as follows: 40 (28%) adequate, 57 (40%) minimal, and 44 (31%) inadequate. The same participants indicated that their in-service training was as follows: 99 (70%) adequate, 36 (26%) minimal, and 6 (4%) inadequate. These results suggested that participants believed that their preservice training was minimal (40%); however, nearly three quarters (70%) of participants perceived their in-service maltreatment training to be adequate. Figure 1 summarizes the participants’ beliefs about their preservice and in-service maltreatment training experiences.

**Table 5 Education level**

Gender identity	Number of responses	Percentage
Master’s degree	88	62.4
Bachelor’s degree	40	28.3
Doctorate degree	6	4.3
Educational specialist degree	3	2.1
No degree	1	0.7
Not specified	3	2.1





Figure 1 Training experience.

### Preservice training

We asked participants about their preservice training experiences. Fifty-three (37%) participants indicated that their preservice training addressed child maltreatment. The 53 participants noted that their preservice training covered maltreatment in one or a combination of the following ways: (1) 39 (74%) in course lectures, (2) 27 (51%) in workshops or seminars, (3) 23 (43%) in assigned readings, and (4) 7 (13%) in other formats including training, online courses, professional development, and practice in fieldwork. Eighty-nine (63%) participants indicated that their preservice training did not address child maltreatment. Participants noted that their preservice training did not cover maltreatment in the following ways: (1) 60 (67%) in course lectures, (2) 31 (35%) in practice session, and (3) 51 (57%) in legal requirements. These results suggested that more than half of participants (63%) did not receive preservice maltreatment training.

### Preparedness

Three (2%) strongly disagreed, 3 (2%) somewhat disagreed, 4 (3%) were undecided, 32 (23%) somewhat agreed, and 99 (70%) strongly agreed that they are aware of the state laws specific to child maltreatment. Four (3%) strongly disagreed, 6 (4%) somewhat disagreed, 8 (6%) were undecided, 52 (37%) somewhat agreed, and 70 (50%) strongly agreed that they are aware of the federal laws specific to child maltreatment. One (0.7%) strongly disagreed, 1 (0.7%) somewhat disagreed, 7 (5%) was undecided, 66 (47%) somewhat agreed, and 66 (47%) strongly agreed that they perceive that they are aware of signs of neglect. Our study looked at participants' perceived ability to identify three types of abuse: sexual, physical, and emotional. Participants perceived that they are aware of

warning signs of sexual abuse as follows: 1 (0.7%) strongly disagreed, 1 (0.7%) somewhat disagreed, 7 (5%) were undecided, 70 (50%) somewhat agreed, and 55 (39%) strongly agreed. Participants perceived that they are aware of warning signs of physical abuse as follows: 1 (0.7%) strongly disagree, 1 (0.7%) somewhat disagree, 4 (3%) were undecided, 57 (40%) somewhat agree, and 78 (55%) strongly agree. Participants perceived that they are aware of warning signs of emotional abuse as follows: 1 (0.7%) strongly disagree, 4 (3%) somewhat disagree, 13 (9%) were undecided, 73 (52%) somewhat agree, and 50 (35%) strongly agree. These results suggested that on average participants perceive that they strongly agree that they are aware of national laws and warning signs of physical abuse. Moreover, these results suggested that participants had mixed perceptions about their awareness of warning signs of neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. Figure 2 summarizes the participants' beliefs about their preparedness to identify maltreatment.

*Difference in preparedness*

The findings suggested there was no significant difference in scores for instructional practitioners ( $M = 4.4, SD = 0.05$ ) and support practitioners ( $M = 4.5, SD = 0.08$ ) on perceived preparedness scores,  $t(139) = -0.76, p = 0.201$ . These results suggested that there is no difference in perceived preparedness of teachers and nonteachers.

*Relationship between experience and reporting*

The results suggested that there is a poor relationship between years of teaching experience and reported cases of child maltreatment  $r(93) = 0.153, p = 0.072$ .

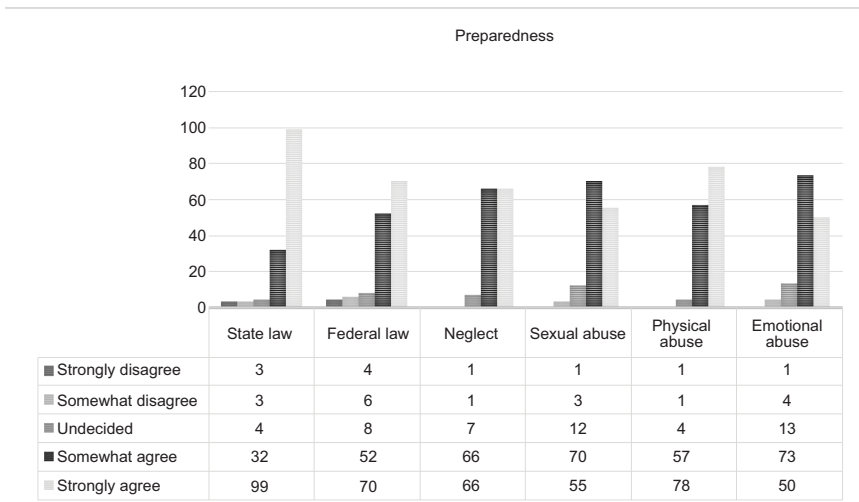


Figure 2 Preparedness.

**Table 6** Summary of stepwise regression analysis for variables predicting school practitioner preparedness to identify and report child maltreatment

Source	<i>B</i>	SEB	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	4.176	0.214		19.532	<0.001*
Age	0.011	0.004	0.238	2.915	0.004*
Gender identity	-0.214	0.099	-0.177	-2.163	0.032

\*,  $p < 0.05$

$N = 141$ ,  $B$  = unstandardized beta, SEB = standard error of the computed value of  $B$ ,  $\beta$  = probability of Type II error,  $t$  =  $t$ -statistic,  $p$  =  $p$ -value.

Likewise, we found a poor relationship between years of teaching experience and failure to report cases of child maltreatment  $r(141) = 0.001$ ,  $p = 0.494$ . These results suggest that there is little to no relationship between years of experience and reporting or not reporting cases of child maltreatment.

#### *Factors contributing to preparedness*

We found that one's age and gender identity accounted for an  $R^2 = 0.082$  or 8.2% of the variance in perceived preparedness  $F(2, 138) = 6.19$ ,  $p = 0.003$ , 95% confidence interval [3.753, 4.599]. Table 6 provides a summary of the stepwise regression. These results suggested that the predictor variable accounted for no more than 8% of the variance in perceived preparedness.

## **Discussion**

Victims of child maltreatment decreased from 656,000 in 2019 to 618,000 in 2020 (DHHS, 2022). This trend is promising yet concerning given that previous research has found that school practitioners reported feeling unprepared to identify and report child maltreatment (Kenny & Abreu, 2016; Tillman et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important that researchers understand how school practitioners perceived their knowledge of maltreatment, identified their attitudes and beliefs about maltreatment, and experienced maltreatment training in order to improve child maltreatment training. Knowing one's perception and experience does not translate to one's ability in identifying and reporting child maltreatment, yet it provides a context for their baseline knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, and training.

## **Statement of Principal Findings**

Findings indicate that 71% of practitioners reported having minimal (40%) to inadequate (31%) preservice training in identifying child maltreatment, respectively. This finding is consistent with findings from Kenny (2004) who found that most of the teachers in their study had received little to no training in child maltreatment during their preservice training. This is a cause of concern considering

that child maltreatment is recognized as a global public health problem associated with a host of negative outcomes (Clark et al., 2020; Hepp et al., 2021) and school practitioners are mandated by law to report maltreatment. Inadequate preservice training limits school practitioners from being able to adequately and thoroughly identify and report suspected cases of maltreatment. This lack of identification and reporting poses great risk for further victimization of children and adolescents who are experiencing maltreatment. Furthermore, minimal to inadequate preservice training poses the risk that school practitioners fail to report (Kenny & Abreu, 2016) or report with low suspicion (Tillman et al., 2015) during their training programs.

School practitioner training programs can address this by providing sufficient training in child maltreatment laws, warning signs, risk factors, reporting procedures, and best practices (Rochford et al., 2023). This might involve incorporating courses that are specifically focused on child maltreatment in their curriculum. Chitiyo and Pietrantoni (2019) noted that high-quality preservice training is an essential part of helping practitioners develop confidence and skills in addressing child maltreatment.

However, although participants in this study had minimal preservice training, it is important to note that 70% of respondents reported having received adequate in-service training. This is an encouraging finding considering the deficit in preservice training that respondents reported. Although, the in-service training will not completely erase the deficit, this finding shows the commitment of schools to equip their staff with training about child maltreatment. This commitment to provide in-service training may be driven by federal mandates such as the CAPTA, which requires mandated reporters in schools in all states to report any case or suspected case of child maltreatment (Children's Bureau, 2019). In addition, Rochford et al. (2023) noted that some states mandate recognition and response training in child maltreatment for school practitioners. Compulsory in-service training might help bridge the gap between perception and experience for school practitioners in their ability to identify and report child maltreatment.

Seventy percent of participants reported that they strongly agreed that they had knowledge about state child abuse laws but only 49% strongly agreed that they had knowledge about federal child abuse laws. Participants reported that they strongly agreed (46%) and somewhat agreed (46%) that they had knowledge about neglect. Nearly 50% of participants noted that they somewhat agreed that they had knowledge about sexual abuse and emotional abuse. Yet, 55% of participants reported that they strongly agreed that they had knowledge about physical abuse. The findings are encouraging, especially knowledge about state child abuse laws (70%) and physical abuse (55%); yet, additional research is required to understand to what extent they have knowledge in all areas of child abuse. Additional research could also help to understand that preservice and in-service school practitioners are trained in identifying child maltreatment and laws. The complexity and multi-dimensional nature (Carr et al., 2018) of child maltreatment requires that school practitioners possess adequate knowledge and skills in

identifying and reporting child maltreatment. Requiring annual recognition and response training for all grade levels that covers laws, warning signs, risk factors, reporting procedures and policies, and prevention efforts will help to ensure school practitioners are up to date on best practices in addressing child maltreatment (Rochford et al., 2023).

The results also indicated no significant differences in practitioner reported preparedness between instructional and support practitioners indicating that there is no difference in their level of preparedness. Therefore, it is recommended that school practitioner training programs adopt a collaborative model when preparing their candidates. For instance, preservice teacher training, school counseling, school psychology and social work programs can collaborate to develop and offer courses centered on child maltreatment. Such a model will ensure that all school practitioners have the same academic training in child maltreatment and multidisciplinary approaches. Furthermore, this approach can encourage consultation to address child maltreatment at the prevention, intervention, and postvention levels (Pietrantonio et al., 2023). Pietrantonio et al. (2023) proposed a consultation model for addressing child maltreatment in schools that could serve as a framework for helping to address the gap between perception and experience.

It was also found that there was no relationship between years of experience and reported and failure to report cases of maltreatment. These results suggest that school practitioners' years of experience does not relate to their reporting abilities. Our findings were different from Kenny (2001a) who found that years of experience were a significant predictor of reporting behavior. The participants in their study had an average of 10.4 years of experience (Kenny, 2001a) and our study had an average of 17.4 years of experience. In addition, Kenny (2001a) also found that 72% of participants had made a report, whereas our study found that 66.7% of participants made a report to their state's child welfare agency.

Finally, our regression analyses revealed that the age of the respondents and their gender identity were the sole significant predictors of participants' preparedness in maltreatment. However, it is important to note that although there was a statistical significance, the variables do not predict much of the difference in perceived preparedness. Our findings had mixed results to Kenny (2001a) who found that gender and years of experience were their predictor variables. Our predictor model did not find years of experience as a significant predictor variable. Kenny's (2001a) study did focus only on one state and had a more diverse sample than our study, which could explain the differences in findings.

### **Strengths of the Study**

This study provided context for how school practitioners perceived their knowledge, identified their attitudes and beliefs, and experienced training related to maltreatment. Our findings provide implications for how to improve preservice and in-service school practitioners training on child maltreatment. These results also

provide opportunities for additional research to support school practitioners in identifying, reporting, and preventing child maltreatment.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study was not without limitations. Firstly, the low response rate (4.3%) in the survey limits our generalizability and could introduce error into the results. We did delete 30 responses (16%) due to 50% or more of incomplete data. The low response rate could be attributed to the random nature of how the respondents were solicited to participate. School practitioners are often inundated with emails and our request could have gotten lost in their inbox or sent to their spam folder.

Another limitation of the study is that our survey had closed-ended questions, requiring participants to only select preferred responses from limited options provided. This may limit respondents from providing more narrative descriptions on the topics of discussion. Future studies on this topic may use interviews, focus groups, or other ethnographic designs to help understand factors that hinder or enhance school practitioners' training in child maltreatment.

The design of this study is a limitation as it is narrow in scope by focusing on perceptions of knowledge, attitudes, and training of child maltreatment. One's perceptions do not translate to their abilities (Pietrantonio & Glance, 2019; Tillman et al., 2015). Furthermore, participants may have responded in socially desirable ways that could limit the true nature of their perception.

### **Unanswered Questions and Future Research**

This study provided context about how school practitioner participants perceived their knowledge, identified their attitudes and beliefs, and experienced training about child maltreatment. However, there are additional unanswered questions and opportunities for future research on this topic. This study did not explore how school practitioners were trained or their ability in identifying and reporting child maltreatment. Future researchers could explore these concepts through interviews, observations, or phenomenology. Furthermore, this study did not explore prevention. Future researchers could examine preventative practices of school practitioners through surveys, interviews, or experiments.

### **Conclusion**

Child maltreatment continues to have significant negative health, economic, and social outcomes for children, adolescents, and their families in the United States (DHHS, 2022). School practitioners are in a unique position to be at the forefront of addressing child maltreatment (Thomas et al., 2020). However, this requires that school practitioners be adequately trained in identifying, reporting, and preventing child maltreatment. We used this study to gain insights into how school practitioners perceived their ability to address child maltreatment. Our study found that most school practitioners believed that their preservice training was

minimal to inadequate, yet most perceived their in-service training to be adequate. These findings suggest that school practitioner preparation programs need much improvement to ensure that school practitioners are adequately prepared to address child maltreatment upon graduation.

### Author Note

We have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

We have no funding source to disclose.

We have completed this research upholding the ethical approval set for by our institutional review board.

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

All authors contributed to the development of this manuscript.

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