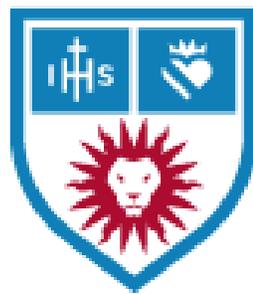


FROM MANDATED REPORTING TO COMMUNITY SUPPORTING

**REIMAGINING SCHOOLS AS THE
NEXUS TO ADDRESS
INTERSECTIONAL SOCIAL
JUSTICE**

Dr. Charity Chandler-Cole



**Loyola
Marymount
University**

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

**From Mandated Reporter to Community Supporter:
Reimagining Schools as the Nexus to Address
Intersectional Social Justice**

by

Charity Chandler-Cole

**A dissertation defense presented to the dissertation
committee of the School of Education, Loyola
Marymount University, in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education.**

2024

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Intersectional Social Justice
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by
Charity Chandler-Cole**

Loyola Marymount University
School of Education
Los Angeles, CA 90045

This dissertation written by Charity Chandler-Cole, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

8 December 2023

Date

Dissertation Committee

[Redacted Signature]

Ernesto Colin, Ph.D., Dissertation Chair

[Redacted Signature]

Cheryl Grills, Ph.D., Committee Member

[Redacted Signature]

Tyrone Howard, Ph.D., Committee Member

[Redacted Signature]

Tamara Hunter, DSW, Committee Member



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Embarking on this scholarly journey in the midst of two global pandemics - COVID-19 and Racial Injustice - and a major career change was never a solitary endeavor. The culmination of this dissertation is not solely a product of my effort, but the collective support, guidance, and unwavering belief of many who stood by me.

To my chair and dissertation committee – Dr. Ernesto Colin, Dr. Cheryl Grills, Dr. Tamara Hunter and Dr. Tyrone Howard – I am immensely thankful for your insights, challenging questions, and constructive criticisms. Your expertise and feedback not only enhanced the quality of this research but also expanded my horizons as a scholar. Thank you for believing in me and supporting the non-traditional lens and perspective I view the world through.

To my husband, Terry, your continued love, encouragement, and patience have been my anchor, thank you for always supporting my missions to the unknown. To my children, you are my inspiration to be great, to transcend boundaries, breakthrough barriers and have the audacity to imagine a world in which you all can truly thrive and exist.

I hope this work serves as a testament to the fact that with passion, perseverance, and love, anything is achievable.

This dissertation stands as a testament to collective effort, encouragement, and belief.

CHARITY CHANDLER-COLE

Positionality Statement

As a Black woman and committed social justice advocate with lived experience in the foster care, juvenile justice and criminal justice systems, my identity deeply informs my work as an author, scholar activist, and national child welfare advocate. Growing up in the dynamic, yet challenging streets of Los Angeles, I've gained a firsthand understanding of the deep flaws in these systems and the many opportunities that lie ahead to undo the harm that has plagued our communities for decades. This lived experience has been the driving force behind my more than ten-year journey to reimagine and correct the social structures, policies, and systems that often fail our children, families and marginalized communities.

As the CEO of CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) of Los Angeles, I hold the distinct honor of being the first person of color, the first Black individual, and the first leader with personal experience in these systems to guide an organization that plays a critical role in advocating for the rights and well-being of children and families I deeply care about. These children and families, whose current circumstances contrast sharply with my own narrative of overcoming adversity, inspire me with the hope that their stories, too, will culminate in healing and restoration.

In addition to my role at CASA of Los Angeles, my influence and perspective in this study are further shaped by several other key roles. I serve as the Vice Chair of the Los Angeles County Commission for Children & Families, and as co-chair of its Racial Justice Committee. I am also a member of the African American Advisory Board to District Attorney George Gascon and play a significant role in the California Mandated Reporting to Community Supporting Task Force, where I co-chair the Policy & Practice Reforms subcommittee. Moreover, I am involved in the LA County Mandated Supporting Initiative, an initiative that evolved from the Racial Justice Committee I co-chair. These positions collectively enhance my understanding and impact in the field of child welfare and social justice.

As I bring my personal and professional experiences into this study, it's important to acknowledge that my deep-rooted advocacy against racial disparity and disproportionality in child welfare and juvenile justice systems might introduce certain biases and assumptions in my approach. My positionality is shaped by my experiences and convictions, and these aspects might influence my perspective in this research.

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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

This section introduces mandated reporting and the profound impact it has on children and families', focusing on its broader implications and its specific role within the educational system. This study begins by exploring its core purpose and significance, setting the stage to reimagine schools as critical hubs for addressing intersectional social justice. We'll ground our discussion in solid theoretical and conceptual frameworks that were selected and applied with intention and purpose. Lastly, a concise preview of research methodologies will be presented, with more extensive detail available in Appendix A.

Schools: Beyond the Curriculum

School personnel account for a substantial 20% of reports to child protective services (CPS), only slightly behind law enforcement's 23% (California Child Welfare Indicators Project [CCWIP], 2021). A staggering 90% of reports from school personnel are unsubstantiated, meaning that the Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS) eventually finds insufficient evidence to confirm abuse or neglect (CCWIP, 2021).

Schools are commonly recognized for their key roles in education, offering a structured and safe environment, fostering pro-social skills, instilling discipline, and equipping students for future success. However, their involvement in perpetuating systemic racism and implementing policies that can be harmful, especially in the context of child protective reporting, is not as widely recognized or discussed. This aspect of the educational system often remains under the radar, yet it significantly impacts the lives of many students, particularly those from marginalized communities.

Public schools are a microcosm of American society, offering education, extracurricular activities, and government-sponsored services, while also being a space where students can experience verbal, physical, and emotional abuse by both their peers and adults. Additionally, schools can act as conduits to systems benevolently disguised as protection where children take express rides to the juvenile justice, criminal justice and child welfare systems via its infamous pipelines. In these educational settings, students often face the tangible implications of their race, gender, socioeconomic status, disability, religion, and sexual orientation, making schools a complex arena where societal issues are both reflected and amplified.

Schools are spatially situated to address and support a host of needs and issues that intersect such as racism, bias, poverty, special needs, and the student opportunity gap which disproportionately affect Black children and children in foster care. When reimaged through an abolitionist framework, situated in critical race realities, schools can serve to prevent vulnerable populations of children from fully experiencing the harmful systems that await them, and take advantage of opportunities to link students and parents to support and resources that can aid in student and community success. Understanding the role schools play in



implementing harmful policies that have damaging effects on vulnerable populations, and in perpetuating bias and racism through the empowerment of these policies is key to understanding the need for reform, or further, abolition.

This report delves into the roles schools play beyond the curriculum, exploring their role in either perpetuating or mitigating systemic issues like racism, bias, and poverty.



MANDATED REPORTING

Mandated reporting, also known as mandatory reporting or child abuse reporting, is a federal legal requirement that requires certain individuals, typically professionals who work closely with children, to report any reasonable suspicions or evidence of child abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2017). This requirement is rooted in the belief that society has a collective responsibility to safeguard the welfare of children and ensure their protection from harm (Dubowitz et al., 2019).

Mandated reporters encompass a range of professionals, including but not limited to teachers, healthcare providers, social workers, counselors, and law enforcement personnel (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019). Their role is deemed critical in identifying and addressing situations where children may be at risk of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, as well as neglect (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2017).

The reporting process typically involves providing information about the suspected abuse or neglect to the designated child protective services agency or a similar authority. Reports are usually made confidentially, and the identity of the reporter is safeguarded to encourage reporting without fear of reprisal (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019).

Upon receiving a report, child protective services or relevant agencies undertake investigations to assess the veracity of the allegations. This investigation may involve interviews with the child, family assessments, and the provision of necessary services or interventions aimed at ensuring the child's safety and well-being (Dubowitz et al., 2019). Mandated reporting laws vary by jurisdiction, so the specific requirements and the list of professionals considered mandated reporters may differ. Nonetheless, the overarching goal remains consistent: to prioritize the protection of children and hold individuals accountable for reporting potential instances of abuse or neglect (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2017).

The Problem

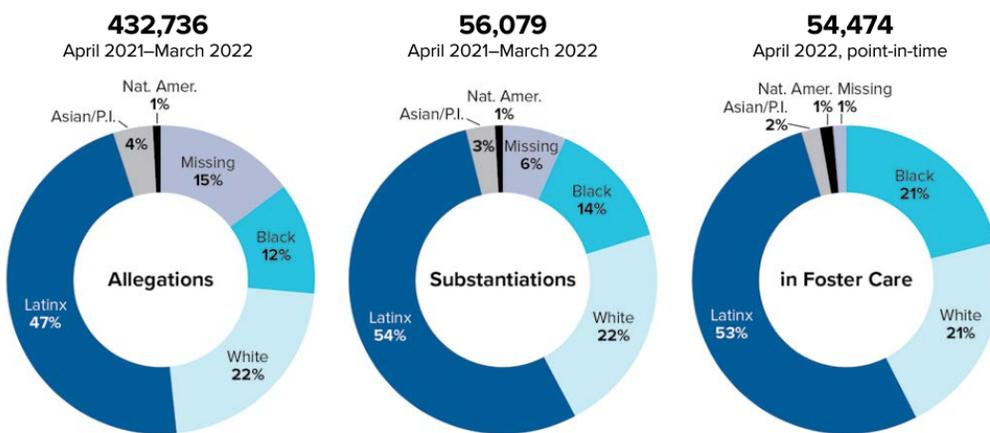
Over-Reporting

Mandated reporting contributes to racial disproportionality and disparity in the child welfare system (Dettlaff & Boyd, 2020). Established by the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) in 1974, mandated reporting has led to a surge in child abuse and neglect reports, from ten thousand in 1967 to over two million by 1990 (Roberts, 2022c). This policy, while aimed at protecting children, has inadvertently penalized and criminalized marginalized groups, notably Black people. In California, professionals like teachers and doctors are required to report any reasonable suspicion of child abuse and neglect, even without concrete evidence, as per the definition of 'reasonable suspicion' in the California Penal Code, - PEN § 11166. This subjectivity, without requisite training in cultural competence, or distinguishing neglect from poverty or mental health related stressors, can result in an excessive number of impoverished and underresourced families being reported for neglect due to poverty-related issues.

- Annually, about 4.4 million referrals of alleged maltreatment are received nationwide, impacting 7.8 million children. In California, from April 2021 to March 2022, 432,736 children were involved in reports, with only 13% (56,079) being substantiated (see Figure 1), (Safe & Sound, 2022).

Figure 1

Allegations and Substantiations of Maltreatment



Percentages are rounded up to whole numbers.

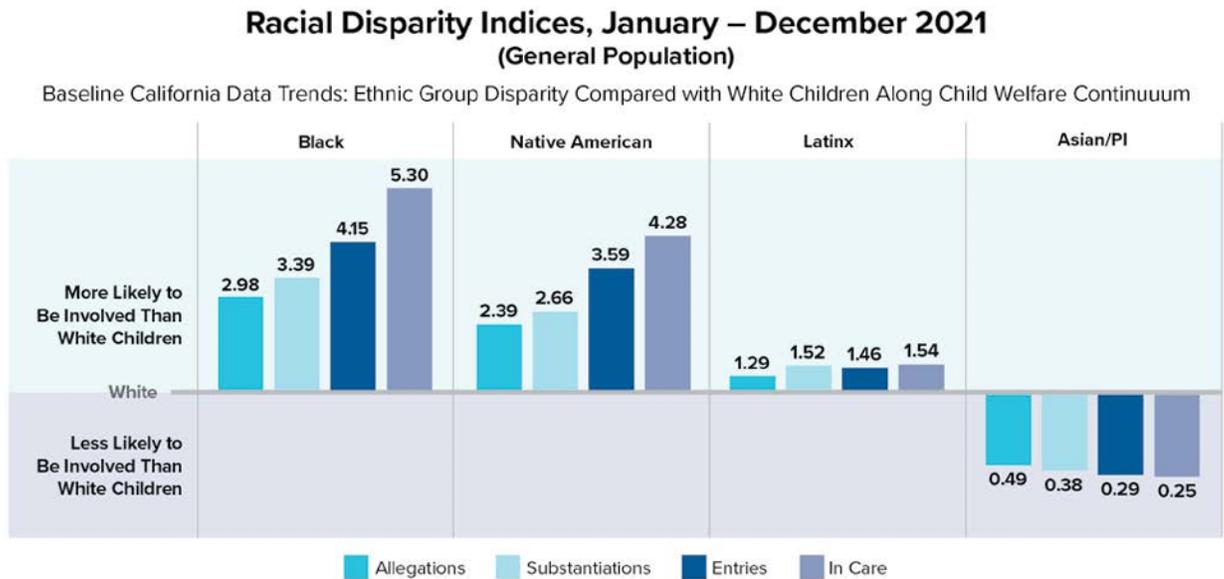
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Black and Native American youth are represented in foster care at approximately four times their proportion in the overall California youth population (Figure 2; Assembly Budget Subcommittee Legislative Analyst Office, 2023; Safe & Sound, 2023).

Almost 50% of Black and Native American children experienced some level of child welfare involvement by age 18, notably higher than their Hispanic, White, and Asian/Pacific Islander counterparts (Putnam-Hornstein et al., 2021).

Figure 2

Racial Disparity Indices



Factors Contributing to Disproportionality

Several factors contribute to the racial disproportionality observed in mandated reporting and child welfare involvement including:

- **Implicit Bias:** Implicit biases among mandated reporters may influence the likelihood of reporting abuse or neglect for children of different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Roberts, 2002a).
- **Socioeconomic Factors:** Socioeconomic factors, such as poverty, may also play a role, as families of color are disproportionately affected by economic challenges, which can be mistaken for neglect, or be a source of stress and resultant issues (Drake et al., 2011).
- **Systemic Issues:** Systemic issues, including policies and practices within child welfare systems, may also contribute to disparities in reporting and outcomes for families of different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Font et al., 2012).

Diminished Trust & Fear

Unsubstantiated reports, unnecessary investigations, and the number of children funneled into the system due to poverty, creates missed opportunities to support children that need protection from blatant neglect and actual abuse. These children fall through the cracks, or their files are buried under intense caseloads, relying on social workers whose practices are wrapped in bad policies and bureaucracy, resulting in experiences that could have been prevented. When children are severely harmed and abused, or even killed, leaders in power respond with even stricter laws and policies that do not protect, but create a more heightened culture of fear.

Mandated reporting has created a culture of fear whereby professionals are afraid of not reporting, and children and families are afraid of being reported, creating a barrier to accessing necessary support and services. The culture of fear engendered by mandated reporting disrupts trust and relationships between professionals, children and families, particularly Black families, who are disproportionately funneled into a system that often fails to genuinely protect and support them.

Mandated reporting, is inherently racist and preys on vulnerable communities by requiring the very spaces they are forced to interact with to do its bidding, such as public schools. Increased exposure to these spaces lead to a higher likelihood of being reported, not necessarily because abuse or neglect is more prevalent in these communities, but because they are under more frequent surveillance.

The reality today is that parents are afraid to rely on teachers and schools for support because they are afraid of losing their children, or being perceived and treated as bad parents. When the fear of asking for help intersects with mandated reporting laws, there is nowhere for parents to turn. Understanding the role schools play in implementing harmful policies that have damaging effects on vulnerable populations, and perpetuating bias and racism through the empowerment of these policies is key to understanding the need for substantial reform or abolition. Analyzing and critiquing policy alone and its current effects on our communities will be difficult without first grasping our country's history of racism, anti-Blackness, and the social and psychological war on Black people.



Purpose & Significance

Purpose of the Study

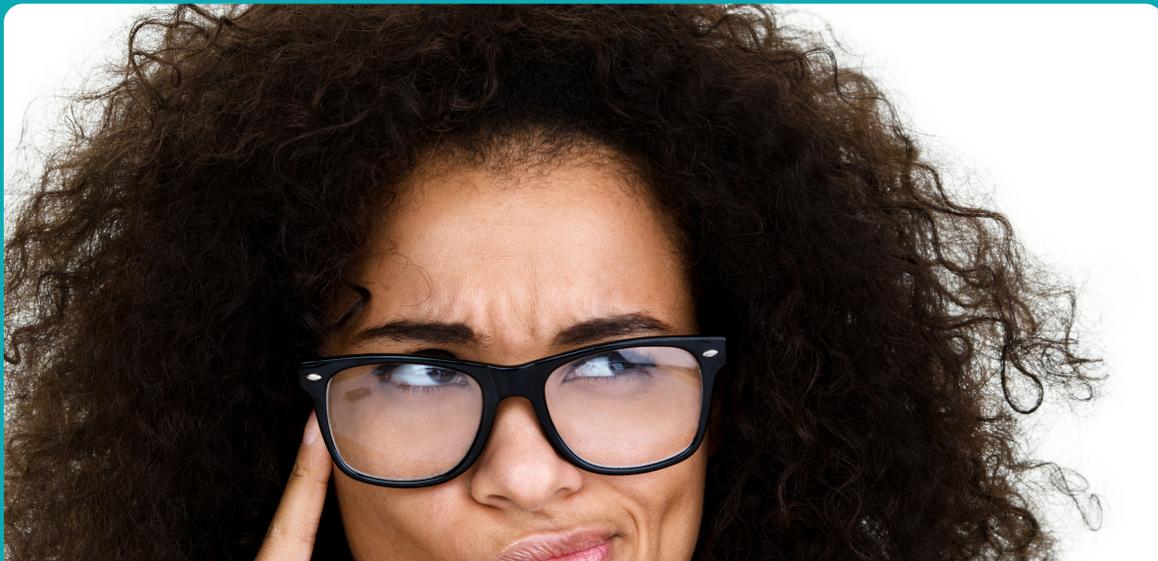
This study aimed to delineate the objectives and actualities of mandated reporting policy in California. It sought to unveil the implications of these policies for Black families and explore opportunities for schools to leverage their proximity and positionality to children and families to move into community supportive roles and adopt a culturally responsive approach. This study explored the interpretation, training, and implementation of mandated reporting policies in K-12 schools, highlighting the lived experiences of those affected.

Further, this study sought to understand what drives school mandated reporter decision making and reporting practices. This study centered the voices of those impacted by the child welfare system and those charged with reporting instances of abuse and/or neglect.

Significance of the Study

Given the detrimental realities and ambiguity of mandated reporting laws and their implementation, advocates are pushing for reform or even abolition. This social justice study aimed to offer insights into how schools can become culturally responsive in a comprehensive manner. It focused on strategies that extend beyond mere curriculum and test score concerns, aiming to effectively support marginalized and underserved students. A key goal of this report is to encourage a shift in the current practice of reporting students to child welfare hotlines for issues stemming from poverty, and instead, provide them with meaningful assistance and intentional support.

This study will also contribute to the growing research on mandated reporting in that it also includes and uplifts the perceptions and attitudes of mandated reporters themselves, which has been absent from other studies reviewed thus far and specific, tangible ways of supporting that policy makers, schools and educators can act on immediately.



Research Questions

THIS MIXED-METHODS STUDY WILL BE GUIDED BY THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

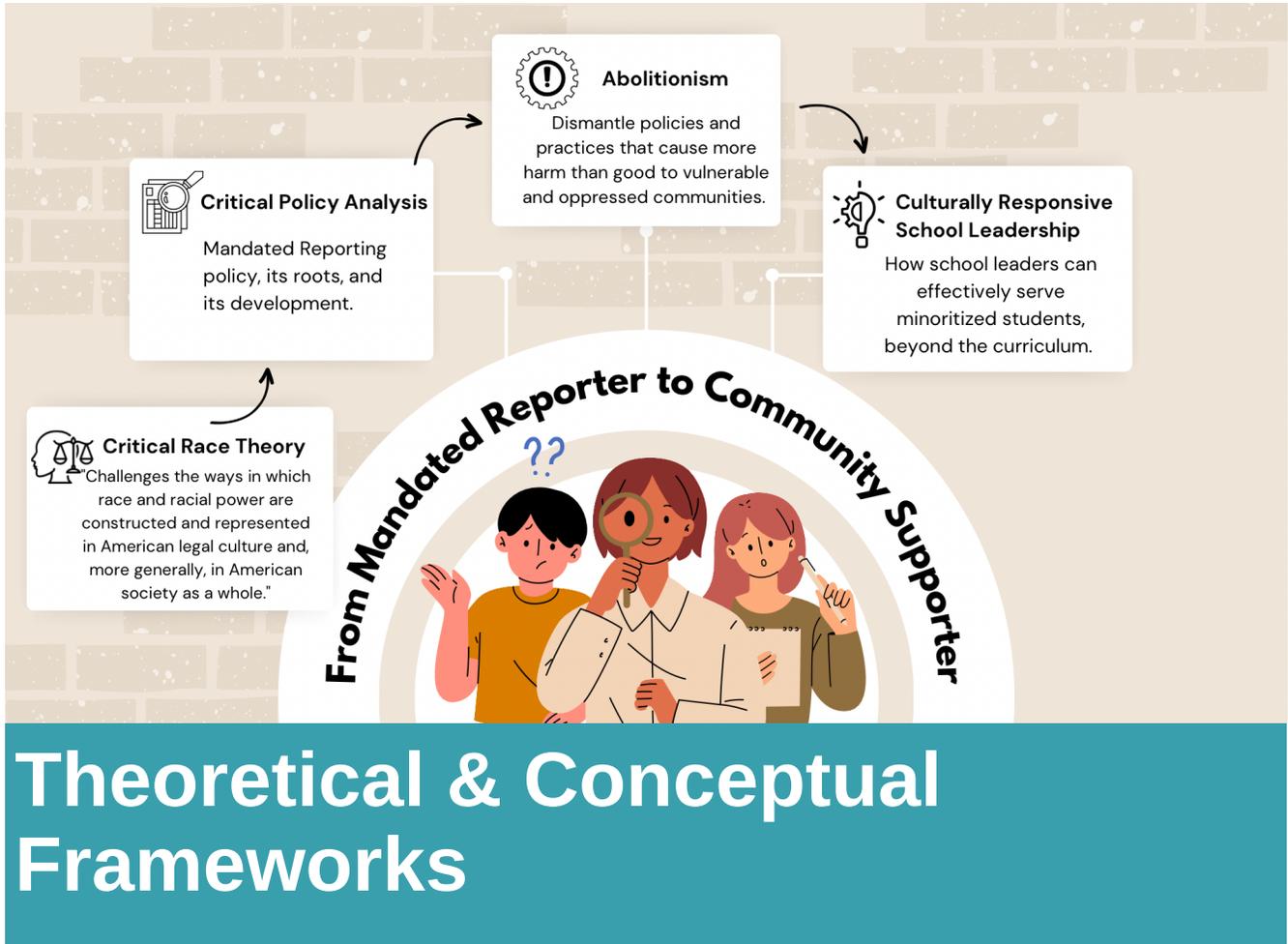
**1. HOW DOES MANDATED REPORTING
IMPACT BLACK FAMILIES?**

**2. HOW DOES MANDATED REPORTER
UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR ROLE
INFLUENCE REPORTING PRACTICES?**

**3. HOW CAN EDUCATORS TRANSITION
FROM BEING MANDATED REPORTERS TO
COMMUNITY SUPPORTERS?**

Figure 3

Application of Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks



The issues plaguing the societal investment in the system involvement of Black children and families is complex, deeply rooted in racism and perpetuated through institutions disguised as vehicles of support, education, protection and health. Therefore, multiple theoretical and conceptual frameworks (see Figure 3) were necessary to break down, digest, understand and offer solutions that would lead to change at the individual, organizational, and systemic levels. This study employed theoretical frameworks Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Policy Analysis, to dissect and comprehend the complex issues surrounding the societal involvement of Black children and families in systemic structures. Furthermore, Abolitionism and Culturally Responsive School Leadership were introduced as conceptual frameworks to understand why the abolition of the current practice of mandated reporting in school settings is necessary for genuinely culturally responsive school leadership.

APPLICATION OF FRAMEWORKS

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an intellectual movement primarily led by scholars of color, challenging the construction and representation of race and racial power in American legal culture and society (Crenshaw, 1995, p. xi). Emerging from critical legal studies, CRT stands out as a tool for social and political change spanning various fields, including law, politics, and notably, education (De La Garza & Ono, 2016). Initially focused on uncovering racial discriminatory practices in schools and colleges (Amiot et al., 2020), CRT has evolved to directly confront white supremacy culture and racism in education. It serves as a framework for examining and challenging power structures that perpetuate racial inequality (Kolivoski et al., 2014). CRT offers an opportunity to scrutinize how power structures rooted in white supremacy enable harm perpetuation by individuals in positions of authority. By connecting racial disproportionality and historical oppression experienced by Black individuals in the child welfare system, CRT facilitates dialogue and action for social change, shedding light on the intricate relationship between race, racism, power, and the interpretation and implementation of social policies in schools. CRT is guided by six key principles aligned with the goal of combatting racism in education:

(1) recognizing the permanence of racism as ordinary, (2) highlighting whiteness as the ultimate property, (3) embracing counternarratives and counter stories, (4) critiquing liberalism, (5) acknowledging interest convergence, and (6) incorporating intersectionality (Kolivoski et al., 2014; Amiot et al., 2020).

Critical Policy Analysis

Critical policy analysis emphasizes the importance of understanding the intricate connections between education and societal power dynamics, as well as the efforts to challenge these dynamics (Apple, 2019, p. 276). Contemporary critical policy scholars focus on five key concerns: (1) the dissonance between policy rhetoric and practical implementation, (2) the historical roots and evolution of policies, (3) the allocation of power, resources, and knowledge, leading to policy "winners" and "losers," (4) the impact of policies on social stratification and inequality, and (5) the examination of how marginalized groups engage with or resist policies (Young & Diem, 2017).

Schools, as policy implementers, have a professional obligation to analyze the policies they are tasked with enforcing. This includes evaluating their effectiveness, identifying unforeseen

negative consequences that hinder overall student success, and advocating for changes when policies perpetuate racism and white supremacy within the dominant culture (Apple, 2019; Young & Diem, 2017).

Abolitionism

Abolitionism in schools, viewed through a critical race lens, aims to deconstruct policies and practices that lack trauma-informed and culturally responsive approaches, often causing more harm than good to marginalized communities. Dr. Bettina Love defined abolitionist teaching as not just a practice but a way of life, seeking to restore humanity in schools and collaborate with parents and communities to establish civically engaged educational institutions. The overarching objective is to achieve intersectional social justice for equitable classrooms and extend this vision beyond the curriculum (Love, 2019). Abolitionist teaching entails rejecting harmful policies, such as mandated reporting, and instead, actively seeking intentional and meaningful ways for schools to address actual instances of abuse while offering support to children and families facing poverty. It goes further by advocating for the comprehensive reimagining of the child welfare system, beginning with the repeal of mandated reporting laws and the introduction of community-led

approaches to promote family and community safety and well-being. This approach aligns with the core principles of abolitionism in education (Love, 2019).

Culturally Responsive School Leadership

Social justice leadership is a multifaceted and dynamic concept, deeply intertwined with the contextual and historical factors inherent to the environment in which it is applied. An essential aspect of this leadership involves recognizing the construction of our knowledge paradigms within their historical and contextual contexts. This awareness allows us to transcend our own perspectives and gain insight into the experiences, societal obstacles, and genuine concerns of those we aim to serve and educate. Consequently, the decisions and actions of leaders become intricately attuned to the needs of students, recognizing that inaction or misguided actions can have profoundly adverse consequences.

In public schools, there exist significant demographic disparities with respect to the racial and cultural identities of students, administrators, and teachers (Horsford et al., 2011; Khalifa et al., 2016). Without critical self-awareness,

it becomes exceedingly challenging to effectively respond to the needs of underserved BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) students. Many educators find themselves unprepared to teach and lead in culturally diverse settings, let alone identify opportunities to support students beyond the standard curriculum. This mismatch between educators and the communities they serve is exacerbated by a lack of resources and knowledge, hindering genuine transformative change and the success of all students.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) centers on the capacity of school leaders to effectively serve historically marginalized minoritized students by honoring indigenous heritages and local cultural practices (Khalifa et al., 2016). CRSL transcends traditional boundaries, extending beyond the classroom to encompass the broader community and community-based support systems (Johnson, 2014). It actively bridges the gap between educational institutions and the larger societal context, connecting activism and initiatives that impact students. Furthermore, CRSL engages with the political landscape and the inner workings of policies that influence their role, personal perspective, and understanding of the students they serve. It underscores the professional duty to create safe, consistent, and anti-racist educational experiences for all students (Horsford et al., 2011).

Khalifa et al. (2016) outlined four key behaviors that constitute CRSL:

1. **Critical Self-Awareness:**
Recognizing one's values, beliefs, and dispositions when serving marginalized children.
2. **Culturally Responsive Curricula and Teacher Preparation:** Equipping teachers with the knowledge to identify and challenge patterns of inequity that disenfranchise urban youth.
3. **Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environments:** Leveraging resources to cultivate a culturally affirming school atmosphere.
4. **Engaging Students and Parents in Community Contexts:** Understanding, addressing, and advocating for community-based issues as a school leader.

Methods & Limitations

Methods

The research employed a problem-centered, mixed-method research approach (MMR) using a concurrent triangulation design, as highlighted by Leavy (2017) and Creswell & Plano Clark (2017). This particular design facilitated the analysis of quantitative survey data to map out the overarching perspectives of mandated reporters.

Simultaneously, in-depth interviews were conducted with a select group of mandated reporters to provide depth to the quantitative findings. The primary goal of this design was to ensure diverse yet complementary data on the experiences of each mandated reporter (Morse & Cheek 2014). This aided in comprehensively grasping the research quandary. Moreover, the research delved into mandated reporting as a specific phenomenon and employed a phenomenological approach to chronicle the real-world experiences of Black children and families subjected to mandated reporting. By intertwining both quantitative and qualitative methods, the study intended to offer a profound comprehension of mandated reporting, thereby fostering an enriched understanding of the research problem and potential solutions.

Additional information on methods can be found in Appendix A.

Limitations

The sample size used for both qualitative and quantitative analyses pose a limitation to this study and another study of a larger scale is encouraged. Further, an additional investigation that could enhance this study should delve into the impact of poverty and oppression on instances of parental abuse and overt neglect. This theme emerged prominently in the interviews conducted. It's crucial to address this because a significant portion, if not all, of the existing mandated reporting mechanisms are associated with neglect rooted in poverty. Furthermore, the obligation of mandated reporters to report, coupled with the dual consciousness revealed in their roles, merits its own dedicated research investigation.



SECTION 2

An Abridged History



In this section, we delve into the multifaceted history of structural racism in the United States, tracing its roots from the nation's inception to its pervasive presence in contemporary society, via systems that are benevolently disguised as protection. Through a critical examination of historical and present-day policies, institutional practices, and cultural norms, we reveal how structural racism has been deeply ingrained in every aspect of American life, affecting Black individuals and communities across generations. The section opens with a discussion on the foundational elements of structural racism, highlighting how the U.S. Constitution, despite its promises of freedom and justice, played a crucial role in perpetuating Black oppression. We then explore the enduring legacy of historical injustices, from slavery and colonialism to the Jim Crow era, and the remarkable resilience of Black communities in the face of relentless adversity. The subsequent sections reveal the covert and harmful characteristics of anti-blackness as a cultural logic. They also shed light on the social and psychological battle faced by Black individuals, as well as the stark inequalities present in the child welfare system. This analysis sets the foundation for understanding the widespread application of mandated reporting as it exists today. By unpacking these critical issues, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the persistent and pernicious nature of structural racism, its historical roots, and its ongoing impact on Black lives in America.



Structural Racism: A Persistent Issue

From its inception, America has been steeped in structural racism, with Black people enduring over four centuries of multifaceted oppression. Defined as a system where public policies, institutional practices, and cultural norms perpetuate racial group inequity (Lawrence et al., 2004), structural racism is deeply embedded in American society, influencing laws, culture, politics, and economics (Lawrence et al., 2004). The United States Constitution, while heralding freedom and justice, excluded Black people from its protective umbrella, embedding their oppression into the nation's foundation and perpetuating it through various systems, such as the child welfare system, which has historically failed to safeguard Black and marginalized communities.

Historical Injustices: A Legacy of Pain

Black individuals and families have demonstrated remarkable resilience amidst numerous adversities, including slavery, colonialism, and the Jim Crow era. Despite enduring 246 years of slavery and a century of legalized discrimination and violence, Black communities have continually sought to rise above the systemic barriers placed before them. However, their aspirations for economic prosperity and autonomy have often been met with violent resistance, as exemplified by the destruction of Black Wall Street during the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921.

James Baldwin poignantly encapsulated the societal expectations and systemic barriers faced by Black individuals, stating, "You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and for no other reason" (Baldwin, 1990, p. 7). This systemic oppression is not merely historical but continues to manifest in contemporary society, where Black people are often forced to navigate a system that simultaneously oppresses and demands assimilation.



"You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and for no other reason.... You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being. You were not expected to aspire to excellence: you were expected to make peace with mediocrity." - (Baldwin, 1990, p. 7).

Anti-Blackness: A Pervasive Cultural Logic

Anti-blackness, characterized as a cultural logic that perpetuates disdain for Black individuals and life (Janvieve Williams Comrie et al., 2022), permeates societal perceptions and interactions with Black communities. This mindset is not isolated to interpersonal interactions but is also ingrained in various institutions, influencing policies and practices that shape contemporary society (Grills, 2022). Black people are often perceived through a lens of threat and criminality, their very existence, culture, and expressions viewed as antagonistic, necessitating control and punishment.

A Social & Psychological War on Black People

Post-emancipation, policies introduced under the guise of protection have facilitated the profitable exploitation of Black individuals, resulting in mass incarceration, systemic poverty, and the mass separation of children from their families. Stereotypes perpetuated through media and political rhetoric have further shaped societal perceptions of Black individuals, often positioning them on a spectrum from lazy to violent, necessitating control or punishment. This has given rise to a culture of fear and hate, justifying social wars that have been both manufactured and sustained by America (Moriearty & Carson, n.d.).

Child "Welfare": A System of Disparity

Pre-World War II, foster care systems systematically excluded Black families, with welfare services being openly segregated (Roberts, 2002b). Even as services transitioned from private to public agencies, discriminatory practices persisted. The shift towards public agencies introduced financial incentives for states to provide services to impoverished individuals through various legislations and initiatives, such as President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty programs. However, as welfare became increasingly associated with Black mothers, it also became burdened with behavior modification rules and reduced benefits (Roberts, 2002b). The introduction of policies such as the Child Abuse Prevention & Treatment Act of 1974 (CAPTA), in conjunction with previous wars on poverty and drugs, has facilitated state-sanctioned policing and separation of Black families, perpetuating a cycle of systemic oppression (Bywaters et al., 2016). Today, Mandated Reporting is considered one of the main threats to family separation outside of the mass incarceration of Black fathers and Black mothers (Roberts, 2022c).



SECTION 3

Analyzing Child Welfare Policies and Advocacy Efforts

A Literature and Advocacy Review



This section dives into the complex history and impact of child welfare policies, with a specific focus on mandated reporting, and their implications on marginalized communities, particularly Black families. We then highlight the voices and demands of child welfare advocates and explore pathways towards moving from mandated reporting to community supporting. This section ends by highlighting two notable initiatives in California that if successful, can prevent families from having unnecessary child welfare involvement, direct families to comprehensive support if needed, and relieve pressure from an overburdened child welfare system to focus on children that are indeed experiencing blatant neglect and abuse.

Child Welfare Laws

Since the early 1900s, child welfare laws have often been manipulated for political and racial objectives, disproportionately affecting Black and other marginalized communities. Black people, specifically, have endured the extraordinary consequences of child welfare laws in general, but mandated reporting laws in particular, have sent a resounding message that systems and government believe they can do a better job of parenting a child than those living in poverty, or are Black, Brown, Indigenous, or immigrant (Roberts, 2002b). Because of the harmful realities and ambiguity of mandated reporting laws, policies and implementation, advocates have been pushing for reform of these laws, and in some cases, complete abolishment. Investing in families and communities, stopping the web of family policing (Roberts, 2022) and reporting and building a culturally appropriate and responsive peer and community support network are arguably more sustainable solutions. Schools are spatially situated and uniquely entangled in the lives of children and families most disproportionately impacted by child welfare laws. Advocates, literature and our ever-changing laws suggest that the time is ripe to make the most meaningful and intentional changes to how we perceive and respond to neglect that stems from poverty, and even disassociate it completely from child abuse. Now is the time for our government to reevaluate and reform these laws, and for institutions and communities to lean in, reimagine and **take the leap from mandated reporting to community supporting.**

Legislative Evolution

Evolution of beliefs and attitudes regarding the government's role in child welfare and protection in the United States has followed a pendulum-like trajectory (Murray & Gesiriech, 2021). Myers (2008) categorizes this historical evolution into three distinct eras. The initial era, spanning from colonization to 1875, coincided with the nation's legalized slavery period, during which enslaved Black children endured the traumatic separation from their families to sustain American capitalism. The subsequent era, post-slavery to 1962, marked the emergence and growth of organized child protection through non-governmental child protection societies. This era primarily focused on the welfare of white children and the punitive treatment of Black children.

The third era, spanning from 1962 to the present day, encompasses government-sponsored child protective services (CPS), once again profiting from the separation of Black children from their families under the pretext of child protection. Ongoing ideological debates surrounding the rights and responsibilities of states and local governments versus the federal government, as well as debates centering on the rights and roles of parents and family preservation versus the perceived best interest of the child, have inflicted considerable turmoil on impoverished, BIPOC, and underserved communities (Murray & Gesiriech, 2021).

From the narrative of Battered Child Syndrome, a term coined by Pediatric Radiologist C. Henry Kempe in 1962 to describe a clinical condition of severely abused, neglected or maltreated children that could result in death (Iii & Gallagher, 2015), **the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) was born.** CAPTA, intended to shield children from abuse, inadvertently paved the way for professionals to overreport due to vague definitions and lack of clear guidance in mandated reporting. This has particularly impacted educators, who play a pivotal role in identifying and reporting abuse and neglect, often without adequate training or resources to support affected children.

Rather than addressing the root and systemic causes within the contexts where our families reside, leading to neglect and abuse, policymakers have often resorted to punitive measures in response to parental shortcomings within a hegemonic society. Alternatively, they have provided aid for needy families that, in essence, amounts to applying a band-aid to a wound that is hemorrhaging. Despite the adoption and implementation of numerous child welfare laws, the system has consistently yielded unfavorable outcomes for Black children and families, necessitating a critical examination of the intent and history of child welfare laws.

Comprehending the original intent and historical underpinnings of child welfare laws, particularly in light of the contemporary calls for prevention and abolition, is crucial for institutions such as schools. Understanding their role in perpetuating harm and recognizing the opportunity to rectify these historical injustices becomes paramount.

Advocate Voices

Most children who are referred to their local child welfare agency due to a suspicion of abuse or neglect are school age (McCarthy et al., 2019, p. 248). Given that children spend a significant portion of their day in educational settings, educators play a pivotal role in identifying signs of abuse and neglect. Therefore, educators should possess accurate knowledge when deeming their suspicion reasonable, bearing in mind the adverse consequences of child welfare involvement. However, it is important to note that educators are only required to suspect maltreatment that is within reason. As defined by the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2019), "reasonable suspicion" means that it is objectively reasonable for a person, based on facts and their training and experience, to suspect child abuse or neglect.

For teachers, determining reasonableness can be somewhat more straightforward due to the time spent with their students. Schools have unparalleled access to children compared to other social institutions, granting them more insights into the child and family dynamics than the average mandated reporter, such as a doctor or law enforcement officer. Because of this unique relationship and the substantial time spent together, educators can potentially provide more context when making reporting decisions and use their knowledge to assess if contacting the child protection agency is not just an option but a legal necessity.

Moreover, teachers and schools should be adequately equipped with resources and community relationships to support children and address any barriers to their educational success. Since students are under the control and protection of teachers during this time, it is in the best interest of schools and children to establish policies and procedures that encourage effective reporting (McCarthy et al., 2019, p. 250). Given the subjective nature of child abuse reporting and the varying circumstances case-by-case, it is imperative to offer comprehensive training on reporting practices and maintain clear policies.

Moreover, the requirement placed upon educators by mandatory reporting laws represents a higher opportunity compared to the duty of reasonable care. Teachers not only possess a deeper understanding of their students as individuals but also carry the responsibility for their welfare both during and, when relevant, outside of school hours. In contrast, mandated reporters are not held to an equivalent legal standard beyond the scope of their professional duties. As stated in Penal Code § 11166, "a mandatory reporter shall make a report whenever he or she, in his or her professional capacity or within the scope of his or her employment, has knowledge of or observes a child whom they reasonably suspect has been the victim of child abuse or neglect" (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019). Within their professional capacity, educators must make timely decisions in some cases, while in others, they have the opportunity to gather additional information that can be valuable in determining the most appropriate course of action when familial concerns arise.

Advocate Demands

Abolish and Rebuild

Mandatory reporting laws convey a belief that government systems can parent children better than those in marginalized communities, as evident in their disproportionate impact on Black, Brown, Indigenous, and immigrant families. The child welfare system's outcomes for these families are often worse than their peers that come from low socioeconomic status, or experience other inequitable social or environmental factors. For instance, in California, there are over 60,000 children in foster care, with Los Angeles County alone housing over 33,000, constituting the largest population of foster youth in the nation. Graduation rates for former foster youth are alarmingly low, with only 31% achieving a high school diploma on time, and a mere 3% projected to graduate from college (CWIP, 2021). Children in foster care also experience disproportionately high rates of homelessness, ranging from 11% to 38%, a consequence of mass incarceration's role in perpetuating generational cycles of imprisonment, homelessness, child welfare involvement, single-parent households, poverty, and hopelessness. Remarkably, former foster youth at one point made up around 70% of the prison population (Senate Office of Research, 2011), reflecting dire outcomes resulting from a system and government that claim to safeguard underserved communities, children, and families while failing to do so.

Advocates argue for the abolition of the current mandated reporting system, suggesting a shift towards a model that prioritizes genuine child and family wellbeing (Inguanta & Siolla, 2021). This involves dismantling the existing surveillance and policing mechanisms and replacing them with supportive, adequately resourced, and intentionally situated individuals and organizations.

Abolishing mandated reporting, as it currently exists, entails fostering an environment where parents can trust and openly communicate their concerns and needs to medical professionals and teachers. It involves eliminating the layer of surveillance and policing that marginalized communities have endured, replacing it with individuals, organizations, and social workers deliberately positioned and adequately resourced to provide support. This shift aims to move away from a child protection system rooted in unwarranted trauma and harm toward genuine child and family well-being.

Legal Reform

Legal reform has been advocated for due to the harmful realities and ambiguities within mandated reporting laws, policies, and implementation. Some states, like New York, have taken steps to address these issues. Proposed legislation (S7326) in New York requires reporters of suspected child abuse or maltreatment to provide their name and contact information, thus prohibiting anonymous reporting. Similarly, in California, AB 391 amended the Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act by requiring agencies to ask nonmandated reporters for specific information when they report suspected child abuse or neglect. Anonymity has been misused for domestic harassment and racial bias against children and families. Another relevant bill (Senate Bill S5484A) in New York, known as Miranda Rights in Child Welfare, empowers parents during child protective service investigations, ensuring they are informed of their rights at the onset of an investigation.

It is essential to reimagine abuse and neglect definitions, as existing legal definitions are broad, vague, and inconsistently applied across jurisdictions. The use of general terms without operational definitions provides substantial discretion to mandatory reporters and child welfare workers, allowing bias to influence decision-making. California has taken a step in this direction with **AB2085**, addressing racial disparities through mandated reporting. This legislation narrows the definition of abuse and neglect and offers a more specific and less ambiguous framework (California AB2085 | TrackBill, 2022).

Training Mandated Reporters

Training for mandated reporters is in need of significant transformation. Current training lacks trauma-informed and culturally responsive elements and neglects to address bias, racism, discrimination, and the role of poverty in reports of neglect. These trainings often promote a white saviorism narrative, portraying parents as perpetrators and children as victims. Additionally, they emphasize penalties for failing to report suspicions and grant immunity for reports made in good faith, even if they are later found to be unfounded (McCarthy et al, 2019, p. 249). This approach fosters a culture of overreporting, as mandated reporters are conditioned to protect themselves from liability. Advocates are demanding training that distinguishes poverty-related needs from child endangerment and abuse and establishes clear limits for when mandated reporters can be held liable for not reporting (Worthy et al., 2022). Additionally, they call for processes that allow for assessing concerns, identifying options, and determining whether a report is necessary (Worthy et al., 2022).

Investing in Families and Communities

To move forward, abolishing the existing practice of mandated reporting requires shifting from family policing to community-led approaches centered around prevention and child and family well-being (Worthy et al., 2022). By investing in families and communities, a system of care and trust can be created, promoting participation in essential services and ensuring the educational success and stability of students.

Schools, like other institutions, must reflect on their practices, particularly those that perpetuate harm to kids, families, and communities, and take proactive steps to discontinue them. A shift towards investing in families and communities involves moving away from punitive policies and towards establishing a network of care and trust. This requires a reevaluation of existing policies and procedures, ensuring they are not perpetuating harmful practices.

Community-Centered Support

Lastly, advocates are calling for community-centered support, providing schools and mandated reporters with the training, knowledge, tools, and resources needed to address families' needs swiftly and effectively (Worthy et al., 2022). Support should be individualized and strengths-based to cater to each child's unique potential and requirements (Templeman & Davis, 2022). Schools can play a pivotal role in this process by employing additional staff, such as resource navigators, mental health counselors, and trusted social workers, who can better support prevention and intervention efforts within a safe and trusting environment for students and parents. Culturally responsive school leaders should recognize the challenges faced by children beyond the curriculum and work toward fostering an inclusive and supportive space that does not perpetuate harmful practices.

The historical and present-day challenges posed by child welfare laws underscore the urgent need for reform. Advocates demand a shift from a system that has historically perpetuated harm towards marginalized communities to one that genuinely supports and uplifts them. This involves legal reforms, enhanced training for mandated reporters, and a commitment to investing in and supporting families and communities through a community-centered approach.



Notable Advocacy Successes in California

This section highlights two pivotal initiatives aimed at reforming child welfare systems in California: the creation of the Los Angeles County Mandated Supporting Initiative and the establishment of the California Mandated Supporting Taskforce. These efforts represent a significant shift from traditional mandated reporting to a more supportive, community-focused model.

CREATION OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY MANDATED SUPPORTING INITIATIVE

In May 2022, the Los Angeles County Commission for Children & Families, along with its cross-sector partners, conducted a two-day summit, "Knowledge is Power: Leveraging Data to Promote Racial Equity for Families and Communities" (Hunter, 2021). The event harnessed data and narratives to illustrate the circumstances that bring Black families into engagement with LA County's child welfare system. Furthermore, it aimed to drive the formulation of strategies that instigate substantial change on individual, organizational, and systemic levels.

Because of the success of this summit and the work of advocates, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors put forth and approved a Board motion titled, *Evolving from Mandated Reporter to Mandated Supporter*, that aims to reform the current mandated reporting system to a more supportive model that minimizes harm to families and addresses racial and socio-economic disparities in reporting and investigations. The initiative involves a multi-faceted approach, including data analysis, policy development, community involvement, and standardized training,

with a focus on supporting rather than penalizing families wherever possible. Following the Board motion, the Mandated Supporting Initiative (MSI) was established.

CREATION OF CALIFORNIA MANDATED SUPPORTING TASKFORCE

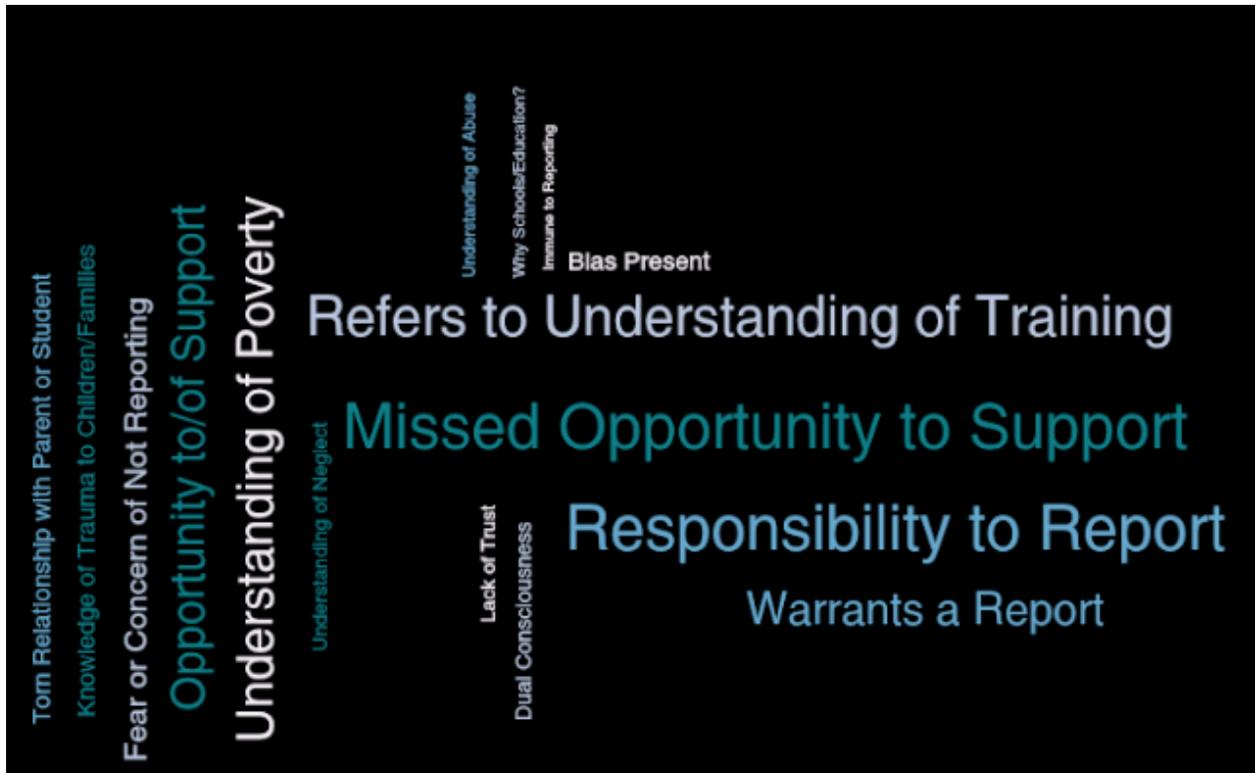
Since 2020, the Prevention & Early Intervention (PEI) Committee of the Child Welfare Council has been diligently paving the way towards a shift from mandated reporting to a model of community support. Such models have been advocated for in recommendations presented by The Citizens Review Panel and documented in an issue brief from Safe & Sound, both commissioned by OCAP in Fall 2022 (Safe & Sound, 2022).

The California Mandated Supporting Taskforce, backed by a rich history of advocacy and data-driven insights, was created in 2023 and is poised to navigate the complex landscape of child and family welfare. With a focus on community support, early intervention, and addressing systemic issues such as structural racism, the Task Force, in collaboration with its partners, is committed to fostering a future where community pathways are not only essential but are also equitable and just in safeguarding the well-being of children and families across California.



SECTION 4

FINDINGS



This section begins with qualitative insights derived directly from educators, followed by a detailed presentation of the quantitative data, allowing for a multi-faceted understanding of the subject matter, then a comparative analysis, where we juxtapose both the qualitative and quantitative findings pertaining to educators, ensuring a holistic understanding of their perspectives. Subsequent to this, we shift our focus to the equally pivotal voices within our study: the parents and students. Their qualitative insights add depth and dimension to our research. As we conclude this section, our emphasis shifts to a profound recommendation: the pressing need to transition from a system heavily reliant on mandated reporting, to one that emphasizes community support.

Participants

For qualitative interviews, participants encompassed three Black or African American parents who had received a mandated report due to neglect allegations, two Black, or African American, and one Native American former foster youth who had either been reported and removed from their homes, or had faced system intervention resulting in uncorroborated reports, and three mandated reporters from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds who had a history of reporting to the DCFS child protection hotline.

Participants for the quantitative survey included 14 mandated reporters from K-12 schools within California, whose race and ethnicity varied.

Additional information on participants can be found in Appendix A.

“But if the living conditions are so adverse, where the kid is coming to school with lice, and bites from bed bugs and things of that nature, then yeah, I will make a mandated report.” - Ben (Educator)

In synthesizing the experiences and insights from educators, parents, and former foster youth, this report endeavors to shed light on the complexities, challenges, and potential pathways forward in the transition from mandated reporting to community support within the educational context. The findings section will delve deeper into each stakeholder's experiences and perspectives, providing a comprehensive overview of the current landscape and illuminating potential areas for systemic improvement and enhancement. These findings call for a re-evaluation of policies and practices in education and child welfare to better serve Black families and their communities.

Educators

This section investigates the understanding and practices of mandated reporters in the field of education, particularly their role in transitioning from mandated reporters to community supporters. The mixed-method analysis of participant interviews and surveys revealed several key findings that shed light on the complexities and nuances of mandated reporting within the educational context.

Qualitative Findings Analysis

1. Dual Consciousness & Fear

A. Perceived Role:

One prominent finding is that the understanding of their role as mandated reporters significantly influences reporting practices among the participants. Mandated reporters in the field of education, such as participants Patrice, Ben and Amber, are driven by a profound sense of duty and service to protect children.

This sense of duty often results in a dual consciousness where they acknowledge the socioeconomic factors and circumstances affecting families but feel compelled and even justified in dissociating from them due to their overwhelming obligation to report any signs of abuse or neglect. They perceive their role as an impulsive reflex, driven by the belief that making a report is their way of doing "their part" to prevent harm, regardless of the potential consequences. Educators, driven by a staunch duty to protect children, sometimes overlook or fail to intentionally consider socioeconomic and familial conditions while making a report.

- Amber: *"I didn't feel anything about it. I mean, I'm just so immune to it, it's just part of the job."*
- Amber: *"But because of his history of lying I don't want to call CPS and then get his mom in trouble who I had a relationship with, right? But I went ahead and made the report anyway, because, hey, he said it, and I refuse to have any child go out like Gabriel Fernandez, so I just made the report."*
- Ben: *"I knew that I had that incumbent responsibility if I became aware of any situation that felt along any lines like that, that I can reach out to CPS as needed. And also, it's something that I don't think about. It's just something that, you know, is reflexive, you know, I go about my day, but if I notice something that triggers a red flag, I know that's the priority. It doesn't matter what task I have at hand, I know that that child's safety is the priority and I may be the only one that may be able to help them. I can't make the assumption that other people have reached out. I know that I can't sleep well if I don't do my part to help."*

B. Impact Belief & Fear:

A striking finding is that there is a pervasive belief and fear that non-reporting might result in harm, superseding fear of penalties. Participants genuinely believe, often conditioned by their training and professional culture, that something bad will happen if they fail to report a concerning situation. Their reporting is rooted in the belief that they are preventing harm, even though they may not fully understand the post-reporting process or outcomes. This fear-driven reporting behavior underscores the gravity with which they perceive their role in child protection.

- Amber: *“your first five years as an educator..that’s when you’re a super rule follower and you don’t have the confidence that you need to have. And so you’re always questioning. Everything looks like abuse to you when you’re a new educator.”*
- Ben: *“I’d rather err on the side of caution. So if you have the slightest inkling that something may be happening, I would encourage you know, a person in that circumstance to make a report. Because what if you do the opposite? What would be the impact then? What if you saw it and didn’t make a report and the child didn’t survive next week? I’d sleep better making the report than not.”*

2. Training & Behavior

Perception vs. Implementation:

While participants like Ben and Amber mentioned training as part of their mandated reporting responsibilities, they revealed a disparity between the seriousness with which they take their duty to report and their perception of training effectiveness. Training is often viewed as a checkbox activity, and participants tend to skip through it or merely complete quizzes without fully engaging with the content. Despite this, the duty to report is

taken very seriously, and participants often make reports on impulse without much deliberation.

- Amber: *“Its the typical online training, it’s like 60 and then you can take quizzes and skip through if you don’t want to really watch the videos. It doesn’t stop you from skipping if you answer so you can really get through it pretty quickly.”*
- Patrice: *“I think when people are doing those trainings, it’s just like, click, click, click, click, click, not really soaking in the information.”*
- Ben: *“Most people in my experience would prefer a video, you know, because of time and convenience, but it may be a training where you need to be there in person. I would say as far as mandated reporting goes usually that’s on a video basis.”*

Despite sometimes viewing training as a perfunctory task, educators still engage in rigorous reporting, indicating a somewhat disjointed relationship between training perception and reporting behavior.

- Amber: *“I make mandated reports maybe four to five times a month at my current school, its very high needs.”*
- Ben: *“No, like in the training, they say, you know, err on the side of caution. You can, you know, talk to people that you work with, like your immediate supervisor or whatnot. But ultimately, this information needs to be reported.”*

3. Feedback & Training Gaps

A. Feedback Absence:

A common theme across participant experiences is the lack of feedback from child protective agencies or social workers after making a report. They expressed uncertainty regarding the outcomes of their reports, contributing to their perception that once a report is made, the receiving parties of the

report are doing their due diligence to investigate and respond to the concerns. The absence of feedback post-reporting causes assumptions regarding follow-up actions by protective agencies.

- Amber: *“There's only been one time that I can remember a social worker following up at all after the report is made.”*
- Ben: *“I would think and hope that it's looked into by the personnel receiving the report at CPS, and that they review it closely and look into it by sending somebody out from the organization or a team to investigate it further. That's what I would hope happens, but again, I don't receive feedback on the report once it's submitted. All I can do is hope for the best. So it's a safe choice.”*

B. Training Inadequacy:

Participants noted significant gaps in their training, particularly in addressing issues related to bias, poverty, racism, and cultural responsiveness. This suggests a need for more comprehensive and culturally appropriate and responsive training programs.

- Ben: *“there was a student who wore the same clothes and had little to no money and I knew the mother was struggling and when I did encounter her she didn't seem to have the greatest grasp on her own wherewithal. So I had concerns, as did some of my colleagues. So you know, I'd rather err on the side of caution, when it comes to anything like that, because if I'm able to see that in a school setting, I can only imagine what the home setting may be like for that student.”*
- Ben: *“I think that poverty influences neglect, it influences mental health, you know, it can lead to depression, anxiety. If those families weren't in that condition, I would like to think that they, you know, would be more able to take care of themselves, but also the children that they take care of.”*

- Amber: *“It can create an adversarial relationship between you as the School Official and the parent. And it's tricky because many times when I've made a mandated report, the social worker will contact the police, and then the police come to the school, and then black kids, my school is mostly black, have a high distrust and trauma from the police, so then it becomes I gotta have therapy with this kid just to get through the mandated report process. It's just tricky. This is a tricky thing, but it's a necessary thing.”*
- Amber: *“But if the living conditions are so adverse, where the kid is coming to school with lice, and bites from bed bugs and things of that nature, then yeah, I will make a mandated report.”*
- Ben: *“Historically, in the United States, there have been certain racial groups that have been more impoverished, but I think at the same time, those groups were victims of circumstances that were beyond their control.”*

4. Community Support Transition

Role Extension:

There was consensus amongst participants that there is an opportunity and appetite to transition from being mandated reporters to community supporters. Participants like Patrice highlighted the importance of schools going above and beyond in supporting families and connecting them to resources. However, the siloed nature of schools and inconsistent training and resources can make this transition complex and often elusive. There's a willingness to morph the role from mere reporters to holistic community supporters, albeit encountering resource and structural barriers.

- Patrice: *“people in the community know what families need, and that's who families listen to, that's where they get their support from.”*

- Patrice: *“but there's a lot of areas of growth and one of the biggest things is actually being invested in the child. Like if you're invested, you would talk to them. If you were invested, you'd get to know the mom, you'd get to know Dad, you'd get to know their story, right? And I think it's maybe like I don't know, compassion fatigue, maybe like you're a great teacher the first 20 years of your life, but the last 10 is treading on.”*
- Amber: *“I would definitely want schools to have a social worker and a mental health clinician, and not just for students but for families.”*
- Ben: *“I know that we give resources related to food and shelters, we have given resources related to things like online technology and hotspots to navigate the internet and have access to the internet. We have bilingual staff, for what I mentioned earlier, when you have families whose first language isn't English, we have parent nights. We have obviously a special education department with trained staff in the areas of special education, teachers, clinicians, counselors, administrators, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, just varying types of staff with special education based knowledge. So all of those types of resources help to combat these situations in general, and hopefully, they are helping to minimize the conditions which usually lead to mandated reporting. “*

Quantitative Findings Analysis:

- **Fear & Professional Dangers:** A substantial percentage of educators report fear and professional apprehensions associated with not reporting to hotlines, such as losing their job (61%).
- **Training Adequacy Paradox:** There's a paradox where a significant majority find their training clear and retainable (84%) and understand their role fully (100%), yet, substantial proportions agree on needing support in areas like cultural competency (69%) and bias identification (69%).

- **Socio-Cultural & Bias Knowledge Gap:** There's a notable gap in training regarding implicit bias, cultural competency, and effects of poverty (all at 23%).
- **Post-Reporting Process:** While a majority (53%) affirm understanding the post-reporting process, only a small fraction (15%) get updates post-report, indicating a disparity between process understanding and feedback receipt.
- **Poverty & Reporting:** High acknowledgment of the role of poverty in neglect is apparent (76%), and there's a universal agreement that students wouldn't be better off in foster care merely due to poverty.
- **Support & Resources:** There is a significant inclination toward being better resourced to support families in poverty (100%) and avoid unnecessary trauma of reporting, albeit acknowledging resource constraints within schools.



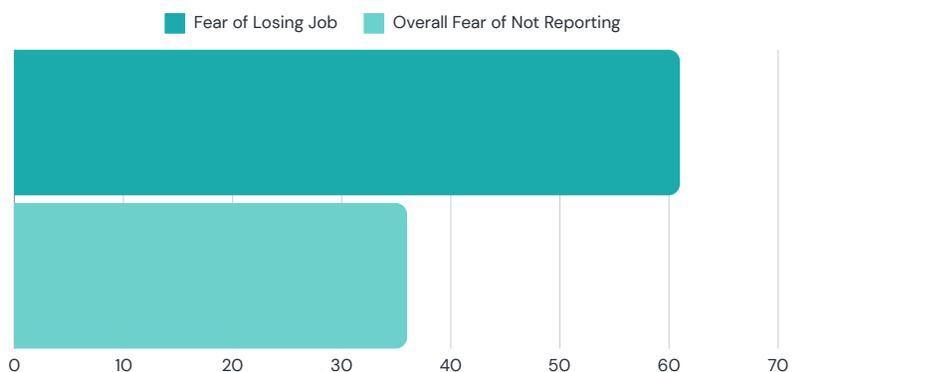
Comparative Analysis and Summary

- **Role Perception and Fear:**

- The qualitative depth provides insight regarding the moral and ethical conflicts educators face, which is substantiated by quantitative data highlighting fears associated with reporting. The fear associated with reporting is multifaceted, stemming from apprehensions about not reporting and potential professional repercussions.

Figure 4

Educators' Fear & Professional Dangers Associated with Reporting



- Figure 4. illustrates the percentage of educators who agreed with the following statements:

- "Afraid to lose job if not reporting neglect": 61%
- "Overall fear of not reporting": 38%

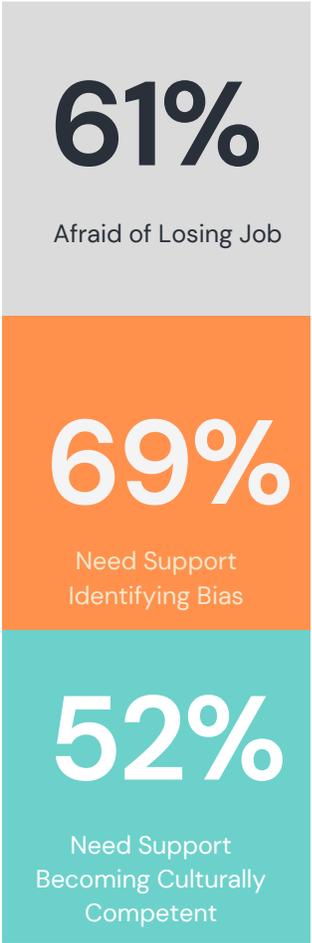
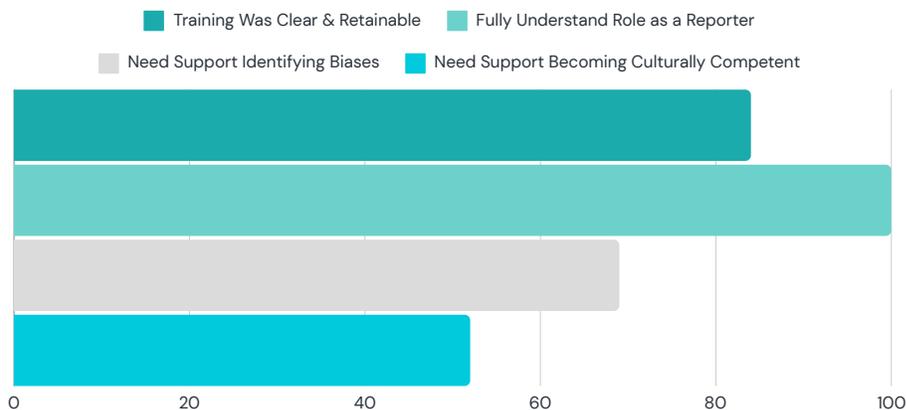
These insights provide a visual representation of the fear and professional apprehensions educators experience related to mandated reporting.

- **Training Incongruence:**

- While educators profess confidence and clarity regarding their reporting roles (100%) and training effectiveness (84%) in quantitative data, qualitative insights expose gaps in training, especially around socio-cultural considerations, hinting at a surface-level satisfaction with training modules.

Figure 5

Training Adequacy Paradox Among Educators



- Figure 5. illustrates the percentage of educators who agreed with the following statements:

- "Training was clear and retainable": 84%
- "Fully understand role as a reporter": 100%
- "Need support identifying biases": 69%
- "Need support becoming culturally competent": 52%

This visualization highlights the paradox where educators find their training adequate but still express a need for support in specific areas like identifying biases and becoming culturally competent.

- **Community Support and Poverty:**

- Educators expressed a strong interest in providing all-encompassing support to communities. This sentiment is quantitatively supported, with a vast majority (92%) showing a preference for having additional resources to assist students affected by poverty, rather than having to resort to reporting them.

Figure 6

Socio-Cultural & Bias Knowledge Gap in Training



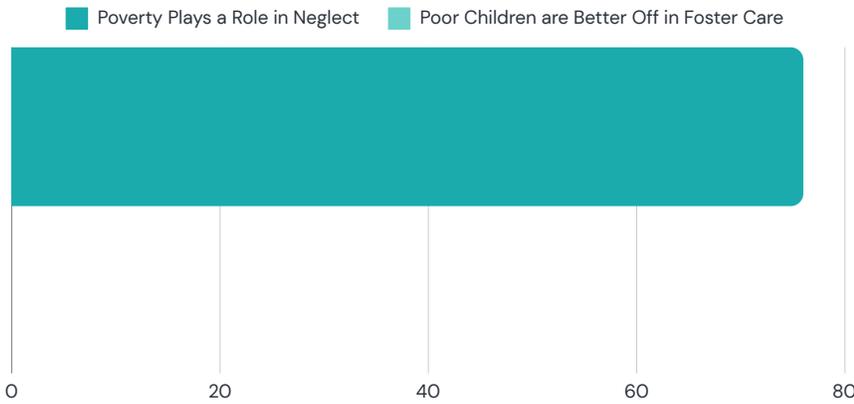
- Figure 6. illustrates the percentage of educators who agreed with the following statements:

- "Implicit Bias in training": 23%
- "Cultural Competency in training": 23%
- "Effects of Poverty in training": 23%

This visualization highlights the notable gap in training regarding implicit bias, cultural competency, and understanding the effects of poverty, with only 23% of educators agreeing that these aspects were part of their training.

Figure 7

Educators' Perceptions on Poverty & Reporting



o Figure 7. illustrates the percentage of educators who agreed with the following statements:

- "Poverty plays a role in neglect": 76%
- "Poor children better off in foster care": 0% (100% disagree)

This visualization highlights educators' acknowledgment of the role of poverty in child neglect and their unanimous disagreement with the notion that poor children would be better off in foster care.

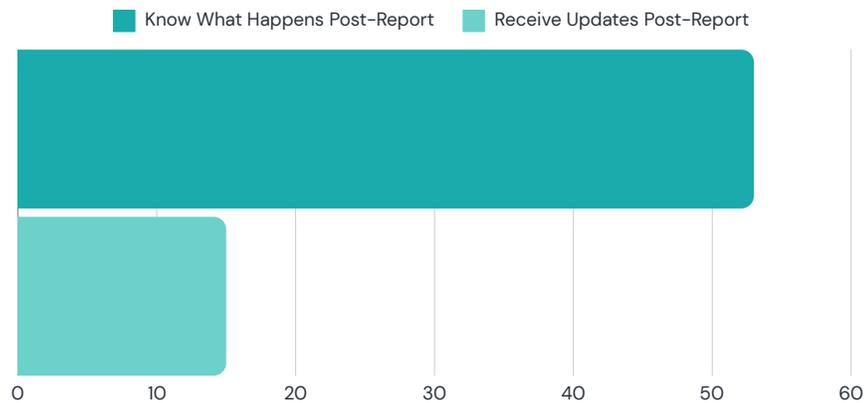


Feedback and Reporting Outcome Understanding:

- Educators qualitatively communicate a lack of feedback and assurance about report outcomes, which is aligned with only 15% receiving updates quantitatively, pointing toward a systemic issue in communication post-reporting.

Figure 8

Understanding & Feedback in Post-Reporting Process



o Figure 8. illustrates the percentage of educators who agreed with the following statements:

- "Know what happens post-report": 53%
- "Receive updates post-report": 15%

This visualization highlights a disparity between educators' understanding of the post-reporting process and the feedback (in the form of updates) they receive after making a report to the DCFS hotline.

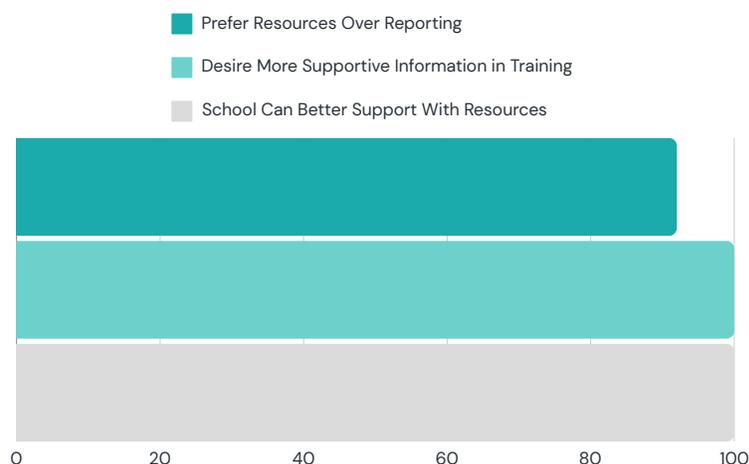
Transition to Support Roles:

- Both qualitative and quantitative findings converge on educator willingness and desire to be more integral in community and family support, yet they're hampered by systemic and resource limitations. A notable percentage (46%) feel their school is adequately partnering with community resources, yet only 23% believe parents are similarly aware, signaling a communication and outreach gap.



Figure 9

Educators' Views on Support & Resources



- Figure 9. illustrates the percentage of educators who agreed with the following statements:
 - "Prefer resources over reporting for poverty impact": 92%
 - "Desire more supportive information in training": 100%
 - "School can better support with resources": 100%

This visualization underscores educators' strong inclination towards having access to resources to support students impacted by poverty and their unanimous agreement on the potential for schools to better support children and families experiencing poverty if provided with adequate resources and support.

While educators exhibit a solidified understanding and commitment to their roles as mandated reporters, a dichotomy exists in their perception of training effectiveness and its real-world application, especially concerning socio-cultural nuances and post-reporting feedback. Moreover, an inherent willingness to transition from a reporting entity to a supportive community role is evident, albeit marred by structural and resource inadequacies. This underlines a pronounced need for systemic improvements in training content and structure, post-report communication, and resource allocation to better empower educators in navigating the complex landscapes of mandated reporting and holistic community support.

“After the investigation I was afraid for people to take my fingerprints. I was afraid for a long time to do any work at church with the children's ministry. I was just afraid, and I did nothing wrong. But I was still afraid, because I felt powerless in this situation.” - Rachel (Parent)



Parents

This qualitative analysis examined the impact of mandated reporting on Black families, with a particular focus on their experiences within the education system. The research unearthed a series of critical findings that shed light on the complex and often distressing interactions between Black parents and educational institutions when it comes to mandated reporting.

Qualitative Findings Analysis

Educator's Duty to Report Supersedes Positive Relationships

- Black parents had previously established good or even great relationships with teachers and schools before any reports were made concerning their families. However, these positive relationships often took a backseat to educators' perceived duty to report. Despite favorable experiences and relationships, educators' obligations to report incidents of suspected abuse or neglect tended to override their previous rapport with Black parents. This dynamic underscores the tension parents face when the duty to report eclipses the trust and relationships they have built with educators.

- Tiffany: *"I knew all of my kids teachers, I even liked them, and when I asked her why*

she reported us, she tried to apologize she was like, you know what, I still have to do my job. I was done with them after that and ended up moving my kids to a new school."

Humiliation and Erosion of Trust

- Black parents had a shared experience with humiliation and the loss of trust in systems they believed were established to support families. The process of reporting was described as dehumanizing, focusing solely on the negative aspects of their circumstances and neglecting to recognize their strengths. This experience led to a loss of trust in educators and schools, as well as a fear of being reported again. Consequently, parents felt unheard and that their voices and circumstances were deemed inconsequential.

- Tiffany: *“They tricked me into coming to the school by making me believe my son was sick. We had a doctor’s note and clearance from the doctor but they called the police, the police came before CPS came. The whole process within itself was just very humiliating, had they asked me and a conversation occurred before any calls were made, I think that could have fully been avoided.”*
- Rachel: *“After the investigation I was afraid for people to take my fingerprints. I was afraid for a long time to do any work at church with the children’s ministry. I was just afraid, and I did nothing wrong. But I was still afraid, because I felt powerless in this situation.”*

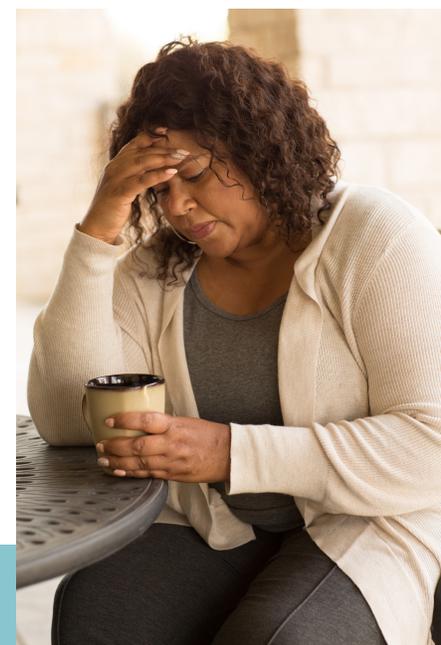
Discrepancies in Perceptions of Abuse and Neglect

- Black parents defined and understood the concepts of abuse and neglect in a manner similar to educators based on similarities in how each group described abuse and neglect. However, there exists a striking disparity in how educators perceive Black parents, particularly those of color, in cases involving their children. Instead of seeing parents as individuals in need of support, educators often view them through a lens of suspicion, casting them as potential perpetrators rather than seeking to understand and address their concerns. This disparity in perception can hinder effective communication and collaboration between parents and schools.
- Rachel: *“I wasn’t even given the benefit of the doubt. No one asked me what was going on at home why this child may be misbehaving. Nobody asked about her home life.”*

Nobody asked about her biological parent that was absent nobody asked these things. It was just a rush to judgement.”

Desire for Holistic Support

- Black parents expressed a strong desire for schools to offer more than just mandated reporting. They wished for schools to serve as hubs that could provide or connect them to resources addressing their concerns, such as mental health support or referrals to alleviate poverty-related challenges. Parents felt that the current approach, which primarily focuses on reporting and lacks genuine care or concern for the issues they report, is inadequate and can be distressing. Parents indicated a preference for a more holistic and supportive approach within the educational system.
- Crystal: *“Not one time did anyone ask me if I was ok, or what I needed. They knew I was also a former foster youth and not one time was I offered support with my daughter, counseling or therapy to help understand what she was going through and how to help her, I would have wanted and accepted the help, if it was real help.”*





“I would like us to for a minute focus on the people who are wrongly accused and the trauma they go through questioning themselves, their abilities as parents and their ability to provide.” - Rachel

Emotional, Physical, and Financial Toll on Parents

- Undergoing an investigation, responding to reports and complying with the requirements imposed by educators and social workers took a substantial emotional, physical, and financial toll on Black parents. This toll adversely affected their ability to provide for their families and be emotionally present for their children. Over time, parents reported growing exhausted and feeling as if it would be easier to concede and terminate rights they felt they never truly had.
- Rachel: *“Everybody in these types of situations, they focus on the child right. But I would like us to for a minute focus on the people who are wrongly accused and the trauma they go through questioning themselves, their abilities as parents and their ability to provide, their ability to bounce back after they've been traumatized and still provide for these children. I don't think that that is taken into account the counseling that's required, sometimes meds are required to regulate.”*

- Rachel: *“And nobody at the end of the day, nobody ever asked me Are you okay? Nobody, and they were wrong. Nobody asked me and then they still had this thing after everything was dismissed, and was like well, you're still going to be on the CACI list until we have a hearing. And what we're not going to do is stay on the khaki list for whatever reason, because it's an antiquated system that nobody uses. It's just a tool that they hold over people's heads.”*
- Crystal: *“I can remember that point in time feeling kind of helpless, or hopeless, kind of because it's like, if people really knew me, they knew that I wouldn't do what they're accusing me of, or saying that I did. So I was very upset. I think I was depressed for a little bit. I know that I ended up having a severe panic attack at work to where they gave me oxygen, and they put me on a gurney, and I was out of work for maybe three months.”*

Reasonable Suspicion and Bias

- Black parents frequently found themselves reported for issues that were suspected rather than proven facts, primarily due to bias. Additionally, signs that could have supported and addressed concerns were often overlooked or overshadowed by the rigid processes followed by educators and social workers. This finding underscores the influence of bias in the reporting process and the potential harm it can cause to Black families.
 - Tiffany: *"When we got in the car, he cried. He cried, and he was like, Mom, why was the police here? Like, did I do anything wrong?" "And he was like, it was just scary because they kept saying it. Like your mom hit you. You can tell that they were coaching him, he even started to question if he was giving the right answers because they never accepted his no."*
 - Tiffany: *"It made me feel less than in the in that moment, it made me question like, would this have happened if I was fully Caucasian?"*
 - Tiffany: *"And had somebody even said, Hey, is there a way that we can support you? Is there something going on that you need added help with? I think I would have appreciated that other than being vilified."*



This qualitative research offers crucial insights into the impact of mandated reporting on Black families within the educational system. It illuminates the complexities and challenges parents face when their relationships with educators are overshadowed by the duty to report. These findings emphasize the urgent need for a more compassionate, holistic, and culturally responsive approach to mandated reporting and support for Black families within educational institutions.



Students (Former Foster Youth)

This qualitative study investigated the impact of mandated reporting on Black families and explored ways in which schools can transition from being mandated reporters to active community supporters. The research generated a series of critical findings, primarily based on the experiences and perspectives of former foster youth who have navigated complex systems throughout their lives.

Reflection of Parent's Plight:

A Cycle of Unaddressed Stressors and Mental Health

All former foster youth interviewed shared a deep love for school, which they considered a safe haven and an outlet from the challenges they faced at home. Importantly, they recognized that their parents grappled with significant stressors that often led to abuse or severe neglect. Poverty emerged as a central stressor, compounded by the absence of a support system to help care for their parents' children. Moreover, all former foster youth expressed that they believe their parents struggled with undiagnosed and untreated mental health issues, exacerbating their difficulties. Despite numerous opportunities to support their parents, the research revealed that they rarely received the assistance they needed. Instead, many parents eventually gave up or could not meet the overwhelming list of requirements placed before them, often resulting in child removal. The lack of effective support for parents perpetuated a cycle of distress and abuse, leaving them isolated and unable to break free from their challenges.

“I feel like there should be a no shame way for families and parents to access the support that they need to ensure that they can be successful and their children can be successful.” - Katrina

- Katrina: *“In hindsight as I look back and thinking about the supports that we could have used, like my mom had her own like issues that further developed with her mental health and drugs. But like prior to that, my mom was like fully functioning. We were just poor like. She was a single mother of three kids, we didn't have a car and she really struggled. I think a lot about that like she went down a rabbit hole of depression and then started using drugs and it escalated from there.”*
- Eboni: *“I ended up learning that a report was made because I wasn't going to school. So I had a lot of absences. I had a lot of absences because my mother wasn't taking me to school. She was engaging in other activities, we were homeless, and didn't have a car, so it was just neglect.”*
- Tasha: *“My mom was a high school dropout, we were always hiding. We would have to hide when the landlord would come to collect the rent. We knew to be quiet. I know we didn't have money and she would disappear for months at a time. And then my older sibling, my brother, he would go and he would steal food for us. We didn't have lights, we didn't have anything and he would figure out how to cook for us. She didn't have the means to provide and it drove her to use drugs.”*



“I had this one experience of sexual abuse that happened for a year.” - Eboni

Traumatic Experiences in Foster Care

- All the former foster youth shared harrowing experiences during their time in foster care. They recounted incidents of sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and physical neglect, often inflicted upon them under the guise of protection and safety. Foster care placements disrupted their schooling and stability, leaving lasting emotional scars.
 - Eboni: *“I had this one experience of sexual abuse that happened for a year.”*
 - Tasha: *“We had to do a lot of fighting. It was almost like I had to defend and protect us every day.”*
 - Tasha: *“We had instances where men would, you know, come in and their sons, or their nephews or whoever, someone from their family, they would come in and try to fondle us, it just always felt like a fight.”*
 - Katrina: *“Like I think I had about seven foster homes in a 10, almost like 10 year span.”*
 - Katrina: *“I did experience sexual abuse and physical abuse. I was physically and sexually abused by the family members of those I was placed with while in care. And I was emotionally abused, I think in foster homes dealing with foster parents that have their own kids and just like all that goes with it.”*

*“I would have loved to stay with my mother. I love my mom.” - Eboni
(Former Foster Youth)*

Desire to Remain with Families and Missed Opportunities for Parental Support

- Interestingly, all the former foster youth expressed a strong desire to have remained with their families. They believed that their parents should have been offered resources and support to address poverty, mental health issues, and substance use. This finding underscores the importance of early intervention and community-based support to keep families together.
- Our findings illuminated a series of missed opportunities to support parents. Despite having numerous chances to offer assistance and resources, the systems often failed to provide comprehensive support, leaving parents and children in dire situations. The lack of proactive and holistic support for parents was a recurring theme throughout the interviews.
 - Katrina: *“There was no one saying like, what can we do to help, or you know, facilitate reunification? Did they explore any other options besides just terminating her rights? You know, maybe help her get her own apartment, or work with her on getting a higher wage job, a living wage job, help with her substance use issues, mental health issues, etc., As I look back, especially now, and like the work that I do and seeing that there’s so many resources and so many different things that we could have probably got. Yeah, maybe you would have had a different outcome.”*
 - Eboni: *“So I would have loved to have some type of support to just know that even though like the social worker did her job, and she seen that she didn’t need to take me out of the home, that the teachers and the nurses and everybody else was there to just make sure that I still had that continuous, safe space to continue to speak up if things were happening, which they were. And if that was the case, I probably would have spoke up and then like, when she drove off, it happened again, you know, like as soon as she dropped off. So it just kind of sucks. I would have loved that especially because like I said school was my safe space.”*
 - Eboni: *“So I just want to say there should be better protocols because my mother she’s good person, but the system definitely had plenty of opportunity before it got to me to give my mother all the help that she needed and to really do their work and create a team to try to help her.”*



Distrust in the System and Fear of School Reporting

- As current and future parents, the former foster youth revealed a pervasive sense of distrust in the child welfare and educational systems. They feared seeking support from schools, doubting whether they would be offered assistance or reported. Furthermore, they lacked knowledge about resources available in their communities to support them as parents.
 - Katrina: *“But I think about like within black and brown culture, communities like how schools have been like, I feel like sometimes parents will feel scared to ask for help or feel like the school's gonna, you know, make a report to CPS or something or neglect and they don't want their kids taken away or whatever it is.”*
 - Tasha: *“It pivots right back to the whole system that's supposed to be designed to help, I feel like if I show any vulnerability or if my son's absent for too many days or anything where I'm not showing that I'm this type of parent. I'm afraid of my child being taken from my home.”*

Inconsistent Responses and Lack of Standard Processes

- The research also uncovered inconsistencies in how schools responded to concerns about child abuse or neglect. There appeared to be no standard process or clear understanding of how to support families in crisis. This inconsistency hindered effective interventions and perpetuated a sense of uncertainty among the former foster youth.

The Potential for School-Based Support

- While reflecting on their experiences, the former foster youth expressed the belief that schools have the potential to serve as resource hubs to support both children and families. They envisioned schools as safe spaces where parents could access support without fear of judgment or reporting. However, to realize this vision, schools need adequate resources and support themselves.
 - Katrina: *“I think there should be resource centers at schools that target things like that. From my knowledge, there was no intervention, there was no like meeting with my mother or figuring out what she needed and I think schools should have the capacity and resources to have that kind of center. I feel a like there should be a no shame way for families and parents to access the support that they need to ensure that they can be successful and their children can be successful.”*
 - Eboni: *“Children normally get a team of people, social workers, lawyers and wraparound support, but what about the parents? What would that look like to have these teams for the parents that can consist of somebody helping them stay on top of their therapy and mental health treatment, and then others helping them stay on top of work and other resources that they need? Like, what does that look like for the parents? They say it takes a village, right? What does that village look like for the parents so that the parents can be great parents or better parents, for their children? Because not everybody has a village you know, and a village doesn't always consist of your family.”*

“The school is the best place for children and families to receive and be connected to support. You have to think for children, it's their safe space, that's where their friends are, that's where they do extracurricular activities and stay after school. And I can only imagine how safe somebody can feel walking into a school as opposed to walking into a social workers office.”

-Tasha (Former Foster Youth)

Summary of Findings

Educators, bound by a profound sense of duty, navigate through the dichotomies of their role, often grappling with a dual consciousness as they go about performing the obligations of their role. This dual consciousness, or role dissonance, encapsulates the internal conflict experienced by educators, particularly those of color, who, while understanding the socio-economic and historical contexts of the families they serve, find themselves compelled to adhere to reporting mandates, sometimes at the expense of community trust and support. The findings delve into the educators' perceptions, practices, and the emotional and ethical landscapes they traverse, revealing a stark need for systemic enhancements in training, post-reporting feedback, and resource allocation.

Parents, particularly those within Black families, find themselves ensnared in a system that often perceives them through a lens of suspicion rather than understanding and support. The findings from parents illuminate the emotional, physical, and financial toll that mandated reporting and subsequent investigations can exact. The experiences shared by parents underscore a palpable need for a shift towards a more holistic, compassionate, and culturally responsive approach within educational institutions, one that prioritizes support over scrutiny and collaboration over punitive action.

Former Foster Youth provide a poignant lens through which the long-term impacts of the existing mandated reporting system are viewed. Their narratives, marked by traumatic experiences within the foster care system and a pervasive distrust towards educational and child welfare systems, underscore the critical need for early intervention and robust, community-based support. Their reflections and insights illuminate the potential for schools to serve as pivotal support hubs, providing resources and assistance to both children and families, albeit necessitating a reevaluation and restructuring of existing policies and practices.

This qualitative research underscores the urgent need for a shift from mandated reporting to community-based support within schools. The experiences of former foster youth highlighted the long-term consequences of the existing system and the potential benefits of proactive, holistic, and culturally responsive support for families in need. These findings call for a reevaluation of policies and practices in education and child welfare to better serve Black families and their communities.



SECTION 5

RECOMMENDATIONS

& CONCLUSION

The findings from educators, parents, and former foster youth weave a complex tapestry that underscores the multifaceted challenges and opportunities present within the current mandated reporting system in educational contexts. The educators, while bound by a profound sense of duty and fear, exhibit a willingness to transition towards a more supportive role within the community, albeit hindered by systemic and resource constraints. Black parents, while navigating the tumultuous waters of scrutiny and bias, express a palpable desire for schools to serve as holistic support hubs rather than punitive reporting entities. Former foster youth, bearing the scars of systemic failures, illuminate the dire need for early, comprehensive, and consistent support for parents to prevent the perpetuation of trauma and disruption within Black families.

This section introduces practical recommendations and opportunities to truly move from mandated reporting to community supporting and reimagine schools as the nexus to address intersectional social justice.

Recommendations

Reimagining Mandated Reporting

- **Policy Reevaluation:** The tension between educators duty to report and the adverse experiences faced by families and children highlights the urgent need for a critical reassessment of existing mandated reporting policies. With educators expressing a readiness to play a more supportive role, and the evident gaps in the current system, it becomes essential to scrutinize these policies through a lens of critical policy analysis. This reevaluation would ensure that the reporting process safeguards children without perpetuating harm or trauma.
- **Abolitionist Approach:** Within the larger narrative of systemic reform, the call for an abolitionist approach resonates with the need to move away from punitive measures. The current reporting structures, which often inflict trauma and sever familial bonds, must be reimaged. Adopting an abolitionist framework would focus on dismantling these harmful systems and constructing alternatives that place the community's well-being and holistic family health at their core.



Culturally Responsive Leadership:

- **Addressing Bias:** The narratives of Black parents and the apparent disparities in perceptions of abuse and neglect spotlight the pressing need for a culturally responsive approach in educational settings. Black parents' experiences and the desire for schools to be more supportive and less punitive provide a compelling case for reform. Culturally responsive leadership in schools means supporting children and families beyond the curriculum. It necessitates the reshaping of policies, practices, and educator training in a way that is not only culturally affirming but also actively anti-racist. Such an approach would ensure that schools are equipped to address systemic biases, offering a supportive environment for all families, irrespective of their racial or ethnic backgrounds.
- **Building Trust:** The testimonies of Black parents and former foster youth emphasize an erosion of trust within the mandated reporting system. This rift necessitates transformative leadership that champions transparency, consistency, and support. Bridging this trust gap means proactively engaging with families, demonstrating an authentic commitment to their well-being, and ensuring that interactions with them are marked by understanding and respect. Only through such dedicated efforts can educational institutions rebuild fractured relationships and foster an environment of mutual trust.

Transitioning to Community Support:

- **Resource Hubs:** Schools have the potential to play a pivotal role in community support. Instead of merely serving as centers of academic learning, they should evolve into comprehensive resource hubs. By providing or directing families to essential resources, such as mental health assistance, poverty alleviation initiatives, and parenting workshops, schools can truly transform into institutions of holistic support.
- **Collaborative Partnerships:** It's crucial to recognize that schools cannot undertake this immense responsibility alone. To truly envelop families in a supportive cocoon, schools must establish robust partnerships with community organizations, mental health professionals, and social services. These collaborative efforts can create a cohesive network that stands ready to assist families, reducing the reliance on punitive measures and fostering an environment of understanding and aid.



Training and Professional Development:

- **Enhanced Training:** There's a pressing need to address the gap between educators' perceptions of training and its real-world application, particularly concerning socio-cultural nuances. Revitalizing the training modules for mandated reporting and offering comprehensive professional development for educators is paramount. Such training should be culturally responsive, providing educators with practical tools and insights to effectively support diverse families.
- **Continuous Support:** The multifaceted challenges educators face in their roles necessitate ongoing support. While they grapple with legal obligations and ethical duties, they should also be equipped with resources that help them support families adeptly. Continuous guidance and resources will ensure that educators' practices are consistent, effective, and always in the best interest of families.

Policy and Practice:

- **Policy Advocacy:** The call to action is loud and clear – policies governing mandated reporting must undergo a transformative shift. Advocacy efforts should focus on reshaping these laws, rooting them in a deep understanding of socio-economic and cultural contexts. Furthermore, there's a need for financial investments in schools and community-based organizations. With adequate resources, training, and preparation, these institutions can truly stand as pillars of support. Policies should include the financial investments in schools and community based organizations so that they are properly resourced, trained and prepared to provide support.
- **Inclusive Practices:** School practices must be inclusive, fostering a supportive environment. Transparency should be the bedrock of all interactions, and families should be active participants in the decision-making processes. Their voices, concerns, and perspectives should hold significant weight in shaping practices that directly affect them.

Research and Data:

- **Continuous Research:** As changes are implemented, it's imperative to monitor their efficacy. Continuous research efforts should track the impact of policy and practice alterations, ensuring that they genuinely address family needs without inflicting further harm.
- **Data-Informed Decisions:** Data-driven decision-making ensures that policies, resource allocations, and community support initiatives are not only effective but also tailored to the unique needs of the community. By grounding decisions in empirical evidence, policymakers and educators can develop strategies that are adaptive, responsive, and ultimately more beneficial.

Conclusion

In applying the theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory and Critical Policy Analysis, coupled with the conceptual frameworks of Abolitionism and Culturally Responsive School Leadership, the implications support a profound need and opportunity for systemic transformation. This transformation should be rooted in anti-racist, culturally affirming, and community-supportive practices that dismantle harmful structures and replace them with systems that uplift, support, and empower Black families within the educational context. This study, therefore, serves as a catalyst for reimagining and reshaping schools as nexuses that address intersectional social justice, moving from punitive mandated reporting to holistic community supporting.





APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

METHODS

Appendix Overview

This appendix outlines the study's methodological framework. It first delves into the procedures used to gather both quantitative and qualitative information. Then, it provides insight into the analytical techniques applied to the data, including descriptive statistics and thematic analysis.

Study Context

Mandated reporting plays a pivotal role in the observed racial imbalances and disparities within the child welfare system. This research aimed to elucidate the objectives and aspirations of the mandated reporting policy and shed light on its real-world execution in California. Furthermore, an attempt was made to discern the ramifications of such policies on Black children and families, emphasizing the potential for schools to adopt culturally sensitive practices. A focal point of the study was the dissection of the interpretation, training, and application of mandated reporting protocols in the K-12 education system. The emphasis was also on elevating the firsthand narratives of those who are negatively affected. One of the study's aspirations was to pinpoint areas where educational institutions, due to their closeness and relevance to children and families, could transition into roles that support the community, especially in addressing neglect cases rooted in poverty.

Research Questions

With the primary objective of deepening our comprehension of the repercussions of mandated reporting on Black families, as well as discerning the perspectives and motivations of mandated reporters, and pinpointing avenues for transition from mere reporters to community supporters, this mixed-methods study was steered by the following three research questions:

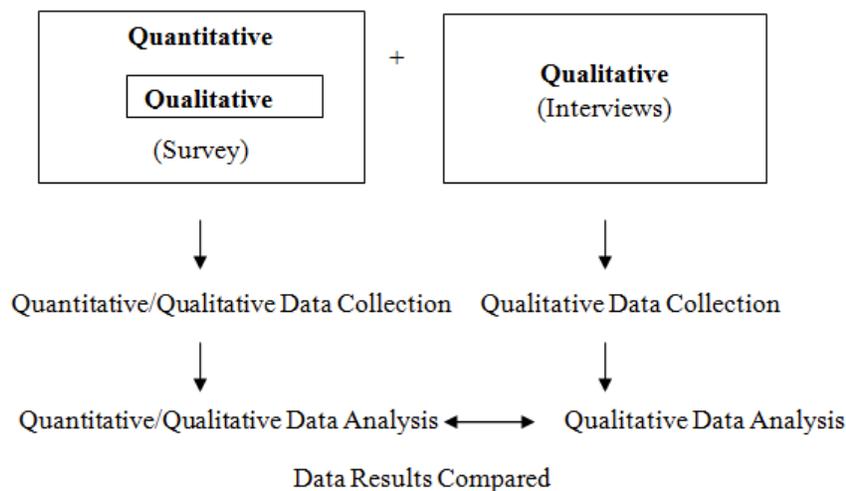
1. How does mandated reporters' understanding of their roles influence their reporting practices?
2. How does mandated reporting impact Black families?
3. How can schools move from being mandated reporters to community supporters?

Study Procedures

The research employed a problem-centered, mixed-method research approach (MMR) using a concurrent triangulation design (Figure 10), as highlighted by Leavy (2017) and Creswell & Plano Clark (2017). This particular design facilitated the analysis of quantitative survey data to map out the overarching perspectives of mandated reporters. Simultaneously, in-depth interviews were conducted with a select group of mandated reporters to provide depth to the quantitative findings. The primary goal of this design was to ensure diverse yet complementary data for the experiences of each mandated reporter (Morse & Cheek, 2014). This aided in comprehensively grasping the research quandary. Moreover, the research delved into mandated reporting as a specific phenomenon and employed a phenomenological approach to chronicle the real-world experiences of Black children and families subjected to mandated reporting. By intertwining both quantitative and qualitative methods, the study intended to offer a profound comprehension of mandated reporting, thereby fostering an enriched understanding of the research problem and potential solutions.

Figure 10

Illustrative Representation - Concurrent Triangulation Approach.



For this study, nine targeted, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The participant pool consisted of parents and former foster youth who were sourced from both professional and social circles affiliated with the researcher. These circles were primarily engaged in aiding children and families affected by the child welfare system. Moreover, we engaged with educational professionals linked to the Loyola Marymount University School of Education Department, notably including participants from the Educational Leadership for Social Justice doctoral program, alumni, and both Master's and Bachelor's level educators. This group also comprised professionals from LA County, Orange County and Sacramento County school districts. These educators played dual roles as mandated reporters for both the interviews and survey responses.

While there wasn't a gender-based criteria for the interviewees, certain specifications were in place. For instance, if they belonged to the parent or former foster youth segment, they needed to identify as Black or African American, be over the age of 18, and possess first-hand experience related to the subject within LA County. The participants encompassed three Black or African American parents who experienced their child's school making a report to the hotline, followed by an investigation, and/or their child removed as a result of the report; two Black or African American and one Native American former foster youth who were removed from their homes due to a report made by their school; and three mandated reporters from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds who had reported to the DCFS child protection hotline. Note that while the intent was to have all participants from the former foster youth group be Black or African American, an interview by a Native American former foster youth was had, at the request of the former foster youth. Her experiences nearly mirrored that of the Black and African American group and was included since her group was also disproportionately impacted by the child welfare system and is a voice that is often missing.

The recruitment strategy was direct and multifaceted. I personally reached out to potential participants associated with the aforementioned professional entities or school districts. Alternatively, referrals from community organizations, personal emails, and social media outreach were also employed. My established network, which consisted of educators and individuals with firsthand experience in the child welfare system, either as parents or former foster youth, played a pivotal role. These connections facilitated the visibility and response rate to recruitment drives disseminated via email and platforms like LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook, often through electronic flyers I shared.

Over twenty (20) individuals, organizations, or districts were contacted directly through email. The aim was to send strategic emails to those who had the means and capability to disseminate the information to relevant groups of people. Additionally, a broad outreach was conducted on social media, aiming to recruit a total of nine (9) interview participants, three (3) from each of the previously mentioned categories, as well as 100 survey respondents. All participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and confidential. They were also made aware that pseudonyms would be used to ensure confidentiality.

An email invitation intended for potential survey participants was sent to acquaintances and groups with whom I was affiliated and who had established connections to the education sector. Once again, participants were reassured that their involvement in the study was voluntary and that all information would remain confidential, with the use of pseudonyms for anonymity.

Upon the first interaction, I provided informed consent and informed potential participants about the qualitative study focusing on their experiences with Mandated Reporting. They were made aware that the study would involve an approximately 60-minute interview. I also mentioned that I planned to audio record the interview for transcription, but their personal details would remain confidential throughout the study.

Data Collection

Survey

The electronic survey questionnaire was designed to gauge educators' perception and understanding of mandated reporting, their roles as mandated reporters, and the motivation behind the reports they made. The survey also assessed environmental factors such as their comprehension and awareness of resources available to students and families within, and outside of the school. The survey was crafted based on a review of existing literature, testimonials, and narratives from advocates, activists, and those with lived experiences. Survey questions were organized according to the three elements of Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986): personal, behavioral, and environmental factors. Social Cognitive Theory provided a framework for understanding how people learn and model behaviors. The theory was employed with the aim of framing questions to discern how mandated reporters processed the training they received, the observational learning and modeling from other mandated reporters, and the influence of self-efficacy on their decision to make a report.

Upon accessing the survey, an informed consent agreement was presented on the first screen page. The survey included 53 questions (Appendix B) specific to understanding the perspectives of mandated reporters as it pertained to their role, and utilized a Likert scale that ranged from 1, signifying “strongly disagree,” to 5, indicating “strongly agree.” It also incorporated an open-ended section where participants could prioritize support they wished to see included in their training and access to resources for students and families.

Example survey questions included:

1. I fully understand my role as a mandated reporter.
2. The training I received was clear, concise and retainable.
3. Based on the training I received, I understand the difference between abuse and neglect
4. I know what happens after a report is made to the DCFS hotline.
5. I am afraid to not make a report to the DCFS hotline.
6. I know who to call or refer families to that are experiencing poverty outside of the DCFS hotline.

Interviews

Nine purposeful, semi-structured interviews were had, each lasting approximately 60 minutes. The interviews included three parents who had experienced being reported; three former foster youth who were reported and removed from their homes; and three mandated reporters who had experience making reports to the child protection hotline. Interviews were conducted via Zoom (www.zoom.us) and with the participants' consent, Zoom interviews were recorded to utilize Zoom's automated transcription service, resulting in a transcript available post-interview from the Zoom Cloud, along with Otter A.I. as a backup transcription software.

Former foster youth responded to questions such as, "What was your experience in the foster care system?" to gauge their perception of the prevalent child welfare phrase "in the best interest of the child." Parents responded to inquiries like, "Walk me through the first 72 hours of the investigation," to evaluate their experience with due process and any potential missed support opportunities. Educators answered questions such as, "Were you ever unsure about making a report but did so anyway?" to comprehend the factors influencing their reporting decision. All interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. The goal of these interviews was to amplify the lived experiences of each group within the context of how mandated reporting policies were presumed to function.

Analytic Plan

Qualitative Analysis Strategy

After reviewing and refining the transcripts from the nine qualitative interviews conducted, the transcripts were uploaded into Dedoose software, an application designed for qualitative and mixed methods research and provides tools for organizing, analyzing, and visualizing data that is not easily quantifiable (Dedoose, Version 8.0.35., 2023). There, I embarked on a comprehensive coding process which allowed me to identify recurring and distinctive themes specific to each participant group in response to my research inquiries or that merited deeper investigation. For instance, a prevalent theme that emerged among the Students (former foster youth) was intricately linked to the trauma they had endured within the foster care system. In contrast, a recurring motif among educators revolved around their perceived duty to report. Beyond the thematic coding, Dedoose enabled me to emphasize and archive direct quotations as excerpts. These were instrumental in facilitating intra-group comparisons, shedding light on the nuanced perspectives within each category.

Quantitative Analysis Strategy

With the quantitative survey data at hand, I delved into discerning patterns, pinpointing correlations, and uncovering disparities present in the collected data, thereby generating a granular understanding of the underlying dynamics.

Integration and Triangulation Process

Employing the concurrent triangulation design as described by Creswell & Plano Clark, V. L. (2017), a comparative analysis was conducted to identify intersections and deviations between qualitative and quantitative findings. This rigorous comparative approach granted a multifaceted perspective on mandated reporting and its reverberations. This design supported the **validation** of the qualitative findings to either corroborate or contest conclusions drawn from that method. This cross-examination bolstered the authenticity, precision, and comprehensiveness of the study's outcomes.

Participants

As shown in Table 1, the demographic characteristics of qualitative interview participants included three Black or African American parents who experienced their child’s school making a report to the hotline, followed by an investigation, and/or their child removed as a result of the report; two Black or African American and one Native American former foster youth who were removed from their homes due to a report made by their school; and three mandated reporters from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds who had reported to the DCFS child protection hotline (see Figure 11). Participants for the survey included 14 mandated reporters from K-12 schools within California (see Table 2). Note that while the intent was to have all qualitative participants from the former foster youth group be Black or African American, an interview by a Native American former foster youth was had, at the request of the former foster youth. Her experiences nearly mirrored that of the Black and African American group and was included since her group was also disproportionately impacted by the child welfare system and is a voice that is often missing.

Qualitative Participants

Figure 11

Race of Qualitative Participants

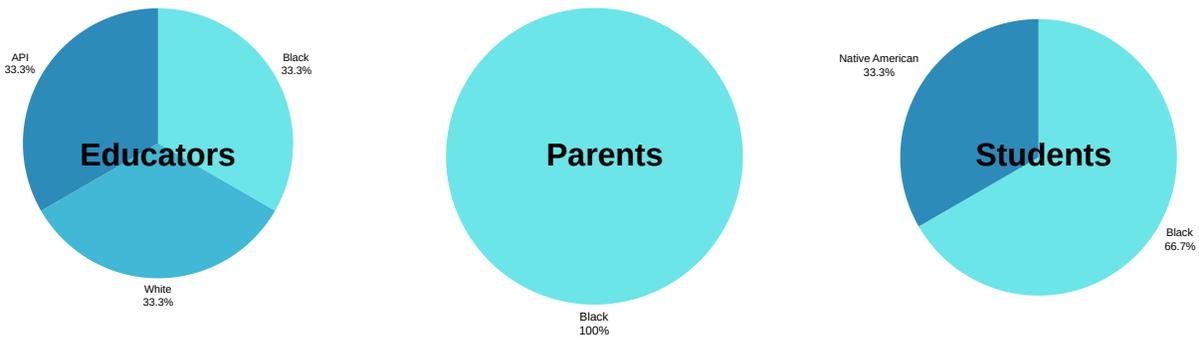


Table 1

Race of Qualitative Participants

Participant Type	Pseudonym	Race
Educator	Ben	White
Educator	Patrice	API
Educator	Amber	Black
Parent	Rachel	Black
Parent	Tiffany	Black
Parent	Crystal	Black
Student	Eboni	Black
Student	Tasha	Black
Student	Katrina	Native American

Quantitative Participants

Table 2

Demographics of Quantitative Participants

Reporter's Role	Reporters Race	Reporters Time in Position
Teacher	Black or African American	More than 10 years
Other School Personnel	Other	5-10 years
Other School Personnel	White or Caucasian,Other	5-10 years
Administrator	American Indian/Native American or Alaska Native,Asian,Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	More than 10 years
Administrator	American Indian/Native American or Alaska Native,Asian,Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	More than 10 years
Administrator	Asian	More than 10 years
Teacher	White or Caucasian	More than 10 years
Administrator	White or Caucasian	5-10 years
Teacher	Black or African American	More than 10 years
Teacher	Black or African American	More than 10 years
Administrator	Black or African American	More than 10 years
Other School Personnel	Black or African American	More than 10 years
Administrator	White or Caucasian	5-10 years
Teacher	Asian	More than 10 years

APPENDIX B

Survey Questions

Mandated Reporting Survey- School Personnel

Start of Block: Informed Consent

Q1

- I consent, begin the study (1)
- I do not consent, I do not wish to participate (2)

End of Block: Informed Consent

Start of Block: Demographics

Q1 Please indicate the type of school you work at:

- Elementary School (PK-5 or PK -6) (1)
- Middle School (6-8 or 7-8) (2)
- High School (9-12) (3)
- Elementary Span (K-8) (4)
- Secondary Span (6-12) (5)
- K-12 Span (6)

Q2 Please choose the title that best describes your role as a mandated reporter:

- Teacher (1)
- Administrator (2)
- School Nurse (3)

Q4 Choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be

- White or Caucasian (1)
- Black or African American (2)
- American Indian/Native American or Alaska Native (3)
- Asian (4)
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (5)
- Other (6)
- Prefer not to say (7)

Q10 Length of time working in public education?

- 0-5 years (1)
- 5-10 years (2)
- More than 10 years (3)

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Block 1

Q5 These next set of questions seek to understand your role as a mandated reporter.

Agree (1)

Neither Agree or Disagree (2)

Disagree (3)

I fully understand my role as a mandated reporter. (1)

The training I received was clear, concise and retainable. (2)

I feel confident making a report on my own to the DCFS hotline. (3)

I see abuse and neglect as the same thing. (4)

I feel children should be reported to the hotline for abuse. (5)

I feel children should be reported to the hotline for neglect. (6)

I understand how abuse is defined in mandatory reporting laws. (7)

I understand how neglect is defined in mandatory reporting laws. (8)

Based on the training I received, I understand the difference between abuse and neglect. (9)

Implicit Bias was apart of my training. (10)

The effects of poverty was apart of my training. (11)

I believe poverty plays a role in children experiencing neglect. (12)

I believe Black parents need more help than white parents with raising their children. (13)

I believe Black parents are not as good at parenting as white parents. (14)

I believe children that are poor would be better off in foster care. (15)

I could use support with becoming culturally competent. (16)

I understand the cultural context of the communities I work with. (17)

I know what happens after a report is made to the DCFS hotline. (18)

I receive updates after I make a report to the DCFS hotline. (19)

I feel comfortable making a report to the DCFS hotline. (20)

I am afraid to not make a report to the DCFS hotline. (21)

There are resources at my school to help children that are experiencing poverty. (22)

I know who to call or refer families to that are experiencing poverty outside of the DCFS hotline. (23)

I feel my school is adequately partnering with local community resources to meet the needs of students in my school. (24)

I feel my school is aware of the community resources available to them. (25)

I feel parents of students within my school are aware of community resources available to their child/family. (26)

I would like to be more equipped to support students that are impacted by poverty. (27)

I would prefer to have access to resources to support students impacted by poverty, than report them to the DCFS hotline. (28)

I am aware that 90% of reports made to the DCFS hotline by school personnel are unsubstantiated. (29)

I am aware that children and families reported to the DCFS hotline experience unnecessary trauma and separation while reports are being investigated. (30)

I am afraid to lose my job if I do not report suspected neglect to the DCFS hotline. (31)

I am afraid to lose my license if I do not report suspected neglect to the DCFS hotline. (32)

I am afraid of being fined if I do not report suspected neglect to the DCFS hotline. (33)

There is an overall fear of not reporting to the DCFS hotline at my school. (34)

I report out of an abundance of caution for instances where suspected neglect is concerned. (35)

I ask clarifying questions before making a report to the DCFS hotline. (36)

I would like to see mandated reporting trainings offer more information on ways to support children. (37)

I know the history of mandated reporting. (38)

I know that Black children are disproportionately impacted by mandated reporting. (39)

I have been unsure about making a report to the DCFS hotline but made it anyway. (40)

I refer to the training I received before making a report to the DCFS hotline. (41)

I have resources to refer to before making a report to the DCFS hotline. (42)

Students feel safe coming to me for support. (43)

Parents feel safe coming to me for support. (44)

I know what information to provide the DCFS hotline so that they can make informed decisions. (45)

I am aware of my own biases. (46)

I strive to check my biases before making a report to the DCFS hotline. (47)

I could use support in identifying and understanding my biases. (48)

I do not have any biases. (49)

I am aware of new laws that went into effect this year around mandated reporting. (50)

Cultural Competency was apart of my mandated reporting training. (51)

Being trauma informed was a part of my mandated reporting training. (52)

My school can do a better job of supporting children and families experiencing poverty if given the resources and support to do so. (53)

End of Block: Block 1

Start of Block: Block 2

Q7 Is there any information not asked that you would like to add or expand on?

End of Block: Block 2

APPENDIX C

List of Figures & Notes

Figure 1: *Allegations and Substantiations of Maltreatment*, p. 5

Note: Adapted from *Creating a Child & Family Well Being System: A Paradigm Shift from Mandated Reporting to Community Supporting*, by Safe & Sound, 2022, Safe & Sound, copyright 2022 by Safe & Sound.

Figure 2: *Racial Disparity Indices*, p. 6

Note: Adapted from *Creating a Child & Family Well Being System: A Paradigm Shift from Mandated Reporting to Community Supporting*, by Safe & Sound, 2022, Safe & Sound, copyright 2022 by Safe & Sound.

Figure 3: *Application of Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks*, p. 10

Note: Adapted from *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, by K. Crenshaw, 1995, New Press, copyright 1995 by New Press; "On Doing Critical Policy Analysis," by M. W. Apple, 2019, *Educational Policy*, 33(1), 276–287, copyright 2019 by Educational Policy; *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*, by B. Love, 2019, Beacon Press, copyright 2019 by Beacon Press; "Culturally Responsive School Leadership: A Synthesis of the Literature," by M. A. Khalifa et al., 2016, *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 1272–1311, copyright 2016 by Review of Educational Research.

Figure 4: *Educators' Fear & Professional Dangers Associated with Reporting*, p. 34

Note: This figure illustrates the percentage of educators who agreed with specific statements related to mandated reporting, as obtained from the "Mandated Reporting Survey-School Personnel."

- "Afraid to lose job if not reporting neglect": 61%
- "Overall fear of not reporting": 38%

These survey results were obtained from a survey created by the author, specifically the 'Mandated Reporting Survey-School Personnel,' and the figure was generated by the author based on the survey data.

Figure 5: Training Adequacy Paradox Among Educators, p. 34

Note: This figure illustrates the percentage of educators who agreed with specific statements related to mandated reporting, as obtained from the "Mandated Reporting Survey-School Personnel."

- "Training was clear and retainable": 84%
- "Fully understand role as a reporter": 100%
- "Need support identifying biases": 69%
- "Need support becoming culturally competent": 52%

These survey results were obtained from a survey created by the author, specifically the 'Mandated Reporting Survey-School Personnel,' and the figure was generated by the author based on the survey data.

Figure 6: Socio-Cultural & Bias Knowledge Gap in Training, p. 35

Note: This figure illustrates the percentage of educators who agreed with specific statements related to mandated reporting, as obtained from the "Mandated Reporting Survey-School Personnel."

- "Implicit Bias in training": 23%
- "Cultural Competency in training": 23%
- "Effects of Poverty in training": 23%

These survey results were obtained from a survey created by the author, specifically the 'Mandated Reporting Survey-School Personnel,' and the figure was generated by the author based on the survey data.

Figure 7: Educators' Perceptions on Poverty & Reporting, p. 36

Note: This figure illustrates the percentage of educators who agreed with specific statements related to mandated reporting, as obtained from the "Mandated Reporting Survey-School Personnel."

- "Poverty plays a role in neglect": 76%
- "Poor children better off in foster care": 0% (100% disagree)

These survey results were obtained from a survey created by the author, specifically the 'Mandated Reporting Survey-School Personnel,' and the figure was generated by the author based on the survey data.

Figure 8: Understanding & Feedback in Post-Reporting Process, p. 36

Note: This figure illustrates the percentage of educators who agreed with specific statements related to mandated reporting, as obtained from the "Mandated Reporting Survey-School Personnel."

- "Know what happens post-report": 53%
- "Receive updates post-report": 15%

These survey results were obtained from a survey created by the author, specifically the 'Mandated Reporting Survey-School Personnel,' and the figure was generated by the author based on the survey data.

Figure 9: Educators' Views on Support & Resources, p. 37

Note: This figure illustrates the percentage of educators who agreed with specific statements related to mandated reporting, as obtained from the "Mandated Reporting Survey-School Personnel."

- "Prefer resources over reporting for poverty impact": 92%
- "Desire more supportive information in training": 100%
- "School can better support with resources": 100%

These survey results were obtained from a survey created by the author, specifically the 'Mandated Reporting Survey-School Personnel,' and the figure was generated by the author based on the survey data.

Figure 10: Illustrative Representation - Concurrent Triangulation Approach, p. 57

Note: This figure presents an illustrative representation of the C Concurrent Triangulation Design as described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2017). The design integrates qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis concurrently to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon. This visual depiction serves to enhance comprehension of the research methodology employed in the dissertation.

Figure 11: Race of Qualitative Participants, pg 61

Note: This figure displays the racial demographics of the qualitative participants interviewed for the dissertation study. The race listed are self-reported racial identification provided by the participants during the interview process.

Images

Note: All images are used with permission from Canva. Copyright © 2024 Canva.

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