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The Impact of Mandatory Substance Abuse Counselor Reporting Requirements on Child Maltreatment Reporting Outcomes

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INTRODUCTION

Child maltreatment takes on numerous forms, including physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect, and affects an estimated 38% of children in the United States. Due to the deleterious effects of maltreatment, 48 states mandate most health professionals to report suspected abuse and neglect. Substance abuse is commonly implicated in maltreatment cases, with an estimated 40 to 70 percent involving alcohol or drug use. Yet, only 14 states specifically require substance abuse counselors to report suspected abuse and neglect. It is expected that differences in the proportion of substantiated Child Protective Services (CPS) reports between states where substance abuse counselors are mandated to report suspected child abuse or neglect will vary based on the implementation of state-level mandatory reporting requirements.

Specifically, this study aims to:

1) Examine how the implementation of substance abuse counselor reporting requirements is associated with the reporting process, including the disposition of reports and the presence of substance abuse
2) Examine differences in the above outcomes based on whether there were non-specific reporting requirements vs. requirements that mention substance use counselors specifically.

METHOD

The proposed study will use existing administrative data to investigate the longer-term impact of substance abuse counselor reporting requirements. Archival child maltreatment reporting data from the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) at Cornell University will be used to examine the association between the implementation of mandated reporting requirements and child maltreatment outcomes between the years 2000 to 2016. As such, de-identified child maltreatment reports captured by NCANDS, rather than individual participants, will serve as our sample.

The basic structure of the regression models is:

\[ Y_{ist} = A_s + B_{1}X_{1st} + ... + B_{n}X_{nst} + \beta_{POLICY_{ist}} + \epsilon_{ist} \]

A repeated, cross-sectional report-level dataset will be created using the raw data provided by NCANDS and then linked to state-level policy variables. The final dataset will contain several variables of interest aggregated at the report-level, including child maltreatment reporting outcomes, such as substantiated dispositions rendered by CPS, substance abuse, and substance abuse-related services, and also including possible covariates, such as caretaker risk factors, demographic information, and the length of the reporting process.

All study analyses will be conducted on the final aggregated, report-level dataset using the version 3.5.1 of the statistical language R. Aims 1 and 2 will be tested using fixed-effects logistic regression, which control for time and state-invariant factors by allowing intercepts to differ across time and between groups.

The research team acquired all available archival NCANDS child file datasets from 2000 to 2016. Sample size approximates several million, and is expected to provide ample power to detect possible existing effects. The team is currently completing a pre-analysis review of each state’s relevant statutes to verify language of mandatory reporting policies and dates of enactment.