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## **Child Abuse and its Effects on the Social-Emotional Behavior of Elementary School Students**

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Child Abuse and Its Effects on the Social-Emotional Behavior of Elementary School Students

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Abstract

Lack of teacher knowledge on child abuse has resulted in lower percentage of child abuse cases being reported. Elementary school students who have been abused show behaviors such as aggression, disruptive behaviors, poor emotions, and lack of social relationships affecting their social-emotional development. Yet, some teachers see these signs as simple misbehavior. Child abuse education program is an essential component in preparing current and future teachers. Mandatory training and extra resources with an open mind to prevent and stop child abuse can make a difference in a child's development in many ways.

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### Child Abuse and Its Effects on the Social-Emotional Behavior of Elementary School Students

Have you ever wondered whose the most common sexual predator in child abuse cases? According to The Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) study done in 2006 and introduced to me through mandatory training called: A Training Curriculum for Mandated Reporters in 2014, the most common predator is a woman. With a 54% of cases being reported the abuser is a woman, usually the mother of the child. Child abuse is a topic that is spoken about all the time. Yet child abuse too many is only seen as someone who has sexually abused a child, without realizing there are more categories in the broad topic of child abuse itself.

There are four categories that fall underneath the broad title of child abuse or also known as child maltreatment. Many of us don't have an idea of the other names child abuse is known as nor do we have a clue about the subcategories of child abuse. Child abuse and its four categories are as follow; sexual abuse is defined as the involvement of a child in a sexual activity that the child doesn't understand and is unable to give consent of. Physical abuse is to be the physical force against a child that results in harm for the child's health. Emotional abuse or in other words psychological abuse is incidents where the child is isolated, or caregiver doesn't provide and appropriate and supportive environment that includes restriction of moving, blaming, threatening, frightening, and rejection. Last we have neglect this is the pattern of failure over time by a parent or caregiver that fails to provide development and the well-being of a child whether health wise, education, emotional development, nutrition, and shelter including a safe living condition. According to Butchart and Phinney (2006), "In the majority of situations involving maltreatment, however, the physical injury itself has a less severe effect in terms of damage to the child's well-being than the acute psychological and psychiatric consequences, and the long-term impact on the child's neurological, cognitive and emotional development ad

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overall health” (p. 7). After defining these different categories of child abuse I am left to wonder, how much does it affect a child’s social-emotional development?

My first semester at Cal State Monterey Bay or also referred to as CSUMB I took LS 300, the Pro-Seminar class, in this class towards the end we had to work on a mini project on a specific topic, I decided to do mine on child abuse. I had done my project on child abuse the topic itself in general, talking about what the topic was about and how it harms a child, all the information was general with no actual focus on anything specific aside from the broad topic. Coming into this class, and after having mandatory child abuse training for work, I knew exactly what I wanted to focus my Capstone project on and that was on the broad topic of child abuse, but on the ways it harms a child’s social-emotional development. With questions about how school teachers and staff work around this topic. Do teachers or any staff members ever pay attention to any of the above information, such as behaviors that would fall into a sub-category of child abuse? Or do teachers and staff members only see a child who acts out as a child who is misbehaved and doesn’t pay attention? The developmental area of concern is children from the elementary age group of k-7. The controversy regarding the issue of child abuse affecting a child’s social–emotional development is that children will not grow out of it and as they grow older, as adults they will only follow the same steps to being abusive with their partners or children. If children don’t ever receive support or accommodations to these situations the probability of them becoming abusive is extremely high.

The purpose of this study has been to analyze how much teachers and staff members know about child abuse and the ways it can affect a child’s social-emotional development that cause problems in a child’s behavior through the collection of data using surveys being distributed to school teachers and staff, and by completing interview with professors. From

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previous talks with teachers and staff members at work, I came to realize how little they combine child abuse with a child's behavior in their classroom. Students usually get categorized by teachers and staff members as a child who always misbehaves in a classroom, without making sure there isn't any other problem back home that is causing the child to behave a certain way.

As a future teacher my primary research question is: How does child abuse affect an elementary school student's social-emotional behavior development? My related secondary questions I propose to seek answers to are: Are there indications to distinguish that a child has been abused? In other words, what indicates that the student has been abused? What are the effects of child abuse on the social-emotional behavior of students according to research? Are there policies and procedures in the school districts on child abuse? If so, how do school districts implement them? Are there any child abuse resources available for teachers to create an environment that is conducive to learning?

### **Literature Review**

Going into the field of education you must be prepared not only to teach but to pay attention to your student's behavior, yet many educators don't. I say this because many signs of child abuse aren't visible, nor do students show unless they misbehave. Many indications are ignored by educators because they lack knowledge of what abuse is, what symptoms or indications a child might show, as well as who they can go to in order to report their suspicions of children who might be going through abuse. In the following paragraphs you will find out about who the abusers are, and what triggers them to be abusive, as well as how to distinguish the different types of child abuse. You will as well be informed of the consequences of child abuse and how it affects a child's social-emotional behavior. Information on policies and procedures at schools are important for teachers and staff members to fully understand and feel

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comfortable to report, this will as well be discussed, including references for teachers in order to have a safe learning environment for students who have been abused or who are going through abuse.

Child abuse is a topic no one wants to speak of, yet it must be done. From information gathered through an article from The New York Times, child abuse is on the decline with a 60% since 1992 to 2010 according to the statistics done by the F.B.I. Although child abuse is on the decline, not reporting a suspicion of child abuse is on the increase, as well as a child not speaking up. So what is child abuse? Or better yet what is child maltreatment? “Child maltreatment refers to the physical and emotional mistreatment, sexual abuse, neglect, and negligent treatment of child, as well as to their commercial or other exploitation,” (Butchart and Phinney 2006, p. 7). But what makes a child vulnerable to this violation? It’s all due to their age and their emotional and social status they are in that makes it difficult for them to speak up and stop the abuse. A child should feel safe at home, because its home, yet it’s precisely these places where children are being abused, the space they should feel protected, yet it’s the opposite of protection and affection that a child should be receiving in the place they call home.

Child abuse is broken down into four different categories, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect. Sexual abuse is defined as the involvement of a child in a sexual activity that the child doesn’t understand and is unable to give consent of. Physical abuse is to be the physical force against a child that results in harm for the child’s health. Emotional abuse or in other words psychological abuse is incidents where the child is isolated, or caregiver doesn’t provide and appropriate and supportive environment that includes restriction of moving, blaming, threatening, frightening, and rejection. Last we have neglect this is the pattern of failure over time by a parent or caregiver that fails to provide development and the well-being of a child

whether health wise, education, emotional development, nutrition, and shelter including a safe living condition.

### **Who is The Abuser?**

It now leaves us to who are the abusers or better yet who are the perpetrators of child abuse? To our surprise the perpetrators are usually those who are closest to the child such as parents, family members, caregivers, and friends. The less common perpetrators are strangers or other children or even acquaintances. Babbel (2011) notes, "According to NCANDS, a 2005 study showed that 79.4% of child abusers were the parents..." (p. 1) Actions done by adults within families are always the hardest and least visibility form of child abuse.

A primary reason as to why parents abuse their children is due to the parent/s once being abused. Adding stress and helplessness to the situation only makes abusive tendencies increase. Socioeconomic conditions play a big toll in parents having an elevated amount of stress as well as feeling helpless especially if the child is living in a single parent house hold. Parents' not knowing how to discipline their child plays another factor in tendencies increasing of developing abusive tendencies that will only harm their children. Common factors such as the ones above are the most common reasons as to why parents are the most common perpetrators of child abuse. Let's not forget that abusers might also suffer from low self-esteem, need to control others, and frustration with authority.

### **Indications to Distinguish Child Abuse**

What are the symptoms of child abuse? How should one know what to look for in a child who has or is being abused? How can we distinguish from a child who is being abused to one who isn't? Kellogg and Neglect (2007) write, "Although the risk of physical abuse increases with age, fatal abuse and serious abusive injuries are more common among children and infants



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younger than 2 years.” Injuries for physical abuse are traumatic brain injuries, bruises, burns, cuts, broken bones, bleeding, balding and many more. Indications of sexual abuse are vaginal or rectal pain, frequent urinary tract infections, or yeast infections, bleeding or bruising in the genital area, or difficulty walking or sitting. Indicators of emotional abuse are changes in affection, inappropriate, fears, nightmares, changes in sleep patterns, childlike behaviors such as bed-wetting, thumb-sucking, depression, withdrawal, and mood swings. Signs of neglect are dehydration, poor hygiene or grooming, malnourishment, smell of urine, poor skin conditions, and improper adaptive aids.

Due to the unclear definition of recognizing signs for child abuse, many cases go unreported. “When inflicted injuries are visible or incidentally discovered, child victims and their abusers typically explain the injuries as accidental...” (Kellogg & Neglect, 2007, p. 1). The lacking of specialty in the field of child abuse allows abusers to get away with the injuries done to their child. In many cases if professionals doubt the answer or the information given to them about the occurred situation an investigation process begins. It is important for mandated reporters such as teachers and staff members to feel comfortable and have the knowledge of the signs that will allow them to distinguish whether a child is being abused and not just think that the child might have fallen or it have been an accident.

### **Consequences on the Development of Social-Emotional Behavior**

Many don't see as child abuse being a problem for a child's development, yet it is. Child abuse can affect a child development so much that it will carry on until they are adults if it goes untreated. Consequences include behavior issues, relationships, emotional and physical problems. According to Walsh (1990), “...growing up in a numerically truncated family, one that lacks broad social support and intellectual stimulation, may result in retarded verbal skills...”

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Lack of support due to the child being abused can cause more than just verbal skill problems but as well include short-term memory, and anxiety. These listed problems are only some of the issues child abuse can cause; if the child already has problems when other students or friends hear him speak the child will fall under stress because he will be bullied due to his verbal skills.

Studies show that children who are maltreated or physically abused tend to form aggressive behaviors as well as disruptive behaviors and have difficulties in keeping social relationships that will follow along into their adulthood as to forming antisocial behavior. Teisl and Cicchetti (2008) discuss, “Empirical research on child maltreatment has, in fact, noted that maltreated children are more likely to evidence problems with emotion regulation, and has indicated that this dysregulation may be the result of inadequate instruction or modeling by parents” (p. 4) Children who are at risk due to being abused physically are the one who are more likely to develop aggressive and disruptive behaviors.

Although many of us believe that child abuse will only harm the child for a certain amount of time, literature tells us otherwise. A child who has been abused is more likely to suffer during their stage of development, meaning that as their development cycle continues the child will continue growing at their different development stages yet it doesn't mean that the effects that child abuse had on the child development won't affect their adult hood. As Elam and Kleist (1999) inform readers, “The studies generally agree that although sexual and physical abuse may be sporadic, psychological abuse or emotional neglect is more constant, and this constancy may have a more damaging effect throughout life than might other forms of abuse” (p. 159).

Although research believes that there are certain types of abuse that can harm a child development more than others, studies do believe that the problem is internalized, if the child doesn't learn to cope with what happened or doesn't receive the support needed to overcome the

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abuse, and then the results will follow the child into their adult life. But if a child receives the help needed to overcome such situations the child will not carry any psychological problem.

Many children don't have the health care assistance to seek help in such cases, as to why schools require reports from teachers or staff members on such cases so that the schools can inform the children's parents of the possibilities of help available for the child's support.

In Glaser (2000) journal article discusses how and why a child's developments change after they have been abused for example; they discuss how a child's brain with experiences from negative environments will be the ones to affect the future development and functioning of the child's knowledge. "...findings show the emotionally neglected children to be socially withdrawn, inattentive, and cognitively underachieving in their elementary-school years" (Glaser 2000, p. 98). If children received the appropriate help from caregivers and counselor's children would be able to develop positive behaviors and attitude that will benefit them in the long run compared to children who go unattended with no support, allow children to understand what happened and provide different approaches to the situation without making the child feel unsafe.

### **Policies and Procedures in Schools**

Each school district contains their own policies and procedures for child abuse, yet are they being implemented? According to Gallardo (2015, Appendix B), "...schools are mandated to have policies and apply them, they are available for teachers to be used as protocols, but I do think that there is more that can be done..." (Personal Communication, October 19, 2015).

Studies show that although schools have policies and procedures, many school teachers and staff members don't report suspicions of child abuse due to not having the sufficient knowledge to report. Crenshaw and Crenshaw (1995) write, "Early research found that educators recognized and reported abuse only when it was obvious and unambiguous..." (p. 1096). Just like Gallardo

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(2015) mentions, although the policies and procedures are available for teachers, what is the use of them if teachers have no idea what any of it is or means, especially because many teachers or staffs are unclear about any relevant laws and procedures for reporting, they let it pass by without mentioning anything to anyone.

Providing mandatory trainings for school teachers and staff will give the personal the ability to gain knowledge in understanding child abuse. Not only will these participants understand child abuse there will be information provided to them that explains step by step on how to report a suspicion of child abuse, including the ways in which the school can help the child. Patterson (2004) informs readers that, "After completing the training, recruits in the experimental group were also more knowledgeable about factual information related to child abuse and neglect," (p. 278). According to literature, providing trainings in the topic of child abuse provides a significant effect on those who participate in the training compared to those who don't. Trainings provide teachers and staff members the opportunity to learn about the policies and procedures about child abuse and how the policies are implemented in the schools.

### **Teacher Resources**

Most studies suggest that teachers receive mandatory training on the topic of child abuse. Literature a couple of years ago to now have had a drastic change, meaning that about 7 years ago child abuse was a high percentage compared to now, the numbers are declining incredibly. Although child abuse is decreasing reports are decreasing as well. Not because child abuse in general is decreasing but because mandated reporters are not comfortable enough to report. Not only do teachers need trainings but as well other resources that provide support to teachers in their classroom to make it a safe learning environment for all students especially those who have been abused. Teachers have to remember that a child's safety space is at home and school, but

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once the child is abused at home the only safety place they have left is school. Making sure that students engage with one another and teachers producing positive behaviors will have a great impact on a child.

Resources shouldn't only be provided to teachers and staff members, information should be included to students as well. "...establishing a safe environment to begin with and environment that is conducive, a harmonious space that models good behavior," (A. Gallardo, Personal Communication, October 19, 2015, Appendix B). Many would suggest that children shouldn't be exposed to the topic of child abuse, but how many of those children don't already get exposed to it at home? Teachers already have a great relationship with students, allowing teachers to briefly inform students of what child abuse is and how harmful it is, many of the children who haven't reported or indicate that they have been abused will find the confidence to speak up. Selph, et al (2013) indicate, "In conclusion, trials of risk assessment and behavioral interventions and counseling in pediatric clinics and early childhood home visitation programs indicated reduced abuse and neglect outcomes for children..." (p. 188). Literature indicates that not only providing the support for teachers in order to distinguish child abuse, the support and information provided to students can prevent behaviors and attitudes children develop.

### **Methods and Procedure**

Before the semester even started I was already brainstorming different capstone ideas. I wanted to come into capstone with an idea of what topic I wanted to focus on. After completing the first meeting with Dr. Paoze Thao about the topic I was interested in, I was able to complete my research prospectus paper with the topic I felt more passion towards and soon started doing my research. In order to answer my primary and secondary questions I focused on finding empirical research and journal articles that were peer-reviewed sources. Luckily I didn't run into

any problems while researching and obtaining the information needed in order to answer my questions regarding the effects of child abuse.

In order to gather information and answers to my primary and secondary research questions I decided to construct a survey (See Appendix C) that would be handed out to school teachers as well as staff. I also constructed a couple of interview questions (See Appendix A) that would be asked to professors who have background knowledge of child abuse and its effects on an elementary age child. The objective of my surveys was to analyze how confident teachers and staff members feel about reporting a suspicion of child abuse. With the interview questions my goal was to get answers to my research questions and apply it to my gathered information.

### **Participants**

In order to gather the appropriate amount of information I had to decide who to hand out the surveys too, and who I was going to interview. I handed out a total of 30 surveys 15 to teachers, and 15 to staff members (See Appendix C). The school teachers and staff members who participated were those who worked the most amongst children in elementary focusing on grades of k-7<sup>th</sup>, and worked in the South Monterey County Schools. The number of participants was 24, 15 being teachers and 9 being staff members. Out of those 15 teachers 60% were female teachers, 40% were male teachers. Seventy-eight percent of the staff member participants were female, and 22% were male staff member participants. The focus of this study was to analyze if teachers and staff members were aware of child abuse, what it was, and how comfortable they felt reporting, as well helping me answer secondary research questions such as: Are there indications to distinguish that a child has been abused? As well as are there policies and procedures in the school districts on child abuse? If so, how do school districts implement them? Out of the 24 participants 100% of school teachers and staff indicated that they felt comfortable

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in their ability to recognize child abuse. When asked whether the school district they worked in had policies and procedures on child abuse out of the 24 participants 100% of them answered yes.

The interview questions were asked to one male professor at CSUMB. This professor was asked to participate in the interview due to their past experiences with children at risk who had behavior issue, not because they wanted to but because of previous situations that happened at home that has affected a child's development. With the interviewees responses I can answer more secondary questions such as: What are the effects of child abuse on the social-emotional behavior of students according to research? Are there any child abuse resources available for teachers to create an environment that is conducive to learning?

The participants were recruited as I would contact and inform them ahead of time of what my senior project would be about and if they would be willing to participate as soon as I need their help. as time passed and time got closer to hand out the surveys I contacted previous teachers and staff members to ask if they were still willing to participate in my data collection, they all said yes, many of them offered to talk to their colleagues in asking them if other school teachers or staff members would want to participate in my data collection by taking a survey. Thanks to those teachers and staff members and professor who decided to participate, I will be handing them a pamphlet with a blue ribbon symbolizing child abuse awareness, as well as a thank you card for their participation in my study.

### **Measures**

The measures used in this study were surveys of 14 questions (refer to Appendix C). Ten questions were yes and no; one question was scaled from 1 being not confident to 5 being confident, two questions were female and male options and one was a choice of teacher, staff

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member, or other. Teachers and staff members had the opportunity to say whether or not they were well aware of the topic of child abuse, how confident they felt about it and if they believe children should be aware of what child abuse is. For example a question that was asked to the participants is, “Who are the most common predators, male or female?” Seventy-eight percent of the participants answered male, 22% answered female. Another question that stood out was, “Would you want to receive more information/resources to help you better understand the topic of child abuse?” Fifty-seven percent of the participants answered yes to this question and 43% answered no. Questions such as the ones above are on the survey the participants agreed to participate in.

The interview questionnaire consisted of 7 questions (Refer to Appendix A) that would take approximately half hour to answer. The questions for example that were being asked were what indications would you suggest a teacher or staff member to look or keep an eye out if they suspect a child is being abused?

Gallardo (2015) says, “One of the factors at least from experience, would be withdrawal: if a student experiences a shift in behavior or attitude dramatic, abuse cases that I’ve seen this is a tell tell. Example: you get to know students very quickly depending on age, students are always happy engaged, but sometimes there are events such as abuse and students start coming to school late, quiet day after day weeks after week, months, you figure out it’s not just them being tired its then depression symptoms loss of interest, work they were doing drops, eye contact stuff of that nature” (See Appendix B, Personal Communication, October 19, 2015).

### **Procedure**

During the survey process the individuals who agreed to participate in the survey received their survey as soon as I had the copies ready. I discussed with them that the survey was



approximately 5 minutes long, what they needed to fill out, and what they needed to sign. I did let the participants know that their names wouldn't appear on anything. Teachers and staff members had approximately a week to return the surveys. A week was too short in order to receive any surveys back. I did communicate with those who had a survey that I was extending the time to a month. Slowly surveys began to come in. As surveys were being turned in I would have small discussions with school teachers and staff about the answer that thanks to literature I was able to answer for them, and help them gain that knowledge that these teachers and staff members weren't too sure about. I had to cut the deadline of when surveys were going to count; I decided to put a deadline up to the date of November 13, 2015.

The process during the interview was different, the professor and I met up at a coffee station where we were allowed to discuss my topic, and better yet the professor answers my questions. The interview started off by discussing what the purpose of my study was. What I expected to find and conclude at the end of it. I started to ask the interview questions, as I paid much attention I would type and type until he would stop. I would make sure he was done answering before I moved on, didn't want to cut him off as he was only taking a break or thinking of what else to say. As the interview continued I try to keep my words on the interview only being half hour long. I wanted to make sure we got to every question, that everything the professor had to say was said, and that by the end of the interview there was enough gathered information to answer some of my secondary questions. The interview was a smooth flow thanks to the pre-existing relationship with this professor. After finishing the interview and receiving a good amount of surveys back, I am able to say that I feel confident about the research I have in my hands to lead me to my results.

## **Results and Discussion**

After surveying a total of 24 South Monterey County school teachers and staff members and a personal interview with a professor, I was able to grasp a better understanding on how teachers and staff felt regarding the reporting of suspicion of child abuse. With the participation of 15 teachers and 9 staff members taking a 14 question survey, I was able to gather information to answer my secondary questions and with the extra help of a personal interview with the university professor consisting of 7 questions. The results from the survey were not what I was expecting but was able to analyze the data that was collected and put it to use. In the following sections you will read the results on what was collected from the school teachers and staff member's survey as well as in depth discussion on my secondary research questions.

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of how confident do teachers and staff members feel on reporting a suspicion of child abuse in their school districts (Refer to Appendix D). There was no significant effect between teachers and staff members at the  $p < .05$  level for the two conditions,  $F(9, 15) = 0.8290$ ,  $p < 0.579$ . Taken together, these results suggest that the low level of participants had no effect on the confidence teachers and staff members have while reporting a suspicion of child abuse.

According to the results from School Teacher and Staff Survey (Appendix D) when asked, "Do you feel comfortable in your ability to recognize child abuse?" Results showed that 100% of the participants felt comfortable in their ability to recognize child abuse. However if the number of participants would have been bigger, there would have been a different outcome to the effect of teachers and staff members feeling confident about reporting a suspicion of child abuse. Literature on the other hand provides us with information on how educators don't feel confident when it comes to reporting child abuse. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2006), "The three largest percentages of 2006 reports were from professionals-teachers

(16.5%)” (p. 6). A total of 56.3% of professionals in the year of 2006 reported child abuse and one of those being teachers, with a small percentage of reports.

Through my research, my results indicate that on a number scale 1 not being confident to 5 being confident 46% of teachers and staff members checked off 5 as being confident and 50% chose 4 enough to report a suspicion of child abuse, and that they know who to contact if they feel the need of reporting a suspicion of child abuse.

### **Discussion**

The results from my own findings such as those from surveys do not support my research. I say this because the number of participants was too small in order to compare percentages. In order to have received support from my surveys on my research I needed a bigger correlation. But when it came to my interview participant the information gathered from the interview questions was a great support to my research. The surprise I took from collecting this data was that most of the teachers and staff members felt really confident about reporting a suspicion of child abuse.

My findings compared to those in existing literature are different. For example on my survey many teachers felt confident when it came time to having to report a suspicion of child abused, but on the other hand literature had the opposite of this, many teachers if they didn't feel confident they wouldn't report the case. It left me to wonder what would have happened if I would have extended my surveys to more schools in the South Monterey County, would my collected data match any of the information located in literature.

Although the research gathered from literature and the information gathered through surveys didn't correlate, I was able to gather enough information to answer the secondary questions I proposed to answer. My first question was what are the effects of child abuse on the

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social-emotional behavior of students according to research? According to research the effects of child abuse on the social-emotional behavior causes a child to develop aggressive and disruptive behaviors. According to Pollak et al (2000), “For the physically abused child, displays of anger may be the strongest predictor of threat; however, increased sensitivity to anger could result in decreased attention to other emotional cues” (p. 679). Children who have been abused will display behaviors depending on what type of abuse they have been through. For instance like mentioned above children who have physically been abused will project emotions such as being angry and bully other children such as classmates or siblings by playing out the same actions being done to the child. When a child has been sexually emotionally abused, and neglected a child will usually become very isolated and depressed, including mood behaviors and sleep patterns. “In light of the important role that the parent-child relationship plays in the development of emotion regulation, it stands to reason that hostile, neglectful, or inconsistent parenting, typically seen in maltreating families...could result in the development of aberrant patterns of emotion regulation”(Teisl & Cicchetti 2008, p. 4). As children being abused they are not only going through the abuse but they are grasping the behaviors the abusers are displaying around the children. Afifi (2014) notes, “The specific mental disorders included depression, bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, alcohol abuse/dependence, and drug abuse/dependence...” (p. 327). Not only does child abuse affect a child social-emotional behavior but as well come with greater consequences as mental disorders that can harm more than the social-emotional development of a child.

My second secondary question is, are there indications to distinguish that a child has been abused? In other words, what indicates that the student has been abused? Literature indicates that each type of abuse contains its own different indications to distinguish child abuse not only

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physical indicators but as well behavioral indicators. For example on the website of Safe Kids (2015) it allows visitors to know about the signs and how to report if a child may need protections. For example indicators for physical abuse are injuries, whether bruises, cuts, burns, or bite marks. Other indications are behavior indicators such as runaway attempts, fear of going home, think of them as bad, may flinch if touched unexpectedly, cries frequently, depressed, or poor memory and concentration. Indications for sexual abuse are fatigue, weight change, cuts or sores, difficulty walking or sitting, genital infections, and so on. Behavior indications are anxious, short attention span, loss of appetite, nightmares, and dramatic behavior changes. Indicators of emotional abuse are bedwetting, thumb sucking, nightmares, isolation, and frequent psychosomatic complaints such as headaches, nausea, abdominal pain. Behavior indicators are emotional development lags, inappropriate age behaviors, lying, aggressiveness, mood swings, and poor peer relationships. Lastly there are indicators for neglect such as, abandonment, lack of supervision, consistent hunger, poor hygiene, developmental delays, and nutritional deficiencies. Behavior indicators are depression, poor impulse control, constant attention and affection, displays fatigue, falls asleep in class, self-destructive, and is frequently absent or tardy.

My third secondary question is, are there policies and procedures in the school district on child abuse? If so, how do school districts implement or enforce them? According to Legal Framework from the Department of Education (2011) “1.1.3 The purpose of these procedures is to give direction and guidance to school authorities and school personnel in the implementation of Children First when dealing with allegations/suspicious of child abuse and neglect”(p. 5). Policies and procedures at school aim to provide school authorities and personal to enable them to have the ability to report any suspicion of child abuse. The policies and procedures include legal framework, including what signs to look for in a child and what injuries are for what type

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of abuse, including the definition for each term. Policies and procedures also include the reporting instructions, as well as the forms needed in order to report a child abuse suspicion. “It is the responsibility of all schools to contribute to the prevention of child abuse and neglect through curricular provision” (Department of Education 2011, p. 8). Schools are required to have policies and procedures and must fully implement them in the schools to help recognize and prevent any harm to children whom they believe are going through abuse.

My fourth secondary question is what could teachers do to reduce the rate of child abuse in their classrooms? Referring to the survey questions (Appendix D), “Would you talk to your students about what child abuse is, and the ways it can be prevented or stopped.” The results from the survey were as followed, 91.7% answered yes, 8.3% answered no. Schools are to provide support for children who have gone through abuse as well as to provide prevention programs to keep students alert and aware of what child abuse is, to enable them to recognize and resist abuse and potentially abusive situations.

My last secondary question is, are there child abuse resources available for teachers to create an environment conducive to learning? According to literature there is. “In that context the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme is a mandatory part of the curriculum for all students in primary schools and in the junior cycle of post-primary schools and must be fully implemented” (Department of Education 2011, p.8). Although there are resources available for teachers, most of the time due to the standards the teachers must meet in order to keep students on track in school with their education, there is no time for teachers to implement such programs in their classrooms. The resources for teachers are available, but when teachers get asked to follow certain conditions to keep a student on track with their education such programs like these aren’t looked into or taken time to set aside to implement them. With resources being

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available but not being used, it brings me to my point as to teachers taking the time of informing students of child abuse and how it can get prevented, a simple talk once a week or a month can be a great help to the child.

After analyzing the data collected there were additional questions arise, such as, was there any support for those who had to report a suspicion of child abuse? Do teachers and staff members change the way their classroom is set up such as the environment to make sure children feel safe in their classroom? Do teachers and staff members know how to accommodate a child who has been abused or is being abused? Most of the questions that generated from this study were focused on teachers and staff members in an actual school setting.

Further research that should be conducted on this topic, in my suggestion would be that research should be done in schools settings. If children are being abused at home, the second place they feel most safe would be at school; where children have teachers that care about them and their safety. Research can investigate what school teachers and staff do in order to help those children who have been abused. Research should as well seek if any teachers or staff members inform their students of what child abuse and what the student should be aware of, and how a child can prevent it from happening or stopped. Usually teachers focus on students who have behavioral issues and categorize them as students who like to act out. But from literature we have learned that child abuse affects a child behavior. Research should focus on learning the difference from a student's behavior that is having a bad day, to a child's behavior that is actually being abused and the child has developed behavior issues. As future teachers, having the ability to have answers to these questions benefits a teacher coming in to a classroom for the first time. With previous research and literature a teacher and staff member can have the ability to pull up these resources and manage to come up with their own solution.

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It would be compelling to do surveys once again to collect data. But learning from the first time, in order to gather enough data a survey should be well questioned and include a couple of in depth questions that will get the participants going, and help gather information that might line up with literature. Surveys if constructed well can have a great result, because in such a study there is no problem of being biased or misinterpreting, the only downfall of surveys is not receiving them all back.

Child abuse is a topic many of us avoid talking about but it has to be done, as uncomfortable as it is, as a future teacher I would want to receive the information gathered through my research to fully understand what child abuse is and what affects it has on children. Due to elementary school students being so vulnerable, if a child is abused their development is stopped. A child doesn't just yet understand what has happened and in order for the child to proceed the child starts to form different behaviors that make you ask what just happened. Child abuse has an effect on a child social-emotional behavior due to their brains not being fully developed and a child being so vulnerable that they have no understanding of what is going on, so the child picks up the behaviors that they witness at home and act them out around other children. Abused children all have a different way of reacting to the situation, many develop behavior issues, other become depressed, and others lose relationships due to either behavior or wanting to be isolated. As adults and future teachers and to many who are mandated reports we must stay up to date with the procedures that are necessary to report suspicions of child abuse. We must contain the sufficient knowledge to feel confident in distinguishing the signs of the different types of child abuse; have the definitions of each category of child abuse clear. A child's behavior can change from one day to the other, and that is when as an adult we step in and make sure the child is okay.



Resources such as policies and procedures, as well as teacher program curricula are also available for teachers to introduce the topic of child abuse to their students. Yet, with resources available, what is the point of being offered if higher administration doesn't make it mandatory for teachers to bring into their classroom. "The neglected child in contrast, may suffer from an extremely limited emotional learning environment" (Pollak et al 2000, p. 679). School teachers and staff members can easily prevent such situations like child abuse to harm a child, if a child is being neglected at home; their consequence is creating limited learning capabilities like mentioned above. If a child is informed of the consequences of what type of abuse there is, and who they can talk to there would be no problems.

### **Problems and Limitations**

The obstacles I faced while getting to my reliable information was that I was supposed to interview two CSUMB professors, but it didn't happen. I contacted the professor but didn't receive a response on time. I am disappointed because I knew I would receive plenty of information from this professor on my research study that would help me answer my secondary research questions. After some time I did receive a response, and the time this professor would be available would be too late to incorporate the professor's results. My second obstacle was not receiving all the surveys back from teachers and staff members who received a survey. After giving school teachers and staff the opportunity of a month period to return the survey, I had to make more copies of the survey hand out more and cross my fingers in hope that I would receive enough data to analyze. The data collected on my own isn't sufficient in helping me answer my secondary research questions. As well as my number of participants wasn't an uneven number of school teachers and staff members as well as gender, which makes the data collected inefficient. The more in depth I would get when it came to writing this paper the more I realized how much

more information I needed to answer these questions. The lack of information gathered by the survey wasn't enough to specifically answer the questions I wanted to answer. Limitations of my study were that the number of participants in the group was too small, aside from that I believe that I could have added more questions to the survey that would have given me more information to analyze. I do believe that more questions should have been added to the survey as well as the number of participants and school districts that participated in my research.

### **Recommendation**

Literature has made us realize how important mandatory child abuse is. How resources are available for teachers and staff members in order to be aware of what to look for in a child they believe might be going through abuse, many teachers and staff members feel confident in their knowledge to report and distinguish child abuse. Yet, my recommendation is, for teachers and staff members to have mandatory trainings on child abuse. I as well would like teachers to keep an open mind about informing elementary school students about child abuse. Informing a child can help them, not informing a child or reporting a suspicion of child abuse is only going to harm the child, this in no way will keep them away from harm.

Another recommendation would be to have the ability to have a class in the Liberal Studies Department that would focus on different topics such as child abuse and inform undergraduates of the consequences the signs one should look for in a child, and what can be done if we run into a problem like so, a class just like Human Development class where a disorder is being talked about for two weeks and then we get introduced into a whole different topic. I believe that once we are introduced to such topics, once in the field of education we can do more to inform our students about these topics and make them aware of what each topic is

about in their own language and in a way where they know that these topics aren't something you can play around with, they are topics that are sensitive and can be extremely dangerous.

### **Conclusion**

Studies show child abuse occurs when a child is abused either sexually, physically, emotionally, or is neglected. Literature notes that child abuse is caused by usually a family member or a close family friend, usually someone the child trust. "Child maltreatment by parents and caregivers gives rise to particular difficulties when designing strategies for prevention and victim services, since the perpetrators of the maltreatment are at the same time the source of nurture for the child" Butchart & Phinney, 2006, P. 7). But have you ever wondered who the common predators are? Many believe that males are always the most common predators amongst child abuse. Yet, from trainings and studies, females are the most common predators. Many don't realize that as single house held moms, children are usually neglected and emotionally abused. When you stop and think about it the mom is going through stress that she hasn't been able to deal with on her own, and in many cases she releases her stress on the children who have no idea what has happened or is happening.

A child who is abused is usually in a bad state of mind. A child who is or has been abused will two either become depressed or will misbehave; this includes acting out in class, bullying other students/siblings, not playing with others, or is just completely isolated. Behaviors such as these can mean many different things, yet many teachers or staff members don't realize that maybe more than a bad day can be causing these behaviors. Such exposure to a child world can automatically stop them from developing at their appropriate age rate of growth. From literature found, if a child doesn't receive help or support after they go through abuse, the child

at their early ages will have problems developing. But not only will child abuse harm their development at a young age but as well will follow the child until they are adults.

Referring back to my primary question how does child abuse affect an elementary school student's social-emotional behavior development? Children who have been abused will become depressed, will misbehave, such as acting out in class, bullying other students/siblings, and not playing well with others. Other students will simply form aggressive and disruptive behaviors, in which many cases teachers see this as a student having a bad day, or who just wants to act out. The lack of knowledge within teachers and staff members has only made the reports of child abuse be less than the cases that are to be reported. According to Gilbert et al (2009) informs us that, "Lack of awareness of the signs of child maltreatment and processes for reporting to child-protection agencies, and a perception that reporting might do more harm than good, are among the reasons for not reporting" (p. 1). Although the survey results showed that school teachers and staff members feel confident in their ability to recognize and report a suspicion of child abuse, due to literature having more research done, I do strongly believe that lack of knowledge due to teachers not having mandatory child abuse training or resources available has made teachers less knowledgeable.

After collecting data through surveys, we were able to compare the data collected to data in literature. We can say that although the data collected was small and not significant, the time period of this data collected through surveys compared to literature data a couple years back can play a big role in the differences found between both data's.

Teachers and staff members might now receive much more training or in many cases make it mandatory to have trainings on child abuse or resources that help teachers and staff members distinguish what to look for in a child they suspect is going through abuse. From the

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survey study 45% of the participants felt very confident when it came to a point where they had to report a suspicion of child abuse. I do believe more studies should focus on a child's behavior development in a school setting when they have gone through or are going through abuse. Such studies would give teachers an idea of what can be done in order to better understand their students in situations like this topic. As future teachers we must be prepared for such cases, if some teachers and staff members now don't feel to confident when it comes to reporting a suspicion of child abuse, us as future teachers who don't get exposed to such topics, how confident will we feel? What are we to do if we get placed in a classroom and do suspect a child being abused? Not only do I believe children should learn about the topic itself, I believe us as future teachers should be exposed to topics like this one to gain a better understand of the topic and what should be done in case of a suspicion.

Mandatory training for child abuse, resources to help teachers in their classroom, is the basic resources that can help a teacher out during the school year. To ensure that a child's development no longer suffers a teacher must take the necessary measures to ensure that their classroom is a safe environment where a child will learn and not feel as though they can't learn because they might be harmed. A child must feel as though they are able to talk to the teacher in any case, as well to make sure that such behaviors from a child isn't just a bad day, but look further into what can be happening outside school hours.

Does child abuse affect the social-emotional behavior of elementary school students? Yes! Thanks to the research done and the literature available I was able to conclude and provide information to say that child abuse indeed affects a child's social-emotional behavior more than what one might ever think. Whether the child starts misbehaving or is completely isolated from the other children, a teacher should take that into consideration and look at it as a red flag. Yet

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many teachers lack knowledge on the topic of child abuse and aren't sure whether a child is simply misbehaving or something is really going on. In order for a child to speak up about being abused or isn't sure about what is happening to them, they must be introduced to the topic, not only do teachers need the information to be knowledgeable but so do students in order to prevent it from happening as well as to stop it. A simple conversation with children will allow the child to speak up. Bad behavior shown to children will only be duplicated by them and a child will then start forming such behaviors to express themselves.

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## Appendix A

### Professor Interview Questions

1. What indications would you suggest a teacher or staff member to look or keep an eye out if they suspect a child its being abused?
2. Will the indications that a child is being abused easy to see? Will they always be visible?
3. Can child abuse affect a child's social-emotional behavior? If so, in what way?
4. Do you believe school districts implement their policies and procedure appropriately to child abuse cases?
5. Is there information teachers can talk about with their students that can help them prevent child abuse or stop it from happening?
6. What would be some suggestions you would offer teachers that can guide them to create a helpful and safe environment for children who have been through abuse?
7. Do you feel teachers have the sufficient resources to help and guide teachers and staff to better understand and put into play the topic of child abuse?

## Appendix B

### Professor Interview Questions/Responses

**Natalie:** What indications would you suggest a teacher or staff member to look or keep an eye out if they suspect a child is being abused?

**Gallardo:** One of the factors at least from experience, would be withdrawal: if a student experiences a shift in behavior or attitude dramatic, abuse cases that I've seen this is a tell tell. Example: you get to know students very quickly depending on age, students are always happy engaged, but sometimes there are events such as abuse and students start coming to school late, quiet day after day weeks after week, months, you figure out it's not just them being tired its then depression symptoms loss of interest, work they were doing drops, eye contact stuff of that nature.

**Natalie:** Will the indications that a child is being abused easy to see? Will they always be visible?

**Gallardo:** No, I think in some case it's just very difficult to detect, often times that because behaviors are coded, in that students sometimes are withdrawal are rebellious, violent, that itself is a cry for help, so because there is violence at home whether its physical or verbal while it's at home, they are so young they can't

rationalize not knowing what to do they act out to classmates, teacher, staff, members, community to express themselves. And that's really for adults that's difficult to decode that behavior because the teacher or adult is just able to letting them go as saying they are bad students without applying common sense, of asking oneself to stop and wonder what has made the child change behaviors.

**Natalie:** Can child abuse affect a child's social-emotional behavior? If so, in what ways?

**Gallardo:** Yes, it can definitely impact such as ways I previously mentioned, ways in which they act in their community or school or at home, abuse isn't uncommon to express their outwardly emotions, or express them inwardly such as being withdrawn to ways in where the child wasn't before. But at times there isn't a clue to draw from socio emotionally. I've seen cases where there were no appearances in such cases I don't understand how the child keeps moving along and when a child is appeared to be abused it's a surprise, it isn't always the case that a child will show and behavior differences.

**Natalie:** Do you believe school districts implement their policies and procedure appropriately to child abuse cases?

**Gallardo:** Honesty its school dependent, I've seen some schools who have implemented very well but there are schools well in between most of the school are

mandated to have policies and apply them ,they are available for teachers to be used as protocols, but I do think that there is more that can be done such as extension training, professional development, staff taking time to develop on the issue sometimes schools are frenzies that they can't focus on issues that require attention, but because of the nature of abuse this should be on the top and I haven't this as the case.

**Natalie:** Is there information teachers can talk about with their students that can help them prevent child abuse or stop it from happening?

**Gallardo:** You know I think they can inform them a teacher is a very powerful advocate because they have a great relationship and have a strong impact on a child with a modicum as a such teachers have an informally way of addressing the issue, furthermore, and more importantly teachers are in a special position to act as go between and the ways I've seen that play out is teachers seeking support from the community such as an agency who helps for free and helps with the issue dissemination they exist this is really one way teachers can act in a way of preventing it from happening. In addition teachers are in a very unique they are able to speak to parents community stake holders that allows them to blend themselves into the issue, speaking to the parent community and classroom parents armed with good information can advocate with the issue at the district office,

principal and vice principals, these options don't require much time but do require the focus.

**Natalie:** What would be some suggestions you would offer teachers that can guide them to create a helpful and safe environment for children who have been through abuse?

**Gallardo:** Definitely establishing a safe environment to begin with and environment that is conducive, a harmonious space that models good behavior from the teacher that shows what healthy environments look like, another thing teachers can do is have what I call a tolerance procedure that looks or resembles physical abuse such as trends that don't get created in the classroom that create otherwise, making sure that teachers respect and support students in their day to day affair, such as between students and the way they engage with one another, that can be extended, such as teachers out in yard duty how do they engage with other staff members or parents, how do these teachers produce good modeling students pay attention to adults in every single move.

**Natalie:** Do you feel teachers have the sufficient resources to help and guide teachers and staff to better understand and put into play the topic of child abuse?

**Gallardo:** Teachers no such as environment they don't have the resources available to reach these resources, personally I think districts the feds, and even

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school sites administration can do better to have those resources, so that teachers don't have to engage in organic to hunt for free opportunities to this topic because after all this is the health of our children there should be more resources for this issue that are available to students and them not having to always be free being such a hard issue for our children's health.

## Appendix C

### School Teacher and Staff Survey Form

This survey will collect data regarding the knowledge and information provided to teachers and staff members about child abuse.

1. I am a

Teacher

Staff Member

Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. Gender

Female

Male

Other

3. Do you know what child abuse is?

No

Yes

4. Who are the most common perpetrators?

Female

Male



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**5. Do you feel comfortable in your ability to recognize child abuse?**

No

Yes

**6. Do you know the different types of child abuse?**

Yes

No

**7. Have you ever had to report a suspicion of child abuse?**

Yes

No

**8. Do you know who to contact in case of having to report a suspicion of child abuse?**

Yes

No

**9. Does the school district you work in have policies and procedures on child abuse?**

Yes

No

**10. Has your school district offered training on child abuse?**

No

Yes

**11. Would you want to receive more information/resources to help you better understand the topic of child abuse?**

Yes

No

**12. How confident based on your knowledge do you feel about reporting a suspicion of child abuse?**

1    2    3    4    5

---

Not Confident                Confident

---

**13. Do you believe elementary school students should be exposed to the topic of child abuse?**

Yes

No

**14. Would you talk to your students about what child abuse is, and the ways it can be prevented or stopped?**

No

Yes

## Appendix D

### School Teacher and Staff Survey Results

#### I am a



#### Gender



#### Do you know what child abuse is?



#### Who are the most common perpetrators?



#### Do you feel comfortable in your ability to recognize child abuse?



#### Do you know the different types of child abuse?



#### Have you ever had to report a suspicion of child abuse?



#### Do you know who to contact in case of having to report a suspicion of child abuse?



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**Does the school district you work at have policies and procedures on child abuse?**



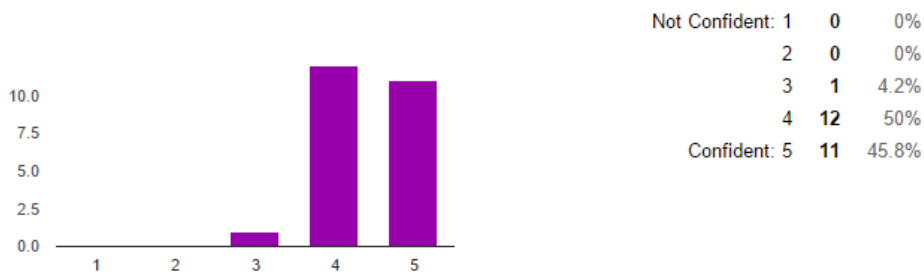
**Has your school district offered training on child abuse?**



**Would you want to receive more information/resources to help you better understand the topic of child abuse?**



**How confident based on your knowledge do you feel about reporting a suspicion of child abuse?**



**Do you believe elementary school students should be exposed to the topic of child abuse?**



**Would you talk to your students about what child abuse is, and the ways it can be prevented or stopped?**

