

**TEACHERS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA:
EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCE OF REPORTING SUSPECTED PARENTAL
CHILD ABUSE**

by

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B.S.W., University of Northern British Columbia, 2004

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULLFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

August 2015

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study describes the experience of detecting and reporting suspected parental child abuse to child protection by six females who teach public school in northern British Columbia within School District 57. The research generated insight into what enables teachers to detect child abuse, why and when they report, as well as the emotional barriers and concerns they encounter during and after making a report. The research was informed by structural social work and the analysis of the interviews was undertaken using applied thematic analysis. The main implications for social work practice include: embracing strategies for effective relationship building with teachers and within schools; communicating with teachers, to the greatest extent possible, the outcome of reports made; and working with the universities and school districts to conduct formal training on indicators of child abuse as well as when and how to report.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First I would like to acknowledge and thank the teachers who participated in this research. Without the generous sharing of your time and experiences, this research would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Glen Schmidt and Lela Zimmer for their guidance and the insightful recommendations made to me during the process of writing this thesis. To Dawn Hemingway, thank you very much for your support and encouragement throughout this entire journey. I am truly thankful for all the hours you put in to help me along the way, even interrupting holidays, and other life events to work with me on my thesis. Words cannot describe the dedication to student well-being I have experienced while working with you during my research, as well as the encouragement, support, expertise, and invaluable feedback you have provided during the process of developing this thesis.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Child abuse and neglect in Canada continues to be a major concern amongst social and healthcare professionals, who are aware that the impact and consequences that child maltreatment can have on a child are devastating, as well as potentially lifelong. As John Briere (2002) points out in chapter one of the *American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children Handbook*, ongoing or severe abuse of children can lead to mental health related disorders such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder, which if left untreated can impact them as adults. It is known that children who grow up in an abusive or neglectful environment are more likely to engage in activities in later life that put them at risk, such as smoking, and substance abuse (Sachs-Ericsson, Cromer, Hernandez, & Kendall-Tackett, 2009, p.175). Children who have been, or are experiencing ongoing abuse can find it difficult to form attachments with others and can be more aggressive and even violent with peers (Meadows, Tunstill, George, Dhudwar, & Kurtz, 2011, pp.10-11). Abuse and neglect in childhood can lead to life-long physical, psychological, and behavioural consequences for the child (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013, pp.4-6) and could negatively affect the development of their brain (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015). Research shows that the frequency of the abuse, the duration, as well as the degree of physical force employed during the abuse has been linked to greater trauma-related symptoms in the child and in adult survivors (Clemmons, Walsh, DiLillo, & Messman-Moore, 2007, pp. 172-180). Overall, studies have uncovered that physical punishment often affects academic achievement; is linked to higher levels of aggression; anti-social behavior; slower cognitive development; and can even affect the physical make-up of the brain (Durrant & Ensom, 2012, pp. 1373-1374).

According to the report, *Making the Links in Family Violence Cases* (2013), child maltreatment cannot only have serious, long-term, negative impacts on children; it can also result in death. In 2011, 32.6% of all solved homicides in Canada were family homicides, 22% of the victims were children (Department of Justice Canada, p.2).

In 2010, Statistics Canada released the report, *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile*, which included a section on the incidence of police-reported family violence involving children and youth. According to the report, between the years 2000-2010, 47% of abuse victims in the 3-11 year old category suffered abuse at the hands of a family member, 65% of the perpetrators were parents or parental figures (p.58). The majority of these children in BC would be attending pre-school or elementary school (4-11 year age range) under the watchful eye of an educator (Public Health Agency, 2010, p.25).

As a social worker I have worked, over the years, with a variety of children and youth within School District (SD) 57. The majority of the children and youth I work with have been abused in the past by parents or parental figures in their lives, within their own home. Many of the youth come from homes where abuse was an everyday occurrence. As a result of this abuse by adult figures in their lives, the children and youth are oftentimes fearful, and untrusting of adults. When they discuss their feelings with me concerning the abuse they suffered they also, at times, express anger that no one came to their aid. These youth speak of physical beatings that left welts, broken bones, massive bruising, and swellings on their bodies. They speak of neglect that left them without access to food, of adult caregivers who would disappear from their lives for days on end, and of the sense of despair as well as feelings of depression they often experienced. These youth

were not locked away in a room where no one could see them; they were in plain sight. Although every person's story is different, and everyone's experiences with abuse are unique to them, I have found a commonality between all the stories of abuse I have heard. Every youth I have spoken with recalls attending school, although for many their attendance was sporadic at best. This has made me wonder if this common thread in their lives could be the key to ending the cycle of child abuse and neglect in British Columbia (BC). From this thought, I began to wonder what the experience was like for a teacher to report parental child abuse to authorities.

Deciding to make a report to child protective services when one suspects a case of child maltreatment appears to be cut and dried. People who have never been faced with such a decision may feel they would have no hesitation in immediately reporting any suspicions to the authorities. However, the reality of encountering such a situation can lead one to understand the complexities involved in making a report to authorities. As the literature review included in this study points out, there are many potential barriers and concerns that teachers as well as other professionals may encounter when detecting or reporting suspected parental child abuse situations. Research in Canada, as well as research in other countries on the subject of detecting and reporting child abuse and neglect, uncovered a myriad of barriers and concerns expressed by teachers. Some barriers and concerns noted by these researchers included: safety issues for the child and for the reporter (Beck et al., 1994; Choo et al., 2013; King, 2011; Smith, 2005; Tite, 1998; Walsh et al., 2005); lack of action on behalf of the organization handling the report (Beck et al., 1994; Choo et al., 2013; Smith, 2005; Tite, 1998); having administrators advise them to not report (Smith, 2005); feeling they do not have enough

information to make a report (Smith, 2005; Tite, 1998; Walsh et al., 2005), or not wanting to make an erroneous report (Beck et al., 1994; King, 2011), to name but a few. This study explored the experience of a group of teachers in northern BC, and reports on their concerns in regards to reporting child abuse and neglect.

Research Question and Objective of the Study

The main research question of this study is: *What is the experience of reporting suspected parental child abuse for teachers who work within SD 57?* This study examined, from the perspective of a group of teachers in Prince George BC, the experience of reporting suspected parental child abuse or neglect in northern BC. The goal of my research was to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences of reporting parental child abuse.

Rationale for the Study

There is currently a gap in the child abuse reporting literature when it comes to teachers in northern British Columbia. The last study I was able to locate with regard to teachers in BC was a study by Beck and colleagues in 1994, 21 years ago, which involved teachers in the lower mainland. Past research in Canada, as well as research in other countries, indicates there are potential barriers and concerns that teachers from other geographical locations have encountered when deciding to make a report (Beck et al., 1994; Choo et al., 2013; Smith, 2005; Tite, 1998; Walsh et al., 2005). These barriers and concerns were identified as requiring consideration prior to making a report to child welfare authorities. Some teachers within Prince George may, or may not, encounter the same barriers or concerns that have been found in past studies, in regards to reporting. As

such, exploring the experience of reporting for this group of teachers was useful in discovering what type of barriers and concerns they have encountered over the years, and understanding what type of supports or education would aid them or other teachers to detect abuse and make reports.

Removing any barriers or concerns and supplying teachers with supports or education as required is vitally important for children. The need to identify children suffering abuse as early as possible is crucial to both their physical and long-term mental health. Studies such as this bring attention to the issue of child abuse in general and serve to highlight the concerns and barriers that teachers face in the field. Knowing how to best support teachers in the detecting and reporting process could potentially expedite the reporting process resulting in children being identified earlier. If we would like teachers to take on the duty of reporting it is important to have an understanding of what supports and tools they require in order to perform this duty.

Personal Framework

As a past Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) Guardianship social worker who worked with teachers in a variety of school settings, I am aware that teachers may become involved in child protection investigations. At times, a child protection investigation is a result of a report made by the teacher to MCFD, expressing concern that a child may be experiencing abuse or neglect at the hands of a parent or guardian. Often times, the child has not disclosed an abuse situation directly to the teacher. Rather, the teacher has made the report based on a suspicion after noting indicators that may or may not be verifiable. Before making such a report, it is essential

for teachers to feel they have reason to make the report, as well as a belief that the child, or youth requires someone to intervene on their behalf. Once the teacher has detected that something may be amiss in the student's life, the teacher must make a decision that what they detect may be abusive and is reportable.

As an MCFD guardianship worker, I have investigated reports that were generated by teachers, physicians, and a variety of other community members. Since leaving the Ministry, I have had a variety of professionals and laypeople, contact me in regards to how to *know* when to make a report, as well as for advice on how to deal with a variety of issues that surfaced after having made a report. As a former MCFD worker, I have a firm grasp of what an investigation entails. However, I was often focused on finding information to support or disprove the allegation of child abuse, not on what the reporter was feeling or experiencing as a result of having to make the report. This is an area that I believe may be neglected when an investigation is in progress. So how does a teacher detect, come to a decision to report suspicions to child protective services, and what is the aftermath of a report? What prompts teachers to take such a step and what concerns, barriers, and personal hurdles must they overcome in order to make such a report?

During the process of exploring this area I have discovered that the report and the reporter are both crucial parts of the process of discovering, and preventing situations of child abuse and neglect. Finding the answer to the question of how someone detects, and why someone reports, regardless of the impact the report may make on their personal, or professional life, is essential to understanding why reports may not have been made in the

past, as well as providing an opportunity to address issues that may currently impact teachers' reporting practices.

Theoretical Framework

This research was conducted with and informed by structural social work.

Structural social work is comprised of features from Marxist, social democratic, feminist, and anti-racist approaches (Mullaly, 2007, pp. 243-244) and meets the three requirements of a critical theory as outlined by Bob Mullaly (2007) in that it:

- locates the sources of domination in actual social practices,
- presents an alternative vision (or at least an outline) of a life free from such domination,
- translates these tasks in a form that is intelligible to those who are oppressed in society.

(p. 215)

Using the framework of Maurice Moreau's past work, Ben Carniol (1992), discussed how the structural approach recognizes that all forms of oppression, whether based on class, gender, race, age, ability/disability or sexuality, are equally important (not hierarchal) and that many people are subjected to oppression from several of these areas in tandem (p.4).

Structural social work identifies that oppression occurs on three levels- personal, cultural, as well as institutional or structural. The forms of oppression experienced by individuals can be overt or covert and the three levels of oppression work to perpetuate social inequality in favour of the dominant group. Structural oppression can and does

affect major areas of an individuals' life such as employment opportunities, access to housing and healthcare, education and access to post-secondary opportunities, financial opportunities and how one is treated by the criminal justice system (Mullaly, 2007, p.p. 269-270).

Mullaly (2007) explains that:

the term 'structural' in structural social work is both descriptive and prescriptive. It is descriptive in the sense that the major source of social problems is identified as being the way our society is structured. It is prescriptive in the sense that because social problems are rooted in our social structures, then the structures must be changed, not the individual, the family, or the subculture adversely affected by social problems (p. 245).

This means that structural social work moves away from the traditional approach which focused on the individual as the problem, and looks instead to societal structures as the root of social problems. As such, structural social work acknowledges and challenges the oppressive nature of societal structures that alienate and exploit marginalized groups and seeks to expose, and change the structures in society that oppress people according to their class, race, gender, ability, and sexuality (Mullaly, 2007, p.245). In the words of Maurice Moreau (1979); "Structural social work is concerned with the ways in which the rich and powerful in society define and constrain the poor and the less powerful" (p.78).

Structural social workers also work for change by working with (not doing for or working on) individuals to alter the structure in families, communities, and society that currently result in inequality and oppression. The structural social worker uses anti-oppressive social work to "help clients handle the oppression they have experienced"

(Heinonen & Spearman, 2010, p.300) and challenge personal and structural issues that create and maintain oppression within our society (Mullaly, 2007).

In, *A Co-operative Inquiry into Structural Social Work Students' Ethical*

Decision-Making in Field Ed, Bellefeuille and Hemingway (2006), outline an expanded description of structural social work by Mullaly. It describes structural social work as follows:

... First the term 'structural' is descriptive of the nature of social problems in that they are an inherent part of our present day social order. Secondly, the term is descriptive, as it indicates that the focus for change is mainly on the structures of society and not on the personal characteristics of individuals victimized by social problems. Thirdly, structural social work is an inclusive social work approach because it does not attempt to establish hierarchies of oppression but rather is concerned with all forms of oppressive dominant-subordinate relations. Fourthly, it has a dialectical analysis, which means that it does not get trapped into false dichotomies, such as whether one should work at the personal or the political—both are necessary simultaneously. Fifthly, it is a critical theory, which by definition means that it has a political and practical intent. Finally, most of the development of structural social work has occurred in Canada, where it continues to assume increasing importance as a major social work perspective, theory and practice (p.ixx).

This description of structural social work is the framework from which I conducted my research.

Definitions of Key Terms

CAN: is an acronym for the term ‘child abuse and neglect’.

Child: means a person in British Columbia less than 19 years of age and includes a youth.

Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA): the legislative authority for the Ministry of Children and Family Development’s Child Protection Services in British Columbia.

MCFD Child Protection Intake Social Worker: a social worker who receives reports from the public regarding child protection cases. The worker assesses the report made, to determine if the report requires an investigation.

Maltreatment: includes both “abuse” and “neglect” and covers those acts or omission of acts endangering the child’s safety or well being.

Mandatory reporting: refers to the legal obligation of a person to report child maltreatment.

Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD): the Child Protection Agency that operates within British Columbia.

Parent: includes a person to whom guardianship or custody of a child has been granted by a court of competent jurisdiction or by an agreement, and/or a person with whom a child resides and who stands in place of the child's parent or guardian.

Child Protection Social Worker: under the CFCSA, the Minister designates the Director of Child Protection, who in turn delegates the provision of child protection services across the province of BC to child protection social workers.

Reporters: people who make reports to MCFD concerning any suspected child abuse situations.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter one outlines the research question, the objective of the study, the rationale for the study and an overview of the effects of child abuse. The chapter also speaks to related concepts that are used

throughout the thesis. Chapter two provides a review of the relevant literature related to the research topic. The literature review examines the topics of barriers to detecting and reporting, impact of training on detecting and reporting, and the rates of child abuse reporting in Canada and abroad. It also includes an outline of the laws and legislation that are used to protect children from child abuse and neglect in British Columbia. Chapter three provides an outline of applied thematic analysis as the methodology used in this research and discusses the research procedures employed within the study. Chapter four identifies the six themes and multiple sub themes that emerged from the analysis of the six interviews conducted for this study. The chapter provides a detailed account of each theme and sub theme. Chapter five, the final chapter, provides a discussion of the research topic and identifies areas of interest for possible future study.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the effects of child abuse, explaining why detecting and reporting all forms of abuse at the earliest stages possible is crucial to the physical and mental health of BC children. The chapter also outlined the research question, the objective and rationale for the study, as well as my personal and theoretical perspectives. This chapter included a section explaining the organization of the five chapters included in this thesis and provided definitions of key terms used throughout the thesis.

The next chapter contains a review of the relevant literature I uncovered which related to studies on school teachers' level of knowledge and training in the areas of child

abuse and reporting. The review also includes a section on laws and legislation used to protect children in BC.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

I conducted this literature review to gain an understanding of some of the complex issues identified by past researchers that teachers may face prior to making a report to authorities.

I reviewed past and present research, to gain an understanding on the level of knowledge of child abuse and reporting protocols that teachers possess and the impact this level of knowledge has on a teacher's ability to detect and report child abuse. I then summarized the findings from various studies, including concerns that teachers expressed which created barriers to their ability to make a report of suspected child abuse to authorities. I included the findings of past studies that reported the known numbers of suspected child abuse cases that have gone unreported by their participants and the training that teachers have received in detecting and reporting child abuse. This chapter also includes an overview of the laws and legislation that protect children in Canada and BC.

After conducting this review I found the results of several studies indicated that some teachers were confused as to what constituted abuse and the reporting process. This knowledge enabled me to formulate sharper and more insightful interview questions in order to explore, from the perspective of teachers, the lived experience of reporting suspected child abuse or neglect. Conducting this literature review enabled me to explore the experience of reporting suspected parental child maltreatment from the perspective of teachers outside of northern BC.

Barriers to Detecting and Reporting

According to past research in the area of teachers' ability to detect and report cases of suspected child abuse, there appears to be some confusion amongst some teachers as to what indicators they are expected to act on; when exactly, they have enough indicators and/or the correct sequence of indicators, on which to base a formal report; and how or to whom the report is to be made. In 1994, Beck, Ogloff, and Corbishley, released the findings of research they had conducted, which focused on the detecting and reporting habits of 216 teachers from the Lower Mainland of BC, Canada. The quantitative study utilized a survey that included five sections: 1) a section on participant demographics, 2) a section that assessed knowledge of BC child abuse reporting laws, 3) a section on their reporting experiences, 4) a set of 4 vignettes, each of which outlined a possible case of child abuse, and 5) the final section, measured the participants' attitudes toward child abuse reporting.

Prior to embarking on the project, the researchers conducted a literature review to determine what was already known regarding the level of knowledge teachers had in the area of child abuse detecting and reporting and any gaps in their knowledge. By searching through the literature available at the time, they discovered, that according to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1988), an American Nationwide teachers regulatory board, "89% of (their) teachers were seeing abused and neglected children in their classrooms" (Beck et al., 1994, p.16), yet research conducted, within the same time period, indicates that few teachers were aware of their state laws in regards to reporting the abuse they were seeing. Other reports from this time period confirmed that only 33% of teachers in Illinois (McIntyre, 1987, p. 134), and only 28% of

teachers in Kansas (Baxter & Beer, 1990, p.78) reported knowing the existence of their state law. Beck et al. (1994) spoke of an earlier study by Levin (1983) who concluded that 40% of teachers who responded to their study knew of the report law but “did not know the proper reporting procedures” (Beck et al., 1994, p.16). Fortunately, the Beck et al., study concluded that, unlike the earlier studies, BC teachers in 1994 were very aware of the duty to report law (94%). But their findings did echo the earlier studies when respondents were tested on the proper reporting procedures. For example, 40% of their participants misunderstood the reporting procedure. These participants believed that the correct procedure was to consult *first* with others, for example the school principal, as opposed to reporting suspected child abuse immediately to a child protection worker as was the law in BC since the proclamation of the Family and Child Service Act in 1981 (Beck et al., 1994. p.25). According to the Inter-Ministry Child Abuse Handbook (1985) which outlined the legislation governing child protection in BC:

The Act states very clearly the obligation and responsibility of a person who has reasonable grounds to believe a child may be in need of protection to report to the superintendent or a person delegated by the superintendent (social workers in district offices or social workers receiving reports through the helpline for children) (p.3).

In 2005, Canadian researcher, Carrie Smith had very similar findings. She concluded that although almost all of her study participants (96.7%) in Ontario were aware of the obligation to report suspected child abuse (p.41), the majority were unaware of the proper protocol to make a report. Smith found that 70% of participants who had made a report did not make the report to child protection services (CPS) but to a principal

(p.74), even though, since 2001 school district policies in Ontario state that reports are required to be made directly to CPS (p.75).

In 2011, another Canadian study on teachers' reporting habits also concluded that, like the participants in the Beck and Smith studies, many teachers were confused as to the proper reporting procedure. King (2011), reported that in his study only 68% of the participants were aware of the procedure for reporting suspected child abuse to CPS, meaning that 32% still were not aware of the procedure to report, which is close to the Beck finding of 40% twenty years earlier (p.81). Thus, one could conclude that there is still a gap in ensuring that all teachers are aware of reporting procedures.

Impact of Training on Detecting and Reporting

Teachers' overall level of knowledge in the area of what constitutes child maltreatment, and their ability to detect with confidence possible child abuse by parents or guardians, is an important component of the reporting process. Included in the Beck et al. (1994) literature review was reference to research that noted possible gaps in teacher training in the area of detecting child abuse. For example, in 1992, the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse (NCPCA), an American organization, found that two-thirds of teachers, who participated in their nation-wide survey, "viewed the child abuse education provided to them by their school insufficient" (Abrahams, Casey, & Daro, 1992, p.232) to detect or report child abuse. This is not surprising as nine years earlier a Wisconsin study had reported that 56% of their respondents had never received any training regarding child abuse or neglect (Bavolek, 1983, p.36). In 1987, another American study concluded that the vast majority of teachers (81%) had received no

training regarding child abuse during their time in college and that 61% had never been offered the opportunity to obtain the required information during in-service training (McIntyre, 1987, p.134). This study also noted that 70% of their respondents were not knowledgeable concerning indicators of neglect; only 21% had knowledge concerning the possible indicators of physical abuse; only 19% felt they would recognize the signs of emotional abuse; and 96% professed to have little or no knowledge of the symptoms of sexual abuse (McIntyre, 1987, p.134).

Apparently lack of training in detecting may still be a factor almost 20 years after Abrahams et al. noted this in 1992. A 2011 study found that, like the earlier study, almost two-thirds of their participants felt that they were not receiving the training required to detect and report child abuse. According to the findings of this study, only 36.5% of the teachers in the study “felt prepared or very prepared from their overall training in the area of child abuse to be able to detect and report suspected maltreatment” (King, 2011, p.80).

Results of the Beck study, released in 1994, also mirrored these other studies regarding the lack of training in detecting and reporting child abuse. The lack of confidence in the ability to detect possible abuse and the lack of knowledge of when to make a report can impede reporting. The study revealed that more than 20% of the teachers who indicated they had failed to report a case where they suspected child abuse also indicated that they had not reported based on their uncertainty about the definitions of abuse. The study also concluded from the results of the vignettes, that “teachers with moderate and substantial levels of information about child abuse issues were significantly more likely to report” (Beck et al., 1994, p. 23) physical and emotional abuse when presented with vignettes that depicted situations of possible child abuse.

In 2001, a study by Hawkins and McCallum supported the contention that training in child abuse and reporting can make a difference. The researchers concluded that the effects of the mandated training program (Department for Family and Community Services, 1997) that was being delivered to Australian teachers “increased participants’ confidence in their ability to recognize the indicators of abuse, their awareness of their reporting responsibilities, and their knowledge of what constitutes reasonable grounds for reporting” (p.1603).

A study conducted by Carrie Smith in 2005, which included a training session on detecting and reporting suspected child abuse for the participants, concluded that her participants experienced an increase in their overall confidence in child protection services and that 50% indicated they would like to receive additional training on the subject in the future (pp.66-67). The researcher noted that “the results indicate that the training offered as part of this study did have a significant impact on the school personnel’s knowledge regarding reporting requirements, attitudes towards their duty to report, and their intended reporting behaviors” (p.78).

However, there are some researchers who question whether training has proven to be as effective in increasing a teacher’s ability to detect and/or report child abuse as some seem to believe. Findings from *Critical factors in teachers detecting and reporting child abuse and neglect*, a study on Australian teachers that occurred four years after the Hawkins and McCallum study, indicated that, although mandatory training had been taking place in Australia for 5 years at this point,

The apparent insignificance of child protection training on reporting practice is cause for concern. The current round of child protection training does not appear to have impacted significantly upon teacher's propensity to detect or report suspected child abuse or neglect (Walsh, Farrell, Schweitzer, & Bridgstock, 2005, p. 59).

A few years later, Goebbles, Nicholson, Walsh and De Vries (2008) pointed out that their review of past research had uncovered contradictory findings that increased training in child protection led to increased levels of confidence in detecting or reporting. They concluded that some studies showed an increase in reporting as levels of knowledge in child abuse and reporting increased, although other studies indicated there was little or no difference in reporting levels. They discovered that training in child protection could, in some instances, actually negatively impact a teacher's confidence to make a report. The findings from their research did show that teachers with higher levels of education (3-6 years and Masters Degree) were significantly more likely to be consistent reporters of suspected child abuse, so that formal education was seen to be a positive factor for increased detection and reporting. But the findings from their study agreed with the Walsh et al. (2005) study, in that they also concluded the number of hours of child protection training made no significant difference in either an increase in the detection of child abuse, or in the reporting habits of individual teachers (pp.942-949).

It is difficult to establish conclusively, at this point, that training in the area of detecting and reporting child abuse would necessarily translate into increased detecting and/or reporting as the majority of training offered to teachers in Australia is limited (usually 3 hours), and not necessarily focused on the detecting aspect (Walsh et al., 2008,

p.19). This is not many hours of training when one considers the complexities involved in the process of detecting and reporting child abuse.

In spite of mixed reviews on whether or not training in detecting and reporting increases reporting from teachers overall, there are some very clear indicators from past research that suggest a lack of training is not the only issue that may be impacting a teacher's decision when it comes to making a report to authorities.

Additional Barriers

Researchers from the 1990s reported that lack of training in detecting, lack of knowledge of the legal obligation to report, and lack of confidence in reporting protocols, although important, were not all that was required to influence teachers to report whenever they suspected child abuse or neglect. Beck and his colleagues (1994) uncovered a myriad of factors, both within their literature review, and from the findings of their own study, which appear to play a crucial role in teacher decision making process. According to Beck et al., Levin (1983) found that some teachers may not report because they believe that the child's punishment is within the bounds of proper parental discipline (Beck et al., 1994, p.17) and that, according to a study by Bavolek (1983) the most frequent reason teachers failed to report child abuse was the fear of getting involved (40%) or the feeling that making a report would not make a difference (20%) (p.35).

Included in the review, Baxter and Beer "reported that many teacher participants were apprehensive about reporting for fear of parental retaliation" (p.79) and Abrahams, Casey, and Doro (1992) "concluded that 52% of responding teachers were concerned about potential damage to the parent-teacher and teacher-child relationships" (p.234).

Beck et al. (1994) concluded that there was reluctance on behalf of some teachers (25% of study participants), in some circumstances, to report to authorities their suspicions of possible child abuse situations. The researchers concluded that over 40% of teachers who did not report thought a report would have negative consequences for the child and family involved, and almost 25% of these teachers lacked confidence in the child protection process (p.26). When measuring the attitudes toward the reporting law they concluded that:

Although teachers recognized that they should be required to report all cases of suspected child abuse many indicated they could conceive of a case when they would not report suspected child abuse particularly when reporting could cause more harm than good for the child (p.24).

Studies conducted more recently continue to speak to the fact that at times, more personal issues may be at play in the teachers' decision making processes that may cause them to not report every instance where they may suspect a child is being abused. Kenny (2001) indicated that over 38% of respondents did not report at some point in their career, for fear of making an inaccurate report, 12.9% failed to report a child's self-report as there was no visible physical injury; and over 16% who did not report felt that CPS was not helpful to children. Other reasons cited for not making a report were: not wanting to appear foolish, a belief that reporting leads to negative consequences for the family and child, a belief that they may be misinterpreting cultural ways of disciplining children, feeling it is not a part of their job and not wanting to deal with any legal issues that may arise as a result of the report (p. 87).

Walsh et al. (2005) also found that teachers were reluctant to report due to concerns that were not impacted by their lack of knowledge on reporting protocols. The researchers identified 19 factors, aside from lack of training that had influenced their participants' decision in the past, to not report suspected child abuse. Of the nineteen listed; the lack of evidence to make a report; fear of possible consequences to the child or to themselves if they were identified as the reporter; lack of support within the school to make the report; and the fact that the family was already known to child protective services, were rated highest as a reason to not make a report (p.40).

Smith (2005) concluded that her participants' reasons for not reporting included: a principal, supervisor or other administrator advised them not to (8.2%); the teachers did not feel they had enough information to make a report (8.2%); and 3.3% of the study participants expressed concerns with the child protection system. Additional reasons expressed by participants within this study included that the child may be lying; fear of repercussions to the child; and a fear of repercussions to themselves from the parents (pp. 50-54).

King (2011) noted in his study that his participants also expressed they encountered barriers to reporting aside from lack of training in the area of child abuse. They spoke of not reporting due to concerns such as: worrying that things would become worse for the child (81%); wondering how making a report would impact their interaction with the child and/or family (65.5%); the fear of being wrong (65.4%); and 57.9% did not report due to their fear of retribution from the parent or family if they did report (p. 82).

In 2013 a new report on the topic of teachers' reporting of child abuse was released. The research, conducted by Choo, Walsh, Chinna, and Tey (2013), used the Teacher Reporting Attitude Scale (TRAS) to measure a sample of Malaysian teachers on their attitude toward reporting child abuse to authorities. The results from the use of this tool are very similar to those found by researchers using other methods over the years. The researchers concluded that although their participants were willing to report and expressed a desire to fulfill their professional duty to report, the participants also expressed some concerns in regards to reporting. These concerns included : fear of family or community retaliation; what the parents may do to the child after a report was made; and the lack of confidence teachers expressed that the authorities would be able to respond effectively or, for that matter that the authorities would respond at all (p.243).

Of particular note is a researcher who performed a number of studies with participants from Ontario, and Newfoundland during the 1990s, which dealt with this subject area. Rosonna Tite focused on "the relationship between teachers' work and the school's response to victims of child abuse". She felt that the school's role in responding to child abuse was to require "teachers to report disclosures or suspicions of abuse to their local Child Protection Service" (Tite, 1998, p. 1). Tite has outlined issues she found within her research that speak to the topic of reporting suspected child maltreatment.

Over the years Tite found several possible barriers identified by teachers within her study findings that may contribute to a teacher's decision to make, or not make a report to authorities. These barriers include:

the lack of training offered to teachers in the area of detecting and reporting; the child's credibility (particularly with "problem children"); the reporter's frustration with outcomes of past reports; concern regarding the huge caseloads of child protection service workers and their perceived inability to cope with the report; the feeling the report will be dismissed if there are no witnesses or marks to corroborate the teachers' report; the concern that reporting will only make things worse for the child; and the risk that the parent may seek revenge on the teacher for making the report (Tite, 1998, pp. 2-5).

These findings are similar to what other researchers within this literature review have uncovered over the years, that there are a number of issues that teachers must consider every time they detect possible child abuse.

Rates of Reporting

Having explored within this literature review the myriad of concerns, and barriers, identified by teachers in past research that created barriers to reporting suspicions of possible child abuse to authorities, I will now examine how these concerns may impact rates of reporting. For over 20 years, researchers have been tracking the reporting habits of teachers world-wide. The results of these studies show teachers do not report all cases of suspected child abuse to child protective services. For example, in 1994, Beck's study concluded that a quarter (25%) of his participants were reluctant, in some circumstances, to report to authorities their suspicions of possible child abuse situations (Beck et al., 1994, p. 26). In 2001, findings from a study conducted by Kenny indicated that over 38% of respondents did not report at some point in their career (Kenny, 2001, p.87). Walsh

and colleagues (2005) discovered that 74.5% of teachers in their study had suspected child maltreatment at some stage in their career but that 10% of their participants had made the decision not to report, plus a further 94% of those who did report, reported to their principal, not child protective services (p.56). Also in 2005, a Canadian researcher, Carrie Smith reported that 34.1% of her participants had not made a report of suspected child abuse (p.50), a percentage that was similar to Kenny's 2001 findings, and in 2008, Australian researchers Goebbles, Nicholson, Walsh and De Vries, concluded that 14.5% of their participants had not reported a case of suspected child abuse to authorities and two-thirds of these teachers had failed to report more than one case (p. 947). As late as 2011, Canadian researchers were finding that a quarter (25%) of teachers in Ontario who had participated in a study on reporting habits had not reported instances where they had suspected child maltreatment (King, 2011, p.92).

In summary, Walsh et al. (2005) concluded their report by stating that "there are complex issues that influence teachers' detecting and reporting practices. These issues should be the subject of further research" (p. 65). My review of literature on this subject, to date, has not revealed, aside from the Beck et al. (1994) study, any recent studies conducted specifically with British Columbia teachers to explore issues or concerns they may have when reporting child abuse by parents or guardians. Although there have been studies conducted to measure a teacher's ability to detect abuse and their compliancy rate to report child maltreatment in other provinces (King, 2011; Smith, 2005; Tite, 1998), and other countries (Choo et al., 2013; Goebbles et al., 2008; McIntyre, 1987; Walsh et al., 2005), the majority of studies have utilized quantitative surveys and vignettes of possible child abuse scenarios to collect data with the data being analyzed using a variety

of quantitative methods. Unfortunately, in quantitative research the individual voices of participants are generally not fully heard, as the data collection method tends to use closed questions with a limited variety of potential responses. These quantitative studies have raised some interesting questions that need to be examined further in an effort to better understand and give voice to a teacher's personal experience of reporting suspected parental child abuse.

Overview of Laws and Legislation that Protects Children

International Child Rights

The worldwide recognition that children have the right to be protected from violence and maltreatment is entrenched in both international and national laws. These rights include the right to go to school; to live with their families in a safe and nurturing environment; to have a say in decisions concerning them; to stay connected with relatives and to participate in their parents' culture (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990).

In December 1991, Canada, as a ratifying member of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, recognized that all children and youth are entitled to the full range of human rights, including the right to be cared for and protected from all forms of violence by parents and other caregivers (Noel, 2013).

Federal: Criminal Code of Canada

The *Criminal Code of Canada* has several sections that can be used to charge people who harm children (Criminal Code, 1985); although it appears that a charge under

the Criminal Code occurs only in extreme cases when parents are the perpetrators, usually when the harm inflicted results in the death of a child. But parents could be charged under the Federal Criminal Code for a variety of offences related to the mistreatment of their child or children. Some of the offences under the Criminal Code for which parents could be charged include; assault (ss 265-268), forcible confinement (s 279), homicide (ss 229-231 and 235), sexual assault (ss 271-273), sexual offences against children and youth (ss 151-153, 155 and 170-172), failure to provide necessities of life (s 215), abandoning child (s 218), and criminal negligence (section 219-221). Although these federal laws are in place to protect children as well as others, provincial and territorial child protection legislation is generally used when children have had their rights violated or are in need of protection, especially in cases of abuse by parental figures. Within Canada, each province and territory has its own provincial legislation, policy, and practice procedures based on the Federal Criminal Code, to protect children within their jurisdiction (Noel, 2013). In British Columbia the provincial child protection legislation that is used to protect children is the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* (CFCSA).

Provincial: BC Child Protection Legislation CFCSA

The legislation that protects children within BC is the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* (CFCSA) which is utilized by the BC child protective service, known as the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). Under the CFCSA, parents are held responsible for protecting their children from neglect; emotional, physical, and sexual abuse; or from the emotional harm of witnessing domestic violence by or against someone they live with. The focus of the CFCSA is to

ensure that all decisions are made in the best interests of the child. Section 4 (1) of the CFCSA states:

Where there is a reference in this Act to the best interests of a child, all relevant factors must be considered in determining the child's best interests, including for example: the child's safety; the child's physical and emotional needs and level of development; the importance of continuity in the child's care; the quality of the relationship the child has with a parent or other person and the effect of maintaining that relationship; the child's cultural, racial, linguistic and religious heritage; the child's views; as well as the effect on the child if there is delay in making a decision (CFCSA, Chapter 46, 1996).

Working within this principle of best interests of the child, MCFD protection social workers investigate reports of suspected abuse and neglect and in instances of substantiated reports, develop and implement plans of care to protect the child or children involved. These are the frontline staff to whom teachers make their reports.

Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect in BC

Persons obligated to report. There is a legal obligation for teachers and other professionals to report suspected child abuse and neglect in BC. Section 14 (1) of the CFCSA outlines a person's Duty to Report Need for Protection as: "a person who has reason to believe that a child needs protection under section 13 must promptly report the matter to a director or a person designated by a director" (CFCSA, Chapter 46, 1996).

Confidentiality and sanctions for non-reporting. Within British Columbia, the duty to report child abuse and neglect overrides a claim of confidentiality or privilege,

except between a lawyer and a client under Section 14 (2) of the Act. This means for teachers in BC the ethical principle of confidentiality does not apply in cases where they have reason to suspect child abuse or neglect may have occurred. As such a teacher who does not report under Section 14 (1) of the Act commits an offence under Section 14 (3) of the Act and could face imprisonment for up to 6 months, a fine of up to \$10,000.00, or both, under Section 14 (6) of the CFCSA (CFCSA, Chapter 46, 1996).

What is reportable. The CFCSA (1996), Chapter 46: Part 3: section 13 (1) (2) outlines the circumstances under which a child would be considered in need of protection. A person would be considered negligent if they suspected that a child was experiencing any of these circumstances and did not report.

- In the case of physical abuse and neglect: A child has been, or is in danger of being physically harmed by a parent or others and the child's parent will not or cannot protect the child; harmed or at risk of harm due to neglect by the parent; a child lives in a home where there is domestic violence; the child is abandoned; the parent will not care for the child and does not provide alternate caregivers or; the parent does not provide adequate medical care for the child as required.
- In the case of sexual abuse: A child has been, or is likely to be, sexually abused, exploited, encouraged or helped to engage in prostitution by the child's parent or others and the parent is not able or willing to protect the child
- In the case of emotional abuse: if a child is emotionally harmed by the parent's conduct and demonstrates severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal, or self-destructive or aggressive behavior.

Although the above could be considered a very comprehensive list of possible abuse or neglect situations that could lead one to report, it lacks a description of

indicators that may lead one to suspect these activities were occurring. The indicator descriptions and an expanded definition of neglect and abuse have been supplied by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) within a handbook called *The BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect for Service Providers*.

The BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect

The BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect for Service Providers (2007a) supplied by the government of BC for use by teachers and others, includes the definitions outlined in the CFCSA as well as a list of indicators, summarized below, which the teachers are directed to reference to determine if a child may be experiencing abuse.

- 1.) A possible indicator of neglect would be; if the child does not have adequate food, shelter, health care, or if adequate supervision or protection from physical risks or danger is not provided by a parent or caregiver.
- 2.) Emotional abuse indicators could include a child being subjected to constant blaming, physical or emotional rejection, verbal attacks, threats, insults, humiliation, and name-calling by a parent or other. Often the child may appear to have extreme anxiety, depression, withdrawal, or may display self-destructive and aggressive behavior.
- 3.) Indicators physical abuse may be occurring could include instances where the child presents with minor bruising, burns, welts, or bite marks, serious burns, cuts, or abrasions, broken bones or skull fractures.

4.) Sexual abuse may be occurring if the child discloses that someone inappropriately touched their body or they were asked to touch someone else in an inappropriate manner, someone is making sexual references to their body or requesting that the child expose his or her body for sexual purposes or someone is deliberately exposing the child to sexual activity or pornography (Government of Canada, 2007a).

The handbook notes that “By themselves, these indicators do not prove that a child has been abused or neglected. They can result from phenomena such as divorce, separation, the death of a significant person or the arrival of a new sibling” (Government of Canada, 2007a, p.27).

The definitions and indicators supplied in the *BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect for Service Providers* (2007a) lack specificity and appear open to interpretation. As a result this handbook, recommended by the school district as a primary source of information on detecting and reporting, seems inadequate in terms of providing teachers with the information they require to detect indicators of child abuse and neglect with confidence. Despite the fact that I agree with the handbook, that “teachers are in an excellent position to observe the behavior of children over a prolonged period of time” (p.12), identifying indicators of child abuse and neglect is usually challenging. This is not meant to imply that teachers require the same level of training in detecting and assessing potentially abusive situations as child protection social workers or child abuse experts, but training teachers to the extent they feel confident enough in their suspicions to report to authorities is essential.

In order to further protect children in BC, the Provincial government instructed all professional organizations and Ministry agencies to draw up guidelines and protocols to inform their members and employees of their duty to report suspected child abuse, as well as to supply instruction and guidance on how to detect and report suspected cases of child maltreatment based on the CFCSA.

School District 57: Child Protection Policy

In compliance with this directive, in March 2012, School District 57 (SD57) revised their Child Protection Policy #5145.4 to include the statement: “Every person who has reason to believe that a child needs protection under Section 13 of the Child, Family and Community Services Act (CFCSA) must report this belief promptly” (Board of Education, 2012, p.1). The revised policy speaks to Section 14 of the CFCSA that makes it a legal duty of every person who has reason to believe that a child needs protection to report that belief to a child welfare worker”. The school district policy directs employees to apply the descriptions of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse as outlined in the *BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect for Service Providers* (Government of BC, 2007a), and in the booklet, *Responding to Child Welfare Concerns*, (Government of BC, 2007b), to determine if a child is possibly being abused, or neglected, by a parent or guardian (Board of Education, 2012, p.4). The policy further states that district employees will be provided with annual training in recognizing signs of child abuse as well as direction on responding to child abuse to aid them to detect and report accurately (Board of Education, 2012, p.7).

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the research design and reviews the following list of topics:

qualitative research, applied thematic analysis, recruitment of participants, data collection, data analysis, methodological integrity, and ethical considerations.

Qualitative Research

This research study uses a qualitative method of inquiry to explore the experiences of participants who have detected and reported suspected parental child abuse in northern BC. Qualitative research is a form of research in which the researcher collects and interprets data. Usually the data is in the form of in-depth interviews, focus groups, or field observations. Qualitative research utilizes an open and flexible design. As defined by Creswell (2014):

Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. Those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation (p. 4).

The main task of qualitative research is to explain the ways people, in groups or particular settings, “understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day to day situations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.7). According to Creswell (2007), it is appropriate to conduct qualitative research when a researcher wants to “understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue” (p. 40).

Applied Thematic Analysis

According to Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012) in their book *Applied Thematic Analysis*,

The applied thematic analysis (ATA) approach is a rigorous, yet inductive, set of procedures designed to identify and examine themes from textual data in a way that is transparent and credible. The method draws from a broad range of several theoretical and methodological perspectives, but in the end, its primary concern is with presenting the stories and experiences voiced by study participants as accurately and comprehensively as possible (p.15).

I used *Applied Thematic Analysis* as a guide, utilizing the suggestions included within to create a comprehensive approach to my applied thematic analysis process.

Applied thematic analysis (ATA) as defined by Guest et al., “is comprised of a bit of everything; grounded theory, positivism, interpretivism, and phenomenology synthesized into one methodological framework” (2012, p.15). Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that thematic analysis does not require the detailed theoretical and technological knowledge of approaches such as grounded theory or discourse analysis (p.82). However, Creswell (2007) cautioned that the data must be processed properly “so

that the researcher, in the end, can forge a common understanding” (p. 62). The common understanding essential to the process, although each person’s experience of the phenomenon will be their own, is inherent in the data.

When using applied thematic analysis, one must consider whether to use an inductive or deductive approach to analysis. I chose to use an inductive approach, allowing the themes to ‘emerge’ from the data as opposed to using a deductive approach, where the researcher uses a pre-established framework of themes in which to fit the data (Patton, 2002, p. 453).

Ethical Considerations

Prior to conducting the research I submitted an ethics proposal to the UNBC Research Ethics Board (see Appendix H) for approval. No interviews were conducted prior to receipt of the Board’s approval. During the interview process I ensured that I explained to the participants the purpose of the research as well as the risks and benefits of participating. I outlined how their confidentiality would be maintained; explained their right to stop the interview at anytime and/or have their information excluded from the final analysis. I ensured that all participants were capable of understanding the implications of participating in this research; and that each participant signed a consent form prior to starting the interview.

Recruitment of Participants

For this study the recruitment of participants was undertaken using criterion as well as chain sampling. “The logic of criterion sampling is to review and study cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (Patton, 2002, p.238). I used criterion

sampling to ensure that all participants were teachers who had taught within School District 57 and had experienced, in the span of their career, detecting and reporting a least one case of suspected parental child abuse to authorities. I used chain (sometimes known as “snowball”) sampling to locate additional “information-rich key informants or critical cases” (Patton, 2002, p.237), by asking teachers who they would recommend I speak with regarding the subject. Creswell (2007) describes the process of chain sampling as “identifying cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich” (p.127). I began to locate participants by contacting teachers that I know, providing them with a copy of the participant recruitment letter (Appendix A) outlining the purpose of the study. I expanded the sample by asking both potential and agreed upon participants to recommend others for interviewing.

Data Collection

My data collection consisted of six semi-structured interviews that I personally conducted and transcribed. Although this is a very small sample of teachers, purposeful sampling ensured that all interviews were information-rich cases. Keeping the number of interviews within these boundaries enabled me to collect in-depth information from each participant. Due to the small sample size, this study is not intended to be representative of the entire population of teachers in BC. Using a qualitative method generated insight into what enables teachers to detect child abuse and report, as well as informed me of the physical as well as the emotional concerns the participants had encountered both during and after the detecting and reporting process.

To obtain the required data, I constructed an interview in two sections. The first section collected demographic and background characteristics such as sex of participant, age, and grade(s) taught by the participant, and number of years employed in the teaching profession (see Appendix B). This general participant description form enables me to identify and describe the interview samples in any subsequent publication of study findings.

The second section is a semi-structured interview (see Appendix C). This type of interview is a qualitative method of inquiry that utilizes a pre-determined set of open questions. This provided an opportunity for me to explore particular themes or responses further, yet the questions did not limit my participants to a set of pre-determined answers such as a quantitative questionnaire does. An additional reason for using this type of interview is that all my participants answered the same questions, which ensured that data is complete for each person on all the topics that were addressed in the interview. This made it easier to compare responses across the six interviews during the analysis process. I included probes and follow-up questions within the interview outline. As suggested by Patton (2002) I used these probes to give clues to the participant about the type of response that I was looking for, or, to encourage participants to deepen their responses.

The setting. I contacted the participants I had selected and once they had agreed to be interviewed for the study I set up an appointment to meet. The participants chose a variety of places to meet. One interview took place in an office; two participants were interviewed at home; two chose to be interviewed in coffee shops and one at a restaurant. Initially I intended to conduct interviews with six to eight participants. However I believe that saturation occurred within six and that conducting more interviews was unlikely to

have yielded new data. Saturation is when “gathering fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties” (Creswell, 2014, p.189).

Data Analysis

Within this study I explored both the individual perception of each teacher as well as the commonalities of the group experience. Data analyzed consisted of six transcribed, one-on-one interviews with teachers who have directly experienced reporting parental child abuse in the past. I personally transcribed the interviews which allowed me to become familiar with the data.

Based on the applied thematic analysis (ATA) approach, I did not create themes based solely on the findings of previous research identified within the literature review. I read and reread the data for patterns that related to my participants’ experiences of reporting child abuse. As suggested by Guest et al., (2012), I then used the interview questions as a starting point and developed a set of preliminary codes based on the questions. This ensured that the intent of the data collection process and the outcome of that process matched. I then extracted text that was applicable to the codes from each interview and placed it under each of the codes. At this point I colour coded the text segments so I knew which participant had said each text segment. This enabled me to perform an analysis of each interview separately as well as allowed me to compare responses to each code across interviews later. I then clustered all the text segments from all six interviews under the applicable codes.

As suggested by Guest et al. (2012) I counted the number of participants whose comments were placed under a particular code in order to summarize and describe the

patterning in the data (p. 132). Codes that appeared multiple times in the data and that were spoken to by all six participants became themes and codes spoken to numerous times by more than three participants became sub-themes. In this manner I measured the frequency of the themes and sub-themes and determined whether the code had enough information from enough participants to be included in the final analysis. The codes that were determined to be robust were used in the final analysis. There was one exception to this frequency count. In the case of the sub-theme positive known outcomes, only two participants spoke of having a positive outcome to a report regarding abuse. I felt documenting the outcomes related to these reports was important to the overall intent of the analysis, even though a positive outcome was experienced by only two participants. As such, the decision was made to include the sub-theme in the final write-up.

The overall analysis objective at this stage was to compare data across the six interviews looking for similarities and differences in the participants' experiences of detecting and reporting suspected CAN situations. By using the techniques of repetition and constant comparison to analyze the code clusters I was able to identify thematic cues (Guest et. al., 2012, p.66). I looked for significant phrases and patterns in the participants' responses across interviews to use for the development of themes. After this process was complete I was able to identify three main themes that were relevant to the research objectives. Each of the identified themes had been discussed by all the participants although each had their own experience of the theme. As pointed out by Guest et al., (2012), "a single theme can engender multiple codes" (p. 52). This was the case within my analysis and I identified several sub-themes which emerged within each of the three broad themes as I read and reread the text segments under each broad theme. I then

placed as applicable, the text segments originally coded to the broad theme under one of the sub-themes I had uncovered.

Over a three-month period, I checked for coding discrepancies by reading and rereading the text and recoded the text segments under the codes using the codebook I had developed. I did this exercise three times over the space of three months as suggested by Guest et al. (2012), “in order to negate any temporary distorting effects immersion in the data can cause” (p.92). In this manner I have sought to ensure that the text segments are coded accurately. I also did the same procedure with the codes, checking to ensure that the codes were placed under an applicable theme. The first check revealed that some of my text segments overlapped into multiple codes, so I revised my codebook, expanding it to include additional codes under which some of these overlapping text segments could be coded. This solved the issue of the overlap of text segments within the codes as well as the addition of the new codes that created additional themes, which I incorporated into the codebook as they emerged. At the end of this process I added an additional three themes bringing the final total to six. These themes are: Knowledge; Training; Reporting; Known Outcomes of Reports; Unknown Outcomes of Reports; and Follow-up.

Once I could clearly define what all my themes and sub-themes were and could describe their scope and content I moved to the next phase, producing the report. I outlined the story of my data in a way that shows the merit of the study as well as the validity of my analysis. Data extracts are used in the final write-up to show the reader evidence of the themes and sub-themes within the data.

Methodological Integrity

According to Guest et al. (2012), there are many alternate terms that have been created in the field of qualitative inquiry to replace the terms validity and reliability, which are thought to be “born of the quantitative tradition” (p.83). The term credibility, which is the one I have chosen to use within this study, is the most commonly used term in qualitative inquiry for the quantitative term validity. Credibility refers to “the confidence in the truth of the findings, including an accurate understanding of the context” (p.83).

In place of the term reliability, a term used in quantitative inquiry, I will be using the commonly employed qualitative term dependability. The term dependability “refers to whether the research project is consistent and carried out with careful attention to the rules and conventions of qualitative methodology” (Guest, 2012, p.83).

All research processes need to be transparent. “Transparency of process is critical to making a convincing case for the validity of one’s findings and interpretations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.278). I have included procedures that create transparency regarding my data processes.

Credibility and transparency. As suggested by Guest et al., (2012), to improve the quality of output and to assess the credibility of my thematic analysis, I followed the procedures as set out by Charmaz (2006, p.99), listed below.

- Has your research achieved intimate familiarity with the setting or topic?
- Are the data sufficient to merit your claims? (Consider the range, number and depth of observations contained in the data.)

- Have you made systematic comparisons between observations and between categories?
- Do the categories cover a wide range of empirical observations?
- Are there strong logical links between the gathered data and your argument and your analysis?
- Has your research provided enough evidence for your claims to allow the reader to form an independent assessment – and agree with your claims?

By using these procedures I managed to “decrease the likelihood of making critical mistakes and unfounded leaps of logic”, as well as to “increase the degree of transparency” within my study (Guest et al., 2012, p.85).

Intercoder agreement. According to Guest et al., (2012), “an individual can serve as both the primary and secondary coder by reviewing some, or all, of her own coding after some time has passed since the first round of coding” (p.92). As I was the only coder for this research project I checked for coding discrepancies by reading and rereading the text and recoded the text segments under the codes using the codebook I had developed. I did this exercise three times over the space of three months as suggested by Guest et al. (2012), “in order to negate any temporary distorting effects immersion in the data can cause” (p.92). In this manner I have sought to ensure that the text segments are coded correctly. I also did the same procedure with the codes, checking to ensure that the codes were placed under an applicable theme. The first check revealed that some of my text segments overlapped into multiple codes, so I revised my codebook. I expanded the codebook to include additional codes under which some of the overlapping text segments could be coded. This solved the issue of the overlap of text segments within the

codes as well as, the addition of the new codes created additional themes that I then incorporated into the codebook as they emerged.

Member checking. I also incorporated into my analysis, member checking to further ensure the credibility of my findings. Member checking “entails participants themselves or members of the participants’ community reviewing the summarized data to see if they accurately reflect their intents and meaning” (Guest et al., 2012, p.93). As such, I contacted my participants and discussed my findings with them. Although, some researchers feel that member checking actually distracts from the credibility of a study “since individual responses are not easily visible within the aggregated summary” (Guest et al., 2012, p.93), I, like Guest, disagree with this statement as my participants recognized within the summary the themes and the content that they had spoken to.

Audit trail. I also created an audit trail to enhance the credibility of my study. An audit trail is a transparent description of the research steps taken from the start of a research project to the development and reporting of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Using this technique throughout the process establishes dependability, showing that the findings are consistent (replicable) and could be repeated by another researcher. “Audit trails involve keeping track of and documenting the entire data analysis process” (Guest et al. 2012, p. 93). I monitored and reported my analytical procedures and processes as completely and truthfully as possible. To accomplish this I kept a journal where I recorded all my procedures and processes. My audit trail, as suggested by Guest et al., (2012) includes analytic activities such as: who transcribed and coded the transcripts; a record of all data included in the analysis and what was excluded as well as my reasoning for doing so; the method I used to apply codes and find themes; my codebook and any

changes I made to the codebook as I moved through the process; as well as the results of my coding checks and any changes I made to the coding process (pp.93-94). As part of my audit trail I also created a codebook.

To establish dependability, and reliability I reported my method and decisions for coding as well as my reasoning for developing themes that were uncovered during the analysis in a codebook. The codebook ensured that I used consistent labelling and interpretation for code development which will enable others to see the same codes and themes within the transcripts by using the method outlined in the codebook (Boyatzis, 1998, pp. 144-147). The audit trail also includes my taped interviews and transcripts, and interview protocol. My audit trail, as Guest et al., (2012), so clearly stated, will “let those who are interested in [my] research know how [I] got from A to B to C” (p.94). I believe that by utilizing my audit trail and codebook other researchers would have very similar results.

Using quotes. I incorporated quotes from my participants throughout the write-up to give voice to the participants and tell their story. The quotes from my participants will also supply readers with enough information to fairly judge the research findings. “Quotes lay bare the emergent themes for all to see” (Guest et al., 2012, p.95). As suggested by Guest et al., (2012), for some of the quotes I have “omitted the ‘ums’ and other non-essential speech elements as well as any superfluous text (which was replaced by the standard “...”)” (p.96) when quoting participants, but overall, I attempted to use quotes that could be included in the write-up verbatim.

Reflexivity. “Recognizing and reporting potential biases that might affect the analysis or subsequent interpretation is a commonly suggested strategy for enhancing validity in qualitative research” (Guest et al., 2012, p.97). Although Guest and colleagues propose the concept that all research is biased, including quantitative inquiry (pp.97-98), they also note that “good content coding and subsequent analysis and interpretation of the codes and code configurations are always tied to the raw data, what the participants actually said” (p.97).

Creswell (2014) suggests that a researcher needs to reflect on “how their role in the study and their personal background, culture, and experiences hold potential for shaping their interpretations, such as the themes they advance and the meaning they ascribe to the data” (p.186). To address this issue and to increase my awareness of any biased decisions I may be making, I began a reflective journal. Within the journal I wrote why I had chosen a theme, and why I had made my decisions on which text segments to extract from the data set. I did this in order to ensure I did not lean toward creating certain themes or actively look for text segments to support a certain position (my belief or value) or theme. I kept in mind my experience of being an investigator of teachers’ reports in the past and sought to ensure that I did not influence the data to reflect my view of the issue. I used my journal to reflect on what the participants had said and how they had said it and I included any insights I had and the reasons for my methodological decisions.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

This chapter presents the results of this research study which examined the experience of detecting and reporting cases of suspected parental child abuse for six teachers in northern BC.

Participants' quotations used within this chapter were edited for confidentiality purposes and ease of reading. Words such as "yah" and "um" and repeated words were removed and replaced with ellipses. Participants are not identified by pseudonyms and any mention of school names or identifiers were omitted to increase anonymity and maintain confidentiality for both the participants and their students.

This chapter identifies the six themes: Knowledge, Training, Reporting, Known Outcomes, Unknown Outcomes, and Follow-up and explores the multiple sub themes that emerged from the analysis of the six interviews conducted for this study. This is the participants' story.

Participant Description

The participants for this study were all females who had taught within School District 57 for a minimum of ten years. They have, during their careers, all detected, multiple times, what they considered to be indicators of possible situations of parental child abuse or neglect. As a result, all of the participants have made reports to the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) during their careers, multiple times, with varying results. All participants possess a minimum of a Bachelor of Education Degree, with two having a Master's Degree as well. They varied in their

number of years of teaching from 10 years in the field to over 40 years of experience in the classroom. Two of the respondents are currently instructors in School District 57 high schools, one participant has taught within the district at both the elementary and high school level, while three participants are teachers in elementary schools in the district. All participants met the criteria set out for the study and had previously reported suspicions of parental child abuse of children in their classrooms to MCFD for further investigation.

Knowledge

The first theme, Knowledge, has seven sub-themes: Knowledge When Applying to University, Knowledge When Entering the Classroom, Current Knowledge on Child Abuse, Current Knowledge on MCFD Standards of Child Abuse, Current Knowledge on Reporting to MCFD, Current Knowledge on SD 57 Reporting Protocol, and Knowledge of BC's Child Abuse Reporting Laws.

Knowledge when applying to university. When deciding to enter the teaching profession five of the six participants had very limited awareness of child abuse and neglect issues. They did not consider they would be expected to play a major role in detecting and reporting parental child abuse situations within their classrooms.

One participant had heard of child abuse but had grown up in a family where abuse was not a factor enabling her to “not give it much thought” during her university days. In this study only one participant entered the teaching field with awareness that detecting and reporting child abuse and neglect (CAN) “was likely going to be a part of my career, a part of something I would have to do”.

Knowledge when entering the classroom. After graduation the participants felt they entered the classroom (all more than 10 years ago) without enough information for what was expected of them and with limited knowledge to perform their duty in this area. The participants did not feel that their university programs had furthered their knowledge base in either detecting or reporting child abuse to the extent they would require.

One teacher shared her thoughts on how university (albeit more than 10 years ago) had enhanced her knowledge on the subject and had somewhat prepared her for entering the classroom but felt that the training could have been expanded to include additional information that would have been useful to her.

I don't think it was enough looking back. ... I truly believe we need to learn more in the education program cause what constitutes abuse right? Like, I mean people tend to think abuse is physical, it doesn't necessarily have to be.

And another felt that she also lacked enough knowledge on child abuse indicators when she entered the classroom more than 20 years ago. She stated her knowledge on detecting and reporting was:

Not enough, not enough, not enough, not even nearly enough. If you've never had any experience yourself I don't think...it's a lot harder. If you've come from a good family and you've never been neglected or emotionally abused or physically abused you don't always recognize it. You just think sometimes "oh that kids just being a brat", you don't recognize the acting out as such and I find that there needs to be a lot more on that.

The participants expressed that their knowledge on how and when to report suspected abuse was also lacking when the participants started to teach in the field. At the time they were hired to work for the school district the participants were informed that they would need to report any suspicions they had that a child may be experiencing some form of abuse. An outline of the process involved in making a report was supplied in written form to half of the participants at the time they were hired and prior to them making a report. The other half of the participants in this study were told they needed to report if they suspected a child was experiencing abuse but had not received instructions on what paperwork was required to be filled out until after they had made a report. As one participant stated:

it's glossed over. It's just like, 'oh and if you ever have to make a report this is what you do with that' "... There isn't a structured seminar that I know of and I have been teaching for 10 years.

Another participant found reporting to be quite a scary experience due to her lack of training on how to report:

Well, when I first started, it's scary, it's scary because they don't really provide you at first ummm your not provided with this information upfront, it's in the book, you know policy whatever but the first time you do it you have to basically go seek out okay how am I supposed to do this?

In all cases the information on how to make a report had been supplied to the participants by their principal or by school administration staff.

Current knowledge on child abuse. All the participants responded that they acquired additional knowledge on child abuse indicators over the years from a variety of sources beyond what was learned from their B.Ed. program or SD57 programming. One participant explained that if she had not had support of others in her personal life that had training in the social work field she would have been “lost” when it came to detecting the subtler indicators of abuse and knowing when to report.

Two participants reported they had returned to university and taken additional courses which dealt with the indicators of child abuse. Other popular sources of information on the subject identified by the participants included; attending seminars (4), reading literature on the topic (3), engaging in discussions with colleagues (6), and their years of professional experience (6).

Due to the information garnered from these additional sources of information over the years one respondent felt they currently have a moderate level of knowledge, while five felt they have acquired a substantial level of knowledge on indicators of child abuse and neglect.

Current knowledge on MCFD standards of child abuse. All the participants responded that they have acquired information on MCFD standards of what constitutes child abuse and neglect over the years from a variety of other sources as well. These additional sources of information on the subject identified by the participants included; engaging in discussions with colleagues (4), taking additional university courses (3), and reading literature on the topic (2). Due to the information garnered from these additional sources of information over the years, three respondents felt they currently have a

moderate level of knowledge of MCFD standards on what constitutes child abuse and neglect, while the remaining respondents (three) feel they have acquired a substantial level of knowledge in this area. One participant noted that in the beginning of her career “it would have been good to have someone who formally sat down and said these are the indicators that you look for...because I know that I missed things, you know, that things just went over my head.”

Other participants echoed this sentiment stating they too would recommend that some type of formal training occur for teachers, especially new teachers, in the areas of detecting and reporting. Some teachers expressed that had they received formal training on the indicators of child abuse, they may have detected and reported earlier in their careers.

Current knowledge on reporting to MCFD. All the study participants at the time this study was conducted, had made reports to MCFD during their careers and noted that their years of professional experience making reports had contributed to their knowledge on the subject.

They did acknowledge that the system had changed over their 10+ years in the field from reporting to the principal to now, reporting directly to MCFD workers by phone and then informing the principal and administration of the call. They also acknowledged that they were unsure what changes, if any, had occurred within the university curriculum across Canada that might now have improved on the level of training teachers receive on indicators and reporting within the B.Ed. program. As one participant noted:

I've been teaching for a long time so I don't know what the official stance is in terms of teacher training but I would hope that it would be really thorough to go beyond just here's a pamphlet on what child abuse is and you must report it...which is essentially what I got (*over 20 years ago*). I would think that a lot of work should be done on the indicators of child abuse.

Current knowledge on SD 57 reporting protocol. None of the participants have received to date, any formal training on the reporting process from the school district. In spite of this, five of the participants felt that their current knowledge of the School District 57 reporting policy was substantial. Participants reported they had acquired their knowledge on this topic from several sources that included; discussions with colleagues (5), professional experience (4), reading literature concerned with the topic (3), and attending seminars (3). One participant felt that their level was only moderate although they had attended seminars and discussed the topic with colleagues. This participant felt that although they currently had only a moderate level of understanding on the topic, administration was very helpful in directing them through the process when required.

Knowledge of BC's child abuse reporting laws. All the teachers in this study acknowledged repeatedly that they were required by legislation and school district policy to report to MCFD any suspicions they may have of a child being abused and/or neglected. They all acknowledge that reporting to MCFD regarding any suspicions is mandatory; as such they do not feel they get to make a choice. They also expressed that they felt morally, ethically, and emotionally obligated to seek assistance for the child involved.

Summary. In the beginning of their careers the participants did not feel very knowledgeable on detecting indicators or reporting situations of possible child abuse. All the participants after 10+ years of teaching are now currently aware of the reporting laws and felt they had moderate to substantial knowledge on what constitutes abuse. The participants agreed that their years of working in the field have increased their knowledge of both the indicators of CAN and when a report is required.

Training

The second theme, Training, has two sub-themes: Training on Child Abuse and Reporting During University and Training by SD57 on Child Abuse and Reporting.

Training on child abuse and reporting during university. All of the participants in this study had obtained their B.Ed. degree over 10 years ago. At that time they did not feel they were made aware by the teaching program of their role in keeping children safe or working with protective services to break cycles of abuse. None of the participants had been required to enroll in a course in any of the varied universities they attended that was specific to recognizing CAN indicators or reporting protocols while pursuing their Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.). As one participant noted:

Not as a student teacher I think they may get more now but I certainly wasn't trained, there was no course that I took on how to identify you know, emotional abuse, physical abuse in children and when to make the call. You know. It was just if you suspect it is your duty to call, err on the side of caution that was basically what we had to do.

Some participants felt they were ill prepared, due to the lack of university courses available to them within B.Ed. programs; specifically, they identified a lack of course content which focused on how to detect and report CAN situations with confidence. As one teacher, who has been in the field for over 20 years, stated;

In school they didn't deal with child abuse at all, and then when I got to the high school and started meeting the kids and knowing the kids I didn't ..., there weren't any workshops really any ...kind of information presented ...to talk about child abuse...it was just sort of underlying you know.

One participant did not recall exactly what type of training she had received but felt "there must have been discussions, but it must have been brief and it was, this is the protocol and you don't have to worry, just do this and that's all you have to do."

One participant noted that 20+ years ago when she acquired her B.Ed., the university she attended in Eastern Canada, did nothing to prepare teaching students emotionally for the eventuality of actually encountering a student that was being abused. This participant described what it was like to see an abused child:

It's an experience to see it in front of you. To see someone show you their arms where they'd been whipped and bruised and broken open and say there's even a younger child at home in a crib that's been hit too. And it's different to see it in person than it is to read it in a book. And you can read it all you want, when you see that little face in front of you, that tiny, tiny person and it's different.

Training by SD 57 on child abuse and reporting. None of the participants were formally trained by the school district on child abuse and neglect indicators when they

were hired. They all agree that they were told when they were hired within the school district that they were mandated to report if they suspected that a child was being abused.

I've been teaching for a long time so I don't know what the official stance is in terms of teacher training but I would hope that it would be really thorough and to go beyond just here's a pamphlet on what child abuse is and you must report it...which is essentially what I got. I would think that a lot of work should be done on the indicators of child abuse.

The participants in this study have all detected and reported suspected parental child abuse multiple times in their careers. They felt that the training offered by the school district on detecting child abuse was inadequate for what they would encounter. One participant felt that the information they received "was just sort of skimmed over and at no point were social workers brought in to, like a seminar or anything...we weren't given any kind of formal information".

Participants felt like they were hired to teach in a classroom setting without the tools required to carry out their mandated duties in this area and as one participant stated, "it is on the job training".

Five of the six participants have still not received any formal training from any school district on how to detect indicators of child abuse and neglect throughout their careers. One participant did indicate that she had been formally trained in the Care Kit early on in her career while working within a different school district. She stated that "there was the care kit that we were to do that with our young children starting in elementary." This training had "provided a lot of child abuse information" ...and "it was

always redone every year.” The participant made note that the training was for indicators observed in young children and as such was not necessarily transferable to high school children an area she now teaches in. She stated that “much more training with the subtler aspects of the behavior would be good for high school teachers because I don’t think they would recognize it as easily”.

The other teachers who taught at the elementary level within School District 57 did not mention they had ever received this particular training.

None of the participants had been formally trained in how to make a report of suspected child abuse while working for SD57. One participant outlined her training experience as:

We were given a sheet of paper that said, you know, if you have suspected child abuse in your class, this is what you do, these are the steps you follow and so in that sense it was clear, it was concise, it was laid out.

Another had a different training experience:

I think the counselor and principal trained me how to do it, but it’s not a formal training. It’s more you go and say this is happening and they say this has to be reported, here’s the form, this is how you do it, and this is where you file the form and this is who you phone.

And yet another shared her training in reporting child abuse situations as “I think a booklet came out with procedures “...” we were supposed to have on the wall in our classroom and if you go to child abuse it tells you what you’re supposed to do.”

The participants indicated that, although they have reported to MCFD in the past, with school district administration guiding them through the process, they would have preferred to have some formal training on the process of reporting prior to actually making a report.

Summary. The participants agreed that they would have preferred to have had formal, ongoing training in both detecting and reporting child abuse as opposed to learning “on the job”.

Reporting

Theme three is Reporting, which has two sub-themes: Why and When Teachers Report and Emotions Connected With Making a Report.

Why and when teachers report. These topics were spoken to by all the participants within this study. Each of the participants very clearly articulated at some point throughout the interview why and when, they personally, made decisions on the need to report.

As to why they reported, participants indicated they did so for the following reasons: due to their knowledge of the duty to report laws enshrined within the school district policy; due to their moral and ethical boundaries; to provide aid for the child and; they reported in an attempt to prevent the perpetrator from continuing to abuse the child. As one participant explained:

“...” in the end, this is like a year, six seven year old, eight year old they can’t defend themselves, they don’t know what to do, this may have been what they’ve

lived through since birth, it's all they know, they don't know there's another life out there. So.....what I have to do I have to do. And you know what I'm sure that sometimes it works not to their benefit ...but I have to do what I have to do. It is.....well it is my job too I'm supposed to be there to help protect them you know.....first line of defense.

Another spoke of her reasons for reporting as:

"..." I always try to view it as I'm here to help the kids and I am one of their support systems so if I feel, I mean, by law all of us have to decide if we've been put into a situation where we suspect anything, we need to call. Morally it's the right thing to do and myself as a teacher I'm bound by my ethics, I have to call so. I try to just put my feelings aside because it's about the child so. My thought is my children or the family need some help so it is my job to go to the system and see if they can get some help.

Several participants also noted their legal duty to report as: "it became law to have to report, you have to report by law." and "..." it's very clear the law says when one has to report.", as well as "But the rules are pretty specific so you just follow what it tells you to, there's no I wonder if I should" and finally "If you suspect, you phone, it is your duty."

Participants within this study also spoke of when they reported as being every time: they suspected a child was being abused or neglected; they saw indicators of abuse such as bruises; a child appeared to not have access to sufficient food or appropriate clothing; a child disclosed abuse; a child was absent from school often or for extended

periods of time or; when a child displayed combinations of indicators of abuse such as flinching, being depressed, suddenly withdrawing from social activities and friends etc. One participant listed some of the common indicators that teachers report as: "... noticeable bruising,"..." a prolonged illness "...", lack of food "...", lots of absenteeism." Another added to the list: "I've called on neglect, situations where a child obviously is not getting fed, doesn't have shoes in the winter, and no clothing ..." While another participant stated: "I saw those bruises and I thought there's no way I'm letting this go any further."

It was clear that all the participants in this study were knowledgeable as to why they reported and clearly understood when they were motivated to report.

Emotions connected with making a report. When asked what it was like to make a report one participant responded with:

Do I ever feel satisfied....not really. Do I ever feel it's been successful...rarely.

Have I saved any child by reporting....I don't think so. I've made their lives more difficult sometimes "... it's been for me personally, yah it's hard, it's really a hard, hard decision. I usually do it in isolation ...that's why I guess I don't talk about it.

And another participant stated:

Frustration! I don't think I remember a time where I felt like it was resolved, and the child was made safer by my calls. Terrific frustration and worry, because I thought if social services isn't going to deal with this what hope does this kid have!??

Some are unsure if the report is necessary when getting ready to report: "Yah at first it's a tricky decision before you've ever done it before and you think what am I doing? Am I opening a whole can of worms, am I right? Is there really something going on?" While another expressed their concerns as:

It seems sometimes I struggle. Sometimes it feels like I'm doing the wrong thing cause I'm feeling...there's no guarantee about any of this. There's no guarantee that the person will be safe and there's no guarantee that when you report you're going to be safe either.

It became clear that detecting and reporting child abuse and neglect was an emotional journey for teachers. The teachers in this study feel a connection with their students that makes the journey at times a more difficult one to traverse. One participant explained her relationship with her students as:

it's a relationship with children and youth. People think it's just teaching and standing up in front of the class. You know those kids inside and out and it becomes personal and if, if you can grab somebody and address that piece it's hard on teachers because they know them more than you would if you were just standing up there being the teacher. You know the kid and so by the end of the year you know them really well. Sometimes you know them better than the parent does because you're a little bit objective...but I don't know...that's where I really get to know that person as a person.

While another expressed her relationship with the children and families as:

Some of my kids I've known for years right so I have a connection with the family and you don't want to sometimes break that trust with them and that connection that you've made , cause that's very important especially in inner city schools and I don't want to damage that.

All of the participants agreed that making a report of suspected parental child abuse is an emotional time for a teacher and they feared it could spell the end of the relationship with the child and/or family.

They could lose their home, their relationship with their family; they beg you not to tell, like they'll, it's hard when they're begging you don't tell. But you say I have to, and sometimes you risk the relationship with the youth because you have to report.

Although the decision to report is not simply the teacher's decision to make due to mandatory reporting laws, a teacher still needs to go through a process in order to place the call. The participants expressed that they can feel many different emotions while getting ready to call. One participant stated that when she phones:

I don't feel good about it when I have to phone MCFD but it isn't about me it's about the kids. Sometimes I feel guilty because sometimes when you call you're not always sure but I've had to make that decision that you have to err on the side of caution. Right? For the little person.

Another participant explained the process of making the report as:

it's difficult and it takes me a long time...I sit there in front of the phone just thinking and thinking am I doing the right thing...which is soooo crazy that you should have to think that waybut it doesn't really happen the way you think it should...it's not really happily ever after, that your saving some kidit doesn't happen that way...sometimes it gets real complex. Yah...so it's a difficult decision to come to.

They sometimes felt like a traitor for betraying the child's trust by reporting.

When reporting they worried as well, about possible outcomes that the child may face as a result of the report. They were fearful that the child may face repercussions or that the family would move in order to avoid an MCFD investigation causing the teacher to lose contact with the child. One participant expressed concern that a report may result in the child running away to live on the streets as she had witnessed this outcome for other children in the past. In one instance "the youth was reported and then they couldn't find her and I found her one day behind a dumpster and it was scary, there were two or three guys with her ..." couldn't get her back."

The process of reporting can be a cause of stress and concern for any teacher but that is only the start of their journey. The data showed several different outcomes that were possible as a result of a report by a teacher to MCFD.

Known Outcomes of Reports

Theme four, Known Outcomes of Reports, has four sub-themes: Impact of Known Positive Outcomes for Teacher & Child, Impact of Known Negative Outcomes

for the Teacher, Impact of Known Negative Outcomes for the Child, and No Action Taken by MCFD.

Impact of known positive outcomes for teacher and child. Of the 27 case scenarios of reporting that were shared with the interviewer during the six interviews, the teachers' spoke of three case scenarios where the teacher perceived making the report had a positive impact on the child's life. In one case:

Well this young girl went into care and she was at a foster home and she was looked after, her parents...her mother got help and her younger brother got taken out of the home as well until the step-father left. So what had happened was that it changed the whole dynamic in the home.

In another instance the teacher explained that "I think it was positive for the child as well...it was positive for me. I think it was positive for the child...cause she got into a home where they cared about her, and did things with her." And in the third case the teacher felt that "They [the protection workers] actually did go and do an investigation but it was done very respectfully."

Since the outcome was positive for the child, the teachers who had made the reports felt that they had experienced a positive outcome as well. They were in a relaxed state when relating their experiences to me.

Impact of known negative outcomes for the teacher. The results shared by the participants of the known outcomes of their reports tended to be overwhelmingly negative for both the child and the teacher. Of the 27 case scenarios of reporting that were shared with the interviewer during the six interviews, 24 were perceived by the

teacher as having negative outcomes. In all 24 cases the negative outcomes impacted the teacher. In 18 cases the reports negatively impacted the child directly ten times, and in eight cases the outcome was unknown for the child.

As the result of making a report some of the participants had been confronted by angry parents. As one participant pointed out:

other than a few altercations with parents "...". I just try to never get myself in that situation where I'm going to be alone. If I see a parent coming down the hallway and I've made a call, then I make myself go in another direction.

According to another participant there is some risk of physical harm "Definitely you put yourself at risk sometimes "...". There are some really scary people out there with kids in our school system." Still another stated:

It's a little scary you know, I just say that whoever made the call felt that the call needed to be made and if we need to pursue this then we need to go down to the office and have a conversation with our principal.

Parents making threats to harm the reporter was the only negative outcome that physically affected the participants. The remaining outcomes of reporting that were mentioned by the participants as negative were emotional in nature.

As one participant stated after recounting her experiences of reporting and witnessing negative outcomes for the child "So you get a bit jaded I guess but you get very empathetic and you get so you can spot things better. But it does take an emotional toll. Here I am blubbering away."

Many of the participants were taken aback at the amount of emotion they experienced while speaking on outcomes of past incidences. I have included an example from one participant who spoke in anger when discussing a past report. She stated “both children that were in that home are going to be abused again and badly, and nobody’s ever going to catch them, they should have gone to prison. I don’t know why I’m so emotional.”

The participants appeared to be frustrated and at times, discouraged and fearful when relating experiences that had negative outcomes for the children involved in the report. “I say well what are you going to do about it and they say, I don’t know they do this all the time, this is what they do, they move every time they’re caught.”

The participants appeared to be in an agitated state when relating their experiences to me. They used words like angry, frustrated, discouraged, and fearful to describe their emotional reaction to the outcomes of their reports.

Impact of known negative outcomes on the child. When an investigation is conducted by MCFD, participants reported that the impact on the child is overwhelmingly negative. The participants shared examples of the known negative outcomes for children they have witnessed during their careers. These outcomes included; the child “being scooped up” and removed from the family unit by MCFD and placed in foster care; the child being blamed by the non-abusive parent for splitting up the family; the child made to feel the abuse was their fault as they were being “bad”; the child being told by MCFD social workers and others they believe the child is lying about the abuse; the child facing possible punishment from the abuser for telling the teacher of

the abuse; the abusive parent moving and taking the child somewhere where they had no friends or connections to aid them; the child being threatened by the abuser; the child being left by MCFD with the abuser and the abuse or neglect continuing unabated; or, for the older children, being rejected by their abusive parents and ending up on the streets as a result of sharing their story with teachers who make reports. The teachers continued to use words like helpless, and fearful to describe their emotional reaction to the known negative outcomes for the children involved. Some were angry and felt that MCFD had failed to do their duty in providing protection to the child.

No action taken by MCFD. One participant summed up her thoughts with the statement: "It's been frustrating and scary because I think the kid's in imminent danger sometimes and nothing happens."

All participants have experienced a variety of outcomes after making a report. Participants were aware that sometimes a report to MCFD results in an investigation and sometimes not. As one participant stated "making a report doesn't always mean that something is going to happen."

This varied response by MCFD often caused the participants a degree of frustration and in some cases anger or fear when the teacher felt that the child involved may be in imminent danger. "When you're working with these kids, you know how vulnerable they are. What else can you do, you know and you're begging them, please look into this; do something." So, although the teacher has gone through the process of making a report to MCFD, they are faced with the very real possibility that no action will be taken to change the child's situation. The participants reported that when their reports

are not acted upon by MCFD the result was continued negative outcomes for the child. Sometimes this created additional stress for the teacher and resulted in the teacher having to make multiple reports to MCFD of further occurrences of suspected abuse or neglect involving the child.

They reported and reported it and reported on this little girl that she shouldn't be in this home "... No, we still phone! Oh yah! That's why we had, like 26 calls about the one little girl "... most of my reports were on the same kids. Like I may have made 40 or so reports but it would have been on four kids.

The participants spoke of eight instances where they had made a report which resulted in no action being taken by MCFD. The participants expressed their frustration and discouragement with statements such as "nothing happened, the kid was still there, didn't have shoes, didn't have winter clothing."

The participants were frustrated and even fearful at times as they recounted the instances where children were left in situations of possible abuse with no investigation done. Some were confused as to why MCFD did not follow through on the call. Some expressed discouragement with the lack of action.

When you report and you see nothing happening or they never get back to you or you perceive nothing's happening you...what's the point? What is the point? You're getting yourself in trouble; you're getting your colleagues maybe upset with you and for what? Nothing... you know cause nothing seems to happen you know so...

Unknown Outcomes of Reports

Theme five, Unknown Outcomes of Reports, includes two sub-themes: Impact of Unknown Outcomes on the Teacher and Coping.

Impact of unknown outcomes on the teacher. All participants felt emotional during the interview when discussing past experiences of detecting and reporting child abuse. Some were particularly emotional when discussing reports with unknown outcomes. One participant summed up her emotions on unknown outcomes as:

I mean it's upsetting in sitting here reflecting about it they're not highlights in my career especially because I don't know what happened, I don't know what the outcome was. If I knew that the child was safe and you know things worked out for that kid then...yah it was great thing but...I don't know if it was a great thing. I did my job, I followed the law, and I'm hoping the abuse or neglect or whatever stopped. But I don't know. But I do know that families were torn apart. That's not a great feeling.

The teachers in the study expressed serious concern for children who just disappeared or were transferred by parents to other schools after the teacher had filed a report with child protective services. There were multiple instances (8) mentioned by different participants where the child left the classroom and never returned after a report was made to MCFD. As one participant stated "one day they just don't come back "... you may never know (where they went) and you have no clue what happened to that child."

Another participant was also concerned with the disappearance of children after a report has been made. She stated: "Most of my worst cases of child abuse just disappeared and I never hear again whatever happened to them. Those are the ones that haunt you for a long time after, cause I'm still haunted by some of mine."

In these cases no follow-up information on the outcome of the report had been made available to the teacher. These teachers were very emotional expressing sadness, and grief at the loss when recalling examples of reports they had made where the child just disappeared. For many participants the mood was melancholy as they openly wept when recalling incidents where they had lost contact with the child with no follow-up as to the outcome of the report. For one participant it was a sad memory, she said "of course like there's two or three kids you worry about the rest of your life, but (crying and long pause)."

Their strong emotional reaction to the incident they were discussing was surprising to them as they had no idea they were still troubled by "something that happened a long time ago".

Yah it's hard, it's really a hard, hard decision. I usually do it in isolation ...and then you don't even get to know. That's why I guess I don't talk about it, I didn't actually know that I was carrying all this until I felt this strong reaction, I'm surprised actually.

The participants expressed concern for the child who just disappeared and a longing to know what had happened for the child as a result of the report. Unlike when they were discussing known negative outcomes, which evoked anger and frustration at

times, these cases elicited feelings of helplessness; anxiety; and sadness as well as continued worry and fear for the safety and well-being of the child.

Coping. Some participants were moved to tears when discussing reports where they had not been told, or not discovered on their own, the outcome for the child.

You know they're injured or you know, like abused victims and you don't get to ever know what happened orI don't know where I was going with that (nervous laugh)....it's just such a personal profession...it's not as...you know....as cold as people might think so it takes a toll.

Some of the participants acknowledged that they try not to think about past experiences as it only causes them stress and some participants felt it caused them at times to question their duty to report, although they were quick to point out that they have and always will, continue to report any suspicions they may have to MCFD.

One participant who had managed to have follow-up on all reports she had made due to personal connections within MCFD, was the only participant who did not express unresolved feelings of worry or concern for children connected to past reports she discussed during the interview. The lack of "knowing the outcome" may impede the teachers' ability to experience closure, prolonging the worry, fear and anxiety the teacher feels concerning the possible outcome the child may have experienced as a result of the report.

Some participants employed the strategy of pushing the worry to the back of their minds so they do not dwell on it. As one participant stated: "You have to leave it alone...

you have to leave it after that. You can't worry everyday about every kid when they go home otherwise you go insane."

Others took a strong stance and justified their reporting to themselves in spite of the negative outcomes they observed. One participant said:

You just tell yourself that you're doing the right thing so you just get up and do it again, you're doing the right thing and being all weepy and stuff doesn't help anybody, doesn't help the kids. If I didn't do it who would do it?

In many cases the participants are unable to discover the outcome of their report. Rarely does the teacher have a social worker call them with an update on the outcome of the report.

Follow-up

The sixth and final theme, Follow-up has two sub-themes: Lack of Feedback on Reports and Relationship with MCFD.

Lack of feedback on reports. The negative impact of not receiving follow-up on a teacher's emotional state was discussed throughout the previous section. Not knowing the outcome for the child appears to prolong the worry, fear and anxiety the teacher feels concerning the possible outcome the child may have experienced. None of the participants in this study had ever been contacted by an MCFD child protection worker to update them on a report they had made. They expressed that it was important to them personally to have some follow-up after making a report.

I would like to knowabout follow-up. If I'm going to betray a child's, it's not really betraying because your protecting them but...if you're going to betray a child's trust and then not have any idea of what's going on, it's horrendous so I would like to know what is happening to the child.

Another participant also spoke of her desire to have follow-up as:

perhaps a follow-up phone call, it doesn't have to be anything grand, can even leave a message with the secretary. Just so I feel better that...you know, I made the right call. Always like to know, did I make the right call.

All of the participants mentioned that there was no information willingly relayed to them concerning the outcomes of their reports to MCFD. One participant who had received information concerning all her reports had sources within MCFD who would give her some feedback due to relationships outside of their professional lives. The other five participants were unable to obtain follow-up on their reports although some of them had contacted MCFD in an attempt to discover the outcome of their report. One participant spoke of her negative experience of phoning for follow-up from MCFD:

the one and only time that I called back to just ask how things went and is there anything that I need to know to be supportive, or helpful to the child in my classroom and I was basically told it was none of my business.

While another participant explained the lack of feedback made her feel that: "you don't ever know what happens. Yah...I guess that haunts you too. You...you make these reports and it's like phoning into an abyss and you never know what happens, if they even took you seriously."

All the participants understood the boundaries of confidentiality, as they themselves are bound to confidentiality as well, but they felt that some information should have been able to be shared. As one participant pointed out:

Just a sharing of questions, that I did the right thing and letting me know that positive changes are happening. It just seems nothing comes out of it. Maybe it's because we don't see it because we're still just teaching in our classroom. And you don't hear it. You never know.

One participant spoke of how having follow-up on reports can give teachers a sense of closure. She explained:

I think there should be some closure for the teacher. Like I mean I'm not saying you have to divulge any confidential details but say it's been taken care of, we're looking into it whatever blah, blah, blah, yah so...it would be nice.

Participants were concerned about what was happening for the child and whether reporting had made things better or worse for the children and families involved;

What happens after I've made the call. And how's the family doing, are they getting the services that they need realizing full well that social workers have huge caseloads umm..but is that family being looked after umm or is the family been completely shattered. Has it been time for the family to prepare? Ummm... it's not just an easy matter of making that call right? It's... What's going on?

What's the process the child's getting cause oftentimes the families turn against the child...and what happens then?

Relationship with MCFD. Some of the participants appeared to feel that there was a distinct disconnect between MCFD and the teachers. One participant explained:

sometimes I feel like it's us against them right, I'm right, your wrong and it shouldn't be like that. We all have our information about the child or the family and I feel that we need to share that more easily, so that we can make the best call.

One participant felt like the protection social workers were working towards a different goal than teachers. She stated:

Sometime you got the feeling of, some of the social workers almost seemed, well I guess some of them were the mom's social worker not the kid's social worker. And so they were advocating for the mom and we were advocating for the kids. So we were almost at...a...had different goals.

Participants expressed that they would like to work closer with MCFD protection workers in the future, and would like to see more social workers on staff in all schools throughout the district. One participant suggested:

There should be more working as partners maybe bringing them in. We're two separate agencies... maybe that would be interesting to have a team that specifically worked with the school so we all know who they were and we can learn how they work and then it would not be so scary to report and you could trust that they're going to take you seriously and take the reports seriously at some level.

All the participants in this study agreed that follow-up, however brief, was an important component that should be included in every reporting instance.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed account of each theme and sub theme that emerged from the data during the research process. Each theme focuses on the experience of the six participants who have, throughout their teaching careers, detected and reported suspected child abuse to MCFD. The six themes: Knowledge, Training, Reporting, Known Outcomes of Reporting, Unknown Outcomes of Reporting, and Follow-up create a picture of the, sometimes emotional, journey of teachers as they deal with helping children escape abuse. This chapter has brought together the voices of the six teachers who shared both their experiences and the myriad of emotions they encountered as a result of trying to ensure that the children in their classrooms received the type of care every child deserves.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The purpose of my research was to explore the experience of detecting and reporting suspected parental child abuse to child protection by six females who teach public school in northern British Columbia within School District 57. This research generated insight into what enables teachers to detect child abuse, why and when they report, as well as the emotions and concerns they encounter during and after making a report. The six themes that emerged from the data support some areas of the existing literature but also uncover some different concepts which are potentially areas for future research. The research points out implications for both the field of social work and education. The six themes discussed in the results section are: Knowledge; Training; Reporting; Known Outcomes of Reports; Unknown Outcomes of Reports; and Follow-up. This concluding chapter will review the limitations of the research, conclusions, and recommendations.

This study was conducted to gain an understanding of some of the complex issues identified by past researchers that teachers may face prior to as well as after making a report to authorities. I believe the findings reflect that I have achieved this goal within the boundaries of my ethics and concern for the well-being of my participants. The main conclusions are: 1.) teachers want to be trained in detecting and reporting child abuse prior to entering the classroom, 2.) detecting and reporting child abuse is an emotional journey for the reporter, 3.) teachers require support and debriefing, especially in cases where the outcome of the report is unknown, 4.) there is a need for teachers and MCFD

social workers to communicate and work together to ensure that the report is handled in the best interests of the child and that 4.) MCFD and the Ministry of Education need to collaborate and create opportunities for teachers to receive in-service training on child abuse indicators and reporting protocols annually.

Concerns Expressed Regarding Reporting

The literature review concluded that some of the barriers to reporting identified in multiple studies were a result of: teachers' concern about potential damage to the parent-teacher and teacher-child relationships (Beck et al., 1994; King, 2011); teachers lacked confidence in the child protection process (Beck et al., 1994; Choo et al., 2013; Smith, 2005; Tite, 1998); a teacher's fear of making an inaccurate report (Beck et al., 1994; King, 2011); fear of possible consequences to the child or to themselves if they were identified as the reporter (Beck et al., 1994; Choo et al., 2013; King, 2011; Smith, 2005; Tite, 1998; Walsh et al., 2005); and the child may be lying (Smith, 2005; Tite, 1998). These 'barriers' to reporting were all referred to as concerns by participants within my study. But the participants, as reporters of abuse, perceived the 'barriers' differently than non-reporters from previous studies, viewing them as concerns to be pushed past or even ignored in order to make the report as opposed to reasons for not reporting. More research in this area may reveal why participants in my research were able to overcome these concerns and report.

Knowledge on Child Abuse

Participants felt there was a decided lack of awareness by new teachers about issues of child abuse and neglect when they first started teaching. They noted that the

school district did not ensure that they had the level of knowledge required to detect child abuse when they were hired by the school districts to teach in their classrooms. Since all participants in my thesis research had been teaching in the field for over ten years, they had learned from several sources over time about the indicators of child abuse and neglect. They now perceive themselves as having a moderate or substantial level of knowledge in detecting child abuse due to acquiring additional knowledge on child abuse from sources aside from university or from SD57. The participants acknowledged that their knowledge in this area was woefully inadequate at the beginning of their careers and that they may have missed some of the indicators children displayed due to lack of knowledge.

Knowledge on Reporting Child Abuse

The respondents of this study indicated they were very aware of their legal, moral, and ethical duty to immediately report any suspicions of child abuse to MCFD.

Some participants did indicate that there had been changes to school district policy and reporting protocols throughout their careers concerning to whom they should report. In 2007 they had been told by administration, by way of text, and literature distributed by the school district, to make all reports directly to MCFD personnel as per the new SD57 policy. But studies by Smith in 2005, and King in 2011, both conducted in Ontario where the school district policy was changed in 2002, still found that 70% of Smith's participants continued to report to others, and 32% of King's participants indicated they were not aware to whom they should report. This appears to show that a change in protocol can take some time for full implementation. This could mean that there are still teachers in SD57 who may not know who to report to or who still report to

others. All participants in my study were experienced in reporting and had many years of experience in the field. Whether teachers who have never made a report or are new in the education field would have the same knowledge of reporting could be a subject for further exploration.

Training on Child Abuse and Reporting

As noted in the literature review, past studies found that the vast majority of teachers in the past received little or no training regarding child abuse during their time in the education program and that many had never been offered the opportunity to obtain the required information during in-service training once employed as teachers. The participants in this study noted there were no university courses, within the various B.Ed. programs they had attended across Canada, that they felt had been specifically designed to teach them what constituted abuse, the indicators of abuse, or the specific province's reporting protocols. Five of the six participants in the present study reported that they had received no formal training from the school district on how to detect indicators of child abuse and neglect throughout their careers.

Some participants in my study also indicated that at times they question their ability to accurately detect when a child is experiencing abuse. In the literature review, according to King (2011), this is not unusual. He found that only 36.5% of the teachers in his study "felt prepared or very prepared from their overall training in the area of child abuse to be able to detect and report suspected maltreatment" (p.80). Having knowledge on how to detect and report child abuse and neglect enables teachers to feel more certainty and report with more confidence. In the 1993 study by Beck on teachers'

reporting habits he concluded that “Degree of certainty that abuse was occurring accounted for a substantial amount of the variance in reporting intention, whereas personal opinions about the reporting law and system made a modest contribution in predicting reporting behavior” (p.iii).

Some studies, in the literature review, suggest that this lack of confidence in detecting can be improved by providing training to teachers, although other studies suggest that training a teacher does not always equate to increased detecting or reporting.

Some participants noted that training in the areas of detecting and reporting child abuse could have been greatly improved if all Canadian universities had, at the time, offered courses within the B.Ed. program which focused specifically on the topic and by the school districts hosting annual seminars on indicators of child abuse and reporting conducted by provincial child protection personnel. They felt this would have raised awareness on the issue of child abuse, especially for new teachers and would have trained all new and current teachers on possible indicators of child abuse.

Negative Outcomes

Negative outcomes impacted the reporters emotionally. The emotions and language used by the participants when discussing reports with unknown outcomes could indicate that these teachers suffer from symbolic loss. Katherine Walsh (2012), speaks of the cycle of grief and loss as not only being connected with a death. The cycle can also be triggered by other significant events in a person’s life, such as the loss of a relationship. When the loss is not connected to a death it is considered to be a symbolic loss. The person who experiences the loss often experiences feelings of anger, sadness, and guilt

much as someone grieving a death does. Often symbolic losses are not acknowledged as losses by others so the person who is grieving is not given the same kind or the same amount of support that is offered to individuals who have experienced a death. Even the individual who has experienced the loss may not recognize the event as such. "Symbolic loss is not always identified as a loss per se, so those who experience a symbolic loss may not realize they need to take time to grieve and deal with the feelings engendered by it" (Walsh, 2012, p.10). If symbolic loss is experienced by teachers as the result of unknown outcomes, then follow-up information on reports is crucial. Information on the investigation needs to be supplied to reporters so they can experience closure in regards to their reports. Although the fact that some participants may be experiencing symbolic loss cannot be proven in this study, it may be useful to note the possibility for future study.

Lack of Follow-up

Some teachers indicated that protection social workers have a role to play in the school system when it comes to dealing with child abuse issues. Some of the participants expressed that having a social worker they had a relationship with to discuss areas that concern them in regards to a child's behavior would make reporting 'easier'. To have support from a social worker would alleviate teachers having to make their decisions to report in isolation; they then would have 'an expert' to confirm that the situation was reportable. Participants expressed that when making reports they often felt that it would be helpful to make reports to a social worker who was connected to the school, understood the dynamics of the school, and could liaise with the MCFD protection team.

From my perspective I believe a social worker in the school could do information sessions with teachers and for students on abuse issues; build relationships with teachers and students; provide guidance for teachers who suspected child abuse situations; provide confidential debriefing and counseling for teachers as required; be involved in organizing safety plans for both the staff and students as required and; could liaison with MCFD workers and provide teachers with follow-up on their reports as applicable and appropriate.

Limitations

This study has a number of limitations. The small sample size and qualitative method means that the findings cannot be generalized to the larger population of teachers. The data collected was only from one northern school district and teachers may face different barriers in other northern school districts. For example, teachers in a very small community from a different district may indicate that family ties or knowing the family could create barriers to reporting, which is something that may be less likely to occur in a larger community like Prince George.

The sample may or may not be representative of School District 57 teachers overall as I did not go through the school district or union to recruit which would have given me access to a larger and possibly a more diverse population of teachers. This may also have given me access to males who have reported abuse as all the participants in this study are female. Having males in the study may have resulted in different perspectives being brought forward on some subjects.

This study is also limited in its ability to speak to the more recent experiences of teachers who have attended Canadian universities in the last decade. All the participants in this study had completed their Bachelor of Education at least ten years before participating in this research project, with one teacher having obtained their degree over 35 years prior to participating in the interview. As such, the participants' experiences in universities across Canada may not be the experiences of more recent graduates of Canadian universities. More research into what universities in Canada are currently teaching student teachers in the area of child abuse indicators and reporting protocols should be carried out in order to compare my participants' past experiences with more recent graduates' experiences.

Of a different nature were the limitations placed on this research due to ethical and legal concerns. As this study utilized interviewing as the data collection method, this meant that I was up close and personal with my participants and knew the identity of all the respondents. As such, during the data collection stage, I could not interview non-reporters or ask questions about any instances where teachers had not reported as I then would have been obligated by law and by my code of ethics to report them and the incident which they had discussed with me. Due to this limitation, the subject "rates of reporting" and "barriers to reporting" explored within my literature review could not be fully explored within this study. Although my participants did express many of the same concerns in regards to reporting as respondents did in the studies within the literature review, they still reported. I believe a quantitative study, where the participants were totally anonymous to the researcher would need to be used to explore these two areas further.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The main implications for social work practice and policy include: MCFD embracing strategies for effective relationship building with teachers and within schools; MCFD improving communication between protection workers and teachers by supplying, to the greatest extent possible, the outcome of reports; and MCFD and protection social workers working with the universities and school districts to conduct formal training on indicators of child abuse as well as when and how to report.

The main implications for educators and education policy include: supplying teachers with training opportunities annually; recognizing that teachers within the classroom need to be supported with training so they feel more confident in detecting indicators and making reports; enabling teachers to be supported on site by social workers trained in child protection issues who can provide follow-up and help with the process of making the report if required by the teacher; ensure that teachers are given on-site access to qualified staff with whom they can discuss, confidentially, their concerns and suspicions prior to making a decision to report; that teachers have access to debriefing and on-site counseling by a qualified staff member every time they make a report and after as requested by the teacher.

Training could increase knowledge in detecting and reporting which could lead to an increase in reports on children early in the abuse and neglect cycle. Providing support and tools to teachers to enable them to detect and report is crucial to identifying abuse and neglect as early in a child's life as possible. This study brings to light areas where the

Ministry of Education and MCFD could work collaboratively to provide support to teachers during the process of their identifying and reporting abused children.

In the area of training, there needs to be recognition by both Ministries that formal training is required in order to ensure that all teachers, in all BC schools, have knowledge of indicators of abuse and reporting protocols. This should entail the two ministries working in collaboration to create opportunities for teachers to receive adequate training supplied by MCFD personnel annually. This would be an important component of increasing safety for children, something which is a primary concern for both ministries involved.

By working together, the ministries could also ensure that teachers have access to a social worker on site, in every school, enabling teachers and children to be supported before, during, and after a report has been made. The on-site social worker would provide support to the teacher during the decision-making process prior to a report, provide the teacher with support to make the report if required, ensure the child is safe when a report is being made, provide the teacher with de-briefing if required, and liaise with protection workers to develop and implement plans which involve the teacher or school. They would also provide on-going support to the child and/or family as required serving as a link between the school, protection workers, and community services.

The current direction in the field of child protection is to provide support to children and families to change cycles of abuse and neglect as opposed to removal and foster placements as the only solution. A part of this direction should include MCFD embracing strategies for effective relationship building with teachers and community

service providers as a way to provide supports to children and families to break cycles. To achieve this goal there is a need to increase communication and relationships between social workers and teachers as well as a need to improve the current image within the community at large of what a social worker does when working with children and families. Schools and teachers can be an important component of the shift that is required in the public's perception of social workers as 'scary' and can instead lead children and the public to view social workers as a resource and supportive. Social workers based in a school can build trust and communication with children and their family members by providing them with information on resources to prevent or alleviate crisis situations. These workers could also act as 'interpreters' for children, teachers, and families during discussions with child protection workers. This would require social workers who, although trained in child protection, do not work within the field of child protection. Having social workers within the schools, interacting on a daily basis with school personnel and students could lead to proactive work with families and potentially break cycles of abuse and neglect early in a child's life.

Structural Social Work

This research was informed by a structural social work perspective. My findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research were influenced by and reflect a structural social work stance. Structural social workers sow the seeds of change at both personal and societal levels. From a structural standpoint my findings suggest that the current system of reporting has significant shortcomings in terms of supporting teachers to detect and report abuse and requires change.

School funding continues to be less than adequate. For example, few schools are able to hire in-house social workers who could liaise with child protection staff and provide support to teachers and students before, during and after reports are made. Similarly, according to participants in this study, in-house training for teachers is not regularly available.

Over the years, community service programs which served children and their families and were eyes and ears for child protection workers, have also become more limited in scope. The work that these agencies and services carried out that facilitated better detection of children who were at risk of abuse or neglect, appears to have been downloaded to the public school system. Inadequate funding of these community services has now put teachers on the front lines of child protection work and the task of detecting children who are abused and neglected is falling more and more on the shoulders of teachers and school administration in the province. As such, schools and teachers have become the crucial link between children and the child protection system. This means that teachers need the support and tools required to carry out the task that has been handed to them. Further, school districts require the necessary targeted funding that will allow needed training to be available to teachers along with on-site support and assistance for their employees who detect and report child abuse.

Conclusion

This study was successful at exploring why teachers do report. I believe that this study is unique in that it is, as far as I know, the first study to explore the emotions and concerns teachers in northern BC schools must overcome in order to report suspected

parental child abuse situations to child protection services. This research generated insight into: what enables teachers to detect and report child abuse; why and when they are motivated to report; the concerns they encounter during and after making a report as well as the emotional impact reporting can have on teachers.

I believe the content and form of this qualitative research complements the mainly quantitative studies that have been done to date on why teachers do not report. More qualitative research is required in this area to expand the number of voices of reporters. This would enable researchers to explore more fully any commonalities or differences in experience that reporters encounter. I believe a large study, utilizing a mixed methods approach should be used to further explore the subject of teachers' reporting and non-reporting habits as well as the emotions experienced by the teacher before, during and after making a report. This would allow us to paint a fully developed picture of what supports and tools teachers may require in order to detect and report child abuse. By knowing and supplying the supports and tools required to detect and report perhaps all teachers in the future could potentially become reporters.

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Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Letter

What is the experience of reporting suspected parental child abuse for teachers?

Participant Recruitment Letter

My name is Candace Miners and I am a Graduate student from the University of Northern British Columbia (School of Social Work). I currently hold a BSW and work in the field with children and youth. This announcement is to let you know about a research project I am conducting as partial fulfillment of a Masters of Social Work degree. My academic supervisor is Dawn Hemingway, Associate Professor in the UNBC School of Social Work.

I am hoping to examine the experiences of teachers who have made reports of suspected, parental child abuse to Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). While it is known that teachers encounter instances of suspected parental child abuse in their classrooms, what I do not know and would like to find out is the thoughts and feelings of teachers in Prince George when it comes to making a report to authorities. I would like to explore what the experience is like for you and if you experience any concerns before, during or after making a report.

I am looking for teachers, who have detected and reported to MCFD, cases of suspected parental child abuse. I would like to gain an understanding of your thoughts, feelings and any concerns or barriers you felt you encountered leading up to making the report, during the initial call to MCFD, and how you felt after you made the report to an MCFD Intake worker. To participate in an interview you need to be able to provide informed consent on your own behalf, have made a report to MCFD concerning a suspected case of parental child abuse, and be willing to share your experiences and thoughts about having made the report. For this project I will not be recruiting participants through any School District 57 school or through the BC Teacher's Federation union office. No recruitment will be undertaken nor letters or posters about project participation posted on any School District 57 property or in any union office. No interviews or recruitment will be conducted during the participants' hours of work nor will any interviews be conducted on School District 57 property. Participants in this study will be asked to confirm that they are participating as an individual contributing their personal knowledge and experience to this topic area and that they are not representing their place of employment. Participation in the research project will require attending a one-time, 60 minute interview, in a location where you are comfortable, to talk about the experience with me. You are also being asked to participate in an approximately thirty minute meeting at a later date, agreed upon by you, to check the completed transcript of your interview to ensure the transcript accurately reflects the interview. As a participant in this study you are not representing your place of

employment, rather you agree that you are participating as an individual contributing your personal knowledge and experience to this topic area.

I hope that the results of this study will ultimately help bring attention to the issue of child abuse in general and may serve to highlight concerns or barriers that teachers face in the field. Depending on the outcome of this study, there may be implications for practice for teachers in the district, for child protection services, and for school district administration. Additional information, from the teachers perspective, may aid policy makers in the development of future reporting protocols and ensure the response of child protective service teams are effective in meeting the needs of the teachers.

If you would like more information on how to become a participant please contact:

Candace Miners Email: minersc@unbc.ca Telephone: 250-960-5602

*If you would like to contact my faculty supervisor about the project: Dawn Hemingway
Email: Dawn.Hemingway@unbc.ca Telephone: 250-960-5694*

Appendix B: Background/Demographic Characteristics of Participant

1. Sex: Male__ Female__ Other__
2. Age __
3. Do you have children: _____
4. Total years of teaching experience _____
4. Highest Level of Education obtained: _____
5. Grade(s) Taught : Kindergarten__1__2__3__4__5__6__7__8__9__
10__11__12__
6. Self-perceived level of knowledge about indicators of child abuse:
 - a) Little__ Moderate__ Substantial__
 - b) Source of information (please check all that apply): Seminars__
Literature__ Discussion with colleagues__ Media__ University
courses__ Professional experience__ Other__
If "other", please describe

7. Self-perceived level of knowledge on Ministry of Children and Family
Development standards of what constitutes child abuse or neglect:
 - a) Little__ Moderate__ Substantial__
 - b) Source of information (please check all that apply): MCFD Seminars__
MCFD Literature__ Discussion with colleagues__ Media__ University
courses__ Professional experience__ Other__
If "other", please describe

8. Self-perceived level of knowledge regarding School District 57 parental child abuse reporting protocols:

a) Little__ Moderate__ Substantial__

b) Source of information (please check all that apply): Seminars__

Literature__ Discussion with colleagues__ Media__ University

courses__ Professional experience__ Other__

If "other", please describe

9. How many times have you reported suspected parental child abuse situations within your classroom(s) over the span of your career? Never__ Once__

Twice__ More__

10. What type of parental child maltreatment do you think is most prevalent in school aged children? Physical__ Emotional__ Neglect__ Sexual__

Other__

If "other", please describe

Appendix C: Questionnaire

Time of Interview: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I realize that the information you will be sharing with me today is of a very personal nature. I also understand that it is shared with the expectation that your identity will be kept confidential. As such, I am asking that any information you use to answer the questions today, come from **past experiences** that have already been resolved as opposed to discussing any present, ongoing situations, in which you may currently be involved. I also ask that you do not use anyone's name when discussing past experiences, in order to ensure their anonymity as well. If you do inadvertently say a name, I will omit it from written documents. Do you have any questions about the consent form that you have signed? Are you ready to start the interview?

1. **To begin, when you decided to become a teacher, did you consider that you may have to deal with situations involving child abuse?**

- Probe: What were your views on reporting child abuse as a student teacher?

2. **What are your thoughts about the amount of training that is offered to teachers on how to detect situations of child abuse?**

Probes:

- Do you feel it is sufficient to enable teachers to detect child abuse situations with confidence? If not, why not?
- Would you personally like to have more training available to you? If so, what type?

- 3. What do you think about the amount of information that was made available to you regarding how to make a report? For example, do you feel, when you were hired to teach within the district, you were given clear instructions on when a report should be made, who you should report to and the process for reporting?**

Probes:

- Do you feel it is sufficient to enable teachers to report child abuse situations with confidence?
- Would you personally like to have more training available to you?
- What is your current understanding of your duty to report child abuse and neglect?
- What, if any, from your understanding, could be the repercussions to you for making an erroneous or unsubstantiated report?
- What, if any, from your understanding, could be the repercussions to you for not reporting your suspicions?

4. What was it like for you to actually come to a decision to make a report?

Probes:

- What was it like to suspect that one of your students may be in a bad situation?
- What was it about the situation that prompted you to consider making the report?
- What kinds of things did you take into consideration prior to making the report?
- What concerns (if any) did you have about making the report?

5. What happened as a result of the report?

- In what ways did making the report impact you personally or impact the child?
- How did you feel about the outcome for the child and the outcome for yourself?
- Did you feel the issue had been resolved for the child?
- How did administration and your colleagues react to your reporting?
- What impact, if any, did the experience have on you as a teacher?
- What supports were offered within the school to aid you in the decision-making process and after having made the report, such as debriefing, counseling etc.?

6. I am going to ask you to envision a situation that could occur where someone might suspect a child may be experiencing some type of abuse but they would

be hesitant to report. Can you speak about what the circumstances might be and why someone might hesitate to report in this instance?

- 7. Is there anything you would like to add or that you feel I have missed that is important for people to know on the topic discussed today?**

Thank you very much for doing this interview with me.

Appendix D: Participant Information Letter

Researcher: Candace Miners, Master of Social Work Student
c/o Dawn Hemingway, Social Work Professor
UNBC School of Social Work
3333 University Way, Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9
Phone: 250-960-9685
e-mail: minersc@unbc.ca

Supervisor: Dawn Hemingway, Associate Professor
UNBC School of Social Work
3333 University Way, Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9
Phone: 250-960-5694
e-mail: Dawn.Hemingway@unbc.ca

Title of Thesis:

Teachers in British Columbia: Examining the Experience of Reporting Suspected Child Abuse

Purpose of Research: The purpose of this qualitative research project is to examine teachers' experiences of reporting suspected, parental child abuse to Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) protection workers. The goal of the research is to explore, from the perspective of teachers, the experience of reporting suspected parental child abuse to child protective services. The intent is to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences of reporting parental child abuse.

How Respondents Were Chosen: For this project I will not be recruiting participants through any School District 57 school or through the BC Teacher's Federation union office. No recruitment will be undertaken nor letters or posters about project participation posted on any School District 57 property or in any union office. No interviews or recruitment will be conducted during the participants' hours of work nor will any interviews be conducted on School District 57 property. Participants in this study will be asked to confirm that they are participating as an individual contributing their personal knowledge and experience to this topic area and that they are not representing their place of employment. I have located potential participants for this study by initially contacting teachers that I know from my work in the field, providing them with a copy of the participant recruitment letter (Appendix A) which outlined the purpose of the study and the criterion that potential participants were required to meet. I then requested that they give a copy of the recruitment letter to other teachers they knew who they felt might fit the criteria as outlined in the recruitment letter and would have a potential interest in participating in this research project. All participants chosen for this study have had at least one experience where they reported to MCFD that a child was being abused by a

parent or guardian. Participants are also teachers who have had experience teaching within School District 57 and are willing to participate in an approximately one hour interview. You were chosen for this project based on your willingness to share your experience of making a report of suspected parental child abuse to MCFD and meeting the criterion as described in the participant recruitment letter you received previously.

Role of Participants: Your role as a research participant is to complete a one-on-one, semi-structured interview with the researcher during which you will be asked to answer a set of questions based on your own experiences and personal beliefs as well as some basic demographic and background information. The interview will take approximately sixty minutes of your time. You are also being asked to participate in an approximately thirty minute meeting at a later date, agreed upon by you, to check the completed transcript of your interview to ensure the transcript accurately reflects the interview. As a participant in this study you are not representing your place of employment, rather you agree that you are participating as an individual contributing your personal knowledge and experience to this topic area.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to exit the interview at any time, stop the recording of the interview, and have your comments deleted from the study at any time even though you had originally consented. You do not need to answer any question(s) that make you uncomfortable nor do you have to give any reason for your decision to not answer. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all your information will be withdrawn as well.

Potential Benefits: There are no direct benefits to participants other than helping the researcher understand the challenges facing teachers who report situations of child maltreatment. Studies such as this bring attention to the issue of child abuse in general and may serve to highlight concerns or barriers that teachers face in the field. It is hoped that your participation in this study will also uncover what additional supports, if any, could be implemented to aid teachers to continue to help children in their classrooms.

Potential Risks: The risk to participants is minimal. Discussing past experiences may raise some negative emotions making it difficult for some to continue. The researcher will have contact information for locally available counseling services in case the need arises.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: Signed consent forms will be kept separate from other data collected and participant description forms will not include any identifying information that could be linked back to individual participants. Transcripts will not

contain the names of individual participants nor will participants names be attached to any reporting of quotes or comments made during the interview. No information will be published that could identify individuals, but anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the small sample size of this research project. Transcripts and audio recordings will be accessible only to Candace Miners (student researcher) and Dawn Hemingway (UNBC faculty supervisor).

Storage of Information: The data collected from you will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office at the University of Northern BC, to which only the researcher and the supervisor will have access. I will be using a transcriber to transcribe the interviews and the transcriber has signed a confidentiality agreement that will remain in effect indefinitely. Transcripts will be inputted into a password protected computer file. Signed consent forms will be kept separate from other data collected. All audio recordings will be erased, electronic data deleted and any paper/hardcopies shredded no longer than five years after the completion of the study.

Sharing of Research Results: Upon completion of the study, a copy of the results will be made available to each participant. The research will be used for the completion of a Master's degree thesis, and a copy will be available at the UNBC library. Research results will also be made available through presentations at conferences and other settings as well as via publications in relevant journals, newsletters, etc.

For More Information: If you have any questions regarding this research study, please contact Candace Miners at 250-960-9685 (student researcher) or e-mail: minersc@unbc.ca

or Dawn Hemingway at 250-960-5694 (UNBC faculty supervisor) or e-mail: Dawn.Hemingway@unbc.ca

Please direct any complaints about this project to the UNBC Research Ethics Board:

Office of Research: Room 1051-3333 University Way, Prince George BC V2N 4Z9.
Email: reb@unbc.ca or 250-960-6735

Appendix E: Participant Consent Form

Informed Consent

I, _____, agree to participate in this study as described in the information letter and understand that the main objective is to explore how teachers experience making a report of suspected child abuse to Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) protection workers.

I have received and carefully read the information letter and understand that I am being asked to participate in a one hour interview to provide my thoughts, opinions, and experiences on this topic to the degree that I am comfortable in doing so. I understand that I am also being asked to give my consent to the interview being audio recorded, and I have read how this and any other notes taken during the interview will be handled in a confidential and anonymous manner. As a participant in this study I am not representing my place of employment, rather I agree that I am participating as an individual contributing my personal knowledge and experience to this topic area.

I understand that I can refuse to answer any question without providing any reason for my decision. I understand that I can withdraw from participating at any time in the study (and that my information will be withdrawn as well) and that I can ask that the audio recording be stopped at any time even though I consented to it earlier.

The risks and discomfort associated with this study have been explained to me and a list of counseling services has been provided to me as well. I have asked all the questions I had regarding this subject and I am satisfied with the answers given to me.

☐ I agree to participate in the interview

☐ I agree to the audio recording of the interview

Name of Participant: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Witness: _____

Witness Signature: _____

Date (D/M/Year): _____

Date (D/M/Year): _____

Appendix F: Transcribers Declaration of Confidentiality Agreement

This study, *Teachers in British Columbia: Examining the Experience of Reporting Parental Child Abuse*, is being undertaken by Candace Miners, Masters of Social Work student at the University of Northern British Columbia.

The study has one objective:

To examine teachers' experiences of reporting suspected, parental child abuse to Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) protection workers.

Data from this study will be used to explore, from the perspective of teachers, the experience of reporting suspected parental child abuse to child protective services. The intent is to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences of reporting parental child abuse.

I, (name of transcriber), agree to:

1. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g. disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the student researcher (Candace Miners) and her faculty supervisor (Dawn Hemingway);
2. Keep all research information in any form or format secure while it is in my possession;
3. Return all research information in any form or format to the student researcher and/or her faculty supervisor when I have completed the research tasks;
4. After consulting with the student researcher and/or her faculty supervisor, erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the student researcher and/or her faculty supervisor (e.g. information stored on computer hard drive).

Transcriber:

(Print name)

(Signature)

(Date)

MSW Student Researcher:

(Print name)

(Signature)

(Date)

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

Professor Dawn Hemingway
University of Northern BC School of Social Work
3333 University Way, Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9
Phone: 250-960-5694
e-mail: Dawn.Hemingway@unbc.ca

This proposed study has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Northern British Columbia. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Office of Research by email at reb@unbc.ca or telephone at (250) 960-6735.

Appendix G: Local Counseling Services Sheet

Walmsley and Associates:

Phone: 250-564-1000

Location: 1512 Queensway Street, Prince George, BC

Community Care Centre:

Phone: 250-960-6457

Location: 1310 3rd Ave., Prince George, BC

Crisis Line

Phone: 250-563-1214

Location: 1600 3rd Ave., Prince George, BC

Women's Counseling Program

Phone: 250-563-1113

Location: 1575 5th Ave., Prince George, BC

Native Healing Centre

Phone: 250-564-4324

Location: 1600 3rd Ave., Prince George, BC

Northern John Howard Society

Phone: 250-561-7343

Location: 154 Quebec Street, Prince George, BC

GDM England and Associates

Phone: 250-961-2715

Location: 193 Quebec Street, Prince George, BC

Appendix H: UNBC Research Ethics Board Approval

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

MEMORANDUM

To: Candace Miners
CC: Dawn Hemingway

From: Michael Murphy, Chair
Research Ethics Board

Date: September 4, 2014

Re: **E2014.0708.051.00**
Teachers in British Columbia: Examining the Experience of
Reporting Parental Child Abuse

Thank you for submitting revisions to the Research Ethics Board (REB) regarding the above-noted proposal. Your revisions have been approved.

We are pleased to issue approval for the above named study for a period of 12 months from the date of this letter. Continuation beyond that date will require further review and renewal of REB approval. Any changes or amendments to the protocol or consent form must be approved by the REB.

If you have any questions on the above or require further clarification please feel free to contact Rheanna Robinson in the Office of Research (reb@unbc.ca or 250-960-6735).

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



Dr. Michael Murphy
Chair, Research Ethics Board