

Mandatory reporting internationally

Broad and narrow versions of mandatory reporting laws – in terms of the types and severity of reportable abuse and the specific persons deemed to be mandated to report – have been taken up internationally. A recent survey by the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) [1] is summarized in Table 1; the findings are organized according to World Bank country groups. The results of this survey should be interpreted with caution as it is limited in design (in most instances the country profiles are tabulated from the answers of one respondent who was thought to be familiar with child protection) and for low-income countries, the survey is limited in representation (includes data from only seven of 31 low-income countries); however, it is the most comprehensive report about the availability of mandatory reporting in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

Table 1. Proportion of mandatory reporting laws and provision for voluntary reporting across countries, as reported in the 2014 ISPCAN report*					
	Low income countries	Lower middle income countries	Upper middle income countries	LMICs Combined	High income countries
<i>Did the country answer the ISPCAN survey?</i>					
Yes	7/31 (22.6%)	12/51 (23.5%)	19/91 (20.9%)	38/149 (25.5%)	35/80 (43.8%)
<i>Is there a national mandatory reporting law?</i>					
Yes	3/7 (42.9%)	7/12 (66.7%)	18/19 (94.7%)	28/38 (73.7%)	22/35 (62.8%)
<i>What types of maltreatment are covered by mandatory reporting law?</i>					
Physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, neglect, and exposure to intimate partner violence	2/3 (66.7%)	2/8 (25%)	5/18 (27.8%)	9/28 (32.1%)	13/22 (59.1%)
Physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and neglect	0/3 (0%)	4/8 (50%)	7/18 (38.9%)	11/28 (39.3%)	6/22 (27.3%)
3 or fewer types of maltreatment	1/3 (33.3%)	2/8 (25%)	2/18 (11.1%)	5/28 (17.9%)	1/22 (4.5%)

Not answered or don't know	0/3 (0%)	0/8 (0%)	0/18 (0%)	0/28 (0%)	2/22 (9.1%)
<i>For mandated reporting of suspected CM for specific groups of professionals or individuals, what is the enforcement rate?</i>					
Wide	1/3 (33.3%)	2/8 (25%)	5/18 (27.8%)	8/28 (28.6%)	8/22 (36.4%)
Inconsistent	1/3 (33.3%)	4/8 (50%)	8/18 (44.4%)	13/28 (46.4%)	9/22 (40.9%)
Never or almost never	0/3 (0%)	1/8 (12.5%)	2/18 (11.1%)	3/28 (10.7%)	1/22 (4.5%)
Not answered or don't know	1/3 (33.3%)	1/8 (12.5%)	3/18 (16.7%)	5/28 (17.9%)	4/22 (18.2%)
*Statistics in this table were tabulated from the country profiles from the ISPCAN [1] report.					

Results from the ISPCAN survey indicate that 73.7% of responding LMICs and 62.8% of high-income countries (HICs) have national mandatory reporting laws for child maltreatment, although the enforcement of these laws is inconsistent or completely absent in 57.1% of LMICs and 45.4% of HICs. The mandatory reporting laws for the responding countries include physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, emotional maltreatment and exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV) in 59.1% of the HICs and 32.1% of the LMICs. The comprehensiveness with which these exposure types are addressed in county-specific legislation is not discussed in the ISPCAN report. For example, in the ISPCAN country profile for Canada, the respondent(s) indicated that “yes” Canada has a law mandating that suspected child maltreatment must be reported and that this law applies to physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, emotional maltreatment, and exposure to IPV. Mandatory reporting legislation in Canada (and many other federated countries), however, is complicated, as what is considered to be reportable maltreatment varies across states/provinces and territories [2].

Beyond the ISPCAN survey, we found little in the English-language literature about mandatory reporting and its associated processes in LMICs [3]. Some authors have suggested that evaluation is needed to address the utility and feasibility of mandatory reporting laws in LMICs [4]. Others have suggested that it is more appropriate for individual nations to develop their own focus and priorities

regarding mandatory reporting so that specific sociocultural and economic conditions are addressed; these authors have suggested that some forms of abuse must be prioritized, such as severe physical abuse, sexual abuse and exploitation, child trafficking, and severe neglect [5 6].

Differential response

Melton [7] has argued that alternative strategies to mandatory reporting “should pass muster if they are less intrusive than mandated reporting and have fewer side effects and, overall, they are more effective in ensuring children’s safety”. Differential response, also referred to as alternative response, family assessment response, or multiple-track response [8], is a method to restructure the CPS system to have multiple ways to respond to reports of child maltreatment [9]. It is an example of an alternative strategy that is being implemented in the U.S., Canada, and Australia that enables CPS to respond differently depending on the type and severity of maltreatment. The effectiveness of this method of response has been widely debated [8-11]. The Child Advocacy Center Model, which arose from the need to improve experiences with sexual abuse investigations, is another strategy that needs further research to better address child outcomes [12].

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