Running Head: THE REPORTING OF VICTIMIZATION BY SCHOOL STAFF

Abstract

Victimization has been widely demonstrated to have negative consequences in minors. Most crimes against children go unreported and victims tend to reach adulthood without receiving any of the available specialized support. Studies have highlighted the unique role of school workers in early detection and reporting of possible cases of victimization, and have also found high rates of underreporting by school staff. The present study analyzes the underreporting of child and youth victimization suspicions among school staff and aims to identify variables related to its detection and reporting. One hundred and eighty-four school staff members (83.7% females, *M* = 42.6 years old, *SD* = 11.7) from 17 different schools completed a self-administered questionnaire designed to record their knowledge and experience regarding the detection and reporting of potential victimization cases. Over 74% of the school workers had suspected at least one situation of victimization during their careers, but only 27% had actually reported these concerns. Higher rates of reporting were significantly associated with male gender, more years of experience, and awareness of five common misconceptions. Reporting behavior could be predicted by gender, years of experience and two statements assessing respondents' knowledge of victimization. In order to increase early reporting of possible cases of victimization, it is necessary to overcome certain misconceptions, raise awareness among school staff, design new training programs or interventions, and adapt the school dynamics in the light of these findings.

Key Words: Victimization; Detection; Report; School.

Introduction

Childhood and youth victimization has been widely demonstrated to affect victims' social and psychological development over their lifespan. Early detection and reporting is crucial in order to provide victims with support as soon as possible and thus to reduce the negative consequences (Winkel, Wohlfarth, & Blaauw, 2003). Although approximately ten million children are estimated to be suffering different forms of maltreatment in Europe, only 10-20% of these cases come to light (World Health Organization, 2013). Unreported crime against children is particularly high (Webster, O'Toole, O'Toole, & Lucal, 2005) even when adults close to them are aware of the situation (Finkelhor, Wolak, & Berliner, 2008). Once reported, only around 22% of cases receive professional attention (Cater, Andershed, & Andershed, 2016); as a result, most victims reach adulthood without having received any of the available specialized support, such as child welfare, health or security services (Finkelhor, et al, 2008).

Meta-analyses such as the one by Stoltenborgh, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Alink, & van Ijzendoorn (2015) have highlighted the challenges facing researchers who try to determine the true prevalence of children and youth victimization. Studies that have directly asked children and adolescents about their victimization experiences (such as Cyr et al. (2013) in Canada, Finkelhor (2011) in the United States; Radford, Corral, Bradley, & Fisher (2013) in the UK; and Pereda, Guilera, & Abad (2014) in Spain) have found higher rates than those published in official reports, demonstrating that the real extent of child and youth victimization remains unknown and uncertain and can only be estimated approximately (Hilis, Mercy, Amobi, & Kress, 2016).

Authors like Finkelhor (2011) have highlighted the need to reduce the gap between the cases identified by the system and the real prevalence in order to be able to provide adequate support for the victims who are currently neglected. To do this, early

detection is a key factor; the role of school staff members is crucial since they interact with almost all the children in the population on a daily basis (Schols, de Ruiter, & Ory, 2013). This fact maximizes the importance of identifying the possible signs of being a victim, such as poor school achievement (Fantuzzo, et al., 2011), less security and closeness towards peers and adults, and conflictual friendships (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011). Another feature of the key role that school staff members play is the fact that they have regular access to children's families and circles (e.g., peers, other caregivers, and so on).

Several international studies (Dinehart & Kenny, 2015; Haj-Yahia & Attar-Schwartz, 2008; Kenny, 2001; Schols et al., 2013; Toros & Tiirik, 2014) have analyzed the behavior of different types of school staff members (e.g., early caregivers, educators, pre-elementary school teachers, elementary school teachers, special education teachers, psychologists) and have found that early detection and the reporting possible cases of victimization depend largely on these workers' knowledge, attitudes and professionalism. Training also appears to be particularly important (Kenny, 2004; Walsh, Bridgstock, Farrell, Rassafiani, & Schweitzer, 2008).

Unfortunately, as previous studies have noted (Crenshaw, Crenshaw, & Lichtenberg, 1995; Finkelhor, Wolak, & Berliner, 2001; Kenny, 2004), most of the people working in the educational setting lack the knowledge or personal motivation to extend their teaching role to include the monitoring of children and young people's rights. Researchers have identified a number of common barriers to detecting and reporting possible victimization cases: an inability to recognize the signs (Kenny, 2001), a fear of misinterpreting families' educational practices (Toros & Tiirik, 2014), a lack of awareness of the workings of child welfare systems, a lack of familiarity with their legal duties or with reporting procedures (Cater et al, 2016; Kenny, 2004; Walsh et al., 2008),

bad experiences with reporting to institutions (e.g., child welfare services, police), a lack of faith in the child welfare system (Schols et al., 2013) and fears of embarrassment or possible retaliations (Alvarez, Kenny, Donohue, & Carpin, 2004). Schools in particular are reluctant to report suspicious cases of victimization because of concerns about their reputation (Finkelhor et al., 2008). Additionally, vague definitions of different types of the phenomenon (Kenny, 2001) and the fact that school staff members tend to make their reports inside the same institution rather than directly to experts or authorities make it even harder to raise their awareness of this professional obligation. Finally, the fact that most members of staff are unaware of the possible legal consequences of failing to report a suspected case has also been identified as an associated factor (Dinehart & Kenny, 2015).

In Spain, studies from different regions have reported alarming results regarding the detection and reporting of suspicious child abuse cases in schools (Prieto Jiménez, 2005). Liébana, del Olmo, and Real (2015) drew attention to the lack of knowledge regarding child abuse among teachers and called for further analyses to measure the factors that can contribute to develop efficient detection. This was also reported by studies focused only on one type of victimization, such as sexual abuse (e.g., Márquez, Márquez, & Granados, 2016). Similar findings have been reported in studies performed with psychology (Pereda et al., 2012) and pedagogy students (Priegue & Cambrielo, 2016). But in spite of the fact that training can significantly improve detection and reporting among professionals (Cerezo & Pons, 2004) and disclosure in minors (López & Del Campo, 2006) schools are not currently developing their potential for providing support for neglected victims.

Purpose of the Present Study

If we aim to protect child and youth victims from violence and to prevent its consequences, early detection and reporting of possible cases of victimization is crucial. School staff members have an important role to play in this respect. The Spanish school system offers several advantages with regard to detecting and reporting different kinds of victimization; schooling is mandatory in Spain between the ages of 6 and 16, in accordance with the *Ley Orgánica de Educación* of 2006 [Education Act 1/2006] which guarantees access to education. Reporting any suspicion of a potential case of victimization is also mandatory according to the *Ley Orgánica de Protección Jurídica del menor of 1996* [1/1996, Minors' Legal Protection Act]). Legislation is believed to increase reporting (see Mathews & Kenny (2008) for a review of reporting in regions with and without mandatory reporting).

The main aim of the present study is to examine school staff members' knowledge, experience, and behavior regarding childhood and youth victimization, its early detection and the reporting of suspected cases in Spain. We take a step forward from previous studies (Dinehart & Kenny, 2015; Liébana et al., 2015) in trying to explain the tendency not to report suspicions, which has already been observed in previous studies both in Spain (e.g., Prieto Jiménez, 2005) and abroad (e.g., Webster et al., 2005). We hypothesize that most suspected instances are not reported; we propose that this behavior is related to a lack of knowledge and professional experience and we analyze variables involved in it (Kenny, 2001, 2004; Walsh, Mathews, Rassa, Farrell, & Butler, 2012). We hope that the study will provide conclusions that may help to increase the early detection and reporting of possible cases of victimization.

Method

Participants

The participants were school employees at 17 schools in the city of Barcelona in the north-east of Spain. Schools were stratified by district and type of school (i.e., publicly funded, private, or subsidized). Then, a one-stage cluster sampling was used. Specifically, schools within districts were randomly selected, maintaining proportionality in terms of the type and amount of schools per district. A total of 38 schools were invited to participate, of which 45% accepted. The total study sample comprised 184 school employees, 83.7% females (M = 42.6 years old, SD = 11.7) with a mean of 19 years of experience (SD = 10.6). The distribution of participants according to district and type of school is shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 around here

Procedure

All procedures were conducted in accordance with the basic ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki in Seoul (World Medical Assembly, 2008) and respecting the ethical standards drawn up by our university's Committee on Bioethics.

A reference person at each school (i.e., principals, academic coordinators, deans) was contacted by phone in February 2016 in order to explain the aim and procedure of the study. It was clearly stated that collaboration was voluntary and that all the data compiled would remain confidential, respecting the *Ley Orgánica de Protección de Datos* [*15/1999*, Data Protection Act]. In return for their collaboration, referents were offered a personalized analysis of their school's results and a one-hour training session on childhood and youth victimization for all staff members.

Once they gave their consent, the referent was asked to invite every school staff member who came into contact with children to participate. All participants received a brief written invitation explaining the study's aims and all gave their written consent when filling in the forms. The information was provided in the participant's language of

choice (i.e., Catalan or Spanish) in either an on-line or printed version. The respondents answering in Catalan or Spanish version of the questionnaire did not differ significantly with regard to gender, age and years of work experience, nor in the choice of the printed or on-line version of the instrument.

Timeframes were agreed for delivering and collecting the questionnaires (in the case of the printed version) and the deadline for submission was established (in the case of the on-line version). Techniques like personalization, pre-notification, and reminders (Fowler & Consenza, 2008) were used to overcome potential non-responses. Schools' referents and all staff members were provided with a contact phone-line and e-mail address to clarify any doubts or to announce that they wished to abandon participation.

After data collection and analysis, a report presenting the results was sent to each school, between May and June 2016. Training sessions were also delivered during this period.

Measures

Based on previous studies with similar aims both in Spain (Cerezo & Pons, 2004; Liébana et al., 2015, López & Del Campo, 2006) and abroad (Kenny, 2001; Walsh et al., 2008, 2012), and drawing on current official conventions and protocols (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2007; Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales, 2006), a self-administered questionnaire was designed and pre-tested. Methodological guidelines (deLeeuw, Hox, & Dillman, 2008) were also considered.

The first section of the instrument dealt with sociodemographic and professional information, including the respondent's gender, age, school where they worked, role at the school and years of experience working with minors. The questionnaire also included three modules to record previous experience and knowledge regarding victimization, detection and reporting. For victimization, experience was addressed

through three questions (e.g., “Have you received any training regarding child victimization?”) and knowledge through ten statements that participants must answer with “Yes/No/I don’t know”, focused on victimization itself (e.g., “Victimization affects less than 10% of children in Spain”). For detection of possible cases, previous experience was addressed with direct questions (e.g., “How many times during your career did you suspect that a minor might be being victimized?”) and knowledge through 10 statements referring to detection (e.g., “Most of the signs regarding child abuse are directly observable”). For the reporting of suspicions, experience was addressed by direct questions (e.g., “How many times did you report a child abuse suspicion?”) and knowledge through 10 statements concerning reporting procedures (e.g. “Reporting a suspicion is mandatory in Spain”).

Additional information regarding the pre-testing of the questionnaire is available in Supplementary material 1.

Data Analysis

Percentages of endorsement were obtained for the distributions of responses to the questions (i.e., experience) and the statements (i.e., knowledge), excluding missing cases for each item. These rates were compared to detection (suspected cases) and reporting rates (suspicions reported) using the chi-square test to analyze whether the relationships were significant. Cramer’s *V* effect size measure and point biserial correlations were used to explore the magnitude of significant bivariate associations.

Reporting behavior was analyzed only in school staff members who had had at least one suspicion during their career (n = 134) as a binary outcome (i.e., had/had not reported the suspicion/s). In order to analyze the hypothesized underreporting of suspected cases, the McNemar test with continuity correction was performed to compare the number of suspicions with the number of reports. A stepwise backward

logistic regression was performed, using the likelihood ratio method, to find possible predictors of reporting behavior. In this model we included as predictors only the variables that were found to be relevant through V (i.e., $V \sim .20$) or r coefficients (i.e., $r_{pb} \geq .20$).

Multicollinearity was checked through variance inflation factors (VIF) and independence of errors through the Durbin-Watson test; the assumptions were met in both cases.

Analyses were performed in R 3.3.1 (R Core Team, 2015).

Results

Question/Statement Descriptive Statistics

Experience. Percentages of endorsement for questions that addressed victimization, detection and reporting experiences are shown in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 around here

More than half of the staff members in the sample stated that they were familiar with the concept of child victimization, although the majority reported not having been trained in this area. Of the ones that were trained (n = 20), around 38% reported having been trained in public institutions, 33% at university, 14% at their current place of work, 9% in private centers and 4% at NGOs.

Around 60% of the sample said that they did not know if they could identify the necessary risk factors (either in minors or in families) in order to define possible victimization cases. Excluding two missing responses, almost two thirds of 182 participants stated that they had suspected at least one case of victimization during their career, but only a few (around 27%) had ever reported these concerns to professional institutions outside the school; most (93%) had made their reports to child welfare services and stated that the principal had participated in the report (95%). Finally, 80%

of the participants who had made reports of suspicions had followed up one or all of the cases (*n* = 33). Of these, 68% considered that most cases improved after being reported to the child welfare services.

The majority of participants mentioned the presence of a person of reference at the school, usually the school's psychologist (48%) or less frequently the principal (28%). Only 44 participants reported knowing whether there was a protocol to guide potential reporting at their school.

Knowledge. Percentages of endorsement for statements measuring knowledge in each module (i.e., victimization, detection and reporting) are shown in Tables 3, 4 and 5. Correct answer is shown in parentheses after each item.

Insert Tables 3, 4 and 5 around here

In relation to knowledge of victimization (see Table 3), in response to the statement "Child victimization affects less than 10% of minors in Spain," over two-thirds of the respondents answered "I don't know". Two other main misconceptions were identified: more than half of participants considered minors to be equally vulnerable to violence as adults, and many excluded intentionality from the definition of victimization.

With regard to detection (see Table 4), in response to the statement about considering isolation as a risk factor, almost half of the sample responded "I don't know". The most salient misconceptions were not acknowledging that a child from a one-parent family is more at risk of being victimized (answered "No" by 78% of the participants) and stating that it is easy to define whether an action constitutes abuse or not (answered "Yes" by around 56%).

The reporting section (see Table 5) was the one with the highest number of statements that elicited an "I don't know" response. Specifically, more than half of

participants responded "I don't know" to items stating that: too many reports make the system collapse, reports could be made anonymously, reports of suspected cases involve a judge, and the family is entitled to sue an informant when a suspicion turns out not to be true. The most salient misconception is that one needs to be certain that victimization is occurring in order to report a suspicion (answered "Yes" by almost 46%).

Bivariate Correlations

Detection. The only variable that was significantly associated with detection (No suspicion/Had at least one suspicion) was years of experience (r_{pb} = .22, p < .01). When analyzing detection behavior as a variable with multiple categories (i.e., 0 suspicions, 1 to 10 suspicions, 11 to 20 suspicions, or more than 20), acknowledging risk factors in families also turned out to be statistically significant ($\chi^2(6) = 29.71$, $p < .0001$, $V = .30$), indicating that participants who considered themselves to be aware of these factors tended to detect more cases.

Reporting. The McNemar test was statistically significant ($\chi^2(1) = 48.16$, $p < .0001$), indicating that most of the suspicions remain unreported (i.e., 74% of the 182 participants responding this item had suspected; only 27% of them had ever made a report).

Additionally, associations between reporting of suspicions and other variables of interest (e.g., having received training) were studied in more depth, considering only participants who had had suspicions (n = 134). Statistically significant associations were found between reporting victimization suspicions and gender ($\chi^2(1) = 5.49$, $p < .05$), indicating that males were slightly more likely to report suspicions than females (V = .19). There was also a moderate correlation between reporting suspicions and years of

experience (r_{pb}= .24, p < .01), showing that staff members with more experience were slightly more likely to report.

The statements assessing knowledge that were significantly associated with reporting behavior were: a) "If the minor belongs to a culture that is more tolerant towards maltreatment, we should not intervene" ($\chi^2(2) = 6.39$, $V = .22$, $p < .05$); b) "In many cases, the intervention of the child welfare services does not improve the minor's well-being" ($\chi 2(2) = 14.65$, $V = .32$, $p < .001$); c) "If the informant wishes to report anonymously, he/she may do so" ($\chi 2(2) = 15.95$, $V = .34$, $p < .001$), d) "Reporting is a voluntary action; it depends on the informant's willingness" ($\chi 2(2) = 8.5$, $V = .25$, $p < .05$); and e) "In order to report, it is necessary to have the principal's consent" ($\chi 2(2) = 15.66$, $V = .33$, $p < .001$).

Logistic Regression

The variables that were found to be relevant (i.e., with a substantial Cramer's V or r) were used to explain the reporting behavior in a stepwise logistic regression model. The final model displayed in Table 4 shows a Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test of $\chi\ 2(8) = 3.17$, $p = .96$. On the one hand, results suggest that for each unit increase in years of experience the likelihood of reporting a suspicion increases by one time, and that males are three times more likely to report suspicions than females. On the other hand, not knowing whether child welfare service interventions are good for the minor tends to decrease the likelihood of reporting suspicions. Finally, acknowledging that one should intervene even when the minor belongs to a culture that is more tolerant towards maltreatment appears to increase the likelihood of reporting potential cases of victimization.

Insert Table 6 around here

Discussion

With the aims of upholding child and youth victims' rights and of providing them with support, the present study analyzed school staff members' knowledge and experience to detect possible cases of victimization and report these suspicions to the corresponding authorities. As predicted in our hypothesis and in previous work that have analyzed underreporting (Kenny, 2001; Schols et al, 2013; Webster et al., 2005), most of the suspicions regarding child victimization remain unreported by school staff members. This behavior appears to be associated with a lack of knowledge and previous experience (Cerezo & Pons, 2004; Dinehart & Kenny, 2015; Kenny, 2001, 2004; Walsh et al., 2008), but also with sociodemographic and professional characteristics such as gender or years of experience (Schols et al, 2013; Toros & Tiirik, 2014). The findings, along with recommendations for future research, are discussed in detail below.

Experience of victimization, detection and reporting

Most of the participants had detected possible cases of child victimization, even though they were not certain about their suspicions. In Spain, certainty about child abuse and neglect is not a legal requirement for notifying the authorities; Spanish law tries to encourage individuals to communicate any suspicion regarding child victimization in order to allow further investigation and, if necessary, early intervention. In agreement with previous studies (Liébana et al., 2015) our analyses suggest that it is crucial to encourage school workers to be more proactive with regard to reporting their suspicions and to highlight the practical implications of reporting procedures, which are completely unknown to most of them (Schols et al, 2013; Toros & Tiirik, 2014; Walsh et al., 2008). In future research, it might also be interesting to collect information about how a suspicious case is defined, and to establish whether this is relevant when it comes to making the decision to report the behavior.

The fear that intervening and reporting a suspicion is likely to have a negative effect on potential victims' lives has a significant influence on the decision to report it, as previous studies have suggested (Alvarez et al., 2004; Kenny, 2004). This reflects one of the most frequent misconceptions regarding child victimization (Finkelhor et al., 2008). Nevertheless, we found consistent evidence (Kenny, 2004) to the contrary, since most of the participants who followed up a reported case stated that they considered the child's well-being to be improved after child welfare services interventions. Due to the small amount of school staff members with reporting experience, this aspect should be further explored.

Knowledge of victimization, detection and reporting

Although half of the participants reported familiarity with the concept of child and youth victimization, more than 80% said that they had not received any specific training regarding this issue. In view of the effect of training reported by previous studies in Spain (Cerezo & Pons, 2004; López & Del Campo, 2006), and in other countries (Kenny, 2004; Walsh et al., 2008) a number of important points should be borne in mind with regard to the design of future training in schools. Staff stated that they were unaware of the magnitude of child victimization and of the signs that would help to detect it (e.g., not knowing whether an isolated child or a one-parent family is more at risk) and expressed misconceptions (e.g., assuming that minors and adults were equally vulnerable, not considering the intention or the frequency to define victimization, and so on). These findings are consistent with those of previous studies (Dinehart & Kenny, 2015; Kenny, 2001; Prieto Jiménez, 2005; Schols et al, 2013) which highlighted this lack of knowledge as a barrier to detecting and reporting possible cases of victimization.

The most important gray area seems to be in the reporting procedures. Some of the strongest barriers have already been noted by other authors, such as misconceptions regarding the professionals (e.g., judges, police, social workers, psychologists) who are involved in the procedure (Cater et al., 2016; Dinehart & Kenny, 2015), the informants' rights and responsibilities, and the information that needs to be reported (Toros & Tiirik, 2014; Walsh et al., 2008). Mistrust of the welfare system and the fear of misinterpreting families' educational practices also emerged as relevant obstacles, as in previous research (Schols et al., 2013; Toros & Tiirik, 2014). Another barrier that might be particularly associated with the school environment was the need to obtain the principal's approval in order to report potential cases of victimization. This barrier has also been recorded in previous studies, which found that most teachers tend to report their suspicions inside the institution rather than to the corresponding authorities (Kenny, 2001). This adds a step to the process in which the report of a possible victimization case can be withdrawn without further assessment, thus increasing the possibility that the minor will continue being victimized (Dinehart & Kenny, 2015; Kenny, 2001).

Predictors of reporting behavior

School staff members appeared to be familiar with the possible consequences of victimization and most had had suspicions during their careers. So what is stopping them from acting on these suspicions? Considering only respondents that answered the item referring to the amount of suspicions (n =182), more than 74% of the sample stated that they had had at least one suspicion during their time working with minors, but only 27% had ever made a report of these suspicions to the authorities, as required by the laws. Although we cannot assume that all suspicions were in fact real cases of child victimization, this reluctance to report potential cases may (at least partially) explain the

gap between the true prevalence, which remains unknown, and the cases known to the child welfare services (Hilis et al., 2016; Webster et al, 2005). Ways of highlighting the responsibilities of school staff members with regard to the protection of minors are urgently needed.

This study has succeeded in terms of quantifying the effect of variables mentioned in other studies in Spain (Cerezo & Pons, 2004; Liébana et al., 2015; Priegue & Cambeiro, 2016) and abroad (Kenny, 2001, 2014; Schols et al., 2013) when analyzing reporting behavior.

According to our results, with every year of experience, school staff members are slightly more likely to report their suspicions. Some studies have found similar results (Toros & Tiirik, 2014; Walsh et al., 2012), though others have not (Haj-Yahia & Attar-Schwartz, 2008) and some even found no significant correlation between this variable and reporting possible cases (Kenny, 2004). Although in our case we found little impact of this variable, it appears that the time the staff member has been employed in the field is a positive point for reporting suspicions. Possibly, spending more time in contact with minors opens up a broader spectrum of possible cases; alternatively, these professionals will have more experience and may feel more secure in their work, and may thus be more likely to report possible cases (Kenny, 2001; Walsh et al., 2008).

An interesting result was the fact that males were significantly more likely to report potential cases of victimization than females. Gender has also shown divergent results as a predictor of reporting behavior: in one study it was found to be non-significant (Crenshaw et al., 1995), while in others females were more likely to report (Kenny, 2001, 2004). This variable may be strongly related with cultural aspects and with the fear of possible retaliation from the perpetrators (Alvarez et al., 2004). Besides,

the high proportion of female employees in schools may be an important factor in the tendency of failing to report suspicions from the school environment.

Acknowledging that school workers should intervene even when educational practices in families from different cultures may be more tolerant towards maltreatment is a variable that also had a significant effect in increasing reporting of possible cases of victimization. It could be that this knowledge mitigates the fear of making an inaccurate report, as a study with preschool teachers showed (Toros & Tiirik, 2014). Finally, the fear that child welfare services interventions might be bad for the minor significantly reduced the likelihood of reporting any victimization suspicion. Doubts of this kind have been pointed out by other studies performed with this population (Cerezo & Pons, 2004; Kenny, 2001; Schols et al., 2013). As highlighted by those studies and by our results, the image of child welfare services needs to be improved if the aim is to decrease the rate of underreporting of suspicions or also of actual cases.

Practical Implications

Our results underline the great potential that school has for reducing the gap between the detection and the reporting of potential crimes against underage victims (Cerezo & Pons, 2004; Dinehart & Kenny, 2015; Walsh et al., 2012). School staff need to learn about reporting protocols and procedures, and must be more aware of their legal responsibility to protect children and youth by means of communicating their doubts to child welfare services. Although they have some knowledge about minors' protection, more training is needed if minors' well-being is to be prioritized over staff members' personal hesitations or fears (Finkelhor et al., 2001, 2008). In view of the positive effect of training (Cerezo & Pons, 2004; López & Del Campo, 2006; Kenny, 2004), more interventions of this kind should be provided to schools. Training programs should focus specifically on the most common barriers to report potential cases of

victimization, such as technical aspects of the reporting procedure itself, the role of child welfare services, and the importance of distinguishing between strict educational practices and abuse.

This study also shed light on the particular school dynamics that affect reporting behavior, such as the misconception that staff need their principal's consent, or the tendency of female workers to be less likely to report potential cases. In the light of these findings, school conventions and protocols should be updated and other measures should be designed to increase child and youth protection. These should be easily comprehensible and accessible for all school staff members in contact with minors.

Sociodemographic variables that appear to be involved in detecting and reporting but cannot be changed through training, such as gender or years of experience, should also be considered. For instance, it may be useful to create working networks in which individuals who are more likely to report their suspicions (i.e., males and with more years of experience) can share their knowledge and experience with colleagues who are less likely to report these doubts. Since school staff members usually turn to their colleagues as their first source of support when sharing their concerns (Schols et al., 2013), positive experiences with the child welfare system could also be an effective way of encouraging the reporting of potential cases.

Limitations

Even though our sample is similar to most international studies in terms of demographic variables such as gender, mean age and years of experience (Dinehart & Kenny, 2015; Kenny, 2004; Schols et al., 2013; Walsh et al., 2012), generalization is particularly challenging in studies like ours because the variables may be strongly related to the context in which the analyses were performed (Toros & Tiirik, 2014). In addition, the results reported in this study should be interpreted with caution since the

school districts with the highest levels of family income and education are not represented in our results (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015). Previous work (Finkelhor, 2008) has already highlighted the misapprehension that victimization mostly occurs in low social-economic settings and does not affect higher social classes. Further research is needed to explore whether these neighborhoods present other specific obstacles to reporting.

Because the study was designed to assess a particular context and since none of the available instruments entirely covered our objective, we were obliged to create a new questionnaire. Although some evidence of validity was collected when pre-testing the questionnaire (which included target participants' opinions combined with scientific and technical knowledge) some of the results might be affected by characteristics of the instrument and its measuring properties. Further applications of this questionnaire or replication will clarify the potential effects of this limitation.

There was also a high rate of missing cases in a question (i.e., States that there is a protocol for reporting at his/her school) and in some of the other statements. The former was placed just after the items that had to be filled in only by participants who had reported. We believe that the location of this item could have led to skip it to participants that never reported, which represents the major proportion in our sample.

Finally, it could also be of interest to determine what proportion of the whole school staff members agreed to participate and if they differ from those who declined in a significant way. We expect to be able to address these aspects in future research.

Conclusions

The school environment is key to the early detection of child victimization and school staff need to accept their responsibility to report in cases of suspicion. To help them to do so, training must be offered and support must be assured when a suspicious

case is detected. Only then will school staff be able to effectively look after children and youth victims with the ultimate aim of providing them with the protection and help they need.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

Ajuntament de Barcelona. (2007). *El context escolar i els infants en risc de maltractament [School context and child at risk of maltreatment]*. Barcelona: Direcció d'Acció Social i Ciutadania, Ajuntament de Barcelona.

Ajuntament de Barcelona. (2015). *Observatori 2015: Barcelona Districtes*. *[Observatory 2015: Disctricts of Barcelona]*. Barcelona: Gabinet Tècnic de Programació, Gerència Adjunta de Projectes Estratègics.

Alvarez, K., Kenny, M., Donohue, B., & Carpin, K. (2004). Why are professionals failing to initiate mandated reports of child maltreatment and are there any empirically based training programs to assist professionals in the reporting process? *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 9,* 563-578. doi:10.1016/j.avb.2003.07.001

Bagwell, C. L., & Schmidt, M. E. (2011). The friendship quality of overtly and relationally victimized children. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 57*, 158-185. doi:10.1353/mpq.2011.0009

Cater, A. K., Andershed, A. K., & Andershed, H. (2016). Victimized as a child or youth: To whom is victimization reported and from whom do victims receive professional support? *International Review of Victimology, 22*, 179-194. doi:10.1177/0269758016628945

Cerezo, M. A., & Pons-Salvador, G. (2004). Improving child maltreatment detection systems: A large-scale case study involving health, social services, and school professionals. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 28*, 1153-1169. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2004.06.007

Crenshaw, W., Crenshaw, L., & Lichtenberg, J. (1995). When educators confront child

abuse: An analysis of the decision to report. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 19,* 1095-1113. doi: 10.1016/0145-2134(95)00071-F

Cyr, K., Chamberland, C., Clément, M. E., Lessard, G., Wemmers, J. A., Colline-Vézina,… Damant, D. (2013). Polyvictimization and victimization of children and youth: Results from a populational survey. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 37*, 814-820. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2013.03.009

de Leeuw, E., Hox, J., & Dillman, D. (2008). *International handbook of survey methodology.* New York: Taylor & Francis Group.

Dinehart, L., & Kenny, M. (2015). Knowledge of child abuse and reporting practices among early care and education providers. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 29*, 429-443. doi:10.1080/02568543.2015.1073818

Fantuzzo, J. W., Perlman, S. M., & Dobbins, E. K. (2011). Types and timing of child maltreatment and early school success: A population-based investigation. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*, 1404-1411. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.04.010

Finkelhor, D. (2011). Prevalence of child victimization, abuse, crime and violence exposure. In J. M. White, M. P. Koss, and A. E. Kazdin, (Eds.), *Violence against women and children: Mapping the terrain* (pp. 9-29). Washington DC: American Psychology Association.

Finkelhor, D., Wolak, J., & Berliner, L. (2001). Police reporting and professional help seeking for child crime victims: A review. *Child Maltreatment, 6*, 17-30. Retrieved from https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/190c/ef558c12eb57db5db2c65a1f57df5e2779b8.pdf

Finkelhor, D., Wolak, J., & Berliner, L. (2008). Getting help: what are the barriers? In

D. Finkelhor (Ed.) *Childhood victimization* (pp. 102-121). New Hampshire, MA, USA: Oxford University Press.

Fowler, F., & Consenza, C. (2008). Writing effective questions. In E. E. de Leeuw, J. Hox, & D. Dillman, (Eds.) *International Handbook of Survey Methodology* (pp. 136-160). New York: Taylor & Francis Group.

Haj-Yahia, M., Attar-Schwartz, S. (2008). Attitudes of Palestinian pre-school teachers from Israel towards reporting of suspected cases of child abuse and neglect. *Child & Family Social Work, 13,* 378-390. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2206.2008.00562.x

Hillis, S., Mercy, J., Amobi, A., & Kress, H. (2016). Global prevalence of past-year violence against children: A systematic review and minimum estimates. *Pediatrics, 137*, e20154079. doi:10.1542/peds.2015-4079

Kenny, M. (2001). Child abuse reporting: Teachers perceived deterrents. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 25,* 81-92. doi:10.1016/S0145-2134(00)00218-0

Kenny, M. (2004). Teachers' attitudes toward and knowledge of child maltreatment. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 28,* 1311-1319. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2004.06.010

Liébana, J., Deu, M.I, & Real, S. (2015). Valoración del conocimiento sobre el maltrato infantil del profesorado ceutí. [*Ceutan school teachers and their knowledge of child abuse: A knowledge assessment*]. *Revista Española de Orientación y Psicopedagogía, 26,* 100-114. doi:10.5944/reop.vol.26.num.1.2015.14345

López, F., & Del Campo, A. (2006). Evaluación de un programa de prevención de abusos sexuales a menores en Educación Primaria. [Evaluation of school-based child sexual abuse prevention program.]. *Psicothema, 18,* 1-8. Retrieved from http://www.psicothema.com/psicothema.asp?id=3168

Márquez Flores, M., Márquez Hernández, V., Granados Gámez, G. (2016). Teachers'

knowledge and beliefs about child sexual abuse. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 25*, 538-555. doi:10.1080/10538712.2016.1189474

Mathews, B., & Kenny, M. (2008). Mandatory Reporting legislation in the United States, Canada, and Australia: A cross-jurisdictional review of key features, differences, and issues. *Child Maltreatment, 13*, 50-63. doi:10.1177/1077559507310613

Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte. (2006). *Maltrato infantil: Detección, notificación y registro de casos. [Child Maltreatment: Detection, Report and Case Registration]*. Madrid: Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales, Subdirección General de Información Administrativa y Publicaciones. Retrieved from http://www.observatoriodelainfancia.msssi.gob.es/documentos/HojasDeteccion.pdf

Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte. (2016). *Panorama de la Educación. Indicadores de la OCDE 2016. Informe Español. [Education at a Glance. OECD Indicators 2016. Spanish Report]*. Madrid, España: Instituto de Investigación Educativa. Retrieved from http://www.mecd.gob.es/dctm/inee/eag/panorama2016okkk.pdf?documentId=0901e72b82236f2b

Pereda, N., Arch, M., Guerra-González, R., Llerena, G., Berta-Alemany, M., Saccinto, E., & Gascón, E. (2012). Conocimientos y creencias sobre abuso sexual infantil en estudiantes universitarios españoles. [*Knowledge and beliefs about child sexual abuse by Spanish university students*]. *Anales de Psicología, 28,* 524-531. doi:10.6018/analesp.28.2.148801

Pereda, N., Guilera, G., & Abad, J. (2014). Victimization and polyvictimization of

Spanish children and youth: Results from a community sample. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 38,* 640-649. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2014.01.019

Priegue, & Cambeiro, M. C. (2016). Los conocimientos acerca del maltrato infantil de los futuros profesionales de la educación: un estudio exploratorio. [*The knowledge of child abuse of future professionals in education: an exploratory study*]. Revista Complutense de Educación, 27, 1003-1019. doi: 10.5209/rev_RCED.2016.v27.n3.47152

Prieto, E. (2005). Proyecto: respuesta en red. El abuso sexual y otras formas de maltrato infantil. Una visión desde los centros escolares de la ciudad de Alcalá de Henares [*Sexual abuse and other forms of child maltreatment viewed from Alcalá de Henares city's schools*]. *Pulso 2005, 28,* 97-123.Retrieved from: https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/1370915.pdf

R Core Team (2015). R: A language and environment for statistical computing. R Foundation for Statistical Computing, Vienna, Austria. URL https://www.R-project.org/.

Radford, L., Corral, S., Bradley, C., &; Fisher, H. L. (2013). The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment and other types of victimization in the UK: Findings from a population survey of caregivers, children and young people and young adults. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 37,* 801-813. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2013.02.004

Schols, M., de Ruiter, C., & Ory, F. (2013). How do public child healthcare professionals and primary school teachers identify and handle child abuse cases? A qualitative study. *BMC Public Health, 13,* 807. doi:10.1186/1471-2458-13-807.

Stoltenborgh, M., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., Alink, L., & van Ijzendoorn. (2015). The prevalence of child maltreatment across the globe: Review of a series of meta-analyses. *Child Abuse Review, 24*, 37-50. doi: 10.1002/car.2353

Toros, K., & Tiirik, R. (2016). Preschool teachers' perceptions about and experience with child abuse and neglect. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 44*, 21-30. doi:10.1007/s10643-014-0675-0

Walsh, K., Bridgstock, R., Farrell, A., Rassafiani, M., & Schweitzer, R. (2008). Case, teacher and school characteristics influencing teachers' detection and reporting of child physical abuse and neglect: Results from an Australian survey. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 32*, 983-993. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2008.03.002

Walsh, K., Mathews, B., Rassa, M., Farrell, A., & Butler, D. (2012). Understanding teachers' reporting of child sexual abuse: Measurement methods matter. *Children and Youth Services Review, 34*, 1937-1946. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.06.004

Webster, S., O'Toole, R., O'Toole, A., & Lucal, B. (2005). Overreporting and underreporting of child abuse: Teachers' use of professional discretion. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 29*, 1281-1296. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2004.02.007

World Health Organization (WHO). (2013). *European report on preventing child maltreatment*. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe. Retrieved from http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/217018/European-Report-on-Preventing-Child-Maltreatment.pdf

Winkel, F. W., Wohlfarth, T., & Blaauw, E. (2003). Police-based early detection of persistent Type A trauma symptomatology in crime victims: The validity of rapid, objective risk assessment. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry, 26*, 191-205. doi:10.1016/S0160-2527(02)00207-8

World Medical Assembly. (2008). *World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects.* Seoul: Republic of Korea.

Table 1.

Sample characteristics

Variable	Male		Female		Total [a]	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Type [b]						
Publicly-funded	9	32.1	73	47.4	83	45.1
Subsidized	19	67.9	81	52.6	100	54.9
Role [c]						
Principals [d]	4	13.8	18	11.9	22	12.0
Teachers	9	31.0	70	46.4	79	43.1
Professors [e]	7	24.1	22	14.6	29	15.8
Special Education Teachers	1	3.5	8	5.3	9	4.9
Psychologists	0	0	2	1.3	2	1.0
Monitors [f]	5	17.3	14	9.3	19	10.3
More than one role	3	10.3	13	8.6	16	8.7
Others [g]	0	0	4	2.6	4	2.1
Level [c]						
Preschool	1	3.8	31	20.1	32	17.4
Elementary school	13	50.0	76	49.4	89	48.6
High School [g]	8	30.8	19	12.3	27	14.7
More than one	4	15.4	26	16.9	30	16.3
All levels	0	0	2	1.3	2	1.0

[a] One case was excluded because gender was missed.
[b] No private schools agreed to participate; private schools represent less than 3% of the total in Barcelona. One missing case was excluded.
[c] For some demographics, the sample does not add up to 184 due to missing data.
[d] Including academic coordinators.
[e] Including music, foreign language and special arts teachers employed by hours at different levels.
[f] In Spain, monitors look after children during their lunch time, breaks and other activities.
[g] Including members of school administration, roles with less direct contact with children (i.e., secretary, cook).
[h] From 12/13 to 17/18 years of age.

Table 2.

Percentage of endorsement for questions on previous experience.

	Yes		No		I don't know/I am not sure	
Questions	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Victimization						
Aware of the concept of child and youth "victimization"	97	53.3	52	28.6	33	18.1
Has received training	20	10.9	159	86.4	5	2.7
Detection						
Has had at least one suspicion during his/her career	134	72.8	27	14.7	23	12.5
Considers to acknowledge risk factors in minors	34	18.9	33	18.3	113	62.8
Considers to acknowledge risk factors in families	22	12.3	48	26.8	109	60.9
Identifies a reference point in his/her school	104	57.8	32	17.8	44	24.4
Reporting						
Has reported at least one suspicion [a]	37	27.6	94	70.1	3	2.3
States that there is a protocol for reporting at his/her school [b]	44	28.2	20	12.8	92	59.0

Note. The total number of responses within the table differs as a result of missing data. Percentages were obtained excluding missing cases for each item.

[a] Only participants who had had suspicions were included (*n* = 134).

[b] Item with a non-response rate above 15%.

Table 3.

Percentages of endorsement per statement about knowledge. Victimization module.

	Yes		No		I don't know	
Victimization statements	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Child victimization can affect the minor's neurological development (Yes)	171	95.0	1	0.6	8	4.4
A minor who has suffered victimization is more likely to develop depression as an adult (Yes)	135	76.3	6	3.4	36	20.3
Minors and adults are equally vulnerable to violence (No)	105	59.0	71	39.9	2	1.1
If a behavior is harmful to the minor we consider it victimization, regardless of its intention (No)	131	73.2	17	9.5	31	17.3
We only consider victimization in a situation in which the minor's physical health is in immediate danger (No)	22	12.5	138	78.9	15	8.6
Most parents who victimize their children are mentally or psychologically ill (No)	25	14.3	96	55.2	53	30.5
Child victimization is always an action perpetrated by a grown-up against a minor (No)	32	18.4	126	72.4	16	9.2
Physical maltreatment is the most frequent type of victimization (No)	28	16.2	82	47.4	63	36.4
Child victimization affects less than 10% of minors in Spain (No)	15	8.6	28	16.0	132	75.4
A minor who has been victimized usually develops a feeling of rejection towards the perpetrator (No)	61	34.3	47	26.4	70	39.3

Note. The total number of responses within the table differs as a result of missing data. Percentages were obtained excluding missing cases for each item.

Table 4.

Percentages of endorsement. Detection module.

	Yes		No		I don't know	
Detection statements	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Only if I see more than one sign at a time can I suspect that a minor might be being victimized (Yes)	57	32.9	59	34.2	57	32.9
Protecting minors' well-being is a legal obligation, even if it means getting involved in situations outside the school context (Yes) [a]	98	64.5	12	7.9	42	27.6
The frequency of aggressive behavior is crucial to suspecting whether a minor is being victimized or not (Yes)	79	45.6	47	27.2	47	27.2
A minor growing up in a one-parent family is more likely to experience victimization (Yes)	5	2.9	135	78.0	33	19.1
A minor with low self-esteem is more likely to experience victimization (Yes)	114	64.8	25	14.2	37	21.0
An isolated family is considered more likely to perpetrate victimization (Yes)	56	32.0	34	19.4	85	48.6
Most signs of the childhood victimization are directly observable (No)	24	14.1	110	64.7	36	21.2
If the minor belongs to a culture that is more tolerant regarding abuse, we should not get involved (No)	13	7.6	130	76.0	28	16.4
An isolated family is considered more likely to perpetrate victimization (Yes)	56	32.0	34	19.4	85	48.6
A family that shows excessive protection towards their minors is associated with stronger precaution regarding victimization (No)	24	13.9	98	56.6	51	29.5
It is easy to define whether a behavior can be considered abuse or not (No)	96	55.8	33	19.2	43	25.0

Note. The total number of responses within the table differs as a result of missing data. Percentages were obtained excluding missing cases for each item.

[a] Item with over 15% of missing cases.

Table 5.

Percentages of endorsement. Reporting module.

	Yes		No		I don't know	
Reporting statements	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
In case of mild abuse, the first institution outside the school that should be notified is child welfare services (Yes)	122	67.0	13	7.2	47	25.8
In case of severe abuse, the first institution outside the school that should be notified is the police (No)	37	20.7	72	40.2	70	39.1
We should only report a case if we know for sure that the minor is being victimized (No)	82	45.8	50	27.9	47	26.3
In most cases, child welfare services interventions are not good for the minor's well-being (No)	26	14.7	65	36.7	86	48.6
If the informant wishes to report anonymously, he/she may do so (No)	52	29.7	24	13.7	99	56.6
A report makes a judge aware of the case (No)	25	14.7	32	18.8	113	66.5
If a suspicions turns out not to be true, the family is entitled to sue the informant (No)	26	14.9	12	6.9	136	78.2
Too many reports make the system collapse (No)	27	15.8	51	29.8	93	54.4
Reporting is up to the informant: the person who has the suspicion decides whether to report it (No)	54	30.6	61	34.7	61	34.7
The school principal's consent must be obtained before reporting (No)	70	39.8	31	17.6	75	42.6

Note. The total number of responses within the table differs as a result of missing data. Percentages were obtained excluding missing cases for each item.

Table 6.

Explaining reporting of suspected cases behavior.

				$e^{ß}$ 95% CI	
Variables	ß	*z*	$e^{ß}$	2.5%	97.5%
Constant	-2.96*	-2.47	0.05	0.003	0.43
In most cases, child welfare services interventions are mostly bad for the minor's well-being (reference category: Yes)					
I don't know	-2.22**	-2.92	0.10	0.02	0.46
No	-1.11	-1.53	0.32	0.07	1.31
Gender (reference category: Female)					
Male	1.19*	2.004	3.31	1.04	11.16
If the minor belongs to a culture that is more tolerant towards maltreatment, we should not intervene (reference category: No) [a]					
I don't know	0.83	0.49	2.29	0.06	88.57
Yes	2.42	1.87	11.29	1.25	280.05
Years of experience	0.07**	3.05	1.08	1.03	1.14

Note. R^2 = .22 (Cox & Snell); .21 (McFadden); .32 (Negelkerke).
Statistical significance is shown by multiple asterisk *$p < .05$ and **$p < .01$
[a] Variable "If the minor belongs to a culture that is more tolerant towards maltreatment, we should not intervene (reference category: No)" reported a significant Likelihood of Ratio Test ($p < .04$)