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Preschool Teachers' Decision-Making Process in Reporting Child Abuse

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College of Education

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MyTra Thi Nguyen-Vu

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2018

Abstract

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by

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MA, San Jose State University, 1998

BA, San Jose State University, 1996

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

April 2018

Abstract

Despite being mandated reporters by law, preschool teachers often fail to report suspicion of child abuse or neglect. Although research has been conducted regarding reasons why teachers do not report, no study has yet examined preschool teachers' thinking as decisions are being made. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to examine the in-the-moment decision-making process of preschool teachers to report or not report cases of suspected child abuse or neglect. Three research questions guided this exploration of teachers' responses to cases of possible child abuse or neglect, the reasons teachers give for their responses, and their confidence in the correctness of their decisions to report or not to report child abuse or neglect. The conceptual framework for this study was the ethical decision-making model of Meneghetti and Seel. The research was a phenomenological study using the think aloud protocol of van Someren, Barnard, and Sandberg. Three scenarios of possible child abuse cases were used as the basis for the face-to-face interviews in which 6 lead preschool teachers described their thought processes. The purposeful sample comprised 6 lead teachers in a major city in the United States with children aged 2 through 5. A thematic analysis method and coding strategy were used to answer the research questions. The findings in this study were consistent with the literature in that most of the teachers did not elect to report their suspicion of child abuse or neglect, but were inhibited by lack of clear understanding of what constitutes abuse and neglect, and by a desire for more information. This study contributes to positive social change by indicating a need for more training of preschool teachers in their mandated reporter role, which can result in more confident decision making and greater success in protecting young children.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to Jesus, who gave me the strength to complete this doctoral research. I could not have achieved this far without your wisdom and knowledge.

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I am very grateful to Dr. Patricia Anderson for being the most incredible committee chair in the world. You guided me to stay on track from the very beginning of the doctoral program. You have been a great role mentor to me, and I grew so much under your guidance. I was so blessed to have you as my committee chair for the dissertation. I am also thankful to Dr. Donna Brackin for your support throughout the entire process of my dissertation. I am grateful for your timely critique and suggestions. Lastly, I want to thank Dr. Michael Brunn for your expertise and constructive feedback for my study. Your encouragement and advice made me a better researcher.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In this study I investigated preschool teachers' in-the-moment decision-making process when considering cases of possible child abuse and their rationales for reporting or refraining from reporting child abuse. Little research explicates the process by which preschool teachers make the decision to report or not to report suspicion of child abuse or neglect (Gallagher-Mackay, 2014).

Educational personnel play a critical role in protecting the safety of young children from abuse or neglect (Gandarilla & O'Donnell, 2014; Krase, 2013). The term *educational personnel* includes teachers, school administrators, educational staff, child protective service workers, and child welfare administrators (Steen & Duran, 2014). Teachers and school officials are mandated reporters, and they have the legal responsibility to report any suspicion of child abuse or neglect (Steen & Duran, 2014).

Evidence from the field revealed that educational personnel do not always report when they suspect possible incidents of child abuse or neglect (Crowell & Levi, 2012; Krase, 2013; Gallagher-Mackay, 2014; Pietrantonio et al., 2013; Shewchuk, 2014). However, none of the research explains the process by which preschool teachers make the decision to report or not to report suspicion of child abuse or neglect (Gallagher-Mackay, 2014). The results of this study may shed light on preschool teachers' in-the-moment decision-making process to report or not to report child abuse or neglect, which may lead to more effective support of preschool teachers in making these decisions. As a result, this study has potential to benefit children who will be better protected from child abuse or neglect when their teachers are more confident in safeguarding them from harm,

effecting positive social change in the children's lives.

The following sections of the paper include the background, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance. This chapter ends with a summary and a transition to Chapter 2.

Background

It was estimated that over six million children are affected by child abuse or neglect each year (Friedman & Billick, 2015). Among the six million children, more than three million child abuse cases were reported (National Child Abuse Statistics, 2014). The U.S. Department Health and Human Services (2013) reported that 1,570 children died of child abuse or neglect in 2013. Children who are maltreated are at risk for developmental delays (English, Thompson, White & Wilson, 2015; Freeman, 2014; Herman-Smith, 2013; Viesel, Freer, Lowell & Castillo, 2015). Cicchetti (2013) indicated that child abuse or neglect poses risks to children's biological development and may also have psychological consequences.

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) was passed in 1974 and reauthorized in 2010 to protect children from all forms of harm including physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological injury (Child Welfare Information Gateway Children's Bureau, 2015). All the states have enacted CAPTA to protect children from child abuse. CAPTA states that professionals who work closely with children are mandated reporters (Child Welfare Information Gateway Children's Bureau, 2015). Mandated reporters include police officers, medical officials, nurses, teachers, or anyone

exposed to young children. One barrier to implementation of CAPTA, according to Brown and Ward (2014), is that these professionals display significant variability in their definitions of suspected abuse, their level of suspicion of abuse, and their decisions to make a report. In Brown and Ward's analysis, the level of variation was due to unclear standards in reporting suspicion of child abuse. Despite the laws to protect children from abuse or neglect, child abuse continues to occur and to be under-reported (Evans, Garner & Honig, 2014; Strasburger, 2013).

Lynn, Gifford, and Rosch (2015) noted that emergency medical services professionals failed to report suspicions of child abuse, despite the fact that health care professionals are mandated to report suspicion of child abuse or neglect. These authors indicated that the reason for low reporting among emergency medical services was the lack of knowledge and understanding of mandatory reporting policy (Lynn et al., 2015). They found that 40% of the emergency medical services did not know that their agency had a mandated reporting policy and that one-third of emergency medical services leadership personnel were not aware of the agency reporting policy (Lynn et al., 2015).

This problem is evident among preschool teachers as well. A study of 137 preschool teachers found that all of these teachers had had child abuse training and were knowledgeable of their requirements under the law for child abuse reporting (Dinehart & Kenny, 2015). However, the study revealed that only 12% (16) of the preschool teachers had ever made a report in a case of suspected child abuse. Among these 16 teachers, each had made only one child abuse reporting in their entire careers. The majority of the preschool teachers did not make any reporting even though each admitted they at some

time had reasonable suspicions of child abuse (Dinehart & Kenny, 2015). According to Dinehart and Kenny (2015), some teachers were afraid that their reports could be inaccurate. Some preschool teachers stated that they were not sure of the cultural basis for discipline in the affected families. Lastly, they found that some teachers specified that they were afraid of negative consequences if the report was inaccurate (Dinehart & Kenny, 2015).

Another study revealed that preschool teachers' reporting of child abuse was influenced by their own personal characteristics and by the early childhood program's climate (Herman-Smith, 2013). The study showed that preschool teachers who were new in the field were more likely to make a report due to their more recent instruction in the law. Preschool teachers who had taught longer were more skeptical of the value of reporting child abuse (Herman-Smith, 2013).

The current study is important to the early childhood field because it brings to light the decision-making process preschool teachers' use in considering a case of suspected child abuse. It fills a gap that currently exists by examining preschool teachers' in-the-moment decision-making with regard to reporting or not reporting a possible case of child abuse or neglect. As a result, this study has the potential to increase understanding of how such decisions are made and perhaps to increase the protection children receive from mandated reporters such as preschool teachers.

Problem Statement

Despite preschool teachers' role as mandated reporters, many preschool teachers have failed to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. This failure to make a report, despite reasonable suspicion and the mandate imposed by CAPTA forms the problem that is the basis of this study. Several studies have investigated the reasons underlying this problem of underreporting. Crowell and Levi (2012) and Herman-Smith (2013) found variability in how elementary and preschool teachers interpreted what constitutes reasonable suspicion of abuse or neglect. This variability in the definition of child abuse or neglect was a contributing factor for elementary and preschool teachers in several other studies (Feng, Wu, Fetzner & Chang, 2012; Gallagher-Mackay, 2014; Shewchuk, 2014). A study conducted among 64 elementary schools showed the documentation of child abuse reports ranged from 1 page to 155 pages long (Shewchuk, 2014). This suggests both a reluctance to fully engage in the reporting process among those who filed very brief reports and a desire to justify a decision beyond challenge among those who filed extensive reports. Shewchuk's (2014) findings support an investigation of teachers' in-the-moment thinking as they consider making a report, because teachers' motives and perspectives may be influential. No prior study of preschool teachers' decision-making with regard to child abuse reporting has been conducted using an in-the-moment tool such as the think aloud protocol. This study has potential to fill this gap and to contribute to the literature information about teachers' thought processes as they make these decisions.

Purpose of the Study

Suspicion of child abuse or neglect continues to be underreported by preschool teachers, despite teachers' role as mandated reporters. The purpose of this study, then, was to understand preschool teachers' in-the-moment decision-making process when considering a case of possible child abuse and what factors might inhibit them or encourage them regarding the making of a child abuse report.

In this phenomenological study, preschool teachers' decision-making process in response to a case of possible child abuse was examined using the think aloud protocol described by van Someren, Barnard, and Sandberg (1994). The think aloud protocol employs a structured interview in which interviewees describes their thinking as they complete a designated task. This study was guided by work in decision-making proposed by Meneghetti and Seel (2001).

Research Questions

The following research questions derived from the decision-making theory of Meneghetti and Seel (2001) guided this study:

RQ1: How do preschool teachers respond when confronted with an incident of possible child abuse or neglect?

RQ2: What is the rationale preschool teachers describe in deciding to report or not report suspicion of child abuse or neglect?

RQ3: How confident do preschool teachers feel about their decision to report or not report incidents of possible child abuse or neglect?

More details regarding how I explored these questions in this study is discussed in Chapter 3. The implications of Meneghetti and Seel's (2001) work for this study are presented in the next section.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the ethical decision-making model described by Meneghetti and Seel (2001). According to Meneghetti and Seel, ethical dilemmas exhibit five traits, including (a) difficulty in identifying dilemmas as such, (b) difficulty in separating a dilemma from its context, (c) difficulty in recognizing the ethical nature of practical dilemmas, (d) difficulty in separating ethical considerations from feelings about situational stakeholders, and (e) difficulty in making a decision with incomplete access to the facts. The ethical decision-making model proposed by Meneghetti and Seel (2001) offered a nonprescriptive four-step process for examining an ethical dilemma and formulating an ethical decision. In addition, Meneghetti and Seel (2001) suggested that ethical decisions are embedded in personal values, ethics, and morality, and so are highly individual and context-specific. These factors identified by Meneghetti and Seel (2001) may be at work in teachers' decisions to report a suspected case of child abuse or to fail to make such a report.

Since preschool teachers are mandated by law to report cases of suspected abuse and neglect, they are confronted with occasions in which they must decide to report or not to report their suspicions of child abuse concerning children in their care. In making this decision, Meneghetti and Seel's (2001) four-factor model suggests teachers must consider (a) *the stakeholders*, which may include the child, the parents, or other adults in

the home, but also center staff and the teachers themselves; (b) *applicable ethical values*, including views about child rearing and discipline; (c) *possible actions to take*, including making a report of child abuse, refraining from making a report of child abuse, waiting, or getting a second opinion; and (d) *those actions' possible consequences*, including consequences for the child, the child's family, the center, and the teacher. In addition, Meneghetti and Seel's (2001) five traits that characterize an ethical dilemma may guide the analysis of teachers' thinking, specifically their willingness to recognize that what might appear to be an everyday situation carries ethical implications, that different solutions to a situation are possible, that the situation can be separated from its context, that emotional connections may bias their decision-making, and that a decision must be made even in the absence of key facts. The complexity of the decision-making process as outlined by Meneghetti and Seel (2001) supports the need for this study in which preschool teachers describe their decision-making process when confronted by examples of possible child abuse or neglect. As Meneghetti and Seel's work and preschool teachers' frequent failure to report suggest, such decisions are not simple and are worthy of investigation. A thorough explanation of the conceptual framework is provided in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

In this study I used a phenomenological study design. According to Moustakas (1994), a phenomenological study examines a specific phenomenon through the person's experiences and the person's interpretations of those experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological design was appropriate for this study because it provided support

in clarifying the teachers' decisions to report or not to report suspicion (Creswell, 2012; Creswell, 2013). I chose this design because it matched the qualitative nature of thought processes at work in deciding a case of possible child abuse and it could provide rich information with which to answer my research questions.

Six lead preschool teachers participated in the study. These teachers were chosen from those employed as lead teachers in classrooms serving children between the ages of two through five, and they had at least 2 years of experience in this role. The think aloud protocol first described by van Someren et al. (1994) was used to generate data during one-to-one interviews. Teachers verbally expressed their in-the-moment thinking process as they assessed written scenarios describing three incidents of possible child abuse. Teachers were prompted to speak aloud as to what went through their mind as they considered each incident and made a decision to report or to not report it as child abuse. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed into text. The transcripts of the conversations collected in this way composed the data for this study. The method that I used to analyze the data was the thematic data analysis method and coding technique (Merriam & Tidsell, 2016; Saldana, 2013). I present a more detailed descriptions of the methodology in Chapter 3.

Definitions

Child abuse: The CAPTA definition of child abuse and neglect is “any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or failure to act which

presents an imminent risk of serious harm” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014, p. 98).

Mandated reporters: Mandated reporters are professionals including doctors, police officers, teachers, counselors, school personnel, and anyone who comes in contact with children to report suspicion of child abuse and neglect to child protection services (CPS) or law enforcement officials (Child Welfare Information Gateway of the Children’s Bureau, 2015).

Reasonable suspicion: Mandated reporters who have a reason to believe and suspect that a child may be abused or neglected by a parent or caregiver (Crowell & Levi, 2012; Herman-Smith, 2013).

Assumptions

I assumed that the information gathered from the interviews of the six lead preschool teachers is true and accurate based on what they believe about identifying suspicion of child abuse and child abuse reporting. In addition, I assumed that what the lead preschool teachers shared in the interview was consistent with what they actually would do if they suspected child abuse or neglect. These assumptions are inherent in qualitative methodologies reliant on participant perceptions (Merriam, 2007). Wiseman and Levin (1996) found no differences in decisions made under real and hypothetical conditions, so the assumptions in this study may be upheld. However, through probing questions, I attempted to ensure that the lead preschool teachers considered carefully the scenarios with which they were presented and that they offered their true perceptions of the scenarios and their decision-making process.

Scope and Delimitations

This phenomenological study was an examination of preschool teachers' in-the-moment decision-making process to report or not to report cases of possible child abuse or neglect. I chose a phenomenological focus because in this study I examined the specific phenomenon of teachers' experiences of child abuse reporting and their interpretations of those experiences. This study was supported by the decision-making model of Meneghetti and Seel (2001), which formed the conceptual framework. Six lead preschool teachers who work with children ages two through five in a preschool setting in a major metropolitan area of the Western United States were interviewed using the think aloud protocol about three hypothetical scenarios of suspected child abuse or neglect. Excluded from the study were teachers of children of other ages, teachers working in family childcare homes or as private nannies, teachers working in a preschool center in an auxiliary capacity without classroom responsibility, and teachers who have fewer than 2 years' experience as an early childhood practitioner. These boundaries of the study may have limited the transferability of the results if applied within the wider scope of all early childhood settings or to all early childhood professionals.

Limitations

One limitation of the study was the small sample size inherent in a study based on in-depth interviews. The small sample size of preschool teachers may not have been representative of the population of all early childhood teachers and may have hindered the transferability of the findings. Another limitation may have been that the child abuse scenarios used in this study were not inclusive of all possible scenarios but only

represented some situations. The think aloud protocol has been used successfully with a wide range of participants, including children, but the necessity to speak about abuse scenarios as part of this study may have been discomfiting to some participants and may have affected the dependability of the results. Some of these limitations may have been mitigated by the conversational, one-to-one nature of the think aloud process, so that participants may have been made to feel at ease and open with me during the interviews. The influence of scenario choice may have been discovered in the course of this study and may be used to inform a larger study in the future with a greater sample size.

There was potential for researcher bias since I was knowledgeable on the topic of child abuse reporting through my professional experiences and through my reading of the literature. It was important to this study that I did not influence the teachers' thinking process during the interviews by interrupting the teachers while they spoke aloud or trying to guide them in any particular direction. The think aloud protocol that formed the basis for data collection and that I describe in Chapter 3 anticipates the challenge of researcher bias, and by following the protocol precisely, I was able to avoid affecting teachers' responses. In addition, I was aware of my biases as I conducted the data analysis and as I wrote the final discussion and conclusion sections.

Significance

The focus of the study was to understand teachers' decision-making process and their rationales for reporting or for not reporting child abuse or neglect. Although a few studies sought to explicate preschool teachers' thinking when confronted by specific incidents of possible child abuse or neglect (Dinehart & Kenny, 2015; Feng et al., 2012;

Schols, Ruiter & Ory, 2013), all of these were retrospective, relying on participants' memory of their thinking at the time of making a decision, or survey-based, offering only a quantitative snapshot of teachers' thinking. Therefore, the current study of teachers' in-the-moment decision-making has the potential to provide new insights into preschool teachers' thinking when considering a case of possible child abuse or neglect and can shed light on the reasons why child abuse is infrequently reported by preschool teachers. Evidence from recent literature indicated that suspected cases of child abuse or neglect often are not reported by school personnel, revealing a gap in practice worthy of study (Krase, 2013; Gallagher-Mackay, 2014; Pietrantonio, Wright et al., 2013; Shewchuk, 2014; Walther, 2013). The results of this study may lead to more effective support of preschool teachers in making these decisions. As a result, this study has potential for influencing positive social change because preschool teachers who feel supported in acting on their suspicions of child abuse or neglect will be more confident and proactive in safeguarding children from harm.

Summary

Studies have shown that mandated reporters, including teachers of children of all ages, have not consistently reported suspicion of child abuse or neglect (Crowell & Levi, 2012; Dinehart & Kenny, 2015; Krase, 2013; Gallagher-Mackay, 2014; Pietrantonio et al., 2013; Shewchuk, 2014). Several factors appear to contribute to underreporting, including lack of a clear definition of what constitutes child abuse, uncertainty over the validity of a person's judgment in assessing a case of suspected abuse, and reluctance to get involved in what is perceived to be a family matter. However, the studies that have

been conducted with preschool teachers have asked participants to rely on memory in reporting their thinking about past cases of suspected child abuse or have used a questionnaire to elicit responses to written vignettes. No study has asked preschool teachers to describe their in-the-moment thinking about a case of possible child abuse. The purpose of this study, then, was to understand preschool teachers' in-the-moment decision-making process when considering a case of possible child abuse and what factors might inhibit them or encourage them regarding the making of a child abuse report. This phenomenological study followed the think aloud protocol in asking six lead preschool teachers to say out loud what they were thinking as they considered three written hypothetical scenarios describing cases of possible child abuse or neglect. The conceptual framework supporting this study was the ethical decision-making model of Meneghetti and Seel (2001).

In Chapter 2, I explain the conceptual framework in greater detail and also review the current literature. In Chapter 3, I describe the research method for my study. Chapter 4 present the setting, the demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, the results of the findings from the research, and a summary. Chapter 5 offer a discussion of the results, a description of the limitations, implications, and recommendations, and a conclusion of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Throughout history, some children have endured harsh treatment from their parents or people who were supposed to care for them (Matthews & Bross, 2015). The abuse was often hidden within the family and children were oppressed behind closed doors. Some of the abused children experienced severe physical beatings, molestation, rape, and emotional and psychological deprivation (Matthews & Bross, 2015). Child abuse and neglect occur at every socioeconomic level of society (Ellenbogen, Klein, & Wekerle, 2014). Although child abuse and neglect are widely agreed to be criminal, and although education is well-placed to notice and report suspicions of abuse, reporting of child abuse by preschool teachers is uneven. Each year in the United States child abuse and neglect cases involve about 6 million children, and one-half of these children are under the age of five (Friedman & Billick, 2015; Henderson, 2013; Steen & Duran, 2014; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). Only about 3.4 million of these estimated 6 million cases were referred to CPS for suspected child abuse and neglect (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). However, variability exists among mandated reporters in their understanding of what is “reasonable suspicion” of abuse and neglect (Crowell & Levi, 2012), and as a result, teachers at all grade levels have demonstrated uneven reporting of cases of suspected child abuse (Shewchuk, 2014).

The problem that is the focus of this study was that despite preschool teachers’ role as mandated reporters, some teachers have failed to report suspicion of child abuse or neglect. The purpose of this study, then, was to understand preschool teachers’ in-the-moment decision-making process when considering a case of possible child abuse and

what factors might inhibit them or encourage them regarding the making of a child abuse report.

The following sections of this literature review will include the literature search strategy, a description of the study's conceptual framework, and a review of current literature surrounding the history of child protection, the negative effects of child abuse and neglect on children's development, a history of mandated reporting, the outcomes and issues of mandated reporting, professionals' knowledge of child abuse and neglect, and a summary and conclusions.

Literature Search Strategy

I conducted a search of the literature using the resources of the Walden University Library. The main databases I used, and key search terms in each, were the Walden University Library holdings (*child abuse and neglect, child abuse laws, child maltreatment, child-protective services, decision-making, ethical models of decision-making, ethical obligations, legal ramifications of abuse reporting, mandated reporters, preschool and child abuse, rationale for reporting, suspect of abuse, mandated reporting laws, and teachers' decisions to report child abuse*), ERIC (*teachers' decisions to report child abuse, legal ramifications of abuse reporting, mandated reporters, and preschool and child abuse*), Education Source (*teachers' decisions to report child abuse, legal ramifications of abuse reporting, mandated reporters, and preschool and child abuse*), Educational Research Complete (*decision-making, ethical models of decision-making, ethical obligations, and ramifications of abuse reporting*), Social Science Index (*child abuse laws, child maltreatment, child-protective services, and mandated reporting laws*),

PsychoInfo (*decision-making, ethical models of decision-making, and ethical obligations*), PsychARTICLE (*rationale for reporting, suspect of abuse, and mandated reporting laws*), Expanded Academic (*decision-making, ethical models of decision-making, and ethical obligations*), MEDLINE (*child abuse and neglect and suspect of abuse*), and Google Scholar (*child abuse and neglect, child abuse laws, child maltreatment, child-protective services, decision-making, ethical models of decision-making, ethical obligations, legal ramifications of abuse reporting, mandated reporters, preschool and child abuse, rationale for reporting, suspect of abuse, mandated reporting laws, and teachers' decisions to report child abuse*). Articles were primarily from peer-reviewed scholarly journals but also included reports of government agencies and branches of government involved in CAPTA and other monitoring processes.

Conceptual Framework

In the study I employed the ethical model of decision-making developed by Meneghetti and Seel (2001). According to Meneghetti and Seel (2001), there are five elements that are typical of ethical dilemmas: (a) ethical dilemmas may not be easy to identify, (b) they may be hard to separate from the context, (c) they may not be obviously dilemmas with diverse options, (d) they may involve various stakeholders that have influence over perception and resolution of the dilemmas, (e) and they may involve making decisions without all the needed information provided. These elements contribute to feelings of uncertainty that accompany many ethical choices (Meneghetti & Seel, 2001) and may be at work in the decisions preschool teachers must make in considering cases of possible child abuse.

Meneghetti and Seel (2001) described a non-prescriptive four-step process of analyzing ethical dilemmas and making ethical decisions. The first step is classifying the main stakeholders in a dilemma. In evaluating a case of possible child abuse, preschool teachers might include as stakeholders the child, the child's parents or other adults who may be involved, the preschool administrators, and the teachers themselves. The second step is stating the problem from the stakeholders' viewpoint by recognizing the ethical values that are being violated. A preschool teacher might consider the value for the child to be protected from harm, the value parents or other adults may place on their privacy or freedom to make disciplinary choices, the value the teacher's preschool administration and the teacher have for their reputation within the community and their role as representatives of the legal system, and the preschool teacher's own perception of self as a parent, as an advocate for children, or as a representative of an ethical tradition. The third step is to establish the possible actions that concern the stakeholders, presumably including for the preschool teacher an action to make a report, to get a second opinion, to delay a decision until more information is available, to talk with the parents, or to do nothing. Step four is making a decision but taking note of the positive and negative consequences and selecting an action that produces the least harm but has the most favorable outcomes. This step, in which an actual action is taken, represents a synthesis of the preceding three steps and is the point at which the dilemma is resolved. These steps essentially assist in the process of thinking through an ethical problem, explaining it carefully, and then selecting an ethical decision.

The four steps do not provide a prescription of what to do, but rather a way of deciding what would be the right thing to do. According to Meneghetti and Seel (2001), the decision to make the right choice is influenced by values, ethics, and morality. Meneghetti and Seel (2001) defined *values* as a person's preference of beliefs and attitudes. For instance, some people highly value fame, wealth, and power. However, not all values are ethical. Ethical values are societal and reflect universal belief systems of right and wrong. An example of an ethical value is honesty (Meneghetti & Seel, 2001). Morals are often private in nature, and their influence may come from a person's upbringing, religion, and culture (Meneghetti & Seel, 2001).

The theory of decision-making was a reasonable choice as the foundation for my study because I examined preschool teachers' reasons for reporting or not reporting suspected child abuse or neglect. Gallagher-Mackay (2014) suggested that teachers based their decisions about child abuse reporting on their relationships with their students. Some close relationship teachers might have with their students lead them to make decisions based on the best interest of the children in their classroom (Gallagher-Mackay, 2014). Gallagher-Mackay noted that relational theory suggests that emotions are tied to the decision-making process. A person's emotions such as love, dependency, fear, anger, or jealousy may influence a decision. According to Gallagher-Mackay (2014), teachers' emotions influence their perceptions of situations and the decisions that they make about them. Teachers' decisions are influenced by how emotionally tied they are to their students.

The elements and steps of ethical decision-making described by Meneghetti and Seel (2001) and relational theory described by Gallagher-Mackay (2014) with particular relevance to teachers' reporting of child abuse underlie this study into teachers' in-the-moment decision-making. In the following sections, I present a review of the literature concerning the history of child protection, the negative effects of child abuse and neglect on development, the history of mandated reporting, the outcomes of mandatory reporting, and professionals' knowledge of child abuse and neglect, along with a summary and conclusions.

History of Child Protection

Matthews and Bross (2015) found that many children throughout the ages have endured oppression and severe abuse in their homes. These children have experienced child abuse and neglect from the people who were supposed to care for them, such as their parents and caregivers (Matthews & Bross, 2015). Up until the middle of the 20th century, there was no system in place to intervene and protect children from such crimes committed against them (Matthews & Bross, 2015). It was not until the early 1960s that laws were enacted in the United States to protect children from child abuse and neglect (Matthews & Bross, 2015). However, to understand the child protection laws, it is important to recapture the history of how children were perceived throughout the centuries.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the concept of childhood began to evolve (Bell, 2011). According to Bell (2011), society viewed children as innocent and dependent beings in need of adult protection and guidance. Books and articles were

written during this period that informed people on how to care for young children (Foucault, 1984). Affluent families continued to educate young children with the intention of training them for managerial positions, but children in the lower classes as young as age seven worked in factories (Foucault, 1984). It was during this time that child abuse and neglect began to surface as social problems (Bell, 2011).

In the 19th and 20th centuries, child saver movements emerged (Bell, 2011). The movements resulted in the establishment of houses of refuge, the Society of Prevention for Cruelty to Children, and the juvenile court system (Bell, 2011). These organizations began to recognize the harmful impact of child abuse and neglect. The purpose of these organizations was to prevent any potential delinquency among children by taking them from their poor environments and moving them into a house of refuge (Bell, 2011). Institutional sites were in place to teach youth order, self-regulation, and obedience. In 1825, the first home established in New York City to offer protection to the delinquent, incarcerated, and poor children (Bell, 2011). Later on, other refuge homes began to appear in the United States that provided a model for the present day juvenile institutions (Bell, 2011). In 1899, the first juvenile court was established in Illinois, and this concept eventually spread throughout the United States (Bell, 2011). The purpose of the juvenile court system was to provide protection for children and to intervene on behalf of a child's best interest.

Then in 1874, the first case of child protection filed in a U. S. court was that of a nine-year-old foster child who lived a life of servanthood and imprisonment (Bell, 2011). She also received repeated beatings from her foster mother. The neighbors reported the

case to a mission worker, who was able to acquire an apartment next to the home so she could witness the beatings inflicted on this child. With this evidence, the mission worker advocated on behalf of the child and brought her case to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), since there was no similar organization yet established for the protection of children. The ASPCA took on the case and was able to prosecute the foster mother for abusing the nine-year-old girl under her care. The ruling was in favor for the child because she was considered a member of the animal kingdom and therefore she was protected under the laws of animal protection (Bell, 2011). The foster mother was sentenced to one year of hard labor. The ASPCA removed the child from the foster mother's custody permanently. Due to this case, social welfare organizations were established. These organizations included the Children's Division of the American Humane Association, the Public Welfare Association, and the Child Welfare League (Bell, 2011). In 1884, an office devoted to child protective services was established in New York.

It was not until the 1960s that the federal government began to respond to child abuse and neglect (Matthews & Bross, 2015). Mandated reporting laws first were established in Colorado following the definition of what was called "battered-child syndrome" with a call to pediatricians to report cases of abused children they see in their work as doctors (Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegemuller & Silver, 1962). Laws throughout the United States subsequently were enacted to require the reporting of children's harsh physical punishment. Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974 was funded as a result of federal legislation. The legislation funded CPS and

established the National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect to provide a systematic process of responding to child abuse reports (Ellett, 2013). At that time, each state was responsible to fund and develop a process of abuse reporting. As a result, there were various CPS models and practices among the states, including rules regarding who are considered mandated reporters, the consequences of reporting, and the types of abuse that should be reported (Ellett, 2013; Matthews & Bross, 2015; Steen & Duran, 2014). During that time, many states were not able to handle the overwhelming number of reports, especially with largely untrained CPS social workers (Ellett, 2013).

Negative Effects of Child Abuse and Neglect on Children's Development

It estimated that child abuse and neglect costs society between \$80 and \$124 billion each year (Fang, Brown, Florence & Mercy, 2012). These costs include mental health and medical services, the criminal justice system, CPS, costs to the educational system, loss of productivity, and high crime rates (Pietrantonio, Wright, Gibson, Alldred, Jacobson & Niec, 2013). In addition to the monetary costs, child abuse jeopardizes children's physical and mental health and well-being (Freeman, 2014; Jaffee & Christian, 2014; Lannen & Ziswiler, 2014), including their physical, psychological, emotional, linguistic, spiritual, and cognitive development (Cicchetti, 2013; Viezel et al., 2014). Child abuse puts children at risk for trauma, long-term harm, developmental failure and even death in young children (Bartelink, van Yperen, ten Berge, Kwaadsteniet & Witteman, 2014; Herman-Smith, 2013; Lannen & Ziswiler, 2014). Abuse also has negative effects on children's academic potential (Freeman, 2014; Jaffee & Christian, 2014). Abused children are more likely to perform poorly in school due to memory loss

and low attention span (English et al., 2015; Jaffee & Christian, 2014). They experience lower language development and impaired cognitive skills that affect their learning abilities (English et al., 2015; Freeman, 2014; Lannen & Ziswiler, 2014). Child abuse may also cause certain regions of the brain to malfunction, which affects memory and learning abilities (Jaffee & Christian, 2014; Lannen & Ziswiler, 2014).

The effects of child abuse increase children's risk for adverse health and chronic illnesses that may not seem obviously connected to abuse (Bartelink et al., 2014; Herman-Smith, 2013). These risks include blindness, heart, lung, liver disease, obesity, cancer, high blood pressure, anxiety, and, among older children and adolescents, smoking, alcoholism, and drug abuse (Bartelink et al., 2014; Herman-Smith, 2013; Lannen & Ziswiler, 2014). Abused children also have higher stress levels, greater incidence of inflammations, lower immunity, and lower brain functioning than unabused (Jaffee & Christian, 2014). Some abused children exhibit problems such as depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and attempts to commit suicide (Bartelink et al., 2014; Freeman, 2014; Kugler, Bloom, Kaercher, Truax, & Storch, 2012). Exposure to trauma at a young age increases children's risk for somatic symptoms, including most commonly post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These children often need of acute and ongoing medical care treatment (Bartelink et al., 2014; Freeman, 2014; Kugler et al., 2012).

All forms of child abuse and neglect occur more frequently in families who live in poverty (Cicchetti, 2013; Douglas & Walsh, 2015). In addition, these children have more occurrence of repeated abuse in their lives (Ingram, Cash, Oats, Simpson & Thompson, 2015). Abused children are exposed to familial stressors, which include low-

income and impoverished environments (Cicchetti, 2013; Freeman, 2014; Oshio & Umeda, 2016). Furthermore, abused children are more likely than unabused children to be subjected to community stressors, which include violence, crime, noise, poorer schools, overcrowded and substandard housing, and minimal local resources (Cicchetti, 2013).

One of the long-term effects of child abuse in childhood is an increase in chronic illnesses later on in adulthood (Freeman, 2014; Jaffee & Christian, 2014; Lannen & Ziswiler, 2014). These diseases include Type II diabetes, cardiovascular illness, cancer, chronic lung disease, alterations to brain structure and functioning, endocrine disorders, interferences within the autonomic nervous system, and disruption in immune functioning (Freeman, 2014; Jaffee & Christian, 2014; Lannen & Ziswiler, 2014).

History of Mandated Reporting

The inspiration for the first mandatory child abuse reporting law was credited to groundbreaking work led by Kempe, a pediatrician from Colorado (Matthews & Bross, 2015). In 1962, Kempe and his colleagues introduced the medical condition they called *battered-child syndrome* to describe children who had been severely abused or neglected (Kempe et al., 1962). California was the first state to adopt mandatory reporting in 1963 (Hogelin, 2013). By 1967, all 50 states in the United States and the District of Columbia had adopted mandatory reporting. These laws required medical professionals, especially doctors, to report their suspicions of child abuse and neglect (Hogelin, 2013). In 1967 only 14 states required teachers to report suspected child abuse and neglect, but by 1974

24 states mandated teachers to make a report. Mandated reporting requirements for teachers doubled to 49 states by 1977 (Hogelin, 2013).

At the federal level, the CAPTA required doctors to identify and report child injuries and fatalities (Ellett, 2013). The purpose of CAPTA was to ensure that mandated reporters would report suspected maltreated children to the attention of Child Protected Services (Steen & Duran, 2014). CAPTA also established the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, which created a systematic way to address and respond to child abuse reporting. It also trains and provides technical assistance to states and local agencies (Hogelin, 2013). The purpose of the training is to provide proper identification of child abuse, effective reporting processes, and appropriate intervention. The plan for CAPTA was to warrant that all children under the age of three years old who have been abused or neglected would have access to developmental screenings (Herman-Smith, 2013). The federal government provides grants to all the states under the requirements of CAPTA regulations (Hogelin, 2013). These federal grants offer assistance with child abuse reporting and setting up prevention programs. In addition, CAPTA supports immunity to professionals for reporting suspicion of child abuse and neglect.

Mandated reporting laws vary from state to state but typically require all professionals who come in contact with children as part of their work, including doctors, police officers, teachers, counselors, and school personnel, to report a suspicion of child abuse and neglect to CPS or law enforcement officials (Child Welfare Information Gateway of the Children's Bureau, 2015). Krase (2013) found that only 16 percent of the child abuse reports submitted to CPS in 2009 were from educational personnel, which

included teachers, school social workers, and other school staff. School districts require teachers to report any suspicion of child abuse to school officials (Dinehart & Kenny, 2015; Krase, 2013; Feng et al.). Teachers are in a position to detect signs of abuse through observing children's daily behavior, socio-emotional and cognitive development (Dinehar & Kenny; Krase, 2013; Matthews & Bross, 2015) and also have the ability to compare a child's current behavior or appearance to previous behaviors and appearances.

The responsibility of the mandated reporters is to make the report (Matthews & Bross, 2015), following state policies and procedures (Goldman & Brimbeek, 2014; Walsh, Rassafiani, Matthews, Farrell, & Butler, 2012). A typical first step in reporting suspected child abuse or neglect is to call CPS or law enforcement and then submit a written report, usually within a specified time (Steen & Duran, 2014). In order to satisfy authorities that one has dispatched one's duties as a mandated reporter, this call and report cannot be anonymous but must indicate the name and professional role of the person making the report. A typical second step occurs when the referral is received and a CPS caseworker determines whether the case meets the requirements for investigation. If the case is substantiated, the caseworker commences an investigation (Henderson, 2013; Steen & Duran, 2014), which may include interviewing the person who made the report and interviewing the child. While professionals are more likely to report suspected child abuse and neglect if they feel confident and competent in their ability to report (Francis, Chapman, Sellick, James, Miles, Jones & Grant, 2012), it is clear that the act of reporting may lead to additional attention to the reporting person or to the organization of

which she is a part. The process of reporting and any personal or professional jeopardy a reporter may believe could be triggered thereby may be important elements in this study.

The Outcomes and Issues of Mandated Reporting

Mandatory reporting has resulted in positive outcomes for protecting children from child abuse and neglect (Matthews & Bross, 2015). Due to the increasing reporting in the United States, childhood deaths due to abuse decreased between 1990 to 2005 from an average of 4,000 per year to 1,500 (Matthews & Bross, 2015). This reduction was due to increased child abuse reporting that resulted in identifying severely abused children who may have been in mortal danger (Matthews & Bross, 2015). Since 2012, reports of sexual and physical abuse in the U.S. have dropped, although reports of child neglect and emotional abuse have risen and are now the most common reports received (Matthews & Bross, 2015).

In spite of the positive outcomes of the mandatory reporting laws, recent studies indicated that not all mandated reporters report their suspicions of child abuse or neglect (Gallagher-Mackay, 2014; Krase, 2013; Pietrantonio et al., 2013). Krase (2013) found that only 16 percent of elementary school teachers and staff report suspected child abuse and neglect. Gallagher-Mackay (2014), in interviews with 38 preschool and elementary grade teachers and social workers, found that even though these educators said they were aware of their status as mandated reporters, and even though they confirmed their knowledge of the laws for reporting suspected child abuse, teachers and school social workers acknowledged that they often fail to report suspected child abuse or neglect. Crowell and Levi (2012), in a survey of over 1200 U.S. preschool and elementary school

teachers, school administrators, and school social workers and counselors, found that these mandated reporters had conflicting definitions of *child abuse* and lacked agreement on what constitutes *reasonable suspicion*.

According to Piertrantonia et al. (2013), the Child Abuse Recognition and Evaluation Study (CARES) found that 27% of the primary health care providers did not report cases of child abuse to CPS even though they had knowledge that the child's injuries were due to child abuse. Some of the children's injuries health providers noted were presented in their office they believed they were "likely" or "very likely" caused by child abuse or neglect. However, these health care providers failed to report their suspicion of child abuse or neglect because, they reportedly said, they felt uncomfortable confronting parents or caregivers directly with an accusation of child abuse or neglect (Piertrantonia et al., 2013).

Bartelink et al. (2014), in a questionnaire of 40 staffers from Dutch "advice and reporting agencies," indicated that some abuse investigators do not trust CPS as an agency, in conducting an investigation, or in implementing an effective intervention process. These professionals were concerned whether CPS intervention would provide benefit to children and families or cause harm to the family structure (Bartelink et al., 2014). Some teachers have described feeling afraid of disrupting lives within the families and tension that may arise from the abuse reporting (Krase, 2013). Bartelink et al. (2014) also indicated that mandated professionals might have limited time, uncertainty about the situation, or overlook pertinent details that may influence their decisions not to file a

child abuse report. These issues echo the ethical decision-making elements of Meneghetti and Seel (2001) and may be evident in results of the current study.

Professionals' Knowledge of Child Abuse and Neglect

CAPTA established that professionals who work closely with children are mandated reporters, including police officers, medical professionals, nurses, teachers, school personnel and anyone else who interacts with children in a professional capacity (Child Welfare Information Gateway of the Children's Bureau, 2015). However, studies have indicated variability in how these professionals define child abuse or neglect (Crowell & Levi, 2012; Francis et al., 2012) and in how professionals understand the meaning of their responsibilities as mandated reporters (Francis et al., 2012; Gallagher-Mackay, 2014; Krase, 2013; Pietrantonio et al., 2013). Crowell and Levi (2012) noted that sometimes the cases are not definitive and so it is difficult for professionals to show evidence of the abuse they suspect. As an example, Francis et al. (2012) conducted interviews of 17 Australian teachers, police officers, and medical personnel regarding their professional background, participation in preservice or in-service training in identification of child abuse, and experience with child abuse reporting. The study found that these professionals' decisions to report were influenced by experiences of reporting, support by administrators, and beliefs about child abuse or neglect (Francis et al., 2012). These authors found that some professionals wanted to gather more evidence to support their suspicions of abuse before they decided to report or not report (Francis et al., 2012).

Some studies have found that more than half of teachers were not familiar with the legislative policy on reporting (McGarry & Buckley, 2013; Choo, Walsh, Marret,

Chinna & Tey, 2013). In a survey of 59 recently graduated Irish teachers, McGarry and Buckley (2013) found that 28 % of teachers lacked knowledge of child abuse reporting, and 78 % said they knew of the reporting policy but had not actually read it. Fifty-seven percent of the responding teachers in McGarry and Buckley's study said they were unsure of how to recognize a case of child abuse. Similarly, a study of over 600 Malaysian educators (Choo et al., 2013) found that scarcely any (3.2%) had ever made a report of child abuse and very few (5.2%) had ever even suspected child abuse in the life of a student they taught. At the time of this study, child abuse reporting was not required by law in Malaysia and Choo et al. (2103) found that fewer than 45% of respondents supported a law-making reporting by teachers mandatory.

Dinehart and Kenny's (2015) survey of 137 Florida preschool teachers indicated that teachers fail to report due to the vague understanding of the process of reporting child abuse and neglect. In addition, these teachers indicated that they feared families might retaliate against a reporting teacher and that their relationship with a family might be damaged if parents find out who made the report. Dinehart and Kenny (2015) also found some teachers reported difficulty in detecting and making a report of suspected child abuse due to a lack of preservice or in-service training and perceived inconsistency of policies and procedures of child abuse reporting. Two-thirds of the teachers in their study claimed they did not have prior training on child abuse and 14% indicated that they received inadequate training. Few of the teachers said they were aware of their preschool's policies on reporting. Furthermore, these teachers said they felt inadequate to detect and identify the various types of child abuse (Dinehart, & Kenny, 2015).

The effectiveness of mandated reporter laws depends on the training of those mandated reporters in recognizing and reporting cases of suspected child abuse and neglect. It also depends on reporters' framing of the ethical decision in light of their own feelings about the stakeholders and the possible implications of their decision to report or not report a case of suspected child abuse and neglect. How preschool teachers make this decision in-the-moment is the process I intend to explore in this study.

Summary and Conclusions

This literature review revealed that millions of children experience some form of child abuse or neglect annually in the United States. Despite the laws to protect children from child abuse or neglect, research has shown that not all mandated reporters report suspicion of child abuse or neglect. Since teachers are mandated reporters, the decisions that they make or not make have great ramifications for their students.

What is not known from the current literature is how preschool teachers decide in-the-moment to report or not to report suspicion of child abuse and neglect. The literature suggests that teachers may feel conflicted, under-trained, and unsure of themselves and that these feelings may influence their decision-making process; however, the actual process by which preschool teachers make that decision when confronted by a possible case of child abuse or neglect is unknown. Therefore, the present study may fill this gap by increasing understanding of preschool teachers' in-the-moment decision-making process and the rationales behind their decisions to report or not to report suspicion of child abuse or neglect. The present study has the potential to increase awareness of child abuse reporting among early childhood professionals.

The next chapter addressed the research methodology for the study. The research design and rationale, including the method by which in-the-moment decision-making was captured and explained in detail.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Teachers by law are mandated to report any suspicion of child abuse or neglect (Ellett, 2013; Herman-Smith, 2013; Hogelin, 2013; Matthews & Bross, 2015; Steen & Duran, 2014). The problem that was the focus of this study was that not all teachers report their suspicions of child abuse or neglect. The purpose of this study was to understand preschool teachers' rationale behind their decision to report or not to report incidents that they suspect might constitute child abuse or neglect. Through exploration of teachers' in-the-moment decision-making process, my hope was that this study explicates the factors that influence teachers' fulfillment of their mandated reporter role. The following sections in this chapter explain the research design and rationale, my role as researcher, the specific methodology, my data analysis plan, a justification of the study's trustworthiness, ethical procedures used to protect participants, and a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

The three research questions that I addressed in this study were:

RQ1: How do preschool teachers respond when confronted with an incident of possible child abuse or neglect?

RQ2: What is the rationale preschool teachers describe in deciding to report or not report suspicion of child abuse or neglect?

RQ3: How confident do preschool teachers feel about their decision to report or not report incidents of possible child abuse or neglect?

The central issue I investigated in this study was preschool teachers' decision to report or not to report reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect. Preschool teachers

are mandated reporters, and by law, they must report any suspicion of child abuse or neglect (Ellett, 2013; Herman-Smith, 2013; Hogelin, 2013; Matthews & Bross, 2015; Steen & Duran, 2014). Mandated reporters are defined as professionals, such as doctors, police officers, teachers, counselors, school personnel, and anyone who comes in contact with children to report suspicion of child abuse or neglect to CPS or law enforcement officials (Child Welfare Information Gateway of the Children's Bureau, 2015).

Reasonable suspicion of abuse is defined as having reason to believe or suspect that a child may be abused or neglected by a parent or caregiver (Crowell & Levi, 2012; Herman-Smith, 2013).

In this qualitative study, I used a phenomenological design for my study. The phenomenological study investigates a person's specific experiences about some phenomenon, and the person interprets those experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological design also is intended to help researchers comprehend the person's perspectives on and understanding of a particular phenomenon. The phenomenological study design assisted me in understanding the teachers' decision-making process of child abuse reporting. The phenomenological design was appropriate for this study because it provided support in clarifying the teachers' decisions to report or not to report suspicion of child abuse or neglect (Moustakas, 1994).

The approach that I took to carry out a phenomenological study was to use the think aloud protocol to produce data through one-to-one interviews with the preschool teachers. The teachers articulated their in-the-moment thinking process as three scenarios were described to them verbally. These scenarios described situations of possible child

abuse. The teachers spoke aloud what went through their minds as they were contemplating the incidents in the scenarios. They shared their thoughts on their decisions to report or not to report child abuse or neglect.

Role of the Researcher

My role as a researcher included that I am a full-time faculty member at a community college in a small city in the Western United States. I am an early childhood educator, and I have been teaching child development courses for the last 18 years. I have been in this field for over 28 years, and I have experience working with children from infancy through adolescence. In addition to teaching at the college, I conduct training for preschool programs in the local community.

I do not have any supervisory role over any preschool teachers, including those whom I was interviewing. I managed any biases or power relationship by excluding from participating in the study any preschool teachers who have been my past students or whom I know to have attended any of my seminars.

I was deeply interested in the reporting of child abuse or neglect among child care and preschool professionals. This interest and the disturbing nature of child abuse or neglect suggested that I entered into this study with a bias towards abuse reporting and with more than a casual interest in teachers' decision-making process. The interpersonal nature of the think aloud protocol used in this study created a risk for interference in teachers' thinking. To protect the integrity of teachers' decision-making independent of the influence of my own biases, I relied on the guidance of van Someren et al. (1994), who suggest "the experimenter should prompt the subject by just, and only just, saying:

‘Keep on talking’” (p.44). More detail on how the think-aloud protocol was implemented is described in the methodology section of this chapter.

Methodology

In this phenomenological study, I gathered data using the think aloud protocol developed by van Someren et al. (1994). Through this process data was generated during one-to-one interviews with preschool teachers as they considered their decisions regarding incidents of possible child abuse or neglect. The teachers verbally conveyed their thinking process in the moment.

Participant Selection

Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) suggested that four to 10 participants are sufficient numbers to participate in the interviews. The population that I selected to participate in this study was six lead preschool teachers in programs serving children between the ages of two through five, and who have at least two years of teaching experience. Lead teachers were invited to participate because they were the professionals most responsible for the well-being of children in their care, in contrast to assistant teachers and support staff. Lead teachers who have at least two years of teaching experience were invited to participate because these teachers, more than teachers with less experience, may feel confident in their role as mandated reporter and may have had experience in making a decision to report or not report their suspicion of child abuse. According to Smith et al., (2009), six lead teachers provided sufficient data for a phenomenological study.

The sampling procedure that I used for this study was purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2012). Eight preschool centers were selected at random from a list of preschools in the local community that were located within a 10-mile radius of the college where I teach. This random selection was made by choosing every third center on a list of preschool centers provided by the local child care resource and referral agency, until eight centers are selected. The lead preschool teachers were recruited through an e-mail (Appendix A) that I sent to the directors of the eight preschool centers, requesting their cooperation in inviting lead teachers in those centers to participate in the study. Along with the e-mail, I attached an invitation flyer for the directors to distribute to their lead teachers who work with children ages two to five (Appendix B).

The first lead teacher from each of the eight preschools who responded to my invitation to participate in the interview joined the participant pool for this study; of these, the first six who responded were selected to serve as participants, with the remaining two kept in reserve. By selecting one teacher from each of eight different preschools, participants were unlikely to talk to each other frequently and were less likely to share information about the scenarios with other participants than if they worked in the same preschools. This process reduced the possibility of outside influence on teachers' decision-making process. Because I sent the initial invitation to eight preschools, I felt assured of receiving responses from at least one teacher from at least six of the preschools.

Instrumentation

I utilized three of the five scenarios by Crenshaw (1995) for the interviews with teachers. I was granted permission from Crenshaw (1995) to use the Crenshaw Abuse Reporting Survey, Form-S (CARS-S) scenarios for this study (see Appendix C for permission). A total of 1,613 surveys were distributed to teachers, school counselors, principals, superintendents, and school psychologists in primary, intermediate, and secondary schools in the Western United States (Crenshaw, 1995). These educators were selected from a state directory. Of the 1,613 surveys that were distributed, 664 valid completed surveys were received back. Crenshaw (1995) examined educators' decision to report based in a quantitative study of 664 elementary school teachers and administrators. The results of Crenshaw's study indicated that 89% of the respondents were familiar with the law and the impact on them as educators in regards to mandatory reporting. Crenshaw noted that about 27% of the educators felt they were not adequate to handle any abuse situation, and 13% of them felt they were poorly prepared to deal with any child abuse cases. The study revealed that only 9.6% of the respondents were prepared to report suspicion of child abuse (Crenshaw, 1995).

The scenarios that Crenshaw (1995) created were chosen for the current study because the scenarios were relevant and provided a realistic situation to the educational setting. The validity of the scenarios was comprehensively tested by using multivariate analyses to establish reportability, relevance, and realism with regard to the school settings. The three scenarios from Crenshaw (1995) were selected for their applicability to a preschool setting and because different types of suspected child abuse are depicted in

these three scenarios. The scenarios can be found in Appendix D. Scenario 1 is related to suspicion of child neglect. Some examples in Scenario 1 described the child mentioning that he or she was hungry and there had not been food in the home for several days (Crenshaw, 1995). This scenario also indicates that the child arrived at school dirty and did not wear proper clothes according to the weather (Crenshaw, 1995). Scenario 2 is related to suspicion of physical abuse. The child had obvious rectangular or oblong bruises on arms, legs, and face especially around the eyes or cheeks (Crenshaw, 1995). Scenario 3 is related to suspicion of sexual abuse. The child in this scenario had the tendency to run away from home, acted younger than his or her age, and most of the times had no friends. The child also displayed sexual behavior such as exposing his or her genitals or trying to touch other children (Crenshaw, 1995).

Procedures

Once I received Walden's Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval, I recruited the participants through an e-mail (Appendix A) and flier (Appendix B) that I sent to directors of eight preschool centers in the local community. I selected the first six lead preschool teachers from different preschools who responded to my invitation to participate in the interview.

I contacted the six lead preschool teachers via e-mail and also telephone to set up a convenient time to meet for the interview. I met with each lead preschool teacher individually at their preschools. Interviews were conducted in a quiet room at the teacher's preschool during their lunch hours. The interviews ranged from 40 minutes to 1 hour to complete, allowing about 15 minutes per scenario (however, each interview

continued as long as a teacher continued to talk). I ensured that the interview was in a quiet and private room. I made sure that the teacher felt at ease and she was comfortable. I brought a bottle of water for the teacher's use during the interview, and I had the three scenarios printed ahead of time on separate sheets of paper, so there was plenty of space for a teacher to make notes in the margins as desired. I provided a pencil and pen for the teacher's use. I recorded each interview with a Zoom H1 digital recorder. I used Rev Transcription Services to transcribe the interviews verbatim. I requested an agreement of confidentiality certificate from Rev Transcription Services.

Each lead preschool teacher signed the consent form before she participated in the study. I also explained to the preschool teachers that they may elect not to participate and that they may exit the interview at any time. I provided the preschool teachers an overview of the purpose of the research, informed them as to what the interview would entail, and explained about the protection of the data. I emphasized that I was interested in understanding preschool teachers' thinking process. I articulated to the preschool teacher that they will read three scenarios, one at a time, which describe a situation that the preschool teacher might observe in her classroom. I instructed the preschool teacher that as she reads each of these scenarios, I would like for her to think about what was described and speak out loud what came to her mind. I did not comment or interrupt while she was speaking to allow the preschool teacher to take her time to think and to speak freely. I avoided any unnecessary interference while the preschool teacher was talking out loud. This process is described in Appendix F.

After completing the first scenario, I presented the second scenario. The procedure was the same as with the first scenario. The preschool teachers spoke aloud what was on their minds after they read the second scenario. I repeated the steps until I had completed presenting all the three scenarios.

I concluded the interview by thanking the teacher for participating in my study. I reminded the teachers that the information they shared will be kept confidential and their identities will be protected. The participant exited the interview after my conclusion.

After I transcribed the interviews through Rev Transcription Services, I wrote a summary of each interview. I provided each preschool teacher with the summary from her interview. I mentioned to the teacher if she had additional thoughts to share concerning any of the scenarios or the process of child abuse reporting, she could add additional information on the transcripts summaries. None of the participants added, subtracted, or suggested alterations from the reported summaries.

Data Analysis

I used Rev Transcription Services to transcribe the interviews verbatim. The transcriptions comprised the data of my study. The data was thematically coded based on the emergent themes to help me organize and analyze the transcript data to answer each of the three research questions that were derived from Megenhetti and Seel (2001). I searched for evidence that applied to each of the research questions, using open coding processes described by Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, and Pedersen (2013). I used member checking for accuracy by having the participants review the summary of their interview, as described above.

In addition, I considered possible discrepant cases. For this study, discrepant cases may be suggested by any personal experiences that the lead preschool teachers share with regard to child abuse and child abuse reporting that affect their decision-making process. Additional discrepant data may emerge as lead teachers are presented with their transcript summary and perhaps comment conversationally at that time about the scenarios or about child abuse reporting. Since my study was a small number of participants, I treated all cases as equal and all information as worthy of analysis. I provided a thorough argument and different perspectives if possible discrepant cases were found during the analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There were no discrepant cases in the study.

Trustworthiness

Credibility (internal validity) is a measure of how accurate and truthful the study is to reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I reviewed the transcripts and ensured that the transcriptions were accurate. I utilized two strategies to confirm the validity of my findings. I asked the preschool teachers to provide member checking (Creswell, 2012) by reviewing the summaries derived from their interviews for sensibility and clarity, along with the results I derived from their interviews. This process may also yield additional data, as described above, if a teacher responded with thoughts she had following the data-collecting sessions. I next utilized external auditing in which two colleagues in the early childhood field who were not connected to my study provided feedback on my interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2012). I have the external auditors sign a confidentiality agreement (Appendix E). I anticipated that the think aloud protocol

provided thick, rich information about teachers' in-the-moment decision-making that may support transferability of conclusions reached in this study.

Transferability (external validity) is a measure of how the results of a study are transferable to another situation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I provided thick and detailed descriptions of the current study. This ensured a clear understanding of the issue being investigated that may be transferable to other social settings, such as primary and secondary schools, and social service agencies. The study may be limited to transferability due to a small sample size, and therefore more likely will not be generalizable to other settings.

Dependability refers to tracking procedures to confirm the accuracy of the data (Creswell, 2012). Dependability can be supported by member checking. I asked the six participants to review the summaries of their interviews and the findings I derived from the data. In addition, since data collection followed established procedures of the think-aloud protocol, the dependability of the study was enhanced by the prior success of this method.

Confirmability is the use of reflexivity and external auditing to reduce potential biases (Creswell, 2012). To address reflexivity, I kept a journal of my awareness, experiences, reactions, and assumptions during data collection and analysis. Through this process, I intended to develop self-awareness to ensure the reduction of subjectivity and biases. Another strategy was that I utilized to confirm the trustworthiness of my results was an external audit initiated by asking one or more of my peers who were not involved with my study to review my findings and conclusions and provided feedback. My

classmates in a doctoral level research course at Walden University were invited to act as external auditors. I have the external auditors sign a confidentiality agreement (Appendix E).

Ethical Procedures

I obtained the approval from Walden's IRB (approval no. 11-01-17-0456620) before gathering data. I sent an e-mail to the eight center directors in the local community to ask their permission to distribute the flyer to the preschool teachers at their centers (Appendix A; Appendix B). I selected the first six lead preschool teachers who respond to the invitation, inviting teachers who work at different centers so that the integrity of the data collection process is preserved, as noted earlier. Participants were asked to sign a consent form before I conducted the interview. The consent form included the purpose of the study, and pertinent information about the interview process. Participants were offered no incentive for participating in this study, which eliminated that ethical concern. Participants were reminded as they began the interview that they may withdraw at any time if they desire.

Participants' names and identities were kept confidential. I used codes to identify the participants, for example, P1 for participant 1 and P2 for participant 2. Rev Transcription Services signed a confidentiality agreement, and I received a certificate of confidentiality from them. Once I received the transcriptions from Rev Transcription Services, I kept all transcribed files in a locked drawer in my office, and no one will have access to any of the documents. The audio files were kept securely on my computer with

a password-protected login. The data were stored for five years, and I will destroy them afterward.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined procedures for the qualitative research for my study. I provided details of my role as a researcher and methodology, which included participant selection, instrumentations, procedures, and data analysis. The last section of this chapter I explained in details the trustworthiness and ethical procedures for my study. The following section in Chapter 4 comprised the findings of my research. I provided a comprehensive analysis of the results of my study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to understand preschool teachers' in-the-moment decision-making process based on possible child abuse scenarios as to whether they would report or not report suspected child abuse. The three research questions were derived from decision-making theory:

RQ1: How do preschool teachers respond when confronted with an incident of possible child abuse and neglect?

RQ2: What is the rationale preschool teachers describe in deciding to report or not report suspicion of child abuse or neglect?

RQ3: How confident do preschool teachers feel about their decision to report or not report incidents of possible child abuse or neglect?

The next sections of this chapter include the setting, demographics, data collection and data analysis. Additionally, there will be a discussion on the results of the study and the evidence of trustworthiness, and the chapter will conclude with a summary.

Setting

I sent out emails to eight preschools randomly selected from a list of preschools in the local community that were within a 10-mile radius from the college at which I teach. A total of 221 preschools fit this criterion. The preschools were randomly selected by every third center on a list of centers in the local child care resources and referral agency until eight early childhood centers were selected.

Demographics

Eight early learning centers were selected randomly from a list of preschools in the local community within a 10-mile radius from the college where I am currently teaching. Eight lead preschool teachers were recruited from the eight centers who responded to my invitation to participate in the interviews. The first six lead teachers who responded were selected to participate in the interviews, with the remaining two kept in reserve. The six lead preschool teachers taught children between the ages of two through five in a major metropolitan area in the Western United States. These preschool teachers each had teaching experience ranging from 10 years to 20 years. Four of the lead preschool teachers had bachelor's degrees, and two had master's degrees in early childhood education.

Data Collection

I interviewed six preschool teachers, one-on-one. The interviews varied from 40 minutes to 1 hour in length. I was not able to schedule an interview with the six preschools teachers at the library as I had initially proposed, because they all indicated it was not convenient for them to drive to the library. However, the teachers were willing to interview if I were able to meet at their preschools during their lunch hours. I was able to interview the teachers individually at the different preschools where they teach. At each of the preschools, I was able to find a quiet room to interview the teacher without any distractions. Before we began, I gave the teacher the consent form to read and sign. After the interview, I photocopied the consent form and gave the photocopy to the teacher for her records. Before the interview began, I gave her a water bottle and made

sure that she was comfortable. I then provided a printout of the three scenarios, and I asked her to read each scenario one at a time. Once she read the first scenario, I gave her instruction to speak out loud whatever came to her mind regarding this scenario. When the teacher told me she was ready, I recorded her speaking out aloud with the Zoom H1 digital recorder. I did not interject or make any comments as the teacher was speaking out aloud based on each scenario. After the teacher finished speaking on the first scenario, I had her proceed to read the second scenario. I repeated the same steps until she had finished with the third scenario. For each of the six interviews, I followed the same protocol and procedures until I completed the last interview. It took two weeks to complete the interviews. After each interview, I uploaded the digital recording to my computer, and I e-mailed the recording to Rev Transcription Service for transcription. Rev Transcription Service returned the transcripts within one day in a Word document format. I then uploaded and stored the Word document on my computer. I repeated these steps until the six interviews were transcribed. Once I had all six transcriptions uploaded onto my computer, I then printed out the transcriptions. I provided the preschool teachers a copy of the summaries so they could review it for member checking. I asked them to read over the summaries from the transcriptions for accuracy and asked that they make any additions or changes they wanted. None of the six preschool teachers made additions or corrections to the transcription of their interview.

Data Analysis

The data were coded based on the emergent themes from the interviews. I was searching for evidence that would apply to each of the research questions. I went through

each transcript starting with interview 1 and highlighted sections from the interview for each of the scenarios. First, I noted statements that referred to RQ 1, then I highlighted statements that related to RQ 2, and I continued highlighting related statements that referred to RQ 3. I color coded the three research questions, red for RQ 1, green for RQ 2, and blue for RQ 3. I repeated the same steps as I went through each of the six transcripts from the interviews, highlighting sections for each of the three scenarios that referred to the three RQs. Then I grouped all the statements that were related to each of the three RQs to organize the data for analysis.

There were recurring themes emergent from the three different scenarios. In scenario 1, which featured a possible case of child neglect, a recurring theme was a desire to investigate the situation, by talking to the parents and center director. Teacher #5 stated, “Yes, the child I would say is somewhat being neglected, but I still would want to further investigate it a little bit.” Teacher #4 said, “I believe what I will do first is to talk to the parent and from what I see.” Teacher #6 indicated, “I would go to the director first and probably discuss this, and probably start taking some kind of documentation.” This impulse to conduct an investigation personally was a key theme for scenario 1 and the issue of child neglect.

In scenario 2, which described a case of possible physical abuse, recurring themes included a desire to know the age of the child, to consult the center director, and to have a conference with the parents. Teacher #2 said, “I don’t know how old this child is, but it seems like the bruises he is getting, it is not self-inflicted or cause by himself falling.” Teacher #3 stated, “I would have of course share with the director of the center for

liability issues.” Teacher #5 said, “I would still have a conference with the parents.”

Teacher #6 stated, “Something about the parent conferences they seem very cooperative and they’re interested in their child. I would definitely contact the director, then me and the director would talk about.” As for scenario 1, teachers wanted more information in response to scenario 2.

In scenario 3 about a possible case of sexual abuse, the emergent themes were a desire to know the age of the child and to talk with the parents. Teacher #2 said, “Without knowing exactly how old this child is in terms of how some young children are beginning to notice their body and just even differences between the male and the female body parts.” Teacher #5 stated, “This scenario looks like it could be a sexual behavior, but still once again, you still need to talk with the parents.” An overarching theme that emerged from data concerning all three scenarios was a reluctance to make an independent decision despite evidence of possible neglect or abuse.

The six lead teachers provided member checking by reviewing the summaries of the printed transcripts from the interviews for sensibility and clarity. This process also allowed the teachers to add additional thoughts that they may have had after the interviews. However, no adjustments to the transcript summaries were received from the teachers.

Results

The three research questions guided the exploration of preschool teachers’ responses when confronted with a possible case of child abuse or neglect. The teachers provided their reasons for their responses as to why they would or would not make a

child abuse report, and the teachers' confidence in the correctness of the decision to report or not to report suspicion of child abuse or neglect. In keeping with the way data from the think aloud protocol have been reported in prior studies, extensive quotations from participants are presented here to provide a complete picture of participants' thought processes.

Research Question 1

RQ 1 examined preschool teachers' responses when confronted with an incident of possible child abuse or neglect. Three different scenarios were presented.

Scenario 1. The first scenario was related to suspicion of child neglect. In this scenario, the child was described as hungry, and there was no food in the home for several days. The child also was not wearing proper clothing, and the clothes were dirty. Some of the lead teachers indicated that they did not have enough information about the child for them to make a child neglect report. Several lead teachers wanted to know about the child's age, the parenting style, and family situations. Teacher 1 stated:

Actually, reading in this scenario, it did not let me know the background of the parent status, whether they were or not a stay home parent. It can give me a more idea about the background of the parenting.

Teacher 3 said:

The first thing that comes to my mind is it would help to find exact age of the child. That's for me, to capture a better understanding, you know about what lack of needs are involved here with this girl. It would be helpful to find out how old she is. There is a big difference if she was for example two year old, or she was

five or six year old. I think for my purpose, it would be easier to find out how old she was, but in general because we are talking now in general. Without that information for me, would be kinda hard to make a decision on this one. There are a lot of lacking information in order to come to a decision about this.

The lead teachers in the interview also appeared to find neglect difficult to discern from a family's dynamics such as parenting, multiple children, jobs or homelessness. For example, Teacher 5 said:

Based upon what I've read, reading through the scenario, it looks like the mom is having difficulties. Yes, the child I would say is somewhat being neglected, but I still would want to further investigate it a little bit. Even though it states that the mom has been brought in before and never does follow up, but there's other things that aren't said in the scenario. Maybe she's working two jobs, maybe there is also other siblings there. Maybe there's some resources that she may need. Before I would actually go in and start reporting and thinking if there's child abuse in there, there might be more to it. She may be a single mom, more siblings, there may not be a support system, her low income.

Teacher 3 indicated that there might be other issues going on with the family so that it was difficult for her to identify the problem. She stated:

My feeling is not because the parents avoiding that is a perception, that's not a fact. We really don't know. I think I would find out more about the situation. I would try to reach out to the parent and find out you know, more about what is going on with you know, the girl in order to support them first. I don't think

nobody can up to a conclusion because we really don't know what's going on with this family. This family could be homeless. This is a reality that we have now.

They struggle a lot so I think for this particular scenario, what I would do is that I need more facts to jump in to conclusion.

The teachers' responses suggested that they recognized that there was some form of child neglect presented in this scenario. However, they wanted more information to investigate the situation before making a decision to report. Teacher 2 indicated:

In the case of scenario number one, I have several concerns. One is that the child is often hungry and seems to not have the proper clothes. I'm kinda feeling like this girl is definitely neglected in some form at home because she is not being taken care of properly that other children her age would also be. Also, hearing that an older sibling is like this, maybe me a little bit concerned that there might be you know, some hardships and difficulties at home. In some way, I also don't know how old she is and not getting the care that a parent would give to a child, like clothes, you know, and being hungry and doing that.

Teacher 5 said:

Yes, the child I would say is somewhat being neglected, but I still would want to further investigate it a little bit. Even though it states that the mom has been brought in before and never does follow up, but there's other things that aren't said in the scenario. Maybe she's working two jobs, maybe there is also other siblings there. Maybe there's some resources that she may need. Before I would actually

go in and start reporting and thinking if there's child abuse in there, there might be more to it.

Some of the preschool teachers suggested that they should meet with the parents and director first before they come to any conclusions. Teacher 4 said:

I believe what I will do first is talk to the parent and from what I see, it's that the children are not coming to school with bruises but they are underdressed and they are hungry all the time, so there might be a financial crisis going through the family or they are homeless. I will try to talk to the mom and explain to her my concerns about what the children are mentioning in school and what I have observed.

Teacher 6 stated:

I would definitely, I mean, I would go to the director first and probably discuss this, and probably start taking some kind of documentation. It sounds like as this all was happening I probably would've been documenting these things, and maybe e-mailing it to the director. I don't think that we'd call CPS right away. I think it would be like trying to work with the parent and maybe bringing in the director. The teacher's asking them, they don't see us as this authoritative; like authority in the classroom, there was just a teacher, but maybe the director comes in, has a little more authority.

In scenario 1, some of the lead teachers specified that they did not have enough information about the child and they wanted to know more about the age of the child, parenting dynamics, and family issues such as homelessness, multiple children, and jobs.

Therefore, some of the lead teachers found it difficult for them to identify the problem and discern the situation to make a child neglect report. Some of the teachers' responses indicated that they recognized that the child in the scenario likely is exposed to child neglect. However, they wanted more information to investigate the situation. Some of the preschool teachers felt that they should meet with the parents and director first before they filed a child neglect report.

Scenario 2. The second scenario is associated with suspicion of physical abuse. In the second scenario, the child has unusual bruises on the arms, legs, and face, especially around the eyes. These bruises are rectangular or oblong. The lead teacher acknowledged that there are bruises on the child and she had some concerns. Teacher 1 responded to this scenario:

Seeing marks right then and there, we begin to ask questions right then and there to the parent. We will pull them to the side or to a quiet room and ask them is everything okay with your child because I think I may see something I should not be. Then they say everything is fine. Okay, so the next day if the child comes with the same marks, I may take a little bit farther. Take the child in the bathroom, raise up the sleeves. In this case it did not say ... He seems like he's a scared child. He's scared. The only thing he can do is cry. His attitude, he gives an aggressive attitude. I believe this child takes out ... Because he's getting abused, he tends to take it out on other kids. The behavior change. They start to get more aggressive, more meaner, more angry. Some children are able to share what happened. Some kids will not. Maybe because they're scared, and then you have some that will tell.

Teacher 2 wanted to know the age of the child, and she recognized there were bruises on the child, but she wanted to know if the bruises were self-inflicted or from falling. The teacher speculated that the child may be physically being abused. However, she was not sure and she was confused about how to respond to this situation. The teacher said:

I don't know how old this child is, but it seems like the bruises he is getting, it is not self-inflicted or cause by himself falling. Because there's these physical signs where he definitely has bruises on his face, arms and legs and it seems like it occurs pretty often and it's not in areas where he would fall, I would be very concerned that he is being physically abused some way. His also mental state just seems to be a little bit confused and not sure what to do in cases where other peers are also getting I guess ... getting upset or angry, he seems I guess confused and not sure how to react. Kinda makes me wonder if this is behavior that he is familiar with. Especially once I ask him about the bruises it seems, if the child cries and refuses to respond, I would be under the assumption that this child has something to share but is afraid to share it.

Teacher 3 indicated that there was a red flag after reading that there were bruises on the child. She also sensed that something was not right at home. However, she wanted to consult with the preschool director first because there may be some liability issues. She stated:

Obviously reading this, this is a red flag for me. Definitely something is going on at home that is not normal. I would have of course the ... share with the director of the center for liability issues. Then let her know that strongly I feel that this would

be something that we need to pursue, but I would like to first get the parent involved and let them know too, what my action are going to be.

Teacher 5 recognized that there were bruises on the child's body such as face and other body parts. However, she commented that she would still not report the bruises this time and she wanted to have a conference with the parents first. The teacher said:

Even though there are bruises, like I said on his face and on his body in different parts, I still ... I don't think at this particular time I would call it in and report it. I would still want to have a conference with the parents. This may be a child that is having difficulties too because of his sight due to his hearing. I would first ask them for him to see a pediatrician and get a full work up on hearing and sight. There might be some other disabilities that we don't even know that he has. Sometimes the children are constantly falling due to different neurological ... the brain function and things like that. I would first do that, then I would talk with the parents and see what happens because he has bruises. Bruises is a sign that there might be some type of abuse there, but I would not go right in to the reporting of that. Now, if the bruises continue, if I did see some reports that his eyesight and this is fine and the bruises keep I would ask for some other documentation when he does. Has he seen the doctor before? I wouldn't even let him in to my classroom. I would talk with the parents, you know if he's continuously with these bruises, I do need to see something from the doctor.

Teacher 6 also mentioned that she wanted to conduct a parent conference because she wanted to find out more about the bruises. The lead teacher was wondering if the bruises

were caused by a sibling at home. She indicated that she was not sure if something could be happening at home. The teacher said:

Something about the parent conferences they seem very cooperative and they're interested in their child, but if this child's coming in with marks on his body that look like they were made by a hand, especially if it looks like a hand, depending on what they look like. If it sounds like something's happening at home I'm not really sure what, or it could be a sibling, or something's happening at home to this child, that we should be taking notice of. Especially if he's being really aggressive towards the other children. I would definitely contact the director, then me and the director would talk about.

In response to scenario 2, some of the lead teachers recognized that there were bruises on the child's body and they acknowledged that this was a red flag. They saw that the child did have some visible marks that could be constituted as physical abuse. However, the teachers did not want to report the incident immediately because they were not sure what to do and how to respond to this situation. Some teachers mentioned that they wanted to converse with the parents and have a conference to further investigate about the bruises before they come to any conclusion. Another teacher even mentioned that she needed to consult with the director first because it could be a liability issue. Some of the lead teachers identified the child's aggressive behavior and acting out were related to abusive treatment. However, some of the teachers were not ready to take any actions or ready to make a child abuse report.

Scenario 3. The third scenario depicts a situation of possible sexual abuse. In this last scenario, the child displays sexual behavior including exposing the genitals or trying to touch other children in their private areas. The child acts immature and most of the time has no friends. Teacher 1 responded to this scenario by wanting to know the child's age first and indicating that she was surprised by the child's advanced knowledge of sexual matters. She suggested that the child needs help such as counseling. She said:

We want to pay attention, because when children do grow up at a certain age, there is a certain age where we talk about the birds and the bees, and things like that. This is a child who is way over advanced in sexual. She needs help. She needs someone to really ... She needs counseling. She needs counseling to help her in this area of the things she's doing to her own body and how she's exposing herself out into the world could cause for her in a bad dilemma here.

Teacher 2 was concerned about the child's inappropriate sexual behavior such as exposing body parts to other children. The teacher responded:

In the case of scenario number three, without knowing exactly how old this child is in terms of how some young children are beginning to notice their body and just even differences between the male and the female body parts, and having I guess interest in an appropriate age way of differences. It just seems like some of the behavior, especially the sexual behavior and displaying knowledge of sexual matters, that kinda concerns me as an educator that she is not only exposing her genitals, but also engaging in touching other people and other students genitals. That is a concern because as an educator, we at least I teach them that our genitals

are our own body parts, and that she should not be touching others. If the child seems to be continuing to do that, it just shows me that she has more understanding of sexual matters, or that is more excessive for her age I guess.

Teacher 3 response to this scenario by stating that she did not want to make any conclusions without knowing the facts. She mentioned that children are curious about their bodies at a young age and she said it is quite expected for their development. She stated:

This one is kinda hard because again, we don't want to jump in to conclusion. Our perception of things we really don't know you know, what's going on unless we have some I think real physical evidence. Children sometimes get very curious about sexuality, and that is very normal development for them. I think this is kind of borderline for me because they become curious around five about the boys, and they notice that their genital and they're different than the boys. You know, sometimes they can be playing games because they're curious about it. You know, I think it depends on the teacher, how she approaches this.

Teacher 5 acknowledged that there could be a red flag when we hear about step-father and sexual behavior. However, she did not want to jump to any conclusion, but she wanted to further investigate this matter. She stated that the child could be exposed to media such as video and television. The teacher said:

This scenario looks like it could be a sexual behavior, but still once again, you still need to talk with the parents. I know when you hear step-fathers involved, that kind of puts up some red flags. Thinking okay, the step-father, abuse. She

does have some knowledge of private parts and stuff like that, but also too her age. There's so much out there right now. You don't know if she's getting a hold of a remote control, if she's putting videos in there, you don't know by YouTube, you don't know if there's older siblings. There's so much more about the sexual abuse that we don't even think that children are aware of.

Teacher 6 also acknowledged that the child sexual behaviors were a red flag, and the parents were aware of her inappropriate behavior towards other children. The teacher said:

I would probably, if it sounds like the parents are very upset about it also, perhaps refer them to see somebody who could evaluate the child first. Cause it sounds like the parents are aware of what's happening at school and maybe help them find a resource where they could take her. Because if she's doing things that are sexual even with the teachers, that's a very big red flag.

In scenario 3, many of the lead preschool teachers were concerned about the child's knowledge of sexual matters by displaying inappropriate sexual behaviors.

Teacher 1 suggested that the child should get some counseling because of the inappropriately exposing sexual body parts to other children. Most of the teachers were concerned about the child's advanced knowledge of sexuality. Teacher 3 teacher said that the child's behavior was typical at this age because of her curiosity about her body parts. Teacher 5 and 6 acknowledged that the child's sexual behavior was concerning and could be a red flag. However, many of the lead teachers wanted to talk to the parents and director before they come to any conclusion because they want further investigation.

Summary of RQ 1. The teachers struggled in responding when they were confronted with the possibility of child abuse or neglect based on the three scenarios. This aligns with Meneghetti and Seel's first trait of decision-making in an ethical dilemma that ethical dilemmas may not be easy to identify. Some of the teachers wanted to discuss with the parents or director first before they concluded. This was in line with Meneghetti and Seel's fourth traits of ethical decision-making that there is often difficulty in separating ethical considerations from feeling about situational stakeholders.

Research Question 2

The second research question looked at the rationale for preschool teachers in deciding to report or not report suspicion of child abuse or neglect. The same three scenarios formed the basis for considering teachers' rationale for the decisions they made as indicated in the analysis of research question 1.

Scenario 1. The situation in scenario 1 suggested a case of possible neglect. With regards to her rationale for the decision she was considering for scenario 1, Teacher 1 stated:

We see all things. We do not want the child to be sick. Everything needs to be reported to. Also if the child comes in any of these matters, they need to be reported to the head boss. If I'm the teacher of this child, everything is reported to my boss so she can be aware of the things going on with this child. She will put me in a conference and let me know how to handle this situation before I call the parent. Because so much is going on with the neglect here with this child, the parent would not be called first.

Teacher 2 responded to why she would make a child abuse reporting and said:

For me you know, I definitely would try one more time to talk to the parent, but if the parent does not communicate well, I would have to report then. Even though I don't have to tell the parent that I'm going to report them, I would report them and show them the concern especially because this child has a medical condition of asthma and that if the medicine runs out, you know it's the child's well-being that is at stake. I will call Child Protective Services, just to make sure that the parents are aware that they need to have a better way of taking care of this child. With all the different signs of neglect that I see in this scenario, I would report.

Teacher 3 stated her reason for not reporting and said:

I don't think nobody can up to a conclusion because we really don't know what's going on with this family. This family could be homeless. This is a reality that we have now. They struggle a lot so I think for this particular scenario, what I would do is that I need more facts to jump in to conclusion, but for sure I would reach out to the parents and make it strong as a goal to know more about the parents. Reach out to them, ask if there is anything that I can help with. Do they need resources? That's why it's important to develop good relationship for the parents so that when things like that happens, then they feel more comfortable to talk about it. That's what I would do with this family to find out, because obviously there are several needs that are not met here and it is a concern.

Teacher 4 indicated her reason for not reporting right away because she wanted to converse with the parents first and then also observe the child for several weeks. She said:

I will try to talk to the mom and explain to her my concerns about what the children are mentioning in school and what I have observed through maybe observing through a period of two weeks at the most and see what the mom has to say before doing any report. Before that, create a plan with the mom and see if I can refer her to any programs where she could get food or find out what's going on at home first. If I don't see any bruises or the child has complained that she's getting hurt, that's what I will do first. Just get to know what's happening in the family before making a report.

Teacher 5's reason for waiting to make a report was that she wanted to find about out more about the family's situation. Her response was:

Before I would actually go in and start reporting and thinking if there's child abuse in there, there might be more to it. She may be a single mom, more siblings, there may not be a support system, her low income. There's several different avenues to take first. Of course, that's what I would do first. I would research a lot more before I would just go ahead and report. I think sometimes teachers feel the child is dirty, this and that. There may not be any money for this. She may have been laid off from her job, there's several homeless people out there. Several people that have lost their jobs so I think there needs to be a little bit more investigation. That would be one of my reasons of not reporting it right away.

Teacher 6 first indicated that she would report to CPS, and then said she would instead provide parents support before contacting CPS. She asserted:

I don't know how old this child's supposed to be, but it sounds like she's a little older, and she has an older sister, too, right? I think that that's the route. And then eventually if nothing happened, then maybe bring in CPS. If nothing was happening, if we were giving the parents some support, trying to find community support for the parent, whatever it is because she's dirty, but maybe there's more going on, maybe a home visit, too, would help. Something first before contacting CPS right away, and then trying to support the parent a little bit more, and then going from there and documenting things, too, over the time so that you have documentation of what's been happening, maybe. Eventually if nothing's changing, and if you felt the child was in danger, then contacting CPS at that point, I think that's what I would do.

In responding to scenario 1, all the lead teachers had the reasons for reporting or not reporting suspicion of child neglect. Teacher 1 indicated that everything should be reported to the director to ensure that the child is being cared for. Then Teacher 2 stated that she would try to speak to the parents about the situation before making a report. Teacher 3 said that she did not want to come to any conclusions, but she needed to investigate further the family's situation before making a report. Teacher 4 indicated that she wanted to meet with the parents at a conference and she wanted to let them know that she was concerned about them. Teacher 5 mentioned that she wanted to consult with the parents first and observe the child for two weeks before filing a report. Teacher 6

initially stated that she would report, but then she changed her mind and said that she would first provide parents the support before making a child abuse reporting. The lead teachers' rationales to report or not to report varied on how they interpreted child neglect.

Scenario 2. Scenario 2 described a child with unexplained bruises that could suggest child abuse. Teacher 1 explained her reason, and she said:

Seeing marks right then and there, we begin to ask questions right then and there to the parent. We will pull them to the side or to a quiet room and ask them is everything okay with your child because I think I may see something I should not be. Then they say everything is fine. Okay, so the next day if the child comes with the same marks, I may take a little bit farther. Take the child in the bathroom, raise up the sleeves. In this case it did not say. He seems like he's a scared child. He's scared. The only thing he can do is cry. His attitude, he gives an aggressive attitude. I believe this child takes out because he's getting abused, he tends to take it out on other kids. The behavior change. They start to get more aggressive, more meaner, more angry. Some children are able to share what happened. Some kids will not. Maybe because they're scared, and then you have some that will tell.

Teacher 2 gave her reason for reporting:

[The child] seems to show not only physical but mental signs of abuse and distress. Child needs help and intervention. As an educator, I would report this incident to Child Protective Services and have them do a more thorough follow up of this child's welfare.

Teacher 3 indicated that she was a mandated reporter and she said:

Perhaps there is some issue in the family that needs some type of assistance, more than what we can provide as child care providers. That perhaps you know, a social worker can help perhaps they're issues in the home, but we're here to help again. I want to let her know or he, you know, or both parents attend, preferable. Then let them know that you know, I'm mandated to report this but I don't want to abandon them. I want to let them know that you know, there are resources and you know, with mandated report, what they will do they will investigate the case and you know, they should look at this as help not something bad. But this is good, that maybe they need this support. They haven't reached out so now we need to step in because children have rights. You know, again based on the facts, you know I have to do this. This is horrible.

Teacher 4 stated her reason for reporting:

I will do a report because the child has bruises on the face and the legs and it's not bruises. Working with children, you get to know if the bruises happened at school or it happened at home and the bruises are usually very light if it's not impactful or the child hit with something but if the child's coming to school with the bruises on his face or the arms.

Teacher 5 stated her rationale for not reporting the bruises:

Even though there are bruises, like I said on his face and on his body in different parts, I don't think at this particular time I would call it in and report it. I would still want to have a conference with the parents. This may be a child that is having difficulties too because of his sight due to his hearing. I would first ask them for

him to see a pediatrician and get a full work up on hearing and sight. There might be some other disabilities that we don't even know that he has. Sometimes the children are constantly falling due to different neurological brain function and things like that. I would first do that, then I would talk with the parents and see what happens because he has bruises. Bruises is a sign that there might be some type of abuse there, but I would not go right in to the reporting of that. Now, if the bruises continue, if I did see some reports that his eyesight and this is fine and the bruises keep I would ask for some other documentation when he does. Has he seen the doctor before? I wouldn't even let him in to my classroom. I would talk with the parents, you know if he's continuously with these bruises, I do need to see something from the doctor.

Teacher 6 stated her reason to why she was would report to CPS:

But it sounds like the thing that got me was where it says they're around the eye or cheek, like, if it looks like a hand mark on their body or it looks like somebody's been hitting this child then I think that we would probably contact CPS.

In scenario 2, the lead teachers stated their reasons for reporting and not reporting suspicion of child abuse. Teachers 1, 2, 4 and 6 reported their reasons for their decision to report this case to CPS. They stated that the child showed visible signs of bruises and marks on the body, such as the face and legs. They also indicated that the child displayed physical and mental distress. Teacher 3 acknowledged that she was a mandated reporter, and she indicated there was red flag based on the child's conditions however, she said she

would not report at this time because,” I don't want to abandon them.” She wanted to provide the parents support and assistance at this time.

Scenario 3. Scenario 3 depicted a situation suggestive of sexual abuse. In regards to this scenario, Teacher 1 described her rationale in this case in this way:

The teacher had reported it, but nothing was done in the school, or nothing was done. I would still call Child Protective Services. Something needs to be done. Sexual conduct. Anything could happen coming to school in a matter like this. I would still call Child Protective Services and get some help for this child. Even if the child has to be taken out of the home, because the parents did not get her any help. It will help and prevent a lot in her life.

Teacher 2 stated that she was “suspicious” of the situation especially the mother was not involved. The teacher responded:

It just seems really suspicious. The mother being distant and passive, and agreeing with her husband, kinda seems not involved or not even sort of wanting to accept what's happening or doesn't even really show that kinda concern that her child knows all this stuff or even attempts to explain where this child's sexual behavior comes from.

Teacher 3 stated that there needs to be more evidence before she can make any conclusions:

This fact that the step-father seemed concerned but all of these things are perception. It's not based on reality, what really happens. I think we're sometimes too fast to jump in to conclusion or making our own ideas. What we should really

do here I think is to have separate parent conferences when you can talk one and one. One with the mom and one with the dad, then with the girl. Then have some real evidence about what is going on. If she were with bloody underwear or some other type of behavior other than you know, showing you know, her genital than I would be really concerned about this. It's very superficial and it's not based on facts. We asking the question, have you been touched and I think that is not appropriate to do that because we're not the expert in this matter. Fishing is not going to work. We could coach the child to say we need things. They may not even understand our question, you know. This still is not quite like an urgent matter, but still a red flag where we would like to keep you know, keep an eye and see for more evidence about the molestation or sexual abuse.

Teacher 4 indicated why she would file a child abuse report:

Since the teacher already talked to the mom and the dad and based on the physical language that the mom seems to know and that the teacher was able to observe, I will do a report on it on this scenario as well because it's the stepfather. He seems that he's taking initiative about everything that's happening to the girl and not the mom or not letting the mom have any input on it. It seems like he's the one. It seems like he's trying to cover something by not letting the mom talk about it or since the mom is just timid and just sitting next to him, there could be some sexual abuse happening in there especially if the girl is so young. How is she going to know that? Why? Is she watching things that she's not supposed to or she's being physically and sexually abused by the stepdad?

Teacher 5 responded that she would not initially report because there are unknown factors. The teacher said:

I wouldn't just jump in and start and go and report something like that cause there's so many unknown factors and a big one is because of the media. I mean, it's everywhere. I mean it may be where she's a child that her parents are working a lot. Maybe the step-dad is trying to you know, has two, three jobs and with all the media and all the Walt Disney's out there and sometimes the girls are trying to get approval from their parents, trying to get a peer pressure is incredible. I mean there's just so much and not everybody looks like what you see on TV. So many girls are trying to be like that and thinking that this is the way to be. I would talk with her a little bit more and see if I can get her some resources and maybe do some counseling. Maybe bring in a counselor to talk with her cause I don't have the expertise of that, but to report this, I would wait and gather some more information. I would really try to find out the source, where is she seeing this? Because it's not a natural thing, but she's gotta be seeing it from somewhere, and try to figure out where the source is first.

Teacher 6 did not indicate that she would report but she mentioned that this situation was a red flag. She stated:

It sounds like the parents have already been talked - and they're aware of what's happening. But it says that he is very upset about this and seemed distant and passive. I've had to call CPS before about something, but never in relation to sexual abuse so that's, just a scary thing I think to even think about, but I know

that it does happen. I would probably, if it sounds like the parents are very upset about it also, perhaps refer them to see somebody who could evaluate the child first. Cause it sounds like the parents are aware of what's happening at school and maybe help them find a resource where they could take her. Because if she's doing things that are sexual even with the teachers, that's a very big red flag.

In responding to scenario 3, the lead teachers' responses varied on their reasons that they would file child abuse report or not file a report. Teachers 1 and 4 stated that they would contact CPS because, in the words of Teacher 1, "something needs to be done" and because, according to Teacher 4, a stepfather was part of the family. Teacher 2, 3, 5 and 6 all said they would not report, citing a lack of information even though they noted the situation presented what they interpreted as "red flags."

Summary of RQ 2. The preschool teachers' rationales to report or not report suspicion of child abuse or neglect agree with Meneghetti and Seel's fifth ethical dilemmas trait which was that decision-makers have difficulty in deciding with incomplete access to the facts. Most of the teachers indicated that they need to know more evidence and facts before they can conclude to make a child abuse report.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 explored the confidence of the preschool teachers' feelings about their decision to report or not report incidents of possible child abuse or neglect. The same three scenarios formed the basis for this question.

Scenario 1. Scenario 1 described a situation of possible child neglect. In response to this scenario, Teacher 1 was confident in reporting her suspicion of neglect because she saw signs of neglect in scenario one. Teacher 1 said:

If there's any sign of neglect going on, then we start to make phone calls. This is a case where it's pretty much just parent neglect here with the child. If I was supposed to be the staff and see all this, my first thing is calling Child Protective Services. Everything needs to be reported. It would actually be child protective service, because there could be more to it than what it is. They will go out to check the home, have a meeting with the parents as well, with the child.

Teacher 2 indicated her confidence in reporting:

I will call Child Protective Services, just to make sure that the parents are aware that they need to have a better way of taking care of this child. With all the different signs of neglect that I see in this scenario, I would report.

Teacher 3 was confident in her decisions not to report because she did not want to jump to any conclusion:

I don't think nobody can jump to a conclusion because we really don't know what's going on with this family. This family could be homeless. This is a reality that we have now. They struggle a lot so I think for this particular scenario, what I would do is that I need more facts to jump in to conclusion, but for sure I would reach out to the parents and make it strong as a goal to know more about the parents. Reach out to them, ask if there is anything that I can help with. Do they need resources? That's why it's important to develop good relationship for the parents

so that when things like that happens, then they feel more comfortable to talk about it.

Teacher 4 showed confidence in her decision by stating what she would do first before reporting:

What I will do first is talk to the parent and from what I see, it's that the children are not coming to school with bruises but they are underdressed and they are hungry all the time, so there might be a financial crisis going through the family or they are homeless. I will try to talk to the mom and explain to her my concerns about what the children are mentioning in school and what I have observed through ... maybe observing through a period of two weeks at the most and see what the mom has to say before doing any report. Before that, create a plan with the mom and see if I can refer her to any programs where she could get food or find out what's going on at home first. If I don't see any bruises or the child has complained that she's getting hurt, that's what I will do first. Just get to know what's happening in the family before making a report.

Teacher 5 was confident in her decision to not report right away:

There may not be any money for this. She may have been laid off from her job, there's several homeless people out there. Several people that have lost their jobs so I think there needs to be a little bit more investigation. That would be one of my reasons of not reporting it right away.

Teacher 6 was confident in explaining why she would not contact CPS first:

Something first before contacting CPS right away, and then trying to support the parent a little bit more, and then going from there and documenting things, too, over the time so that you have documentation of what's been happening, maybe. Eventually if nothing's changing, and if you felt the child was in danger, then contacting CPS at that point, I think that's what I would do.

The six lead teachers provided their reasons for reporting or not reporting based on scenario 1. Two of the six teachers were confident in their explanations on why they would make a child abuse report. Teacher 1 and 2 indicated that they would report to CPS because they see a sign of neglect in the child. The other four teachers were confident in their rationales for not reporting, citing a need to find out more about the family situation and to provide parents with support if needed.

Scenario 2. Scenario 2 presented a case of possible child abuse. In answering research question 3 in regards to scenario 2, Teacher 1 indicated her confidence to report:

In this scenario I noticed the teacher, I believe the teacher had talked to other colleagues about the child, but it didn't specify about the closing part, whether the other colleagues might have spread the news to the director of the school, or the principal to the school. Because there are witnesses to the fact of what happened if they see him by sight. But if someone tells me like this teacher told her colleagues, I would report that, because we don't know what's going on in the home. We have to help out, help this child, because we don't know how long it's been happening. This report does also show in this scenario too at least what is the outcome that the teacher have done.

Teacher 2 stated her reason for reporting:

[The child] seems to show not only physical but mental signs of abuse and distress. Child needs help and intervention. As an educator, I would report this incident to Child Protective Services and have them do a more thorough follow up of this child's welfare.

Teacher 3 provided her reason for filing a report:

Then let them [the parents] know that you know, I'm mandated to report this but I don't want to abandon them. I want to let them know that you know, there are resources and you know, with mandated report, what they will do they will investigate the case and you know, they should look at this as help not something bad. But this is good, that maybe they need this support. They haven't reached out so now we need to step in because children have rights. You know, again based on the facts, you know I have to do this.

Teacher 4 was confident in reporting a possible incident of child abuse by asserting:

I will definitely have to do a report because if the child doesn't want to say what happen and the child seems to be hesitant and just doesn't want to say what happened to him, it's scared that maybe he's being physically abused at home or outside the school just because of all the bruises. This one, I will not even talk to the mom. I will have to do the report immediately knowing the family history.

Teacher 5 gave her explanation for reporting:

I would do some documentation on this before. Then I may call it in if it was to continue, and I did see bruising. As far as him yelling and the screaming and that,

that might be some type of domestic violence that he has seen within his home. I would think about that, there might be some other. I would talk with the parents, there might be some classes. I would talk to the parents and if this continues, I may have to go another direction, which would be having to report it.

Teacher 6 was also confident in making a report by indicating:

But it sounds like the thing that got me was where it says they're around the eye or cheek, like, if it looks like a hand mark on their body or it looks like somebody's been hitting this child then I think that we would probably contact CPS.

In responding to scenario 2, all six lead teachers were confident in making a child abuse report. They all had concerns for the child and the family. Their reasons were similar for reporting because there were bruises and marks on the child. They also saw signs of “physical and mental distress” in the child. Some of the teachers suggested that they would provide resources for the parents to help them. The six lead teachers agree to report suspicion of child abuse or neglect based on scenario 2.

Scenario 3. Scenario 3 portrays a situation indicative of possible sexual abuse.

Teacher 1 showed confidence in her response:

The teacher had reported it, but nothing was done in the school, or nothing was done. I would still call Child Protective Services. Something needs to be done. Sexual conduct. Anything could happen coming to school in a matter like this. I would still call Child Protective Services and get some help for this child. Even if the child has to be taken out of the home, because the parents did not get her any help. It will help and prevent a lot in her life. In this scenario I would call Child

Protective Service. They will be the lead to know what's best for this child to where someone will not take advantage of her, or her taking advantage even through her own self could lead to the wrong hands of somebody else. We want to take action right away before things get farther.

Teacher 2 stated her reasons for reporting to CPS:

I would also report to Child Protective Services because it just doesn't seem like she is doing things that a child her age would do and her knowledge of sexual matters just seems to be a little bit above her age. I would report her parents because they don't seem to understand the severity of this behavior that the child is acting out on. Because the parents are not and there doesn't seem to show that they're going to talk to her or you know, let her know that touching other people isn't something that she should be doing. It just doesn't seem like the parents are gonna do anything about it, that I would report this child to Protective Services because the parents don't seem to be that concerned and I under my gut, kinda feels like there might be something more underneath the surface than what is going on.

Teacher 4 responded:

The child doesn't want to talk about it either. Most likely, usually children in preschool, they like to talk about what happens at home if they fall or everything. If you ask them something, they don't just stay quiet and it seems to me weird that she doesn't want to talk about it or said what she saw that or that if she's being touched. I will do a report on this one as well just because it's the stepdad

and the stepdad seems overprotective of the girl. Why? He's the stepdad and not the mom. I will do a mandated report on it.

Teacher 6 stated:

I don't think I'm qualified to ask children if they've been sexually abused. I'm not qualified to ask those questions, so I would be really careful with that, and letting a professional do something like that. Cause it might not be the parents, it could be somebody else in the house, or lots of times I know it's somebody they know. So, that's probably the route I would go. But it sounds like the parents would wanna get help but I don't know, but if they weren't willing then at that point maybe bring in CPS because the child obviously does need help; but not right at first. I think I would talk to the parents and possibly refer them to somebody, or just say, "your child does need some help.

In describing their confidence in their decision to report or not report the case of possible sexual abuse of a child, all of these teachers seemed secure in their choice. Four teachers gave reasons for a decision to report despite the fact that results presented in RQ2 showed only two teachers clearly supported making a report.

Summary of RQ 3. In regards to research question 3, the three scenarios were presented to the six lead teachers to examine how confident they were in their decisions to report or not to report suspicion of child abuse. In scenario 1, two of the six teachers were confident to make a child abuse reporting. Then other four teachers were confident in their decisions not to make a report. In scenario 2, all of the six lead teachers were confident in their decision-making process to report possible physical abuse. They were

not hesitant in their decisions to make a child abuse reporting because they saw signs of neglect, mental, and physical injuries to the child's body. In scenario 3, four lead teachers were confident in their decision to report suspicion of sexual child abuse despite the fact that in providing their decision as reported in RQ2, only two teachers actually said they would make a report.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility (internal validity) is a measure of how accurate and truthful the study is to reality. I reviewed the transcripts and ensured that the transcripts were accurate. I utilized two strategies to confirm the validity of my findings. I asked the preschool teachers to provide member checking by reviewing for sensibility and clarity summaries of their transcribed interviews. However, no teacher responded with thoughts she had following the data-collecting sessions. The think aloud protocol provided thick, rich information about teachers' in-the-moment decision-making that may support transferability of conclusions reached in this study. I also asked two colleagues in the early childhood field but not connected to this study as external auditors to assist me in the interpretation of the data. Their feedback was valuable since they provided constructive comments that clarified my interpretation of the data.

Transferability (external validity) is a measure of how the results of a study are transferable to another situation. I provided thick and detailed descriptions of my study. This ensured a clear understanding of the issue being investigated that may be transferable to other social settings, such as primary and secondary schools, and social

service agencies. The study may be limited to transferability due to a small sample size, and therefore more likely will not be generalizable to other settings.

Dependability refers to tracking procedures to confirm the accuracy of the data. Dependability was supported by member checking. I asked the six participants to review the summaries of their interviews and the findings I derived from the data. In addition, since data collection followed established procedures of the think-aloud protocol, the dependability of the study was enhanced by the prior success of this method.

Confirmability is the use of reflexivity and external auditing to reduce potential biases. I addressed reflexivity by keeping a journal of my awareness, experiences, reactions, and assumptions during data collection and analysis. Through this process, I had self-awareness to ensure the reduction of subjectivity and biases. Another strategy that I used to confirm the trustworthiness of my results was the use of external auditors, as I previously described, to provide their perspective on the data and reduce the chance of conclusions drawn from any personal biases.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to understand preschool teachers' in-the-moment decision-making process when considering a case of possible child abuse and what factors might inhibit them or encourage them regarding the making of a child abuse report. I pursued three research questions about preschool teachers' response, rationale, and confidence about their decisions to report or not report incidents of possible child abuse or neglect formed the basis of this research. The research questions were derived Meneghetti and Seel's ethical decision-making process. Six lead teachers of two- to five-

year-old children from six different preschools were presented with three scenarios of possible incidents of child abuse or neglect. Interviews followed the think aloud protocol, in an effort to capture teachers' thoughts as they considered each scenario and decided what they would do in response to the problem each scenario presented.

The results of the study indicated that the six lead preschool teachers were not able to easily make the decision to report when confronted with an incident of possible child abuse or neglect, which was the substance of research question 1. Some of the lead teachers indicated that they needed to converse with the parents and the preschool director before they could make any decision about reporting. Their responses reflected Meneghetti and Seel's first trait ethical decision-making, which is that ethical dilemmas may not be easily identified, and their fourth trait, in that deciders may have difficulty in separating ethical issues from their feelings for various stakeholders. In terms of the second research question, the lead teachers' rationales to report or not report suspicion of child abuse or neglect were in line with Meneghetti and Seel's fifth trait of ethical dilemmas in that some of the preschool teachers felt that they did not have all the information needed to decide to make a report. The majority of the lead teachers indicated they wanted more proof before they came to any conclusion on reporting suspicion of child abuse or neglect. Lastly, research question 3 assessed the teachers' confidence in their decision to report or not report suspicion of child abuse or neglect. Two lead teachers indicated that they felt confident about their decision report their suspicion of child neglect presented in scenario 1, but the remaining four lead teachers specified confidence that they would not make a report of child neglect. In response to

scenario 2, all six lead teachers expressed confidence in their decision to report suspicion of physical abuse, because they saw marks and signs of distress on the child. In response to the last scenario 3, which depicted possible child sexual abuse, four lead teachers felt confident in a decision to report. These teachers did not show any hesitation to report but felt it was unusual for the child to have sexual knowledge at a young age, and that the fact that the situation involved the child's stepfather presented additional concern. The remaining two teachers were confident in their decision not to report the case in scenario 3.

In Chapter 5, I will discuss these findings in light of the literature and the conceptual framework. I will also suggest the implications of these findings for further research and for teaching practice.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The literature indicated that many teachers have failed to report suspicion of child abuse and neglect despite the mandated law imposed by the CAPTA. The CAPTA requires all professionals working with children to report reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect (Child Welfare Information Gateway Children's Bureau, 2015). One reason why teachers may underreport their suspicions of child abuse or neglect is the variability in perceptions of what constitutes child abuse or neglect (Feng et al., 2012; Gallaher-Mackay, 2014). In addition, Shewchuk (2014) found that teachers simply were reluctant to engage in reporting suspicion of child abuse or neglect.

There has been no prior research conducted on preschool teachers' decision-making process in regards to child abuse reporting using the think aloud protocol. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine preschool teachers' in-the-moment decision-making process in response to cases of possible child abuse incidents to report or not report child abuse or neglect by using the think aloud protocol described by van Someren et al. (1994). The think aloud protocol allowed the preschool teachers to explain their thinking out loud while being audio-recorded as they were presented with three possible child abuse cases. The decision-making process was from Meneghetti and Seel (2001) and guided the three RQs for this qualitative study. The three RQs were:

RQ1: How do preschool teachers respond when confronted with an incident of possible child abuse or neglect?

RQ2: What is the rationale preschool teachers describe in deciding to report or not report suspicion of child abuse or neglect?

RQ3: How confident do preschool teachers feel about their decision to report or not report incidents of possible child abuse or neglect?

The results in this study for scenario 1, about a case of possible child neglect, revealed that the preschool teachers felt that they did not have enough evidence, such as the child's age, family issues, and parenting dynamics, to make a child abuse or neglect report. Some of the teachers stated that they had difficulty in identifying the problem in the situation, with insufficient information to make a child abuse report. Other preschool teachers indicated that they wanted to consult with the director and parents before they come to any conclusion.

The results in scenario 2 about a case of possible physical abuse revealed that although some teachers recognized that bruises on the child's body and other visible marks likely indicated physical abuse, some of the teachers indicated that they did not want to make a child abuse report because they were not sure how to respond to the situation. Again, some of the teachers wanted to consult with the director first and then talk to the parents before making a child abuse report. Some teachers wanted to investigate where the child received the bruises before they make any decision. Even though many of the preschool teachers agreed that there were definite signs of physical abuse, they were not ready to make any decisions or take any actions to make a child abuse reporting.

The results in scenario 3 about a case of possible sexual abuse, indicated that the preschool teachers saw signs of sexual issues, but they wanted to further investigate to find the cause of this evidence before making a child abuse report. Some of the teachers

stated that the child needed counseling. Some teachers felt that children at this age are curious about their bodies and so their precocious sexual behavior was simply part of this stage of exploration. Once again, teachers indicated that they wanted to talk to the parents and the center director before making any decision to file a child abuse report. In scenario 3, the teachers showed some concerns about the child but said they would not make a child abuse report. They indicated that they needed to further investigate the situation, talk to the child's parent, and refer the child to get help from a counselor.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings in this study from the three scenarios were consistent with the literature that suggested teachers do not always report their suspicions of possible child abuse or neglect (Crowell & Levi, 2012; Feng et al., 2012; Krase, 2013; Gallagher & Mackay, 2014; Pietrantonio et al., 2013; Shewchuk, 2014). The literature revealed that preschool teachers do not report child abuse despite their knowledge of reasonable suspicions of child abuse or neglect (Crowell & Levi, 2012; Dinehart & Kenny, 2015; Feng et al., 2012; Gallaher-Mackay, 2014; Herman-Smith, 2013; Shewchuk, 2014). Dine and Kenny (2015) revealed in their research that only 12% of the preschool teachers had ever made a report of child abuse. They also indicated that the preschool teachers did not make a child abuse report because they were afraid the report would be inaccurate and there would be negative consequences. Some of the teachers in Dine and Kenny's study indicated that they were not sure of the families' cultural attitudes about discipline.

The findings in this current study were consistent with the literature. The preschool teachers in this study were reluctant to make any child abuse reporting when

presented with the three scenarios of possible child abuse cases. The majority of the teachers wanted more information about the child and the family before they came to any conclusion to file a child abuse report. Some of the preschool teachers in the study had difficulty in identifying the situations presented in the three scenarios as possible examples of child abuse or neglect.

This difficulty to make a decision is in alignment with Meneghetti and Seel's (2001) traits of ethical decision-making that suggested an ethical dilemma may be difficult to identify, may be difficult to separate from feelings about situational stakeholders, such as parents or the center director, and that decisions are difficult to make if there is incomplete access to facts.

Teachers' desire for more information, their desire to investigate the situation by talking with the parents, and their inclination to defer decision-making to someone else, such as the center director, are immaterial under the law. As mandated reporters, teachers are personally required by law to make a child abuse report if they have any suspicion of abuse or neglect. CAPTA does not require teachers to provide evidence for their suspicions or to make their own investigation prior to making a report. Reports made in good faith carry with them no penalty under the law, but failure to make a report does. Nonetheless, the results of the study showed that the preschool teachers would fail to report suspicion of child abuse or neglect, citing uncertainty and reluctance to get involved, which is consistent with prior findings in the literature.

Other studies in the literature revealed that elementary and preschool teachers' understanding of what constitutes reasonable suspicion of child abuse might vary, and

this may have contributed to the number of underreported cases of child abuse or neglect (Crowell & Levi, 2012; Feng et al., 2012; Gallaher-Mackay, 2014; Herman-Smith, 2013). Teachers in this study recognized that there were red flags due to bruises or sexual behavior in the child but they were not willing to file a child abuse report based on their suspicions because they were not sure what to do or how to respond to the situation. One teacher said, "Definitely something is going on at home that is not normal," and another noted that, "Even though there are bruises, like I said on his face and on his body in different parts, I don't think at this particular time I would call it in and report it." The teachers recognized that there were signs of abuse, but they failed to connect their observations with their personal mandate to make a child abuse report. This disconnect between observation and action is consistent with the literature and indicates teachers' uncertainty of what constitutes child abuse and what their mandated reporter role requires.

Another, disturbing issue was raised by a teacher who said, "I would have of course shared this with the director of the center for liability issues." The fact that legal liability for the center or staff might take precedence over the safety of children is in itself concerning and raises issues about risk-management attitudes that seem to ignore the risk both to children and to the center of failure to report child abuse. This attitude also indicates a misunderstanding of CAPTA, which protects those who make reports in good faith and does not require reporters to verify the facts of a case themselves.

The current study adds value to the literature because there has not been any prior study using preschool teachers as participants in determining the decision-making process

on child abuse reporting and utilizing the think aloud protocol to acquire real-time thoughts. This study filled a gap and contributed to the literature regarding preschool teachers' in-the-moment decision making about reporting or not reporting suspicion of child abuse or neglect. This study also brings value to the literature by increasing the understanding of how these preschool teachers' decisions were made in reporting or not reporting possible child abuse or neglect.

Limitations of the Study

The study had several limitations. First, the study was limited to the small sample of six lead preschool teachers. Because this group of teachers may not be not representative of all early childhood teachers in the early childhood field, the small sample size may hinder the transferability of the findings. The second limitation was the child abuse scenarios that were used in the study. The scenarios were inclusive of all possible child abuse scenarios but only represent some cases of possible abuse. The scenarios may have limited the teachers' responses because only a few cases were presented. Third, the think aloud protocol was a useful tool to allow participants to speak freely. However, the think aloud protocol may be limited due to some discomfort the preschool teachers may have felt during the interviews. For example, when it came to the scenario of sexual abuse, some of the teachers were uncomfortable to speak on this topic. They displayed uneasiness to speak aloud on this topic, and some of the preschool teachers diverted the issue which may have affected the dependability of the results. Teacher #6 stated, "I don't think I'm qualified to ask children if they've been sexually

abused. I'm not qualified to ask those questions, so I would be really careful with that, and letting a professional do something like that.”

As the main researcher in the study, I was careful not to betray any bias as a person concerned and knowledgeable about the topic of child abuse reporting. Following the think aloud protocol, I was cautious not to have any influence on the preschool teachers' thinking as they were speaking aloud during the interview. I did not interject or interrupt them during the interviews. I just listened intently and let the preschool teachers speak aloud during the entire interview. I did not need to prompt the preschool teachers at any time during the interviews.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations for further research. Child abuse reporting is a critical topic that is worthwhile to investigate on a larger scale. It is an important topic that needs to be addressed at every level in the educational system to safeguard children from any potential abuse neglect. Further investigation on this topic can be explored with a larger sample size in different educational settings, such as elementary and secondary levels. The findings in this study indicated that preschool teachers' reluctance to report suspicion of child abuse substantiate a great need for more training and education on child abuse reporting for teachers. The findings in this study are consistent with the literature of the underreported cases of child abuse. Therefore, further research on the rationales for underreporting would bring more awareness to teachers of the seriousness of their responsibility as mandated reporters. Further investigation would provide teachers the tools and training that they need as mandated reporters to report suspicion of

child abuse or neglect.

Implications

Several implications for practice in the early childhood field result from this study. First, teachers need ongoing training to maintain their awareness of the law that requires them to report any suspicion of child abuse, and their roles as mandated reporters. Current rules in many states, including the state in which this study took place, require only a single course in mandated reporting at the beginning of a teacher's career. It is clear from the results of this study that teachers need continuing professional training on the different types of child abuse and identifying the signs of abuse and the serious consequences if they fail to not report suspicion of child abuse or neglect. The teachers need to feel supported in making decisions without waiting for more information or stakeholder support. Second, early childhood policymakers must take steps to ensure that child abuse reporting policies are enforced by directors and owners. These administrators need clarity around the issue of legal liability so they can support teachers in making child abuse reports without interference. Third, all early childhood educators and administrators need training in the harmful effects of child abuse on children. These effects have been demonstrated to be profound and long-lasting, but teachers' comments made to the scenarios in this study illustrate a lack of awareness of the importance of protecting children. Child abuse and neglect are non-trivial matters and cannot be condoned in an effort to protect parents.

This was a small-scale study conducted in a single locale in the United States. Recommendations can be made for future research, including replication of this study to

other areas of the country. The think aloud protocol proved to be an effective way to discern teachers' in-the-moment decision-making and its use in this study exposed the difficulties teachers have in making what the law assumes are simple decisions. Greater research is needed to explore the psychological barriers teachers feel in reporting child abuse and neglect.

Lastly, the results of this study offer implications for positive social change. Now that it is clear how difficult it is for teachers to understand what constitutes child abuse and neglect, to separate what they observe in children from concerns about overstepping their authority or offending parents, and to feel empowered to make a child abuse report when they have a suspicion of child abuse or neglect, directors and owners and state administrators can take steps to clarify teachers' role as mandated reporters and celebrate the bravery they need to make the difficult decision to report. With greater support and training, teachers could be more aware of their roles as mandated reporters and more confident in making reporting decisions. As a result of this study, many children could be protected from harm from abuse or neglect. These positive outcomes for children are the ultimate benefit of this study.

Conclusion

The present study examined preschool teachers' in-the-moment decision-making process in reporting or not reporting suspicion of child abuse or neglect. The study found that lead preschool teachers were reluctant to report suspicion of possible child abuse depicted in the three written scenarios. The majority of the preschool teachers wanted more information about the child, family dynamics, and circumstances before they could

decide to make a child abuse report, reported feeling uncertain how to respond to a situation without guidance from their directors or the parents themselves, and expressed difficulty in determining the difference between parental rights to discipline their children and children's rights to protection from abuse and neglect. The findings in this study were consistent with the literature, which indicated that teachers do not always report suspicion of child abuse or neglect. This study provided an in-the-moment look into how this failure to report occurs.

Teachers are the community's eyes and ears in efforts to protect children from abuse and neglect. Because teachers see children every day and see many children of the same ages, they understand what are ordinary bumps and bruises and commonplace fears and reactions and those that are abnormal. They are uniquely positioned to detect evidence of possible abuse and neglect and to report it so children get the help they need. It is therefore essential that teachers feel empowered to trust their assessment of a possible abuse or neglect situation and feel supported in making a formal report. When teachers feel responsible and validated as a result of policy changes made in response to the implications of this study, children will be safer, happier, and healthier. The safety, happiness, and health of children is the entire objective of early childhood education and care. Attention to the results of this study will result in support to teachers and hope for the children in their care.

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Appendix A: E-mail to Director

From: MyTra Nguyen-Vu, mytra.nguyen-vu@waldenu.edu

To: _____

Date: _____

Subject: Recruiting Teachers for a Study

I am currently a doctoral student at Walden University, and I am conducting a research study for my dissertation. I am writing to ask your help to recruit preschool teachers at your center to participate in my study. I have enclosed a flyer for you to pass out to the teachers at your preschool. My research study is to investigate how preschool teachers make decisions about child abuse reporting. The focus on my study is to understand preschool teachers' decision-making process to report or not to report child abuse. The teacher will participate in a one-hour, one-on-one interview at a local library and at a mutually convenient time.

Thank you for your consideration to assist me in recruiting your teachers for my study.

Sincerely,

MyTra Nguyen-Vu

Appendix B: Flyer to Invite Preschool Teachers

You're Invited to Participate



You can be a part of a study to investigate preschool teachers' decision-making process on child abuse reporting. I will conduct a one-hour interview to inquire about preschool teachers' decision to report or not report suspicion of child abuse.

The Purpose of the Study

I am a doctoral student in the Early Childhood Education field. I am completing my dissertation, and I need your help for my study to learn more about preschool teachers' decision-making process on child abuse reporting.



I am looking forward to talking with you! Please contact me at
mytra.nguyen-vu@waldenu.edu or (408) 398-3711.

Space is limited to participate. Contact today!

Appendix C: Permission to Use and Reprint CARS-S Scenarios

From: wescrenshawphd@fpskansas.com <wescrenshawphd@fpskansas.com>
 Sent: Friday, May 4, 2018 8:20 AM
 To: Mytra Nguyen-Vu
 Subject: Re: Permission

I grant permission.

Thank you for your conscientiousness in this regard.

On May 4, 2018, at 10:19 AM, Mytra Nguyen-Vu <mytra.nguyen-vu@waldenu.edu> wrote:

Dear Dr. Crenshaw,

I hope this email finds you well. I asked you permission last summer to use your scenarios for my dissertation. I finally finished my study and it has been approved by my university. Now, I need your permission to reprint the scenarios in the publication of my dissertation. The university requires that I receive your permission before they can grant me to publish the dissertation.

I have enclosed my final dissertation for you to view. Thank you very much for you time!
 MyTra

<MyTra Nguyen-Vu Final Dissertation May 3, 2018.doc> Wes Crenshaw, PhD ABPP
 CST
 Family Psychological Services, LLC
 2601 W 6th ST STE A
 Lawrence, KS 66049-4319
 Ph: 785-371-1414
 Kansas City: 913-888-8967

From: wescrenshawphd@fpskansas.com <wescrenshawphd@fpskansas.com>
 Date: Mon, Dec 12, 2016 at 7:18 AM
 Subject: Re: Permission to use your CARS-S Scenarios
 To: MyTra Nguyen-Vu <mytra.nguyen-vu@waldenu.edu>

You have my permission. These are used about twice a year and I like to keep track of findings. Please do send me a copy (electronically) of your final paper.

Good luck.

On Dec 11, 2016, at 11:49 AM, MyTra Nguyen-Vu
<mytra.nguyen-vu@waldenu.edu> wrote:

Dear Dr. Crenshaw,

Thank you very much for your prompt reply to my email. appreciate your time!

I am currently attending Walden University, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Early Childhood Program. The purpose of my study is to understand preschool teachers' rationale behind their decision to report or not to report suspicion of child abuse. Through exploration of teachers' decision-making process, I hope my study explicates the factors that influence teachers' fulfillment of their mandated reporter role. The approach that I will take to carry out an instrumental case study is to use the Think Aloud Protocol to produce data through a one-on-one interview with teachers. The teachers will articulate their real-time thinking process as scenarios are described to them verbally. These scenarios will be situations of possible child abuse cases. The teachers will speak aloud as what goes through their minds as they are contemplating the incidents in the scenarios. They will share their thoughts on their decision to report or not to report child abuse based on these scenarios.

My committee chair suggested that I search for scenarios on child abuse cases that already been studied. I was searching for scenarios, and I found your article through the Journal of Child Abuse and Neglect (When Educators Confront Child Abuse: An Analysis of the Decision to Report). I will cite your original work correctly in my study. Using your scenarios will assist me to complete my research study. I have been studying on this topic for the last three years, and this is my final work to complete my dissertation.

Thank you for your consideration. MyTra Nguyen-Vu

On Sat, Dec 10, 2016 at 8:37 AM, wescrenshawphd@fpskansas.com
<wescrenshawphd@fpskansas.com> wrote:

I believe you are referring to the CARS-S scenarios.

Please tell me the university and program you are in and a bit about your project.

I usually am fine with that as long as you cite them correctly and the original source material which is either my dissertation or the article in Child Abuse and Neglect: International Journal.

On Dec 10, 2016, at 10:34 AM, MyTra Nguyen-Vu <mytra.nguyen-vu@waldenu.edu>
wrote:

Dear Dr. Crenshaw,

I am a doctoral student and conducting my research on child abuse. I purchased your article: When Educators Confront Child Abuse. I would like to ask your permission if I can use the five scenarios in your Appendix for my study.

Thank you, MyTra Nguyen-Vu Doctoral Student

Appendix D: CARS-S Scenarios

Scenario 1:

On several occasions, the girl mentions to you how hungry she is, adding that she has not had any food at home. As you think back on other experiences with this girl, you recall that she often comes to school dirty and without proper clothing (e.g., under-clothed for winter, clothes in disrepair, etc.). She is often coming to school late, reporting that she was late watching T.V. When asked, the girl says that her parent went to bed early and did not put her to sleep. These stories are confirmed by the teacher of one of the older siblings. The teacher suggests this is common in the family and says the older sibling tells her the same thing.

At school, the girl has few friends and keeps to herself. She seems overly mature and over responsible for her age. She relates better to you than her peers do, even to the point of being overly-dependent. The girl is of average intelligence. She also lacks problem-solving skills and is easily distracted. She often gets frustrated with tasks and gives up easily. The parent does not have open communication with you and tends to avoid you. When you do talk to the parent, the parent never seems to follow through on your discussions. Of particular concern is the girl's daily prescription medication for asthma. When the medication runs out, it often takes more than a week for the parent to send a replacement. You have asked the girl how things are going at home, but she tells you that everything is good at home.

Scenario 2:

On various occasions, a child has come to school with noticeable bruises on his face, arms, and legs. The facial bruises are usually around the eye or cheek and are of a size and shape consistent with being struck by hand or a fist. The bruises on the arm or leg are rectangular and oblong. Although the boy sometimes falls at school, each of these incidents has quickly ended without visible injury – making this an unlikely source of the child's bruises. You have met the parents at the conference, and they usually seem interested and cooperative.

The boy often gets upset, particularly when disciplined by an adult – an occurrence which has become increasingly common. During class activities, he is excessively aggressive and easily “flies off the handle” (crying, pushing, yelling, etc.). When other students get upset or angry, this boy seems oddly fascinated and worried, particularly when a teacher has to intervene. You have talked with other colleagues, and they have also noticed these same bruises and behaviors. You talk with him about his behavior as you have on previous occasions, but this time you ask him how he got the bruises. He begins to cry and refuses to respond.

Scenario 3:

One of your students has been having trouble all year. She has almost no friends and acts younger and inappropriate for her age most of the time. Your rapport is good with this student. Most noticeable is her sexual behavior toward other students and even some teachers. She displays a knowledge of sexual matters which you consider excessive for her age. On occasion, the girl has been caught exposing her genitals or attempting to engage in sexual touching with other students.

At a teacher-parent conference, the parents seem very edgy. The step-father seems very concerned about the girl and could even be called protective – defending her as a “special child who has different needs.” However, the step-father admits he is very upset about the girl’s sexual behavior. The mother seems distant and passive, commenting only to agree with her husband.

You and a colleague (e.g., the director or another teacher) talk with the girl about her ongoing sexual behavior. On a hunch, you ask if the girl has she ever been touched in her private body parts (using age-appropriate language and explanations). She ignores your questions, and she does not want to talk about it.

Appendix E: Confidentiality Agreement

Confidentiality Agreement

Name of Signer: _____

During the course of my activity reviewing this research: Preschool Teachers' Decisions-Making Process in Reporting Child Abuse. I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participants.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement, I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modifications or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I am officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F: Interview Guide

Interview Guide Following the Think-Aloud Protocol

Thank you for participating in my study. Although I will be recording our conversation today, keep in mind that your identity will be kept completely confidential, so that no one but I will know what you say.

Today I will present you with three written descriptions of a situation that might be a case of child abuse or neglect or might not be. I'll ask you to read the first description and tell me all the thoughts that go through your mind as you consider this case. I am interested in how you sort through the case and think about what to do about it, as if this were something that you noticed in your actual classroom involving an actual child and family. Please say out loud everything that pops into your head. Because I will audio record your thinking, please try to speak clearly. Okay?

[Once the participant indicates understanding, I will present her with the first written scenario. Following the Think-Aloud Protocol Method guide, I will only say, "Please keep talking," after the participant seems to stop reporting her thoughts. After about 15 minutes or when the participant seems to have said all she can say, I will conclude the consideration of the first scenario by thanking the participant.]

Please consider now this second description of a situation that might or might not be a case of child abuse or neglect. Just as before, please read through this and say out loud everything you think about as you consider this scenario.

[I will repeat the process of listening and recording the participant's thinking.]

Thank you so much. One more scenario to consider. Please read this description of a case and say out loud what you're thinking as you consider this.

[I will repeat the process of listening and recording the participant's thinking.]

Thank you so much. We are all finished now. What did you think?

[If the participant has any concluding thoughts, she and I will discuss those briefly. I will then turn off the recording device and escort the participant out of the room with good wishes for the rest of the day.]