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A Case Study of School Counselors-in-Training Addressing Diversity in Child Maltreatment

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ABSTRACT

School counselors-in-training are required to develop attitudes, knowledge, and skills throughout their training programs to address child maltreatment. Diversity might influence how school counselors-in-training acquire this information. This study examines how school counselors-in-training address cultural considerations in child maltreatment. We utilized a multiple case study to interview three school counselors-in-training who were completing their internship. We identified five themes and four sub-themes from the data. The five themes were (a) context, (b) awareness, (c) perceptions and beliefs, (d) training development, and (e) family support. The results provided context to how school counselors-in-training consider cultural differences in addressing child maltreatment.

Keywords: Child maltreatment; Diversity; School counselors-in-training; Case study

1 Introduction

Child maltreatment has remained a widespread social problem, with an estimated 3 million children reported to child welfare agencies in 2022, and nearly 1,990 deaths in the United States alone (Leeb et al., 2008;[28] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2024).[40] Addressing this issue has been a crucial demand for children's safety and well-being, as maltreatment severely impacts children's development and health, correlating with psychological and physiological issues such as mental disorders, low self-esteem, aggression, poor academic performance, and negative adulthood outcomes (Pietrantoni et al., 2023;[36] Tillman et al. 2015).[39]

Mandated Reporter

School counselors, as mandated reporters under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act

(CAPTA), are required to report any suspicion or evidence of child abuse or neglect to authorities, a mandate supported by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), permitting the release of information to other professionals to ensure children receive necessary intervention and support (Child Welfare Information Gateway [CWIG], 2019;[6] Crosson-Tower, 2003;[10] Pietrantoni et al., 2024).[35] However, many counselors were unaware of the specifics of the state and federal laws indicative of definitions of sexual and emotional abuse causing confusion and concerns about reporting and potential legal repercussions, leading to under and overreporting of cases (DHHS, 2024;[40] Pietrantoni et al., 2023).[36] Positioned to notice signs of maltreatment due to their frequent interactions with students, counselors should be trained to recognize behavioral and emotional indicators and establish trusting relationships with students (Bryant, 2009;[5] Lambie, 2005;[26] Pietrantoni et al., 2024).[35] Their commitment to student's safety and development is crucial, yet without adequate training, the consequences of not addressing child maltreatment could result in ongoing or even escalating harm to the child.

Despite U.S. Department of Health and Human Services guidelines, school counselors and mandated reporters have continued to face challenges in identifying and reporting child maltreatment due to gaps in knowledge, inconsistent definitions, and fear of repercussions (Alvarez et al., 2004;[1] Crosson-Tower, 2003;[10] Pietrantoni et al., 2023).[36] Key resources on understanding and reporting child abuse, last updated in 2003 and 2008, lack guidance on racial and ethnic disparities despite significant demographic changes, risking adjustment struggles in their new environments for families of diverse backgrounds (Crosson-Tower, 2003;[10] Leeb et al., 2008;[28] Maiter et al., 2004;[31] Raman & Hodes, 2012).[37] Studies indicated that around two-thirds of child abuse cases go unreported, with 25% of mandated reporters failing to report suspicions during their careers (Gubbels et al., 2021;[16] Kenny & Abreu, 2016;[20] Kenny & McEachern, 2002).[21] Studies found that counselors were unaware of the

specifics of the state and federal laws indicative of definitions of sexual and emotional abuse causing confusion and concerns about reporting and potential legal repercussions, leading to under and overreporting of cases (DHHS, 2024;[40] Pietrantoni et al., 2023).[36] This underreporting is partly due to limited educational curriculum and a lack of mandated training requirements, underscoring the need for enhanced training and support for mandated reporters (CWIG, 2023;[7] Kenny & Abreu, 2016).[20]

Researchers found that school counselors experienced barriers in child maltreatment reporting, including insufficient evidence, doubts on Child Protective Services (CPS) actions, and legal adherence (Bryant, 2009;[5] Pietrantoni et al., 2023).[36] The Child Abuse Reporting and Experience Study (CARES) found 27% of abuse-related injuries unreported, with clinicians' decisions influenced by family familiarity, case details, resources, and past CPS interactions (Jones et al., 2008).[19] Despite legal and ethical obligations, many school counselors lacked formal training in recognizing and reporting maltreatment (Pietrantoni et al., 2023),[36] especially in cases involving ethnic and racial disparities (Krase, 2015).[23] Pietrantoni et al. (2024)[35] noted the need for comprehensive pre-service training in identifying, reporting, and preventing child maltreatment for school practitioners.

Pietrantoni et al. (2024)[35] conducted a content analysis of national accreditation standards for pre-service school practitioners and found that national accreditation standards require training in ethical and legal considerations of child maltreatment. They reported that pre-service school counselors-in-training national accreditation standards require training in laws and policies about child maltreatment and factors that affect student functioning (Pietrantoni et al., 2024).[35] Pietrantoni et al. (2024)[35] found that standards require training in developmental theory and ecology for pre-service school counselors-in-training. The authors argue that training should be grounded in culturally responsive practices (Pietrantoni et al., 2024).[35] In another study, Pietrantoni et al. (2025)[34] conducted a phenomenological analysis of pre-service school

counselors-in-training and found that participants reported feeling unclear about their professional responsibilities in terms of their role and confidence in their role with a call for continuous training in identifying, reporting, and preventing child maltreatment. These studies highlight the need for adequate training in addressing child maltreatment with a focus on cultural awareness (Pietrantoni et al., 2025;[34] Pietrantoni et al., 2024).[35]

Disparities in Addressing Child Maltreatment for Diverse Children

Children of different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds face a greater chance of being misrepresented (Dettlaff & Boyd, 2020;[12] Drake et al., 2023;[13] Faulkner et al., 2024;[15] Krase, 2015;[23] Luken et al., 2021).[29] The 2022 U.S. Child Maltreatment report indicated that American Indian/Alaskan Native children had the highest overall maltreatment rate at 14.3 per 1000 children, and psychological abuse rates at 13.2%, African-American/Black children had the highest physical abuse rates at 17.1%, Hispanic children faced the highest rates of sexual abuse at 10.5%, and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander children had the highest rates of "other" maltreatment at 19.6% (DHHS, 2024).[40] Wilderman et al. (2014)[41] estimated that one in eight US children are likely to experience maltreatment, yet only 1 in 100 cases of childhood maltreatment are reported and confirmed. They further estimated that the numbers of reported cases are significantly greater for non-white children (Wilderman et al., 2014).[41]

Studies revealed that reporting practices often lacked cultural awareness and exhibited racial biases, with African-American and American Indian/Alaska Native families overreported to CPS, while Asian American and Hispanic children were underreported (Children's Bureau, 2021;[8] Krase & DeLong-Hamilton, 2015;[24] Lane et al., 2002;[27] Magquire-Jack et al., 2018;[30] Palusci & Botash, 2021).[33] Research further indicated that racially minority children were more frequently investigated but less likely to have substantiated cases or be placed in out-of-home care than white children (Drake et al., 2023;[13] Lane et al., 2002;[27] Palusci & Botash, 2021).[33] Factors such as implicit bias, prejudice, socioeconomic status, and systemic inequalities shaped how professionals assessed and reported cases, accompanied with poverty, structural racism, and phenomena like Surveillance Bias and Hispanic Paradox which complicated these disparities (Children's Bureau, 2021;[8] Davidson et al., 2019;[11] Eads et al., 2024;[14] Faulkner et al., 2024;[15] Harris, 2021;[17] Klein & Merritt, 2014;[22] Krase, 2015;[23] Tillman et al., 2015).[39] Awareness of racial identity is essential for school counselors when addressing child maltreatment issues.

ASCA Code of Ethics (2022)[2] requires that school counselors and school counselors-in-training not impose their worldview on clients. These codes serve as a framework for addressing child maltreatment. Pietrantoni et al. (2025)[34] found that school counselors-in-training recognize their personal experiences, values, and beliefs when working with clients to ensure that they utilize culturally responsive approaches to addressing child maltreatment. Moreover, they found that school counselors-in-training considered culturally appropriate decisions when addressing child maltreatment (Pietrantoni et al., 2025).[34] Awareness of racial identity is essential for school counselors when addressing child maltreatment issues (Harris, 2021;[17] Krase, 2015;[23] Maguire-Jack et al., 2018;[30] Pietrantoni et al., 2025).[34]

2 Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore how school counselors-in-training address cultural considerations in child maltreatment. This study aims to acquire awareness into the process of school counselors-in-training when considering cultural differences in child maltreatment. School counselors-in-training are learning the roles, expectations, and practices of school counselors and require additional support to ensure they develop the appropriate knowledge, attitudes, skills, and actions to address child maltreatment (Pietrantoni et al., 2024).[35] This study addresses the following research question: How do school counselors-in-training address cultural differences in child maltreatment? An Institutional Review Board

approval was obtained prior to any data collection.

Procedures

This study used a multiple case study design to explore how school counselors-in-training consider cultural differences when addressing child maltreatment (Schoch, 2019)[38]. Schoch (2019)[38] noted that multiple case study design allowed for a deeper conceptualization of themes between and across participants. A purposive sampling of three school counselors-in-training with experiences in observing or completing a child maltreatment report were selected to provide a deeper exploration of their experiences (Yin, 2018).[42] The three participants were graduate students enrolled in an internship at a large CACREP school counseling program in the Southeast. The sample size is consistent with literature on multiple case study design recommendations (Schoch, 2019;[38] Yin, 2018).[42]

Recruitment

All participants were recruited from a school counseling internship course between January 23 to February 3, 2023. All interested participants met with the lead author to discuss the study, answer questions, determine eligibility, and complete the informed consent. Those who completed the informed consent were sent a brief demographic questionnaire via Qualtrics within one week. Participants were contacted by the lead author and a 60 minute semi-structured interview was scheduled.

Participants

Chloe described herself as a 31-year-old Hispanic female. Chloe was in her final year in a CACREP school counseling program. She was enrolled in an internship at a middle school while participating in this study. Chloe indicated that she completed three classes that discussed child maltreatment. In addition, she observed a child maltreatment report made by her site supervisor, yet had not completed a report on her own or under supervision.

Dylan described himself as a 29-year-old white cis-male. Dylan was in his final year in a CACREP school counseling program. He was enrolled in an internship at a high school while participating in this study. Dylan indicated that he completed two classes that discussed child maltreatment. In addition, he had not observed nor completed a child maltreatment report.

Trinity described herself as a 28-year-old Asian female. Trinity was in her final year in a CACREP school counseling program. She was enrolled in an internship at a high school while participating in this study. Trinity indicated that she completed two classes that discussed child maltreatment. In addition, she observed multiple child maltreatment reports made by her site supervisor and completed four reports on her own.

Interview and Document Review Protocol

The interview questions were developed to explore cultural considerations when addressing child maltreatment as a school counselors-in-training. All interviews were completed via Zoom and the audio only was recorded. Participants were contacted for a follow-up 60-minute semi-structured interview within one week of the initial interview. Interviews took place over six weeks between February 6 and March 17, 2023. Each participant was contacted for a member check after each interview but only one participant completed the member check. After the interviews, the lead author consulted the school counseling program's coordinator for access to all course syllabi. Document reviews of course syllabi took place over three weeks between March 20 to April 7, 2023.

Trustworthiness

Our research team was composed of two counselor educators and two research assistants. One counselor educator identifies as a White cisgender male of European descent and the other identifies as a cisgender female who immigrated from Taiwanese. Together, they have 16 years of experience working as counselors in schools and mental health settings with children and adolescents. They both worked to address child maltreatment by creating awareness programs for children and parents, consulting with teachers and counselors about child maltreatment, and reporting multiple cases to ensure the safety and well-being of all children. Both have taught and

supervised counselors-in-training and contributed to scholarly publications and presentations for a total of 17 years. The lead author mentored the research assistants to aid in the literature review and data analysis. The research assistants were an undergraduate honors student and an advanced graduate student who were trained and mentored throughout the process.

The lead author was responsible for all data collection, while the second author acted as an auditor to ensure accurate representation of participant responses throughout the process. The lead author mentored the third and fourth authors in the data analysis process including data coding, reflective journaling, and establishing themes. The data analysis process was shared with the auditor. This allowed the auditor to review the process and notes to confirm accuracy and identify any potential for inconsistency and researcher bias.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of a comprehensive review of collected data using the coding steps as outlined by Schoch (2019).[38] Our process consisted of an iterative process of (a) descriptive phase - defining the who, what, when, where, and how often; (b) open and axial coding phase - using in vivo coding to capture exact thoughts and expressions of participants and establishing relationships between codes; and (c) thematic analysis phase - using constant comparative analysis to pieces of data across the multiple cases (Schoch, 2019).[38]

Data were analyzed in six rounds. Round one was where the data were reviewed by the lead author in an effort to define the who, what, when, where, and how often of the interview and document data. The lead author reviewed the interview transcripts for accuracy in relation to the recordings and member checks. In the next round, the auditor (second author) reviewed the transcripts, member checks, and lead author's notes to confirm the first round review. Round three saw the lead and third authors engaged in open and axial coding (table 1). Open and axial coding provided a deeper analysis and familiarity with the data by dissecting and reassembling it (Schoch, 2019).[38] Table 1 provides a summary of the codes.

Table 1 *Codes*

Codes		
Maltreatment	Abuse	Neglect
Training	Supervision	Identify/identification
Report	Prevent/prevention	Decision-making
Laws	Ethics	Culture/cultural
Family	Beliefs/values	Context
Community	Race/ethnicity	Difference
Intersectionality	Welfare/well-being	Safety

The auditor independently reviewed the codes in round four to identify inconsistencies and confirm accuracy. The first, second, and third authors all met to come to consensus after the auditor's review of the codes. Round five had the lead and third authors engaged in thematic analysis using constant comparative across the multiple cases. Constant comparative provided a connection between themes to create categories to create a story (Schoch, 2019).[38] The auditor independently reviewed the themes and categories in round six to identify inconsistencies and confirm accuracy. The first, second, and third authors all met to establish consensus after the auditor's review of the themes and categories. This resulted in nine categories (table 2). Table 2 provides a summary of the categories.

Table 2 *Categories*

Categories		
Theme 1: Context		
Theme 2: Awareness	Sub-theme 2.1. Identity	Sub-theme 2.2. Bias
Theme 3: Perceptions and beliefs	Sub-theme 3.1. Community	Sub-theme 3.2. Personal
Theme 4: Training development		
Theme 5: Family support		

3 Results

The following results provide context to the process school counselors-in-training take to consider cultural differences when addressing child maltreatment. We used pseudonyms for all participants to maintain their confidentiality.

Context

Context is the first theme that emerged. This theme reflected the participant's recognition of cultural norms and practices that they used to interpret behaviors and actions. Participants discussed how they considered behaviors and actions as cultural norms and practices when considering if something was suspicious of child maltreatment. When asked about what ways they consider cultural differences in child maltreatment, Chloe noted that "...something that's normal for me might not necessarily be normal for them. I can't just be like, okay, this is normal within my culture, it's going to be normal within theirs." She expanded by stating, "...even though something is normal for a child, right? It's something that should not be happening, it's something that I would still want to do something about."

Understanding what to do next might be difficult for school counselors-in-training as Dylan pointed out, "to me it was normal because I went through the same experience, and I don't consider it an adverse event… So there's like all these different factors and I still don't know, like, I don't know where to draw the lines sometimes. I don't have that experience but there might be a counselor who had that experience and knows that, like, it, was not ideal but it might not necessarily warrant calling [State's Child Protective Services]."

Trinity explained how she considers culture when talking to students, "culture of mistrust is going on. I'm kind of thinking of two layers like the first layer is the fact that there aren't enough people on our campus who speak their language. So that's already like one kind of complicating factor and then on top of that like for the staff that do share a language, if there is that unease, there's that uncertainty, that distress, then it's not going to be disclosed." She continued by sharing, "I guess it's hard for me to speak on like what's normative but there is some physical discipline that I hear about and when it kind of goes outside the norms of what are the boundaries of what the student thinks is normal is usually one. So it becomes about what's normative rather than what the definition is and it is like really common to berate, like all that stuff. So I think [the] emotional piece gets probably under reported. You know, it's like normalized." Each participant's understanding of con-

text provided insights into their cultural awareness.

Participants reflected on how they consider context in child maltreatment. The theme summarizes the internal processes participants consider as they interpret cultural norms and practices in relation to suspected child maltreatment. Understanding the context of cultural norms and practices provides information relative to identifying, reporting, and preventing child maltreatment.

Awareness

Awareness is the second theme that emerged. This theme reflected the participant's recognition of cultural differences between them and their client and the client's family. Participants discussed how they considered cultural differences when suspicious of child maltreatment. Two sub-themes emerged from this theme - identity and bias.

Identity

Race/ethnicity is a sub-theme of awareness. Participants discussed how they considered their race/ethnicity and how it differs from their client's race/ethnicity. Reflecting on his awareness when working with culturally diverse students Dylan stated, "I'm like a white cisgender male. I did come from a low socio-economic background. So, I guess that much like I operate through that lens, but also because my culture is not the dominant culture at the school… I have to be cognizant of like cultural differences." He continued by talking about a client by saying, "...I was thinking one of my weekly check in, I think her parents were Afro-Caribbean…she was saying, my mom is like very intense and I get in trouble for like the littlest reasons." Dylan reflected on his understanding of Caribbean culture by saying, "I know that several friends and their parents are like really strict with discipline. I'm like, okay, that might not necessarily quantify as abuse."

Chloe noted that race plays a role in identifying maltreatment. She stated "I can think of race being a factor when it comes to abuse is the identification of physical abuse because it would just be a little harder to identify what would be more challenging to identify on darker skin than lighter skin."

Bias

Bias is a sub-theme of awareness. Participants discussed how they considered personal biases that could affect how they understand their client. When asked about awareness as it relates to child maltreatment, Chloe noted, "it's just like I want to remain like objective when I'm trying to make these kinds of decisions." Dylan made a similar point by stating, "we had students who like miss school because they had to take care of their younger ones because their parents were working like two jobs. Things like that but it's like that doesn't necessarily, if we're talking about cultural sensitivity…they're not doing it out of mal-intent. They're doing it because they need to provide for the family but I truly don't know. I think of internal biases and how I think like Black and Brown male students especially are three to four times more likely to be written up for discipline measures [than] their White counterparts. Internal biases come into play but the rest I truly like when it comes to actually receiving [counseling] services, I'm sorry I'm ignorant." Understanding one's cultural awareness provides perspective to their perceptions and beliefs.

Participants shared how they consider awareness of factors such as identity and bias in child maltreatment. The theme and sub-themes combine to summarize the factors participants consider relative to cultural differences between them and their client and client's family. Understanding awareness of identity and bias provides insight into the process participants can take to mitigate under and overreporting of child maltreatment.

Perceptions and Beliefs

Perceptions and beliefs is the third theme that emerged. This theme reflected the participant's recognition of their perceptions and beliefs about the community and individual they used to identify behaviors and actions. Participants discussed how their perceptions and beliefs about the client and their community related to their suspicion of child maltreatment. Two sub-themes emerged from this theme - community and personal.

Community

Community is a sub-theme of perceptions and beliefs. Participants discussed how they considered their perception and belief of the behaviors and actions of families, school, and community they served. Chloe noted that her internship site is at a school where "it's a very violent neighborhood, you know ACES [adverse childhood experiences] and all of that. They're going to be more likely to experience neglect. There's a lot of violence, I mean maybe like it's what they see around them, you know?" When asked about the school's process for addressing maltreatment, Chloe continued "I'm not sure what's happening. I'm sure that staff knows how to identify [maltreatment]...it should be like a staff thing or a school-wide thing, maybe even a community thing like if you see that it's like a big problem, if there's a certain issue across a lot of students, across a large population of student then maybe it [is] more of a community thing than just like a school thing, but I guess it just really depends on the data." Trinity's internship site was similar to Chloe's site. Trinity stated, "that's kind of carried over from, you know the community and then it affects the campus life… So these neighborhoods may be experiencing some violence and gang activities. Those are also happening in this school as well."

Dylan's experience at his internship site was different. He noted "We're a community partnership school. So we have all like the community partnership organizer, liaison, like a lot of resources, and connections. So he [community liaison] was actively trying to like dismantle barriers…There was not like specific trainings [about maltreatment] but our school did a lot [of] work like to at least alleviate some of the burden of it or like address barriers."

Personal

Personal is a sub-theme of perceptions and beliefs. Participants discussed how they considered their personal perception and belief about behaviors and actions. Chloe and Trinity had similar experiences in how they considered their personal perceptions and beliefs about behaviors and actions that were in-

fluenced by their cultural identity. Chloe explained "I myself am Hispanic and I grew up with parents hitting me, you know, and just like a lot of my friends. And so I know that like in [specific state], for example, it is legal as long as you don't have marks and bruises and things like that, but within the Hispanic community marks and bruises are still legal. Unofficially, of course, right?" Trinity noted "I think there's always that element of countertransference for people who go back to their home community or work with people that they share identities with…but I think if you're not careful about looking at your own cultural frame maybe you can see like dysfunction where there isn't dysfunction." Dylan's reflection noted, "I guess when you take in the social factors, I guess it's like what parameters do we have…Like culturally, I guess it can vary because I know I'm trying to think even like not to be like stereotypical for me at least but you know the same [personal ethnic group] guilt is like very, extremely real. My parents, a lot of the times and outwardly disciplined me but none of this was abuse, but I would like get ignored and treated really passive aggressively, which like maybe someone could interpret as like neglecting you." Recognizing context, awareness, and perspectives and beliefs can influence how participants consider child protection.

Participants reflected on their perceptions and beliefs about the community and individuals they serve. The theme and sub-themes combine to summarize considerations of the perceptions and beliefs between them and their client and client's family. Understanding perceptions and beliefs offers information about how participants consider community and personal factors in an effort to identify, report, and prevent child maltreatment.

Training Development

Training development is the fourth theme that emerged. This theme reflected the participant's acknowledgement of the relevance of training development for ensuring school counselors are equipped with the necessary attitudes, knowledge, and skills to support students who experience child maltreatment. In a content review of course syllabi, the data

revealed that Chloe, Dylan, and Trinity all completed two classes that covered child maltreatment. A course about counseling law and ethics did not have any readings or modules related to child maltreatment. Instead they completed an online training about abuse reporting. A crisis counseling course covered the topics of child sexual abuse, assessing and reporting, and treating abused children. The assignments and readings in the syllabi did not explicitly state anything about cultural difference.

When asked about training related to child maltreatment at their internship site, Chloe responded, "Things might be so normal within a family that kids might not even realize what's happening, you know? So teaching what it looks like to the kids. I don't remember getting much education about this and I definitely don't see them doing much about this at [internship site]...They might just see it as okay, I'm just a bad kid, or I don't do what I'm told or whatever but if a friend is like, this is what abuse looks like or if like they're taught, this is what abuse looks like it can help open their eyes and like maybe do something themselves or tell a teacher or counselor." She went on to discuss training at her internship site. "Definitely no trainings. Any information that I might have gotten, it wouldn't even be with regards to maltreatment but more so the process of having to call [State's Child Protective Services]." Dylan shared a similar experience. He noted, "I've done no [maltreatment] trainings. I've used this [current study] as like a resource but I haven't done any like PDs [professional development] through [internship site] or anything along those lines. Just you know the classes we took." Trinity's internship site provided more training than Chloe and Dylan experienced. She reported "the only training I got was from my law and ethics class before I went in but at [internship site] we did that training up front before we were working with students and that would be only for identifying and reporting and I've never had training on preventing [child maltreatment]." Trinity concluded with "I think fostering more positive relationships between students and staff so that there is that trusting relationship would be great like I would

love to see the results from the school climate survey and see if, see what percentage of students feel like they have at least one adult that they could really talk to on campus. Then after that, just a bit more like staff training." Participants received training in their school counseling program but all of them suggested more training at their internship site.

Participants reflected on their training relevant to child maltreatment. The theme summarizes the need for additional training in child maltreatment. Moreover, understanding the training needs of school counselors-in-training provides insight into their acquisition of the necessary attitudes, knowledge, and skills to identify, report, and prevent child maltreatment.

Family Support

Family support is the fifth theme that emerged. This theme reflected the participant's recognition of the family's role in promoting child welfare. Participants discussed how they considered the family's role in promoting child welfare when suspicious of child maltreatment. When reflecting on the role that family's play in child maltreatment, Chloe mentioned, "normal is subjective, you know, like what's normal in my family isn't necessarily normal in yours. Just because something is normal in my family, it doesn't necessarily make it right. So it's like I want to take it into consideration but at the same time I know that you also have to take more or less an unbiased approach in a sense when looking at it like I don't want to put like my judgments, my biases like into trying to figure out is this child being mistreated."

Trinity had a similar response, "I think it's kind of like the introspection you do but at the end of the day if it is harm to the child in any of those categories you have to call it in. I think, in the abstract, this doesn't make a lot of sense, but maybe in like the concrete decision of whether to call it in it's like, is there another way to support the family? If it's a gray area to get the need met like if the kids hungry, can it instead be a referral to the food back or like a grocery box pick up for this one month versus calling [State's Child Protective Services] and saying it's

like neglect for sure. What kind of impact another [State's Child Protective Services] call would make on the family system versus a family meeting where it actually gets addressed and it's in a more comfortable setting for the student and the parent. What actions feel more ethical if it's a gray area."

Participants shared their consideration of family support in child maltreatment. The theme summarizes how participants consider the family's role in promoting child welfare. Understanding the role families play in child maltreatment will help school counselors-in-training work collaboratively to identify, report, and prevent child maltreatment.

Overall, the results of this study provide school counseling training programs with insight into how these school counselors-in-training address cultural differences in child maltreatment. The process school counselors-in-training take to address cultural differences in child maltreatment highlighted various approaches. ASCA Code of Ethics (2022)[2] noted that school counselors are responsible for accurately identifying and reporting issues of suspected child maltreatment and follow all state and federal laws and school district policies.

4 Discussion

School counselors are mandated reporters who address child maltreatment (ASCA, 2022;[2] CWIG, 2019).[6] ASCA (2022; 2021)[2][3] outlined the school counselor's role in addressing child maltreatment by identifying, reporting, and preventing it. Yet, there is limited research on the role that cultural differences play in addressing child maltreatment. It is essential that school counseling training programs understand how school counselors-in-training address cultural differences in child maltreatment. Understanding this process can provide school counselor educators with insights into how to enhance and enrich training to ensure it is consistent with laws, accreditation, and best practices.

Statement of Principle Findings

It is imperative for school counselor educators to understand how school counselors-in-training

address cultural differences in child maltreatment. School counselor training programs are responsible for training school counselors on how to identify, report, and prevent child maltreatment in addition to the laws, resources, and best practices for supporting children who have experienced maltreatment (ASCA, 2021;[3] Pietrantoni et al., 2024).[35] The results of this study suggested that the participants considered multiple factors when addressing child maltreatment. Yet, all the participants indicated they need more training in their school counseling program and their field experience sites.

Context

Recognizing context as it relates to behaviors and actions is beneficial to developing the appropriate attitudes, knowledge, and skills related to suspecting child maltreatment. Participants shared how they consider context as it relates to suspecting child maltreatment. Recognition of contextual factors can help with identifying, reporting, and preventing child maltreatment (Hogan & Harris, 2021;[17] LaBrenz et al., 2023).[25] However, school counseling training programs would benefit from providing more specific training on the relationship between context and child maltreatment (Cox et al., 2022;[9] Mikton & Butchart, 2009;[32] Pietrantoni et al., 2024;[35] Tillman et al., 2015).[39] School counseling training programs can provide school counselors-in-training with opportunities to learn more about the communities that they will serve in the field experience courses (i.e., practicum and internship). Assignments that help school counselors-in-training understand context of behaviors and actions can help with identifying risk factors and warning signs and preventative measures in the communities they serve.

Awareness

Awareness recognizes how identity and bias affects the interpretation of context. Participants discussed their awareness of identity (i.e., self and client) when it comes to addressing child maltreatment. Furthermore, participants noted that personal biases can affect their understanding of their client and client's context. Implicit bias affects how school counselors and other educational professionals consider issues of child maltreatment for culturally diverse students and families (Eads et al., 2024;[14] Harris, 2021;[17] Palusci & Botash, 2021).[33] School counselor training programs would benefit from providing school counselors-in-training with opportunities to reflect on their identity and how that relates to the communities they support. Furthermore, school counselor training programs could provide training on implicit biases and how that relates to suspicion of child maltreatment.

Perceptions and Beliefs

Awareness of identity and biases complements one's acknowledgement of perceptions and beliefs about the client and the communities they serve. Participants acknowledged that their perceptions and beliefs about the families, school, and community they serve affects how they consider child maltreatment. Participants noted that community factors influenced the issues that were present in the school and what factors they would consider when it comes to suspecting child maltreatment. Moreover, the participants acknowledged that their personal beliefs about their development affects how they consider maltreatment. School counselor training programs could benefit from providing school counselors-in-training with opportunities to discuss and reflect on their upbringing and how that relates to the communities they serve. Encouraging school counselors-in-training to seek outside counseling prior to starting field experience courses could help them to understand and reduce countertransference issues. Helping school counselors-in-training reflect on these factors in supervision can also help to enhance their understanding of perceptions and beliefs.

Training Development

Specific training about cultural considerations and school and district-wide policies about child maltreatment could greatly enhance school counselors-in-training development. Participants noted that child maltreatment training at their internship site varied. School counselor training programs would benefit from collaborating and consulting with schools to create standardized training for field ex-

perience sites that covers school and district policies around identifying, reporting, and preventing child maltreatment. Moreover, school counselor training programs should integrate child maltreatment assignments, readings, and role plays specific to identifying, reporting, and preventing child maltreatment with consideration for expectations outlined by ASCA (2021)[3] about course materials.

Family Support

Providing support to children and families who experience maltreatment can help to address the effects that maltreatment has on the academic, college/career, and social-emotional development of students (ASCA, 2021).[3] Participants acknowledged their role as mandated reporters and questioned other ways they can support the family. School counselor training programs would benefit from providing school counselors-in-training with the knowledge and skills to address and refer students who experience child maltreatment to community services and resources that provide treatment for mental health (ASCA, 2020).[4] Moreover, school counselor training programs should train school counselors-in-training about child welfare that specifically addresses client and family resilience, interpersonal communication, promoting self-concept, and advocating for school supports that address maltreatment (ASCA, 2021).[3]

Strength of the Study

This study addressed a gap in the literature specific to cultural considerations of child maltreatment. The findings provided insight and context to how school counselors-in-training considered culture when addressing child maltreatment. Moreover, the findings of this study provide school counselor educators and school counselor training programs with insights into how to integrate cultural considerations into child maltreatment training.

Limitations of the Study

The study addressed a literature gap but is not without limitations. Our study used a multiple case study design that might not have provided a comprehensive analysis of cultural considerations in child maltreatment training. Participants were enrolled in an internship at a school site but they all had vastly different experiences at their school site. Some had experience with observing and reporting suspicion of child maltreatment, while others did not. This could have affected their response. Lastly, participants were all from the same institution and geographic area, which could have affected how they were trained about and considered cultural differences in addressing child maltreatment.

Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this study provided additional questions and points for future research. This study explored cultural considerations for addressing child maltreatment. Future researchers could explore how school counselor training programs train school counselors in child maltreatment and in what ways cultural differences are taught. Furthermore, future researchers could explore how field experience sites train school counselors-in-training in child maltreatment.

5 Conclusion

School counselors are important figures in school to address and support the safety and welfare of children (ASCA, 2020).[4] They are mandated reporters who promote the welfare of children that promote academic, college/career, and social-emotional development, which requires attitudes, knowledge, and skills to identify, report, and prevent child maltreatment (Pietrantoni et al., 2023).[36] Though there is limited research on cultural considerations in addressing child maltreatment by enhancing cultural considerations in addressing child maltreatment, school counselors can effectively assess and intervene when suspicion of child maltreatment is evident. Therefore, it is essential that school counselor educators understand how school counselors-in-training consider cultural differences when addressing child maltreatment.

Author Note

We have not known conflict of interest to disclose.

We have no funding source to disclose.

All authors contributed to the development of this manuscript.

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