



'Our Duty of Care'

Social Care Workers' Lived Experiences of the Challenging Intersection between Relational Work and the Irish Mandatory Reporting System

A study by Lena McCarthy & Dr Mike Murphy

Mandated Persons



MR in Ireland is governed by the Children First Act 2015

Main Legal Obligations of Mandated Persons:

1. To report to Tusla
2. To assist Tusla

Contact with children/families puts them in a position to protect children from harm.



Designated Liaison Person (DLP):

Member of an organization that ensures reporting procedures are followed.

The History of Mandated Reporting in Ireland



The Experiences of Mandated Persons



International Research

➤ **Meta-Synthesis – 42 studies, 12 countries**

Negative experiences in 73%

Need: Increased communication & collab with CPS, training

(McTavish et al., 2017)

➤ **Pediatric Practitioners – US**

66% Nurses believed child/family had some positive benefit

40% Drs had patients disengage

(Flaherty et al., 2006; Herendeen et al., 2014)



Research in Ireland

➤ **DLPs in Primary Schools**

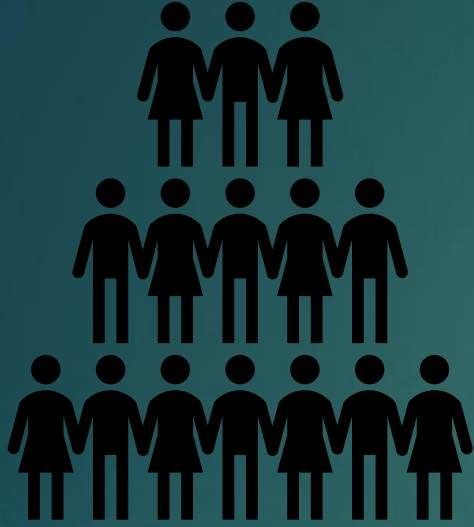
Dissatisfaction with Tusla's communication – feedback & responses, capacity & available training

(Tracey & Nohilly, 2020)

➤ **HSE Psychologists**

Some positive but mainly negative experiences
Preference for removal of statutory requirement especially for retrospective disclosures

(Pellegrini et al., 2022)



Social Care Workers



Research Questions

1. What is SCW's experience of **engagement with TUSLA** regarding mandated reporting of child abuse?
2. What is SCW's experience of the impact of mandated reporting on **the client-practitioner relationship**?
3. What is SCW's experience of the impact of mandated reporting on **the practitioner**?
4. What might **improve the functioning** of, and experience of, mandated reporting in Ireland?

Research Design

Qualitative



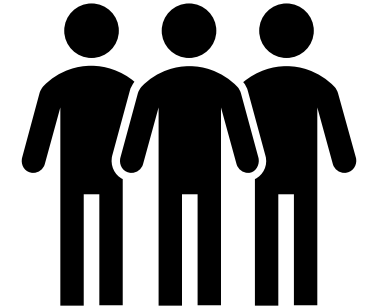
REFLEXIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS
(BRAUN & CLARKE)
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Quantitative



DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS
SURVEY

Participants



- N = 12
- DLPs = 4
- Background = family support, child protection, DV, homelessness, residential foster care, children's services

Open,
honest,
transparent

The Relational Recipe

Containment

“They can be anxious, they can be upset. But I think when it’s all about your relationship with the client and if...you communicate the information well to them and generally it can be okay.”

Core
conditions

Absence &
inconsistency

Unpredictable Communication

Frustration &
Empathy

“You don’t hear anything and it’s very frustrating to know. You can’t even reassure the family.”

Contrast in
style

2 Sides to the Story

Positive in Theory

“Being a mandated reporter kind of takes away from that, that it's it's no longer about how you feel. It's about that child and their personal safety.”

Less
deliberation

Professional
values

In
favour

Issues in Practice

“I find there's as a buzzword on sexual abuse...Straight away there's a great big reaction. But if somebody's bruised or burnt or left alone, it's like it doesn't get the same reaction.”

Varied
responses

Thresholds

ARDs

Supporting the MR System

Supporting Reporting

“there’s both the team as a collective and then supervision as a process.”

Just part of the job

Peer Support

Duty SW

Room to Improve

“I think a lot of people are scared of that part. They think ‘if I put in that reports the child’s going to be taken away.’ They don’t realise the full system

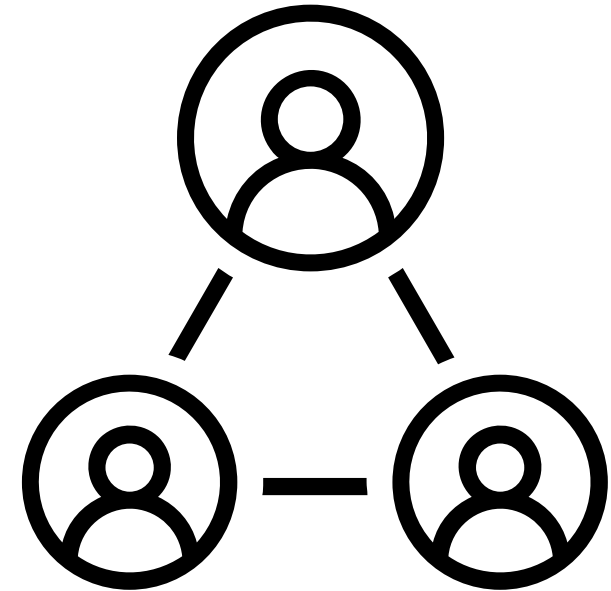
National level

Inter-agency level

Individual organisations

Key Discussion Points

- ▶ Relational Model and Engagement
- ▶ Moral Distress
- ▶ Parallel Process



Conclusion

- ❖ Supportive of MR
- ❖ Frustrated with the MR system
- ❖ More research is needed on other stakeholders' experiences

The logo for Children First features the word "Children" in a blue, sans-serif font. Below it, the word "First" is written in a teal, sans-serif font. The letter "i" in "First" is replaced by a stylized icon of a yellow adult figure and a blue child figure standing together.

Children
First

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