Teachers’ reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect: behaviour and determinants

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Abstract

By reporting suspected child abuse and neglect, teachers can make an important contribution to the early detection and prevention of abuse. However, teachers are sometimes reluctant to report their suspicions. This study investigated the determinants of teachers’ reporting behaviour using concepts from the Integrated Change Model. Self-report data were collected from 296 teachers employed in 15 Australian schools. Compared to their colleagues, teachers who had never suspected child abuse or neglect (non-detectors, N=57, 19%) were more likely to have a lower confidence in their skills for recognising the signs of abuse, a higher degree of perceived social support regarding reporting, less years teaching experience and lower academic qualifications. Among those who had suspected cases of child abuse or neglect (N=239, 81%), teachers who always reported their suspicions (consistent reporters, 82%) were more likely to have firm action plans about reporting and detecting signs of CAN than teachers who did not always report their suspicions (inconsistent reporters, 18%). While only a small proportion of the variance in detection and reporting status was explained, the results illustrate the utility of health promotion theory and methods for improving our understanding of these behaviours.

Introduction

Child abuse and neglect (CAN) is an international problem [1, 2], with worldwide annual deaths from homicide estimated at 57 000 in children <15 years [1]. International data are not available for non-fatal CAN, but rates are believed to be considerably higher, since deaths are the tiny, tragic tip of a very large iceberg of abuse [2]. In Australia, data on CAN are collated by statutory agencies in each state and territory. The most common form is emotional abuse (41.6%), followed by neglect (30.2%), physical (21.9%) and sexual abuse (6.3%) [3]. In the state of Queensland, 25 687 cases of suspected CAN were reported for the year 2005–06. Of these, 10 177 cases were substantiated, representing a prevalence of 10.4 cases per 1000 children under the age of 18 years [4]. However, official statistics underestimate the real prevalence of CAN. Unknown numbers of cases are never officially reported and some are only disclosed months or years later leaving CAN unrecognized at the time it is occurring [5–7].

The serious short- and long-term consequences for victims of CAN have been well documented [8–13]. Adverse outcomes can be especially severe when maltreatment takes place over a prolonged period of time, making early detection and the
prevention of reoccurrence essential. Teachers are in a unique position to detect possible cases of CAN due to their daily contact with children, their capacity to observe changes in children’s behaviour and appearance over time and their proximity to children who may make direct disclosures [14, 15]. In Queensland, 15% of substantiated cases of CAN are reported by teachers [3].

Three-quarters of Australian primary school teachers indicate that they have suspected a case of CAN at some stage in their careers [16]. However, teachers often fail to report suspected CAN to statutory authorities [17–20]. In a recent Australian survey, only 49% of teachers who had detected a likely case of CAN indicated that they had ever reported their suspicions [16], and in USA an estimated 84% of cases of suspected CAN in schools are not reported [18]. Under-reporting occurs despite teachers’ commitment to the prevention of CAN [21] and irrespective of whether teachers are legally mandated to report their suspicions or not [22].

To facilitate teachers’ reporting of suspected CAN, most Australian states and territories have legal reporting obligations for teachers [23] and provide training about CAN [24]. For example, schools in Queensland are required to conduct child protection workshops to train staff in recognizing the signs of CAN and the processes for reporting suspicions [25]. Despite this training, a recent study showed that when Queensland teachers were asked how they would respond to case vignettes, under-reporting was still likely [16].

Previous research suggests that reporting behaviour may be influenced by teachers’ attitudes, detection skills, knowledge and training, social influences, teachers’ personal characteristics and features of the abuse. Attitudes that may promote reporting include beliefs that reporting is part of the teacher’s professional responsibility and that it will prevent future harm [26, 27]. Attitudes that act as barriers include concerns that reporting will damage teacher–child or teacher–family relationships, fear of making an inaccurate report, fear that reporting may escalate the abuse and beliefs that inadequacies in the child protection system may harm the family or fail to help the child [19, 28–30]. A supportive social environment may also be influential. Open discussion of CAN suspicions within the school has been associated with greater reporting intentions [16], while reporting was less likely if teachers felt unsupported in this [16, 28–31]. Internationally, studies have found that teachers lack skills and confidence to accurately detect CAN [16, 32, 33].

More experienced teachers appear to be more likely to report suspected CAN than less-experienced teachers [16, 19, 20] and while two studies found that female teachers were more likely to report CAN than male teachers [33, 34], gender differences were not found in another study [26]. Finally, reporting appears to be influenced by case characteristics. Reporting is more likely to occur when CAN is severe, involves sexual or physical abuse and when the child has disclosed the abuse [14, 27].

Research into the factors that influence teachers’ reporting of CAN has been limited by methodological and conceptual weaknesses. Methodologically, the study of reporting behaviour is challenging. Approximately 50% of Australian teachers will encounter a case of CAN in a 12-month period [16], making it difficult to observe reporting behaviours as they occur. Consequently, researchers have tended to use two types of designs that have inherent limitations: case vignettes, where teachers are presented with hypothetical cases and indicate whether or not they would report each case [16, 19, 21, 25, 27, 30, 35], or retrospective recall of past reporting behaviours [16, 21, 31, 36].

Research has been further limited by inconsistency in the potential determinants of reporting behaviour that have been examined. There has been a lack of a theoretical framework that would
facilitate the systematic study of determinants and their relationships. Most studies have used small samples, precluding the ability to examine multiple determinants simultaneously. This may lead to erroneous conclusions arising from a failure to control for confounding between variables. Generalizability has also been limited by non-representative samples, and response rates (when reported) have typically been poor, ranging from 24 to 44% [16, 28, 29].

The field of health promotion has a long tradition of examining the factors that influence behaviours, which may be informative to studying teachers’ reporting behaviour. Several models of health behaviour have recently been drawn together in an overarching framework, known as the integrated (I-) change model [36]. The I-change model integrates concepts from the Theory of Planned Behaviour [37], Social Cognitive Theory [38], the Transtheoretical Model [39], the Health Belief Model [40] and Implementation and Goal Setting Theories [41, 42]. The model and its predecessors have been used to examine the determinants of addictive and habitual health risk behaviours (e.g. smoking and food patterns) [43, 44] as well as a wide range of volitional behaviours (e.g. voluntary blood donations, maternal breastfeeding, patient education behaviour of professionals and children’s moral behaviours) [45–50]. Components of the I-change model correspond well to the constructs examined in previous studies regarding teachers’ reporting of suspected CAN. Hence, the I-change model appears to be a potentially useful conceptual framework for examining teachers’ reporting behaviour.

According to the I-change model (see Fig. 1), behaviour is a function of a person’s abilities and intentions [36]. Abilities, such as being able to plan specific actions to reach the desired behaviour (action plans) and actual skills (performance skills), increase the chance of turning an intention into action. Personal and institutional barriers can lower these chances. An individual’s intention is influenced by three types of motivational factors: attitudes, social influences and self-efficacy beliefs. Attitudes refer to the perceived advantages and
disadvantages of the behaviour. Social influences consist of the support an individual encounters in carrying out the behaviour (social support), perceived norms of other people with respect to the behaviour (social norms) and perceptions of others carrying out the behaviour (social modelling). The I-change model assumes that these motivational factors are determined by various distal factors, including awareness (e.g. knowledge, risk perceptions and cues to action), information (e.g. the quality of the messages, channels and sources used) and predisposing factors (i.e. behavioural, psychological, biological and sociocultural factors) [36].

This study aimed to examine the extent to which teachers’ reporting behaviour was associated with variables from the I-change model, including intentions, motivational factors, performance skills and action plans. Reporting was considered to be a two-stage process consisting of a detection stage (i.e. forming a suspicion that CAN may have occurred) and a reporting stage (i.e. acting on that suspicion by reporting it to the appropriate authorities). Based on these stages and teachers’ self-indicated reporting behaviour, we distinguished three groups of respondents: teachers who had never suspected CAN (non-detectors), teachers who had suspected cases of CAN but had not always reported them (inconsistent reporters) and teachers who had always reported suspected cases (consistent reporters).

**Measures**

The questionnaire consisted of items derived from a previous Australian survey [16] and items developed using the format and structure adopted in previous studies based on the I-change model [36, 47, 49]. The draft questionnaire was reviewed by two Queensland primary school teachers and four researchers knowledgeable about questionnaire design and health promotion and was formally piloted with 15 Bachelor of Education students (i.e. prospective teachers) to check face validity, comprehensibility and ease of use.

‘Teacher’s reporting behaviour’ in relation to CAN was the key outcome variable. Teachers indicated how frequently they had reported neglect, emotional, physical or sexual abuse during their teaching career; how many cases of CAN they had suspected in the last 12 months; if they had ever chosen not to report a suspected case and if so, how many times this had occurred. Based on their responses, teachers were categorized as non-detectors (who had never suspected CAN), consistent reporters (who had suspected CAN and reported all cases) or inconsistent reporters (who had suspected CAN but not reported it in at least one case).

‘Attitudes’ towards reporting were examined with two subscales, where teachers indicated their level of agreement with a series of statements [rated from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)]. The Advantages-Scale (nine items) assessed potential perceived positive consequences of reporting for the child, the child’s family and the teacher including avoiding potential future regret (e.g. ‘If I reported a suspected case ... I would feel that this would protect the child from further harm’), while the Disadvantages-Scale (10 items) assessed potential perceived negative consequences of reporting (e.g. ‘If I reported a suspected case ... I would feel doubtful of the ability of statutory agencies to respond appropriately to my report’).

‘Social influences’ were measured by two five-item scales (rated strongly disagree to strongly agree) assessing whether teachers perceived that school colleagues, the school principal, the state education department, the broader school community

Participants were primary school teachers employed in the Queensland state education system and recruited through schools. Study information was mailed to the principals of all state primary schools (n = 94) with an enrolment of at least 500 students and located within a 150-km radius of Brisbane. The first 15 schools expressing a willingness to participate were surveyed. Data were collected by questionnaires distributed to all teaching staff (n = 636) in June–August 2005. Completed returns were received from 302 teachers with full data on detection and reporting behaviours available for 296 teachers (46.5%).
and friends/family outside school believed that they should report their suspicions of CAN (social norms) and whether these individuals supported them in reporting (social support).

‘Self-efficacy’ regarding reporting (seven items) assessed self-efficacy in different situations (e.g. ‘How easy or difficult would it be for you to report a suspected case of child abuse or neglect … when your suspicion is based on little evidence?’), social contexts (e.g. ‘How easy or difficult would it be for you to report a suspected case … when you know the child’s parents outside of school?’) and under stress (e.g. ‘How easy or difficult would it be for you to report a suspected case … when there are a lot of other demands on your time?’). Responses were rated from very difficult (1) to very easy (5).

‘Reporting intention’ was measured by one item assessing how strongly teachers agreed with the statement that they intended to report their suspicions of CAN in the future (rated strongly disagree to strongly agree).

‘Action plans’ regarding prospective reporting and detecting signs of CAN were assessed by eight items, rated strongly disagree to strongly agree (e.g. ‘If I come across a case of possible CAN in the future, I plan to … seek information about correct reporting procedures from my school colleagues’).

‘Performance skills’ to accurately detect indicators and warning signs of CAN were not directly measurable. Therefore, teachers’ confidence to detect indicators and warning signs of different types of abuse (i.e. neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse) and under different circumstances was used as a proxy measure. This was assessed by eight items, rated from not at all confident (1) to very confident (5) (e.g. ‘How confident do you feel about your ability to adequately detect indicators and warning signs of CAN … if you have several students in your class who need special attention?’).

For each multi-item construct, internal consistency was examined using Cronbach’s alpha, which was found to be good to excellent for all scales (range from 0.79 to 0.89), with the exception of perceived the Advantages Scale (α = 0.66). The overall score for each construct was computed as mean of the item scores of each scale.

### Data analysis

Univariate and multivariable logistic regressions were conducted using Stata release 10.0 [51] to assess associations between I-change variables, teacher demographic characteristics and the odds of not detecting CAN (non-detectors versus detectors) and the odds of consistently reporting suspected CAN (consistent versus inconsistent reporters). As age and years of teaching experience were strongly correlated (r = 0.76), indicating multicollinearity, age was excluded from these analyses. P values and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were obtained using Wald tests. A clustered sandwich estimator was utilized to adjust the standard errors for the clustering of teachers within schools and to provide more accurate estimates of the precision of the odds ratios (ORs) [52].

### Results

Participating teachers were predominantly female (87.6%) and relatively evenly spread across age groups (25.7% 21–30 years, 23.0% 31–40 years, 29.1% 41–50 years and 22.3% >50 years). The majority had a 3- or 4-year degree (86.7%). Average teaching experience was 13.7 years (SD = 10.4), ranging from <1 year to 46 years.

The majority of respondents had experience with reporting suspected CAN: 80.7% (n = 239) had reported CAN at some point during their careers and 39.5% (n = 117) had reported CAN in the past 12 months. Neglect was reported most frequently, followed by physical abuse, emotional abuse and sexual abuse. One-fifth indicated that they had never suspected CAN (non-detectors, 19.3%, n = 57). Among teachers who had suspected CAN (detectors), 82.0% were consistent reporters (n = 196) and 18.0% were inconsistent reporters (n = 43). Of the inconsistent reporters, 30.0% indicated that they had failed to report one suspected case, 32.5% failed to report two cases and 37.5% failed to report three or more cases. Teachers who had suspected CAN but never reported their suspicions were rare (n = 3) and were included in the inconsistent reporters’ category for the analyses.
The multivariable logistic regression revealed that after controlling for the associations between variables, three of these I-change variables (disadvantages, self-efficacy and intentions) failed to make significant independent contributions to detection status. Performance skills remained statistically significant in the adjusted model (OR = 0.384), indicating that a unit increase on the mean performance skills rating was associated with a 62% reduction in the odds of a teacher being in the non-detector category. Social support, which was not statistically significant in the univariate analyses, was found to be associated with risk of non-detection after adjustment for the other variables. A unit increase in the mean social support rating was associated with a 3-fold increased risk of being a non-detector (OR = 2.728).

In terms of demographic characteristics, higher levels of qualifications and more years teaching remained significant. Compared to those with less than a 3-year degree, a 3- or 4-year degree was associated with a 97% reduction in the odds of being a non-detector (OR = 0.034), while each additional year of teaching experience was associated with a 9% reduction (OR = 0.908). The test of the full model with all 12 predictors (qualifications entered as two levels) against the constant-only model was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 331.14, df = 12, P = 0.000$), indicating that the predictors reliably distinguished between non-detectors and detectors. The model predicted 19.9% of the variance in teachers’ detecting of CAN.

Table III presents the results of the logistic regression analyses comparing consistent with inconsistent reporters. Comparisons at the univariate level indicated that the odds of consistent reporting were associated with six I-change variables and one demographic variable. Higher perceived advantages, lower perceived disadvantages and higher self-efficacy, intentions, performance skills and action plans were each associated with a 2- to 3-fold increased odds of being a consistent reporter. Higher educational qualifications were associated with greatly increased odds of consistent reporting (OR = 4.447 and 8.667 for 3- to 4-year degree and Masters degree, respectively, relative to <3 years).

### Table I. Mean scores on I-change variables and demographic characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-detectors (n = 57)</th>
<th>Inconsistent reporters (n = 43)</th>
<th>Consistent reporters (n = 196)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advantages</td>
<td>4.17 (0.29)</td>
<td>4.01 (0.41)</td>
<td>4.18 (0.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantages</td>
<td>3.34 (0.51)</td>
<td>3.38 (0.67)</td>
<td>3.16 (0.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social norms</td>
<td>4.23 (0.64)</td>
<td>4.12 (0.68)</td>
<td>4.30 (0.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>4.18 (0.49)</td>
<td>4.01 (0.58)</td>
<td>4.16 (0.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>2.77 (0.55)</td>
<td>2.78 (0.73)</td>
<td>3.08 (0.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention</td>
<td>4.33 (0.51)</td>
<td>4.21 (0.83)</td>
<td>4.59 (0.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance skills</td>
<td>2.68 (0.60)</td>
<td>2.87 (0.67)</td>
<td>3.14 (0.73)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action plans</td>
<td>4.03 (0.43)</td>
<td>3.93 (0.73)</td>
<td>4.20 (0.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years teaching</td>
<td>8.38 (10.56)</td>
<td>15.51 (10.30)</td>
<td>14.66 (9.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual hours of training</td>
<td>1.71 (1.58)</td>
<td>2.07 (1.67)</td>
<td>2.26 (2.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50 (87.7)</td>
<td>37 (88.1)</td>
<td>170 (87.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age group (years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21–30</td>
<td>22 (40.0)</td>
<td>10 (24.4)</td>
<td>42 (21.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31–40</td>
<td>18 (32.7)</td>
<td>5 (12.2)</td>
<td>45 (23.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41–50</td>
<td>6 (10.9)</td>
<td>15 (36.6)</td>
<td>64 (32.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51+</td>
<td>9 (16.3)</td>
<td>11 (26.8)</td>
<td>43 (22.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>&lt;3-year degree</td>
<td>3 (5.3)</td>
<td>1 (2.4)</td>
<td>1 (0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- or 4-year degree</td>
<td>50 (87.7)</td>
<td>38 (90.5)</td>
<td>169 (86.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters degree+</td>
<td>4 (7.0)</td>
<td>3 (7.1)</td>
<td>26 (13.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SD, standard deviation.

*a n may not sum to column total due to item-level missing data.
The multivariable logistic regression revealed that after controlling for the associations between variables, only one I-change variable (action plans) and no demographic variables remained statistically significant. In the adjusted model, a unit increase on the mean action plans rating was associated with a 72% increase in the odds of a teacher being in the consistent reporter category. The test of the full model with all 12 predictors against the constant-only model was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 426.07$, df = 12, $P = 0.000$) and predicted 12.2% of the variance in reporting consistency.

**Table II. Unadjusted and adjusted OR of being a non-detector**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Unadjusted OR</th>
<th>Unadjusted SE</th>
<th>Unadjusted $P$</th>
<th>Adjusted OR</th>
<th>Adjusted SE</th>
<th>Adjusted $P$</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advantages</td>
<td>1.124</td>
<td>0.252</td>
<td>0.772</td>
<td>1.175</td>
<td>0.452</td>
<td>0.550</td>
<td>1.788</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disadvantages</td>
<td>1.852</td>
<td>0.650</td>
<td>0.550</td>
<td>1.382</td>
<td>0.491</td>
<td>0.472</td>
<td>3.476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social norms</td>
<td>0.919</td>
<td>0.304</td>
<td>0.776</td>
<td>0.909</td>
<td>0.304</td>
<td>0.472</td>
<td>1.753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>1.174</td>
<td>1.361</td>
<td>1.026</td>
<td>2.728</td>
<td>1.044</td>
<td>1.026</td>
<td>7.254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>0.592</td>
<td>0.293</td>
<td>0.499</td>
<td>0.927</td>
<td>0.811</td>
<td>0.384</td>
<td>1.723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention</td>
<td>0.608</td>
<td>0.181</td>
<td>0.384</td>
<td>0.659</td>
<td>0.129</td>
<td>0.208</td>
<td>1.129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance skills</td>
<td>0.430</td>
<td>0.120</td>
<td>0.707</td>
<td>0.384</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.208</td>
<td>1.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action plans</td>
<td>0.802</td>
<td>0.237</td>
<td>0.307</td>
<td>0.638</td>
<td>0.227</td>
<td>0.853</td>
<td>1.323</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years teaching</td>
<td>0.982</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.853</td>
<td>0.908</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.398</td>
<td>0.966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual hours of CAN training</td>
<td>0.870</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>0.730</td>
<td>0.894</td>
<td>0.280</td>
<td>0.966</td>
<td>1.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- to 4-year degree$^{c}$</td>
<td>0.161</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>0.301</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.582</td>
<td>0.398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters degree$^{c}$</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td>0.301</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.582</td>
<td>0.398</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SE, standard error.

$^a$Unadjusted and adjusted ORs represent estimated relative increase in odds of the teacher being in the category of non-detectors according to status on predictor variable.

$^b$Statistical significance for the unadjusted estimates.

$^c$Relative to those with less than a 3-year degree.

The multivariable logistic regression revealed that after controlling for the associations between variables, only one I-change variable (action plans) and no demographic variables remained statistically significant. In the adjusted model, a unit increase on the mean action plans rating was associated with a 72% increase in the odds of a teacher being in the consistent reporter category. The test of the full model with all 12 predictors against the constant-only model was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 426.07$, df = 12, $P = 0.000$) and predicted 12.2% of the variance in reporting consistency.

**Discussion**

This study examined the independent contributions of a set of I-change model variables on teachers’ self-indicated detection and reporting of suspected cases of CAN. Strengths of the study were the relatively large sample compared with previous research in the field [14, 19, 29], the use of multivariable methods of data analysis and the innovative application of the I-change model. A weakness of the study was the potential for response bias. Teachers were sampled from the first 15 schools that volunteered for participation. Hence, it is possible that child protection issues were of greater salience in these schools. Consistent with this, our sample was somewhat more likely to have suspected CAN when compared with the sample of a previous Australian study [16] involving 254 teachers from 30 Queensland schools (detection rates of 80 and 75%, respectively). The participation rate in this study, while modest, was similar or better than those obtained in previous studies [16, 28, 29]. Moreover, in terms of teacher characteristics, our sample was consistent with the demographic characteristics of Education Queensland primary school teachers [25] and comparable with sample data reported in previous research [14, 16], suggesting that our sample may be reasonably representative of the broader population of Queensland primary school teachers.

The data collected in this study indicate that under-reporting of suspected CAN remains a considerable problem with 14.5% of teachers indicating that they had ever failed to report suspected cases CAN and two-thirds of these teachers indicating that they had failed to report in more than one case. While this proportion of under-reporting of suspected CAN is rather high when compared with similar
studies [13, 17, 20], it may still underestimate the true levels of under-reporting. The current study relied on teachers’ retrospective recall of their reporting behaviour. Reporting a case of CAN is an event that teachers are arguably unlikely to forget. It is therefore likely that any recall biases would arise from social desirability rather than poor memory, potentially leading to an underestimate of the ‘undesirable’ behaviour (in this case, the failure to act on suspicions).

Our analyses showed that, compared with their colleagues who had detected cases of CAN, non-detectors had fewer years of teaching experience, lower educational qualifications and less confidence in their ability to detect signs of CAN. While these findings may indicate that less-experienced teachers had less opportunity to encounter CAN, it is also possible that confidence to detect CAN increases with teaching experience. However, it is notable that not all non-detectors were novice teachers, with an average of >8 years employment. Non-detectors were also more likely to rate social support for reporting highly, suggesting the possibility that experience with CAN leads to a more pessimistic view of the extent to which reporting is supported in the school context.

Regarding the consistency with which teachers reported suspected cases of CAN, only one I-change variable made a significant independent contribution to the prediction of consistent reporting. Teachers who had more well-formulated action plans regarding detection and reporting were nearly twice as likely to be consistent reporters.

Caution is warranted when interpreting the current findings. The I-change model assumes that factors such as performance skills, social support and action plans are determinants of the behaviours of interest (detection and reporting). However, with cross-sectional data, it is not possible to exclude the alternative interpretation that detection and reporting influences teachers’ ratings of their skills, perceptions of support and the development of clear action plans. Therefore, this field of research would benefit from longitudinal studies which track detection and reporting over time to enable identification of the factors that precede these behaviours. However, as noted earlier, such research is challenging given the relative infrequency with which individual teachers encounter CAN.

This study has illustrated the value of multivariable analyses for avoiding misleading conclusions. For example, attitudes regarding advantages and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Unadjusted</th>
<th>Adjusted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ORa</td>
<td>ORa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advantages</td>
<td>2.894b</td>
<td>1.694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantages</td>
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<td>0.476</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social norms</td>
<td>1.514</td>
<td>1.192</td>
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<td>Social support</td>
<td>1.546</td>
<td>0.511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>1.751b</td>
<td>1.502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention</td>
<td>2.513b</td>
<td>1.505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance skills</td>
<td>1.702b</td>
<td>1.412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action plans</td>
<td>1.940b</td>
<td>1.721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years teaching</td>
<td>0.991</td>
<td>0.974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual hours of CAN training</td>
<td>1.039</td>
<td>0.996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- to 4-year degreec</td>
<td>4.447b</td>
<td>2.540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters degreec</td>
<td>8.667b</td>
<td>4.323</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SE, standard error.

*aUnadjusted and adjusted ORs represent estimated relative increase in odds of the teacher being in the category of consistent reporters according to status on predictor variable.

bStatistical significance for the unadjusted estimates.

cRelative to those with less than a 3-year degree.
disadvantages of reporting were significant in the univariate, but not the multivariable analyses. Reliance on univariate approaches could lead to recommendations that detection and reporting may be improved by providing teachers with a better appreciation of the benefits that may result from notifications and demonstrating how failures to intervene may increase the child’s risks for future harm. Other researchers have argued that professionals’ decisions not to report are typically rational, good faith attempts to protect children from further harm that may arise in the context of an overloaded child protection system [53]. However, our findings indicate that these types of attitudes do not make significant independent contributions to detection and reporting.

A further notable finding from the current study is the failure of hours of child protection training to make a significant independent contribution to the models. This suggests that the current child protection training methods are not effective in increasing teachers’ detection of CAN or the consistency with which they report suspected cases and parallels the conclusions from previous research with Queensland primary school teachers [16].

Collectively, the models examined here accounted for 20% of the variance in teachers’ detection and 12% of the variance in reporting behaviours. In part, this may reflect measurement and design issues. For example, the large CIs around the ORs suggest an imprecision in the estimates, and our measure of positive attitudes had poor internal consistency. Alternatively, several variables in the I-change model were not examined here. It is possible that distal factors related to teachers’ awareness of CAN may also make a contribution. Similarly, the lack of contribution by hours of child protection training suggests that further investigation of information factors (e.g. the quality of the messages, channels and sources used) is warranted. There is now a considerable body of research that has examined the role of these factors in facilitating or impeding the implementation of recommended practices within health care, educational and community contexts [54]. Finally, case characteristics have been shown to influence reporting decisions [14, 27]. These factors were not assessed here as our focus was on potentially modifiable factors that could be addressed in interventions designed to promote consistent reporting.

Despite its limitations, this study has illustrated the utility of health promotion theory and methods for improving our understanding of teachers’ reporting of CAN. In particular, the study focussed on factors that are potentially modifiable and system-wide changes to factors that have only a small predictive value can still make a substantial contribution to altering behaviour at a population level. Longitudinal studies, employing large, representative samples, taking additional I-change variables into account will further contribute to this field of research.

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## Conflict of interest statement

None declared.

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