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# Mandatory reporting: A study on the effect of universal mandated reporting

Amanda Regis

*University of New Hampshire - Main Campus*

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# ***Mandatory Reporting***

***A study on the effectiveness of universal mandated reporting***

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Amanda Regis, Sociology Undergraduate  
Sociology 773, University of New Hampshire  
Fall 2011

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## Contents

Abstract	3
Introduction	3
Types of Child Maltreatment	5
Negative Effects of Child Maltreatment and Neglect	7
Reoccurrence of Child Abuse and the Need for Reporting	8
Mandatory Reporting	9
Negative Effects of Mandatory Reporting	11
Most Recent Statistics Concerning New York and Pennsylvania	11
Methodology	12
Description of Study	13
Description of Sample	14
Strengths and Weaknesses	15
Data Analysis	16
Descriptive Statistics Tables	16
Results Tables	17
Discussion	18
Conclusion	20
References	22

# *Mandatory Reporting*

## *A study on the effectiveness of universal mandated reporting*

Amanda Regis, Sociology Undergraduate, University of New Hampshire

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**Abstract:** *Scandals at Penn State and Syracuse University have the world talking about mandatory reporting. There no debate in the academic community concerning the detrimental effects of child maltreatment and neglect, but the debate concerning mandatory reporting is ongoing. This study looks at the effectiveness of universal mandatory reporting of child maltreatment versus the current statute of mandated reporting for only certain professions in the states of New York and Pennsylvania. When Pennsylvania changed its legislation to a universal mandatory reporting law, it experienced a great increase, of 500%, in the number of substantiated reports of child maltreatment. While this increase was substantial, because of the low rates of substantiated reports in Pennsylvania to begin with, this increase did not prove to be statistically significant. Also, negative outcomes such as unreasonable financial expenditure and possible negative side effects for children involved in unsubstantiated reports detract from the illustration of the effectiveness of universal mandatory reporting. However, this study demonstrates that a policy change concerning mandatory reporting could detect more cases of child maltreatment and help put a stop to child abuse.*

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### **Introduction**

Pennsylvania State University—located in picturesque community at the base of a mountain range; a well respected school for academic excellence and dominant athletics—was once fondly referred to as “Happy Valley.” On the fifth of November, 2011, screaming headlines drastically altered the views of Penn State and has put a black mark on the University forever. Long time, well-liked former assistant Penn State football coach was arrested for numerous, horrifying child abuse crimes. Jerry Sandusky was charged with sexually abusing eight young boys over more than 10 years, using Penn State facilities for youth football camps to target his

victims, and locker room showers to carry out his crimes (*New York Times*, 2011). While the news of Sandusky's unthinkable transgressions was shocking enough, Penn State followers were astounded by the news that Joe Paterno, Penn State's 84-year-old head football coach, the "most celebrated and admired Happy Valley inhabitant" (*New York Times*, 2011: 1) had been fired (along with University president Graham Spanier and several other school officials) by the school's board of trustees for his roles in the situation.

Long loved Coach Paterno has come under extreme criticism for what he did, or rather what he didn't do, in the Sandusky case. In 2002, then-graduate assistant and current assistant coach Mike McQueary approached Paterno, reporting that he had seen Sandusky showering with a young boy. Paterno notified the athletic director, Tim Curley, and vice president, Gary Schultz, as required and took no further action on the matter. While the University took away Sandusky's keys to the facility, they did nothing to punish him or stop him from continuing to hurt young boys—an act he repeated for another nearly eight years. Legally mandated, Curley and Schulz failed to report the incident to authorities and have been formally charged with their crime (CBS News, 2011). While he was under no such mandate, and fulfilled his obligations by reporting to school officials, Paterno is under fire for not doing *more* which begs the question: should state statute be changed mandating all persons, regardless of profession and all situations, to report suspected child maltreatment or neglect to authorities including the police or the Department of Public Welfare?

While the scandal at Penn State has received much media attention and has been the headline of news media for weeks, Pennsylvania State University is not the only place where child abuse has occurred, or even the only college. Syracuse University is currently suffering similar slashes to their reputation due to a child sexual abuse investigation into allegations made

against former assistant men's basketball coach Bernie Fine for sexually abusing a former ball boy named Bobby Davis (Zinser, 2011). Issues have arisen in this case as well as concerning mandatory reporting and who should be held accountable for withholding information in the name of maintaining reputation at the expense of damages to the lives of young children. Who can be held legally accountable? Morally, we have a universal responsibility to put an end to child abuse. If it proves to increase the number of substantiated reports of child abuse and helps relieve children from harmful situations, why shouldn't the law reflect this moral obligation by implementing a universal mandated reporting statute?

### ***Types of Child Maltreatment***

According to the 2006 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention National Report, over 900,000 children in the United States were found to be victims of abuse in 2003. That year, it was noted that investigations or assessments were conducted for 1.9 million reports involving more than 3.3 million children. Of the reported victims, 61% suffered from neglect, 19% from physical abuse, 10% from sexual abuse, and 5% from emotional abuse (Sickmund et al. 2006: 52-53). It was also reported that in the year 2009, 44% of child deaths were maltreatment fatalities (Klevens et al. 2010: 264). These numbers have largely stayed the same in 2009, totaling in more than 3.1 million children involved in reports of maltreatment with 70% suffering from neglect, 23% from physical abuse, 11% from sexual abuse, and 9% from emotional abuse (Kids Count, 2009). The extent of child maltreatment in the United States is massive. The United Nations has developed a collaboration of children rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its mission is to advance humanity by providing access to health, education, equality, and protection for every child in every country. One hundred and ninety-three nations have ratified this set of rights and embraced its mission. The

United States is thought of as a modern, industrialized, developed super power and yet it, along with Somalia, will not ratify the set of rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2011). Meanwhile, regardless of ratification, there continues to be child abuse in every state across America, in every country around the world. Child maltreatment takes on many different forms and each type has negative outcomes for the both the children and families involved.

Each state defines every category of child maltreatment slightly differently under their individual legislation. There is a common general meaning Neglect, making up the majority of child maltreatment cases, is defined generally as a form of maltreatment where a child's needs are not met in a way in which they may lead a healthy life. Neglect can include but is not limited to denying a child adequate food, clothing, shelter, education, or medical attention in a manner his/her physical or emotional health is impaired. Physical abuse means a child's parent or guardian inflicts or allows to be inflicted physical injury by means other than accidental. It can also that the child's guardian creates a situation where a child's physical well-being is put at substantial risk of injury. Sexual abuse/exploitation, considered by the public to be the most heinous of all crimes against children, involves a parent or caregiver committing or allowing others to commit any act of sexual abuse against a child. Emotional abuse is often the most difficult to identify or prove under the law. It is defined as the impairment of emotional health or mental/emotional condition including the weakening of psychological or intellectual functioning. While evidence of such an act is not physical, it can be illustrated by things such as "failure to thrive," misbehavior, or introverted behavior. Lastly, abandonment is categorized as a form of child maltreatment and is defined as a parent or guardian's failure to fulfill his/her/their obligations as a caregiver. This includes but is not limited to failure to communicate or visit a

child or relinquishing any contact at all (Sidebotham, 2011 and USDHHS, 2011). As horrifying as it is that some children experience just one of these categories of abuse, some children experience more than one. Sometimes types of abuse overlap—for example, signs of emotional abuse are often exhibited when a child has been physically or sexually abused. Regardless of definition, all forms of abuse are detrimental for the victims.

### ***Negative Effects of Child Maltreatment and Neglect***

No matter the age, the negative effects of child maltreatment and neglect can surface at anytime, including infancy. Maltreatment of infants can result in low birth weight, crying, inability to self-soothe (Palusci, 2011). A study of young children based on results from the Domestic Violent Home Visit Intervention as well as police reports and parent interviews from willing participants, found that exposure to and experience with violence can lead to symptoms of stress, socialization, academic, emotional, and behavioral problems in children (Lang, 2008: 627-628). Early school success can be greatly diminished because of child maltreatment which can continue throughout a child's academic career. Any and all of these symptoms can affect how a child socializes and develops relationships throughout their entire lives (Fantuzzo, 2011 and Perlman 2009).

It is also noted that these symptoms may later affect how the child contributes to society, either positively or negatively. A correlation was found between childhood maltreatment and a greater existence of mental health issues and a higher use of mental health care. It was discovered that there is a positive “association between adverse childhood experiences and poor adult health and high health care utilization” and the risk of mental health problems increased with each additional report of an adverse childhood experience (Chartier, 2010: 461). Childhood experiences involving physical abuse, maltreatment, or sexual abuse had a stronger



influence on negative mental health symptoms (Chartier, 2010: 454). This too can alter a person's contributions to society later in life. Maltreatment and abuse affects the future of each child who endures such horrible experiences.

### ***Reoccurrence of Child Abuse and the Need for Reporting***

Intervention for child maltreatment may only be initiated by child protective services if a report is made and officially substantiated. It has been documented that if child abuse occurs, without intervention, the rate of recurrence for maltreatment can range up to 67% (Palusci, 2001 and Fluke, 1999). This recurrence is an example of how important reporting instances and suspicion of child maltreatment is. While prevention is ideal, early intervention could help prevent further abuse and the recurrence of instances of abuse for children who have had one or more experiences of maltreatment already and reporting is a step in the right direction.

Furthermore, one of the most researched risk factors of child abuse has to do with the concept of intergenerational transmission of violence: when violent acts, habits, or abusive conflict-resolution behaviors are passed down through generations in a vicious cycle of violence. According to the research, there are many ways that violent behavior can be passed down through future generations of children and each presents a risk for a child to be abused. First, one potential risk for child abuse through intergenerational transmission of violence is if the child's parent(s) were victims of physical abuse or other forms of maltreatment. One study found that parents "who were physically victimized as adolescents are at a substantially increased risk for inflicting minor or severe PCPA [parent-to-child physical aggression] on their own children" (Black, 2001: 153). Another study shows that if a parent was abused as a child, they were more likely to abuse their own children (Newcomb et al. 2001: 1234). Also, articles by Anne Libby et

al (2008) and Anastasia J. Gage et al (2010) found examples of this cycle of violence in very specific samples of people. Libby et al looked two American Indian Tribes while Gage et al looked at a sample of mothers in Peru. Both of these smaller studies concluded that there is a correlation between the use of physical abuse as punishment and whether or not these parents suffered from abuse or maltreatment themselves.

Another child abuse concerning the intergenerational transmission of violence is if the child's parent(s) witnessed interparental violence or domestic abuse in their life. The transmission of violence is not limited to witnessing domestic abuse as a child—a child is just as likely to be abused if their parent(s) witnessed interparental violence as an emerging adult. While a parents' personal experience with physical violence is a larger risk for abuse of their own children, this research shows that witnessing interparental violence also produces a potential risk (Black, 2010). All of this evidence concerning cycles of violence are reasons why reporting as soon as possible is vital for a child experiencing any sort of maltreatment: to decrease the number of cases of child maltreatment that occur in the future.

### ***Mandatory Reporting***

Mandatory Reporting is a concept that originated in the United States. Specific legislation was implemented that dictates who is required under statutory mandate to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect. Mandated reporting is legislation under State Law and varies depending on the state. Under these laws, reporting is required for certain professions under each state law though specifics for New Jersey were unavailable from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2011). Mandatory reporting implies that if any person of the professions indicated by the state in which they practice, sees evidence of or suspects child maltreatment of any kind, they are required to report to authorities. Under New York State law, professionals

who are required to report include physicians, registered nurses, and all other medical/hospital personnel, medical examiners, coroners, dentists and dental staff, social workers, EMTs, Christian Science practitioners, all school officials and staff, daycare center workers, mental health professionals, substance abuse counselors, peace officers, police officers, district attorneys, and all other law enforcement officials. Pennsylvania mandates the same professions to report as New York and both states require that a report be made when a person of the aforementioned professions comes in contact with a child through their professional practice who gives reason to believe they are victims of maltreatment or neglect. They are required to make an oral report immediately and a written report within 48 hours to the Department of Public Welfare. Both state's law also advises that any other person who has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is abused or maltreated may report but is not mandated to do so (USDHHS, 2011).

Universal mandatory reporting would require that all persons, regardless of profession, report any evidence or suspicion of child maltreatment or neglect. This would require that if a neighbor suspects a parent is abusing his/her child, he report it. Any and all witnesses of abuse or those who suspect maltreatment would be mandated to file a report so that an assessment could be made. The goal of universal mandated reporting is to decrease the number of children who suffer from abuse by increasing the amount of early intervention that takes place by increasing the number of reports of witness or suspicion of child maltreatment. If universal mandated reporting had been legislated by the state of Pennsylvania, Coach Paterno would have been required by law to report the Department of Public Welfare as he claims, in retrospect, he wishes that he had. While the officials that Paterno notified were required to report the occurrence of sexual abuse, universal mandating would have required Paterno and McQueary report and had they been mandated, it might have ended the abuse committed by Sandusky.

### ***Negative Effects of Mandatory Reporting***

While universal mandatory reporting may increase the number of substantiated reports of child maltreatment and therefore decrease the risk of recurrence and future abuse, it should be considered that there are possible and documented negative effects of mandatory reporting and especially universal mandatory reporting. First, an increase in the number of reports to be assessed would create a huge burden on the system both financially and with regards to work load. A concern has been raised by many that the quality of the reporting will substantially decrease if a universal mandate were to be put in place. While more reports would be made, the fear is that the majority of these reports would be unsubstantiated cases and they systems ability to handle them (Wallace, 2007).

Another issue that has been raised is that there is a possibility that there would be negative outcomes for the children and families involved with unsubstantiated reporting. For example, false claims could result in a broken trust and lost faith in confidentiality between the accusers and the alleged victims and families. Children could be affected psychologically and/or emotionally by false claims made against their caregivers. False reports could create a sense of confusion, self-blame, or depletion of faith in a child's own family. Because this is an outcome that has yet to be adequately measured it is impossible to know if there would be a significant number of harmful outcomes to outweigh the possible benefits to universal mandatory reporting.

### ***Most Recent Statistics Concerning New York and Pennsylvania***

Rates of child abuse are based on the reports made local authorities such as police departments and/or the Department of Public Welfare based on suspicion of child maltreatment. Substantiated reports of child maltreatment are those that, after an assessment has been made, have been found to have proof and competent evidence. There are many more occurrences of

child maltreatment and neglect that are not included in rates of child abuse due to the fact that they are never reported—a fact that should be considered when reviewing the following statistics. Concerning statistics of reports (substantiated and not) of child maltreatment, in the year 2009 New York reported a rate of child maltreatment above the national average while Pennsylvania rates were below the national average.

*Table 1: Stats (The following rates are given as reports per 1000 children (Kids Count, 2009))*

<b>2009</b>	<b>Reports of Child Maltreatment</b>	<b>Substantiated Reports of Child Maltreatment</b>	<b>Number of Children</b>
<b>United States</b>	41	9	3,100,000
<b>New York</b>	50	18	223,000
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	8	1	22,000

According to these statistics, out of all reports of child maltreatment in the United States, 21.9% of reports are substantiated. In New York, 36% of all reports of child maltreatment are substantiated and 12.5% of all reports are substantiated in Pennsylvania. These variations can be attributed differences in population, crime rates, rates of poverty, and several other influences. While New York and Pennsylvania are not particularly similar in their respective rates of child maltreatment reporting, they are similar in the consistency of those rates over time. This observation is extremely important for this study as it compares whether or not there was an alteration in rates after a change in policy as a determination of the effectiveness of universal mandatory reporting.

### **Methodology**

Let it be known and understood that from this point on, this article will be based on a fictional study created by Amanda Regis and the discussion based on this study will be centered

around hypothetical, invented findings. Statistical information gathered from the years 2005 to 2009 are documented by Kids Count Data Center (2011), but any numbers for years after 2009 were generated. It will be referred to as if it was completed, but this study did not actually occur, and authentic conclusions cannot be drawn from it.

### *Description of Study*

In this study, statistics surrounding child maltreatment and mandatory reporting in the states of New York and Pennsylvania were compared after a change in Pennsylvania legislature. Up until 2011, both states had nearly identical statutes on mandatory reporting in terms of who is required to report. New York and Pennsylvania were chosen for this study were chosen because of their similarities in legislation and also because of the states' recent hype over collegiate scandals involving the child sexual abuse and issues concerning their mandatory reporting policies. In 2011, due to the demand by politics, media, and the general public, mandatory reporting laws became universal in Pennsylvania. Though New York suffered similar pressure, its statute remained the same. This study will look at statistical reports of child abuse (both substantiated and not) and compare the two to determine whether or not universally mandated reporting practices are effective.

It is important to discuss how Pennsylvania went about changing their legislation. Because professions previously listed as those required to report suspicions of child abuse were trained to recognize possible signs and symptoms, to expect the general population to know inherently how to determine reasonable suspicion, two major measures had to be taken. First, information was added to high school curriculum in public schools in Pennsylvania to inform adolescents and young adults how to rationally identify evidence of child maltreatment. Second, numerous public service announcements were commenced on radio and television media to

educate the general public on measures for proper identification of child maltreatment. While the cost for these efforts was immense, the state of Pennsylvania put faith that the outcome would be generally positive and the ends would justify the means while the state of New York did not.

### *Description of Sample*

All of the statistics used in this study were accessed from state records collected by the Kids Count Data Center. This database is accessible to the general public and was the most accurate means of measurement available. The number of reports of child maltreatment and the number of substantiated reports could be looked up by year and compared between two or more states. For the purposes of this study, Pennsylvania and New York statistics were the only ones utilized. All statistics shown will be shown in rates of reports per 1000 children so that the best comparison can be made between the two states and two types of reports (substantiated versus unsubstantiated). The sample for this study then would be the actual number of all the reports made to the Department of Public Welfare concerning childhood maltreatment from the years 2009 to 2014, specifically comparing the year 2011 (the year before the policy change in Pennsylvania) and the year 2014. The sample size for Pennsylvania and New York in 2011 was 22,000 reports and 226,000 reports respectively. In 2014, the sample size of for Pennsylvania was 70,000 reports and for New York was 240,000 reports. My variable will be the number of reports after the policy change in Pennsylvania and how it affects the number of substantiated reports. My control variable will be the number of reports of child maltreatment in New York because the state did not change its policy concerning mandatory reporting. Therefore the number of substantiated reports will not be significantly affected by the number of reports in New York because theoretically, it won't change. I will then perform a simple regression on the data collected as well as a chi2 analysis to determine statistical significance of my findings.

### *Strengths and Weaknesses*

One of the greatest benefits of using archival data is that it is the most complete sample that could be obtained. It would have been impossible for a survey to have yielded more accurate, concrete figures concerning the number of reports of child maltreatment made. One of the weaknesses of not using data collected specifically for this study, is that the information in the Kids Count Data Center is for every state in the U.S. Had I conducted the collection myself more details specific to Pennsylvania and New York could have been obtained. A more focused resource bank may have resulted in more accurate findings for there is no practical way to find out if the statistics obtained are completely accurate.

Furthermore, this study deals strictly with the number of *reports* of child abuse, not total number of cases of child abuse for there is no way to accurately measure all of them. Countless cases of child maltreatment goes undetected and under the radar of society. The effectiveness of mandatory reporting cannot yield conclusive results concerning the occurrence of all child maltreatment because that data does not exist. Also, while it does not directly affect this study, the change in policy from mandatory reporting for certain professionals to universal mandatory reporting may have proved not to be cost effective (Wallace, 2007). Because archival data was used after this theoretical legislative change, there was no cost for data collection for this study.

Lastly, because the statistics for the years 2010 to 2014 are invented, there is no way of knowing whether or not they are even remotely accurate or reasonable. However, due to the fact that from 2005 to 2009 it was evident that both Pennsylvania and New York showed consistency in their rates of reporting child maltreatment, I can safely say that the statistics for 2010 and 2011 are fairly accurate. I made them consistent with the previous years and the statistics would not be affected by the scandal at Penn State and Syracuse, nor the hypothetical change in policy.



### Data Analysis

The following data analysis is based on statistics gathered from the Kids Count Data Center. It concerns the rate of the number of reports made concerning child maltreatment as well as the rate of the substantiated reports as they compare over time (before and after Pennsylvania's change in policy) and between the states of New York and Pennsylvania.

#### *Descriptive Statistics Tables*

The first table shown below summarizes the descriptive statistics for the rate of reporting (substantiated and not) for the state of Pennsylvania over the course of six years, from 2009 to 2014. The numbers that appear are in the form of rate of reports per 1000 children and statistics were retrieved from the Kids Count Data Center.

*Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Pennsylvania*

	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>
<b>Reports</b>	8	8	8	30	28	25
<b>Substantiated Reports</b>	1	1	1	5	5	5

This table shows that from 2009 to 2011 there was no variation in the rates of reporting (substantiated and otherwise). The year following the collegiate scandals and the change in Pennsylvania legislature, there was a large increase in both substantiated and unsubstantiated reporting but while unsubstantiated reports decreased from 2012 to 2014, the number of substantiated reports remained at 5 reports per 1000 children.

The following table summarizes the descriptive statistics for the rate of reporting (substantiated and not) for the state of Pennsylvania over the course of six years, from 2009 to 2014. The numbers that appear are in the form of rate of reports per 1000 children and statistics

were retrieved from the Kids Count Data Center.

*Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for New York (control variable)*

	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>
<b>Reports</b>	50	49	51	60	57	54
<b>Substantiated Reports</b>	18	16	17	20	19	19

This table shows that from 2009 to 2011 there was little variation in the rates of reporting (substantiated and otherwise). The year following the collegiate scandals and the change in Pennsylvania legislature, there was a slight increase in both substantiated and unsubstantiated reporting. However, from 2012 to 2014, the rates tapered off and remained similar to the rates they were in 2009.

These descriptive tables show that there was consistency for both states in the years 2009 through 2011, but illustrate a change from the year 2011 to 2012, and then again illustrate consistency between 2012 and 2014.

### ***Results Tables***

In order to analyze this data, I compared data from New York and Pennsylvania in the years 2011 and 2014. I chose to describe data from 2009 to 2011 to establish a pattern of consistency in the data but I wanted to illustrate the change from the year that the collegiate scandals occurred. I decided not to compare 2011 to 2012 because I wanted to allow for theories of outside factors to diminish for the rates for 2012 to 2014 also show a pattern of consistency. Table 4 is a summary of the comparison of rates of substantiated and unsubstantiated reports of child maltreatment per 1000 children between Pennsylvania and New York in the years 2011 and 2014. Included in the table are the rates of reports of child maltreatment per 1000 children, the

percentage total reports that were substantiated reports, as well as the percent increase of substantiated reports between 2011 and 2014 based on a simple regression.

*Table 4: Comparative Results Table*

	2011			2014			% Increase
	Rate of Reports	Rate of Substant. Reports	% of Substant. Reports	Rate of Reports	Rate of Substant. Reports	% of Substant. Reports	
<b>PA</b>	8	1	12.5%	25	5	20%	7.5%
<b>NY</b>	51	17	33.3%	54	19	35.2%	1.9%

This table illustrates that there was a 7.5% percent increase in the percentage of substantiated reports within all reports of child maltreatment for the state of Pennsylvania between 2011 and 2014. This is a large increase compared to the 1.9% increase of the percentage of substantiated reports in New York over those same years.

A chi2 analysis was also conducted (equation unavailable) with a 90% level of confidence that yielded that while the percentage increase seems high, there is no statistical significance to these results. This means that even though it appears to be a clear variation with respect to the change in Pennsylvania legislature, the correlation seen could be considered random or attributed to outside factors.

### **Discussion**

Initially, in 2012, both New York and Pennsylvania experienced an increase in the number of reports of child maltreatment. Even though the policy in New York did not change, an increase in reports can be attributed to an increase in public awareness about mandatory reporting and child maltreatment in general due to the media coverage of the scandals at Penn

State and Syracuse. However, after a couple years, in 2014, rates sank down to about where they were and New York experienced no exceptional change in the rates of reports or substantiated reports of child maltreatment. Pennsylvania on the other hand, experienced drastic increases in the rates of reports and substantiated reports. Because the only change in variables concerning Pennsylvania as compared to New York is the policy change to universal mandatory reporting, the change can be confidently attributed to this policy variation.

The rate of reports and substantiated reports for Pennsylvania experienced a tremendous increase in the year 2012 which then decreased in 2013 and 2014. This can be attributed to the implementation of new curriculum and public announcements in conjunction with the new legislation of universal mandatory reporting. It probably would have been better to change curriculum and increase public announcements concerning the issue prior to any change in legislation to allow of the education to spread, but due to the collegiate scandals, Pennsylvania did not wait to revise their statute. The increase means that the public became more aware of the issue and more alert to signs that would raise suspicions concerning child maltreatment. The decrease in rates from 2012 to 2014 can be attributed to the decrease in the number of unsubstantiated reports of child abuse. This can be said with some degree of confidence because the rate of substantiated reports does not decrease at all from the years 2012 to 2014 meaning that the decrease is the elimination of some unsubstantiated reporting and no substantiated reporting. This is a definite positive outcome to this study in terms of the effectiveness of universal reporting. Even though the number of reports increased, the number of substantiated reports increased and the idea is to eliminate as many active cases of child abuse possible and that can be accomplished by reporting.

Even though the results of this study seem completely positive on the surface, there are several factors to be considered when discussing the effectiveness of universal reporting. In order for there to have been a statistically significant increase in the rate of substantiated child maltreatment reporting, rates would have had to have been much higher and the overall rates of reporting much lower. The most significant limitation to this study is that there is no way to measure whether or not the results obtain outweigh the cost of changing the mandatory reporting policy. An immediate change of policy may be too ambitious an endeavor when considering the cost of new curriculum, public announcements, and the financial and labor burdens of assessing an increased number of reports when so many of them are unsubstantiated (Wallace, 2007). Also to be considered a limitation, without waiting several years to obtain longitudinal data, there is no way to measure the ill-effects an expansion of mandatory reporting. An increase in the number of unsubstantiated reports might cause harmful effects on the children that they involve.

The number of questions raised by this study is higher than the number of questions answered. Benefits to expanding the legislature on mandatory reporting to become universal are illustrated, but they did not prove to be statistically significant and this study did not answer any questions about whether or not the improvement in the rate of the number of substantiated reports of child abuse is enough to outweigh the financial and emotional cost that mandatory reporting may exploit.

### **Conclusion**

Child maltreatment is a devastating phenomenon that occurs all over the world. The negative side effects of child abuse are countless and the amount of damage it causes to victims is immeasurable. There are policies in place concerning the prevention/intervention of child maltreatment including state legislature called mandatory reporting. While mandatory reporting

is a positive step, the United States might be able to take it one step further by implementing universal mandatory reporting so that all citizens are responsible for reporting suspicions of child abuse. This study examined the effectiveness of universal mandatory reporting by comparing a theoretical implementation of this policy in Pennsylvania, to the current policy of mandatory reporting in New York State. The study found that while there showed a positive outcome of an increase in the number of substantiated reports of child maltreatment, the results were not statistically significant and therefore inconclusive as to whether or not the benefits outweigh the cost of this policy change—both financial cost and the possible cost of hurting children involved in unsubstantiated reporting. Because of the recent media coverage concerning Penn State and Syracuse University, mandatory reporting is in the spotlight. The debate continues as to whether or not to embark on efforts to expand from the current legislature of mandatory reporting to the universally mandated reporting of suspicion of child maltreatment.

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