

## **Healthcare Workers as Mandated Reporters – What is the Evidence? A Narrative Literature Review**

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**Introduction and Aims:** In Australia, all registered healthcare practitioners are legally required to report suspicion of child maltreatment or neglect to child protective services. For substance using parents, fear of child protection involvement and subsequent child removal may pose a significant barrier to accessing healthcare. We aimed to evaluate the evidence surrounding mandated reporting as a healthcare worker intervention, with a focus on the impact on substance using mothers and their children. Specific aims for this study were to identify outcomes of mandated reports and clinician and patient perspectives on reporting.

**Design and Methods:** We undertook a comprehensive narrative review. A search of medical, humanities and legal databases was conducted, and 238 studies were assessed for relevance of which 18 studies were included in the review. Data from these studies were summarised qualitatively and quantitatively.

**Results:** 18 studies, including observational and qualitative study designs, were included in the results. Mandatory reporting appeared to be associated with an increase in the rate of reporting to child protective services, but not with the rate of report substantiation or service provision. Both healthcare workers and patients identified confidentiality as a key issue with mandated reporting, and both groups had reservations regarding the efficacy of child protective services for improving outcomes for children. Fear of child removal was identified as a key barrier to seeking treatment.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** We were unable to find high quality evidence supporting the effectiveness of mandated reporting legislation for healthcare workers. High-quality research is required to assess the benefits and harms of this legislation.

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