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The influence of organizational and professional factors on child maltreatment reports within children's hospitals

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All health care professionals in Sweden are required to report children whom they suspect are subject to maltreatment to Social Services, but they have been shown to report less frequently than other professionals. Based on a quantitative study within the four largest children's hospitals in Sweden the organizational and professional conditions and the professionals' assessment and reporting experiences are explored. The findings show differences between the hospitals and the professions, and great differences between professional groups' assessment and reporting experiences. Nurses and nurse assistants showed a lower level of awareness and knowledge of risk to children, the legal framework and the available organizational support than physicians and hospital social workers. The reporting experiences were also reflective of these conditions: while half the respondents had never made a report, there were at the same time clear differences between the professions as nine out of ten nurse assistants and more than two thirds of the nurses had never made a report. Some organizational and professional factors were found to have a significant impact on the respondents reporting experiences. Longer working experience and access to guidelines and routines were related to being a high reporter, but also related to experiences of deciding not to report. The study argues that all professional groups need to have equal access to education, with the opportunity to become more involved in the assessment and reporting process and to strengthen multidisciplinary structures. This would reduce the insecurity in assessment and the strategies of avoidance among some professionals.

Biography

Veronica Svård has completed her PhD in May 2016 from the University of Gothenburg. She is a hospital social worker, researcher and lecturer who work at Karolinska University Hospital and the Department of Social Work at the University of Gothenburg.

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