

ABSTRACT — *iLook Out for Child Abuse: An Innovative Learning Module for Childcare Providers*

The epidemic of child abuse in the U.S. (>680,000 confirmed annually) causes massive harm to children and the adults they become. Sequellae include physical disabilities and neurological damage, mental health problems, maladaptive behaviors, and perpetuating cycles of abuse. Young children (aged 0–5 years) are particularly vulnerable to victimization. They account for $\geq 75\%$ of deaths from abuse and a greater proportion of victims than older children for all categories of maltreatment except sexual abuse. Yet despite >8 million American children being in childcare, childcare providers (CCPs) report fewer than 0.5% (~2,500) of all substantiated cases of child abuse. Research shows that CCPs are not adequately prepared to identify at-risk children, and there are no evidence-based interventions with demonstrated efficacy for improving CCP reporting of suspected child abuse. That said, efforts to raise CCP reporting rates must be careful not to promote inappropriate reporting that merely wastes scarce resources and causes families undue stress.

This 5-year study will evaluate the efficacy of an innovative educational intervention, *iLook Out for Child Abuse (iLookOut)* for increasing rates of accurate child abuse reporting. Grounded in an *Experiential Learning* conceptual model, *iLookOut* is a multi-media, online intervention that engages learners emotionally and intellectually through an interactive, video-based storyline that provides education, challenges learners with decision-points, and gives critical feedback. *iLookOut* uses gamification strategies to promote experiential learning through simulation, problem-solving, and practice opportunities to apply new information and understanding. It also will include follow-up activities that promote retention and integration of new knowledge, as well as help CCPs to remain aware and engaged.

Prior studies have demonstrated that *iLookOut* significantly improves CCP knowledge and attitudes about reporting suspected child abuse, and is very well received by CCPs. To evaluate its impact on actual reporting behavior, the proposed research will randomize 3 geographically distinct regions in the state of Maine (which was chosen because of its excellent child welfare information system, centralized reporting structure, and enthusiasm to collaborate) to receive *iLookOut*, *Standard* training, or *Control* (no intervention).

The primary goal is to increase the number of CCP reports for which either child abuse is confirmed *or* social services (e.g., therapeutic services, nutritional assistance) are recommended –as these are the kinds of reports that are likely to actually benefit a child. The secondary goal is to decrease the proportion of reports that don't offer such benefit, and in particular to decrease costs to the state associated with intake and investigation of non-beneficial reports. If, as hypothesized, *iLookOut* 1) increases the incidence of beneficial reports, and 2) decreases the proportionate costs of non-beneficial reports, we will have the first evidence-based tool for helping CCPs accurately identify and report young children who are victims of abuse.