

---

---

**A Survey of Massachusetts Dentists Regarding Child Abuse. RAED BABAE\*, BDS, and W.R.CHENEY BDS, DMD BOSTON UNIVERSITY GOLDMAN SCHOOL OF DENTAL MEDICINE.**

**The OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:** To determine the level of awareness of dentists and pediatric dentists in Massachusetts regarding the state law concerning child abuse and neglect and their role in recognizing and managing suspected cases.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS:** A questionnaire was sent to 149 pediatric dentists practicing in Massachusetts who are members of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, and 285 general dentists who are members of the Massachusetts Dental Society. The questionnaire consisted of 18 questions regarding the practitioner's knowledge of state laws concerning child abuse; their personal experience with suspected and confirmed child abuse cases and the sequelae of reported cases.

**RESULTS:** of 434 letters sent 253 were returned for a response rate of 58%. From the 243 usable questionnaires, 162 (66.7%) were from general dentists and 73 (30%) were from pediatric dentists. 219 (90.9%) claimed they were familiar with the law in the state regarding dentists and the reporting of child abuse/neglect (CAN). 122 (51%) said they would feel uncomfortable reporting a suspected case if they were unsure abuse or neglect had occurred. The most common reasons for not reporting suspected cases was fear of possible repercussions from the victim's family members to themselves 90 (37%), or unfamiliarity with signs of abuse to the extent that abuse or neglect had actually occurred 88 (36.2%). 76 (31.3%) indicated that they had suspected cases of child abuse or neglect in their patients in the last 5 years but only 25 (36.8%) reported suspected cases. These 25 dentists reported an average of 2.1 cases. (80%) of the reported cases were to the Department of Social Services. 3 of the 25 (14.3%) dentists who reported cases were required to participate further in the cases. Dentists who were older than 55 years or in practice for more than 15 years were less suspicious of child abuse or neglect than younger or less experienced dentists. This was statistically significant at  $p=0.028$  and  $p=0.015$  respectively. The results showed that pediatric dentists were more familiar, more suspicious, and more comfortable with reporting child abuse or neglect with statistically significant differences compared to the general dentists.

**CONCLUSION:** Pediatric dentists are more aware, more likely to be suspicious of, and more likely to report child abuse/neglect. This study supports including child abuse and neglect in the undergraduate dental education as well as in continuing education courses for dental professional.