

Assessing an Innovative Method for Training Adult Protection Caseworkers

Program Evaluation of the Illinois Department on Aging's Simulation Training

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A home visiting nurse called the Senior Helpline about her client with limited mobility, who has an open sore on her elbow. The nurse has also found her client lying in urine numerous times. Her client's daughter, the main caregiver, refuses to let anyone assist with the client's care and has not refilled the client's medications.

The mission of Adult Protection Services (APS) of the Illinois Department on Aging (IDOA) is to investigate situations like this, involving possible abuse, neglect, and/or financial exploitation of older adults and adults with disabilities (IDOA, 2023). In 2021, IDOA added simulation training to the Adult Protection Services (APS) Certification training. Trainees engage in simulations of typical APS caseworker encounters with clients. The idea is to provide experiential learning to help trainees transfer knowledge from the classroom to practice. This should enhance caseworkers' capabilities and confidence. The ultimate goal is to improve the quality of their work with clients.

Simulation Training

The development of this APS training builds on many years of work by the Alliance for Experiential Problem-Based Learning at the University of Illinois Springfield (UIS) to develop and implement simulations to train child protection investigators for the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (Chiu & Cross, 2020; Goulet et al., 2020). Hundreds of child protection investigators have received simulation training since 2016. Studies by the Children and Family Research Center (CFRC) have shown that these trainees report positive experiences with simulation training and growing confidence over the course of a simulation training week (Chiu et al., 2021). A follow-up survey found that alumni of the training reported that their experience in simulations helped them in their work as child protection investigators (Cross et al., 2021). The UIS group helped IDOA develop the simulation training for adult protection investigators and provided training of IDOA's trainers. Two IDOA in-house trainers¹ have provided the simulation training to all newly hired APS caseworkers since May 2021. IDOA is the first adult protective state agency in the nation to employ simulation training for adult protection investigators.

¹ The current trainers are Claudia Kemple and Kimberly Tiley.

IDOA's Simulation Training

IDOA's simulation training is a two-day virtual training conducted at a mock townhouse on the UIS campus (Cross, Tittle, & Chiu, 2018). A mock family played by actors from Southern Illinois University School of Medicine's Standardized Patient Program is physically present, and trainees participate remotely via Zoom. One of the trainers holds a tablet with a camera and serves as a proxy for the trainee. The proxy approaches the family just as the trainee would in person, and the head camera serves as the trainee's "eye", enabling the trainee to observe the home and family.

The first simulation, ***Call the Reporter***, helps trainees develop their language and information-gathering skills when calling the nurse who reported the maltreatment. The second simulation, ***Engagement and Scene Investigations***, teaches trainees to negotiate entry to the home by effectively articulating their role and the purpose of the visit. Once inside, they learn to engage the family and gather more information on the alleged victim's safety and well-being. Each trainee receives individual debriefing with trainers and actors after their encounter regarding their demeanor, professionalism, engagement ability, and investigation skills. Day 1 ends with a group debrief in which the trainees discuss their overall experience of the day, consider the new facts or evidence that they have gained throughout the day, and plan what they need to do the next day.²

Day 2 focuses on interviewing skills. Trainees interview the alleged victim and alleged abuser separately. Before each simulation interview, trainers discuss areas of concerns regarding elder abuse, including medical information, environment, finance, mental capacity and mental health, personal information, and intervention goals with trainees. Trainees learn to gain more information and respectfully question inconsistencies or initiate necessary confrontations. Important tasks in the interview of alleged victim include performing a short mental health assessment and asking about medications, doctor appointments, social security status and bank account information (to assess possible financial exploitation). Trainees also review the areas of concern with the victim's daughter in a separate interview. In addition, trainees learn to assess family needs and address safety issues. They also practice gaining the alleged abuser's commitment to an intervention plan. Day 2 again ends with a group debrief.

Preliminary Evaluation Results

To measure trainees' experiences over the two-day simulation training, CFRC and the APS training team developed an online survey, the Daily Experience of Simulation Training–APS (DEST-APS) which was adapted from a similar measure used with child protection trainees (Chiu et al., 2021). Using the DEST-APS, trainees rate their confidence in different skills from 1 (low) to 7 (high) at the following timepoints: baseline, end of Day 1 training, end of Day 2 training, as well as 3-months and 6-months post training. The DEST-APS also asks trainees to provide

² Sometimes the training might go over time. Therefore, the group debrief would move to the beginning of the Day 2 training.

feedback for the individuals in each training role and provides the opportunity for them to provide written comments evaluating the training.

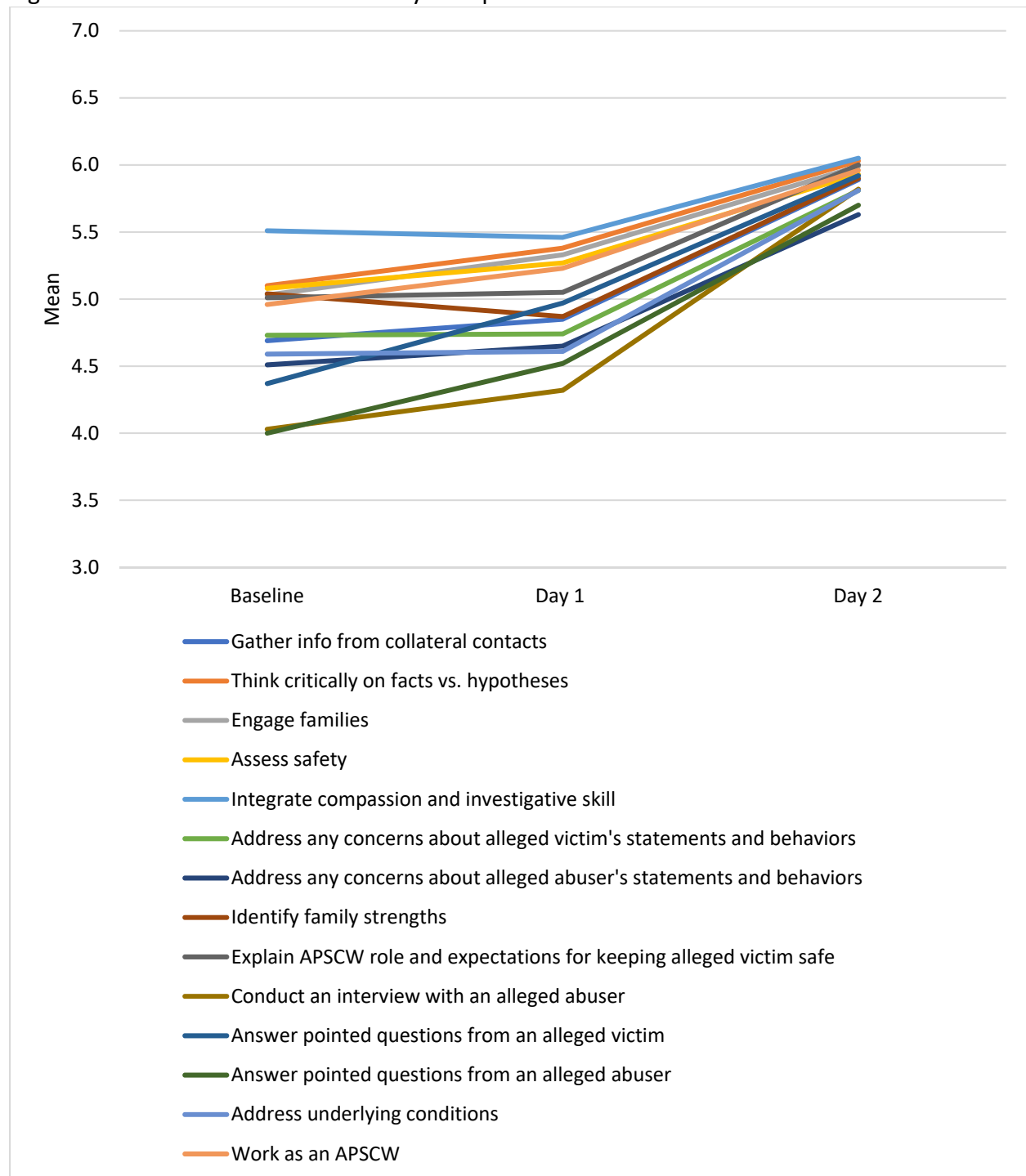
The preliminary evaluation results include data collected between March and December 2022. During this period, 76 clients received simulation training and 74 completed at least one DEST-APS during the two-day training. Figure 1 shows the average confidence level on 14 adult protection service skills from Day 1 morning (baseline) to the end of Day 2. The results indicate the upward trend from baseline to Day 2 across all 14 skills. On the Likert scale from 1 (low) to 7 (high), confidence levels at baseline ranged from an average of 4.0 (conduct an interview with an alleged abuser) to an average of 5.5 (integrate compassion and investigative skill). Confidence levels had increased by the end of Day 2. They ranged from an average of 5.7 (Answer pointed questions from an alleged abuser) to an average of 6.1 (Integrate compassion and investigative skill). To date the number of participants who have completed 3- and 6-month follow up surveys is very small; thus, this analysis excludes those two timepoints.

Of 61 respondents, 98.4% found feedback from simulation trainers either helpful or very helpful. The same percentage of respondents found the actor who played alleged victim either helpful or very helpful; and 96.7% of respondents found the actor who played the alleged abuser either helpful or very helpful.

Conclusion

The preliminary analysis shows that trainees' confidence in their adult protection skills increased significantly over the two-day training. Their satisfaction with the training team's feedback was very high. These preliminary results suggest the value of simulation training for meeting trainees' needs and promoting their learning. The 3- and 6-month follow-up data we are collecting will assess whether they maintain their confidence once they start working in the field, but to date, the response rate has been low. Future research can employ additional methods to assess the value of simulation training for APS caseworkers. Ratings by expert observers can provide a more objective measure of changes in trainees' competence in response to simulation training (see Havig, et al., 2020). A survey of alumni of simulation training who are currently APS caseworkers can examine whether they feel simulation training has contributed to their skill and confidence in the field (see Cross, et al., 2021). In the autumn of 2023, we will produce a complete evaluation report on IDOA's simulation training with more recommendations.

Figure 1. Trainees' Confidence Level By Timepoint



Note. the measure applies the Likert Scale from 1 (low) to 7 (high). The figure only shows the Y-axis between 3 and 7 for visualization.

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