FY2024 Program Evaluation of the Child Protection Training Academy for New DCFS Investigators

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Key Findings

The FY2024 Program Evaluation Report on the Child Protection Training Academy for New DCFS Investigators included multiple sub-studies to assess simulation training:

- A study of the implementation of simulation at the new laboratory at Northern Illinois University (NIU);
- The Daily Experience of Simulation Training (DEST) survey conducted during simulation training;
- The post training satisfaction survey that trainees complete following simulation training;
- The simulation training follow-up survey of current investigators who completed simulation training at the beginning of their position with the Division of Child Protection. Below we summarize a number of important learnings from the evaluation.

Study of the Implementation of Simulation Training at the Laboratory at Northern Illinois University (Chapter 2)

- The NIU laboratory and those organizations and individuals supporting it demonstrated notable resourcefulness in dealing with the stress of the development and implementation of a new simulation laboratory.
- Workforce challenges and turnover forced the laboratory into taking a number of ad hoc steps to begin providing training and maintaining it.
- Participants emphasized how much trainees needed training on how to interact with clients.

Daily Experience of Simulation Training (DEST) survey (Chapters 3 and 4)

Quantitative Data (Chapter 3)

- The DEST in FY2024 continued to show significant linear increases in trainees' confidence between baseline and the last day of training across all 13 items.
- 96% or more of trainees reported that the feedback from the training team was helpful or very helpful.
- Majorities of respondents rated the group and individual debriefings as effective.
- Trainees' ratings of the quality of feedback from different participants (trainers, actors/family members, medical professionals, and courtroom professionals) was significantly related to increases in confidence, with feedback from courtroom professionals having the largest effect.
- Trainees' ratings of the quality of group debriefing were positively related to increases in trainees' confidence.

Qualitative Data (Chapter 4)

- Trainees' reflections on daily learning experiences mainly revolved around the concepts or skills taught during the training, concerning such tasks as questioning reporters, family engagement, scene investigation, information-gathering and interviewing, and testifying in juvenile courts. Most respondents reported improved skills.
- Many respondents volunteered positive feedback highlighting the training's utility and expressed gratitude towards the trainers.
- A smaller number of respondents had specific criticisms of simulation training. Themes included redundant information with no new insights, feelings of disconnection during the training sessions, perceived lack of realism in the simulations, and negative interactions with trainers.
- Feedback obtained from the individual debriefing on Day 2 and Day 3 significantly contributed to enhancement of specific skills: .
  - Nearly 30% of participants reported gaining self-awareness regarding their own skills, along with a heightened understanding of their strengths.
  - The majority emphasized that feedback received from actors who played family members was highly beneficial to improve their family engagement skills.
  - Debriefing sessions also enabled trainees to identify safety concerns they may have overlooked and learn strategies to ensure self-safety during investigations.
  - Helpful feedback included suggestions to avoid asking pointed questions, use more structured and organized sentences, and not hesitate to ask uncomfortable questions.

Post-Training Satisfaction Survey (Chapter 5)

Quantitative Data

- Most participants reported satisfaction with simulation training, with the majority of participants responding they agreed or strongly agreed with the positive statements expressed by the eight items on simulation training satisfaction scale.

Qualitative Data

- The qualitative analysis of the two open-ended questions that asked about trainees' experience in simulation training showed that the respondents' sentiments leaned towards being positive (n = 71) rather than negative (n = 27) or mixed/neutral (n = 20).
- Comments praising trainers focused on trainers' feedback, guidance, and credited them with providing an environment where they felt comfortable and safe.
- Critical comments were focused on inconsistencies regarding information and instructions (e.g., policy and procedure from prior training) or trainers' lack of respect for trainees or lack of openness to feedback.
- Positive responses regarding the actors praised their ability to adapt to the trainees and make the simulation feel realistic.

- Trainees frequently suggested that simulation training would benefit from being longer or increasing the number of in-person days, decreasing virtual days, and using time differently.
- Some trainees deemed simulation training to be unrealistic due to “extreme” or “over the top” behavior from some actor(s).
- Some trainees felt that the information presented or taught to them in simulation was inconsistent with their classroom training or work experience.
- Others felt that trainers’ lack of experience in child protection was a deficit.

Simulation Follow-up (STF) Survey (Chapters 6 and 7)

Quantitative Data (Chapter 6)

- Two-thirds of respondents felt the training was a safe learning environment.
- 74.5% strongly agreed or agreed that they were respected during their debriefing and 68.3% agreed the debriefing provided valuable feedback.
- Only a little more than half of the study sample felt the training was realistic and increased their confidence.
- Procedural Competency: concerns applied skills based generally on didactic learning. A scale measuring procedural competency includes fifteen skill items. Below are the three skills with the highest percentages of respondents who found that the simulation training helped them to develop the skill well:
  - “Provide active listening”, 70.1% of respondents.
  - “Show professionalism in my interactions with families”, 68.8% of respondents.
  - “Learn to provide with clear expectations about the investigation”, 64.8% of respondents.
- Meta-competency: represent a complex interplay of theoretical and policy knowledge with interpersonal and professional capacities. The scale measuring meta-competency includes eleven skill items. Below are the three skills with the highest percentages of respondents who found that the simulation training helped them to develop the skill well:
  - “Be aware of physical surroundings and recognize safety hazards in the location or the circumstances”, 72.9% of respondents.
  - “Be aware of my own body language, approach, choice of words, etc. and their impact on interactions”, 67.1% of respondents.
  - “Reflect on my own strengths”, 64.6% of respondents.
- 63.0% of respondents found supervision somewhat or strongly supported using what they learned from the simulation training.
- 57.9% found the checklist of things required by policy supported using what they learned from the simulation training.
- 40.9% of respondents found that their caseload hindered the use of what they learned in their initial simulation training.

- Most of the respondents rated their current confidence in child protection work between moderate and high.
- The more trainees felt satisfied with the training, better prepared for competency, and better supported at work, the more confident they felt.

Qualitative Data (Chapter 7)

- 53.1% of 96 respondents who responded to the open-ended questions had a positive appraisal of their simulation training experience verse 40.6% who had a negative appraisal of their experience.
- Several expressed that they valued the opportunity that simulations provide to learn about the reality of investigations, including dealing with difficult families.
- A number of respondents praised the opportunity to practice their skills in simulation training or discussed the skills they gained.
- Respondents credited simulation training with increasing their awareness, understanding, knowledge, learning, critical thinking, judgment, or insight.
- Respondents spoke of the need for more time devoted to simulations; and/or more tasks, situations, and populations simulated.
- The most common gap mentioned was training on the SACWIS client information system that is so central to their work.
- A few respondents wanted simulations to focus on one case all the way through, with one complaint being that simulation training "glued several investigations together."
- Most of the negative comments concerned one or more of four types of experiences:
    - perceiving simulation training as contravening standard practice to protect investigators' safety,
    - perceiving actors' behavior as egregious,
    - perceiving simulation training as not providing a realistic experience that matched practice,
    - experiencing negative or disappointing interactions with trainers.
- Several respondents did not feel online training provide an effective simulation experience.
- Some respondents mentioned issues with difficult supervisors in their job and another stated that the current state of DCP offices, on-the-job training, and methods of motivating workers are harmful and contribute to high worker turnover.

Executive Summary

Since the Child Protection Training Academy launched the first simulation training in February 2016, it has trained over a thousand new child protection investigators for the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). Currently, teams from the Child Welfare Office of Workforce Development at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) and the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences at Northern Illinois University (NIU) provide simulation training. The former provides simulation training in DCFS offices in Chicago and the latter on campus at NIU. A network of simulation laboratories is planned that will also include laboratories at Illinois State University and Southern Illinois University.

Trainees receive first-hand experience learning a wide range of child protection tasks, from the first knock on a family's door to testifying in family court. They are guided by training facilitators and work with actors playing the family in a mock house and mock courtroom. Facilitators provide frequent debriefings to help trainees reflect on and learn from their simulations. They employ problem-based learning methods to improve critical decision-making. In FY2024, the Children and Family Research Center's (CFRC) evaluation team at UIUC again used multiple sub-studies to assess simulation training, including study of the implementation of simulation training at Northern Illinois University, the Daily Experience of Simulation Training (DEST) survey, the post-training satisfaction survey, and the simulation training follow-up (STF) survey. Below is an overview of the report.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The laboratory in DCFS offices in Chicago that is run by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) has been operating since April 2019. In FY2024, the laboratory at Northern Illinois University (NIU) became a full-fledged partner of DCFS, providing simulation training throughout the fiscal year.

A change that affected both laboratories was a modification in the staffing of the courtroom simulation. Since 2019 , the DCFS Legal Office had provided lawyers to the Chicago laboratory to play the roles of the judge and attorneys in the courtroom simulation, but it no longer had the resources to do so for the multiple trainings held every month. For two months, the courtroom simulation was held only once a month. Thereafter, the DCFS Legal Office was unable to participate in any simulations, and each laboratory developed ad hoc methods to staff the court simulation, including using child welfare professionals with relevant experience and an NIU staff member to play the roles of legal professionals. By the end of the fiscal year, however, the NIU laboratory had recruited an ample number of legal professionals and the courtroom simulation was fully staffed.

Chapter 2: Study of the Implementation of Simulation Training at the Laboratory at Northern Illinois University

This chapter reports on a study we did of the implementation of the Northern Illinois University (NIU) laboratory. We conducted interviews and focus groups with a range of professionals in

involved with NIU laboratory. Below we describe the primary themes that the implementation study identified.

The Challenge of Implementing Simulation Training Networks. Working agreements between the parties hold together the complex network needed to support simulation training, but executing working agreements could be a challenge. The process of developing the contract between DCFS and NIU was one of the first factors affecting implementation. There was a gap of an estimated nine to twelve months between acceptance of the NIU proposal and the execution of the contract for the NIU laboratory. One issue was disagreement over financial aspects of the contract for the NIU laboratory. This delayed the onset of simulation training at NIU. There was also a delay arising in the DCFS contracting office in setting up the contract with the talent agency that provides the actors.

DCFS and the laboratories strove to standardize the implementation of simulation training of DCP investigators to maintain those elements of the training that DCFS sees as effective. The experienced Chicago laboratory provided considerable training and support for the NIU laboratory. One element of maintaining consistency is offering all new DCFS investigators simulation training in a timely way. That required adhering to a tight schedule as approximately 235 investigators received simulation training between May and December 2023. This created a substantial challenge when some simulation facilitators left NIU and new ones had to be hired and onboarded. One issue identified in the interviews was the difficulty of maintaining professional autonomy given the priority given to consistency (read more details in Chapter 2, pages 5-6).

Workforce Challenges. There was a shortfall of applicants for positions at the NIU laboratory. The salary for the positions was identified as a factor. One result was a lack of DCFS experience among the applicants for the director and facilitator positions. The shortage of legal professionals mentioned above was also a workforce challenge. One factor that exacerbated the unavailability of legal professionals was the local court schedule. The courtroom simulation is planned for Friday of the training week, as a culmination of the experience with the mock family. However, Friday is a busy day for the local court, with grand jury hearings and other demands. Due to volunteer shortages for the legal professional roles, a staff member at NIU who is not a legal professional stepped in on numerous occasions to play the state attorney role. To prepare for the role, he watched and reviewed simulation training videos and had DCFS and legal volunteers prepare material for him to use during simulation. The NIU site relied on a mixture of resources to operate and sustain the simulation training, including significant recruitment of staff and volunteers through their own established personal connections. Their recent recruitment of 15 lawyers and judges now provides full staffing of the courtroom simulation (read more details in Chapter 2, pages 6-11).

Perceived Effects of Simulation Training. The facilitators and actors who were interviewed observed that trainees became more confident over the course of their simulation training and were able to improve their communication skills. Some actors pointed out that trainees

sometimes exhibited attitudes towards parents that could potentially compromise their ability to ensure their own safety and the safety of the parents being investigated. They emphasized the importance of prioritizing safety by being cautious when interacting with parents, avoiding any intimidating tones, and providing comprehensive explanations of the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act (ANCRA) to ensure clarity and understanding (read more details in Chapter 2, pages 11-12).

Chapter 3: Quantitative Data During the Training—DEST

The program evaluation team implemented the Daily Experience of Simulation Training (DEST) measure in 2018 to measure trainees' change in confidence in their skills over the course of a simulation training week. During the week of simulation training, trainees use the DEST to rate their confidence daily on 13 child protection work skills. The DEST also asks trainees to provide daily feedback on the training. Between April 3, 2023, and March 8, 2024, a total of 340 trainees participated in simulation training, and 334 (98%) completed the DEST at one time point or more. Out of 334 respondents, 213 (64%) completed the DEST at all six time points. Due to the shortage of courtroom professionals this year, several cohorts of trainees had to return to the training labs an extra day to do their courtroom simulation. Between August 21, 2023, and January 22, 2024, 26 trainees completed two Day 5 DEST due to the situation.

Changes in Confidence Level Over the Course of the Training. The average trainee's confidence increased between baseline and the last day across all 13 items. One-way ANOVAs found a significant linear increase in confidence over the course of the simulation-training week (Figure3.1 and Table 3.4 & 3.5). For both those trainees who did NOT have an extra day of training and those who did have an extra day (see above), their confidence in testifying increased after they completed the courtroom simulation (Figures 3.2 and 3.3; also read more details in Chapter 3, pages 17-21). A repeated measures ANOVA with respondents who completed the DEST for all six time points also showed a significant linear increase. The effect sizes for all these analyses of variance were in the medium to large range (read details in Chapter 3, pages 22-23). The cohort analysis also showed that increases in confidence were consistent across 32 cohorts in FY2024, including both cohorts with Chicago trainees and those with NIU trainees (read details in Chapter 3, pages 24).

Appraisal of Feedback and Debriefing. Each time trainees answered the question about feedback, 96% or more reported that the feedback was helpful or very helpful. (read details in Chapter 3, pages 24-25). Majorities of respondents rated the effectiveness of debriefing at 5 or above on a 7-point effectiveness scale(read details in Chapter 3, pages 26-27). Results of a hierarchical multiple regression indicate that perceptions of helpfulness of the feedback and effectiveness of the group debriefing were both significantly related to increases in trainees' confidence (read details in Chapter 3, pages 28-29).

Historical Comparison on DEST Results over Time. We compared results on the DEST over the course of four fiscal years: 2019 to 2024. The results are similar for each fiscal year: There were

comparable confidence scores and comparable increases in confidence from Day 1 to Day 5 for each fiscal year (read details in Chapter 3, pages 29-30).

Chapter 4: Qualitative Data During the Training—DEST

The DEST includes open-ended questions that elicited nuanced insights into individual experiences, enriching our understanding beyond numerical metrics alone.

Learning Experience from Simulation Training. On Day 1, the majority of respondents (54%) felt that they had improved their questioning skills for reporters, which was one of the main objectives of the training. On Day 2, the majority of respondents noted improvements in their home investigation abilities, particularly in family engagement (39%), questioning and information gathering (25%), and skills for initiating home visits (16%). On Day 3, nearly one-third of participants reported enhanced skills in scene investigation and interviewing (30%). The importance of conflict management and safety skills also remained prominent (22%). On Day 4, which simulated interviewing parents and medical evaluations, a high proportion of respondents noted they increased their information-gathering and interviewing skills (40%), followed by a noteworthy portion who reported increased interaction skills with medical professionals (20%). The final day of training covered courtroom simulation, and most respondents indicated an enhanced understanding of the courtroom process and testimony skills (50%), along with improved knowledge of courtroom preparation (20%) (read more details in Chapter 4, pages 32-33, and Appendix B).

The open-ended questions on the DEST asked trainees to report on what they had learned that day in simulation training. These questions did not ask trainees to evaluate the program. Nevertheless some trainees commented on their appraisal of the training that day. Many of them used superlatives phrases such as “very beneficial” “I really appreciate the practice”, “the whole experience was amazing”, and “very rewarding.” A smaller number had some criticisms or were entirely negative. The negative training experiences primarily stemmed from Days 2 and 4. These trainees identified various issues: redundant information with no new insights, feelings of disconnection during the training sessions, perceived lack of realism in the simulations, and negative interactions with trainers (read more details in Chapter 4, pages 33-36).

Reflection on Feedback Gained from Individual Debriefing. The majority expressed that they had meaningful learning experiences during the individual debriefing. Nearly 30% of participants reported ***gaining self-awareness*** regarding their own skills, along with a heightened understanding of their strengths. Some also mentioned that trainers’ constructive feedback helped a lot in ***improving their skills***. Many participants noted that feedback obtained during debriefing sessions significantly contributed to their ***knowledge and proficiency in interviewing and investigation techniques***. Some respondents reported ***improvements in their family engagement skills*** following debriefing sessions with both families and facilitators. Debriefing sessions enabled trainees to identify ***safety concerns*** they may have overlooked and learn strategies to address situations safely. Helpful feedback for ***improving questioning skills***

included suggestions to avoid asking pointed questions, use more structured and organized sentences, and not hesitate to ask uncomfortable questions. While most of the debriefing experiences were positive, some noted insufficient debriefing due to time constraints. Additionally, individuals with negative debriefing experiences highlighted unhelpful feedback or a lack of positivity (read more details in Chapter 4, pages 36-40).

Chapter 5: Post-Training Satisfaction Survey

DCFS administers an online post-training satisfaction survey to trainees who have completed Certification Training, which includes simulation training. Survey respondents rate their agreement or disagreement with eight positive statements about simulation training and provide written responses to two open-ended questions about their appraisal of simulation training. For this report, we used data from March 8, 2023, to February 15, 2024 that DCFS provided.

Simulation Training Satisfaction.

Majorities of respondents ranging from 77.5% to 88.9% agreed or strongly agreed with most of the positive statements. Somewhat smaller majorities agree or strongly agreed with statements that simulation training provided a realistic scenario (76.6%), provided a realistic experience (77.1%), and increased their confidence (74.5%). Across items, the percentage strongly disagreeing or disagreeing was 12.3% or less (read more details in Chapter 5, pages 41-42).

Analysis of Open-Ended Responses. The two open-ended questions asked about trainees' experience in simulation training: 1) "Please comment on this experience" and 2) "Please add a few statements that summarize your experiences in the Simulation Labs to help us improve the scenarios." Overall, the respondents' sentiments leaned towards being positive (n = 71) rather than negative (n = 27) or mixed/neutral (n = 20). We identified the following themes:

- ***Experiences with trainers/instructors***: Responses mentioning trainers/instructors were among the most frequent in the data with a wide range of sentiments. There were roughly the same number of positive and negative comments Positive responses usually consisted of praise for the trainers on their feedback, guidance, and creating an environment conducive to learning. In contrast, some trainees felt that trainers caused them to feel intimidated, uncomfortable, or disrespected (read more details in Chapter 5, pages 43-44).
- ***Experiences with actors***: There were about the same number of positive and negative comments. Positive responses about the actors regarded their ability to adapt to the trainees and make the simulation feel realistic. On the other hand, actors' behavior was sometimes deemed unrealistically and unhelpfully aggressive (read more details in Chapter 5, pages 44-45).
- ***Realism of simulation training***: Some trainees felt the training provided realistic scenarios and situations that are reflective of the ones they would face while on the job.

In contrast, a slightly higher number of trainees felt that the scenarios were unrealistic and/or not representative of their own experiences (read more details in Chapter 5, pages 45-46).

- ***Training format, integration of content, trainer experience, and logistical issues***: Some trainees suggested changes regarding the allocation of time in training or the need for additional training, and others reported challenges due to the format of hybrid/virtual training with a preference for in-person training. Some trainees shared feeling a disconnect or confusion regarding the integration of information from classroom training and/or professional experience with what they were being taught in simulation. Some trainees felt the lack of experience in child protection of some trainers had an impact on training. Some also shared that the travel demands expected of them were not considerate of their well-being, safety, and work-life balance (read more details in Chapter 5, pages 46-50).

Chapter 6: Quantitative Data at Follow-up—Simulation Follow-up Survey

To understand whether or not simulation training has had an impact after these trainees enter the field, the evaluation team conducted a follow-up survey with child protection specialists who had previously participated in simulation training. The final recruitment consisted of 1,046 email addresses. The final survey sample included 166 unduplicated respondents, which yielded a response rate of 16%. About half of the study sample had worked at the Division of Child Protection (DCP) of DCFS for less than one year and more than three-quarters had worked with DCP for less than three years. Most of respondents (81.8%) still worked in DCP (read more details in Chapter 6, pages 54-55).

Satisfaction with Simulation Training. About 75% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that "the training was a safe learning environment" and "they felt respected during their debriefing" and over 60% of respondents agreed that "the debriefing provided valuable feedback," "the training was conducted in an environment conducive to learning," and "I felt prepared to participate in the SIM lab." Other items had agreement from only a small majority of respondents: "the training helped increase my confidence in their role" (56.0%), "it provided a realistic experience of the challenges facing in the field" (55.7%), and "the scenario was realistic" (55.4%) (read more details in Chapter 6, pages 55-57).

Competency. We asked a series of questions regarding whether the simulation training helped participants to develop holistic competency. Holistic competence involves two distinct constructs: procedural competency and meta-competency. The Procedural Competency scale includes three subscales: rapport-building (five skills), communication and information-gathering (six skills), and safety assessment (four skills). Across items on the Procedural Competency Scale, 57% to 70% of respondents rated simulation training as helping them well or very well to develop the competencies, and 30 to 43% gave simulation training a rating of neutral, poorly or very poorly. The average scores of all three subscales were around 3.6 on the five-point Likert scale (read more details in Chapter 6, pages 57-59).

The Meta-Competency Scale includes four subscales: skills in action (five skills), deepening of perspectives on diversity (three skills), managing affective intensity in the moment (five skills), and openness to learning (three skills). Overall, there were seven items on the Meta-Competency Scale on which 48% to 73% of respondents rated simulation training as helping them well or very well to develop the competencies and 27% to 52% gave simulation training a rating of neutral, poorly or very poorly. Of all the subscales, deepening of perspectives on diversity subscale (M = 3.4) and skills in action subscale (M = 3.5) had the lower average scores compared to the other two subscales (M = 3.6, respectively) (read more details in Chapter 6, pages 58-60).

Variables that Could Support or Hinder Learning from the Initial Simulation Training. Sixty-three percent of respondents found that supervision somewhat or strongly supported using what they learned from the simulation training and 57.9% found that the checklist of things to do required by policy supported it. However, 40.9% of respondents found caseload hindered the use of what they learned in their initial simulation training (read more details in Chapter 6, pages 60-61).

Current Confidence in Child Protection Skills. We asked participants to rate their current confidence in thirteen child protection skills on a Likert scale ranged from 1- lowest to 7-highest, the measure that we use in the DEST (see Chapter 3). The two skills, "assess safety and integrate compassion" and "investigative skill," had higher average ratings, clustering between 6 and 7, with a low score of 5. The results indicate that most respondents felt confident in performing child protection skills (read more details in Chapter 6, pages 61-62).

Variables Related to Current Confidence. Respondents had higher confidence in their current work when they had stayed at DCP longer, were more satisfied with their simulation training, felt better prepared on procedural competency and meta-competency from their simulation training, and felt that supervision supported them, and caseload and checklist of things required by policy did not hinder them. The hierarchical multiple regression analysis showed that tenure at DCP ($p < .01$), rapport-building ($p < .05$), managing affective intensity in the moment ($p = .055$), openness to learning ($p < .01$), and supervision ($p < .05$) had the largest effect on respondent's current confidence (read more details in Chapter 6, pages 62-64).

Difference by Year in which Respondents' Received Simulation Training. The 2023-2024 cohort felt significantly more prepared than the 2018-2020 cohort for rapport building, communication and information-gathering, deepening of perspectives on diversity competency, and managing affective intensity in the moment. In addition, the average score indicate that those who received simulation training in 2018-2020 experienced caseload and the checklist of things required by policy as more of a hindrance than the later cohorts did (read more details in Chapter 6, pages 64-65).

Chapter 7: Simulation Training Follow-up Survey – Responses to Open-Ended Questions

At the end of the simulation training follow-up survey, we included five open-ended questions to learn more about trainees' experience with and opinions about simulation training:

Overall Appraisal of Simulation Training. Excluding those who did not provide text responses or had responses that did not appraise simulation training, 53.1% of 96 respondents had a positive appraisal of their simulation training experience verse 40.6% who had a negative appraisal of their experience (see details in Chapter 7, page 68). We also conducted a thematic analysis to identify the themes expressed in the text responses, which we discuss below. Appendix E provides a listing of excerpts from these responses sorted by theme.

The Variety of Positive Effects of Simulation Training. Several respondents valued the opportunity to learn about the reality of investigations of simulations, including dealing with difficult families. A number of respondents praised the opportunity to practice their skills in simulation training or discussed the skills they gained. Such skills as addressing people appropriately, engaging families and understanding their perspective, interviewing, understanding parents' reactions, and assessing families' needs were mentioned. Several mentioned how simulation training improved their mental abilities for the work. Respondents credited simulation training with increasing their awareness, understanding, knowledge, learning, critical thinking, judgment, or insight (see details in Chapter 7, page 69).

The Desire for More, Longer, More Complete, or Different Simulation Training. Many respondents advocated for longer, more complete, or different forms of simulation training. Usually the wish for more, longer, or more complete simulations followed from appreciating simulation training and wanting to increase its positive impact. Sometimes respondents' wish for more, longer, or more complete simulations reflected some frustration. These respondents felt that they had not gained enough from simulation training to prepare them, but valued the method and felt more was needed. Three respondents wrote that simulation training was "rushed" (see details in Chapter 7, page 69).

Use of Problem-Based Learning. A number of respondents told us they use PBL in their practice, and some elaborated on that (e.g., "Problem-based learning (PBL) is a valuable tool for me as it allows me to address complex issues in a collaborative and practical manner"). A smaller number said they do not use it. Some wrote that they did not remember or understand the term (see details in Chapter 7, page 70).

Reasons for Negative Experiences with Simulation Training. Most of the negative comments concerned one or more of four types of experiences: 1) perceiving simulation training as contravening standard practice to protect investigators' safety, 2) perceiving actors' behavior as egregious, 3) perceiving simulation training as not providing a realistic experience that matched practice, 4) experiencing negative or disappointing interactions with trainers (see details in Chapter 7, pages 70-71). These experiences were typically interrelated: a number of respondents felt that the actors' egregious behavior was what made the simulation training

unrealistic, and the facilitators urging them to keep trying to engage the belligerent actors was both unrealistic and contravened best practice around safety that they had learned in other parts of their training.

Practical Obstacles to Using What is Learned in Simulation Training. Several respondents did not feel online training provide an effective simulation experience. One respondent talking about having long drives back and forth from the laboratory, combined with long simulation training days, meaning they were getting home late and having to attend virtually at 8:30 the next morning. Another respondent mentioned delays in receiving simulation training as a whole or the courtroom simulation in particular, which this respondent reported interfered with receiving licensure in child protection in a timely way. One respondent lauded her simulation training and described in some detail what they learned, but then added "I was once confident in my abilities until I started working in the office and in the field. On-the-job training is a RUSHED process and can be very dangerous to the investigators" (see details in Chapter 7, page 71).

The Impact of Simulation Training on Working with Diverse Individuals and Families. In response to the question on this topic, some respondents credited simulation training with helping them work with diverse individuals and families. However, more respondents reported no effect. Some wrote that the training was not designed to address diversity. One wrote "Simulations did not place an emphasis on working with diverse families. It is difficult to practice diversity with 1.5 walkthroughs and the main one you are trying to split with another person." (see details in Chapter 7, page 72).

Chapter 8: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter discusses the success and challenges of Implementation of the NIU laboratory (see details in Chapter 8, page 74), trainees' appraisal of simulation training (see details in Chapter 8, page 75), positive descriptions of simulation training (see details in Chapter 8, page 76), expanding simulation training for investigators (see details in Chapter 8, page 76), dissatisfactions with simulation training (see details in Chapter 8, pages 76-78). A list of recommendations is provided at the end of the chapter:

- Recommendation 1: Address the Perception that Simulation Training Departs from Best Practice (see details in Chapter 8, page 79).
- Recommendation 2: Consider Adjusting the Intensity of Simulations (see details in Chapter 8, page 79).
- Recommendation 3: Conduct Trainee Assessments (see details in Chapter 8, page 80).
- Recommendation 4: Assess the Realism of Simulation Training (see details in Chapter 8, page 80).
- Recommendation 5: Provide Training Professionals with Child Protection Experience to each Laboratory (see details in Chapter 8, page 80).

- Recommendation 6: Develop a Rapid Response to Disgruntled Trainees (see details in Chapter 8, page 80).
- Recommendation 7: Assess the Logistics of Taking the Training (see details in Chapter 8, page 80).
- Recommendation 8: Consider Developing a Separate Training on SACWIS (see details in Chapter 8, page 81).
- Recommendation 9: Undertake New Research on the Issues Identified in this Report (see details in Chapter 8, page 81).

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Child Protection Training Academy (CPTA) program provides experiential learning through simulation training and related methods to all new child protection investigators hired by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). University teams provide the simulation training in partnership with DCFS' Division of Learning & Professional Development, Education & Transitional Services. After completing their initial classroom training, all new investigators attend a week-long training at one of two simulation laboratories. One laboratory is run by the Child Welfare Office of Workforce Development at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This laboratory is in DCFS offices in Chicago and has been operating since April 2019. The other laboratory is run by a team from College of Health and Humans Science at the Northern Illinois University (NIU). That is on the university's campus in DeKalb. A network of simulation laboratories is planned that will also include laboratories at Illinois State University and Southern Illinois University.

Simulations during this training week deal with such situations as the initial engagement with the family and a scene investigation of the residence. Trainees interact with actors playing the role of a mock family involved in a child protection investigation. The laboratory is outfitted as a family residence. Trainees also participate in a simulation of a juvenile court hearing concerning the family and interact with volunteer professionals playing the roles of judge and attorney and a simulation of a medical evaluation, with nurses playing the role of medical examiners. Two days a week investigators come to the laboratory to do simulations in person. These are the simulations with the most extensive interaction with the mock family. The other three days simulations are done virtually.

Trainers provide frequent debriefings to help trainees reflect on and learn from their simulations. They employ problem-based learning methods to improve critical decision-making. Problem-based learning guides trainees to distinguish between hunches and hypotheses and facts; to develop alternative hypotheses; and then gather the information they need to test their hypotheses to make sound decisions. More information on this simulation training program is available on the Children and Family Research Center at https://cfrc.illinois.edu/trained-on-maltreatment.php.

In FY2024, NIU became a full-fledged partner, providing simulation training throughout the fiscal year, as did the Chicago laboratory. The NIU laboratory had just begun to do simulation training at the very end of FY2023. A major change in the simulation training program that affected both laboratories was a modification in the staffing of the courtroom simulation. Since 2019, the DCFS Legal Office had provided lawyers to the Chicago laboratory to play the roles of the judge and attorneys in the courtroom simulation, but it no longer had the resources to do so for the multiple trainings held every month. For two months in 2023, the courtroom simulation still included DCFS Legal but was held only once a month, with trainees from every training that month coming to it on that one day.

Thereafter, the courtroom simulation was again conducted at the end of each training week, but the DCFS Legal Office did not have the resources to participate in any simulations. Each laboratory had to develop ad hoc methods of dealing with the shortfall of legal professionals to

staff the courtroom simulation. In the Chicago laboratory, the roles of lawyers and judges were played by child welfare professionals from the Field-Implemented Support Program of UIUC's Child Welfare Office of Workforce Development. They are not lawyers, but they have experience testifying in juvenile court and supervising caseworkers. Recognizing their lack of legal training, these professionals limited themselves to commenting on how trainees did their mock testifying and did not provide feedback on legal matters. At NIU, the courtroom simulation proceeded short-staffed for a period of time, and also included for a time an NIU staff member without legal training playing the role of a legal professional. By the end of the fiscal year, however, the NIU laboratory had recruited an ample number of legal professionals and the courtroom simulation was fully staffed. Chapter 2 provides information on other developments in the simulation training program at NIU during FY 2024.

Program Evaluation

In FY2024, the CFRC evaluation team again used multiple sub-studies to assess simulation training. Most data came from this fiscal year, but we also included some FY2023 data, particularly those data that had not been available in time for last year's analysis. We aim to analyze all data on simulation training, even though this means that our data sets are not fully synchronized with the fiscal year.

Chapter 2 reports on a study conducted by the program evaluation team of the implementation of the new Northern Illinois University simulation laboratory. Chapter 3 presents quantitative results and Chapter 4 presents qualitative results from the Daily Experience of Simulation Training (DEST) measure. The DEST is an ongoing component of the simulation training program for new investigators and CFRC periodically analyzes DEST data to track changes in trainees' confidence over the course of simulation training. Chapter 5 provides results from feedback on simulation training on the post-training satisfaction survey that all new investigators are invited to complete following their Certification Training. Chapters 6 and 7 analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data of a simulation training follow-up survey. The simulation training follow-up survey was a one-time survey that invited respondents to appraise their simulation training experience after they went into field and examined how simulation training was related to child protection specialists' perceptions of their current confidence and competency. Chapter 8 discusses the evaluation's implications for understanding the current state of the simulation training program and offers recommendations for next steps.

Chapter 2: Study of the Implementation of Simulation Training at the Laboratory at Northern Illinois University

As we discussed in Chapter 1, Northern Illinois University (NIU) became a full-fledged partner in FY2024 in providing simulation training to new child protection investigators in Illinois. This required a major implementation effort. This chapter reports on a study conducted by the program evaluation team of the implementation of the new laboratory. In previous years, the program evaluation team conducted implementation evaluations of the simulation laboratory at the University of Illinois at Springfield[1] and the simulation laboratory in Chicago run by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.[2] This implementation evaluation has considerable value for understanding both the methods necessary for developing and running these simulation laboratories and the factors that may influence the effect of simulation training.

To explore the implementation of a new simulation laboratory, it is helpful to understand the organizational infrastructure of simulation training for DCFS investigators. The Division of Learning & Professional Development, Education & Transitional Services oversees simulation training at the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). The simulation training itself is provided by two laboratories organized and run through contracts with two university partners, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) and Northern Illinois University (NIU). The UIUC laboratory is in DCFS offices in Chicago and the NIU laboratory is on the university's campus in DeKalb. A network of simulation laboratories is planned that will also include laboratories at Illinois State University and Southern Illinois University.

Each laboratory in turn depends on a network of contributors, so the operative metaphor is "networks within a network." The laboratory directors and simulation facilitators, who run the simulations and provide support and debriefing to trainees, work for these universities, but other professionals contribute to simulation training through contracts or on a voluntary basis. Each of the two current laboratories has a contract with a talent agency representing professional actors who are hired to play the role of the family involved in the simulated DCFS investigation. Nurses who contract with DCFS play roles in the medical professional simulations. Legal professionals and other staff volunteer to play judges and attorneys in the courtroom simulation. Some of these participants work in both current laboratories and some are specific

[1] Cross, T.P., & Chiu, Y. (2018). *FY2018 Program Evaluation of the Child Protection Training Academy for new DCFS investigators*. Urbana, IL: Children and Family Research Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. https://cfrc.illinois.edu/pubs/rp_20181016_FY2018ProgramEvaluationoftheChildProtectionTrainingAcademyforNewDCFSInvestigators.pdf

[2] Chiu, Y., Lee, L., & Cross, T.P. (2020). FY2020 Program Evaluation of the Child Protection Training Academy for new DCFS investigators. Urbana, IL: Children and Family Research Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. https://cfrc.illinois.edu/pubs/rp_20200909_FY2020ProgramEvaluationoftheChildProtectionTrainingAcadeyforNewDCFSInvestigators.pdf

to one of the laboratories. The centrality of these networks of professionals to simulation training led us to gather data from a range of these participants.

In this implementation evaluation, we conducted interviews and focus groups with a range of professionals involved providing simulation training at the NIU laboratory. We sought to learn how the team developed simulation training at NIU, exploring in part what adaptations if any made were made to the existing model of simulation training in Chicago. We also took the opportunity to learn about their observations of the effects of simulation training.

Methods

Key Informant Interviews

We used key informant interviews to gather data on implementation. DCFS and NIU provided contact information for professionals involved in the NIU laboratory implementation (see Appendix A for the interview protocols). The evaluators recruited 24 participants on the contact list via emails or phone calls and 17 participated, yielding a participation rate of 71%. Table 2.1 shows the distribution of key informants recruited and interviewed by informant role.

Table 2.1

Number of Key Informant Interviews by Role

	Number Recruited	Number Participated
Administrative	5	4
Simulation Training Facilitators	4	2
Courtroom Professionals	4	3
Medical Professionals	3	3
Actors	8	5
Total	**24**	**17**

The interview protocols were semi-structured and shared the same research questions, with minor differences tailored to interviewees' role (see Appendix A for the interview protocols). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. All of the authors reviewed the transcripts and coded them independently, following Braun and Clarke's method.[3] The four evaluators then met to discuss their coding and developed a consensus about the themes that emerged in the interviews. The implementation evaluation was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

[3] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Results

Challenges in Implementing Simulation Training Networks

Several of the themes we observed relate to the challenges of developing and maintaining the complex network needed to support simulation training. Working agreements between the parties hold these networks together, but executing working agreements could be a challenge. Some agreements take the form of formal contracts; some are simply informal working agreements. Negotiating agreements and changes in agreements over time affected the implementation of simulation at the NIU laboratory. The process of developing the contract between DCFS and NIU was one of the first factors affecting implementation. There was a gap of an estimated nine to twelve months between acceptance of the NIU proposal and the execution of the contract for the NIU laboratory. One interviewee noted: "the largest obstacle first and foremost was the…length of time of the contract in terms of working with this as an intergovernmental agreement between the department and NIU."

One issue was disagreement over some financial aspects of the contract for the NIU laboratory. This delayed the onset of simulation training at NIU. There was also a delay in setting up the contract with the talent agency that provides the actors, which meant that volunteers and DCFS staff had to play the roles of family members for two weeks. In addition, with its resources being stretched because of the workforce challenge (see below), the legal office of DCFS withdrew from its previous agreement to participate in the courtroom simulation, forcing the NIU to move quickly to find legal professionals to participate. These challenges in working agreements stressed the network.

Another theme that emerged was the effort at standardization to maintain consistency across laboratories, and the challenge that standardization sometimes posed for professional autonomy. DCFS and the laboratories strive to standardize the implementation of simulation training of DCP investigators to maintain those elements of the training that DCFS sees as effective. These quotes illustrate the commitment to fidelity to the model:

> *Our goal is to keep the same format, to keep the same learning objectives and learning points for each simulation and the key items within the household configuration that are needed and necessary for the learning points to be experienced during a simulation.*
>
> *I definitely felt positive in putting those spaces together and getting those resources from the other simulation sites because I wanted to make sure that we maintained fidelity, that everything looked and felt the same as much as possible given that they're different sites.*
>
> *I think we've been pretty strict with trying to make sure we maintain that fidelity and consistency.*

The experienced Chicago laboratory provided considerable training and support for the NIU laboratory. The Chicago site provided a three-day training to the actors at NIU and also provided a training to DCFS nurses. The nurses that NIU uses in the medical simulation learned

their role by shadowing two nurses at the Chicago laboratory. Staff members of the NIU laboratory observed the simulations of the Chicago and some facilitators from the NIU lab temporarily worked as facilitators in the Chicago lab.

Documentation of simulation training methods supports maintaining consistency, as quotes from both the producers and users of the documentation illustrate.

> *And we wanted to make sure that each group in each university that comes on, we actually have a packet of information for them that contains all of the specs.*

> *The fact that I could go to, whether it's UIS or later UIUC more so, to get that documentation, to get that clarity, and still be able to find those things in the manuals… that demonstrated that fidelity.*

One element of maintaining consistency is offering all new DCFS investigators simulation training in a timely way. That required adhering to a tight schedule as approximately 235 investigators received simulation training between May and December 2023. This created a substantial challenge when some simulation facilitators left NIU and new ones had to be hired and onboarded. In this situation, the effort to maintain consistency conflicted with a professional's wish for a measure of professional autonomy.

> *My professional assessment of my own staff didn't matter because, again, they pushed them to do the work when they were clearly not ready…The schedule, in and of itself…is challenging because DCFS makes the schedule. Simulations has no choice but to run that. So we have no say in how that looks or maybe spreading that out a little bit more.*

Workforce Challenges

Participants discussed how workforce challenges impeded implementation of simulation training, applying to contractors and volunteers as well as employees. Illinois is one of many states that face a workforce crisis in human services.[4] Among the factors cited as causes nationally are high caseloads, limited salaries, difficult working conditions, expectations of human services that are unrealistic, and insufficient training and professional development opportunities.[5]

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[4] Adusu, I. (March 24, 2023). Essential staffing shortage in human services: A public health crisis. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/essential-staffing-shortage-human-services-public-adusu-msnpm/ ; Gaskill, H. (February 22, 2023). Human services staffing shortage is at an 'an all-time high.' Maryland Matters. https://www.marylandmatters.org/2022/02/03/human-services-staffing-shortage-is-at-an-an-all-time-high/ ; State of New Jersey Department of Human Services (2024). NJ Social and Behavioral Health Services Workforce Analysis Info Hub. https://www.nj.gov/dcf/workforce_analysis.html?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery ; WICS/WRSP Staff (August 31, 2022). Illinois to tackle critical staffing shortages. https://khqa.com/newsletter-daily/illinois-to-tackle-critical-staffing-shortages .

[5] Adusu, ibid; Gaskill, ibid.

Directors and Simulation Facilitators. One participant in our study gave the following overview of the workforce problems affecting hiring directors and simulation facilitators for the NIU laboratory:

> *Initially we just weren't getting applicants* [for positions at the NIU laboratory]*. I mean Chicago experienced this. So we weren't alone in that. The great resignation and trying to hire people…And in terms of hiring, we're not in the city. We're out here* [in DeKalb, IL] *[…] reposting things two and three times was not uncommon at all.*
>
> [We] *were choosing not only just the director of the program and the leadership but then also the facilitators. So that did take quite a while for them to get onboarded. I would say those would be the primary obstacles in terms of getting the program up and started.*

One feature of the shortfall of applicants was a lack of DCFS experience among the applicants for the director and facilitator positions:

> *We weren't getting people with DCFS experience applying for those two positions. We just weren't. We said, "We're not getting applicants. Can we get people with maybe mental health experience or trained counselors… [with a] masters [degree]-prepared people to perform these roles? Maybe they would not with the ideal social services trajectory and experience with DCFS, but at least they're going to be familiar with what some of the issues are with abuse and neglect, right?" So that's the route we went with the approval and grace of DCFS.*

Pay was identified as a factor in the reduced number of applicants for these positions who had DCFS experience. This reflected the state of compensation at the time we conducted the interview, Autumn 2023. More recent information from an NIU stakeholder suggests that recent cost of living adjustments from DCFS in FY2024 and FY2025 have mitigated the disparity, but the below quotes :express interviewee perceptions at the end of 2023.:

> *Folks that have experience with DCFS are not going to come work at a university for that much of a pay cut.*
>
> *The pay…is…significantly lower, especially when we're hearing, right, that DCFS is now going to have simulation trainers and they're getting paid substantially more than what facilitators are going to be currently.*

Given their lack of experience with DCFS and child protection, the simulation facilitators activity in the training may be more circumscribed than previous simulation facilitators who had more experience with DCFS (see Chiu and Cross' 2020 publication for a description of a previous facilitator).[6] Courtroom professionals and nurses mentioned how facilitators will brief them for short periods about the relevant characteristics of the trainee cohort before a simulation; for

[6] See Chiu, Y., & Cross, T.P. (2020). How a training team delivers simulation training of child protection investigators. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *118*. 105390. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105390

example, facilitators mention those trainees who are particularly vulnerable to being triggered, actors noted the facilitators' decision-making in choosing different scenarios for implementing a simulation, and on giving them feedback after the simulation.

Courtroom Professionals. At the beginning of the fiscal year, there was also a shortage of legal professionals to serve as volunteers in the courtroom simulation. The primary reason for the shortage of legal professionals was the decision by the legal office of DCFS to stop providing legal professional volunteers to play roles in the courtroom simulations. The office cited workload issues as the reason, reporting that they had 25 unfilled attorney positions. This decision affected both laboratories, as DCFS Legal had provided the Chicago lab with volunteers for a number of years, and would have been poised to do so at NIU as well. The NIU staff then had to work hard to find legal professionals.

> *The biggest challenge we've had here in more recent months is establishing this network of legal people… we needed to really attack the court volunteers, former judges, attorneys, and now we've got… we're trying to bring in students from our law school…It's been a lot.*

One factor that exacerbated the unavailability of legal professionals was the local court schedule. The courtroom simulation is planned for Friday of the training week, as a culmination of the experience with the mock family. However, Friday is a busy day for the local court, with grand jury hearings and other demands.

Before leaving the position, the former associate director had recruited several judges and attorneys, but during the first quarter of the fiscal year only one judge and one attorney available. Having only one attorney meant led them to omit the public defender who represents the parent. They thought that this situation was not too great a departure from reality, because it is not uncommon for a parent to decline to have an attorney. The NIU laboratory improvised and/or created additional opportunities to make up for days impacted by legal staff shortages.

> *Well, for the time that I was there, I know like, for example, we just had a judge and then one attorney. Realistically, that does happen where a parent will refuse an attorney. So that wouldn't be an unrealistic scenario, and so we improvised in that aspect. That's my only experience. I mean we had to cancel one completely…So that was frustrating. Then I had to do two cohorts in one Friday…I was so, so thankful that these two, the judge and attorney were willing to give up their entire day essentially. So we did a morning court call and then we did an afternoon court call.*

In most of the second quarter, only the judge role was covered by a legal professional. On numerous occasions, a staff member at NIU who is not a trained professional stepped in on numerous occasions to play the state attorney role during the first half of the fiscal year. To prepare for the role, he watched and reviewed simulation training videos and had DCFS and legal volunteers prepare material for him to use during simulation (e.g., prepared questions). Several of the interviewees, including legal professionals, commended the staff member for his willingness to step in and for their performance as a legal professional.

Volunteers' scheduling has led to volunteer shortages. To that point, [name of logistic coordinator] *has filled in as a prosecutor 2-3 times and he's done…well. I think he watched some of the better lawyers and was a quick study. That the fact pattern does not change may have allowed for a non-lawyer (who is familiar with the facts and the sim) to do an adequate job. However if you ever had a real lawyer to represent parents, I think a non-lawyer would have a hard time with courtroom protocol, objections, etc. I am sure the best outcome is with a full staff of volunteer professionals, however.*

[Name of NIU staff member] *is a bright political science major…he said, "You know, I think I can do that. I can play that role of that lawyer," because some of this is scripted. So he's gotten to a certain level of proficiency…*

A participant described this substitution as a practical step that was not ideal but enabled them to train more investigators at an acceptable level.

It's not the desirable solution; but if it means getting eight more people on the line to protect children, I think it's an example of if you can preserve some degree of fidelity in the experience. You know, in the cases where he's [the NIU staff] *had to jump in, it's been—I think he's done this like three times now in three different cohorts* [out of] *12 or 15 cohorts.…But lives happen, life happens. When you get a call, you know, Friday morning and somebody says, "I can't make it" and you're going up and down your list and nobody else can make it, then this has been a workaround I guess. So in that sense we've adapted but it hasn't been at the cost of like a different case or compromising…integrity.*

Nevertheless, concerns were expressed about the quality of the courtroom simulation if the attorney roles were not filled with legal professionals.

I have a lot of concern over that because that experience should be authentic. Only court personnel can give that authentic feedback…I felt it was unethical…it just did not sit well with me for them to have that not be an authentic experience.

It should absolutely continue to be professionals in the field because that feedback is so critical as well as any other simulation like the medical simulation as well. All of those things should definitely have those professionals as part of those volunteers and/or paid staff or paid, you know, contracts because it's already very difficult to engage folks in a simulation.

When they [trainees] *get the feedback, they're like, "Wow." Then when they're able to de-role the various roles that we have during the week, that becomes very powerful and it lends itself to an opportunity to ask questions, right? If you have a volunteer that's not in that profession, they're not going to really be able to answer those questions authentically. Now, we're doing a disservice for the staff who then are leaving our site to go and engage with those professionals in the field.*

If we lack an attorney volunteer, one of the staff steps into the attorney role. They do a good job but don't have the training or experience of an attorney to elicit good responses from the CPI trainees.

Several interviewees mentioned that the former associate director's initial recruitment of legal staff led to snowball recruitment of judges and lawyers. The site has also had some assistance from the director of Student and Legal Services at the site. NIU has ongoing outreach to different attorneys' offices and bar associations. The staffing of the courtroom simulation has improved the second half of the fiscal year. Two legal professionals participate in each simulation the third quarter, covering the judge and state attorney roles. In the fourth quarter, three legal professionals participated in each simulation, covering the judge, state attorney, and public defender roles. As of the end of June 2024, NIU has 15 legal professional volunteers to staff the courtroom simulation, 11 attorneys and 4 judges.

Other Roles in Simulation Training. The pool of nurses working for DCFS who could staff the medical simulation was too limited to fill the position consistently. To supplement DCFS nursing staff for the medical simulation, the NIU laboratory has reached out to NIU's nursing department.

The NIU laboratory has also been using students who they feel can contribute to simulations even though they lack a child protective services background.

> *So we like to recruit people who have some type of protective services background if possible. But if not, we have been open to using students as well…we've been trying to build value for the Child Protection Training Academy to the program of Family and Consumer Sciences. So we offered a volunteer opportunity to Family and Consumer Science students to become a reporter in this simulation….Then we have also recruited two other reporters who have protective services backgrounds in adult protective services. So our search for reporters are ongoing as well.*

In addition, the NIU laboratory hired a retired DCFS trainer with decades of experience in child protective services as a consultant.

> *He provided support to the academy by basically just supporting the facilitators …because our facilitators were new facilitators and they did not have direct experience in child protective services. The consultant…40-some years of experience in child protective services. So he was able to really bring that practical implementation lens of how to implement child welfare and how to teach our participants the best practices.*

Turnover exacerbated the workforce issue. Since its inception, the NIU laboratory has had turnover in the positions of director, associate director, and simulation facilitators. Similar turnover has affected the Chicago laboratory. The primary factors identified as leading to turnover were low salary and the difficulty of taking time off because of the heavy training schedule.

Contributions to Implementation

The NIU site relied on a mixture of resources to operate and sustain simulation training, including significant recruitment of staff and volunteers through their own established personal connections. For example, the former associate director at NIU had years of experience at DCFS and taught a partnership course at NIU. The NIU laboratory received a significant number of

donations through community connections to help them set up most of the mock house at the NIU site. One staff member explained how she capitalized on her connections developed over years.

> *Since I've been in college here, but I've also worked in this community for, you know, over 25 years. And so, you know, having worked for DCFS doing social work in this community and having those meet and greets with the young youth in college, it's not uncommon for me to put something out on social media and say, "Hey, I need this. If you know of somebody, let me know." And the donations just poured in. I gave them the list of all the items that I know I needed for staging those two apartments, and before you knew it I had stuff in front of my porch. So there was a lot that absolutely got donated. I would say probably three-fourths of it was donated.*

Perceived Effects of Simulation Training

Although this study did not focus on impact, we took advantage of the interviews with professionals to ask participants for their observations about interactions with the trainees and about the effects of simulation training. Some participants emphasized how much the trainees needed training on how to interact with clients.

> *When I did it last week, the trainees…kept calling it investigation, investigation. We were like…that word is very intimidating and makes us very scared….So that was a big feedback that we just said, you know, that word is too scary for us.…I think there needs to be a need for more sensitivity training, how to meet people where they are.*

> *A lot of people bring their prejudices and their attitudes to the case. I just had a young lady…Lord have mercy, this child walked up on me. She put her clipboard in my hand to sign the body chart for Oliver* [one of the alleged victims]*. And after I signed the body chart, I just naturally was inquisitive and started thumbing through and she had the whole report there* [thus the trainee inappropriately enabled the mock family member to look at the whole report]*. …If I had to put it in percentiles, I would say right now, what I'm seeing is maybe 70-80 percent of the people need some training in how to deal with the public.*

The actors raised another important point regarding safety concerns. Some actors pointed out that trainees sometimes exhibited attitudes towards parents that could potentially compromise their ability to ensure their own safety and that of the parents being investigated. They emphasized the importance of prioritizing safety by being cautious when interacting with parents, avoiding any intimidating tones, and providing comprehensive explanations of the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act (ANCRA) to ensure clarity and understanding:

> *A lot of people come in with a very high authority, and they feel they can walk in and just tell people what to do in their homes. I try and bring an air of reality that you're not going to be able to walk into someone's home, tell them what to do, start bossing them around, start asking and really prodding as though they're supposed to answer you. My number one pet peeve is if you can't explain ANCRA to me, then you're not getting in the door. I need to know that I'm protected, as well as the reporter is protected.*

But yeah, they're putting themselves at risk in that job…going to…people's homes and say, "I have a report. Somebody reported. I have a report on your child, and I need to investigate." What could be scarier to anybody to open the door? And they got to show their IDs and they should be asking for our IDs. They're supposed to be asking "Do you have any weapons?" "Do you have any pets?" "What about the closed doors?" I mean, there's a lot they need to be careful that they don't like to get caught in. They need to be mindful of where the door is if they have to take off or something.

The facilitators and some actors observed improvement over the simulation week in how trainees interacted with client. They thought that trainees became more confident over the course of their simulation training and were able to improve their communication skills. This improvement included interacting more sensitively when communicating with parents:

In some cases, I've noticed that some people will come in with a very high authority. If they get it, the next day in the fishbowl, they will have toned down their attitude and their vocal tone and ask more questions like you would ask any responsible adult, not as bringing your own prejudices and not bringing what you saw in the apartment.

I do find them to have more ability, more communication ability, more confidence, I guess is a better—towards the end or at the very end, I see more confidence and awareness of what we're doing and what the job entails.

They become more gracious.

Discussion

Providing all new child protection investigators in Illinois with simulation training is complex. It is being implemented as a statewide network of laboratories, each with a local network within it. The networks involve multiple organizations and organizational units bound together by contracts and agreements. Multiple professional disciplines are involved, all affected by workforce challenges. At the same time, scores of new child protection investigators are being trained every year, each with the need for timely simulation training to enable them to enter the child protection workforce prepared. It is not surprising that the development and implementation of a new simulation laboratory is stressful, which was evident throughout most of the interviews and focus groups we conducted. The NIU laboratory and those organizations and individuals supporting it demonstrated notable resourcefulness in dealing with this stress, but it would not be easy to maintain this resourcefulness over long periods of time.

Workforce challenges and turnover forced the laboratory into taking a number of ad hoc steps to begin providing training and to maintain it. Participants varied in their appraisal of this situation; all seemed to think that these steps enabled them to provide worthwhile training, but some acknowledged that the training was nevertheless not ideal. The workforce challenges abated over time as the NIU benefited from the vigorous networking it did and persistence in recruitment. All the same, the continuous need to recruit talent of various sorts while maintaining a demanding schedule of training numerous cohorts every year is a significant

demand. One question is what the long-term effect of this demand, and whether the laboratory will be able to reduce turnover going forward.

One important question is how much the gaps in prior experience affect the quality of the simulation training. We lack data at present to answer this question, and recommend that future research focus on it (see our discussion of this in the final chapter). Facilitators in the NIU laboratory lack prior experience with DCFS and child protection, but the staffing has provided professionals with prior human services experience and experience with gathering data related to protection of victims. The preparation of actors arguably also provides them with considerable skills in observing and responding to human interaction. It is likely that the simulation training laboratory professionals have skills in helping trainees learn important human interaction skills. Given our participants' observations of how much the trainees need to improve in their interaction with families, these training skills are critical. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine trainees' prior experience, but it plausible that workforce challenges may mean that recent pools of new investigators have less human services experience and fewer people skills than investigators in past years. This would make simulation training even more important. Trainees are also likely to learn about following relevant DCFS procedures in the course of interacting with families, given how the NIU staff have studied the relevant DCFS documents.

It is plausible that trainees who are trained by staff who lack experience with DCFS investigations and with juvenile court hearings related to child maltreatment may miss out on opportunities for specific knowledge that will help them in their practice. But it is unclear how big an effect this has, and how important it is given all that trainees must learn in one short week about human interaction with clients, following DCFS procedures, and developing an effective child protection mind set. In the final chapter, we discuss ideas for new research that might assess the effects of trainer prior experience in the field.

Through its hard work and requires resourcefulness, the NIU laboratory has been able to provide a continuous source of simulation training and appears to be a reliable source of training into the future. The stresses of doing so deserve attention. In the final chapter, we consider implementation options going forward.

Chapter 3: Quantitative Data During the Training—DEST

If it is effective, simulation training should enhance investigators' preparedness for and confidence in their work. This should increase the quality of their work with families. The program evaluation team first implemented the Daily Experience of Simulation Training (DEST) [7] measure in 2018 to assess trainees' change in confidence in their skills over the course of a simulation training week. During the week of simulation training, trainees use the DEST to rate their confidence daily on 13 child protection work skills. The DEST also asks trainees to provide daily feedback on the training. This chapter analyzes results from the DEST to gauge trainees' changes in confidence during simulation training and their feedback on the training. The most plausible explanation for changes in trainees' confidence is the impact of simulation training, though we are limited in being able to infer a causal effect because we lack a comparison group.

Day 2 and Day 3 trainings are in person and the rest of the training days are conducted via video conferencing. Two case scenarios are used, one for Day 1 and Day 2, and the other for Day 3 to Day 5. The Northern Illinois University (NIU) site launched their training on May 22, 2023. This year's report will include the DEST results from their site for the first time. Below we present results for FY2024 and compare them to results from previous fiscal years.

Methods

The DEST includes 13 items measuring trainees' level of confidence on different child protection skills. Trainees rate their confidence on each specific skill from 1 (low) to 7 (high). We analyze each item individually and also analyze an overall confidence score operationalized as the mean of the 13 items. Trainees complete a baseline DEST in the morning of Day 1 and a DEST at the end of each day, Day 1 through Day 5. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for the overall confidence score in the current sample were between 0.96 and 0.98 across the six time points, which indicates excellent internal consistency among the 13 items in the scale. The baseline DEST includes additional questions about trainees' on-the-job-training experience. The DEST also asks trainees to rate the helpfulness of feedback and the effectiveness of the debriefing from the training team on specific days.

Each day trainees were given a little time to complete the DEST, although the DEST was voluntary, and trainees were free to decline to participate or terminate participation at any time. Trainers did not know which trainees participated and who did not. The data were collected through a secure website that automatically saved the data on a secure server managed by the Children and Family Research Center.

Response Rates

The response rate for the DEST at each time point was calculated by dividing the number of trainees who completed the DEST (numerator) by the total number of trainees in simulation training (denominator). Between April 3, 2023, and March 8, 2024, a total of 340 trainees

[7] See, Chiu, Y., Cross T.P., Wheeler, A., Evans, S., & Goulet B.P. (2023). Development and application of a self-report measure for measuring change during simulation training in child protection. Journal of Public Child Welfare, 17(2), 239–257. https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2021.2016546

participated in simulation training, and 334 (98%) completed the DEST at one time point or more. The DEST data included 1749 responses over six time points. The daily response rate for the six time points ranged from 86% to 96% (Table 3.1). Compared to the average response rate for the post-training survey (34.2%),[8] the weighted average daily response rate of 86% is very high.[9] Out of 334 respondents, 213 (64%) completed the DEST at all six time points.[10] Since a large percentage of trainees completed the DEST, it is reasonable to conclude that results from the DEST are representative of trainees, and the measure is being used successfully with investigators receiving simulation training.

Due to the shortage of courtroom professionals this year, several cohorts of trainees had to return to the training labs an extra day to do their courtroom simulation. Between August 21, 2023, and January 22, 2024, 26 trainees completed two Day 5 DEST due to the situation. When calculating the response rates, we only counted their Day 5 once.

Table 3.1

DEST Response Rate for Each Time Point

	All (Trainees = 340)		**Chicago (Trainees = 191)**		**NIU (Trainees = 149)**	
Time Point	Responses	%	Responses	%	Responses	%
Baseline	314	92%	186	97%	128	86%
Day 1	316	93%	188	98%	128	86%
Day 2	300	88%	180	94%	120	81%
Day 3	277	81%	174	91%	103	69%
Day 4	273	80%	176	92%	97	65%
Day 5	269	79%	172	90%	97	65%

Analysis

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare average confidence scores over time for all 184 respondents, whether or not they had responded at all six time points. Repeated measures ANOVA was used to measure change among the respondents who completed the DEST at each time point. Repeated measures ANOVA is a powerful method for examining change over time of the training week because variation due to trainee differences is eliminated by comparing each trainees' later scores to their earlier scores. , but it can only be used with trainees who completed the DEST at each time point. Because we anticipated a trend over time toward greater confidence day by day, the specific ANOVA method of trend analysis was used to assess whether the pattern of means across time followed a trend. Both linear and curvilinear trends were assessed for both the one-way ANOVAs and repeated measures ANOVAs. In the same analysis, we also compared fully live training with the hybrid model on trainee confidence.

[8] Poynton, T. A., DeFouw, E.R., & Morizio, L.J. (2019). A systematic review of online response rates in four counseling journals. Journal of Counseling & Development, 97(1), 33–42. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12233

[9] The weighted average daily response rate in the last annual report was 92%.

[10] In the last annual report, 70% of trainees completed the DEST at all six time points.

We conducted additional analyses to explore further meaningful patterns of DEST results. We ran additional repeated measures ANOVAs that included type of model (hybrid vs. fully live) as a between-subjects factor, to see if trainee confidence differed by training model. We examined DEST results across cohorts who received simulation training in FY2024 to assess whether changes in confidence were consistent across cohorts. We calculated standard descriptive statistics to examine trainees' appraisal of the feedback and debriefing they received in the training and compared Day 2 and Day 3 on ratings of debriefing using student's independent sample t-tests.

Moreover, because the quality of feedback and debriefing might affect the amount of confidence the trainees gained over the training, we conducted a multiple regression analysis to assess the relationship between trainees' ratings of the feedback and debriefing and their change in average confidence across the 13 skills. Instead of using change scores, which can yield misleading results, we regressed the average Day 5 confidence score (Y variable) on both the feedback and debriefing scores while controlling for average baseline score, which were used as covariates. This produces the most valid assessment of a variable's relationship to change[11]. The regression model included all the feedback variables and debriefing variables.

Results

To provide a context for interpreting results in this section, we provided a summary table of the key simulated activities of the training week (Table 3.2). Feedback from the training team—including simulation facilitators, actors/family members, medical and courtroom professionals—are given immediately after the associated simulated activities. Individual debriefings are specifically provided after the "Knock on the Door" and "Scene Investigation" simulations. Simulation facilitators conduct a group debriefing at the end of each day except Day 5. Problem Based Learning (PBL), a method to cultivate and reinforce trainees' critical thinking ability, is taught and used throughout the training week.

Of the survey respondents, 57.5% had a bachelor's degree and 42.2% had a master's degree (0.3% had missing data). Psychology (22.2%), Criminal Justice (20.7%), and Social Work (18.9%) were the most common majors among the respondents.[12] In response to the question of years of your employment experience in the child welfare field, 56.2% had 1 years or less, including 44.1% with no experience. Table 3.3 presents the distributions for the questions regarding trainees' on-the-job training (OJT).[13] Most of the respondents (80.8%) had OJT for four weeks or less. Few respondents (2.7%) had OJT for eight weeks or more.[14] Most respondents spent time in their OJT shadowing seasoned investigators (78.7%), reading related documents (65.8%),

[11] Cohen, J., Cohen, P., West, S.G., & Aiken, L.S. (2003). *Applied multiple regression/correlation analysis for the behavioral sciences*. Second edition. Mahwah, NJ; Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

[12] These three fields are usually the three most common majors of respondents each year; yet the percentage of each major varies year by year.

[13] We added the questions regarding the OJT during the pandemic because some trainees experienced a greater delay in receiving simulation training. They had more time on-the-job training (OJT) prior to receiving simulation training than other cohorts prior to the pandemic.

[14] In the FY2022 report, 94.7% of respondents had the OJT for four weeks or less.

and/or learning about the DCFS Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) (41.7%).

Table 3.2

Simulation Training Week Schedule

Day	Simulation
Day 1	***Calling the Reporter***: Trainees, as a group, interview the individual who called the hotline to make the report. A training staff person plays the reporter.
Day 2 *(In Person)*	***Knock on the Door***: Each trainee takes turns initiating contact with the family (standardized patients) at the mock house.
Day 3 *(In Person)*	***Scene Investigation***: Groups of two trainees take turns conducting a scene investigation in the presence of the perpetrators (standardized patients) at the mock house.
Day 4	***Interviewing the Parents***: All trainees formulate specific questions for parents (standardized patients) together. Trainees, as a group, interview the mock father and the mock mother separately in the classroom. ***Medical simulation***: Trainees are divided into two groups representing each child. Each group report the family situation and each child's information and communicate with the doctor played by a medical professional.
Day 5	***Courtroom Simulation***: Groups of two trainees prepare parents for the hearing. In the mock courtroom, each trainee provides a portion of the testimony in response to questions from the [state agency] attorney, parents' attorney, and guardian ad litem.

Table 3.3

Characteristics of On-the-Job-Training (N = 333)

Time on OJT	n	%	Tasks done during OJT	n	%
None	20	6.0	Shadowed seasoned investigators	262	78.7
Less than 1 week	34	10.2	Read related documents	219	65.8
1-2 weeks	108	32.4	Learned about SACWIS	139	41.7
3-4 weeks	107	32.1	Worked on investigation reports	61	18.3
5-6 weeks	39	11.7	Other	24	7.2
7-8 weeks	16	4.8			
More than 8 weeks	9	2.7			

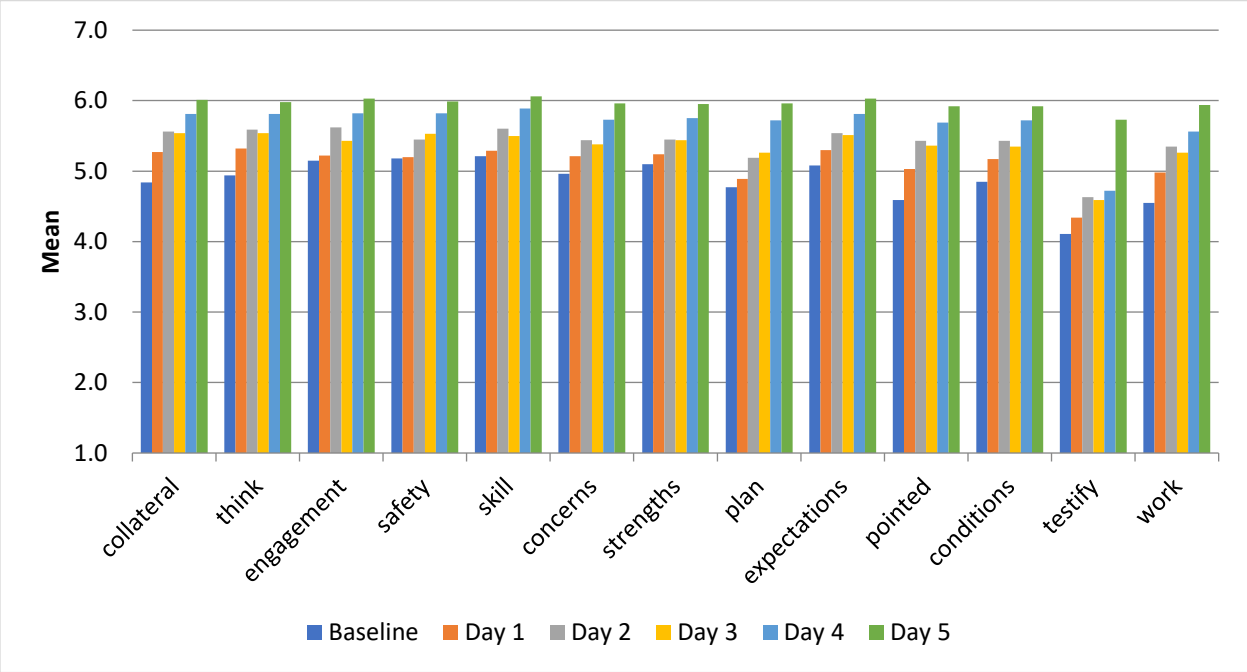
Changes in Confidence Level Over the Course of the Training

Figure 3.1 shows the changes for the entire sample of FY2024 over six time points for the 13 DEST items measuring confidence in one's skills. The average trainee's confidence increased between baseline and the last day across all 13 items. Confidence levels at baseline (Day 1 morning) ranged from an average of 4.1 (testify in court) to an average of 5.2 (engage families,

assess safety, integrate compassion and investigative skill). Confidence levels on Day 5 ranged between an average of 5.7 (testify in court) to an average of 6.1 (integrate compassion and investigative skill). As Table 3.4 shows, one-way ANOVAs testing a linear trend were statistically significant, indicating a significant linear increase in confidence over the course of the simulation-training week for all 13 skills. Note that any concerns about family-wise error or false discovery rate due to conducting multiple significance tests is mitigated by the very small p values that we obtained.

Figure 3.1

Confidence Level by Time Point



Our results also show significant quadratic and/or other higher order effects for some skills, meaning that some skills had "jumps" in trainee confidence on certain days in addition to the overall upward trend. Confidence in the skill of "answer pointed questions from parents and caregivers" increased substantially from baseline to the end of Day 2, when these skills are first introduced and practiced, and then again on Days 4 and 5. Confidence in "testifying in court" was fairly low from baseline to Day 4, and then increased substantially on Day 5, the day of the courtroom simulation.

Results for the effect size measures eta squared (η2) for the linear effects and Cohen's d comparing the DEST scores at baseline and the last day are presented in Tables 3.4 and Table 3.5. According to Cohen's (1988)[15] guidelines, most of the effect sizes were in the medium to large range (i.e., η2 = .06 to .10, or d = .68 to 1.04). Cohen (1992, p. 156)[16] has described a

[15] Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences*. New York, NY: Routledge Academic.
[16] Cohen, J. (1992). A power primer. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112, 155-159.

medium effect as "an effect likely to be visible to the naked eye of a careful observer" and a large effect as noticeably larger than a medium effect.

Table 3.4

One-way ANOVA Tests for Trends on Confidence over the Course of the Week (N = 1,727)

	df	***Linear***	**Quadratic**	**η2[17]**
Gather info from collateral contacts	1, 1721	34.73***	3.57	0.08
Think critically on facts vs. hypotheses	1, 1002	31.70***	3.12	0.08
Engage families	1, 1000	25.29***	1.03	0.06
Assess safety	1, 993	23.11***	2.13	0.06
Integrate compassion and investigative skill	1, 999	23.20***	1.41	0.06
Address any concerns about family statements and behaviors	1, 998	26.98***	0.33	0.07
Identify family strengths	1, 996	20.88***	1.20	0.06
Explain need for safety plan and/or protective custody	1, 998	37.79***	3.38	0.10
Explain DCFS role and expectations for keeping children safe	1, 1000	23.54***	0.12	0.06
Answer pointed questions from parents and caregivers	1, 988	43.36***	3.97*	0.10
Address underlying conditions	1, 997	29.09***	0.06	0.07
Testify in court	1, 999	32.15***	13.41***	0.07
Work as a DCFS investigator	1, 997	38.04***	0.53	0.09
Total Scale Mean	1, 1002	37.91***	0.23	0.09

Note. *$p < .05$, ***$p < .001$

[17] Cohen (1988) has provided benchmarks to define small (η2 = 0.01), medium (η2 = 0.06), and large (η2 = 0.14) effects.

Table 3.5

Statistics for Change between Baseline and Last Day of Simulation Training

Confidence Scale	Baseline		Friday		Cohen's d[18]
	M	SD	*M*	SD	
Gather info from collateral contacts	4.8	1.48	6.01	1.09	0.90
Think critically on facts vs. hypotheses	4.9	1.30	5.98	1.06	0.88
Engage families	5.2	1.30	6.03	1.04	0.75
Assess safety	5.2	1.25	5.99	1.12	0.68
Integrate compassion and investigative skill	5.2	1.30	6.06	1.09	0.71
Address any concerns about family statements and behaviors	5.0	1.30	5.96	1.09	0.83
Identify family strengths	5.1	1.29	5.95	1.14	0.70
Explain need for safety plan and/or protective custody	4.8	1.44	5.96	1.12	0.92
Explain DCFS role and expectations for keeping children safe	5.1	1.35	6.03	1.13	0.76
Answer pointed questions from parents and caregivers	4.6	1.42	5.92	1.12	1.04
Address underlying conditions	4.9	1.36	5.92	1.14	0.86
Testify in court	4.1	1.80	5.73	1.28	1.04
Work as a DCFS investigator	4.6	1.59	5.94	1.13	1.01
Total Scale Mean	4.9	1.18	5.96	1.04	0.98

Due to the shortage of available legal professionals, training for several cohorts between June and October 2023 did not include the courtroom simulation during their designated training week. The trainees were invited back to do the courtroom simulation at a later time. Those trainees asked to complete an extra Day-5 DEST survey. Of those trainees, 26 completed an extra survey at the time when they completed their courtroom simulation.

Figure 3.2 showed the average confidence over time for those trainees who did NOT have an extra day of training. Figure 3.3 shows the average confidence over time for those trainees who did have an extra day of training because of the postponement of the courtroom simulation. For both groups, their confidence in testifying increased after they completed the courtroom simulation (Figure 3.3).

[18] The rule of thumb on magnitudes of Cohen's is that d = 0.2 are small; 0.5-Medium; and 0.8-Large (Cohen, 1988, 1992).

Figure 3.2

Confidence over six Time-points of the Respondents Without an Extra Day (N = 239 - 287)

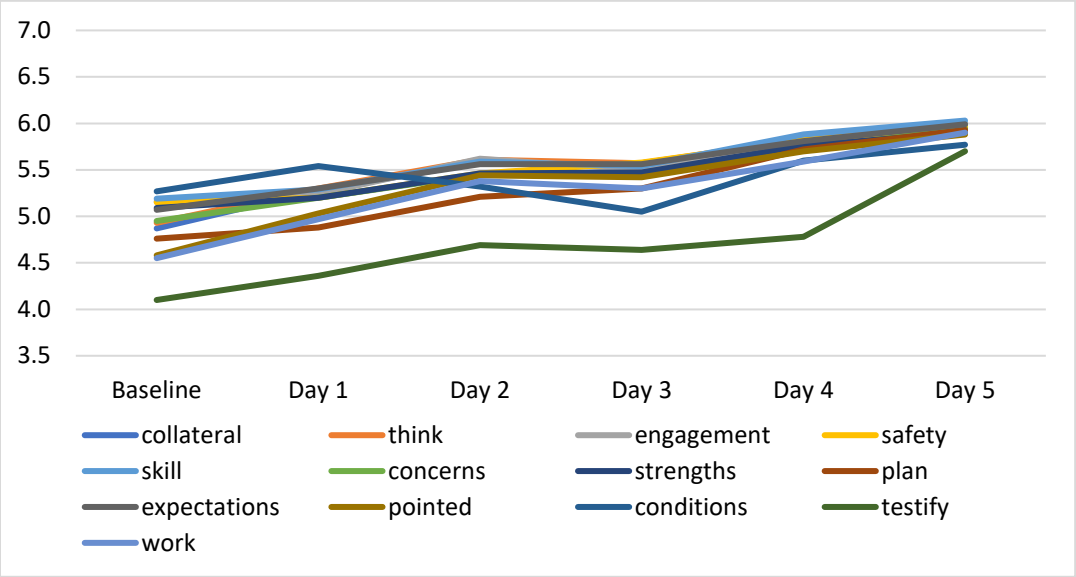
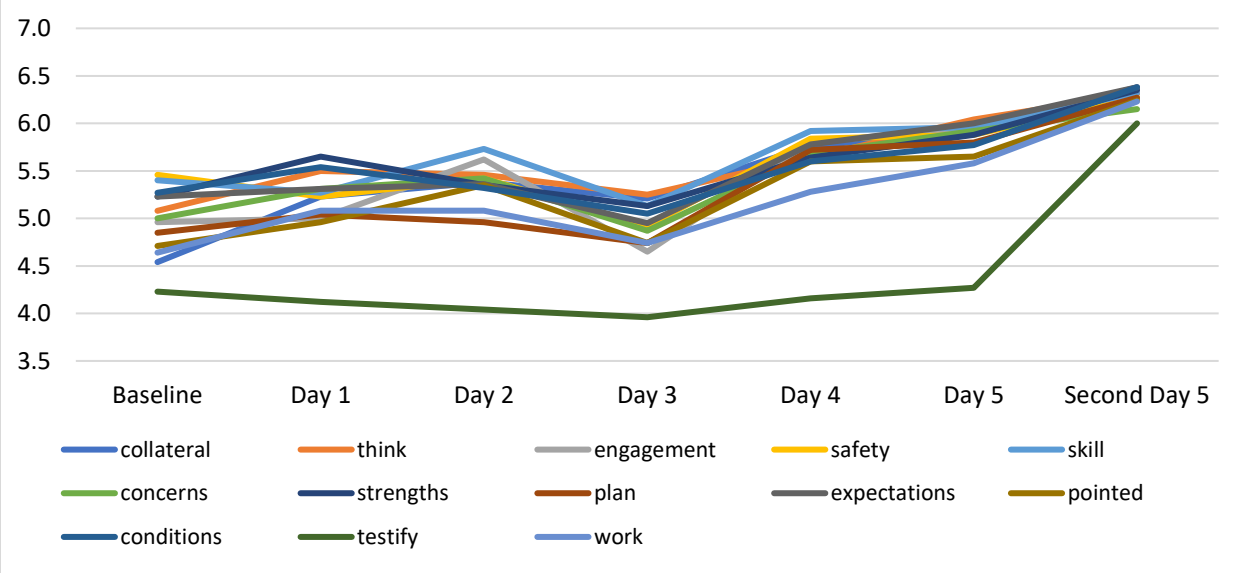


Figure 3.3

Confidence over seven Time-points of the Respondents who had an Extra day (N = 22 – 26)



Changes in Confidence Level with the Repeated Measure Sample

A repeated measures ANOVA was conducted with the 213 respondents who completed the DEST for all six time points during FY2024. Differences across time points were statistically significant for all 13 items (Figure 3.4 and Table 3.6). Consistent with the findings in the previous section, the confidence of respondents on performing the 13 investigative skills showed a significant linear increase over the course of simulation training week and the effect sizes were in the medium to large range (i.e., η2 = .06 to .12, or d = .74 to 1.10) (Table 3.6 and 3.7). As Figure 2.4 illustrates, confidence increased steadily for almost all skills across the simulation training week. The skills of "explain need for safety plan and/or protective custody" and "testify in court" showed a somewhat different pattern. The average confidence score for "explain need for safety plan and/or protective custody" increased substantially on Day 4 and Day 5 after the simulation of interviewing the parents. The average confidence score for "testify in court" stayed near baseline until Day 4, and then increased substantially on Day 5 — the day trainees did the courtroom simulation.

Figure 3.4

Changes in Confidence Level over 6 Time Points of the Simulation Training Week

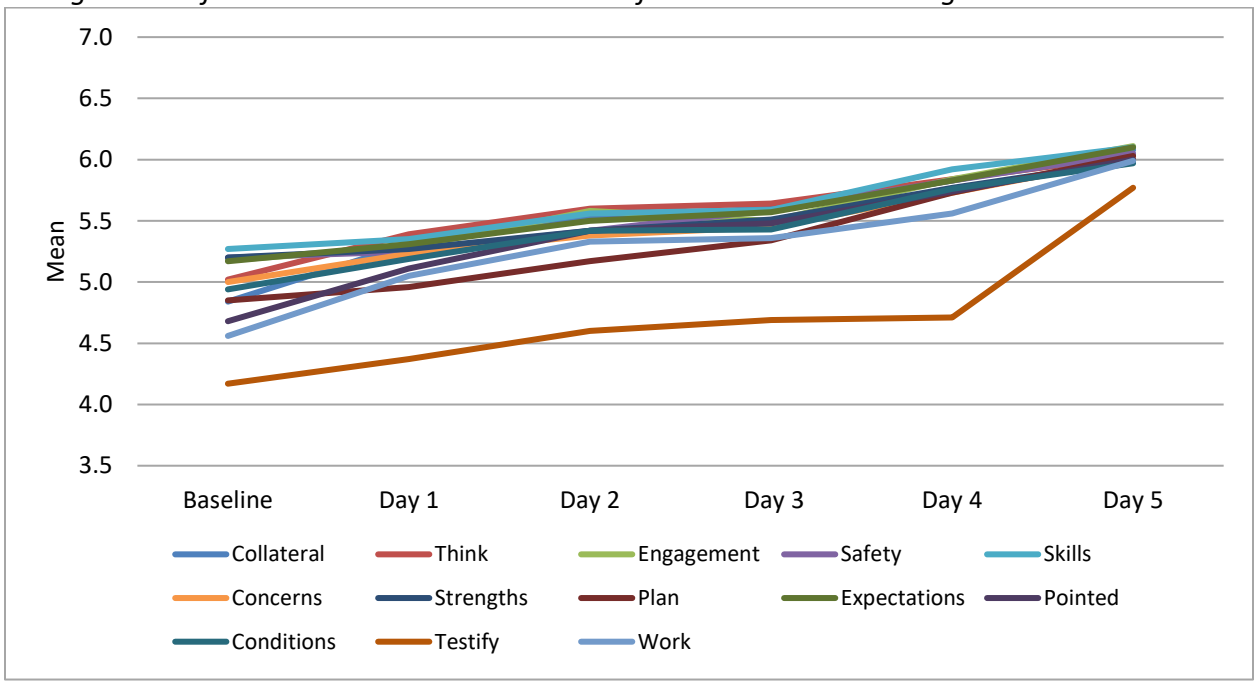


Table 3.6

Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance Test of Linear Effects (all p < .001)

Confidence Scale	N	*F*	η2
Gather info from collateral contacts	212	31.03	0.10
Think critically on facts vs. hypotheses	209	26.85	0.08
Engage families	210	31.24	0.08
Assess safety	206	24.85	0.07
Integrate compassion and investigative skill	202	26.63	0.07
Address any concerns about family statements and behaviors	211	29.57	0.08
Identify family strengths	210	20.55	0.06
Explain need for safety plan and/or protective custody	210	41.93	0.11
Explain DCFS role and expectations for keeping children safe	206	24.91	0.07
Answer pointed questions from parents and caregivers	203	39.91	0.12
Address underlying conditions	206	27.19	0.08
Testify in court	204	40.65	0.09
Work as a DCFS investigator	206	41.73	0.11
Total Scale Mean	213	45.07	0.11

Table 3.7

Statistics for Changes between Baseline and Last Day of Simulation Training-Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance Sample

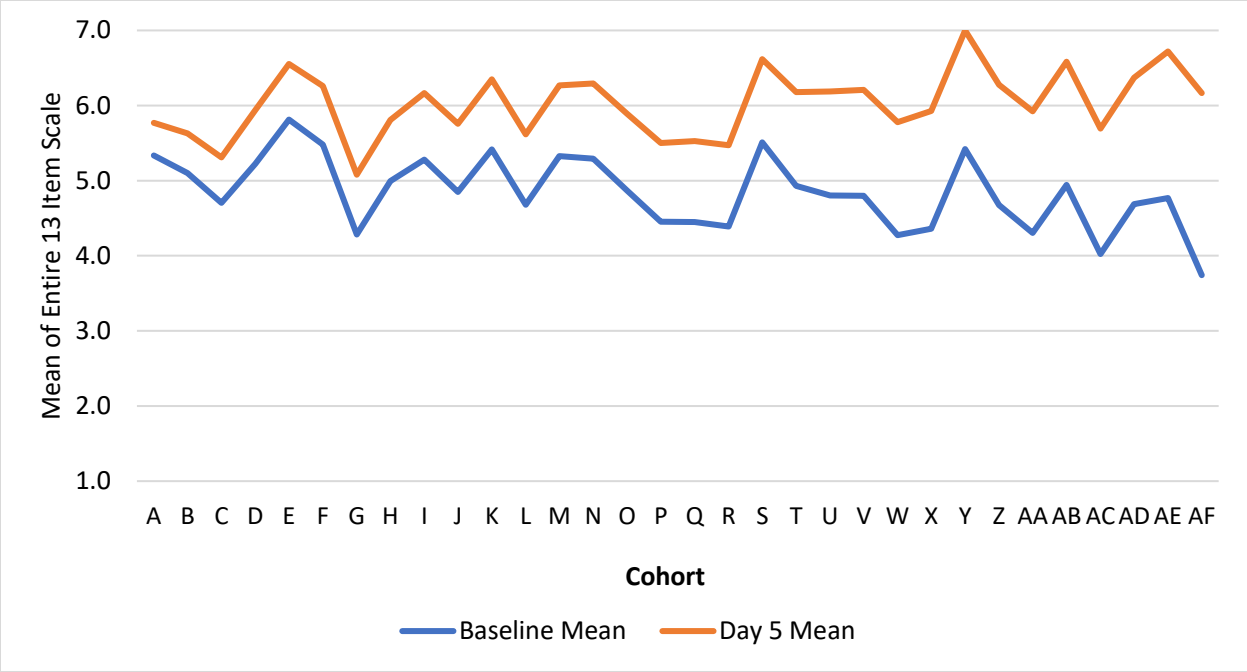
Confidence Scale		Baseline		Friday		Cohen's
	N	*M*	SD	*M*	SD	*d*
Gather info from collateral contacts	213	4.9	1.46	6.1	1.04	0.97
Think critically on facts vs. hypotheses	212	5.0	1.30	6.0	1.00	0.89
Engage families	212	5.2	1.27	6.1	0.93	0.85
Assess safety	212	5.2	1.22	6.1	1.02	0.75
Integrate compassion and investigative skill	210	5.3	1.27	6.1	0.99	0.74
Address any concerns about family statements and behaviors	212	5.0	1.25	6.0	1.02	0.89
Identify family strengths	213	5.2	1.26	6.0	1.07	0.68
Explain need for safety plan and/or protective custody	211	4.8	1.38	6.0	1.01	0.98
Explain DCFS role and expectations for keeping children safe	211	5.2	1.33	6.1	1.04	0.77
Answer pointed questions from parents and caregivers	209	4.7	1.36	6.0	1.02	1.10
Address underlying conditions	211	5.0	1.31	6.0	1.05	0.87
Testify in court	209	4.2	1.77	5.8	1.22	1.05
Work as a DCFS investigator	211	4.6	1.58	6.0	1.04	1.05
Total Scale Mean	213	4.9	1.13	6.0	0.95	1.04

Examining DEST Results Across Cohorts

Comparing DEST results across cohorts enables us to see if changes in trainees' confidence have been consistent across trainings. We examined DEST results by training cohort for 32 cohorts between April 3, 2023 and March 8, 2024. The sample size for each cohort ranged from 2 to 15. Figure 3.5 depicts the results of the cohorts in order from smallest to greatest change. The blue line shows the mean confidence level (across the 13 skills) at baseline for each cohort and the orange line shows the mean confidence level for each cohort at week's end. Thus, the gap between the blue line and orange line represents the increase in confidence over the course of the week. We can see that there is a noticeable gap for all but one cohort between the blue line and the orange line, indicating substantial change in most weeks. Though the sample size of each cohort is small, these results suggest that most cohorts, on average, experienced meaningful increases in confidence during simulation training.

Figure 3.5

Trainee Confidence Levels at the Beginning and End of the Simulation Training Week by Cohort in FY2024



Appraisal of Feedback and Debriefing

Feedback from the training team during individual and group debriefings is important for facilitating trainees' learning. In the DEST, we asked participants to rate the helpfulness of the training team's feedback and the effectiveness of individual and group debriefings. Each day trainees were asked to rate the helpfulness of whatever feedback they received that day—from the simulation facilitator from Day 1 to Day 4, from the actors/standardized patients on Day 2 and Day 3, from the medical professionals on Day 4, and from the courtroom professionals on

Day 5. Note that the rating of classroom trainer's feedback was excluded because the classroom trainers did not always attend the simulation training with their trainees after the training format was changed to be virtual. Each time trainees answered the question about feedback, 96% or more reported that the feedback was helpful or very helpful. This was true for each contributor to the training and for each day that this was measured (Table 3.8). Note that 334 trainees in total participated in the survey. There was a fairly high rate of missing data for the feedback questions, from 13% (Day 2 for simulation facilitators) to 34% (Day 3 for actors/family members), as compared to rates of missing data for the confidence scales (between 6% and 21%).

Table 3.8

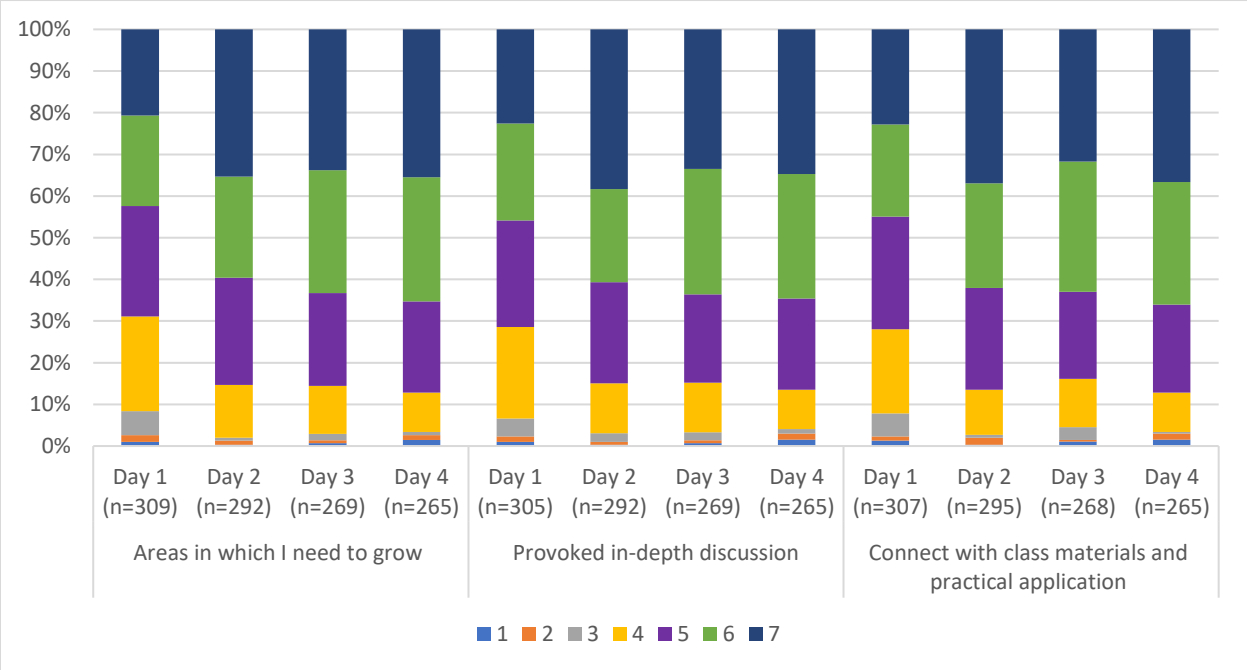
Trainees' Ratings of Training Team's Feedback by Days

	Day 1		**Day 2**		**Day 3**		**Day 4**		**Day 5**	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Simulation Facilitators										
Very unhelpful	4	1.4%	4	1.4%	7	2.7%	3	1.2%	-	-
Not helpful	6	2.1%	4	1.4%	3	1.2%	6	2.4%	-	-
Helpful	110	38.2%	66	22.8%	54	21.0%	67	27.1%	-	-
Very helpful	168	58.3%	215	74.4%	193	75.1%	171	69.2%	-	-
Total	**288**	**100%**	**289**	**100%**	**257**	**100%**	**247**	**100%**	-	-
Actors/Family members										
Very unhelpful	-	-	5	1.7%	8	3.6%	-	-	-	-
Not helpful	-	-	3	1.0%	1	0.5%	-	-	-	-
Helpful	-	-	73	25.3%	50	22.7%	-	-	-	-
Very helpful	-	-	207	71.9%	161	73.2%	-	-	-	-
Total			**288**	**100%**	**220**	**100%**	-	-	-	-
Medical Professionals										
Very unhelpful	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	1.6%	-	-
Not helpful	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	1.2%	-	-
Helpful	-	-	-	-	-	-	67	27.1%	-	-
Very helpful	-	-	-	-	-	-	173	70.0%	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	**247**	**100%**	-	-
Courtroom Professionals										
Very unhelpful	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	1.1%
Not helpful	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0.8%
Helpful	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	39	14.8%
Very helpful	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	220	83.3%
Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	**264**	**100%**

Respondents were also asked to rate the effectiveness of their group debriefing every day between Day 1 and Day 4 and their individual debriefing on Day 2 and Day 3 (individual debriefing was only provided on those two days). Three specific prompts were presented: 1) debriefing identified the areas in which I need to grow; 2) debriefing provoked in-depth discussion that led me to reflect on my skills; and 3) debriefing allowed me to connect with class materials and their practical application.[19] A seven-point rating scale was used, ranging from 1-Extremely ineffective to 7-Extremely effective. Majorities of respondents rated the effectiveness of group debriefing at 5 or above across all three areas (ranged 68.9% and 87.2%). The positive ratings for group debriefing also increased significantly from Day 1 to Day 4 (see Figure 3.6 and Table 3.9). The effectiveness of group debriefing during Day 2, Day 3, and Day 4 were significantly better than on Day 1. The effect sizes were in the small to medium range ($\eta 2$ = .01 to .03). Across Day 2 and Day 3, over 83% of respondents rated the effectiveness of individual debriefing at 5 or above across all three areas (see Figure 3.7). There was not a statistically significant difference between Day 2 and Day 3 in the ratings for individual debriefing. The positive ratings on debriefing support the conclusion that both group and individual debriefings helped facilitate learning.

Figure 3.6

Appraisal of Group Debriefing Effectiveness



[19] The Center for Medical Simulation (2009). *Debriefing Assessment for Simulation in Healthcare (DASH).* Authors: Boston, MA. https://www.unmc.edu/academy/community/simulation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/04/IMSH_2009_DASH.pdf

Table 3.9

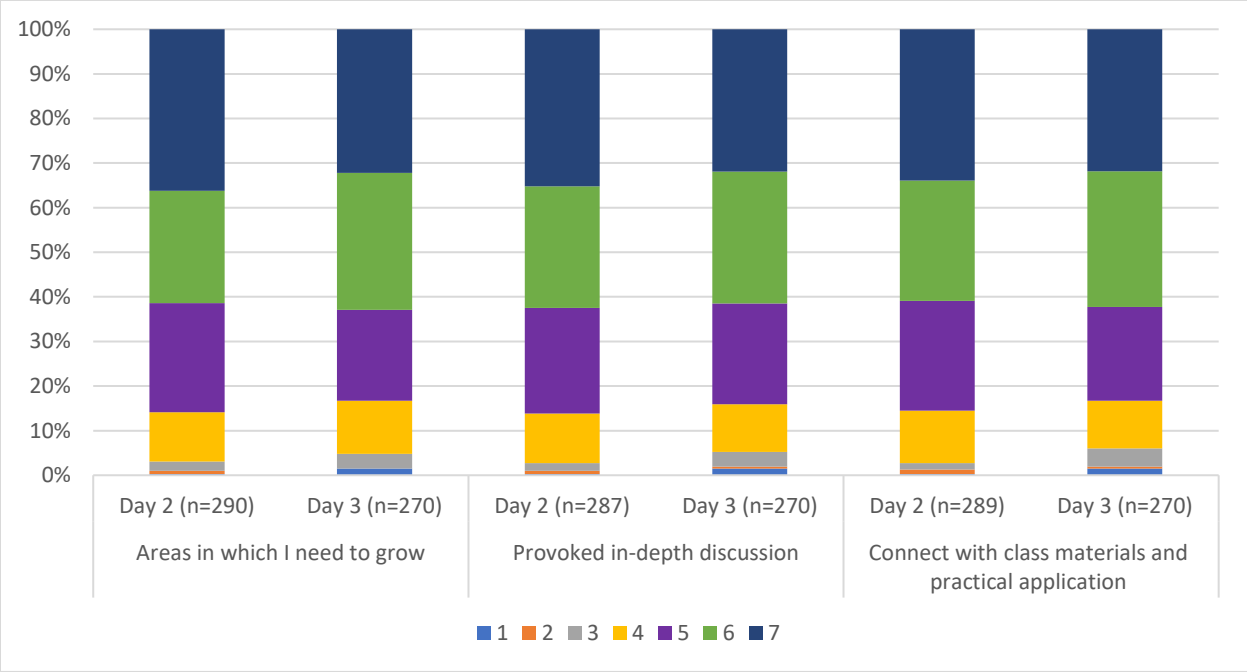
One-way ANOVA Comparison of Group Debriefing Effectiveness by Training Day

	df	Linear	η2	Post Hoc Comparison of Means Test
Areas in which I need to grow	3, 1131	16.45***	0.03	Day4 > Day1; Day 3> Day 1; Day 2> Day 1
Provoked in-depth discussion	3, 1127	10.75***	0.01	Day4 > Day1; Day 3> Day 1; Day 2> Day 1
Connect with class materials and practical application	3, 1131	12.00***	0.02	Day4 > Day1; Day 3> Day 1; Day 2> Day 1

Note. ***p < .001

Figure 3.7

Appraisal of Individual Debriefing Effectiveness



Because the quality of feedback and debriefing might affect the amount of confidence trainees gained over the training, we conducted a hierarchical multiple regression analysis to assess the relationship between trainees' ratings of the feedback and debriefing and their change in average confidence across the 13 skills. As Table 3.10 shows, we entered the following sets of variables into the regression model in sequence:[20] a) average baseline confidence score, b) helpfulness of feedback ratings (for simulation trainers, actors/family members, medical professionals, and courtroom professionals), c) ratings of effectiveness of group debriefing (for Days 1, 2, 3, and 4), and d) ratings of effectiveness of individual debriefing (for Days 2 and 3). The four variables measuring helpfulness of feedback explained 16.6% of the variance in average Day 5 confidence scores, over and above what was explained by average baseline confidence scores [F change (4, 179) = 11.702, $p < .001$]. Similarly, the four group debriefing variables explained 6.9% of the variance in average Day 5 confidence, over and above the previous variables in the model [F change (4, 175) = 5.312, $p < .001$]. These results indicate that perceptions of helpfulness of the feedback and effectiveness of the group debriefing were both significantly related to increases in trainees' confidence. The set of individual debriefing variables were not significantly related to changes in trainees' confidence over and above the effects of the feedback and group debriefing variables (Table 3.10). These results are similar to those from a hierarchal regression analysis reported in last year's program evaluation report.

The results for the individual predictor variables in Table 3.10 further our understanding of the relationship of feedback and debriefing to increases in confidence. While ratings of feedback from different participants (trainers, actors/family members, medical professionals, and courtroom professionals) had a significant relationship to increases in confidence, it was the courtroom professionals that had the largest effect. A trainee who had a 3-point higher rating of the courtroom professionals than another trainee was also likely to have a 1-point higher score on the 7-point confidence scale. Ratings of group debriefings from different days were all correlated. No one day of group debriefing had a greater effect than another day—it was the set of group debriefing variables from different days that had a significant effect.

[20] See Cohen, Cohen, West & Aiken, ibid.

Table 3.10

Final Multiple Regression Model Predicting Day 5 Confidence Score (Mean) (N = 185)

Variables	*B*	*SE*	*Beta(β)*	*p*	R^2 *Change*	*Sig. F Change*
Baseline Confidence Score (Mean)	.213	.054	.262	<.001	.199	<.001
Helpfulness of Simulation Trainers' Feedback (Mean)	-.293	.224	-.138	.192	.166	<.001
Helpfulness of Actors/Family Members' Feedback (Mean)	.259	.155	.137	.096		
Helpfulness of Medical Professionals' Feedback	.137	.138	.079	.323		
Helpfulness of Courtroom Professionals' Feedback	.331	.124	.163	.008		
Effectiveness of Group Debriefing-Day 1 (Mean)	.048	.050	.070	.334	.069	<.001
Effectiveness of Group Debriefing-Day 2 (Mean)	.114	.104	.144	.276		
Effectiveness of Group Debriefing-Day 3 (Mean)	.174	.107	.219	.105		
Effectiveness of Group Debriefing-Day 4 (Mean)	.066	.067	.086	.328		
Effectiveness of Individual Debriefing-Day 2 (Mean)	.046	.092	.058	.618	.002	.713
Effectiveness of Individual Debriefing-Day 3 (Mean)	-.071	.101	-.089	.482		

Note. Constant = 2,316, *F* (11,109) = 10.65, *p*<.001, R^2 = .544. Font colors show sets of variables that were entered into a hierarchical multiple regression model in sequence.

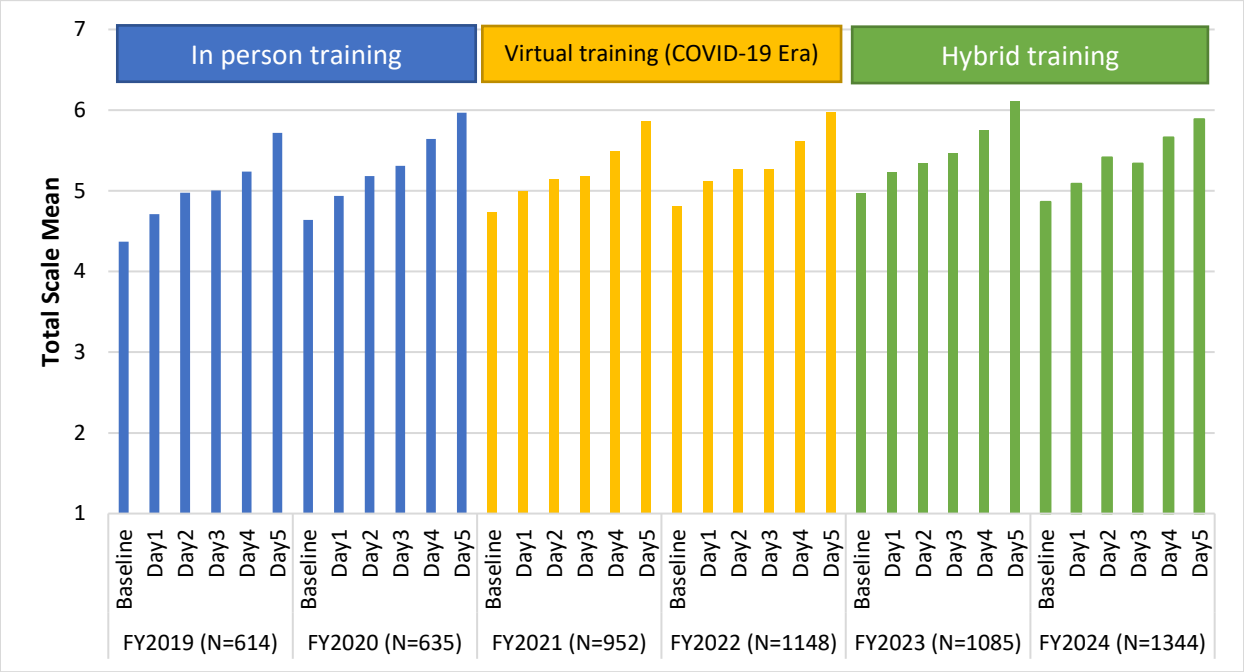
Historical Comparison on DEST Results over Time

The DEST has been used continuously since 2018 to assess simulation training in the CPTA. This enables us to compare results on the DEST over the course of four fiscal years: 2019 to 2024.[21] As Figure 3.8 shows, the results are similar for each fiscal year. There were comparable confidence scores and comparable increases in confidence from Day 1 to Day 5 for each fiscal year.

[21] Since the cutoff date of data for this report was on March 8, 2024, the FY2024 data in this section was partial between July 1, 2023 and March 8, 2024.

Figure 3.8

Confidence Level by Time Point by Fiscal Year[22]



Discussion

The Daily Experience of Simulation Training (DEST) provides valuable real-time data on trainees' changes in confidence during simulation training. It is the only evaluation method to date that measures change over the course of the simulation training week. Ninety-eight percent of the simulation training participants completed the DEST at least once during their training week. The high response rates enhance the validity of the results. The DEST in FY2024 continued to show statistically significant linear increases in confidence for all the 13 skills, with effect sizes in the medium to large range. For those who completed an extra Day 5 DEST survey, their confidence shows statistically significant increase over time as well. This suggests that simulation training is helping increase trainees' confidence in their skills over the course of the training week.

The cohort analysis also showed that increases in confidence were consistent across 32 cohorts in FY2024, including both cohorts with Chicago trainees and those with NIU trainees. Because sample sizes for this analysis were small and the reliability of individual results is limited, we think it is inadvisable to examine individual cohorts with smaller changes in the DEST. A better use of the cohort results is to conclude that increases in confidence during the simulation training week are typical but not guaranteed, so quality control remains important.

In terms of the appraisal of the training team, each member of the simulation team included in the analysis continued to receive positive feedback from large majorities of trainees this year.

[22] FY2023 in this figure only included the data from July 1, 2022, to March 28, 2023, due to the cutting date for this year's analyses.

The results concerning the helpfulness of feedback and effectiveness of debriefing with the training team suggest the importance of these elements of the training, since higher ratings on feedback and debriefing were related to greater increases in confidence. For the FY2024 sample, the courtroom professionals had the largest effect on trainees' increases in confidence. Also, ratings of group debriefing from Day 2 through Day 4 had a significant effect in trainees' confidence.

One limitation of the DEST is that it measures trainees' subjective sense of their abilities and is not an objective measure of their skills. So, we cannot know for certain from the DEST whether trainees' skills are actually increasing over the course of simulation training. Nevertheless, it is sensible to judge that trainees have a reasonably accurate appraisal of their own skills. Moreover, developing confidence through training is certainly a prerequisite to doing one's job well, and people's appraisal of their skills is likely to be correlated with their actual skills, even though the correlation may be modest. In addition, training is unlikely to be effective if trainees do not believe that their skills are increasing.

Another limitation is that changes in trainees' confidence is an imperfect measure of the impact of simulation training. Our thinking was that the most plausible explanation for changes in confidence during the training is the effect of what the trainers provided. But an alternative explanation is possible. Trainees may give themselves ratings indicating increasing confidence but believe that this was due to their own effort to learn the skills during the week, and not credit the training for helping them increasing their confidence. The high ratings on both feedback and debriefing suggest that trainees do credit the training team with helping them. Also, a regression analysis suggests that more value placed on the courtroom professionals' feedback and individual debriefing predicts greater increase in confidence. These results suggest that simulation training is likely to improve trainees' confidence.

Despite these limitations, the DEST provides important information on trainees' experience of the simulation training experience and data on their appraisal of growth in skills that are important for practice. It has provided consistent data on every cohort of simulation training for several years, suggesting the impact of the training experience and offering data that assist in quality control. Results from these data consistently indicate that trainees experience increases in skills over the course of simulation training and support the value of the training.

Chapter 4: Qualitative Data During the Training—DEST

Alongside the survey items that yield scores, the DEST includes open-ended questions to elicit qualitative feedback on participants' perceptions of simulation training. At each time point trainees were asked, "What were the most meaningful concepts or skills you learned today?" On both Day 2 and Day 3, another question was added, asking, "What was the most helpful feedback that you learned from your individual debriefing? And why?" Responses to these comments offer nuanced insights into individual experiences, enriching our understanding beyond numerical metrics alone. This chapter reports on an analysis that was adapted from the method of Braun and Clarke[23] to identify the themes expressed in the text responses. Altogether 1,772 DESTs were analyzed.

Learning Experience from Simulation Training

The daily learning experiences mainly revolved around the concepts or skills taught during the training. After analyzing the responses to open-ended questions, we identified distinct themes for each day. It is worth noting that not all DEST participants answered the question, and some comments were unrelated to the concepts or skills but expressed satisfaction or opinions about the training itself. In conducting content analysis, we exclusively focused on responses that occurred at least five times and addressed the concepts or skills acquired during the training as a central theme. Example quotations corresponding to each day of the week and theme are provided in Appendix B.

During Day 1 of the training, participants took part in simulated scenarios that involved calling reporters and gathering information. Among 184 who responded to the question, the majority of respondents (54%) felt that they had improved their questioning skills for reporters, which was one of the main objectives of the training. Additionally, participants noted an improvement in their information-gathering and documentation skills (11%) and an increased ability to think critically (10%). Other skills that participants felt were enhanced include family engagement skills (8%) and a deeper understanding of investigation procedure and planning (7%).

Day 2 of the training focused on the practical skill of introducing oneself to the family and gaining entry to the home to conduct the investigation. Reflecting on the topics covered during the simulation training, the majority of respondents noted improvements in their home investigation abilities, particularly in family engagement (39%), questioning and information gathering (25%), and skills for initiating home visits (16%). Additionally, learning safety skills with conflict management (11%) emerged as a new theme, while a small portion of respondents reported an increase in critical thinking ability (3%).

On Day 3 of the training, the focus was on scene investigation, that is, investigation of the mock home in which suspected abuse may have taken place. Analysis of responses revealed that nearly one-third of participants reported enhanced skills in scene investigation and interviewing

[23] Braun & Clarke, ibid.

(30%). The importance of conflict management and safety skills also remained prominent (22%), emphasizing their ongoing relevance in investigative scenarios. In addition, respondents highlighted improvements in questioning techniques (10%) and family engagement skills (10%). Further, some participants expressed a deeper understanding of investigative protocols and policies (6%). These findings underscore the effectiveness of a comprehensive training approach that addresses both technical competencies and interpersonal dynamics within investigative practice.

On Day 4, the training continued with a focus on interviewing parents and medical simulation. A high proportion of respondents noted their increased information-gathering and interviewing skills (40%), followed by a noteworthy portion who reported increased interaction skills with medical professionals (20%). Conflict management skills and ensuring safety (19%) remained meaningful themes for learning, highlighting their continued importance in investigative practice.

The final day of training covered courtroom simulation, and most respondents indicated an enhanced understanding of the courtroom process and testimony skills (50%), along with improved knowledge of courtroom preparation (20%). Several participants also reflected on their feelings of improvement through practical experience and feedback from experts during the courtroom simulation (16%).

Although the questions did not ask for feedback on the simulation training program, trainees completing the DEST sometimes provided it. We counted 62 DESTs on which trainers volunteered positive feedback. These comments often highlighted the training's utility and some expressed gratitude towards the trainers. Many of them used superlatives phrases such as “very beneficial” “I really appreciate the practice”, “the whole experience was amazing”, and “very rewarding”. A number of trainees stated that they enjoyed the process. Below are representative quotes:

> *They* [the trainers] *went above and beyond to increase our knowledge, confidence, skills, people skills, and how to deal with patients (especially in rough situations). Shout out to [*name of facilitator]…*she is an asset to this class.*
>
> *I believe all of the concepts and skills from foundation training, along with simulations, will enhance the child protection specialist's ability to do his or her job effectively.*
>
> *I love the training so far and I love the instructors as well. They're very helpful, very informative and very honest with their feedback and constructive criticism.*
>
> *I believe everything was helpful. All parts benefit and teach me how to become a better investigator and do my job effectively.*
>
> *Meaningful dialogue/concepts occur every day.*
>
> *All the information gathered is extremely helpful. it also helps to have the excellent trainers [*name of facilitators*] to assist us with our learning. Thanks so much!*

I loved the Chicago sims…I learned so much and would attend this again in a heartbeat. The teachers were all amazing and thorough.

This has been the most valuable training I have received since I have been in DCFS.

My final thoughts on simulations were that the simulation felt very real. The actors and environments were really immersive, and most of the way, I barely noticed that it was a non-real case. I think the courtroom was very realistic as well; the judge and ASA were great.

We counted 25 DESTs in which trainees had specific criticisms of the simulation training, though they supported it overall. Some of these included suggestions for improving simulation training, including expressions of the need to add more in-person sessions, address simulation environment issues, and extend the simulation training program.

I wish we could have more than just 2 days' worth of simulations.

It would be beneficial to either have the entire simulations training in person for the entire week or at least the full week of being in the hotel versus having to travel after sims and returning to work the following morning at 8:30. Also, the hotel accommodations were not good.

I need to work on assertiveness. Simulation training should be incorporated throughout training and not limited to a week with only two in person contacts.

I feel as though everything was meaningful. However, it would be beneficial if we did the entire SIMS training in person and focused on one case all week instead of trying to rush through multiple cases.

I think the simulation would benefit if more time was spent engaging with the families and going into simulated houses. I also think the simulation would benefit if we could be given the opportunity to simulate the moment where we inform the family that protective custody is going to be taken.

Overall, I like the idea of sims and the real time playing out of cases that I have gotten to do is much appreciated but I think it would be more beneficial if we got to do a bit more, as it could lead to more teaching moments and seeing where our bias stand and where we can improve.

We counted 19 DESTs that were entirely negative. The negative training experiences primarily stemmed from Days 2 and 4. These trainees identified various issues: redundant information with no new insights, feelings of disconnection during the training sessions, perceived lack of realism in the simulations, and negative interactions with trainers. Three respondents simply stated they gained 'nothing' from the training, while some expressed that the lessons from simulation training felt repetitive.

There is a lot of repetitive information being stated throughout the week. I don't feel any new information was given today.

For the most part, the skills that were described were/are skills I currently have and feel proficient in.

I felt that today was a bit redundant in the form of keeping the family on Zoom for so long, given the conditions of the mock case we had. I feel that if we would have all gotten our own cases.

Some participants also experienced a sense of disconnection during the training. One factor is the hybrid nature of simulation training, combining online and in-person training. One person also perceived a conflict between their simulation training and classroom training.

I really had a hard time staying focused today from going from an in-person schedule for the past two days and then a virtual schedule today. On Monday, I had to drive after hours five hours, and then the same thing happened on Wednesday. This is exhausting and needs to be either all in person or all virtual. I felt some of the information was conflicting on how this is done in the offices which also was confusing. That difference makes you question if you are capable of doing the job.

I feel as though there is a huge disconnect between the facilitator [trainer] *and the class. I am unsure if it is because we are virtual and not in person. However, I do not feel as though the trainer's style of teaching is effective. It is my hope that tomorrow will be better.*

There is definitely a disconnect between the process from in person and online. This training is very difficult to complete online.

Today was very frustrating. Much of what was taught was in direct conflict with what was just taught in Foundations. The scenario today did not seem to align with what would be the steps taken in real world situations. Instead of discussing the concepts or hearing those concerns, it seemed more of a this is how it is response.

Some trainees felt the simulations did not accurately mirror real-life scenarios.

In person interviewing and simulation is very different. While I understand and appreciate the need for simulation training, I feel there could be a better way to conduct the simulation training.

The interview with the reporter did not flow like an actual interview. Only asking questions that were prompted and not able to go with the flow like an actual interview. Not encouraging, helpful, or empathetic.

There was a role play with a telephone call. I do not find role-playing effective for training. The experience has no comparison to the actual workout in the field.

A few trainees commented on their negative experiences with their trainers, citing issues such as a perceived lack of leadership and compassion as well as demanding attitudes.

> *Honestly, I can think of none. I believe the trainers lack leadership, experience, maturity and knowledge. This training is simply not beneficial.*
>
> *Trainers are rude, demanding, feeling the need to exert power and authority and also lack compassion. This has negatively impacted SIMS experience and brings dread for each day. It's embarrassing to be addressed and made to feel the way I have, sometimes over things out of my control. When the trainers target my classmates with this aggressive tone and authority, it makes me uncomfortable.*
>
> *Just working collaboratively with the team. On a different note,* [Trainer A] *is a good facilitator with a kind and courteous demeanor, and* [Trainer B] *is quite curt and is not a friendly facilitator. I feel her feedback is welcome, but the way in which individuals are treated are unkind and disrespectful at most. It is unfortunate to write this.*
>
> *I honestly felt like today, the vibe of the classroom was very off. From other trainees being short to irritation from the trainers. I did not want to engage or ask questions because I felt it would be seen as not a good use of the time. At the end of the day I want to be the best investigator that I can be, and I don't feel like today boosted me in any way for that.*

Reflection on Feedback Gained from Individual Debriefing

Trainees had individual debriefing after the simulations on Day 2 and Day 3. The majority expressed that they had meaningful learning experiences during this phase. Common themes included (1) enhancement of self-reflection and self-awareness (n = 91); (2) development of interview and investigation skills (n = 90); (3) improvement in family engagement skills (n = 40); (4) understanding and ensuring self-safety (n = 39); (5) development of questioning skills (n = 22).

Enhancement of Self-reflection and Self-awareness (n = 91)

Nearly 30% of participants reported gaining self-awareness regarding their own skills, along with a heightened understanding of their strengths.

> *Be more confident because I know what I'm doing.*
>
> *I learned that I hide my stress better than I thought.*
>
> *Strengths, understand my own areas for improvement.*
>
> *The flow of me asking questions was conversational and caused the actors to be more comfortable.*
>
> *The most helpful feedback was when I was told that I was not intimidating to people.*

Letting me identify what I thought were my strengths and weaknesses first and then hearing the feedback.

I need to gain the families trust a little more before trying to dive into the report. Slow down and not rush things.

I was able to identify some strengths and weaknesses that I had when interviewing the family. I was able to identify what things i was missing when interviewing.

Some also mentioned that trainers' constructive feedback helped a lot in improving their skills.

The constructive feedback was the most helpful for me because it allowed me to see how others view my areas of improvement.

The instructors [trainers] *were extremely helpful and were able to provide feedback and step in to assist with additional steps.*

I believe all the feedback to be very helpful, and all the feedback from the actors was also helpful. I like how they shared the things I did right and the areas I could improve on.

The most helpful feedback was both the positive and negative one. More so the negative because it will allow me to fix my mistakes, and it helps me know what I need to work on.

It allowed me to step back and reflect on the feedback as well as think about what i need to do going forward; the most helpful feedback was to be careful of my surroundings and where to sit during an interview.

The most helpful feedback was when facilitator explained the things to do when walking into the home during the simulation training and what things not to do. Feedback during the simulation training as far as looking for closed doors in the house, watching where the baby was sleeping, mom leaving the baby on the couch sleeping and walking away and how to respond to the family when observing their child baby. Also, the entire feedback regarding the simulation with my partner.

I love the training so far, and I love the instructors [trainers] *as well. They're very helpful, very informative, and very honest in their feedback and constructive criticism. Those pointers that they give us, help when we go home to self-reflect and ponder on ways that we can improve and how we'll do things differently next time around. The trainers are making it easier for us by fully breaking down everything that we need to know, and they do not mind going back to something if the group, as a whole, doesn't have a complete understanding of something.*

Development of Interview and Investigation Skills (n = 90)

Many participants noted that feedback obtained during debriefing sessions significantly contributed to their knowledge and proficiency in interviewing and investigation techniques.

Furthermore, in response to the question about what they learned that day, the majority of respondents answered with detailed reflections on their skills as a result of the debriefing process.

> *Concerns or issues that we may have throughout the investigation that we may need to consult with our supervisor on.*
>
> *I learned that during an interview to keep everyone engaged in the conversation, to not allow the alleged perpetrators to go in separate rooms. To be aware of my surroundings at all times.*
>
> *To explain in detail to the family that due to the Abuse and Neglect Child Reporting Act, I cannot disclose the reporter to them to protect the confidentiality of the reporter as well as the family.*
>
> *That my investigating style was laidback but professional, knowing that I have the skill to balance being a professional and make the family feel more trusting about me because I am human too.*
>
> *Redirecting the conversation back to the investigation. Collecting all party's information while in the home and asking for additional support.*
>
> *I learned a lot about identifying safety concerns, identifying risks, I was able to see some things I missed in regard to interviewing, and the complexity of each case and what can happen and how we can start with small questions, to bigger questions.*

Improvement in Family Engagement Skills (n = 40)

Some respondents reported improvements in their family engagement skills following debriefing sessions with both families and facilitators. Of those participants who mentioned family engagement skills, the majority emphasized that feedback received from families was highly beneficial. The below answers to the question of what they learned today exemplify this theme.

> *Engaging the family, feedback from the family, and facilitators. Advice on being more attentive to my surroundings picking up on things the family says.*
>
> *I learned that joining with the family and making them feel human is so important to productive working. It helps break down the barriers and form a working relationship.*
>
> *I enjoyed hearing the family's feedback. It put things in a different perspective and allows you to reflect on how you are asking questions or how the family might perceive those questions. It was also nice to have the instructors feedback at the same time as it went hand in hand so well. I found this to be very useful for the group and the individual.*
>
> *I loved the opportunity we had to receive feedback from the family in addition to the facilitators/instructors.*

Understanding and Ensuring Self-Safety (n = 39)

Many trainees commenting on the debriefing also highlighted the awareness of ensuring self-safety during investigations. Debriefing sessions enabled trainees to identify safety concerns they may have overlooked and learn strategies to address situations safely. Below are representative answers to the question about what they learned that day.

> *The safety feedback was very helpful for future work in the field.*
>
> *It was very helpful when the facilitator* [trainer] *came in while in investigation. The trainer was able to walk us through the whole safety assessment practically.*
>
> *The most information I learned was to remain in a safe stance and position and not allow a person to get in my space. This will help me go home every night.*
>
> *Make sure to ask worker safety questions and to ask if others present may observe the conversation.*
>
> *Reminder to check for my worker safety questions before entering the home. Feedback was very helpful from actors and instructors*
>
> *I learned a lot about identifying safety concerns, identifying risks, I was able to see some things I missed in regard to interviewing, and the complexity of each case and what can happen and how we can start with small questions, to bigger questions.*
>
> *Make sure that when entering the rooms of the family, let them lead, and you follow behind them.*
>
> *Regarding domestic violence disclosures. How to address situations in a safe way. When making a mistake it is important to not repeat the mistake.*

Development of Questioning Skills (n = 22)

In response to the question about what they learned that day, some participants pointed to helpful feedback for improving questioning skills. This included suggestions to avoid asking pointed questions, use more structured and organized sentences, and not hesitate to ask uncomfortable questions.

> *Ask questions even when uncomfortable, do not be afraid to stand up/move/be strategic.*
>
> *Feedback on asking pointed questions and redirecting to get more information as new things are brought up.*
>
> *It was to avoid asking pointed questions and to let the family tell their story. It was helpful because I did not realize that I was doing that. I will continue to work on it.*
>
> *It was helpful that the instructor let us know that certain questions can be triggering for the family, and we need to be mindful of how we are asking but also what we ask. I had inadvertently triggered the father to kick us out of the home by asking about the*

footprint on the door because he felt like I was interrogating him and didn't like it. I found it helpful to see how certain questions can lead to safety threats.

Have a little bit more structure and have my questions in order so I can flow through the conversation easily.

While most of the debriefing experiences were positive, some felt their debriefing was insufficient or unhelpful.

I did not feel my feedback was useful due to not having enough time in the simulation.

I felt like I did not receive much feedback on what I needed to improve on.

I cannot see what they saw and spoke. I would like to see my video back so that I can better understand their feedback and put things in context.

There was no individual debriefing today. There was only group feedback, and no feedback was provided from the actors. The focus was on what was missed, and no positive feedback was provided.

Chapter 5: Post-Training Satisfaction Survey

All newly hired child protection investigators participate in Certification Training for Child Protection, which includes five weeks of classroom training followed by five days of simulation training. DCFS administers an online post-training satisfaction survey to trainees on the Certification Training experience. Ten survey questions ask about trainees' assessment of simulation training. Survey respondents rate the quality of simulation training on eight Likert-scaled questions and provide written responses to two open-ended questions about their appraisal of simulation training. There is also an open-ended question at the end of the survey for respondents to share any additional general comments. For this year's evaluation, DCFS provided data from the post-training survey from March 8, 2023, to February 15, 2024. This chapter analyzes quantitative data on simulation training from the FY2023 post-training survey to assess trainees' experience of simulation training and the open-ended questions of the post-training survey.

Methods

The post-training survey includes eight items in which trainees rated the quality of simulation training on 5-point Likert scales that range from strongly disagree to strongly agree:

- I felt prepared to participate in the SIM lab; the simulation environment was a safe learning environment;
- I felt the training was conducted in an environment conducive to learning; the scenario environment was realistic;
- I was able to incorporate my training into practice; the SIM lab provided a realistic experience of the challenges I will face when working in the field;
- Participating in the scenarios helped to increase my confidence in my role;
- I felt respected during my debriefing;
- The debriefing sessions provided valuable feedback.

We computed descriptive statistics for the entire sample on these scales.

Results

Simulation Training Satisfaction

A total of 154 survey respondents completed the survey during observed period, March 8, 2023 to February 15, 2024. Figure 5.1 shows the distribution of ratings on the satisfaction items for the entire sample (*N* = 151 to 154). Majorities of respondents ranging from 77.5% to 88.9% agreed or strongly agreed with over half of the items. Somewhat smaller majorities agreed or strongly agreed with the statements on realistic scenario (76.6%), realistic experience (77.1%), and confidence (74.5%). Across items, the percentage strongly disagreeing or disagreeing was 12.3% or less.

On the 5-point scale (strongly disagree=1; disagree=2; undecided=3; agree=4; strongly agree=5), the mean on the eight items ranged from 4.0 (prepared, real scenario, real experience, confidence) to 4.3 (respected). Based on these data, the average response across

all items was at least “agree,” which suggests indicating at least some degree of satisfaction on average (see Table 5.1).

Figure 5.1

Distribution of Training Satisfaction Ratings (N = 151-154)

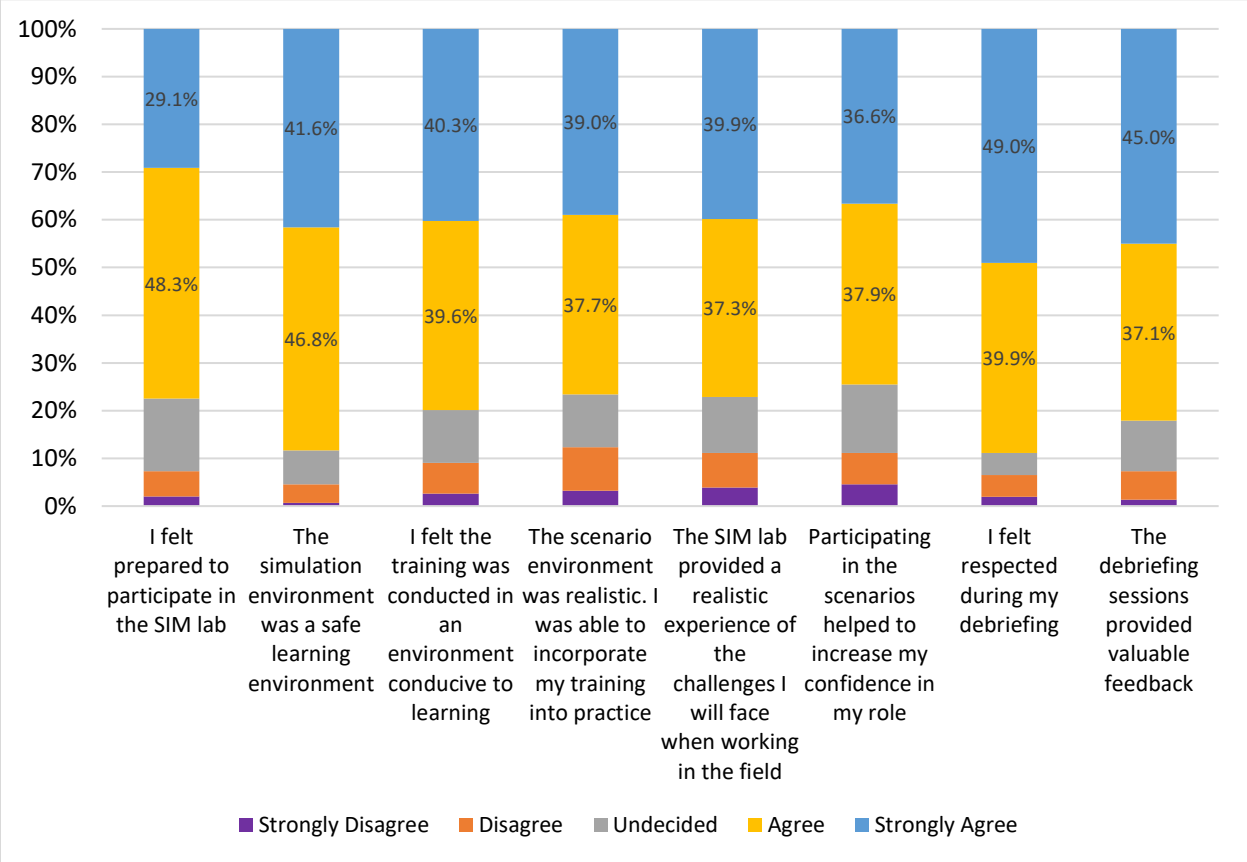


Table 5.1

Means and standard deviations of satisfaction questions

Item	N	*M* (SD)
I felt prepared to participate in the SIM lab	151	4.0 (0.92)
The simulation environment was a safe learning environment	154	4.2 (0.80)
I felt the training was conducted in an environment conducive to learning	154	4.1 (1.00)
The scenario environment was realistic. I was able to incorporate my training into practice	154	4.0 (1.08)
The SIM lab provided a realistic experience of the challenges I will face when working in the field	153	4.0 (1.08)
Participating in the scenarios helped to increase my confidence in my role	153	4.0 (1.09)
I felt respected during my debriefing	153	4.3 (0.90)
The debriefing sessions provided valuable feedback	151	4.2 (0.94)

Analysis of Open-Ended Responses

In addition to the Likert-scaled items, the post-training satisfaction survey also includes open-ended questions in which trainees can write comments. The two open-ended questions asked about trainees' experience in simulation training: 1) "Please comment on this experience" and 2) "Please add a few statements that summarize your experiences in the Simulation Labs to help us improve the scenarios." Because these questions and respective responses did not differ thematically, we combined respondents' answers to the questions and analyzed the text from both questions together. We also included answers from another general open-ended question about Certification Training as whole, if a respondent's comments were related to simulation training. It is worth noting that not all participants responded to the questions, and some responses included information that was not related to simulation training; therefore, we limited the analysis to the open-ended responses that were related to simulation training.

An initial read of the comments was used to identify common themes from responses among trainees who responded to the open-ended questions. Overall, there were 117 respondents who answered the open-ended questions. The respondents' sentiments leaned towards being positive (n = 71) rather than negative (n = 27) or mixed/neutral (n = 20). Beyond general sentiment, we also identified themes regarding aspects of their training that appeared more frequently or were notable, and illustrative quotes were then selected for each. We identified the following themes:

- Experiences with trainers/instructors
- Experiences with actors
- Realism of simulation training
- Training format, integration of content, trainer experience, and logistical issues
- Experiences with trainers/instructors

Experiences with Trainers/Instructors

Responses mentioning trainers/instructors were among the most frequent in the data, with a wide range of sentiments ranging from very positive to very critical. There were roughly the same number of positive comments (n = 26) as negative comments (n = 24). Positive responses usually consisted of praise for the trainers on their feedback, guidance, and creating an environment conducive to learning:

> *[*Name of simulation facilitator*] gave great feedback. Even when I made mistakes, she redirected me in a way that allowed me to feel comfortable. The scenario was hard, but it was necessary. I believe this type of SIM environment will prepare investigators for real situations. [*Name of simulation facilitator*] is definitely a great asset to IDCFS!*
>
> *The experience was wonderful. I felt prepared beforehand. Initially, it was nerve wracking, however, the instructors guided me through every step of the process. The feedback was great*.

*I had a great experience in Sims. There was only one day during the training where my insecurities stepped in but the following day, I was able to bounce back with the support of the trainers. Big shout out to [*name of simulation facilitator and lab staff member] *Excellent Trainers.*

The feedback provided was really helpful even having a video to look at and take notes on the feedback we were given at that time. It was really helpful to hear from other people how I did and what to improve on.

Overall great training with great information and feedback from instructors/role players.

In contrast, some trainees felt that trainers caused them to feel intimidated, uncomfortable, or disrespected. Some trainees also reported feeling that there was a lack of connection or incorrect information presented by trainers that did not match their training or experiences, while other comments concerned trainers' lack of experience:

Sims with [names of two facilitators] *was somewhat misleading and hard to follow at times. They had a conflict as to how the participants were to "knock on the door" and made me feel a little uncomfortable during this time. They base these scenarios on [*one*] County only and no other counties. As not all of us work out of [*that*] County and would be better off with more realistic scenarios from our personal areas.*

I found the simulation to be slightly disorganized, it seemed like there were not many instructors with investigative experience.

The Simulation lab training should be taught by actual DCFS workers so they can make sure they are providing us with the correct information.

I felt uncomfortable after the trainers had to assert their status as our supervisors to justify their rationales.

*Again, I wish we could have had one trainer throughout the whole process. When we got to SIMS the trainer that was there was not very prepared and did not engage with the class. This made it hard to feel comfortable to ask questions when [*name of simulation facilitator*] was not present in the room.*

Experiences with Actors

Trainees also shared varied perceptions regarding the simulation training actors. There were about the same number of positive comments (n = 26) and negative comments (n = 24) regarding the actors. Positive responses regarding the actors regarded their ability to adapt with the trainees and make the simulation feel realistic:

I feel the actors were great at adapting to minor cues they would hear in our tones, actions, or lines of questioning.

The actors were engaged as real families and really got into their roles. It was beneficial and helped prepare me for real-life resistance.

I feel like the actors did a very good job of presenting a realistic scenario.

The actors did well, and they were good representations of what one can encounter.

Actors' behavior was sometimes deemed unrealistically and unhelpfully aggressive:

> *The actors in the simulation were over the top. The male actor was mean and not in the acting way. He was rude and hateful only to certain people.*
>
> *I felt that the SIMS was unrealistic and set up for failure. I felt that with the continued interruptions during the second scenario prohibited my ability to regain control or to form any rhythm. I also felt that I was completely set up for failure, and on day two I honestly felt very defeated. I have been working in the field for 15 years and have had experience knocking on doors and working with hostile clients and dealing with extremely angry people. I can say that in the real world I would never have entered the apartment, due to how the individual reacted at the door. I felt that I would have stepped back and called the police and waited for their arrival before entering the apartment. I was triggered and maintained myself until I was out of the apartment.*
>
> *I did simulation in DeKalb and the male actor on Wednesday was out of line. I understand that it needs to be a realistic scenario but it did not feel that way. He called me a skank and white dumb bitch. I do understand this happens in real life but that a little over the top for practice and he was only saying it to the white women. If this role was reverse[d], it would not be taken lightly in training or in the real world. I also know he also threaten[ed] a classmate with breaking his ankles. The fact we could not leave in the middle of the interactions is the problem. If we were in a home and this occurred our supervisor would tell us to leave or wait for law enforcement.*

Realism of Simulation Training

Some trainees felt the training provided realistic scenarios and situations that are reflective of the ones they would face while on the job (n = 18):

> *The experience helped answer any lingering questions and doubts I had about how to apply procedures to real life.*
>
> *I thought the scenarios were realistic and helped prepare me for conflict in the field.*
>
> *SIMS gave me examples of what I need to do during real home visits. I think the scenario provided a perfect example of everyday people that we may run into.*
>
> *The actors were engaged as real families and really got into their roles. It was beneficial and helped prepare me for real life resistance.*
>
> *Realistic scenario and helped understand my strengths and weaknesses. Able to do all the things wrong in the simulation and self-correct and progress in time.*
>
> *The simulation was a very realistic experience. It challenged me to move out of my comfort zone.*
>
> *The experience was believable and gave me a lot of strategies to apply in real life. The actors did well and they were good representations of what one can encounter. The instructor was knowledgeable and able to effectively discuss our weaknesses and strengths. We were always given strategies to use when we were off track. The instructor promoted self-care and how to effectively do our job while being alert to our*

surroundings to keep safe. Sims taught us how to de-escalate situations, so our investigations stayed focused.

The foundation was great. The Simulation was awesome. It really prepared me what to expect and then some. It opened my eyes to so much more in this job.

The training provided as close to real life as possible. I am very glad to have had this experience. I feel more confident going into the field as a licensed child welfare professional.

In contrast, some trainees felt that the scenarios were unrealistic and/or not representative of their own experiences (n = 20). Some trainees felt that the simulation needed to be tailored to regional differences (n = 4). Illustrative quotes are below:

Some of the virtual portions were set up such that it was difficult to behave as if we were in-person.

SIMS training could've had a better impact on my learning; however, there were a ton of aspects that were unrealistic. The order in which we do things and how in the real world these cases are unpredictable. Also, the trainer was a bit closed off to opinions and our real-life experiences.

I feel SIMS training would be better learned out in the field with coworkers and us learning in our own areas. I feel the family used in SIMS training was a little over the top. They are supposed to help teach us to be better at our position, not intimidate us and make us more afraid to go out to the real world.

This experience was not the best. I felt the experience was not realistic as to what my area deals with. I feel as though having SIMS labs in every region would be more beneficial and applicable to what we do in the field.

Did not follow policy and procedure. The resistance received was very unrealistic. The actors/actresses were very good, but it was nothing close to what really happens.

Part of the sims training was too extreme and unrealistic. Conversations with the trainers did not feel authentic or substantive.

It would be nice to have simulations that were pertinent to the area of the trainee. Rural communities deal a lot with drugs and getting calls into homes that have drug use.

Training Format, Integration of Content, Trainer Experience, and Logistical Issues

Some trainees suggested changes regarding the allocation of time in training or the need for additional training (n = 24), and others reported challenges due to the format of hybrid/virtual training (n = 15), with a preference for in-person training:

There should be at least 3 scenarios that trainees go through. Just like in this simulation Hayden Thomas was the icebreaker/introductory scenario and Rhodes/Jones was the guided scenario, there should be one more where the trainees are doing everything from start to finish on their own. Only at the end of the day/session should they receive full feedback.

Overall, it was okay. However, I do think it would be more beneficial to have one week classroom, one week sims to apply what we learned in real time. I also think training could be longer if doing the above stated format, giving more simulation time. The classroom knowledge is essential, but the simulations are more impactful in the day-to-day job of a DCP worker.

Adding another day of simulation training would be helpful for learning. For example. Day 1 of SIMS give[s] a mild case where Day 2 of SIMS gives an extreme case. A medium experience case scenario would be beneficial for the build-up of learning.

Please provide more time to prepare learners, better communication, or an additional week in sims.

Sims was good, but I think that SIMS should have been 1 week as a learning experience. It was too short.

It would have been helpful to focus on conducting an investigation from start to finish. I feel as if we did not get to see how that is, including consulting with our supervisor, etc. We needed more time to go through each step and debrief. Again, I think focusing on one scenario would have been helpful so we could see an investigation all the way through. It would have enhanced my understanding on the flow of the investigation and what it entails. I understand some aspects of it, but not all of them.

I wish the in-person training is longer. The virtual is okay but to fully be free of distractions and fully engage, I prefer in-person.

There was a lot of information provided. It could have been more helpful to focus on 1 case and get all the information collected as you would in the field. I think there were some steps we couldn't get to because of working on the first case.

I believe that trainees should have more experience in the Simulation Labs. I do believe that 2 face-to-face interactions with the families are enough to gain enough experience. When doing the final face-to-face interaction with the family there is so much going on in the house and there is a lot of information you need to obtain. Then to be expected to get cases immediately is unrealistic. There should be more one on one situations that you get to experience to build confidence.

I do think there should be another week of training in order to feel more comfortable and prepared. It was very fast-paced and having education at that level and pace can be difficult to absorb, as well as be prepared for implementation.

Sims was overwhelming, exciting, anxiety inducing, and wonderful. I felt I learned so much, that I was pushed to be my best, and that I gained an extensive amount of knowledge. I really wish in-person sims was longer. I feel we could have benefited from things such as a room specifically designed to do a home safety checklist, several different scenarios as in-depth as the Mike Jones/Carla Rhodes scenario, and more training on how to do visual inspection of a baby/toddler/child/teen. While the classroom learning was important, I feel that the Sims training was more hands on and therefore will have a larger impact on my overall learning.

SIM was one of my best sessions. I wish they increase the number of days actually CPS playing a role as investigator.

I wish that there were more scenarios, I am a hands-on learner and felt like it would have been more helpful to me in the field.

Some trainees shared feeling a disconnect or confusion regarding the integration of information from classroom training and/or professional experience with what they were being taught in simulation (n = 12). Some trainees felt the lack of experience in child protection of some trainers had an impact on training (n = 9):

SIMS virtual was not helpful at all. Policy and procedure [were] not followed.

The last two days I really didn't want to attend. I felt like the CERAP was taught differently in foundations vs. SIMS. SIMS handed out papers for court that were not the same as what anyone in our group experienced and then were told minutes before court to use that in court. It was all just a mess. I felt like the idea of SIMS is a wonderful tool, however the way it was executed was not positive.

Also, when doing CERAP, we didn't discuss risk or safety. We focused on if a threat existed or not. So that was a little confusing.

During the simulations, the trainers were not knowledgeable about some policies and procedures. The trainer provided false information. The trainers were very boring. The trainers should undergo the same training as the investigators.

I feel that all the "trainers" of SIMS should have experience as previous investigators. It is hard to train someone on real life experiences when you have never been in that role in the field.

Although I did feel that SIMS was a good training experience and the "families" did a great job. I still am unsure if I am doing the job correctly because of conflicting information between practice and what was discussed in SIMS as policy.

Simulation should match what we are taught in class. I do feel that we were able to use the information we were given to apply it to sims. However, when writing notes or speaking to collaterals, parents or doctors, there was confusing information around job title. Are we CPS or investigators? This information changed when we were at SIMS.

After the training in [the classroom training], I was very confident for simulation with a solid understanding of what my job was and how to do it. Once simulations started, a different trainer gave different information about how things are done causing confusion. Simulations contradicted what was learned in [the classroom training], but what was learned in [the classroom training] is what I have experienced with OJT.

Some also shared that the travel demands (n = 18) expected of them were not considerate of their well-being, safety, and work-life balance:

In my opinion, the schedule to the training is not considerate to those who have to travel a far distance. In addition, there were practices that were not consistent with those that we were taught prior to the SIMS training and even in our respective offices. It was

confusing for quite a few of us. We were chastised in court for things that we were told not to do in the simulation. This should have been told to the panel prior to court.

*If SIMS training is happening when there are bad weather conditions the facilitators need to be more caring about the employees rather than focusing on getting the training completed how they expected. There is no reason employees should have to drive more than 3 hours in snow and ice just to sit in a hotel because one of the training days got canceled for in person. Anyway, yes, it's not as effective to complete on the computer; it's better than risk[*ing*] employees' lives.*

The driving is also a struggle. Having to be engaged Monday virtually all day then drive 5 hours to Chicago was a bit much, especially since they gave us "homework" to do Monday after the day was over. They stressed the importance of getting the homework done by a certain time and if we were going to go over, we had to request an extension, which is normal. However we did not receive feedback on our homework for several days after they stressed that we had to have it done that day.

First and foremost, the simulation training is 4-5 hours away for some individuals. We were expected to complete online training all day and then drive 4-5 hours at night, alone, to somewhere we had never been. It seemed as if our safety was not of a concern or thought about. Then we were expected to turn around and do it all over again 2 days later.

On Monday, we were virtual and they kept us until 4:30 and gave us homework to do. Normally, I would not have a problem with this. However, an ice storm occurred on Sunday and continued on until Tuesday. So, I was told that I had to drive up to Dekalb on Monday evening, in the dark, in the middle of an ice storm. I arrive to Dekalb 3 hours later to find out that NIU closed their campus on Tuesday so SIMS would be virtual on Tuesday. I had to sit in my hotel room with everything closed all day Tuesday. SIMS virtual was not helpful at all. Policy and procedure [were] not followed. Wednesday, we did get to participate in person. However, the weather was so foggy on the drive back that I could barely see in front of me. Once again, in the dark because we had to be at SIMS all day. I felt the instructors discounted our feelings on the unsafe weather conditions.

It is very difficult to stay focused on hybrid schedule when you have to drive over five hours away to get to training. This needs to be done all in person. I feel that all the "trainers" of SIMS should have experience as previous investigators. It is hard to train someone on real life experiences when you have never been in that role in the field. The SIMS location was Dekalb and the DCP training was in Springfield.

As a side note, it is hard to believe that there is a lab in Springfield that's not in use, and the confusion that takes place regarding when and where sims is going to happen. It was not easy to book a hotel room, direct billing, etc. It's hard to prepare for leaving your family/pets/etc. in the first place. There's a lot to be done when leaving your home for days and DCFS does not make that process easier. We are driving all over the state to prepare for this job. It's a long and exhausting process. Please do something to make it

less stressful. Driving into Chicago after a full day is not fun for anyone. It's a 3-hour drive for me and getting in at 10 pm isn't ideal. Please consider the safety of your trainees.

Sims needs to be more than one week. Also, traveling so far to attend sims or leave, while exhausted from a full day of training the day before and the day of was really dangerous. Most of us traveled 3 or more hours to reach Chicago, and training is exhausting. I struggled to make it home, had enough time to pet my dogs for a minute, then I had to go to bed so I could be up for training again the next day. Sims is exhausting, physically, mentally, and emotionally, and then to add another several hours on top of that to get to and from Sims is a recipe for disaster. Traffic was so bad when we left Chicago that it added another hour to our drive times, most of us not returning home until after 9pm. Travel time needs to be accounted for properly, as well as the mental drain.

Having two separate travel days during a week of simulations caused me to be tired and unfocused as well as having an auto accident.

Discussion

As in previous years, most participants reported satisfaction, with the majority of participants responding they agreed or strongly agreed with the positive statements expressed by the items. Thus, most participants felt that simulation training achieved its objectives and provided them with a realistic experience, valuable feedback, and increased confidence in their role.

Many of the trainees who responded to the open-ended questions shared positive sentiments for simulation training. Trainees who mentioned trainers in their responses provided a mix of positive and negative experiences. Comments praising trainers focused on trainers' feedback, guidance, and credited them with providing an environment where they felt comfortable and safe. Critical comments were focused on inconsistencies regarding information and instructions (e.g., policy and procedure from prior training) or lack of respect or openness to feedback from trainers. Some trainees shared positive comments on the actors for their performances that made training feel more realistic. However, others reported that they felt scared or targeted and discriminated against due to inappropriate or "over the top" behavior from some actor(s).

Comments attesting to the realism of simulation training focused on how the scenarios or acting seemed realistic and would help prepare trainees for work in the field. In contrast, some trainees deemed simulation training to be unrealistic due to the scenarios being too "extreme" or "over the top," while others mentioned a disconnect between the information they had before simulation from other training or experience, differences between the lab and their work regions, or the constraints of virtual training.

Lastly, there were a range of comments that were related to simulation training's format, integration of content, trainer experience, and logistical issues. Trainees frequently suggested that simulation training would benefit from being longer or increasing the number of in-person days, decreasing virtual days, and using time differently. Some trainees felt that the information presented or taught to them in simulation was inconsistent with their classroom training or work experience. Others felt that trainers' lack of experience in child protection was a deficit.

Trainees from regions far from the training location reported that the travel requirements expected of them were burdensome and stressful.

Overall, these analyses demonstrate that most trainees had were satisfied with simulation training and its objectives, a finding that has been consistent over the years. While open-ended responses tended to be positive and provided praise for simulation and its many aspects, the critical comments provided areas that could be reexamined or improved, which would strengthen simulation training for future trainees. According to one of our stakeholders, some personnel changes have already mitigated some of the problems mentioned.

Chapter 6: Quantitative Data at Follow-up—Simulation Follow-up Survey (STF)

Simulation training for Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) child protection specialists has been provided for over six years. Over a thousand newly hired child protection specialists have been trained through this method. To understand whether or not simulation training has had an impact after these trainees enter the field, the evaluation team conducted a follow-up survey with trainees who have received simulation training. The survey focused on the following domains: 1) their current appraisal of their past simulation training experience; 2) their appraisal of their skills learned from simulation training and its application in the field; 3) factors supporting their learning from simulation training in their current work; 4) suggestions for improving simulation training. The survey questions in the second domain, their appraisal of their skills learned from the simulation training and their application in the field, were drawn from studies regarding confidence[24] and holistic competence[25] of child welfare workers who received simulation training.

Method

DCFS sent the program evaluation team a list of email addresses of DCFS child protection specialists who received the simulation training. We combined this email list with a list of simulation trainee email addresses the program evaluation team had from conducting the Daily Experience of Simulation Training (DEST) survey. This yielded 1,142 email addresses in total. Several times between October 2023 and April 2024, we sent to these email addresses an invitation to participate in the survey. Excluding those email addresses that returned a message of undeliverable, and those people who informed us that they never received DCFS simulation training, we derived a final legitimate recruitment number of 1,046 email addresses. We received 173 responses from this recruitment; however, several participants took the survey more than once and several only completed the first page of the survey which was related to

[24] Chiu, Y., Cross T.P., Wheeler, A., Evans, S., & Goulet B.P. (2023). Development and application of a self-report measure for measuring change during simulation training in child protection. Journal of Public Child Welfare, 17(2), 239–257. https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2021.2016546

[25] Bogo, M., Kourgiantakis, T., Burns, D., King, B., & Lee, E. (2021). Guidelines for advancing clinical social work practice through articulating practice competencies: The Toronto Simulation Model. Clinical Social Work Journal, 49(2), 117–127 https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-020-00777-6 ; Havig, K. Chiu, Y., & Tran, S. (2023). Defining metacompetence for child welfare investigators using qualitative data from simulation training. Children and Family Research Center. https://cfrc.illinois.edu/pubs/bf_20230614_DefiningMetacompetenceForChildWelfareInvestigatorsUsingQualitativeDataFromSimulationTraining.pdf ; Chiu, Y., Havig, K., Tran, S.P., & Cross, T.P. (2023). FY2023 Program Evaluation of the Child Protection Training Academy for New DCFS Investigators. Children and Family Research Center https://cfrc.illinois.edu/pubs/rp_20231019_FY2023ProgramEvaluationOfTheChildProtectionTrainingAcademyForNewDCFSInvestigators.pdf ; Havig, K., Pharris, A., McLeod, D.A., Natale, A.P., & Miller-Cribbs, J. (2020). Assessing new child welfare worker competency through social simulation with standardized clients: Rubric development and pilot testing. Journal of Public Child Welfare, 14(5), 531–552. https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2020.1724237 ; Tufford, L., Bogo, M., & Katz, E. (2017). Examining metacompetence in graduating BSW students. Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work, 22(1), 93–110. https://doi.org/10.18084/1084-7219.22.1.93 .

their current employment status. Excluding the duplicated and incomplete responses, the final survey sample included 166 unduplicated respondents, which yielded a response rate of 16%.

In addition to questions about the participants' employment status, demographics and background, the simulation training follow-up (STF) survey contains several scales. It assessed respondents' satisfaction with the simulation training (on a Likert scale that ranged from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree). It also assessed their perceptions of the impact of the simulation training on their procedural competency (subscales: rapport-building, communication and information-gathering, and safety assessment and ending) and meta-competency (subscales: skills in action, deepening of perspectives on diversity, managing affective intensity in the moment, and openness to learning). Each competency item began with the phrase "Simulation training helped me…" and then presented the competency, and participants responded on a scale from 1-very poorly to 5-very well.

In addition, thirteen items measured participants current confidence in their child protection skills, on a Likert scale that ranged from 1-lowest to 7-highest. We further asked about three variables that could support or hinder their use of what they learned from the simulation training—supervision, caseload, and checklist of things required by policy—on a Likert scale that ranged from 1-strongly hinder to 5-strongly support. Participants rated each of these factors on a five-point scale from strongly hinders their use of simulation training to strongly supports it. Finally, we asked five open-ended questions that asked respondents to describe different aspects of their simulation training experience (See Appendix B for the content of the survey).

Scale Testing

The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was .92 for the Simulation Training Satisfaction Scale, .98 for both the Procedural Competency Scale and the Meta-Competency Scale, and .96 for Current Confidence in their Work. The results indicate that each scale has excellent internal consistency.

A principal component analysis with varimax rotation of the Satisfaction with Simulation Training Scale, Procedural Competency Scale, and the Meta-Competency Scale yielded two factors. The eigenvalue for the first factor was 28.67 (a total of 73.5% of the variance) and was 1.57 (a total of 73.5% of the variance of 4.0%) for the second factor. Out of the 39 items in the principal component analysis, 34 had loadings of .50 on the first factor; most of these had loadings greater than .70. This factor seemed to be measuring a general negative or positive appraisal of simulation treatment. The loadings on the second factor suggested that this factor pertained to how the respondent was personally treated in simulation training. We calculated a score that was a composite of three items that had loadings on the second factor that exceeded .75: the simulation environment was a safe learning environment, I felt the training was conducted in an environment conducive to learning, and I felt respected during my debriefing. This score represents the safety and respect they felt in the training.

Analysis

In addition to descriptive data analysis, we conducted one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and t-tests, to examine whether respondents' simulation training experience varied by their employment status, demographics and background. A multiple regression analysis was also

conducted to examine the relationship between their simulation training experience and their current confidence in child protection work.

Results

Table 6.1 presents results for respondents' demographics and background characteristics. Of our study sample, 78.5% were females, 47.3% were White, 38.4% were Black, and 60.6% were age 31-50 years old. The majority either held a bachelor's or a master's degree. Only 32.3% had a degree in Social Work. Almost two-thirds of participants had three or more years of experience in child welfare, but about a quarter had less than one year. About half had worked at the Division of Child Protection (DCP) of DCFS for less than one year and more than three-quarters had worked with DCP for less than three years. One-third of respondents carried 11–25 cases and 28.4% carried more than 25 cases in the past 30 days.

Table 6.1

Respondents' Demographic and Background Characteristics

Variable	N	%	Variable	N	%
			Demographics		
Gender (n = 144)			Race-ethnicity (N = 146)		
Female	113	78.5	White	69	47.3
Male	31	21.5	Black	56	38.4
			Latinx	16	11.0
Age (n = 142)			Two or More Races	4	2.7
30 years and younger	22	15.5	American Indian and Alaska Native	2	1.4
31-40 years old	39	27.5			
41-50 years old	47	33.1	Asian	1	0.7
51 years and older	34	23.9	Other	2	1.4
			Background		
Degree (n = 145)			Tenure in child welfare (n = 146)		
Bachelor's Degree	70	48.3	Less than one year	35	24.0
Master's Degree	73	50.3	1 to 2 years	18	12.3
Doctoral	2	1.4	3 to 5 years	34	23.3
			6 to 10 years	21	14.4
A degree or degrees in Social Work (n = 146)			More than 10 years	38	26.0
Yes	47	32.2			
No	99	67.8	Tenure in DCFS DCP (n = 141)		
			Less than 6 months	43	30.5
Degree in (with no Social Work degree) (n = 91)			6 to 12 months	29	20.6
Psychology	28	16.9	1 to 2 years	36	25.5
Criminal Justice	26	15.7	3 to 5 years	27	19.1
Human Services	10	6.0	More than 5 years	6	4.3
Sociology	8	4.8			
Law Enforcement	3	1.8	Caseload in the past 30 days (n =134)		
Other	16	9.6	None	22	16.4
			1 to 5	11	8.2
			6 to 10	18	13.4
			11 to 25	45	33.6
			More than 25	38	28.4

Table 6.2 summarizes the respondents' current employment status. Most of respondents (81.8%) still worked in DCP. Of those who still worked in the DCP, 91.7% still held the "Child Protection Specialists" position. Most of them work in either the Central (33.8%) or Northern (32.3%) region, followed by 19.5% in the Cook region and 14.2% in the Southern region. Of those who no longer worked at DCP (n = 30), 76.7% left DCP within 2 years, yet 72.4% still worked in DCFS, either holding a position in a different form of child welfare practice, or moving up to an administrative position.

Table 6.2

Respondents' Current Employment Status (N = 165)

Questions	Options	N	%
Do you still work at Division of Child Protection (DCP):	No	30	18.2
	Yes	135	81.8
If yes,			
what is your current position: (n = 133)	Child Protection Specialists	122	91.7
	Child Protection Supervisors	2	1.5
	Other	9	6.8
what is your regional office: (n = 133)	Cook	26	19.5
	Northern	43	32.3
	Central	45	33.8
	Southern	19	14.3
If no,			
how long did you stay in DCP after you completed the simulation training for your certification training: (n = 30)	Less than 1 year	12	40.0
	1 to 2 years	11	36.7
	3 to 4 years	5	16.7
	More than 4 years	2	6.7
Which of the following best describes your current position: (n = 29)	A different child welfare position at DCFS	17	58.6
	An administrative position at DCFS	4	13.8
	Child welfare related work as a state employee outside of DCFS	1	3.4
	Child welfare-related work, but not as a state employee	3	10.3
	I no longer work in child welfare	4	13.8

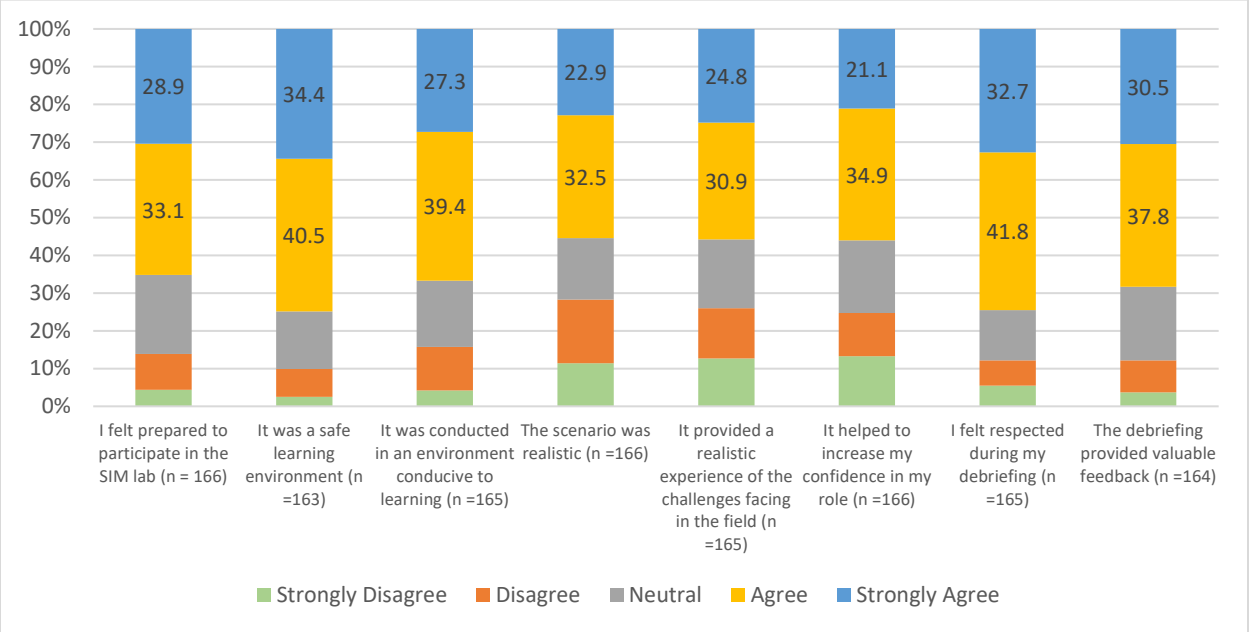
Satisfaction with Simulation Training

To measure satisfaction with simulation training, the items on the first scale in the survey asked participants their degree of agreement or disagreement with positive statements about their simulation training (see Figure 6.1). On each item, a majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the positive statement about simulation training. About 75% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that "the training was a safe learning environment" and "they felt respected during their debriefing" and over 60% of respondents agreed that "the debriefing

provided valuable feedback," "the training was conducted in an environment conducive to learning," and "I felt prepared to participate in the SIM lab." Other items had agreement from only a small majority of respondents: "the training helped increase my confidence in their role" (56.0%), "it provided a realistic experience of the challenges facing in the field" (55.7%), and "the scenario was realistic" (55.4%). The mean on the nine items ranged from 3.4 (e.g. the scenario environment was realistic and I was able to incorporate my training into practice) to 4.0 (the simulation environment was a safe learning environment) on a 5-point Likert scale (see Appendix Table D. 1 for the mean of items).

Figure 6.1

Satisfaction with Simulation Training



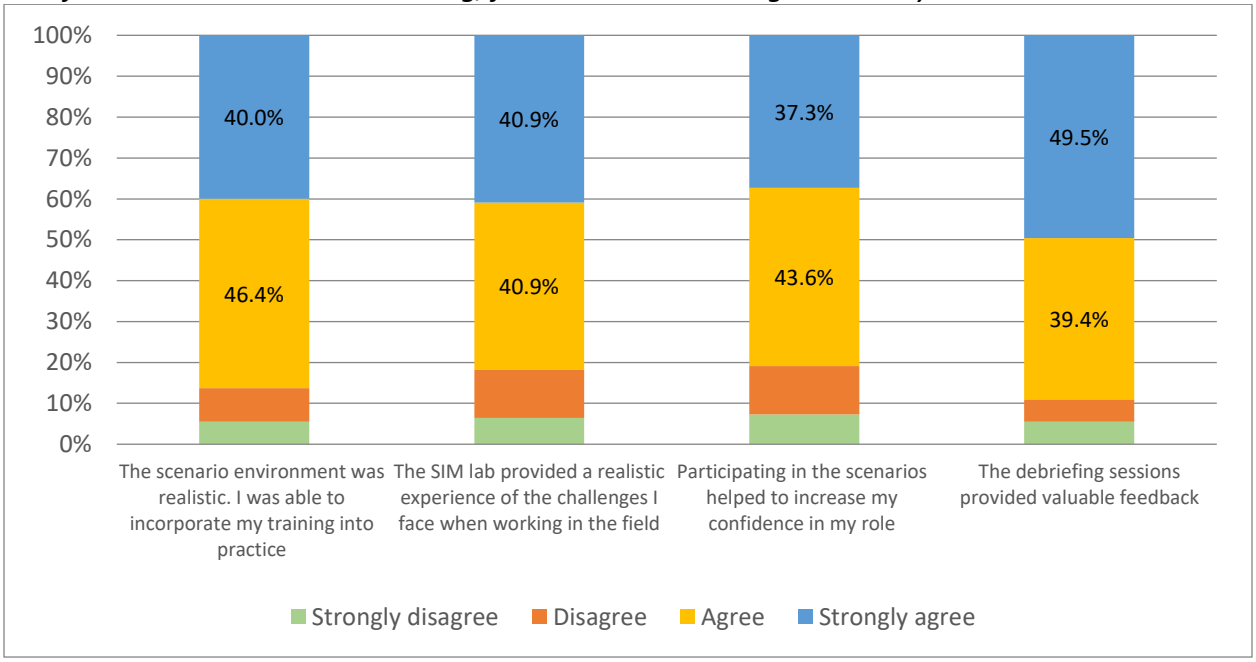
To see whether satisfaction with simulation training has changed over the years, it is useful to compare these results with those from an investigator survey we conducted in 2018.[26] Four of the questions from the 2018 were similar to questions from the current 2023-2024 survey (Figure 6.2). The results from the current survey contrast with parallel results from 2018. In 2018, 86.4% of respondents agreed that the scenario environment was realistic, compared to 55.7% of the current respondents who found the scenario realistic. In 2018, 81.8% agreed that "the sim lab provided a realistic experience of the challenges I face when working in the field", compared to 55.7% in the current survey who agreed "it provided a realistic experience of the challenges I will face in working in the field." In 2018, 80.9% agreed that "participating in the scenarios helped to increase my confidence in my role", compared to 56.0% on the current survey who agreed that "it helped to increase my confidence in my role." In 2018, 88.9% agreed

[26] Cross, T.P., & Chiu, Y.L. (2018). *FY2018 Program Evaluation of the Child Protection Training Academy for new DCFS investigators*. Urbana, IL: Children and Family Research Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. https://cfrc.illinois.edu/pubs/rp_20181016_FY2018ProgramEvaluationoftheChildProtectionTrainingAcademyforNewDCFSInvestigators.pdf

that the debriefing sessions provided valuable feedback, compared to 68.3% in the current survey who agreed with this.

Figure 6.2

Satisfaction with Simulation Training, from the 2018 Investigator Survey



Competency

We asked a series of questions regarding whether the simulation training helped participants to develop holistic competency. Holistic competence involves two distinct constructs: procedural competency and meta-competency.[27] Procedural competencies are applied skills based generally on didactic learning. Meta-competencies represent a complex interplay of theoretical and policy knowledge with interpersonal and professional capacities such as critical thinking, self-awareness, and affective processing applied in unique and situational contexts.

Several participants responded that their training did not provide them with the meta-competencies measured by the following items: “use adaptive resources and services as clients need them” (n = 5, 3.0%), “be consistent in decision-making across dynamic and varied contexts” (n = 4, 2.4%), “seek knowledge about a client’s culture and its relevance to the investigation” (n = 4, 2.4%), “understand multiple and multidisciplinary perspectives on a case or event” (n =3, 1.8%), “use supervision proactively” (n =3, 1.8%), “apply of knowledge related to underlying conditions and their impact” (n = 2, 1.2%), and “identify cultural or other characteristics impacting client interaction” (n = 2, 1.2%).

The Procedural Competency scale includes three subscales: rapport-building (five skills), communication and information-gathering (six skills), and safety assessment (four skills) (Figure 6.3). On the rapport-building subscale, 68.8% of respondents found that simulation training

[27] Bogo, et al. (2021), ibid.; Havig, et al., (2023), ibid.; Chiu, et al. (2023), ibid.; Tufford, et al. (2017), ibid.

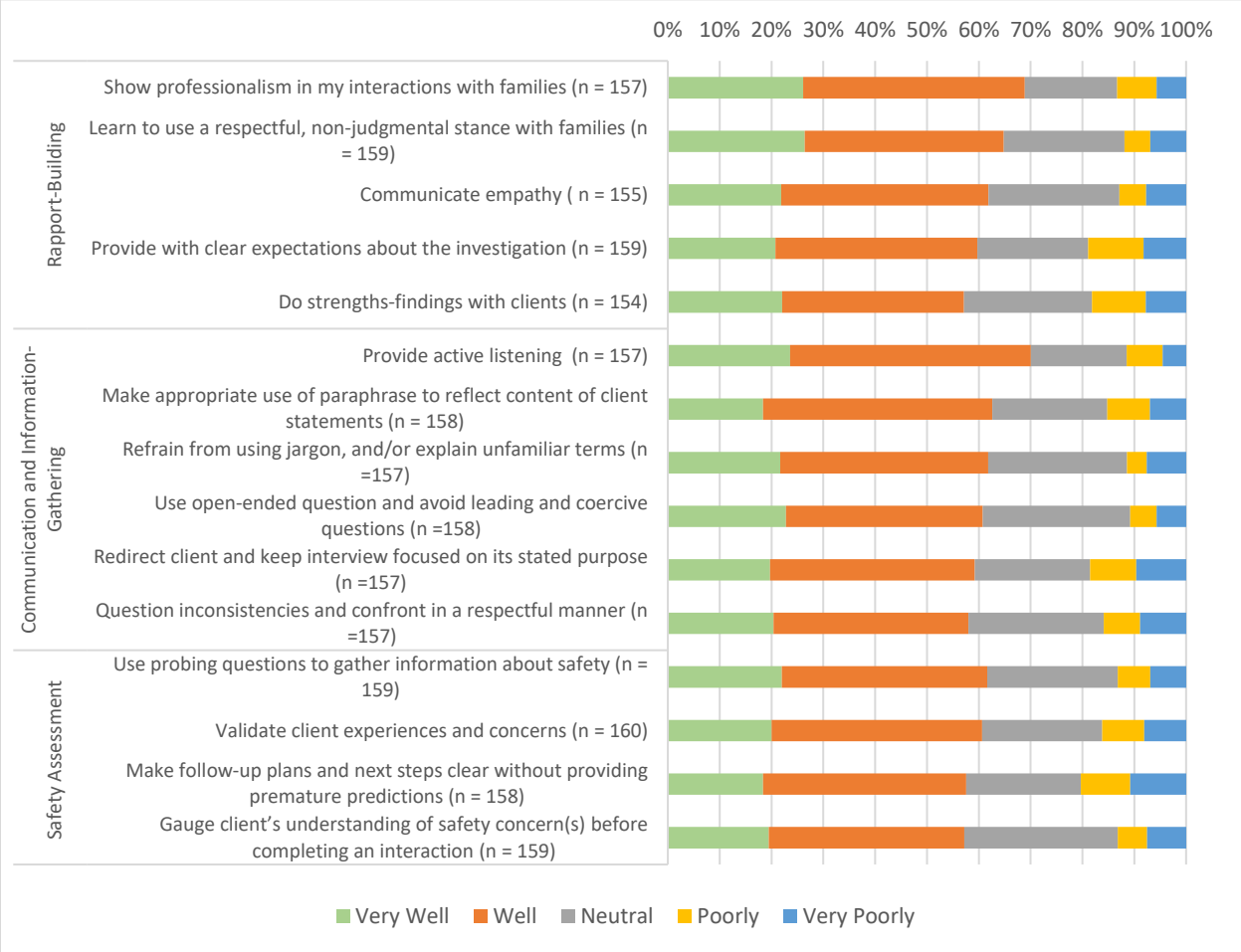
helped them to “show professionalism in my interactions with families” either very well or well, followed by “learn to provide with clear expectations about the investigation” (64.8%), “communicate empathy” (61.9%), “provide with clear expectations about the investigation” (59.8%), and “do strengths-findings with clients” (57.2%). On the communication and information-gathering subscale, 70.1% of respondents found that the simulation training helped them to “provide active listening” either very well or well, followed by “make appropriate use of paraphrase or summarization to reflect content of client statements” (62.7%), “refrain from using jargon, and/or explain unfamiliar terms” (61.8%), “use open-ended question and avoid leading and coercive questions” (60.8%), “redirect client and keep interview focused on its stated purpose” (59.2%), and “question inconsistencies and confront in a respectful manner” (58.0%). On the safety assessment subscale, 61.6% of respondents found that the simulation training helped them to “use probing questions to gather information about safety” either very well or well, followed by “validate client experiences and concerns” (60.6%), “make follow-up plans and next steps clear without making promises or providing premature predictions about the future” (57.6%), and “gauge client’s understanding of safety concern(s) before completing an interaction” (57.2%). Across items on the Procedural Competency Scale, 57% to 70% of respondents rated simulation training as doing well or very well and 30%–43% gave simulation training a rating of neutral, poorly or very poorly. The average scores of all three subscales were around 3.6 at the five-point Likert scale (Appendix D, Table D.2).

The Meta-Competency Scale includes four subscales: skills in action (five skills), deepening of perspectives on diversity (three skills), managing affective intensity in the moment (five skills), and openness to learning (three skills) (Figure 6.4). On the skills in action subscale, 67.1% of respondents found that the simulation training helped them to “be aware of my own body language, approach, choice of words, etc. and their impact on interactions” either very well or well, followed by “apply of knowledge related to underlying conditions and their impact” (54.9%), “’use myself’ in my work” (54.8%), “be consistent in decision-making across dynamic and varied contexts” (53.1%), and “understanding multiple and multidisciplinary perspectives on a case or event” (53.0%). On the deepening of perspectives on diversity subscale, 55.4% of respondents found that the simulation training helped them to “identify cultural or other characteristics impacting client interaction” either very well or well, followed by “seek knowledge about a client’s culture and its relevance to the investigation” (49.0%), and “use adaptive resources and services as clients need them” (48.0%). In the managing affective intensity in the moment subscale, 72.9% of respondents found that the simulation training helped them to “be aware of physical surroundings and recognize safety hazards in the location or the circumstances” either very well or well, followed by “think critically and resist assumptions” (63.5%), “recognize the emotional cues of others” (61.1%), “respond effectively to resistance” (60.0%), and “with my own emotional responses in order to remain professional, safe, and effective in the field” (55.7%). In the openness to learning subscale, 64.6% of respondents found that the simulation training helped them to “reflect on my own strengths” either very well or well, followed by “value the need for continuous learning and seeking knowledge and resources necessary to meet the needs of each unique client” (64.0%), and “use supervision proactively” (52.4%). Overall, there were seven items on the Meta-Competency Scale on which 48%–73% of respondents rated simulation training as doing well or very well and

27%–52% gave simulation training a rating of neutral, poorly or very poorly. Of all the subscales, deepening of perspectives on diversity subscale (*M* = 3.4) and skills in action subscale (*M* = 3.5) had the lower average scores than the other two subscales (*M* = 3.6, respectively) (Appendix D, Table D.3).

Figure 6.3

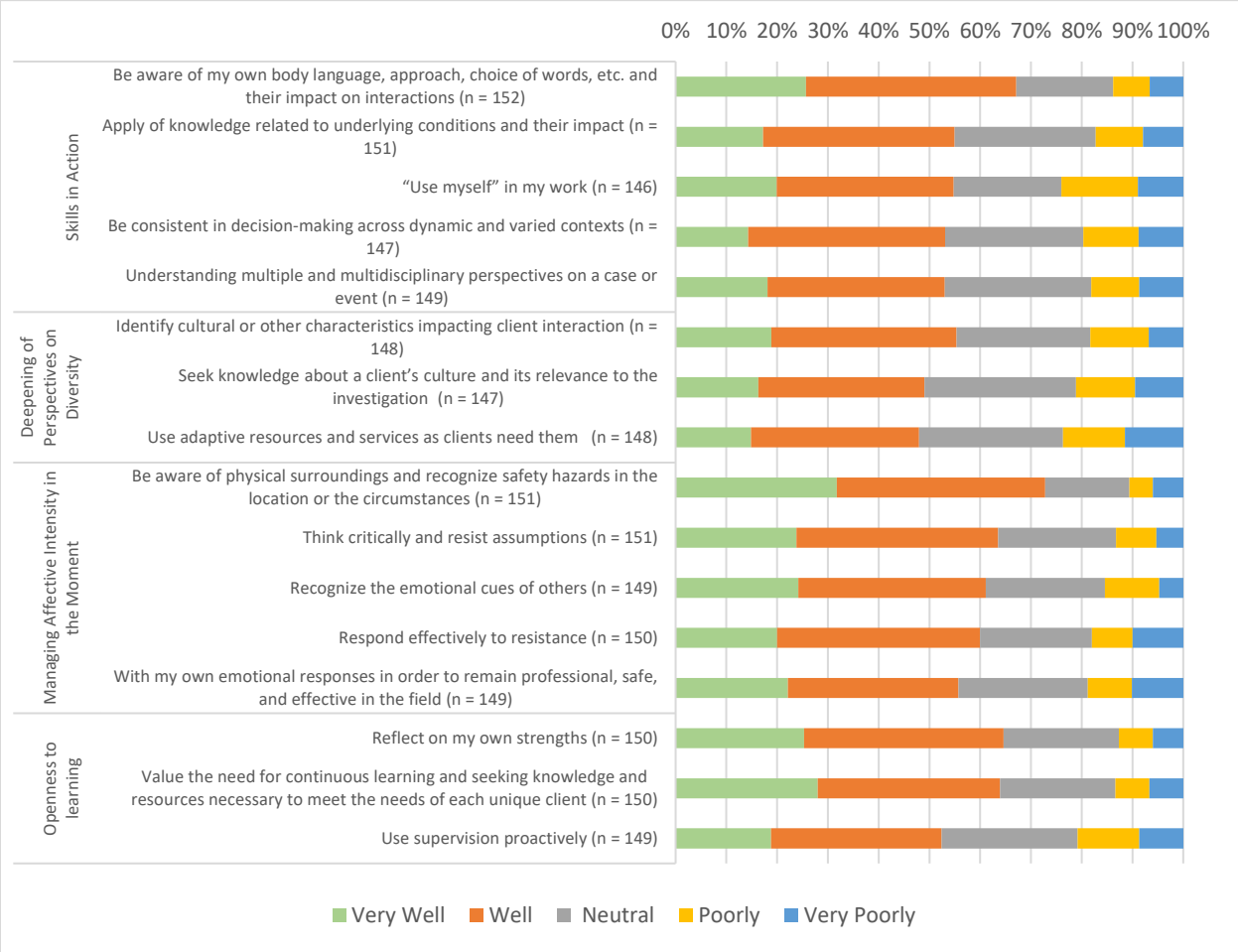
How Well Simulation Training Prepared Respondents for Procedural Competency



Note. Each item began with "Simulation training helped me…"

Figure 6.4

How Well Simulation Training Prepared Respondents for Meta-Competency



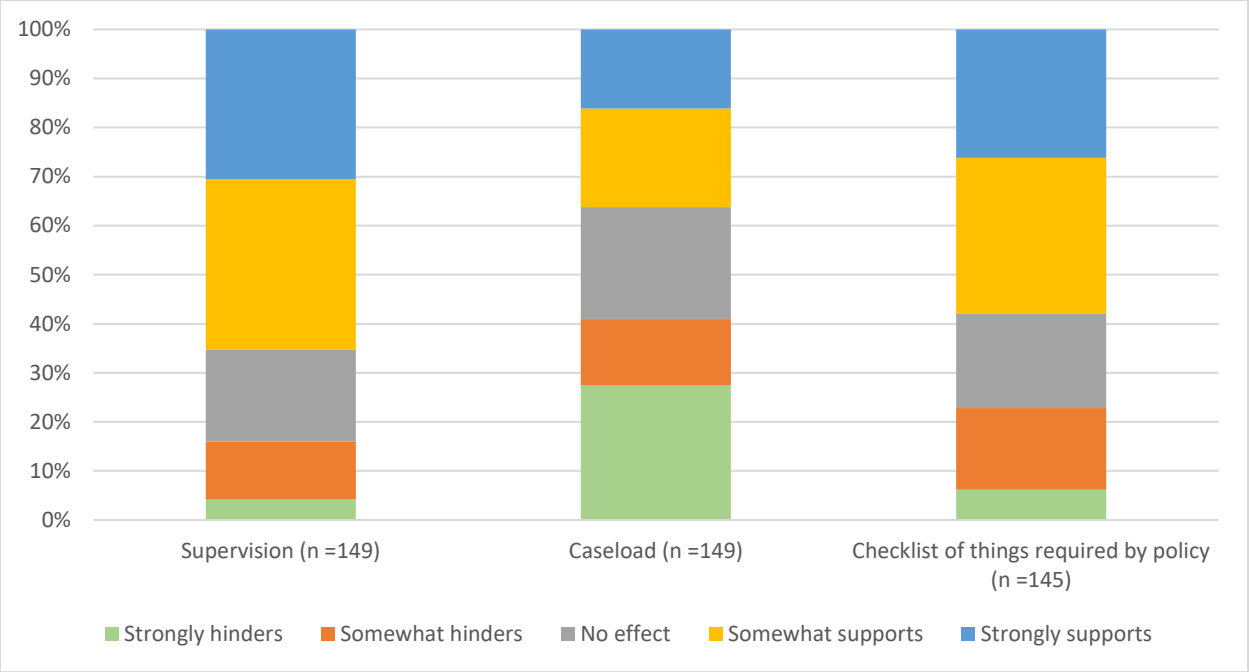
Note. Each item began with "Simulation training helped me…"

Variables that Could Support or Hinder Learning from the Initial Simulation Training

The survey participants were also asked to rate how three influential factors from simulation training supported or hindered them : supervision, caseload, and the checklist of things required by policy. The rating scale for these items ranged from 1-strongly hinder to 5 strongly support. Sixty-three percent of respondents found supervision somewhat or strongly supported using what they learned from the simulation training and 57.9% found the checklist of things required by policy supported it. However, 40.9% of respondents found that caseload hindered the use of what they learned in their initial simulation training (Figure 6.5).

Figure 6.5

Variables Supporting or Hindering Using the Learning from the Initial Simulation Training

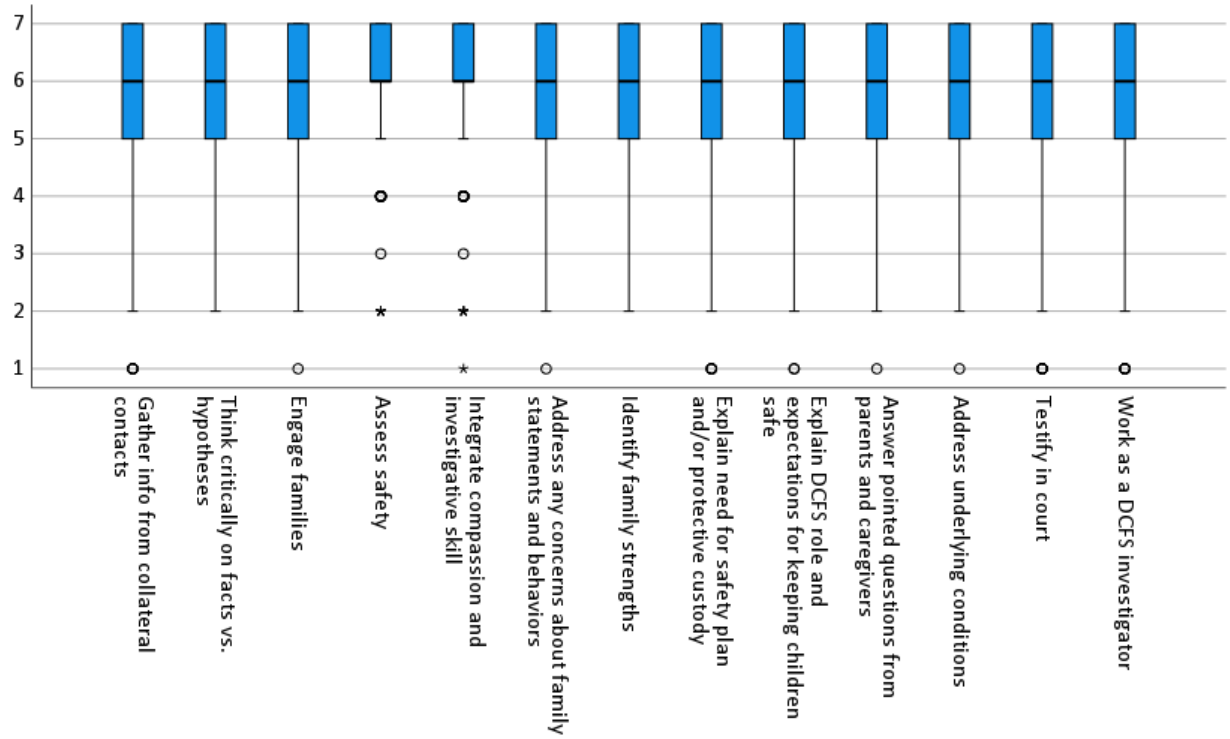


Current Confidence in Child Protection Skills

We presented participants with a series of items to rate their current confidence in thirteen child protection skills on a Likert scale ranged from 1- lowest to 7- highest, the measure that we used in the DEST (see Chapter 3). In Figure 6.6, we use a box-and-whisker plot, another standardized method of presenting numerical data. In a box-and-whisker plot the box shows where the middle half of the scores lie (between the 25th and 75th percentile). The horizontal dark line in the box shows what the middle score (the median) is. Most or all of the rest of the scores are in the "whiskers" above and below the blue box—these are the high and low scores. Sometimes there are extreme or outlier scores that are very high or low and show up as points or dots outside of the box and whiskers. Of all thirteen skills, the average ratings of eleven skills clustered between 5 and 7 (the blue box), with a low score of 2 (the bottom whisker). The two skills, "assess safety and integrate compassion" and "investigative skill," had higher average rating clustering between 6 and 7 (the blue box), with a low score of 5 (the bottom whisker). Some respondents had outlier ratings (such as 1 or 2) that are extremely different from the average ratings (also see Appendix D, Table D.4). The results indicate that most respondents felt confident in performing the child protection skills.

Figure 6.6

Trainees' Current Confidence in their Child Protection Skills



Variables Related to Current Confidence

We conducted analyses to examine what variables were related to respondents' current confidence in their child protection work. Table 6.3 shows the Pearson correlation coefficients for the relationship of different variables with confidence. Respondents had higher confidence in their current work when they had stayed at DCP longer, were more satisfied with their simulation training, felt better prepared on procedural competency and meta-competency from their simulation training, and felt greater support in supervision, caseload, and checklist of things required by policy. Most of these correlations were in the range from .30 to .40, which represent a medium effect size.[28]

[28] Cohen (1988), ibid.

Table 6.3

Correlation with Current Confidence in Child Protection Skills (Mean)

Measure	Correlation with Current Confidence
Gender	0.13
Degree	-0.12
DCP regional office	-0.15
Tenure at DCP	0.18*
Simulation Training Satisfaction Scale	0.37***
Procedural Competency:	
Rapport-Building	0.34***
Communication and Information-Gathering	0.31**
Safety Assessment and Ending	0.34***
Meta-Competency	
Skills in action	0.30**
Deepening of perspectives on diversity	0.35**
Managing affective intensity in the moment	0.27**
Openness to learning	0.33***
Support Variables	
Supervision	0.40***
Caseload	0.25**
Checklist of things required by policy	0.36***

We also conducted a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, which also examined the relationship of multiple variables to confidence, while taking into account the relationships among these variables. The dependent variable is the mean score of each respondent's self-rating on their current confidence in thirteen items of child protection skills. We entered the following sets of variables into the regression model in sequence: a) gender, b) degree, c) regional office and tenure in DCFS, d) Simulation Training Satisfaction Scale, Procedural Competency Scales, and Meta-Competency Scales, and e) the three variables that we thought could support or hinder use of simulation training (supervision, caseload, and the checklist of things required by policy). Table 6.4 shows how each set of variables explained the variance in the confidence scale. Respondents' regional office and tenure in DCP explained 7% of the variance in current confidence, over and above what was explained by gender and degree [F change (4, 94) = 3.519, p = .034]. The current appraisal of their simulation training including simulation training satisfaction, procedural competency subscales, and meta-competency subscales, explained a large portion (25%) of their current confidence, over and above the previous variables in the model [F change (12, 86) = 4.044, p < .001]. This represents a very large effect size.[29] Supervision, caseload, and checklist of things required by policy explained 7% of the variance in current confidence, over and above the previous variables in the model [F change (15, 83) = 3.558, p = .018].

[29] Cohen (1988(, ibid.

The results for the individual predictor variables in Table 6.4 further our understanding of the relationship of individual variables to increases in confidence. Tenure at DCP ($p < .01$), rapport-building ($p < .05$), managing affective intensity in the moment ($p = .055$), openness to learning ($p < .01$), and supervision ($p < .05$) had the largest effects in respondent's current confidence, effects that was statistically significant in itself.

Table 6.4

Final Multiple Regression Model Predicting Current Confidence in Child Protection Skills (Mean)

Variables	*B*	*SE*	*Beta(β)*	*p*	R^2 *Change*	*Sig. F Change*
Gender	0.35	0.26	0.12	0.183	.017	.197
Degree	-0.25	0.20	-0.11	0.223	.014	.244
DCP regional office	-0.13	0.09	-0.12	0.153	.067	<.05
Tenure at DCP	0.24	0.09	0.26	0.008		
Simulation Training Satisfaction Scale	0.25	0.26	0.22	0.331	.246	<.001
Procedural Competency:						
Rapport-Building	0.86	0.34	0.90	0.013		
Communication and Information-Gathering	-0.74	0.46	-0.73	0.113		
Safety Assessment and Ending	-0.23	0.31	-0.25	0.458		
Meta-Competency						
Skills in action	-0.41	0.35	-0.44	0.238		
Deepening of perspectives on diversity	0.45	0.24	0.50	0.065		
Managing affective intensity in the moment	-0.64	0.33	-0.65	0.055		
Openness to learning	0.70	0.24	0.72	0.005		
Support Variables					.075	<.05
Supervision	0.22	0.11	0.23	0.043		
Caseload	0.05	0.09	0.06	0.608		
Checklist of things required by policy	0.07	0.13	0.08	0.576		

Note. Constant = 5.39, F (1, 97) = 1.69, p<.001, R^2 = .17. Font colors show sets of variables that were entered into a hierarchical multiple regression model in sequence.

Difference by Year in which Respondents' Received Simulation Training

We conducted one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and t-tests, to examine whether respondents' simulation training experience varied by their employment status, demographics and background characteristics. The only statistically significant results related to the year cohort in which respondents received simulation training. Table 6.5 shows that the rapport building competency subscale, communication and information-gathering competency subscale, deepening of perspectives on diversity competency subscale, managing affective intensity in the moment competency subscale, caseload , and checklist of things required by policy all differed

significantly by training year. According to Cohen's (1988)[30] guidelines, the effect sizes were in the medium to large range (i.e., η2 = .04 to .10).

The post hoc tests showed that the 2023-2024 cohort felt significantly more prepared than the 2018-2020 cohort for rapport building (*M* = 3.8 vs. 3.3), communication and information-gathering (*M* = 3.8 vs. 3.3), deepening of perspectives on diversity (*M* = 3.6 vs. 3.0), and managing affective intensity in the moment (*M* = 3.8 vs. 3.3). In addition, both the 2021-2022 and 2023-2024 cohorts differed significantly from the 2018-2020 cohort on the following factors: caseload (*M* = 2.0, 2.9, 3.2 respectively) and checklist of things required by policy (*M* = 2.8, 3.8, 3.7 respectively). Thus those who received simulation training in 2018-2020 experienced caseload and checklist of things required by policy as more of a hindrance than the later cohorts did. (Table 6.5).

Table 6.5

One-way ANOVA Tests by Training Year Cohort

Measure	N	2018-2020		2021-2022		2023-2024		F(2, 160)	η2
		M	SD	*M*	SD	*M*	SD		
Simulation Training Satisfaction Scale	166	3.6	0.96	3.6	0.97	3.8	0.91	0.85	0.01
Procedural Competency									
Rapport-building	158	3.3	1.21	3.5	1.08	3.8	0.95	3.10*[a]	0.04
Communication and information-gathering	160	3.3	1.17	3.6	1.01	3.8	0.91	3.52*[a]	0.04
Safety assessment and ending	160	3.3	1.12	3.5	1.04	3.7	1.04	2.49	0.03
Meta-Competency									
Skills in action	151	3.3	1.16	3.4	1.06	3.6	1.01	1.42	0.02
Deepening of perspectives on diversity	150	3.0	1.13	3.3	1.12	3.6	1.09	3.30*[a]	0.04
Managing affective intensity in the moment	152	3.3	1.10	3.6	1.11	3.8	0.94	3.67*[a]	0.05
Openness to learning	152	3.3	1.07	3.7	1.05	3.7	1.08	1.84	0.02
Current Confidence	151	6.1	0.98	5.7	1.21	5.6	1.13	1.82	0.02
Support Variables									
Supervision	149	3.6	1.33	3.9	1.16	4.0	1.10	1.36	0.02
Caseload	149	2.0	1.31	2.9	1.40	3.2	1.44	8.02***[b]	0.10
Checklist of things required by policy	145	2.9	1.29	3.8	1.14	3.7	1.13	7.16**[b]	0.09

Note. [a] Tukey post hoc tests: 2023-2024 cohort > 2018-2020 cohort; [b] Tukey post-hoc tests: 2021-2022 , 2023-2024 > 2018-2020 cohort; *p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

[30] Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences*. New York, NY: Routledge Academic.

Discussion

This was the second time that the evaluation team conducted a survey with DCFS child protection specialists regarding their appraisal of simulation training after they entered the field Two-thirds of respondents felt the training was a safe learning environment. Most respondents also had positive rating regarding debriefing: 74.5% strongly agreed or agreed that they were respected during their debriefing and 68.3% agreed the debriefing provided valuable feedback. However, only a little more than half of the study sample felt the training was realistic and increased their confidence. In terms of how well they were prepared for the procedural competencies and meta-competencies, the average ratings were between neutral and well. On average, most of the respondents rated their current confidence in child protection work between moderate to high.

Further analyses showed that their appraisal of simulation training was moderately to highly related to their current confidence in their child protection. The more they felt satisfied with the training, better prepared for the competency, and better supported at work, the more confident they felt currently. The effect of the variables that supported and hindered their ability to use their simulation training is also highly correlated with their current confidence. Caseload, particularly, was viewed as an obstacle for them to use the learning from the initial simulation training as 28.4% of the respondents carried more than 25 cases and 33.6% carried 11–25 cases in the past 30 days.

The appraisal of simulation training differed by the year. Those who received the training in the recent two years were more satisfied with their competency building in the simulation training than those who received it during 2018-2020. The cohort of 2018-2020 was more seasoned than the other cohort of 2023-2024, which might lead them to value their own field experience over the training that they received years ago. We also could see in Table 6.5 that their current confidence level is slightly higher than the cohort of 2023-2024. Moreover, the cohorts of 2021-2022 and 2023-2024 found that their caseload and checklist of things required by policy supported the use of their learning from the simulation training more than the cohort of 2018-2020. Further analysis is needed to understand the difference. One factor to consider is that the earlier cohorts have been in the field longer and their longer experience may have had an impact on their appraisal of simulation training.

One significant limitation of this study was the low response rate (16%). Our study sample might not reflect the opinions or experience of the majority of the current DCP workforce due to the small sample size. Moreover, the self-rating confidence was subjective. Their current confidence in their work may influence their retrospective appraisal of simulation training. The relationship between their appraisal of training and their confidence may reflect their attitude about their child protection work in general. The attitude about child protection work may influence both their appraisal of simulation training and their confidence in their work. Therefore, it is important to interpret the findings with caution.

Chapter 7: Simulation Training Follow-up Survey (STF) – Responses to Open-Ended Questions

At the end of the simulation training follow-up survey, we included five open-ended questions to learn more about trainees' experience with and opinions about simulation training. Respondents were asked to write in text responses to these questions. The open-ended questions were as follows:

> Is there anything else that supports or hinders your using what you learned in your initial simulation training? Please describe it.
>
> Please describe the impact of the simulation training on your overall perception of yourself and your competence for the role of investigator.
>
> In what ways has simulation training affected your ability to work with diverse individuals and families when doing an investigation?
>
> How do you use Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in your current work?
>
> How can simulation training for child protection investigators improve?

We used the text responses to rate each respondent on their overall appraisal of simulation training. We also conducted a thematic analysis following the method of Braun and Clarke[31] to identify the themes expressed in the text responses. Appendix E provides a listing of excerpts from these responses sorted by theme.

The most common suggestions for improving simulation training involved expanding it in one or more ways: devoting more time to simulation, or adding more simulations or simulated tasks. We discuss this below. Other suggestions are difficult to categorize. We recommend that readers review all respondents' suggestions, which are presented in Appendix F.

Method

The majority of respondents (62%) provided text comments in response to the open-ended questions. All the text responses of the five open-ended questions were read, and the second author developed a method for rating respondents' overall appraisal of their simulation training based on this initial reading. The rating scale was as follows: -2 — negative, -1 — somewhat negative with some positive, 0 —neutral or balanced, +1 — somewhat positive with some negative, +2 — positive. Two missing value codes were also used: 8 — provided text response but did not appraise simulation training, 9 — did not a provide text response. The first and second authors independently coded each respondent on this rating scale, based on all the text they wrote, and calculated the intraclass correlation coefficient to assess interrater reliability. The resulting coefficient of .88 indicates high interrater agreement and substantial reliability for this rating. When the authors disagreed about their rating, they discussed the disagreement and agreed on a consensus rating, which was used as the final rating. The authors' ratings were used to provide a frequency distribution on this negativity-positivity scale. In addition, we conducted one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to examine whether the overall appraisal

[31] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006), ibid.

from the text responses was consistent with their responses to the scale of satisfaction with simulation training presented in the previous chapter. The scale of satisfaction with simulation training consisted of 8 questions with the rating from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree on their degree of agreement with positive statements about their simulation training (see Chapter 6).

Results

Overall Appraisal of Simulation Training

Of 166 respondents, 19.3% appraised simulation training negatively in their comments with little or no positive feedback, 4.2% were mostly negative but had some positive comments, 3.6% were neutral or had a balanced appraisal, 11.4% had a mostly positive appraisal with some negative comments, 19.3% had a positive appraisal with little or no negative feedback, and 42.2% did not provide text responses or did not appraise simulation training in their text response. Excluding those who did not provide text responses or their responses didn't apprise simulation training, 53.1% of 96 respondents had a positive appraisal of their simulation training experience verse 40.6% who had a negative appraisal of their experience.

The one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) showed that our overall appraisal rating from the text responses is consistent with the average rating of Simulation Training Satisfaction Scale (see Table 7.1). Those whose comments were negative rated their simulation training experience significantly lower than those who had positive appraisal and those who did not appraise simulation training or provide responses. Those who did not provide a text response or provided a text response that did not appraise simulation training had satisfaction ratings that were in-between the group who wrote negative comments and the group that wrote positive comments.

Table 7.1

One-way ANOVA Tests of Simulation Training Satisfaction by Overall Appraisal (N = 166)

	Simulation Training Satisfaction Scale				
Overall Appraisal	N	*M*	SD	F(6, 159)	Games Howell Post Hoc Tests
a. Negative	32	2.7	0.63	18.24***	a < d; a < e; a < f; a < g
b. Mostly Negative	7	2.9	0.48		b < d; b < e; b < f; b < g
c. Neutral or Balanced	6	3.5	0.79		c < e
d. Mostly Positive	19	4.1	0.48		f < e
e. Positive	32	4.4	0.55		g < e
f. Response did not appraise simulation training	7	3.8	0.37		
g. Did not provide text response	63	3.8	0.94		

*** $p < .001$

The Variety of Positive Effects of Simulation Training

As noted above, slightly more than half of those who wrote responses to our open-ended questions commented positively on simulation training. Several different themes characterized these positive comments. Several mentioned valuing the opportunity of learning about the reality of investigations of simulations, including dealing with difficult families. A number of respondents praised the opportunity to practice their skills in simulation training or discussed the skills they gained. Such skills as addressing people appropriately, engaging families and understanding their perspective, interviewing, understanding parents' reactions, and assessing families' needs were mentioned. Several mentioned how simulation training improved their mental abilities for the work. Respondents credited simulation training with increasing their awareness, understanding, knowledge, learning, critical thinking, judgment, or insight. Several noted the opportunity simulation training gave them to reflect on themselves and the confidence they gained from simulation. A few respondents also use the open-ended items to praise the training facilitators, using adjectives such as helpful, knowledgeable, resourceful, available.

The Desire for More, Longer, More Complete, or Different Simulation Training

Other than positive feedback, perhaps the most common type of comment was a suggestion for more, longer or more complete simulations. This was probably the most common suggestion for improvement, but this felt need was expressed in response to other open-ended items as well. Respondents spoke of the need for more time devoted to simulations; and/or more tasks, situations, and populations simulated. Occasionally they advocated dramatic expansion of simulation training, such as quadrupling or quintupling the number of simulations, replacing most of the classroom training with simulation time, or having investigators return for future simulation training using other scenarios. Two strongly advocated for including child interviewing in simulation training.

Usually the wish for more, longer, or more complete simulations followed from appreciating simulation training and wanting to increase its positive impact. Sometimes their wish for more, longer, or more complete simulations reflected some frustration. These respondents felt that they had not gained enough from simulation training to prepare them, and more was needed. Three respondents wrote that simulation training was "rushed."

Several respondents felt that their simulation training had gaps that detracted from its value or that it needed a different focus. Some identified specific aspects of their job that they wished simulation training had addressed. The most common gap mentioned was training on the SACWIS client information system that is so central to their work. A few respondents wanted simulations to focus on one case all the way through, with one complaint being that simulation training "glued several investigations together." Another respondent wished that simulation training would go "step by step" through all tasks needed for a successful investigation, and wrote, "we didn't know many of the basic things when it came to an investigations."

Use of Problem-Based Learning

With our question about Problem-Based Learning, we were attempting to evaluate this specific instructional method used in simulation training to enhance critical thinking. A number of respondents told us they use PBL in their practice, and some elaborated on that (e.g., "Problem-based learning (PBL) is a valuable tool for me as it allows me to address complex issues in a collaborative and practical manner"). A smaller number said they do not use it. Some wrote that they did not remember or understand the term (e.g., "I honestly couldn't even tell you what that means anymore, I'm sure I do it, I just don't know the term"). One thought they used it, but criticized the emphasis on PBL in sim training ("Honestly, the time in sims training could have been better utilized practicing skills than filling out the sheet that we never use in the field.").

A number of respondents answered this question by discussing problem-solving in their practice or dealing with problems in their practice, without reference to the PBL instructional method. Their answers suggest that they did not understand that we were referencing this specific method, and instead they were providing a general response about problem-solving. It seems likely that these respondents did not know or remember what PBL is.

Reasons for Negative Experiences with Simulation Training

While most respondents who provided written comments wrote positively about simulation training, a significant minority of respondents were negative. Most of the negative comments concerned one or more of four types of experiences:

1) perceiving simulation training as contravening standard practice to protect investigators' safety,
2) perceiving actors' behavior as egregious,
3) perceiving simulation training as not providing a realistic experience that matched practice,
4) experiencing negative or disappointing interactions with trainers.

The arguments about safety, the actors' behavior and realism were interrelated. The reason some respondents felt that simulation training contravened safety practice is that they felt that the actors' egregious behavior signaled a threat that would lead workers to take action to protect their safety. They argued that the appropriate response was for the worker to leave and/or consult with their supervisor and/or return with the police. They were concerned or alarmed about facilitators' urging trainees to continue trying to engage the family. They felt this was a situation that would have put their safety at risk and flouted DCFS safety standards were it to happen in real life. Several people described this as a "worst case scenario" that they had never encountered in their practice as investigators. Several respondents felt stress, hurt and anger, connected either to what they perceived as the actors' abusive treatment of them in their roles or the trainers urging these respondents to engage the family they found dangerous, against these respondents' better judgment. It is beyond the scope of this evaluation to assess how frequently these specific concerns arose and in which cohorts, and whether personnel changes have mitigated these concerns.

Some other respondents described simulation training as unrealistic or unrepresentative of practice without explaining their reasons for this judgment. Some respondents believed that job shadowing fit their needs better. One commented “simulation training is not superior to on the job shadowing […] I feel it would be much better for an apprentice-style training with Investigators who are actively working. Also with the high caseloads and constant change, simulation cannot mimic that experience.”

A small number respondents felt that trainers treated them badly. They used words such as “not encouraging nor helpful”, “no positive feedback”, “belittled”, “judgmental”, “mocked”, “talked down to”, “made me feel stupid”, and “made me feel I knew nothing.” One respondent felt that trainers coming in and out of the apartment disrupted her rhythm, and another felt that instructors would argue or disregard instead of explaining why an investigator should take note of a particular safety risk. Facilitators lack of child protection experience was an issue for several respondents, with two respondents reporting that facilitators provided incorrect information as a result.

Practical Obstacles to Using What is Learned in Simulation Training

In response to the question about factors that support or hinder their use of what they learned in simulation training, several respondents mentioned practical obstacles. The most common concern was the effect of doing some or all of the simulation training online and not in-person. Several respondents did not feel online training provide an effective simulation experience.

Two respondents mentioned practical challenges to getting to simulation training. One respondent talking about having long drives back and forth from the laboratory, combined with long simulation training days, meaning they were getting home late and having to attend virtually at 8:30 the next morning. Another issue mentioned was delays in receiving simulation training as a whole or the courtroom simulation in particular, which a respondent reported interfered with receiving licensure in child protection in a timely way.

Most respondents responding to the question about supports and hindrances focused on aspects of the simulation training itself. Only a few discussed contextual factors that may have made it easier or harder to use what they learned in simulation training. It is likely that the wording of the question was not satisfactory to elicit information on contextual factors. Two responses mentioned excessive caseload and two mentioned lack of time as hindrances, one of these citing high expectations as well. Two respondents mentioned issues with difficult supervisors and another stated that the current state of DCP offices, on-the-job training, and methods of motivating workers are harmful and contribute to high worker turnover. One respondent lauded her simulation training and described in some detail what they learned, but then added “I was once confident in my abilities until I started working in the office and in the field. On-the-job training is a RUSHED process and can be very dangerous to the investigators.”

The Impact of Simulation Training on Working with Diverse Individuals and Families

In response to the question on this topic, some respondents credited simulation training with helping them work with diverse individuals and families. One respondent wrote, "I believe it has assisted me with asking families more information about their culture and trying to understand the situation from their perspective." However, more respondents reported no effect. Some wrote that the training was not designed to address diversity. One wrote "Simulations did not place an emphasis on working with diverse families. It is difficult to practice diversity with 1.5 walkthroughs and the main one you are trying to split with another person." Some respondents answered by reporting that their prior experience or other training had prepared them to work with diverse individuals and families.

Discussion

Most respondents responded to the open-ended items and we analyzed their text responses. A small majority of the respondents who provided text response appraised simulation training positively. Those who provided positive text responses tended to have higher satisfaction with their simulation training than others. The result supports the validity of the authors' coding of respondents' overall appraisal of simulation training assessment of the text responses. Among the themes in the positive comments were learning about the reality of investigations, the opportunity to practice skills, improving their mental abilities, the opportunity for self-reflection, and the confidence they gained.

The theme "the Desire for More, Longer, More Complete, or Different Simulation Training" was common. This is consistent with our findings from the DEST and post-training survey every year, in which respondents frequently express the wish for more simulation training. This is another indicator of the value trainees place on simulation training, even if some had some criticisms of how it was currently being delivered. Many former trainees continue to value extending the simulation training program.

On the other hand, 23.9% of respondents wrote comments that were entirely or mostly negative. Concerns about simulations contravening standard practice, the actors' behavior being egregious, and simulations not being realistic were interrelated. A number of negative comments concerned the "Knock on the Door" simulation. These respondents felt that the actors' behavior was egregious and excessive in a way that was not realistic. They felt that the instruction to engage the actors contravened standard practice designed protect workers' (and others') safety. Some respondents complained that facilitators treated them badly.

Diversity and critical thinking training builds core competencies of child welfare workers. Even though some respondents credited simulation training with helping them work with diverse individuals and families, more respondents reported no training effect related to diverse individuals or no effect. The simulation training uses PBL to enhance trainees' critical thinking through the five-day training. While a number of respondents valued PBL and used it in their practice, some said they do not use it or do not know what it is.

We had a range of different responses to our questions about specific aspects of simulation training and investigators' experience in response to the question about factors supporting or

hindering use of what they learned in simulation training, a few respondents mentioned such factors as the limitations of online training and practical challenges getting to simulation training. Factors hindering use of simulation training that a few respondents mentioned included excessive caseload, lack of time, and difficult supervisors, and the current difficult state of DCP offices.

The qualitative results of the follow-up survey affirm the value that simulation training had for a majority of respondents, while also highlighting the negative experience of a subset of respondents. Respondents reported a range of positive effects of the training on their practice. The suggestions to expand simulations in different ways represent respondents' commitment to its use as a method, and also a hunger to learn more and receive more support. It is striking that many of the negative comments concerned specific aspects of one specific simulation, "Knock on the Door". In the Conclusion chapter, we discuss ideas about the wish to expand simulation and possible actions to ameliorate the difficulties some trainees experience.

Chapter 8: Conclusion and Recommendations

Fiscal Year 2024 was a time of transition for the Child Protection Training Academy. Northern Illinois University (NIU) became a full-fledged partner and for the first time provided simulation training throughout the fiscal year, alongside the Chicago laboratory run by University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). Preparation proceeded for additional laboratories in the Central and Southern regions. This is an opportune time to learn more about the development of the program through evaluation. The program evaluation team has an unusually rich set of data sources this fiscal year. Using interviews of key informants, we completed an implementation evaluation of the simulation laboratory at NIU. We also had survey data from trainees collected during the training (the Daily Experience of Simulation Training [DEST], Chapters 3 and 4), soon after the training (the post-training survey, Chapter 5), and later when trainees are on job (the follow-up survey [STF], Chapters 6 and 7). The program evaluation provides ample data documenting the success of the Child Protection Training Academy (CPTA) while also highlighting the challenges facing it.

Success and Challenges of Implementation

The NIU laboratory has been able to provide a continuous source of simulation training throughout the year and appears to be established as a program. It has had to overcome serious implementation challenges, however. The long interval between NIU's proposal to DCFS and the execution of the contract delayed the onset of simulation training at NIU, and delay in executing the contract with the talent agency meant that actors were not initially available to play the family in simulations. The legal office of DCFS withdrew from providing legal professionals, forcing the NIU to scramble to find others, some who are not legal professionals, to play lawyers and judges in the courtroom simulation. More recently, the NIU team has made substantial progress in recruiting legal professionals.

To initiate simulation training and keep it going, the NIU laboratory needed to take a number of ad hoc steps due to delays or changes in working agreements, workforce challenges and turnover, but it developed a stable operation over the course of the fiscal year. One factor to consider is several training facilitators' lack of child protection experience, which characterized the NIU facilitators but has also applied to some facilitators at the Chicago laboratory. This was an issue identified by several of the respondents to our surveys.

The current implementation study as well as ones we have conducted previously of the Chicago and Springfield laboratories[32] shows the substantial effort and resources needed to launch and maintain universal simulation training for even one category of child welfare worker. Each laboratory is a somewhat complicated network of employees, contractors, volunteers and organizations, and CPTA as a whole is a network of these networks. The continual turnover of individuals and organizations in each of these categories that the laboratories have experienced for extended period meant that they were in a near constant state of recruitment. The stress involved in launching and maintaining both the individual laboratories and the network of laboratories as a whole is substantial.

[32] Cross & Chiu (2018, 2020), ibid.

Trainees' Appraisal of Simulation Training

Evaluation results from the DEST data collected during simulation training have been remarkably similar over the years. Matching previous years, trainees completing the DEST demonstrated significant increases in their confidence in 13 child protection skills over the course of their simulation training experience. Once again, each time trainees answered questions about the quality of the feedback they received, 95% or more reported that the feedback was helpful or very helpful. On most questions about the effectiveness of group debriefing, more than 80% of respondents the effectiveness of group debriefing at 5 or above, on a scale from 1-extremely ineffective to 7-extremely effective (Chapter 3). On the post-training survey, 75% to 88.9% agreed or strongly agreed with positive statements about the simulation training (Chapter 5), though respondents' written text included comparable numbers of positive and negative comments. Moreover, most respondents reported that their supervisor supported their use of what they learned in simulation training. Caseload hindered using what they learned in simulation training, but only to a modest degree.

Ratings on the same items from the follow-up survey were also mostly positive but less so (Chapter 6). The percentages agreeing or strongly agreeing with positive statement about simulation being a safe learning environment and feeling respected during debriefing were about 75% on the follow-up survey while on three other items it was over 60%. One item about sim training increasing confidence in their role, and two items about training being realistic, had smaller majorities of 55.4% to 56%. The finding that the ratings appraising simulation training were lower on the follow-up survey than the post-training survey replicates a finding from our 2018 follow-up survey, which also found lower ratings than the post-training survey at that time. In the follow-up survey, we asked those who were working in the field or had worked in the field to rate the simulation training they had received months or years ago. Perhaps challenges they have experienced working in the field since then have led some investigators to become somewhat disenchanted with their earlier simulation training.

The proportion of positive ratings and comments is higher in the DEST than in the post-training survey and simulation training follow-up survey. This may relate to response rates. The DEST had a response rate that ranged from 86% to 96%. We cannot calculate the response rate for the post-training survey exactly, but we know that there were 351 trainees between February 27, 2023 and February 5, 2024, and 154 respondents complete the survey during that time. This suggests that the response rate for the post-training survey fell below 50%. The response rate for the follow-up survey (STF) was only 16%. Thus the DEST results are likely to be substantially more representative than those of the other surveys. It is possible that participants dissatisfied with simulation training were disproportionately likely to respond to the latter two surveys and to provide text responses. Recall that those who did not provide text responses on the follow-up survey had significantly higher satisfaction scores than those who wrote negative comments. Thus these two surveys may have artificially inflated the degree of discontent with simulation training. Also, trainees may sometimes value the training overall but have particular negative reactions they want to tell us about in order to improve a good program.

Positive Descriptions of Simulation Training

Most trainees were positive about simulation training both in their ratings and many offered positive comments. They appreciated learning about the reality of investigations of simulations, including dealing with difficult families; practicing their skills in simulation training; developing their mental abilities for the work; and gaining greater self-understanding and confidence through simulations. Simulation training helped them develop skills related to self-reflection, interviewing, investigation, family engagement, understanding and ensuring self-safety, and questioning clients. On the DEST, those who had positive experiences highlighted the training's utility and expressed gratitude towards the trainers.

Moreover, perhaps the most common type of comments was a suggestion for more, longer or more complete simulations. This usually followed from appreciating simulation training and wanting to increase its positive impact. Sometimes it accompanied criticism of their simulation training; for the trainees who suggested this, it could be seeing as an endorsement of simulation training as a method, even if they perceived some shortcomings of the simulation training they received (see Appendix F for all the suggestions).

Expanding Simulation Training for Investigators

Several participants expressed the wish to expand simulation training in different ways. This would have substantial benefits, but also demand more resources. The current resources devoted to simulation training are barely sufficient for the basic task of providing a week of simulation training for all new investigators. Given the disparity in salary between DCFS and the university partners' simulation facilitators, one could argue that the resources for simulation training are even insufficient for the simulation training that is currently provided. Perhaps data on the oft expressed wish to expand simulation training could be used to help advocate more resources to provide it. The value of simulation training for investigators suggests its value for other DCFS workers. Recently, DCFS hired new simulation facilitators to provide simulation to intact family services workers and permanency services workers. They will also help support simulation facilitators who train investigators.

Dissatisfaction with Simulation Training

Although most of the data provide a positive picture of the simulation training, negative comments were not uncommon in the three surveys, particularly the post-training survey and the follow-up survey. Because of the possibility that the post-training survey and the follow-up survey had limited response rates, it is difficult to estimate the true level of discontent with simulation training. One might be tempted to say, "you can't please everybody" and dismiss it entirely. But there are several reasons to take it seriously. First, several expressions of dissatisfaction were vehement or even scathing, suggesting a large negative impact on certain individuals. Second, some of the disaffected respondents' accounts corroborated each other, suggesting that it could not entirely ascribed to the problems of one individual. Third, negative appraisals of simulation training in the follow-up survey (STF) were correlated with investigators lower confidence in their job. This suggests the possibility that difficulty in simulation training is linked to long-term difficulties on the job.

Perceptions of Departures from Best Practice

Perhaps the most concerning finding is some trainees' perception that simulation training contradicted best practice. Several trainees felt that the belligerence of the actors in the Knock on the Door simulation indicated that investigators should leave the scene to protect their safety and consult their supervisor and/or return with the police. They reported that facilitators urged them to continue to try to engage the family, leading some trainees to feel that facilitators were acting contrary to best practice, as well as providing training that was not realistic.

The *perception* that simulation training departs from best practice is a problem, regardless of whether or not it is accurate, particularly when it concerns the issue of worker safety. Concerns related to worker safety are likely to create great anxiety. This could affect investigators' well-being. Moreover, it may lead trainees to question the legitimacy of their training overall, undermining the trust in one's employer that is a necessary part of satisfactory employment. These factors are likely to contribute to turnover. In our opinion, this is the single most important finding from this evaluation that DCFS and the laboratories need to address. Recommendation 1 below discusses this problem.

One recent development may help ameliorate the problem. An adjustment has been implemented by the training team. To better bridge the learning from the classroom to the simulation laboratory, foundation trainers are required again to join the simulation training. The requirement was on hold after COVID and reimplemented this year. The simulation training teams found it beneficial as well. DCFS' in-house foundation trainers usually receive procedures and practice updates or changes quicker than the DCFS-contracted simulation training teams. The foundation trainers have pointed out some outdated information in the simulation training curriculum and helped it improve. This arrangement can help address the concern regarding the inconsistency of teaching between the classroom and simulation laboratory.

Realism

Many trainees felt that simulation training was realistic. On the other hand, several trainees thought that the simulation training was not realistic. Some trainees clearly attributed this to actors' egregious behavior and being urged to try to engage the actors' despite this behavior, which these respondents felt was contrary to the best practice they had been taught. Other trainees reported this perception without explaining why they had it. Perhaps all the perceptions that simulation training was not realistic stem from the actors' behavior and the training recommendations related to it; perhaps there were also other causes of this perception. Again, regardless of the accuracy of this perception and the causes of it, it is a problem, because it affects the perceived legitimacy of the training and workers trust in their employer. This needs further assessment and steps need to be taken to address this perception. We discuss this in our Recommendation 2 below.

Facilitators Without Child Welfare Experience

The laboratories have not always been able to hire facilitators who have previous experience with child protection. Several respondents identified this as a deficit of simulation training, though most respondents did not mention it. DCFS has hired four new foundation trainers who

had child protection experience. The close collaboration between DCFS foundation trainers and simulation facilitators might ease the concern. Laboratory facilitators' prior human services training is likely to be helpful in helping trainees improve their interaction with families, a skill that actors we interviewed identified as a central need. It is also relevant that the laboratories have hired facilitators that have child protection in other states and/or experience with other DCFS functions such as placement. The NIU benefitted from hiring a consultant with prior DCFS experience during part of this fiscal year. Expanded use of such consultants might address this issue – see Recommendation 5 below.

Negative Experiences with Trainers

Several trainees commented on their negative experiences with their trainers. On the DEST, some respondents cited issues such as a perceived lack of leadership and compassion as well as demanding attitudes (Chapter 4). On the post-training survey (Chapter 5) and the follow-up survey (STF, Chapter 7), some trainees reported that trainers caused them to feel intimidated, uncomfortable, or disrespected. Some trainees also reported feeling that there was a lack of connection or incorrect information presented by trainers that did not match their training or experiences, while other comments concerned trainers' lack of experience.

It is a paradox that many trainees report a gratifying and fulfilling experience with simulation training while others who have the same facilitators describe their experience as frustrating, infuriating, or even humiliating. This underlines the potential value of tailoring the individual's simulation experience to their particular needs and capabilities. It is important to recognize that simulation training is unlike other training, in that it makes more emotional and behavioral demands on trainees. This poses some risks. A person sitting in the back of the room during an unfulfilling PowerPoint training may dislike their training, but they are unlikely to have pronounced emotional reactions.

Other Issues

Some trainees suggested changes regarding the allocation of time in training or the need for additional training, and others reported challenges due to the format of hybrid/virtual training with a preference for in-person training. Some trainees expressed a wish for simulation training to include training on SACWIS, the information system that investigators must devote considerable time to in their work (see Chapter 7). Entering data into SACWIS is an important part of their job, and it is understandable why trainees would want additional training on SACWIS. However, it strikes us as a waste of resources to include SACWIS in simulation training; the resources and infrastructure of laboratories are better used for aspects of the job that involve human interaction. Perhaps existing classroom training could enhance its training on SACWIS, or special classroom training on SACWIS could be developed. A number of respondents mentioned travel or other logistical difficulties related to participating in simulation training. This deserves attention too, though it may be mitigated by the development underway of two new simulation laboratories in different regions of Illinois.

Recommendations

Simulation training for child protection investigators has substantial value and yields many benefits, but the frequency of reports of challenges across our data sources suggests that

improvements are called for. Influenced by our analysis of the data and recommendations made by the participants in this evaluation research, we are making multiple recommendations.

We also want to acknowledge another source for the ideas expressed in our recommendations. The first and second author recently attended a meeting of a focus group on simulation training in child welfare, which stimulated our thinking about possible methods for improving simulation training. The Child Welfare League of America and the Alliance for Experiential Problem-Based Learning at the University of Illinois Springfield convened this group, which included professionals from seven different states. The group includes college and university instructors and researchers, representatives from state child welfare and relevant non-profit organizations, and staff from the Chicago simulation laboratory, as well as the first and second author.

One benefit of the meeting was learning that some of the issues that the CPTA faces also occur in other child welfare simulation training programs. One set of issues concerns the anxiety trainees' experience and the possibility that complex, highly charged scenarios can provoke negative reactions in trainees. The group discussed the idea of introducing complexity into scenarios gradually. One aspect of this is explaining their pacing for simulating engagement, which is perhaps the central task of simulation. Another issue is the variability in trainees' prior experience. This may make simulation training more difficult for less experienced trainees, while making the training less useful for experienced trainees. One idea is to conduct a readiness assessment before trainees begin simulation training. This would enable facilitators to provide instructions to the actors and other that would tailor the simulation to each trainees' background.

Recommendation 1: Address the Perception that Simulation Training Departs from Best Practice

All the parties collaborating in the CPTA should conduct a systematic comparison of practice procedures imparted in simulation training, classroom training, and in the Procedures 300 manual to identify any possible inconsistencies. CPTA would benefit from further inquiry about the specific cohorts in which any inconsistencies arose. If inconsistencies are found, the CPTA network should discuss methods of altering the information imparted to make the different sources consistent, and make revisions accordingly. To the extent that practice guidelines are consistent across sources but are not perceived to be consistent, training needs to be revised to provide more instruction on practice guidelines and explain the consistency.

Recommendation 2: Consider Adjusting the Intensity of Simulations

The CPTA should insure that scenarios of differing level of intensity and complexity are implemented, and develop a method of avoiding the negative effects on trainees of scenarios of highest intensity. Such strategies as gradually increasing the intensity of scenarios, framing the scenarios to acknowledge that some are outliers, and tailoring intensity of the scenarios to trainee differences should be explored.

Recommendation 3: Conduct Trainee Assessments

Classroom trainers could collaborate with the simulation laboratories to develop a standardized method for assessing the readiness of each trainee for simulation training. Such assessments could be used to tailor the simulation experience to the needs and capabilities of each trainee.

Recommendation 4: Assess the Realism of Simulation Training

This is similar to Recommendation 1, but would encompass other aspects of the realism of simulation training. CPTA could work to gather data to identify specific ways in which trainees find simulation training realistic and unrealistic. Again, CPTA would benefit from further inquiry about the specific cohorts in which this arose. CPTA could also examine how simulation training is framed, to help set trainees' expectations about the ways in which the simulations are and are not realistic. The program evaluation team could develop in-depth methods to gather data on trainees' perceptions of the realism of different elements of simulation training.

Recommendation 5: Provide Training Professionals with Child Protection Experience to each Laboratory

Having trainers who have child protection experience contributes to the quality of simulation training in child welfare.[33] Increasing salaries for university-based facilitators may help make this happen in future hiring. In lieu of this, it may help to hire professionals with child protection experience to provide part-time consultation to each laboratory. The NIU has a successful experience with this in Fiscal Year 2024. These consultants could observe selected simulation training sessions, in-person or virtually, and debrief facilitators and trainees. The consultant could also provide designated hours to field questions from trainers and facilitators.

Recommendation 6: Develop a Rapid Response to Disgruntled Trainees

The CPTA should develop methods for responding rapidly to disgruntled trainees. It would be useful, for example, to identify professionals outside the laboratories to serve in an ombudsman role. Trainees could be given the contact information of the ombudsman, who would have the authority and resources to investigate and mediate disputes, and have the ability to support individual trainees. Perhaps a consultant with child protection experience could serve in this role, as well as providing child protection consultation (see Recommendation 5).

Recommendation 7: Assess the Logistics of Taking the Training

The CPTA should examine alternative procedures to mitigate the logistical problems identified by respondents, such as travel demands. They should explore methods either to minimize the use of online training or bolster it in order to make it a more viable adjunct to live training. The development underway of new simulation laboratories in new regions of the state will help with these concerns.

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[33] Chiu, Y. & Cross, T.P. (2020). How a training team delivers simulation training of child protection investigators. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *118*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105390

Recommendation 8: Consider Developing a Separate Training on SACWIS

Some survey respondents pointed out the centrality of SACWIS to investigators' jobs are recommended more training on SACWIS. In our review, incorporating this within simulation training would be a misuse of resources, because training on SACWIS does not truly employ simulation methods. Developing a separate supplemental training on SACWIS may address trainees' needs without disrupting simulation training.

Recommendation 9: Undertake New Research on Issues Identified in this Report

This report has identified several issues respondents had with simulation training, but little is known about the scope and nature of these issues. New research could develop knowledge about these issues that would inform efforts to improve simulation training. Research could, for example, examine the effects of facilitator prior work experience, the realism of the simulations, and the nature of negative reactions to simulation training. Interviews and new surveys could explore such issues in greater depth. Excerpts from training recordings in which these issues were manifest could be identified and studied.

Final Words

In its history, the Child Protection Training Academy (CPTA) has achieved considerable success. It has trained more than 1,000 new investigators and received substantially positive feedback during its entire history. This success continues. The DEST data consistently show increases in trainee confidence during the training. Most of the feedback continues to be positive, and many trainees credit the program with promoting their development. The follow-up survey (STF) shows that most investigators, all of whom received simulation training, have moderate to high confidence in their work in the field. CPTA has been a national model for simulation training in child welfare.

The CPTA operates as a complex network and has challenges to address, but it brings many strengths to overcome its difficulties. The network of DCFS and universities collaborating on simulation training has considerable work to do, but it is already making changes to address these challenges. We hope the findings of this report are useful in informing program development.

Appendix A: Implementation Study Interview Protocols

- **Simulation training administrators and program developers:**
  1. Please describe your role in the simulation training program of the NIU site.
  2. Please describe the process of developing or adapting the simulation training for the NIU site.
  3. What factors facilitated the adaptation of the simulation training in the NIU site?
  4. What obstacles did you need to overcome? (ask about courtroom sim specifically)
  5. Please describe briefly the adaptation and implementation of the following elements of simulation training and discuss the rationale for your choices in each area
     a. Design of the simulation training, including the training materials
     b. Mock house and courtroom
     c. The simulation trainers (ask about trainer's on hiring and boarding process; what the facilitators without CPS background can offer during debriefing giving they didn't CPS working experience)
     d. The recruitment and use of the actors (ask about the casting call)
     e. The recruitment and use of the professionals in courtroom simulation
  6. In your opinion, is there any difference between the simulation training in the Chicago and NIU sites? How?
  7. What role currently does simulation training play in DCFS overall training effort?
  8. What is needed to sustain simulation training and develop it further?
  9. Suggestions for the future sites?

- **Simulation Trainers**
  1. Please describe your role in the simulation training program of the NIU site.
  2. Please describe your background or training in relation to this role (ask about the onboarding process)
  3. Please describe the process of developing or adapting the simulation training for the NIU site.
  4. What factors facilitated the adaptation of the simulation training in the NIU site?
  5. What are your objectives in training a sim class?
  6. What methods do you use to facilitate the learning process?
  7. How does your lack of CPS working experience affect you during the debriefing?
  8. What methods do you use to help trainees' build their competence?
  9. In your observation, how does the simulation training transform trainees' knowledge, skills, confidence, and commitment during the week?
  10. In your opinion, is there any difference between the simulation training in the Chicago and the NIU sites? How? (ask about courtroom sim specifically)
  11. In your observation, in what ways is the program successful? What are growth areas that need further work?

- **Actors/Professionals**
  1. Please describe your role in the simulation training program of the NIU site.
  2. How were you recruited to be in the simulation training in the NIU site?

3. Please describe your background or training (and specific from NIU) in relation to this role (how many sim weeks have you done with NIU).
4. How do you work with the simulation trainer?
5. How do you interact with trainees during the training and what is the rationale for your interactions?
6. In your observation, how does the simulation training transform trainees' knowledge, skills, confidence, and commitment during the week?
7. In your observation, in what ways is the program successful? What are growth areas that need further work?

Appendix B: DEST Reflective Log for Learning Experience

Reflective log question: What were the most meaningful concepts or skills you learned today?

- **Monday: Calling the Reporter (N =184)**

Theme (n)	Examples of Quotation
Questioning skill for reporter (n = 100)	• *I learned how to question the reporter and ask appropriate questions needed for my investigation. I learned about PBL which will be a great tool.* • *What questions to ask and know what the reporter is entitled to know as far as information about the status of the case.* • *I learned to not assume what the reporter is saying and to always ask them to clarify.* • *Use of the Reporter Interview rubric was extremely helpful in breaking down questions as it made it much easier to decipher questions to ask and made the interview more fluid.*
Information gathering and documentatio n (n = 21)	• *Gathering the Information from the Report to determine facts.* • *Question everything that is presented.* • *Importance of documentation, how to interact with a reporter over the phone.* • *Interviewing the reporter documentation making notes of the critical aspects of the report.* • *I learned how to gather information and come up with questions that are important to a case.*
PBL, Critical Thinking (n = 20)	• *The PBL model and feedback from the trainer.* • *Critical thinking and asking the right questions.* • *Critically thinking about the most useful questions to ask when interviewing a reported. Separating our facts from our bias/hunches* • *The use of the PLB in formulating questions and steps in the investigative process.* • *Assists us to think outside of the box when engaging with reports. To question the intentions of the report and direct my questions from the reporter's answers.*
Family Engagement Skill (n = 15)	• *How to engage and keep a conversation going.* • *Learning engagement skills, practicing interviewing the reporter, clarifying who is entitled to updates regarding a report/investigation. Reflecting on alternatives regarding the narrative/report.* • *How to properly engage a family to gather all of the necessary information. what to include in contact notes.*

Investigation Procedure and Planning (n = 14)	• *The investigative plan worksheet and how it organizes the steps I should take.* • *The introduction to the investigative plan, it seems like it basically allows you to break down the observation of the interview. To me it might be an extra step that allows my interviewing process flow smoothly. Also, I liked how the phone interview went today; even though we did practice during my foundation training, today`s interview I was not as nervous as I was the first time. So, I really appreciate the practice.* • *The informal investigative tool that can be utilized in the investigation process. It will assist in organizing my cases when they are assigned.*

- **Tuesday: Knock on the Door (N = 132)**

Theme (n)	Examples of Quotation
Family Engagement Skill (n = 67)	• *Engaging families.* • *Working on getting in the door and building a relationship with the family.* • *How to engage with the families in a way that does not trigger them.* • *Understanding how to keep families engaged and remaining calm and respectful.* • *I learned how to be empathetic and how to actually engage with the family to build a rapport. That way, they are more likely to comply and help you get the answers that you need for your case.*
Questioning and Information-Gathering Skill (n = 43)	• *The different types of questions and areas of questions that need to be asked.* • *Gather facts, think about all possible situations or reasons of why an incident happened. Be open minded.* • *Remember to ask about safety concerns before entering the home. Ask about family strengths, listen to the family and follow up with questions after their responses.* • *The entire experience with the family and seeing all of the variety of demonstrations. Asking questions, the importance of gathering as much information as possible, remaining calm, asking the proper questions and developing a good rapport with the family. Staying engaged with the family. Also, interviewing the reporter and gathering good information for the next case.*
How to Knock on the Door (n = 28)	• *How to interact with a family during the initial visit. Take into account safety, choice of wording, confidence. Alternative methods to interact with families and to deal with different situations.* • *How to properly knock on the door, maintaining eye contact, and having proper body language.*

	• *How every knock at the door can be different, and you can learn from every situation.* • *Actually doing or first knock! It was extremely helpful to see a family's perspective on how I conducted interviews.*
Managing Conflicts and Ensuring Safety (n = 18)	• *Make sure you do things to keep you safe.* • *How to de-escalate conflict and to explain things to families to where they understand.* • *How to de-escalate the situation. How to talk to families in a firm, yet caring way.*
PBL, Critical Thinking (n = 5)	• *I am finding the PBL more helpful as we continue to use it.* • *Think outside the box. Go with the flow.* • *Critical thinking and analyzing.*

- **Wednesday: Scene Investigation (N = 132)**

Theme (n)	Examples of Quotation
Scene Investigation and Interviewing Skill (n = 40)	• *Scene Investigation and pay attention to details.* • *Walking through the entire scene investigation including body chart with the parents and home safety checklist.* • *The process involved with a visit and what to look for in terms of environmental and red flags (i.e. domestic violence demeanor of victims).* • *Learning some strengths and needs, learning how to interview correctly, and learning how to look at things correctly and observing all things needed for the case.*
Managing Conflicts and Ensure Safety (n = 30)	• *How to handle resistance.* • *How to get through resist families.* • *Dealing with resistant, combative, and untruthful clients.* • *Practicing remaining composure during times of pushback. Assessing home safety issues Processing information in a chaotic environment and paying attention to inconsistencies in the story.*
Questioning Skill (n = 13)	• *The skills I learned was learning how to talk to the parents and what to ask.* • *Do not be afraid to ask the more important questions. Also to ask clarifying questions if it is something that I do not understand.* • *To be prepared with points you are going to make and the questions to ask. Pay attention to details in the home.*
Family Engagement Skill (n = 13)	• *Engaging the family.* • *Genuineness, empathy, respect.* • *Effective engagement, reflection, follow up for clarity.* • *Engaging with strong and defensive personalities was the most meaningful skill from today.*

Procedure 300 & Policy (n = 8)	• *Follow policy and procedures.* • *Learning how to have a poker face and the importance of referring to procedure 300.* • *Explaining to the families the purposes of certain policies and procedures and how they expected to protect the families.*

- **Thursday: Interviewing the Parents and Medical simulation (N = 143)**

Theme (n)	Examples of Quotation
Gathering Information and Interviewing Skill (n = 57)	• *Understanding the flow of an interview one on one. Both parents were able to be more open and shared more. I am feeling much more prepared in starting an investigation.* • *Learning how different aspects of interviewing from separating the perpetrators will garner new or different informational paths.* • *Ask direct question when possible and get to the point of the question as soon as possible so you don't lose the family cooperation.* • *Gather accurate facts & make reasonable efforts to keep families together.* • *Learning how to ask relevant questions to perpetrators and parents, and also learning what to ask.*
Interact with Medical Professionals (n = 29)	• *I learned how to interview and talk to a physician to collaborate the information and facts received from going to the home, talking to the caregivers separately, and seeing the child.* • *Make sure to ask deeper questions when asking the doctor what happened with the children.* • *Questions to ask Medical Examiners and how to probe alleged perpetrators of child abuse and neglect.* • *How to speak with a doctor, what things to look for and what to ask a doctor regarding children when taking PC. Practice interviewing and gathering extensive information.*
Managing Conflicts and Ensure safety (n = 27)	• *How to incorporate the CERAP into the investigation, how to thoroughly review each threat.* • *How to offer a safety plan and what to do if the safety plan is rejected by the parents.* • *Looking at the CERAP and being given examples along will all the safety threats. The examples finally gave me a better understanding of each safety threat.* • *Today helped me feel more confident in assessing the CERAP and coming up with a safety plan.*

- **Friday: Courtroom Simulation (N = 182)**

Theme (n)	Examples of Quotation
Courtroom Process and Testifying skill (n = 92)	• *Court proceedings and expectations.* • *Learning the proper terminology to use in court. Understanding the importance of knowing the case in its entirety.* • *I was able to see how a court hearing and handled and how the process of the court hearing goes. A lot of information that will help me* [be] *successful in the future.* • *The most meaningful concept was learning and practicing how to testify in court. I learned that preparation is important, as lack of experience, or insufficient knowledge of a case can quickly discredit your testimony.* • *How to testify in court, answer questions asked. Take time to listen to questions and answer questions and ask for clarification if needed. How to enter case and contact notes into SACWIS (SWAPPER).*
Knowledge of Courtroom Preparation (n = 36)	• *To make sure you review the court report thoroughly before attending court to ensure preparedness.* • *To be prepared for your court cases. Always be honest and never make things up for court.* • *Be prepared for anything in court! The more information you have, the better! I truly appreciated this entire experience! Thank you!* • *The court simulation was very meaningful since that will part of my job as an investigator. The training provided me with an understanding on how to prepare for court and what actions or steps to take to be prepared when been interviewed.*
Experience and Feedback from Experts (n = 29)	• *Court Training today was very helpful, and the feedback provided was invaluable.* • *This week prepared me for real life events. All parties involved was extremely knowledgeable and helpful. I loved the feedback; it helped me to be more confident and gave me tips on what to do differently.* • *The courtroom experience was invaluable. I felt more confident after the judge gave feedback on everyone's performance.*

Appendix C: Content of Simulation Training Follow-up Survey (STF)

- When did you receive the simulation training provided as part of your certification training to be a child protection investigator: _ Month_ Year_ (drop down menu—including an option for those who did not receive simulation training)
- Do you still work at Division of Child Protection (DCP): □ Yes □ No

  2a1. If yes, what is your current position: □ Child Protection Specialists □ Child Protection Supervisors □ other_____
  2a2. If yes, what is your regional office? □ Northern □ Cook □Central □ Southern
  2b1. If no, how long did you stay in DCP after you completed the simulation training for your certification training: □ less than 1 year □ 1 to 2 years □ 2 to 3 years □ 3 to 4 years □ more than 4 years
  2b2. If no, which of the following best describes your current position: □ a different child welfare position at DCFS □ an administrative position at DCFS □ child welfare related work as a state employee outside of DCFS □ child welfare-related work, but not as a state employee □ I no longer work in child welfare

- Looking back, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the simulation training you received as part of your certification training to be a child protection investigator? Strongly disagree (1) Disagree (2) Neutral (3) Agree(4) Strongly agree(5)

I felt prepared to participate in the SIM lab
The simulation environment was a safe learning environment
I felt the training was conducted in an environment conducive to learning
The scenario environment was realistic and I was able to incorporate my training into practice
The SIM lab provided a realistic experience of the challenges I will face when working in the field
Participating in the scenarios helped to increase my confidence in my role
I felt respected during my debriefing
The debriefing sessions provided valuable feedback

- Looking back on the training at the Simulation Training Laboratory, how well did the simulation training you received as part of your certification training to be a child protection investigator prepare for in the following ways? Did not receive the content (yes1/no0); Very Poorly (1) Poorly (2) Neutral (3) Well (4) Very Well (5)

Procedural Competencies:
Rapport-Building Skills
The simulation training helped me learn to provide with clear expectations about the investigation
The simulation training helped me learn to use a respectful, non-judgmental stance with families)
The simulation training helped me communicate empathy

The simulation training helped me show professionalism in my interactions with families
The simulation training helped me do strengths-findings with clients
Communication and Information-Gathering Skills
The simulation training helped me provide active listening
The simulation training helped me make appropriate use of paraphrase or summarization to reflect content of client statements
The simulation training helped me refrain from using jargon, and/or explain unfamiliar terms
The simulation training helped me be able to redirect client and keep interview focused on its stated purpose
The simulation training helped me use open-ended question and avoid leading and coercive questions
The simulation training helped question inconsistencies and confront in a respectful manner
Safety Assessment Skills
The simulation training helped me gauge client's understanding of safety concern(s) before completing an interaction
The simulation training helped me use probing questions to gather information about safety
The simulation training helped me validate client experiences and concerns
The simulation training helped me make follow-up plans and next steps clear without making promises or providing premature predictions about the future
Meta-Competencies:
Skills in Action
The simulation training helped me apply of knowledge related to underlying conditions and their impact
The simulation training helped me be consistent in decision-making across dynamic and varied contexts
The simulation training helped me understanding multiple and multidisciplinary perspectives on a case or event
The simulation training helped me be aware of my own body language, approach, choice of words, etc. and their impact on interactions
The simulation training helped me "use myself" in my work
Deepening of Perspectives on Diversity
The simulation training helped me identify cultural or other characteristics impacting client interaction
The simulation training helped me use adaptive resources and services as clients need them
The simulation training helped me seek knowledge about a client's culture and its relevance to the investigation
Managing Affective Intensity in the Moment
The simulation training helped me be aware of physical surroundings and recognize safety hazards in the location or the circumstances
The simulation training helped me recognize the emotional cues of others
The simulation training helped me think critically and resist assumptions
The simulation training helped me respond effectively to resistance

The simulation training helped me with my own emotional responses in order to remain professional, safe, and effective in the field
Openness to Learning
The simulation training helped me reflect on my own strengths
The simulation training helped me value the need for continuous learning and seeking knowledge and resources necessary to meet the needs of each unique client
The simulation training helped me use supervision proactively

- (Confidence Scale) With (1) being lowest and (7) being highest, please check the appropriate number to indicate your current level of confidence in the following skill areas. (if you no longer work at Division of Child Protection (DCP), please think back at the time when you worked at DCP)

Gather info from collateral contacts
Think critically on facts vs. hypotheses
Engage families
Assess safety
Integrate compassion and investigative skill
Address any concerns about family statements and behaviors
Identify family strengths
Explain need for safety plan and/or protective custody
Explain DCFS role and expectations for keeping children safe
Answer pointed questions from parents and caregivers
Address underlying conditions such as domestic violence, substance abuse, mental health, developmental disabilities
Testify in court
Work as a DCFS investigator

- Please rate how the following factors support or hinder your using what you learned in your initial simulation training. Strongly hinders (1) Somewhat hinders (2) No effect (3) Somewhat supports (4) Strongly supports (5)

Supervision
Caseload
Checklist of things required by policy

- Is there anything else that supports or hinders your using what you learned in your initial simulation training? Please describe it.
- Please describe the impact of the simulation training on your overall perception of yourself and your competence for the role of investigator
- In what ways has simulation training affected your ability to work with diverse individuals and families when doing an investigation?
- How do you use Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in your current work?

- How can simulation training for child protection investigators improve?
- When you think about how you see yourself, which of the following terms best fits how you describe your gender?
  □ Female □ Male □ Trans or Transgender □ Other (please state) _____
- Your age (drop down menu)
- Your race-ethnicity (Check all that apply)
  □ White □ Black □ American Indian and Alaska Native □ Asian □ Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander □ Latinx □ Two or More Races □Other_____
- Education
  a. Your highest education degree: □ Bachelor's Degree □ Master's Degree □ Doctoral Degree
  b. You have a degree or degrees in Social Work? □Yes □ No
     If no, what is your degree in? □ Criminal justice □ Law enforcement □ Sociology □ Psychology □ Human Services □ Other _____
- Tenure/Experience
  a. How many years have you worked in child welfare?
     □ Less than one year □ 1 to 2 years □ 3 to 5 years □ 6 to 10 years □More than 10 years
  b. How long have (or did) you worked as a DCFS investigator?
     □ Less than 6 months □ 6 to 12months □1 to 2 years □ 3 to 5 years □ More than 5 years □ not applicable
- Caseload: About how many active child abuse and neglect investigations did you have in the past 30 days? □ none □1 to 5 □ 6 to 10 □11 to 25 □ More than 25 □ not applicable

Appendix D: Chapter 6 (STF) Supplemental Tables

Table D. 1

Satisfaction with Simulation Training (Mean)

1- strongly disagree to 5- strongly agree	N	*M*	SD
I felt prepared to participate in the SIM lab	166	3.7	1.03
The simulation environment was a safe learning environment	163	4.0	1.01
I felt the training was conducted in an environment conducive to learning	165	3.7	1.11
The scenario environment was realistic and I was able to incorporate my training into practice	166	3.4	1.32
The SIM lab provided a realistic experience of the challenges I will face when working in the field	165	3.4	1.34
Participating in the scenarios helped to increase my confidence in my role	166	3.4	1.30
I felt respected during my debriefing	165	3.9	1.10
The debriefing sessions provided valuable feedback	164	3.8	1.07
I felt prepared to participate in the SIM lab	166	3.7	1.03

Table D. 2

How Well Simulation Training Prepared Respondents for Procedural Competency (Mean)

1- very poorly to 5- very well	N	*M*	SD
Rapport-Building Skills			
The simulation training helped me learn to provide with clear expectations about the investigation	159	3.5	1.17
The simulation training helped me learn to use a respectful, non-judgmental stance with families)	159	3.7	1.12
The simulation training helped me communicate empathy	155	3.6	1.12
The simulation training helped me show professionalism in my interactions with families	157	3.8	1.10
The simulation training helped me do strengths-findings with clients	154	3.5	1.17
Communication and Information-Gathering Skills			
The simulation training helped me provide active listening	157	3.8	1.03
The simulation training helped me make appropriate use of paraphrase or summarization to reflect content of client statements	158	3.6	1.10
The simulation training helped me refrain from using jargon, and/or explain unfamiliar terms	157	3.6	1.10
The simulation training helped me be able to redirect client and keep interview focused on its stated purpose	157	3.5	1.19
The simulation training helped me use open-ended question and avoid leading and coercive questions	158	3.7	1.06
The simulation training helped question inconsistencies and confront in a respectful manner	157	3.5	1.16
Safety Assessment and Ending Skills			
The simulation training helped me gauge client's understanding of safety concern(s) before completing an interaction	159	3.6	1.10
The simulation training helped me use probing questions to gather information about safety	159	3.6	1.11
The simulation training helped me validate client experiences and concerns	160	3.6	1.14
The simulation training helped me make follow-up plans and next steps clear without making promises or providing premature predictions about the future	158	3.5	1.21

Table D. 3

How Well Simulation Training Prepared Respondents for Meta-Competency (Mean)

1- very poorly to 5- very well	N	*M*	SD
Skills in Action			
The simulation training helped me apply of knowledge related to underlying conditions and their impact	151	3.5	1.12
The simulation training helped me be consistent in decision-making across dynamic and varied contexts	147	3.4	1.13
The simulation training helped me understanding multiple and multidisciplinary perspectives on a case or event	149	3.4	1.15
The simulation training helped me be aware of my own body language, approach, choice of words, etc. and their impact on interactions	152	3.7	1.12
The simulation training helped me "use myself" in my work	146	3.4	1.22
Deepening of Perspectives on Diversity			
The simulation training helped me identify cultural or other characteristics impacting client interaction	148	3.5	1.13
The simulation training helped me use adaptive resources and services as clients need them	148	3.3	1.20
The simulation training helped me seek knowledge about a client's culture and its relevance to the investigation	147	3.4	1.17
Managing Affective Intensity in the Moment			
The simulation training helped me be aware of physical surroundings and recognize safety hazards in the location or the circumstances	151	3.9	1.10
The simulation training helped me recognize the emotional cues of others	149	3.7	1.10
The simulation training helped me think critically and resist assumptions	151	3.7	1.08
The simulation training helped me respond effectively to resistance	150	3.5	1.19
The simulation training helped me with my own emotional responses in order to remain professional, safe, and effective in the field	149	3.5	1.22
Openness to learning			
The simulation training helped me reflect on my own strengths	150	3.7	1.10
The simulation training helped me value the need for continuous learning and seeking knowledge and resources necessary to meet the needs of each unique client	150	3.7	1.14
The simulation training helped me use supervision proactively	149	3.4	1.18

Table D. 4

Trainees' Current Confidence in Child Protection Skills (Mean)

	N	*M*	SD
Gather info from collateral contacts	151	5.7	1.47
Think critically on facts vs. hypotheses	150	5.8	1.21
Engage families	149	6.0	1.20
Assess safety	150	6.0	1.19
Integrate compassion and investigative skill	148	6.0	1.22
Address any concerns about family statements and behaviors	150	5.8	1.30
Identify family strengths	148	5.8	1.27
Explain need for safety plan and/or protective custody	150	5.5	1.53
Explain DCFS role and expectations for keeping children safe	148	6.0	1.25
Answer pointed questions from parents and caregivers	148	5.7	1.34
Address underlying conditions	150	5.8	1.24
Testify in court	150	5.4	1.61
Work as a DCFS investigator	146	5.6	1.52

Appendix E: Responses to Open-Ended Items on the Follow-Up Survey (STF)

Theme	Examples of Quotation
The Variety of Positive Effects of Simulation Training	• *Training made me realize that I have much to learn as an investigator.* • *This training helped me be confident as an investigator.* • *Trainers were so knowledgeable and resourceful and available after the training.* • *Simulation training was a great way to help me reflect on myself and learn from others.* • *Simulation training positively impacted my ability to understand potential situations that may arise in the field. Though it was a very short period of time it is effective to provide a new investigator how to anticipate and plan for what may arise in the field.* • *I feel that the simulation training improved my understanding of the role of being in investigator. It has given me more confidence in my ability to perform the duties of the job.* • *It was great to practice the skills in a true role-playing fashion with actors who understood what clientele we work with so we truly have to respond on our feet.* • *My simulation experience has made me become more aware in scene investigations. I received very good feedback and will take everything I have learned into the field with me.* • *Simulation training is great and effective tool that's applied to DCP work…Simulation laid down the fundamentals in order for me to apply it to my job.* • *The simulation training gave me…the skills and techniques to perform my duty with success…The simulation training gave me to be able to identify and recognize individuals and families' cultural backgrounds, their beliefs and how all these impact their parenting skills.* • *The training gave me insight on what you can't expect when entering homes with allegations. Both positive and negative aspects of how parents will react to the immediate situation of having a CPS in their home asking very personal questions…It was a great experience.* • *Simulation was beneficial in creating confidence in the questions to ask during the initial phase of the investigation. Simulation helped build confidence with speaking with families and maintaining control of a situation.* • *Simulation was awesome and it really helped prepare us for situations we may see in the field. Secondly,* [name of facilitator] *is an excellent teacher and she made the class very interesting!*

	• *Training simulation really helped me get an idea of what it will look like in real life once i go out to the families' homes…it affected me in a good way because you get to work with different individuals.*
Obstacles to Using Simulation Training	• *We were handed cases immediately on day one (despite not being certified yet in the state) with no idea how to perform a real-life case.* • *The amount of cases at one time and expectations are very stressful.* • *Do not feel supported by AA and those above in management. I do not feel that management cares about the case load and the obstacles of trying to get police reports, PCP, and locating alleged perpetrators that CPI faces. Management only cares about cases getting closed and taking people's kids. Management does not care about helping families or keeping them together and providing the knowledge and assistance that families need to do better.* • *The foundations part of training was fantastic but the simulation part was short and useless to be honest. My competence did not come from simulation.* • *…court training was a waste of time. We waited nearly 5 weeks and then was put into a group with people that we did not know. They did not have the exact simulation we did so their testimony was off. Being able to testify about 3 minutes of your moment after listening to countless people tell it not the way you know it happened yet still stay consistent was fruitless.* • *My experience in the field did not follow the training. My supervisor told me not do things that way, referring to training. I was loaded down with cases, receiving at least 1-2 each day upon starting working in the field. I could hardly ever find my supervisor for my questions. She called me a slow snail, and told me that the only way I could make it was to work at night and on the weekend and refused to approve overtime, so I worked without pay or accruing comp time. I could not believe how unprofessional and sabotaging my supervisor was.* • *Simulation training provided me knowledge and confidence in my skills, abilities and previous experience. However, once I began working within the office and giving investigations that confidence crumbled. The current state of DCP offices, their process of on-job training and methods of supposedly motivation will forever continue to provide a high turnover.*
Concerns About the Realism and Applicability of Simulations	• *Simulations had almost no real-life situations or information in it. Everything I've seen in the field is completely different.* • *Simulations showed me exactly what won't happen while being in house.*

	• *I feel like most of what we learned in training and SIMS was forgotten within the first couple weeks in the field, because working in the field is so much different than the actual training.* • *Most of the information I learned in training, I have never used in my investigation.* • *This* [simulation training] *made me feel prepared until I saw no one using the techniques.* • *The simulation was not an accurate simulation of what we see in DCP and needs to be redone…Redo and make it more accurate and focus on what was discussed in the interview. DCP has a high turnover, and the training needs to focus on what really happens when you initiate an investigation. Trainees need to be educated on what DCP is really like and what they are getting into. Essentially, don't sugar coat it.* • *The simulation training does not provide realistic scenarios and it is not culturally sensitive as dealing with certain families. The real experience is being in the field. There is nothing that can prepare you for the work we do unless you are in the field.* • *The simulation was overload, rarely would we walk into a home that was that overloaded with allegations. Learning to see what's under is what we should be learning. Instructors would argue or disregard instead of walking through why an investigator thinks that they should mark a certain safety risk. Also court training was a waste of time. We waited nearly 5 weeks and then was put into a group with people that we did not know. They did not have the exact simulation we did so their testimony was off. Being able to testify about 3 minutes of your moment after listening to countless people tell it not the way you know it happened yet still stay consistent was fruitless.* • *Simulations showed me exactly what won't happen while being in house.*
Concerns about Lessons about Safety	• *After I had a coworker stabbed to death, and myself in several precarious situations, I believe the simulation did a poor job of preparing us for our own safety. The total goal was, whatever it took to get into the house. Looking back, the CPI trainee who did not make it into the house, probably was the one who was the wisest. This scenario should have from the beginning told us to bring law enforcement, not to talk our way into a volatile, precarious, dangerous situation. Gun in the drawer, drugs, angry clients are all a recipe for a horrible ending. I hope in the future there is more a focus on utilizing law enforcement instead of talking our way into a home.* • *Instead of focusing on one "worst-case" scenario that most likely we won't come across for some time in our careers, simulations should expose trainees to multiple REAL life scenarios from start to finish, as if it was a real case. In real life, no one spends hours and hours asking*

	reporters 75 questions. There is no time, and the other person would never even answer such frivolous detailed questions. In real life, if a father of a child was yelling aggressively at you nonstop, you would not continue the home visit, you would simply leave and call the supervisor or law enforcement. It is possible that a worst-case scenario is thrown at us simply for the entertainment of the instructors, because it certainly cannot be for training purposes related to the real world. At the end of 2-week regular foundations training and 1-week simulation training, my coworkers and I came back to the office not knowing how to perform the real-life job function. • *They said the forms were not needed such as the Home Safety Checklist and we did not do a CERAP after, we did not call a supervisor afterward to assess for safety. In my office if there is extreme abusive speak coming from the client, we are told to excuse ourselves from their residence, call the supervisor and come back with a police officer so you can safely complete the visit. You would never stay in a volatile situation like this and be told you must stay and there is no calling for supervisor or police. (this is too dangerous and unrealistic).* • *I…felt the trainer's main focus was to get into the apartment, and honestly that went against everything that we learned in Safety training. I have been working in child welfare since 2008 as a foster care case worker and supervisor, and after those two days I felt angry as the situation is unrealistic in the sense that in the real world no worker should walk into a home alone, where the parent is that hostile.* • *I feel that it hindered my ability to move forward with engaging parents as I was stopped for observing and addressing an immediate safety issue. This is supposed to be a "real" training and it should be addressed and taken seriously as a real situation, so therefore unsafe sleep right in front of us should be addressed immediately, due to the limited amount of time it takes for a child to suffocate.* • *It was unrealistic and demonstrated an unsafe training environment. It also encouraged staff to continue to try and engage when the parents told staff to leave.*
Limitations of Online Training	• *This was an online simulation and was not overly effective as such more simulation in-person training. That whole week would be better in person.* • *I did simulation training during COVID, so my training took place virtually. I believe that the training would have been much more effective if I had been able to do it in person, so some of my scores are lower due to it being done virtually… I do think it was helpful, however having to do it virtually did make it difficult because it was hard to see*

	everything we were supposed to during the simulations that took place in the house. • *I didn't like the virtual days. I feel like I learn the most in person because I'm away from my home/work distraction.*
Use of Problem-Based Learning	• *Prior to taking the simulations training I had never heard of PBL. Now I feel confident in using it on the job to perform different task and assignments.* • *It* [problem-based learning] *has helped me identify the most important information and facts of the case. It has allowed me to distinguish and gather my thoughts in a thorough matter.* • *This is used daily when staffing a case or dealing with a situation involving staff or when complaints are made against staff.* • *I honestly couldn't even tell you what that means anymore, I'm sure I do it, I just don't know the term.* • *I don't recall much about PBL process.* • *I usually do not use PBL.*
Training on SACWIS	• *They insisted we do notes for SACWIS & never gave feedback. I was doing them wrong, and it would have been nice to know that during training. I emailed several times requesting feedback with no response... I don't believe simulation training helped, I would have loved to spend a couple days learning SACWIS instead.* • *It* [simulation training] *was helpful, but there was no training on how to use the computer systems and that's a major part of the job.*
The Desire for More, Longer, or More Complete Simulations	• *It was not enough to really prepare me. As previously stated, we should have 4-5 simulations, not one.* • *The training was rushed and need more time going over key components of the process.* • *I would have loved to do one simulation from beginning to end, meaning go over the CANTS, going over the home safety check list, talking to parents and having them provide all information needed such as children's doctor information, collateral.* • *I feel that the training for simulation needed to be more, scenarios and in person simulation as the two days were not enough and not long enough to gather and complete what a normal case would look like on initial visit.* • *The limited time spent in simulation training* [hinders its use]*; I can read policy all day long but only have the limited time to practice the skills with experienced feedback…Lengthen it; we need more real-life practice as opposed to the series of weeks going over policy and procedures that we can read about on our own.*

	• *There needs to be more time spent in simulation rather than the classroom and learning policy... The simulation however is rushed with no fault to the instructions due to the strict time restraint they are given to push new hires into simulation.* • *I believe simulation training will improve if we have more simulations training centers as well as having simulations-based training regularly for employees because the world is ever changing and as investigators we might encounter very new scenarios that we have never seen before.*
Preferred Training with a Different Focus or Form	• *Very little was learned in the simulation training. It was completed virtually and looking back, didn't address some of the most important facets of the position. A new employee will learn much more from OJT.* • *The entire simulation preparedness is confusing with several cases occurring at once with specific goals and outcomes that are highly unpredictable due to interactions with new hires and actors. The training that I was in glued several investigations together and I was unsure what I was looking for in my "report." The scenario also changed from the first contact to the last which changes the scenario for everyone differently in the "court phase." Simulation needs to mimic real life. This simulation did not. The simulation is cut short and trainees are unable to finish their meeting with the family which stunts the learning process. The feedback was not beneficial as again, trainees are giving a simple goal not consistent with the rest of the simulation. I was cut short in my scenario which prevented me from completing tasks. Simulations should not be a group learning experience. Simulations should be a one on one or a team of two so that the trainees can learn based off of their interaction in the simulation.* • *It would have been more helpful to go step by step on what should be done for a successful investigation. LEADS/CANTS/Collaterals/Drs./witnesses, etc. That was not my experience. We didn't learn anything about how/when to add a person to the report, when a person should be marked as a collateral vs a contact vs a person listed on the report, so many other valuable things. This is what we were thrown into at the start of working on our own. We didn't know many of the basic things when it came to an investigation.* • *I think it would have been a lot more helpful working a single case all the way through rather than having one family that was "easier" and one family that was difficult. Make it so it is a medium experience and allow us to do the entire thing all the way through. There is so much I was unprepared for because I had never gotten to do a whole case yet.*

	• *Did not learn anything new in simulation; it was a complete waste of time and of taxpayer's money to pay for "actors". I could have spent that time with a co-worker to learn more "in the field" experience. If one does not know how to engage a family prior to foundations and/or simulations then this is not a job for them.*
Difficulties with Travel	• *We also were expected to work a full day then drive 5 hours to our training site getting us to a hotel late at night in a city most have never been. We then had training 40+ minutes away. After the 3rd day of training we then had to drive in rush hour traffic back home making that commute nearly 6-7 hours and then report back remotely at 8:30. This is unsafe practice and investigators could get hurt.* • *The timing as it pertains to the location could be improved. I had to leave my office on a Monday evening after a SIMS Zoom training to make it to the training facility two hours away in Chicago.*
Negative Experiences with Trainers	• *Our trainer for the entirety of training, literally asked me if I thought this job was for me when one of the actors was extremely uncooperative during a mock interview and refused to answer any questions, so I ended the interview. With that said, the women who were in charge of and taught SIMS were awesome, never belittled us (unlike the actual trainer), were extremely outgoing and involved us as peers, not underlings.* • *The women who were the instructors of the SIMS in Springfield (during my SIMS) were very judgmental, rude, and gave no positive feedback…The instructors made me feel stupid and made me feel like I knew nothing*. [the respondent summarized their previous experience]. • *The simulation trainers were bullies, they were not professional at all and they were racist. All who participated noticed it. The DCFS trainer asked me to report this as is not acceptable.* • *I was mocked, talked down to, etc. by the trainer.*
Trainers Lack Child Protection Experience	• [How can simulation training for child protection investigators improve?] *Having trainers who used to be investigators, giving some positive feedback after doing the simulations rather than being all negative* • *I think that an actual child protection specialist should be contacted and have them act or help out. I think it's important for someone who actually does our job teaches the class*. • *Make it so the simulation facilitators have actually been investigators and know what they are talking about. We received quite a bit of false information from our facilitators because they have never done the job before and did not know what they were teaching.* • *I feel that the simulation instructors would better benefit their SIMS classes if they had more experience in the field themselves. While it seems, they know a basis of topics and formalities about DCFS it does*

	not seem that they know the everyday ins and outs of an investigation. I feel that if they had more time shadowing investigators, or if retired investigators were running the SIMS classes it would better prepare future investigators for what they're going to be doing. Furthermore, getting more knowledge on how to do behind the scenes things like navigating SACWIS, writing up safety plans and things like this would have been beneficial (this goes along with foundations as well). I think the people running the current SIMS classes are great but overall lack the real-world experience they need to share with the future investigators and in my class were sometimes even caught giving wrong information.
Problems with the Actors	• *There was no learning from simulation training. All the actors talked over us or between them not allowing us to engage them back in the simulation.* • *The simulation used actors that were TOO RESISTANT and hindered the learning aspect in the training scenario. The actors were too willing to resist and not realistic. Better actors that are not zealous with the resistance part of the training and more on the learning is needed. I have experienced peopled that were resistant to me but not to the extreme I experienced in the training scenarios with meeting clients…I was not able to finish the simulation involving actors because of the extreme resistance that was not realistic. I was getting a headache and just stated "I will be back with the police" as learned when resistance to seeing a child is present. The actor apologized to me later knowing he was over acting for the scenario. I missed some of the learning because of the over pressuring.* • *The simulation training was very poor as the actors portraying the clients consistently went out of their way to be resistant unnaturally that would not occur in an actual interaction outside of the normal course of business…The actors need to be trained better so that they can help the DCP trainees be better prepared for actual on the job situations.* • *Sim training was way over the top. Some of the worst investigations I've had, and none of them were as difficult, stubborn or uncooperative as some of the "actors" in SIMS… To be honest, the lack of safety support by the department is the largest issue when it comes to being in the field. With short staffing in most police departments and the department refusing to allow DCP to protect ourselves, nothing will prepare new workers for the field.* • [Written in reference to abusive behavior by an actor] *Had someone been treating me like that, I wouldn't have stayed in that home, I would have left when things got heated and we weren't able to calm things down. There is no reason to put ourselves in danger when there is other people who can support us. The lady in charge made my partner and I go*

	back into the home, after being thrown out, and apologize to him. We didn't do anything wrong, why would we apologize for being screamed and cussed at? If that were real life, I would have called the police to assist. My supervisors would have never made us apologize to someone who was verbally assaulting us to try and get back into the home. • *I think that if SIMS is going to be beneficial or more realistic the actors need to be better. The male actor was unpleasant used foul language, threats, and racist comments. He was way to over the top for it being a training. I know out in the field my supervisor would never leave me in a house with the way the actor was acting. After watching my videos of SIMS you can see how we would ask a question and it would not be answered by the actors but once the instructor came in to talk they answered and listened. I don't know what the point of the actors refusing to answer or talk to us as we are the ones who are doing it. Not only would they not answer the questions they would yell or argue and again would not do that to the instructors. I think overall the actors are just trying to be as difficult as possible but to the point it was not beneficial. I would not let any client talk to me the way the actors were allowed too.* • *The simulation was the worse that I have ever encountered in any sort of job training. For example, with one of the scenarios during the simulation, I specifically and VERY NICELY explained to the family "3" times who I was and my purpose for being there in their home. After those "3" attempts, the family was still refusing and was still being non-compliant. Again, after "3" attempts. I was told, however, that I was not nice enough to the family and that I should have kept trying to convince them to comply. I have been doing this job for 7 years now and that type of training during the simulation was very stressful for me, and I disagreed wholeheartedly with the way that the actors were telling me that I should have kept trying and begging is not the way to investigate our cases. It was awful and I will never do the simulation again. It made me feel less of a DCP worker….* • *During my SIMS training I had a terrible experience. I felt like I learned nothing. I was totally frustrated and questioned if I even wanted to do this job. During one of the hands on portions, I was screamed at in my face by an actor numerous times, told to get the fuck out of his house, he made my partner cry due to prior events in her life with an abusive relationship and being treated like that. That scenario taught us absolutely nothing.*

Appendix F: Follow-Up Survey (STF) Respondents' Suggestions for Improving the Simulation Training

More, Longer, or More Complete Simulations/ In-person Training

Being able to have mid term trainings on new policies and procedures and being updated on case notes for cases that need more information such as who to send information to and what needs to be done in order to complete cases in a timely manner.

Hard question due to simulations was great learning experience. I think everyone should be in person daily and daily simulations with the actors - families. This is a great learning experience for us to see where we are weak at and where we are strong at. We then can get the feedback from everyone and adjust ourselves now before we go into the field. To have trainers not stand in front of the power point when we are writing things down and to be able to address us by our correct names which appeared to be a problem during simulations with a few people. Maybe it is as simple as going around the room and asking us a bit of information about ourselves and our names. Maybe the setup of the room differently so trainers our not in front of power point. Overall simulations training was great and I would love to do it again.

I think it can improve by having more than two days of simulation. getting more practice.

More time putting terms and procedure into practice. I felt as though had simulations been Incorporated into the classroom portion of the training with discussion then role play. So has topics are discussed during the first four weeks take two days a week in those weeks to role play. Two days in the classroom then a day in simulations putting into practice the topics learned or discussed. Then one final event at the end

more simulation in person training. that whole week would be better in person. Longer sessions within the simulation to identify more things needed. more training on sacwis and overall, just more time, and more explanation than we were getting.

I believe that most of the training should be centered around simulation training. Many of the staff do not know how to interview or what questions to ask. I believe that the environment should also be a clean environment as some homes look normal and aren't. I think that simulation should even work with staff on once a referral is made and how to interact with other professionals (ie, what they need and what questions to ask).

Maybe it should be longer!

I believe that the training can improve by being longer than a week. I believe that helping investigators work the checklist would better prepare future investigators for more efficient ways to work an investigation. Having a week to work a case, complete a checklist and close a case all the way through to the end including SACWIS would improve the time it takes for future investigators to completely close a case.

By simulating one case from beginning to end including filling out every form needed, practicing calling police for standby practice preparing a case for court, getting all the

resources we can including who to call and what forms are needed to get the family in intact services or obtain Norman funding.

One scenario (instead of two), broken down, slowly discussed, analyzed over the three days. More of a step by step, to truly discuss and understand the what's and whys on an initial investigative interview.

I think this training should be broke up into two parts. I think when a new group who needs training starts that they have a few days reviewing what they have to do and then have a stimulation training. For the most part, a majority of the new workers have some experience but some of them might not have CWS experience. From that you do the normal training and then follow up with the simulation training. I also think that there should be some peer review feedback to part of the simulation training. I also feel that this type of simulation training should not only be for Investigation but also Child Welfare Specialist. Our job is a lot of hands on learning which is why i do feel simulation training can be beneficial. However, our current training for workers is not the best. We also have no follow up after they are licensed. Because of this, i feel that at 60 days after being licensed and taking cases. They should have a follow up with their trainers including a part of training with simulation. As well as one at 6-9 months. We truly don't know our job for about a year or more and we have such a vulnerable job.

Refresher training.

To add follow up simulation training checking in to address areas of improvement and support needed by bringing a real case from their caseload and present how the investigation was managed and identifying areas of improvement.

I completed the SIMS training virtually. I believe it would have been even more impactful if conducted in person

Simulation training should be longer than one week, and it should be in-person. I didn't like the virtual days. I feel like I learn the most in person because I'm away from my home/work distraction.

I think individuals should have more simulations through the training process. One solo simulation and one tandem training with a partner not of your choosing isn't enough before placing real Childrens lives on the line as well as our safety and risk of criminal prosecution.

The training needs to be longer at least 2 weeks. It was not long enough to get the effect that we should have received.

longer training

Lengthen it; we need more real life practice as opposed to the series of weeks going over policy and procedures that we can read about on our own.

More simulations vs classroom.

i believe simulation training will improve if we have more simulations training centers as well as having simulations based training regularly for employees because the world is ever

changing and as investigators we might encounter very new scenarios that we have never seen before.

I would advise the facilitators add more time to this exercise.

You could do continuous training for Supervisors and teach consistency in application. Having to relearn after the SIM training negated the training.

More time for the simulation and more direct goals. The entire simulation preparedness is confusing with several cases occurring at once with specific goals and outcomes that are highly unpredictable due to interactions with new hires and actors. The training that I was in glued several investigations together and I was unsure what I was looking for in my "report." The scenario also changed from the first contact to the last which changes the scenario for everyone differently in the "court phase." Simulation needs to mimic real life. This simulation did not. The simulation is cut short and trainees are unable to finish their meeting with the family which stunts the learning process. The feedback was not beneficial as again, trainees are giving a simple goal not consistent with the rest of the simulation. I was cut short in my scenario which prevented me from completing tasks. Simulations should not be a group learning experience. Simulations should be a one on one or a team of two so that the trainees can learn based off of their interaction in the simulation.

offer more simulation and more feedback.

More scenarios

Smaller and more types of scenarios

Practice interviewing children! Wouldn't be able to be a real child, but it's important to know how to speak with children because it's vastly different then how you interview an adult. - Talk more about services! When parents tell us in the field that they're struggling with domestic violence, substance abuse, mental health and more, their issues typically do not rise to the level for taking protective custody or implementing a safety plan and instead we link clients/families to services. Learning how to navigate that conversation/explain the services provided(especially intact services), would be helpful. - How to tell a parent/caregiver that you're indicating them! Telling an AP that they're indicated for CA/N can get really heated. Navigating that conversation, plus giving tips would be helpful. (Tip: Tell the parent over-the-phone rather than in person, especially if they're aggressive).

The most difficult thing I engage in the field is incidents that come in as abuse/neglect but are really driven by a child with severe mental health issues. I feel like there are not appropriate resources for those families and so they just keep piling on investigations but we're incredibly limited on how they can actually be helped.

I am not sure it can improve. I feel like the training is very productive and conducive to what we are doing in the field. Maybe change the scenarios occasionally but other than that, I feel it was all wonderful.

Simulation Training should be longer than one week if possible and should include a variety of case scenarios for those in training. Also, the trainees should be able to practice more

with cases and practice case scenarios with other trainees in the classroom setting before being recorded.

Add more scenario in which the child protection trainee will have to face different families with a representation of each race group.

I would like to see and participate in more scenarios in order to practice as much as possible before being turned loose on the job.

Have more scenarios, with different situation and families, not just having and meeting uncooperative families.

While I feel that the simulation was a good experience for an incoming CPI, I did feel also that, a good scenario could have been acted out as well. Someone who is coming out of Foundations training and thrown into a simulation should have had the experience of a good investigation, rather than go straight to a complicated one and then your group is torn down by the actors. I don't think that is a fair approach nor does it build confidence of a new CPI. This is what.

Adding Different Tasks

Include diversity and how investigators should address that issue in regards to possible implicit bias.

investigators would benefit from practicing interviewing minors.

replay good first time listening skills to improve their cooperation and listening skills.

Watch some videos in simulations that include mock hearings and cases to have an idea of how to interview.

By going over all the forms that are required with talking protective custody. Different scenarios

more variety in things we have to deal with on cases, practicing proper procedure.

Pair new employee with a current investigator and allow the process to be modeled. Work through every scenario including opening intact, taking protective custody etc.

Do a home safety checklist instead of engaging the actors in that room. The mom holding the baby to cover the bruises was about the best thing to come out of that training.

Run more than 1 simulation all the way through. We were given a partial simulation that we were supposed to start on our own then work off where classmates had made it in the simulation, and it was a bit confusing. The main simulation where we did a full run through was split between 2 classmates adding to confusion. Parameters of the home that were part of the home were poorly defined. The simulation attempted to focus on difficult parents and safety but failed to create any believable threats. The whole situation felt and played out like a bad roleplay. A large part of our job is speaking with children. There was no preparation for speaking with children at all during the roleplay. There was no practice on talking with a child that is afraid to speak with you. There was no practice talking with a child with ADHD. There was no practice talking with children that do not speak well yet. The simulation fails to

create a real environment. There is too much handholding. If someone messes up, they don't need to be patted on the back and told it is ok. Have the instructors call workers out when they mess up. Getting called out sternly will stick in someone's mind a lot better than a softly spoken correction. Problem areas do not need to be minimized. If the department wants to focus on the safety of its workers put in a mandatory self-defense week. That is something that could be incorporated into simulations. Also, when you have workers that are teaching you about problem solving and working with difficult people, they should be able to handle a difficult student going through a rough time without involving everyone's supervisors. I feel like the department would be better off with a field training officer in every office. More time in the field with an experienced employee would be much more beneficial than an overly soft roleplay that feels like it is crammed in at the end. We do these simulations in controlled environment. If we continue to do this why not tailor, the scenario to hit on the weaknesses of the students? Everyone is given the same scenario, but people struggle with different areas. I understand that this response probably means less than the checkboxes, but as it stands right now simulations felt like a waste of time.

Training on SACWIS

There should be more training on how to close out cases in SACWIS. How to complete the Allegation Tab.

It would be very helpful if the stimulation training would give them more training on SACWIS, more training, facility report.

teach how to use SACWIS

Have the stimulation be set up with several different reports and have the CPIs have to put the reports in SACWIS and see what it is like to have several different reports to work on at once to complete. When I was in stimulation, I had no idea what to expect when I started doing the job. It can be overwhelming at first until you get a master on completing the reports in a timely basis on top of learning SACWIS. I think it will prepare new CPIs to know if this job is for them.

I don't believe simulation training helped, I would have loved to spend a couple days learning SACWIS instead.

Make it realistic. Learn how to use SACWIS, how to prepare for a case before going out on it.

Realism and Applicability of Simulations

Redo and make it more accurate and focus on what was discussed in the interview. DCP has a high turnover, and the training needs to focus on what really happens when you initiate an investigation. Trainees need to be educated on what DCP is really like and what they are getting into. Essentially, don't sugar coat it. Respectfully'

I think that if sims is going to be beneficial or more realistic the actors need to be better. The male actor was unpleasant used foul language, threats, and racist comments. He was way to over the top for it being a training. I know out in the field my supervisor would never leave me in a house with the way the actor was acting. After watching my videos of sims you can

see how we would ask a question and it would not be answered by the actors but once the instructor came in to talk they answered and listened. I don't know what the point of the actors refusing to answer or talk us as we are the ones who are doing it. Not only would they not answer the questions they would yell or argue and again would not do that to the instructors. I think overall the actors are just trying to be as difficult as possible but to the point it was not beneficial. I would not let any client talk to me the way the actors were allowed too. I think that an actual child protection specialist should be contacted and have them act or help out. I think its important for someone who actually does our job teaches the class.

Instead of focusing on one "worst-case" scenario that most likely we won't come across for some time in our careers, simulations should expose trainees to multiple REAL life scenarios from start to finish, as if it was a real case. In real life, no one spends hours and hours asking reporters 75 questions. There is no time, and the other person would never even answer such frivolous detailed questions. In real life, if a father of a child was yelling aggressively at you nonstop, you would not continue the home visit, you would simply leave and call the supervisor or law enforcement. It is possible that a worst-case scenario is thrown at us simply for the entertainment of the instructors, because it certainly cannot be for training purposes related to the real world. At the end of 2-week regular foundations training and 1-week simulation training, my coworkers and I came back to the office not knowing how to perform the real-life job function. In real life, 99% of the work is typed into an outdated computer program called SACWIS, which training failed to show us.

It doesn't need to be rushed, real life stories need to be used, the dangers need to be addressed and new hires need to understand what the job entails.

Have investigators go out on real cases, with real investigators to get the experience.

The simulation training may improve for child protection investigators by using actual cases.

Simulation could be more realist.

Scenarios seem to be worse case scenarios. Not all cases are that way and it can come across as un realistic.

be more encouraging, provide realist scenarios.

Simulation actual scenarios should relate more with everyday experiences. The characters used for simulation was a bit overboard.

create a more realistic scenario.

it should be more realistic.

Comments About the Training Team

be clearer in directions and expectations of the simulation process and have the team of trainers be on the same page.

The process has to be done by trainers who are non-judgmental and having the same trainer who you started with be a part of the process or complete that aspect of the training would

help. Cultural Sensitivity in regard to minority Investigator is absent from this simulation training. Increased risk, how to engage and handle situation that address the family's basis from the minute they open the door.

Having trainers who used to be investigators, giving some positive feedback after doing the simulations rather than being all negative.

More effective sims instructors who have had direct experience with DCP in ILLINOIS.

Make it so the simulation facilitators have actually been investigators and know what they are talking about. We received quite a bit of false information from our facilitators because they have never done the job before and did not know what they were teaching.

Have it ran by actual investigators that have done and experienced the work first hand.

Yes, multicultural trainers that are competent in doing their job.

Different trainers. Be respectful. I was mocked, talked down to, etc by the trainer.

It can be more realistic and focus on safety and not just engagement. I also think that the trainer that we had during our time in [classroom training] should also be present and we should not have a new person as I felt that she was not very helpful or responsive.

Allowing the CPS workers to go in do the job and then critique them instead of stopping them during the simulation as I feel this throws people off and then they struggle through the remainder of the time they are in the home.

reign in some of the actors a bit, they tended to go overboard, again, i haven't met anyone in the field half as bad as some of the actors. honestly i would say if we wore bodycams, that would be one of the best training tools, however we do not.

The actors need to be trained better so that they can help the DCP trainees be better prepared for actual on the job situations.

It would have been more helpful to go step by step on what should be done for a successful investigation. LEADS/CANTS/Collaterals/Drs./witnesses, etc. That was not my experience. We didn't learn anything about how/when to add a person to the report, when a person should be marked as a collateral vs a contact vs a person listed on the report, so many other valuable things. This is what we were thrown into at the start of working on our own. We didn't know many of the basic things when it came to an investigation. During my SIMS training I had a terrible experience. I felt like I learned nothing. I was totally frustrated and questioned if I even wanted to do this job. During one of the hands on portions, I was screamed at in my face by an actor numerous times, told to get the fuck out of his house, he made my partner cry due to prior events in her life with an abusive relationship and being treated like that. That scenario taught us absolutely nothing. Had someone been treating me like that, I wouldn't have stayed in that home, I would have left when things got heated and we weren't able to calm things down. There is no reason to put ourselves in danger when there is other people who can support us. The lady in charge made my partner and I go back into the home, after being thrown out, and apologize to him. We didn't do anything wrong, why would we apologize for being screamed and cussed at? If that were real life, I

would have called the police to assist. My supervisors would have never made us apologize to someone who was verbally assaulting us to try and get back into the home.

Not spending time learning how to properly walk through an investigation or how to observe and photograph a baby prior to being in an investigation. The simulation was overload, rarely would we walk into a home that was that overloaded with allegations. Learning to see what's under is what we should be learning. Instructors would argue or disregard instead of walking through why an investigator thinks that they should mark a certain safety risk. Also court training was a waste of time. We waited nearly 5 weeks and then was put into a group with people that we did not know. They did not have the exact simulation we did so their testimony was off. Being able to testify about 3 minutes of your moment after listening to countless people tell it not the way you know it happened yet still stay consistent was fruitless. The simulation training could be fantastic but that should be the bulk of what we are learning. DCFS is spending too much time worried about the paperwork and book part of it and not near enough time making sure investigators are safe in the field. We also were expected to work a full day then drive 5 hours to our training site getting us to a hotel late at night in a city most have never been. We then had training 40+ minutes away. After the 3rd day of training we then had to drive in rush hour traffic back home making that commute nearly 6-7 hours and then report back remotely at 8:30. This is unsafe practice and investigators could get hurt.

IN person.

Training Location

The timing as it pertains to the location could be improved. I had to leave my office on a Monday evening after a sims zoom training to make it to the training facility two hours away in Chicago.

Mine took place virtually because this was during the covid pandemic so this made things a little tricky but wasn't impossible. However, I know this may have changed since I went through simulation training but having other locations besides Springfield Illinois would be something to consider and again, I thought I heard that this has changed since the time.

Other

Have a smaller class size when it comes to the actual simulation. A larger class size can be rushed and simulation is very important for new investigators.

I felt like the preparation could have been clearer. It should have been more informative. The atmosphere could have been relaxing. It seemed that some parts of the training were a mystery on purpose, and it did not have to be that way. It should have not been so stressful to do the simulation.

The only thing I can think of that might improve the simulation training is to maybe make each in person scenario not seen by the other peers in the group. When I did the role-playing part on the first day when my peers were observing me, I became very nervous and felt that this might have affected how I interacted with the family.

Those teaching the simulation needs to collaborate with those providing on-the-job training. Those within the office seems to have lost touch with empathy, interpersonal skills and the changes in dangers and threats in the surrounding communities. Rushing DCP to investigate and close cases is the first step to the entire process of helping children and families to FAIL. The turnover rate and constant need to hire speaks volumes along with the low pay rates.

Focus the simulation on practicing the steps required in an investigation.

Training in general could be improved by job shadowing seasoned workers on multiple occasions for an extended period of time rather than the focus of policy and procedures. It would be better for a supervisor and seasoned worker to evaluate the individuals ability to engage and assess in real time rather than hypothetical experiences.

not be a requisite and instead be supplementary. Also if you're to mimic the actual job, it should have the same requirements. Such as mandated deadlines rather than causing an investigator in training wait 2 months post CPI exam in order to do actual field work.

I don't think it's needed. But for some people it may be useful in helping them prepare for working in the field. Most DCP's are not prepared when working in the field. Not sure what suggestions I could bring to the discussion about improving simulation training.

Take it out as it is a week earlier that an investigator can be in the field learning hands on experience from experienced investigators.

It can help with understanding what is needed to testify in court.

I just observed an simulation training last week and I felt like the simulation and improved since I completed my training in 2019 . I did not recall PBL from 2019.