

Undergraduate Child Protection Curriculum in the Southeastern United States

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Background

- In 2022, CPS received over 4.2 million referrals of alleged maltreatment and investigated 2.1 million cases involving 3.1 million children (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2024).
- Social Work and Psychology are the two most popular bachelor's degrees among frontline child protection workers. Yet, both majors were found to have higher turnover rates than a group of all other bachelor's degrees in a study of Kentucky CPS caseworkers (Yankeelov et al., 2009).
- A previous review of undergraduate coursework done in 2006 found that only 29% of the 1416 universities offered at least one course related to the area of child maltreatment (Johnson, 2015; Vieth et al., 2012).
- Undergraduate education on child maltreatment and training for mandated reporting and child protection work is lacking, with many students reportedly receiving no education before their on-the-job training (Vieth et al., 2019).
- Zero Abuse Project's Child Advocacy Studies (CAST) program aimed to create a standardized multi-disciplinary curriculum for future child-serving professionals and has grown to 92 CAST programs across 30 states (Vieth et al., 2019; Zero Abuse Project, 2023).
- The efficacy of the CAST curriculum has been well established. Parker et al. (2020) found that undergraduate CAST students were better at analyzing a complex poly-victimization case study than current child protection professionals across all experience levels.

Objectives

- Evaluate the amount of child maltreatment coursework available to undergraduate students in psychology and social work bachelor's programs within the Southeastern U.S.
- Explore trends and share state-level data for SE states.

Method

- Generated a list of all bachelor programs in Psychology and Social Work using the NCES College Navigator database.
- Data Entry Procedure:** Florida Tech undergraduate and graduate psychology student research assistants entered college, program, and course information on postsecondary institutions into a Qualtrics form following a standardized protocol.

Phase 1: College Information: Entered college demographics provided by NCES database

Phase 2: Program Information: Used NCES site to code relevant program areas and degree programs offered by the college

Phase 3: Course Information: Searched, evaluated, coded, and entered course information available on the college's website (i.e., course catalog) relevant to child maltreatment, child protection, and child advocacy.

Conclusions

- Few psychology programs provide undergraduate students with child protection relevant courses, while most social work programs do.
 - Southeast Region: 10.2% of undergraduate psychology programs offer at least one undergrad child protection course compared to 82.4% of social work programs
 - U.S. Overall: Psych = 17.3%; SW = 68.7%
- Social work bachelor's programs in the Southeastern region of the United States provide more targeted child protection education opportunities than in other U.S. regions.
- Further implementation of child advocacy courses in psychology bachelor's programs is necessary to prepare future child protection professionals.

Figure 1. A comparison of the mean number of undergraduate child protection content courses and overall CAST-themed courses in psychology and social work bachelor's programs by state in the Southeastern United States.

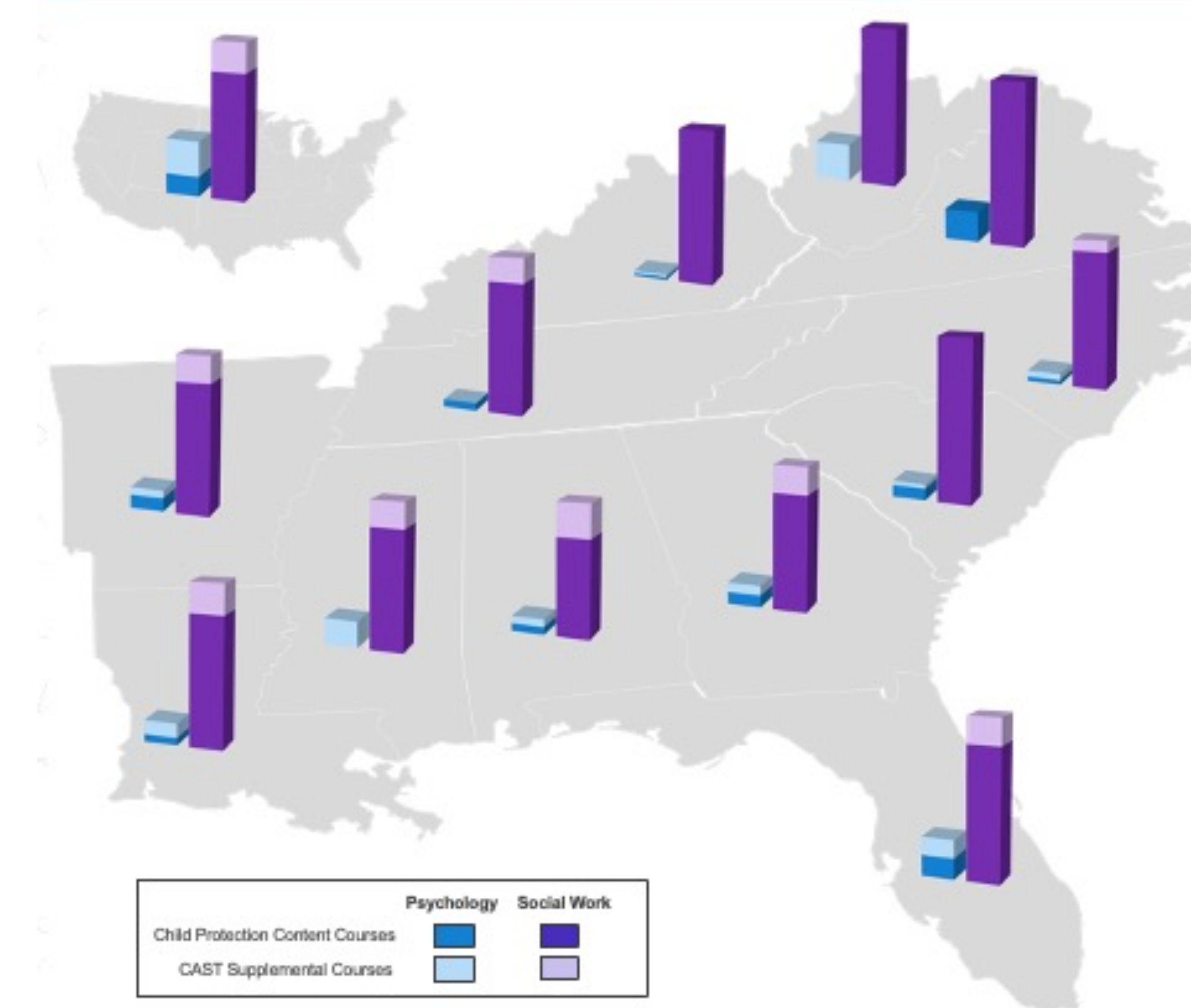


Table 1. Descriptive data on UNDERGRADUATE child protection content courses and overall CAST-themed courses offered by PSYCHOLOGY bachelor's programs for the Southeastern United States.

	N	Child Protection Content Courses Only ¹					Total Courses with CAST Themes ²			
		No Course	M	SD	SE	Range	M	SD	SE	Range
Alabama	25	88.0%	.12	.33	.07	0-1	.24	.44	.09	0-1
Arkansas	19	84.2%	.21	.54	.12	0-2	.32	.75	.17	0-3
Florida	48	85.4%	.40	1.14	.17	0-5	.75	1.84	.27	0-8
Georgia	47	87.2%	.15	.42	.06	0-2	.26	.53	.08	0-2
Kentucky	25	96.0%	.04	.20	.04	0-1	.08	.28	.06	0-1
Louisiana	22	86.4%	.14	.35	.07	0-1	.41	.96	.20	0-4
Mississippi	12	100%	.00	-	-	-	.67	1.23	.36	0-4
North Carolina	48	95.8%	.04	.20	.03	0-1	.10	.37	.05	0-2
South Carolina	27	88.9%	.11	.32	.06	0-1	.15	.36	.07	0-1
Tennessee	29	89.7%	.14	.44	.08	0-2	.14	.44	.08	0-2
Virginia	39	87.2%	.15	.43	.07	0-2	.15	.43	.07	0-2
West Virginia	11	100%	.00	-	-	-	.18	.40	.12	0-1
SE U.S. Total	352	89.8%	.15	.54	.03	0-5	.28	.87	.05	0-8
U.S. Nationwide	1440	82.7%	.25	.66	.02	0-6	.69	1.22	.03	0-9

¹Includes only courses that identified content knowledge and/or training addressing child maltreatment, child welfare, and/or child protection professional system responses.

²Includes the courses within the more restrictive categorization above plus any additional secondary or supplemental courses with themes relevant to preparing a CAST student or multidisciplinary team professional for child protection work with children and families.

Table 2. Descriptive data on UNDERGRADUATE child protection content courses and overall CAST-themed courses offered by SOCIAL WORK bachelor's programs for the Southeastern United States.

	N	Child Protection Content Courses Only ¹					Total Courses with CAST Themes ²			
		No Course	M	SD	SE	Range	M	SD	SE	Range
Alabama	15	6.7%	1.53	.92	.24	0-4	2.07	1.67	.43	0-7
Arkansas	10	20.0%	2.00	1.41	.45	0-4	2.40	1.71	.54	0-5
Florida	14	0%	2.50	1.02	.27	1-5	3.00	1.47	.39	1-6
Georgia	12	33.3%	1.42	1.51	.43	0-5	1.75	2.49	.72	0-9
Kentucky	13	23.1%	2.31	1.70	.47	0-5	2.31	1.70	.47	0-5
Louisiana	9	22.2%	2.44	1.94	.65	0-5	3.00	2.69	.90	0-8
Mississippi	11	0%	3.00	1.67	.50	1-7	3.64	1.96	.59	1-7
North Carolina	21	14.3%	1.24	.77	.17	0-3	1.33	.91	.20	0-3
South Carolina	8	25.0%	1.50	1.20	.42	0-3	1.50	1.20	.42	0-3
Tennessee	18	5.6%	2.39	1.69	.40	0-6	2.83	1.92	.45	0-7
Virginia	14	42.9%	.79	.89	.24	0-3	.79	.89	.24	0-3
West Virginia	8	37.5%	.75	.71	.25	0-2	.75	.71	.25	0-2
SE U.S. Total	153	17.6%	1.82	1.44	.12	0-7	2.11	1.83	.15	0-9
U.S. Nationwide	614	31.3%	1.55	1.51	.06	0-11	1.91	2.06	.08	0-18

¹Includes only courses that identified content knowledge and/or training addressing child maltreatment, child welfare, and/or child protection professional system responses.

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