

January 2024 APS TARC Podcast Transcript

APS & Reporter Communication – EDC Pathways to Safety Improving Communication

Introduction

Andrew Capehart: Welcome to the Adult Protective Services Technical Assistance Resource Center podcast. We come to you with the goal of sharing promising practices and innovations from the APS field, and to highlight what is achievable with new ideas and partnerships to help you envision what may be replicated in your program. Let's join our host, Jennifer Spoeri APS TARC subject matter expert and guests in conversation.

Discussion

Jennifer Spoeri: Well, welcome to the APS TARC podcast today. We're going to be speaking with Dr. Kristen Lees Haggerty, a Public Health Researcher focusing on the design, testing, and dissemination of innovations to improve healthcare for older adults. Thanks Dr. Lees Haggerty's work focuses on prevention and remediation of elder mistreatment and improving systems to support older adults' health and safety. Dr. Lees Haggerty is a Project Director for the National Collaboratory to Address Elder Mistreatment and Associate Director of the National Dementia Care Collaborative. To kick us off, Dr. Lees Haggerty, can you tell us about the genesis of this research involving APS and Reporter communication and how it was funded?

Kristin Lees Haggerty: Sure. So, thank you so much. I'm thrilled to be here. Um, and I wanted to start by sharing a little bit about when I present this work at conferences and workshops, I always start by asking the audience. I say, how many of you have heard this from Reporters? Whenever I make a report, nothing happens. It's a black hole. I never hear anything back. And when I do that, of course, all of the hands in the room go up, and now, you know, you and I and the listeners on this podcast know that that's not true, that APS is doing a lot, but it's an important perception among Reporters, and it can be a deterrent for them to reporting.

So, I think one of the major drivers of that issue is a lack of understanding among Reporters, many Reporters, about what APS is, and more importantly, I think, what APS is not, and how APS should be used. So, at EDC, Education Development Center, where I work, we've done work over the years trying to improve elder mistreatment, identification, and reporting, mainly by focusing on the Reporter side. So, that is, we've developed training and tools for those on the front lines who are well positioned to identify abuse and neglect, like emergency health care providers, and so, for example, in our e-learning courses, we've developed trainings that explicitly call out what APS can and can't do.

We include activities so that the learners spend time reflecting on those points. But we find that those tools are really only as good as the confidence providers have. That they can do something if they identify elder mistreatment. So, we have screening tools. We have training, but still, if providers are not feeling confident in

the system, then they aren't going to use them. Right? So, we thought about this. And in addition to addressing the issue from the Reporter side, I, and we at EDC wondered whether there was more we could do on the APS side to enhance feedback to Reporters and help address some of those barriers. So, kind of coming at it, both from the Reporter side and the Adult Protective Services side.

So, we partnered with the incredible Kathy Greenlee, and we applied for a grant to the National Institute on Justice to examine policy and practice related to communication from APS to Reporters. And our ultimate goal during that grant period was to develop recommendations for improving feedback to Reporters. So, that's kind of to answer your question about the genesis of the research, where this is all coming from.

Jennifer Spoeri: That's fantastic. That, that really makes sense when you, when you talk to a conference room and everybody's hands go up, it's like, oh boy, I got something hot here. Yeah, exactly. So, what are the barriers that APS faces in providing feedback to reporters?

Kristin Lees Haggerty: Excellent question. There are many very real and important barriers. The biggest barrier and a salient theme from our qualitative research is a concern about violating Client confidentiality and privacy rights. And some of that, of course, is tied to concern about compliance with existing regulations, but it was clear from our interviews that as much, if not more, was about APS's staff, their commitment to doing what is right for the Client. So, it's not just about, I want to follow the rules. It's really, I need to prioritize my Client and doing what's right for them. Other barriers, unsurprisingly, I think, include things like concerns over whether there's enough resources and whether there's enough staff to make it feasible to be providing feedback to Reporters.

Jennifer Spoeri: Yeah, that's a really important point and I'm sure the APS listeners on this are like, yes, thank you resources. That's what we need.

Kristin Lees Haggerty: Yes, exactly. So, we knew at the outset that we could not just make recommendations from this work that said, every time you get a call, you need to send an individualized report to every reporter that calls in. So, we knew that going in our recommendations needed to be feasible and needed to be informed by the people doing this work.

Jennifer Spoeri: That's fantastic. Based in reality. So, the deep dive, you did a deep dive into the current policy and practice involving APS and the Reporters to APS. How did you do that? That's a huge tool to dive into.

Kristin Lees Haggerty: Yeah. Yeah. So, we kind of took a broad approach to doing environmental scan that included simply desk research. Our excellent Research Assistants, um, at EDC scoured APS websites to pull what they could from state websites. We also leveraged data that had already been collected by APS TARC, Technical Assistance Resource Center, and they had compiled state profiles, but the previous research that we looked at in APS data didn't really cover feedback. So, that was really starting from square one. Well, there wasn't a lot out there about what our state's doing to provide feedback to Reporters. So, we also included interviews.

We set out to interview APS Directors in every state, and unfortunately, we're not able to get people from every state. I think our recruitment came about the same time as states were kind of scrambling to develop their plans for ARPA spending. And so, hooray that there was funds coming into APS. And that was absolutely more important than sitting on a phone call with us. So, we, were able to interview 44 people from 23 states and actually, we did it from a qualitative perspective, one of the ways that, you know, that you have enough people is, are you reaching saturation? And that is to say, are you hearing the same themes over and over again?

And we were, we reached the saturation. We felt like we got a good enough sample that we, from a research perspective, we're pretty happy. Yeah, we also did a more intense look at a single state case study in Massachusetts because Massachusetts had been implementing over the years. Some policies that that were related to feedback. So, things like instituting a centralized intake line, having a web portal, and then incentivizing APS agencies to provide feedback to mandated reporters in the form mostly of a letter. So, we spoke to APS workers and Reporters in Massachusetts and look more closely. They are to see what perceptions of those changes were.

Jennifer Spoeri: Gotcha. And to clarify that was with the Executive Office of Elder Affairs, not DPPC. It was the 860 plus because Massachusetts is one of the 3 states. Yeah, bifurcated.

Kristin Lees Haggerty: Absolutely. Yep, we focus on the 60 plus, and included in our interviews, Managers, Supervisors, Caseworkers. And then from the Reporter side, we did focus groups with, people in the healthcare field and Nursing Homes, Law Enforcement. So, we tried to cover the basis and see what kind of were the experience of people and getting feedback from Massachusetts Adult Protective Services.

Jennifer Spoeri: That is great. You know how multidisciplinary this field is. I mean, that's a lot of bases to cover because we touch everything. It's incredible.

Kristin Lees Haggerty: Yeah. And I will, if I could just say, one thing that was sort of reiterated in this most recent research is I, you know, I opened this with saying there's this kind of barrier, this tension, because people in, Reporters feel like APS isn't doing anything after they get the report. And that's absolutely true. But what I found in my work, and I do a lot of qualitative work, both with Reporters and with APS, is that both sides, there's overwhelmingly a desire to work together. It's not that, you know, There's a tension that can't be overcome. Both sides want to work together, and they have different ideas about what that might mean.

So, we're hoping through this project and by assessing some of these barriers and Facilitators and potential strategies that we can improve communication with Reporters and try to break down some of those barriers so that that both Reporters and APS are able to get the information that they need to do their jobs appropriately.

Jennifer Spoeri: That does not surprise me because everyone in this field and around the field just care. They just want to help. So, it's bridging that gap.

Kristin Lees Haggerty: Absolutely.

Jennifer Spoeri: So, we learned that they're through your report that or through the study that there are benefits and risks to providing feedback to Reporters. So, can you tell us a bit about the decision-making model for APS and providing and just so the listeners know, I have reached out to the Technical Assistance Resource Center who's going to be posting this podcast on the website, on their website. And that's where they will be able to post a link to the model and the report. It won't be able to be linked to the Apple Podcast site, and wherever the other podcasts are housed, but it will be on the TARC site where this is posted, so.

Kristin Lees Haggerty: Wonderful, thank you. Yeah, because the decision-making model has a visual that I think is really helpful in understanding it, but I'll talk through it. And at the end of this, I can say a little bit more about where people can contact me and find the report otherwise perfect. So, let me try to do this. So, essentially, we learned through all of this qualitative research. As I mentioned that there's not going to be a simple one size fits all approach to providing feedback. That is, we're not going to be able to say just all Reporters should be told X, Y, and Z, and the work of APS, as anyone listening to this podcast already knows, is much more complicated and nuanced than that.

So, what we did is we took the themes from all of this research, we had this big database of state policies, really rich qualitative data from interviews and focus groups with the APS Directors, Caseworkers, Intake Workers, several different types of Reporters, and all this data was telling us useful things about whether and when APS provides feedback to Reporters, the types of feedback they provide, and that is whether they share simple procedural information, and about case flow or more substantive information about the outcomes of a specific case and then third, their concerns about providing more feedback. And we saw patterns in the data.

We saw that APS is motivated to provide feedback when there's a high potential for benefit to the Client and to their APS workflow or their investigation. And when there's a low potential for risk to the Client and APS by providing information to the reporter. Of course, conversely, APS is unlikely to provide feedback when there's a high risk to the Client or APS and a low potential benefit. The data showed a pattern where the level of these risks and benefits can be determined by be determined by two main factors. And so, we found that what really mattered was the type of reporter and that's whether they're a professional or a non-professional, like, their relationship to the Client is in a professional capacity or not.

In some states that maps neatly on to mandated versus non-mandated and others. It does not. And then the second, piece is the length or the quality of the relationship between the reporter and the Client and we focused mainly on older adults. I know many states also cover adults with disabilities, but we focused mainly on older adults in our interviews. So, sometimes I slip up and instead of saying Client, I say older adult, but, that length or quality of the relationship is really whether the reporter has just a brief interaction and is making a report or has an ongoing relationship with the Client in a way that might assist APS and their investigation in a way that might assist the older adult in an ongoing way and helping to keep them safe.

So.

Jennifer Spoeri: That totally makes sense. I'm just thinking from my APS perspective is, that person that has a brief interaction with an older adult and it gives you good information, but you know, they're not going to have anything else or 3 years and they're calling about something that was previous to, you know, it's just, it's very interesting how this flowed.

Kristin Lees Haggerty: Yeah, and from APS perspective, is it worth investing resources into providing the same level of feedback? Is that does that make sense? And so, we wanted to be pretty kind of pragmatic about it. So, for example, professionals are more likely to understand the Client's rights to privacy. They may have their own confidentiality lies that they abide by and their role as professionals. Make it just less risky to give them more information versus non-professional, like a family member or neighbor who, in terms of kind of quality of relationship may have a lot to offer, but it might be more risky because they're not holding to those same kind of confidentiality rules.

So, if a reporter is only involved with the Client in passing, there's less benefit potentially to providing more detailed information, as I mentioned. Yeah, so APS was describing to us that they provide the most feedback or they're willing to provide more feedback to reporters who are professionals and have an ongoing relationship with the Client. And they're least motivated to provide feedback to non-professionals who had either a brief relationship with the Client or and this is a really kind of important caveat. There are non-professionals who have an ongoing relationship. But a potentially unhealthy, or even kind of nefarious relationship with the Client, and that is to say, they're asking for more information because they want to use that information in a way that could potentially harm the Client.

Jennifer Spoeri: Yes, wait, you mean reporters call with an angle? No, it's true though. They have their own vested interest, you know, so.

Kristin Lees Haggerty: Yeah, interest. Right? And yeah, it could be that they. That there's kind of ulterior motives in terms of the Client. It could be other wider family dynamics that are at play. And reporters told, I mean, I'm sorry, APS told us we just have to be careful about that. So, we developed the model based on the research that we had conducted, and then we took it back to states because we had this research that we're really excited about. We were able to simplify it into this decision-making model that spoke to the type of reporter, the length of their relationship, the risks and benefits to APS, but we really needed to go back to the states and kind of ground truth it.

So, we held workshops in four states. Three of those were in person and one was virtual, and we convened staff of all levels. We asked them to review the model, review our research, provide feedback, and help us determine where they thought. A change was needed. Just because we found this doesn't mean that their APS is going to agree that something should change. And then what changes they would make in their own states to improve communication where they saw opportunities for change and strategies to affect change. And

these workshops were incredible. I mean, people really leaned into this. And as a researcher, kind of like, okay, we think this is really exciting, but what are people going to think?

It's so reassuring to then bring it back to the states and have them be like, yup, this makes sense. And here's how we would put it into action. They told us about things like how long they're currently spending responding to requests for more information. So, where resources are an issue, maybe there's actually potential solution to standardizing some of the practices around reporting back to reporters rather than having to sift through all of these emails and phone calls coming at them. And the ideas that they came up with about how to kind of put into action some of the recommendations, they weren't all moonshot ideas. There were some, you know, kind of, we'd really need to reimagine the way we do things, but most of it was really pretty low lift ideas for improvements that can be implemented quickly and that have the potential to be quite impactful. So, we were really excited about that.

Jennifer Spoeri: Yeah, APS, we tend to be pretty common sense, like let's be logical and not too involved. So, there's other things that came out of this research. So, there's recommended strategies to allow APS and reporters to work more collaborative, collaboratively. Can you expand on that?

Kristin Lees Haggerty: Sure. Yep. So, we have this decision-making model, but then like, so what, how do you put that to action? Um, and I won't go through every recommendation from the report. As you mentioned, that will be available on APS TARC. And in that report, we do walk through kind of each of the quadrants of our decision making model and say, here's where you can provide strategies for providing feedback, um, to these specific people at this specific point in kind of the. Case workflow from screening and intake through case closure, but I will share a couple of key highlights. So, the intake that piece is pretty easy. We recommend that at intake, all types of reporters should receive some sort of information. So, you're not giving details about an individual, but more using it as an opportunity to educate reporters.

So, getting back to some of those misperceptions that reporters might have, one of the specific strategies that we give in the report came directly from the workshops and I love it so much. It's really just change the audio on the hold line from music to education. Tell the reporter that they're fulfilling an important role by reporting, share information about the process, what they can expect next, when they can expect to hear back from APS. And, there could even be more information about, like, the role of, of APS, and again, what APS is not, but just using that hold line as an opportunity is a pretty low lift.

Jennifer Spoeri: That is fantastic. Yes. And some of that hold music is horrible. So, that's a beautiful, beautiful recommendation.

Kristin Lees Haggerty: Yeah. And then, of course, in the next phase is investigation and case closure. The decision-making model helps to differentiate the type of feedback that each group should receive. And those that are low risk and high benefit should receive more substantive information about the case, whereas those that are higher risk and lower benefit should still only receive procedural information or information that can

be more generalized and not about a specific Client. I think it's most complicated when you're thinking about the non-professionals with ongoing involvement because that's a group that has to be considered on a case-by-case basis, because there could be a really high benefit to providing more information and working together with them more collaboratively.

But there also could be a higher risk. And that's where the skills and the savvy of APS staff themselves. Is so important. And APS staff described to us using their skills to be able to kind of elicit information that they need for the case and satisfy the reporter's kind of desire to feel like they're included without jeopardizing the privacy or safety of the Client. But I think some of that ability to do that comes with kind of years on the job and experience. And so one of the things that we want to think about is, is there a way to kind of more explicitly train more junior staff? To get to that point of being able to use that Saturday more quickly. So that the reporters are more often feeling like they're being heard and included without, of course, risking the rights to privacy of the older adults or the Client.

Jennifer Spoeri: That's so true. I always say there's an art, there's totally an art to this and using hypothetical situations, you know, in some cases, it's just kind of saying something without saying something.

Kristin Lees Haggerty: That's what we heard. And then there were times in the workshops they brought up, you know, sometimes we do, we really need to share specific information we go to our legal team for that. So, there is, in some places, if you have access to a legal team opportunity to kind of vet what information you share. But for the most part, it was really amazing to me how the APS staff are able to convey their message without risking it. And so, helping other staff to learn that, as they're being onboarded, is a strategy.

Jennifer Spoeri: What I always used to find interesting is when the non-professional reporter, you know, the family member or the neighbor. Is actually a professional on the side, you know, like, not related to the case. So, they're a lawyer or doctor or nurse or something, but not as related to this case. They just live next door to the person. So that's a tight walk, you know.

Kristin Lees Haggerty: Yeah, that right. Really interesting.

Jennifer Spoeri: So, any other recommendations that came out of the study? I mean, you use so much information. It's so much information.

Kristin Lees Haggerty: I think one other point about the kind of categories of reporters and what information to provide. We do recommend that, for reporters who are professionals with brief involvement and professionals with ongoing involvement but recommend providing substantive information. And even when there's a reporter with brief involvement, who's a professional, we think we should provide a little bit more substance information because that group is really, they may have only a brief encounter with that particular Client, but they're the surveillance system. And so, we want to make sure that they have a good understanding of, of what APS is so that they'll keep reporting different Clients.

So, just because it's a brief relationship, there is some value. We've found in providing more substantive information as long as it's safe to do so. And then I think in terms of other recommendations, I mean, not news to anyone listening to this, but we need more funding and more stable funding for APS, and that is very clear because every time that I have the privilege of speaking with, running a focus group or interview or workshop with the people working in adult protection, I'm just struck by how much they are, you are, able to do with, with so little, but they shouldn't have to do it with so little, right? So, elder abuse is a huge problem and it's growing. We need support and systems and the people to be well supported that are doing this work. Um, so I think that is just another.

Jennifer Spoeri: Yeah, absolutely. It's nice to have a champion in the research world. We appreciate that.

Kristin Lees Haggerty: It really is a privilege to be able to do this work. So, I appreciate you all so much.

Jennifer Spoeri: That's fantastic to hear. So how, how did you summarize and present all of this information? I mean, it's so broad, like, how did you logistically do this package?

Kristin Lees Haggerty: So, we package it into a final report, which is probably lengthier than most APS staff will use. But we are interested in continuing this work. So, we have the report and that's posted online and we're looking now to collaborate with some states that might want to actually put some of the recommendations in practice and evaluate it. So, I encourage anybody that's listening that is interested in, in potentially collaborating and testing some recommendations to contact me. They can reach me at klees@edc.org. That's klees@edc.org. And then, of course, through the kind of usual channels, publishing academic papers about it, presenting at conferences. So, we were at NAPSA last year, GSA, ASA, the kind of aging conference ring, and we'll be at Tamkin Symposium with a poster this year.

Jennifer Spoeri: Well, great. Thank you so much for your work in this area, Dr. Lees Haggerty. And like I said, it's nice to have a champion, an APS champion in the research world. And there are others, I'm not saying there aren't, but all of us in APS know how critical reporters are in helping us identify and respond to the abuse, neglect, exploitation. So, this study again, will be on the APS TARC website along with this podcast. So, thank you and have a good day. Thank you.

Andrew Capehart: Thanks so much for listening. The APS TARC is a project of the Office of Elder Justice and Adult Protective Services at the Administration for Community Living Administration on Aging Department of Health and Human Services, and is administered by WRMA, Incorporated a TriMetrix Company in partnership with the National Adult Protective Services Association. Contractors' findings, conclusions, and points of view do not necessarily represent the official policy of the Federal Government. To give us feedback on this podcast or reach out to us, please visit our website at apstarc.acl.gov.