

The Characteristics Among Maltreatment, Special Education Service Delivery, and Personnel Preparation

The Journal of Special Education
2020, Vol. 53(4) 216–225
© Hammill Institute on Disabilities 2019
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/0022466919836278
journalofspecialeducation.sagepub.com


Deserai Miller, PhD¹  and Rosa Milagros Santos, PhD¹

Abstract

Children are experiencing abuse and neglect at alarming rates, and reported cases of maltreatment are increasing every year. Furthermore, children are 4 times more likely to receive special education services if they have experienced abuse and neglect. Multiple calls for action to better support children with special needs who have experienced maltreatment have been developed; however, we must understand what the research says related to the preparation of special education providers to carry out these recommendations. In this literature review, we focused on three areas related to maltreatment: (a) reported and assessed knowledge base of school-based professionals, (b) attitudes and training beliefs of school-based professionals, and (c) access to training opportunities. The findings suggest practitioners feel unprepared, there are limited and insufficient opportunities for preparation, and researchers need to consider different methodology when studying this topic. Practice and research implications are discussed.

Keywords

abuse, neglect, special education service delivery, preparation, trauma-informed care

Children are experiencing abuse and neglect at staggering rates, with the number of cases reported increasing every year. Between 2011 and 2015, more than 3 million children were identified as victims of maltreatment each year, which translates to one in eight children experiencing abuse or neglect by their 18th birthday (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). Sadly, these numbers are growing, with 25,000 more cases of abuse and neglect reported in 2015 compared with 2011 (NCANDS, 2017). Moreover, researchers have noted that children who have experienced abuse and neglect are 4 times more likely to receive special education services (Sullivan & Knutson, 2000; Waldman, Perlman, & Lederman, 2007; Zetlin, 2006), which highlights the need to gain a deeper understanding of how special education teams can better support children who have experienced abuse or neglect.

Researchers reported that children who receive trauma-informed supports have better outcomes (Chu & Lieberman, 2010). However, trauma-informed supports, also called trauma-informed care, trauma-informed services, trauma-informed practices, or trauma-informed service delivery, are minimally available, and most children do not receive these supports due to environmental barriers, such as lack of transportation or financial resources (Smith, Linnemeyer, Scallse, & Hamilton, 2013). In the short term, children who have experienced abuse and neglect and do not receive appropriate support, are more likely to have greater cognitive, communication, and social-emotional delays (Darwish, Esquivel,

Houtz, & Alfonso, 2001; Eigsti & Cicchetti, 2004; Pears, Fisher, Bruce, Kim, & Yoerger, 2010). In the long term, children are more likely to experience school failure, mental health concerns, substance abuse, and suicidal behavior (Arata, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Bowers, & O’Farrill-Swails, 2005; Denov, 2004; Goerge, Voorhis, Grant, Casey, & Robinson, 1992). The considerably large number of children who have experienced abuse and neglect, coupled with the overrepresentation of many of these children also receiving special education services, highlights the need for special education teams to be prepared to support this population of children.

Currently, 38 states mandate at least one training for school staff on reporting abuse or neglect (National Association of Child Care Resources & Referral Agencies, 2013). Despite policy recommendations to include training around the support of children who have been abused or neglected (National Education Association [NEA], 2014), the mandate does not include training for how best to support these children in school settings. Miller, Santos, and Burke (2019) found that school social workers and school

¹University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign, USA

Corresponding Author:

Deserai Miller, Department of Special Education, University of Illinois Urbana–Champaign, 1310 S. Sixth Street Champaign, IL 61820, USA.
E-mail: millerde@illinois.edu

psychologists believed providing trauma-informed support through special education service delivery was necessary but did not occur in actual practice due to a lack of staff preparation. Over the last 40 years, multiple calls for action have been made by organizations and researchers to address this growing concern (Council for Exceptional Children [CEC], 2018; Division for Early Childhood [DEC], 2016; McCaffrey & Tewey, 1978; NEA, 1989; Oseroff, Oseroff, Westling, & Gessner, 1999). Nonetheless, researchers continue to find that professionals employed in schools feel unprepared to support children who have experienced abuse and neglect (Anderson, Blitz, & Saastamoinen, 2015; Baxter & Beer, 1990; Costello, 2009; McIntyre, 1987; Miller et al., 2019; San Julian, 2013), and reported that the training they have received in this area is minimal and insufficient (Abrahams, Casey, & Daro, 1992). Before the field can move forward with how best to prepare special education teams to support children who have experienced abuse and neglect, it is critical that we understand what the research says related to the preparation of special education professionals around this topic.

To better understand the preparation of special education professionals on providing trauma-informed supports in school settings, it is important to not only consider their knowledge about trauma-informed care but also understand their beliefs. The intended focus of this literature review was to understand the preparation specifically of special education providers; however, due to a lack of research in this area, the search criteria were broadened to include all school employees, which is explained in more detail in the "Method" section. Therefore, the three focus areas of this literature review included (a) reported and assessed knowledge base of school-based professionals on this topic, (b) attitudes and training beliefs of school-based professionals related to supporting children who have experienced abuse and neglect, and (c) access of training around trauma-informed supports received through preservice or professional development opportunities. Furthermore, to understand the landscape of preparation for school staff over the last 40 years, from the call to action published by *Exceptional Children* in 1978 to present day, a longitudinal view of the research in this area was part of the focus of this literature review.

Method

Selection Criteria and Procedures

Using the framework identified by Littell, Corcoran, and Pillai (2008) for conducting systematic literature reviews, inclusion criteria were identified within the following areas: populations or samples, area of interest, and outcomes. Although the intended focus was to consider the preparation of special education teams around providing trauma-informed

support, very few research studies included members of a special education team. Furthermore, if special education team members were included, it was within the larger school staff population. Our initial search yielded only one study in which special education teachers were the only participant group. We then extended the search to studies that included special education teachers as part of the participant group, which yielded only six studies. Therefore, the inclusion criteria for articles were set to include any participant who was employed within a school that served children aged 3 to 21 years. This could include, but was not limited to, general education teachers, special education teachers, administrators, speech and language pathologists, nurses, school social workers, occupational therapists, physical therapist, school psychologists, transportation specialists, or office staff. Due to the inclusionary requirement of being employed by a school, this excluded early intervention providers, and volunteers, such as school mentors.

Second, the area of interest was limited to a focus on the perceptions of participants related to preparation around trauma-informed support; therefore, studies that described specific interventions for children who had experienced trauma and mandated reporting (e.g., determination, reporting) were not included. It should be noted that most of the studies included preparation related to mandated reporting in some form, but articles were only included if they also contained data related to supporting children who had experienced abuse or neglect.

Third, although there is overlap between children who have been identified as at risk of school failure and children who have experienced abuse and neglect, the focus of this review was specifically on preparation for working with children who have experienced abuse or neglect. As defined by the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (2008), child abuse or neglect includes physical, emotional, or sexual maltreatment of children; therefore, only articles with this focus were included in the review.

Fourth, due to the sparse research in this area, both preservice preparation and in-service professional development opportunities were included in this review. Fifth, specific outcome criteria were not set, which was intentional, because the purpose of this literature review was to gain a deeper understanding of the preparation of school staff around the topic of maltreatment, which included outcomes related to perceptions, experiences, or preparation. Sixth, due to different practices across countries, studies were only included if they took place in the United States, and were reported in English. Finally, preparation of school staff is an ever-changing process; therefore, research studies were included regardless of the year they were conducted. However, only primary-source empirical studies were included. The staggering numbers of child abuse and neglect cases combined with a lack of preparation of school staff are an ongoing issue, including all available research

helped create a more holistic picture of the overall preparation of school staff related to providing trauma-informed support.

Search Strategies

To identify relevant articles, the following search terms were used: trauma, maltreatment, teacher preparation, school service personnel preparation, trauma-informed supports, school preparation, school staff, professional preparation, abuse, and neglect, or a combination of the aforementioned words. The following electronic databases were searched—EBSCOhost, PsycINFO, PubMed, and Google Scholar—and when articles met the inclusionary criteria, the reference lists of these articles were searched and articles that cited the identified article were considered. This search yielded 42 articles. After screening the titles and abstracts of these articles, we found 12 articles that had a focus on specific interventions or mandated reporting, and 10 articles that had a focus on children who were considered at risk.

After conducting a full-text review on the remaining articles, the search methods and criteria described yielded a total of 20 empirical studies, three of which were unpublished dissertation studies, and the remaining 17 were published in peer-reviewed journals. It should be noted that the dissertation studies, although not peer reviewed, were empirical in nature, closely connected to the inclusionary criteria, and were current. For these reasons, it was decided to include these three studies, but this is noted as a limitation of the literature review.

Results

The 20 identified studies were published between 1978 and 2015. Across all studies, multiple roles of participants were represented, including general education teachers, special education teachers, school psychologists, administrators, teaching assistants, school nurses, counselors, and preservice teachers. Although participants represented professionals who worked at the preschool through high school level, most of the studies included participants who worked at elementary schools, middle schools, or high schools ($n = 12$). Also represented were studies that included only participants who worked in elementary schools ($n = 4$); preschool, elementary, middle school, or high school ($n = 2$); preschool or elementary school ($n = 1$); and preschool only ($n = 1$). The results are organized into four areas of focus: (a) reported and assessed knowledge base of school-based professionals related to abuse and neglect, (b) attitudes and beliefs of school-based professionals related to this topic, (c) access to training around trauma-informed supports received through preservice or professional development opportunities, and (d) a longitudinal view of the reviewed

studies. Please see Table 1 for further information related to each study, and to reference specific studies from the results below.

Reported and Assessed Knowledge Base

Of the 20 studies reviewed, a questionnaire or survey design was used for at least a portion of their study. Ninety percent of the studies ($n = 18$) used questionnaires as their primary source of data collection. Only 20% ($n = 4$) of research teams conducted intervention studies where they facilitated workshops and assessed knowledge before and after the workshop (Anderson et al., 2015; Hazzard, 1984; Kleemeier, Webb, Hazzard, & Pohl, 1988; Randolph & Gold, 1994). The researchers in the remaining studies investigated participants' beliefs, training opportunities, and understanding of abuse and neglect. Of the four intervention studies, three used questionnaires to assess knowledge before and after the workshops (Hazzard, 1984; Kleemeier et al., 1988; Randolph & Gold, 1994).

Anderson and colleagues (2015) completed a needs assessment with participants related to training needs through open dialogue, similar to a larger focus group. The findings from this needs assessment were used to create four workshops. At the completion of the workshops, the research team conducted focus groups with the participants and utilized a survey to examine staff perceptions related to the workshops (Anderson et al., 2015). Finally, in a dissertation study conducted by Costello (2009), a survey was used as the main data collection tool, but the author also conducted two interviews with participants who were recruited from the survey portion of the study.

Sixty-five percent ($n = 13$) of studies reviewed included teachers or preservice teachers as the participants. Less than half of the studies (40%, $n = 8$) reported the participant's role or involvement with special education service delivery. Moreover, only 20% ($n = 4$) of research groups (Costello, 2009; Orelove, Hollahan, & Myles, 2000; Oseroff et al., 1999; San Julian, 2013) considered abuse and neglect as it directly related to the special education process or the relation between maltreatment and disability.

Questionnaires. As noted, most of the identified studies (90%, $n = 18$) included a questionnaire or survey as their main method to assess knowledge and perceptions. Furthermore, of the research teams that used a questionnaire to assess knowledge, all had a primary focus of assessing knowledge related to mandated reporting. Thus, assessing knowledge related to supporting children who had experienced abuse or neglect was a much smaller portion of the data collection if it was measured at all.

Fifty-five percent ($n = 11$) of the studies that utilized a questionnaire included teachers only, whereas seven included other school staff as well. Furthermore, 20% ($n = 4$) of

Table 1. Summary of Reviewed Studies.

Study	Primary Focus of the Study				Methods					
	Knowledge	Attitudes and Beliefs	Access to Training	n	Special Education Team Members	Demographics			Research Design	
						Study Participants	Population of Children Served	Survey	Other	
Abrahams et al. (1992)	X	X	X	n=575	n=6 (1%)	Teachers, School nurses	Elementary	X		
Anderson et al., (2015)	X	X	X	n=16	Not available	Teachers, teaching assistants	Preschool-elementary	X	X	Focus Groups
Baxter & Beer (1990)	X	X	X	n=42	n=3 (7%)	Administrators, teachers, counselors	Elementary-high school	X		
Bradshaw-Sears, 2015	X	X	X	n=191	n=191 (100%)	School psychologists	Elementary-high school	X		
Costello, 2009		X	X	n=157	Not available	Pre-service teachers	Elementary-high school	X		Interviews
Dinehart & Kenny, 2015		X	X	n=137	Not available	Teachers, teaching assistants	Early childhood	X		
Hazzard, 1984	X		X	n=104	Not available	Teachers	Elementary-middleschool	X		
Hazzard & Rupp, 1986	X		X	n=104	Not available	Teachers	Elementary	X		
Kenny, 2004	X	X	X	n=200	n=60 (30%)	Teachers	Elementary-high school	X		
Kleemeier et al., 1988	X		X	n=45	Not available	Teachers, library assistant	Elementary	X		
Martin et al., 2010	X		X	n=66	Not available	Teachers	Early childhood-high school	X		
McIntyre, 1987	X	X	X	n=440	Not available	Teachers	Not available	X		
Orelowe et al., 2000	X		X	n=199	n=94 (47%)	Teachers, administrators, support personnel	Early childhood-high school	X		
Oseroff et al., 1999			X	n=471	n=367 (78%)	Teachers	Early childhood-high school	X		
Randolph & Gold, 1994	X		X	n=42	Not available	Teachers	Elementary-high school	X		
Reynome & Gaeddert, 1998	X		X	n=87	Not available	Teachers	Elementary-high school	X		
Riggs & Evans, 1978	X	X		n=104	n=0 (0%)	Preservice teachers	Elementary	X		
Romano et al., 1990		X	X	n=186	Not available	Teachers, administrators	Elementary	X		
SanJulian, 2013		X	X	n=49	n=49 (100%)	Teachers	Elementary-highschool	X		
Yanowitz et al., 2003	X	X		n=59	Not available	Teachers	Elementary-high school	X		

research teams used the Early Childhood Educators Child Abuse Questionnaire or a slightly modified version of this tool, which examines educators' knowledge related to child maltreatment (Costello, 2009; Dinehart & Kenny, 2015; Kenny, 2004; San Julian, 2013). The remaining research teams used independent researcher-developed questionnaires.

Intervention studies. Four different research teams implemented a workshop or training, and assessed changes in participants' knowledge before and after the workshop (Anderson et al., 2015; Hazzard, 1984; Kleemeier et al., 1988; Randolph & Gold, 1994). The training and workshops varied in length, from less than 6 hr to four full-day workshops (Anderson et al., 2015; Hazzard, 1984; Kleemeier et al., 1988; Randolph & Gold, 1994). Seventy-five percent ($n = 3$) of the intervention studies included a pre- and postsurvey or questionnaire as the means for measuring growth before and after the training or workshop (Hazzard, 1984; Kleemeier et al., 1988; Randolph & Gold, 1994), whereas one research team conducted a preworkshop needs assessment and a postworkshop survey to assess perceptions after the workshops (Anderson et al., 2015). Half of intervention studies ($n = 2$) included teachers only as the participants (Hazzard, 1984; Randolph & Gold, 1994), whereas the other intervention studies included additional school staff as well, such as teaching assistants or library assistants (Anderson et al., 2015; Kleemeier et al., 1988).

Attitudes and Beliefs

This section aims to understand professionals' perceptions related to preparation or lack of preparation they have received, which included school staff's perceptions of training and preparation as it relates to children who have experienced abuse and neglect. In almost half of the studies reviewed related to school staff's perceptions ($n = 8$), researchers investigated how school staff felt related to their preparation in supporting children who have experienced abuse or neglect (Abrahams et al., 1992; Anderson et al., 2015; Baxter & Beer, 1990; Bradshaw-Sears, 2015; Costello, 2009; Kenny, 2004; McIntyre, 1987; San Julian, 2013). Findings from these eight studies suggested that school staff do not feel adequately prepared to support children who have experienced maltreatment. Of the participants who received training related to abuse and neglect, most believed the training they received was insufficient and did not prepare them to support children who have been abused or neglected (Abrahams et al., 1992; Anderson et al., 2015; Baxter & Beer, 1990; Bradshaw-Sears, 2015; Costello, 2009; Kenny, 2004). For example, in a large nationwide survey funded by the National Study on the Incidence of Child Abuse and Neglect, only a third of all participants believed the training they received was sufficient in terms of both the

quality and quantity (Abrahams et al., 1992). Interestingly, Romano (1990) found that school administrators were more likely to be satisfied with the training they received related to abuse and neglect compared with other school staff.

In addition, researchers concluded that school staff believed the training they received related to supporting children who have experienced abuse and neglect was of poor quality (Abrahams et al., 1992; Costello, 2009; Kenny, 2004), often too brief in nature (Abrahams et al., 1992), and was not a priority (Abrahams et al., 1992; Costello, 2009). Abrahams and colleagues (1992) illustrated this idea through a quote from a teacher participant, "I have been teaching for 10 years and during that time I have had only one meeting about child abuse and neglect" (p. 235). Furthermore, school staff believed providing trauma-informed support is necessary (Abrahams et al., 1992; Anderson et al., 2015; Costello, 2009; McIntyre, 1987; Riggs & Evans, 1978; Romano, 1990), but reported some barriers including (a) lack of appropriate qualifications to implement trauma-informed supports (Abrahams et al., 1992; Baxter & Beer, 1990; Riggs & Evans, 1978), (b) time constraints (Abrahams et al., 1992), (c) comfort with the topic (Abrahams et al., 1992; Costello, 2009), and (d) a lack of understanding related to district policy (Baxter & Beer, 1990). Of the individuals who expressed more confidence related to this topic, their confidence was with regard to recognizing abuse or neglect and understanding when to report these cases, and not necessarily related to supporting this population of children (Bradshaw-Sears, 2015; Dinehart & Kenny, 2004; Yanowitz, Monte, & Tribble, 2003).

Access to Training

Due to the focus of this literature review, all the reviewed studies included findings related to preparation, which included both preservice preparation and in-service professional development. Access to training was divided into two different areas: (a) *assessment of knowledge*, which pertained to the knowledge of school staff related to supporting children who have experienced abuse and neglect, and (b) *access to training opportunities*, which included available preservice preparation experiences and in-service professional development experiences.

Assessment of knowledge. The findings for this area included the knowledge (e.g., competency or confidence) of school staff related to supporting children who have experienced abuse and neglect. Of the six research teams that considered professionals' confidence in supporting children who have experienced abuse or neglect, all found a positive correlation between the amount of training and participant reported confidence levels (Anderson et al., 2015; Bradshaw-Sears, 2015; Hazzard, 1984; Hazzard & Rupp, 1986; McIntyre, 1987; Reyome & Gaeddert, 1998). In addition, researchers

suggested that training in this area improved school staff's ability to recognize abuse, collaborate with other professionals regarding children who have experienced abuse and neglect, and appropriately support this population of children (Anderson et al., 2015; Hazzard & Rupp, 1986; Kleemeier et al., 1988; McIntyre, 1987; Randolph & Gold, 1994). For example, Kleemeier and colleagues (1988) compared elementary school teachers who received a 6-hr training on sexual abuse with a control group of elementary school teachers with similar demographics. The teachers who received the training could identify content related to sexual abuse and were more able to correctly apply this content to hypothetical situations.

Although researchers suggested that some school staff understood the negative impact of abuse and neglect (Martin, Cromer, & Freyd, 2010; Yanowitz et al., 2003), most school staff were unaware of the signs of maltreatment (Hazzard & Rupp, 1986; Kenny, 2004; McIntyre, 1987; Reyome & Gaeddert, 1998) and had limited understanding related to the connection between abuse and disability (Orelove et al., 2000; Riggs & Evans, 1978). Furthermore, Hazzard and Rupp (1986) found that teachers are less prepared than pediatricians and mental health workers to support children who have experienced abuse and neglect.

Access to training opportunities. In this section, results are presented related to the availability of preparation opportunities around supporting children who have experienced abuse or neglect. In 75% ($n = 15$) of the reviewed studies, researchers examined prior training or preparation of school staff around the topic of abuse and neglect. The primary focus of preparation or training in all 15 studies was related to identifying abuse with the goal of reporting or general training around mandated reporting. However, responding to the needs and supporting a child who has experienced abuse or neglect were identified as the priority for training by school staff (Anderson et al., 2015; Orelove et al., 2000).

Despite school staff expressing an interest in additional professional development around supporting children who have been abused or neglected (Anderson et al., 2015; Orelove et al., 2000; Oseroff et al., 1999), training was generally only provided once a year and was often delivered by a school social worker, counselor, or nurse who worked in the building (Abrahams et al., 1992). Furthermore, some researchers found that less than 25% of school staff have received training in this area (Baxter & Beer, 1990; Hazzard, 1984), and of the staff who have received training, most had received less than three total hours of training (Hazzard, 1984; McIntyre, 1987). For example, in a study conducted by Costello (2009) a participant noted, "there is always a little side note" related to education around children who have been abused or neglected, which further illustrates the lack of priority this topic is given related to training staff. Furthermore, researchers found that if school staff do

receive training around supporting children who have experienced abuse or neglect, more access this training through professional development opportunities once they are working in the field, rather than during their preservice preparation programs (McIntyre, 1987). Even so, these trainings are minimally offered and are rarely supplemented with written resources. In addition, these limited opportunities still have a primary focus on mandated reporting rather than supporting children (Abrahams et al., 1992).

Some training programs (Hazzard & Rupp, 1986; Randolph & Gold, 1994) have demonstrated an increase in knowledge related to supporting children who have experienced abuse and neglect, but without follow-up, much of the growth in this area is lost. School staff reported a need for additional professional support following training opportunities (Anderson et al., 2015). They noted that their main preparation opportunities have been through informal opportunities, such as consultation with colleagues or on-the-job experiences (Bradshaw-Sears, 2015). Although these experiences are inconsistent and more reactive, researchers suggested that appropriate supervision for school staff related to supporting children who have experienced abuse or neglect may be useful (Bradshaw-Sears, 2015).

Not surprisingly, school staff reported training on supporting families who had dealt with abuse and neglect-related issues as the least provided form of training (Abrahams et al., 1992). It is also not surprising that school staff have significantly greater negative emotions toward parents who have abused or neglected their child (Costello, 2009; Hazzard, 1984; Hazzard & Rupp, 1986). Consistent themes were found in a study conducted by Hazzard (1984), where she noted that teachers were more likely to have negative reactions to family members who had been indicated or found guilty of committing abuse or neglect. Interestingly, after the teachers attended a 6-hr workshop on supporting children and families who had dealt with abuse and neglect-related issues, teachers had less negative reactions to these same families (Hazzard, 1984). Findings also suggested that school staff may believe that supporting children who have been abused or neglected may not be as necessary if they teach in more affluent or more rural communities (Costello, 2009).

Preservice preparation. All the preparation opportunities identified in the reviewed studies had a direct focus on mandated reporting. Three studies that focused on preservice preparation found that most preparation programs delivered information in a variety of different ways (e.g., practicum, lecture), and with minimal consistency or intention (Bradshaw-Sears, 2015; Costello, 2009; San Julian, 2013). Sadly, one preservice teacher who was interviewed on how she acquired knowledge related to supporting children who have been abused or neglected, reported that some of her

gained knowledge was through media, such as the movie *Kindergarten Cop* or the book *One Child* (Costello, 2009). Researchers found that the lack of intentionality contributed to gaps within preservice preparation programs related to this topic (Bradshaw-Sears, 2015; Costello, 2009; San Julian, 2013).

In-service training. Consistent with preservice preparation, researchers found that school staff have limited professional development opportunities related to supporting children who have experienced abuse or neglect (Baxter & Beer, 1990; Bradshaw-Sears, 2015; Orelove et al., 2000). In a study conducted by Baxter and Beer (1990), professional development opportunities related to this topic were identified as a significant need. More specifically, in a study conducted by San Julian (2013), most of the teachers surveyed noted they wanted more speakers and seminars compared with more instruction through lectures during college coursework. This is consistent with the findings from a study conducted by Oseroff and colleagues (1999), where participants reported a desire for more in-service training.

Longitudinal View of Themes

As noted previously, questionnaires have been the main tool for data collection related to this topic. Variations of the Early Childhood Educators Child Abuse Questionnaire have been the most utilized tool (Costello, 2009; Dinehart & Kenny, 2015; Kenny, 2004; San Julian, 2013). Although findings have suggested that not much change has occurred across the years related to supporting children who have been abused or neglected, there does appear to be some progress in identification and mandated reporting obligations by school staff. More studies were conducted before 2000 (Hazzard, 1984; Kleemeier et al., 1988; Randolph & Gold, 1994) that examined posttraining outcomes, compared with after 2000 (Anderson et al., 2015), but findings are consistent across all studies, which indicated that training does improve how well school staff understand how to support children who have experienced abuse or neglect.

By including a longitudinal look at all the studies conducted in this area, it is clear that there has been a limited amount of growth related to supporting children who have experienced abuse or neglect. For example, three research studies conducted before 2000 (Abrahams et al., 1992; Baxter & Beer, 1990; Hazzard, 1984) and two after 2000 (Kenny, 2004; Orelove et al., 2000) found that school policies serve as a barrier, but there are no studies to date that look at addressing this issue. Furthermore, almost an equal number of studies before 2000 (Abrahams et al., 1992; Baxter & Beer, 1990; Hazzard & Rupp, 1986; McIntyre, 1987; Oseroff et al., 1999; Reyome & Gaeddert, 1998; Riggs & Evans, 1978) and after 2000 (Anderson et al., 2015; Bradshaw-Sears, 2015; Costello, 2009; Kenny, 2004;

Martin et al., 2010; Orelove et al., 2000; San Julian, 2013; Yanowitz et al., 2003) indicated that school staff lack preparation and training to support children who have experienced abuse or neglect. Consequently, over the course of almost 40 years, researchers continue to come to the same conclusions, yet a limited number of studies have been conducted that consider how best to prepare school staff. Therefore, without this intentional research, it is not surprising that studies conducted across the last five decades continue to reveal that school staff feel unprepared to work with children who have experienced abuse or neglect (Abrahams et al., 1992; Anderson et al., 2015; Baxter & Beer, 1990; Bradshaw-Sears, 2015; Costello, 2009; Hazzard & Rupp, 1986; Kenny, 2004; McIntyre, 1987; Reyome & Gaeddert, 1998; Riggs & Evans, 1978).

Discussion

With the staggering numbers of children experiencing abuse and neglect (Chu & Lieberman, 2010), there continues to be a need to educate school staff to support the unique needs of this population. With almost half of the children who have been abused or neglected also qualifying to receive special education services (Zetlin, 2006), sufficient training for special education teams is imperative. Although the 20 reviewed studies had components related to how well prepared school staff were to support children who have experienced abuse or neglect, the primary focus of the studies was on how well prepared school staff were to identify and report abuse and neglect. The findings from this literature review are clear: (a) school staff are not prepared to support children who have experienced abuse or neglect; (b) preservice and in-service professional development opportunities related to supporting children who have experienced abuse and neglect are lacking; (c) although training has the potential to improve outcomes for children who have experienced abuse and neglect, the quality of training is insufficient; and (d) surveys and questionnaires have been heavily relied on when conducting research in this area.

By considering the preparation of school staff related to supporting children who have experienced abuse and neglect, many implications for future research and practice became clear. Across the last 40 years, researchers have called for more work in this area, specifically related to supporting children who have experienced abuse and neglect. For example, in 1978, *Exceptional Children* published an article outlying clear expectations for professionals related to supporting children who have experienced abuse and neglect (McCaffrey & Tewey, 1978). Although this article offered practice and research implications, 24 years later, Oseroff and colleagues (1999) referenced this article and pointed out that the field has not made much progress in this area. Unfortunately, 19 years after Oseroff and colleagues' call for action, the gap still remains.

In 2014, the NEA issued a policy recommendation that school staff become appropriately trained in supporting children who have experienced abuse or neglect. A similar statement was issued by the DEC in 2016. With the recent release of the position statement on the Prevention of and Response to Maltreatment by the CEC (2018), the field of special education must focus attention on how prepared special education professionals are to carry out this work.

Implications for Practice

Through the position statements issued by DEC and CEC, we have made a commitment to supporting children with special needs who have experienced abuse and neglect (CEC, 2018; DEC, 2016). These position statements offer a starting place for what quality care and instruction looks like for this population of children. In addition, through the position statements, there is a clear message that special education providers are responsible for providing appropriate supports to children who have experienced abuse and neglect. However, based on the literature, we know professionals do not feel prepared, and preparation in this area is not seen as a priority. For professionals to carry out recommendations outlined in the position statements, (a) we must ensure organizations that provide services to individuals with disabilities consider abuse and neglect when developing policies related to the provision of services; (b) we must prioritize the preparation of professionals related to supporting children who have experienced abuse and neglect, which must include preservice preparation and ongoing in-service professional development opportunities; and finally, (c) special educators must be seen as a priority group when working with this group of children, rather than the responsibility falling on a different group of professionals.

Implications for Research

Considering the significant number of children who have experienced abuse and neglect and receive special education services, coupled with the recommendations from the NEA, DEC, and CEC, the special education field has an obligation to appropriately support these children. Furthermore, there is a disparity in the high number of children who are affected by abuse and neglect, and a lack of focus on research in this area. To more appropriately support children who have experienced abuse and neglect, research must be conducted (a) with a primary focus on supporting children beyond identifying and reporting maltreatment, (b) that directly targets the special education process and staff rather than considering special education as an afterthought, and (c) that diversifies research methods to develop a deeper understanding of the issues. Finally, within the existing literature, findings suggested that school staff are unprepared, and preparation and training

are insufficient, so we must understand the facilitators and barriers to appropriately supporting children who have experienced abuse and neglect, and receive special education services to design meaningful and appropriate professional development opportunities.

Limitations

This literature review does present some limitations, such as the fact that most of the studies had a focus on mandated reporting, and there was a heavy reliance on questionnaires. Furthermore, half of the articles included in this review were conducted prior to 2000, which may be considered outdated. However, it was necessary to include all the studies related to this topic to create a more holistic depiction of the current state of preparation of personnel related to supporting children who have experienced abuse and neglect. Notably, although the articles included in this review span 40 years, the findings were consistent. In addition, due to the lack of available research in this area, dissertation studies were included for review. Although, not peer reviewed, all three dissertation studies were original research, and were closely aligned with the guiding questions for this literature review. Furthermore, by including these studies, we were able to achieve a more comprehensive representation of the research that has been conducted in this area.

Conclusion

Children are experiencing abuse and neglect at staggering rates, and many of these children will receive special education services. Fortunately, the field of special education has taken action through multiple position statements which highlights the importance of appropriately supporting this vulnerable group of children. However, special education professionals are not fully prepared to support children who have experienced abuse and neglect. As we move forward, we must prioritize work in this area specifically for special education providers. Although children who have experienced abuse and neglect are overrepresented related to the provision of special education services, preparation in this area has not been a priority for special education providers, and researchers in this area have not prioritized special education providers as participants in research studies. The field of special education has highlighted the need to consider children who have experienced abuse and neglect, which is a promising step in the right direction; the next step is to prepare professionals to carry out this important work.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This study was supported in part by funding from the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education: Project BLEND (H325D110037). The views or opinions presented in this manuscript are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the funding agency.

ORCID iD

Deserai Miller  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8135-8818>

References

- Abrahams, N., Casey, K., & Daro, D. (1992). Teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about child abuse and its prevention. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 16*, 229–238.
- Anderson, E., Blitz, L., & Saastamoinen, M. (2015). Exploring a school-university model for professional development with classroom staff: Teaching trauma-informed approaches. *School Community Journal, 25*, 113–134.
- Arata, C. M., Langhinrichsen-Rohling, J., Bowers, D., & O'Farrill-Swails, L. (2005). Single versus multi-type maltreatment: An examination of the long-term effects of child abuse. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma, 11*(4), 29–52.
- Baxter, G., & Beer, J. (1990). Educational needs of school personnel regarding child abuse and/or neglect. *Psychological Reports, 67*, 75–80.
- Bradshaw-Sears, K. (2015). *Mandated reporting: An examination of training and practice of school psychologists* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/1654/
- Chu, A., & Lieberman, A. (2010). Clinical implications of traumatic stress from birth to age five. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 6*, 469–494.
- Costello, L. H. (2009). *A study of preservice teachers' knowledge and attitudes about child maltreatment and mandatory reporting* (Doctoral dissertation). Indiana University School of Education, Bloomington.
- Council for Exceptional Children. (2018). *CEC's policy on the prevention of and response to maltreatment* [Position Statement]. Retrieved from <https://www.cec.sped.org/Policy-and-Advocacy>
- Darwish, D., Esquivel, G., Houtz, J., & Alfonso, V. (2001). Play and social skills in maltreated and non-maltreated preschoolers during peer interactions. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 25*, 13–31.
- Denov, M. S. (2004). The long-term effects of child sexual abuse by female perpetrators: A qualitative study of male and female victims. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 19*, 1137–1156.
- Dinehart, L., & Kenny, M. (2015). Knowledge of child abuse and reporting practices among early care and education providers. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 29*, 429–443.
- Division for Early Childhood. (2016). *Child Maltreatment: A position statement of the Division for Early Childhood* [Position Statement]. Retrieved from <http://www.dec-sp.ed.org/single-post/2016/10/28/DECs-Position-Statement-on-Child-Maltreatment-Taking-a-Stand>
- Eigsti, I., & Cicchetti, D. (2004). The impact of child maltreatment on expressive syntax at 60 months. *Developmental Science, 7*, 88–102.
- Goerge, R., Voorhis, J., Grant, S., Casey, K., & Robinson, M. (1992). Special education experiences of foster children: An empirical study. *Child Welfare, 71*, 419–437.
- Hazzard, A. (1984). Training teachers to identify and intervene with abused children. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology, 13*, 288–293.
- Hazzard, A., & Rupp, G. (1986). A note on the knowledge and attitudes of professional groups toward child abuse. *Journal of Community Psychology, 14*, 219–223.
- Kenny, M. (2004). Teachers' attitudes toward and knowledge of child maltreatment. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 28*, 1311–1319.
- Kleemeier, C., Webb, C., Hazzard, A., & Pohl, J. (1988). Child sexual abuse prevention: Evaluation of a teacher training model. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 12*, 555–561.
- Littell, J., Corcoran, J., & Pillai, V. (2008). *Systematic reviews and meta-analysis*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Martin, C., Cromer, L., & Freyd, J. (2010). Teachers' beliefs about maltreatment effects on student learning and classroom behavior. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma, 3*, 245–254.
- McCaffrey, M., & Tewey, S. (1978). Preparing educators to participate in the community response to child abuse and neglect. *Exceptional Children, 45*, 114–122.
- McIntyre, T. (1987). Teacher awareness of child abuse and neglect. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 11*, 133–135.
- Miller, D., Santos, R. M., & Burke, M. M. (2019). Trauma and the special education process: Current practices, preparation and professional perceptions. Manuscript under review.
- National Association of Child Care Resources & Referral Agencies. (2013). *We can do better. Child care aware® of America's ranking of state child care center regulations and oversight*. Retrieved from https://drfiene.files.wordpress.com/2017/11/naccrra-wecandobetter_2013.pdf
- National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (2008). *Child maltreatment: Facts at a glance*. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.
- National Education Association. (1989). *Resolution C-59: Child abuse, neglect, and exploitation*. West Haven, CT: Author.
- National Education Association. (2014). *Resolution C-28: Child abuse, neglect, and exploitation*. West Haven, CT: Author.
- Orelove, F., Hollahan, D., & Myles, K. (2000). Maltreatment of children with disabilities: Training needs for a collaborative response. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 24*, 185–194.
- Oseroff, A., Oseroff, C., Westling, D., & Gessner, L. (1999). Teachers' beliefs about maltreatment of students with emotional/behavioral disorders. *Behavioral Disorders, 24*, 197–209.
- Pears, K., Fisher, P., Bruce, J., Kim, H., & Yoerger, K. (2010). Early elementary school adjustment of maltreated children in foster care: The roles of inhibitory control and caregiver involvement. *Child Development, 81*, 1550–1564.
- Randolph, M., & Gold, C. (1994). Child sexual abuse prevention: Evaluation of a teacher training program. *School Psychology Review, 23*, 485–495.
- Reyome, N., & Gaeddert, W. (1998). Teachers' awareness of child and adolescent maltreatment. *Child Study Journal, 28*, 111–122.

- Riggs, R. S., & Evans, D. W. (1978). The pre-professional elementary educators' knowledge and opinions regarding child abuse. *College Student Journal, 12*, 290–293.
- Romano, N. (1990). *Schools and child abuse: A national survey of principals' attitudes, beliefs, and practices*. Chicago, IL: National Center on Child Abuse Prevention Research.
- San Julian, A. (2013). *Special educators and their perceptions and knowledge of child maltreatment in children with disabilities* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.csustan.edu/bitstream/handle/011235813/225/SanJulianA.spring2013thesis.pdf?sequence=3>
- Smith, T., Linnemeyer, R., Scallse, D., & Hamilton, J. (2013). Barriers to outpatient mental health treatment for children and adolescents: Parental perspectives. *Journal of Family Psychotherapy, 24*(2), 73–92.
- Sullivan, P., & Knutson, J. (2000). Maltreatment and disabilities: A population-based epidemiological study. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 24*, 1257–1273.
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2017). *Child Maltreatment*. Available from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/child-maltreatment>
- Waldman, B., Perlman, S., & Lederman, C. (2007). Foster children with disabilities. *Exceptional Parent, 37*(12), 20–22.
- Yanowitz, K., Monte, E., & Tribble, J. (2003). Teachers' beliefs about the effects of child abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 27*, 483–488.
- Zetlin, A. (2006). The experiences of foster children and youth in special education. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability, 31*, 161–169.