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#204 - Implementation determinants of trauma-informed education practice

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Objectives/aims

A trauma-informed approach to education has the potential to address persistent inequalities in educational attainment. Children and young people affected by trauma often struggle at school and are at greater risk of non-completion, with long-term consequences for their employment, civil engagement, health, wellbeing, and relationships. By addressing the needs of students, a trauma-informed approach holds short- and medium-term prospects for increased school engagement improved academic performance, decreased behavioural issues, and greater student wellbeing which ultimately contribute to a healthier and more productive society.

The objectives of this study were to:

- Investigate how educators' intentions to implement trauma-informed education practice translated into action six months after completing postgraduate professional learning in trauma-informed educational practice.
- Understand the implementation determinants (i.e. facilitators and barriers) associated with trauma-informed practice in schools.

Trauma-informed professional learning for educators has proliferated in recent years. Despite the heightened attention implementation determinants are not well understood.

Trauma-informed educators are trained to recognise and respond to trauma affected students and support their education. Much of this training utilises neuroscience principles from a well-established evidence base; however the uptake and implementation of this approach is complex, varied, and challenging. To address the



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inequalities faced by the increasing number of students living with the effects of trauma, there is an urgent need to better understand the implementation barriers and facilitators.

Methods

A two-phase survey research design was developed for this study. Participants (n=72) were educators who had completed a year-long graduate certificate in trauma-informed education at an Australian University. They completed a self-administered online survey immediately after completing the course, and again six months later. Questionnaire development was informed by the theory of planned behaviour and implementation science, with the aim of identifying individual, organisational and systemic factors associated with educators' taking action to implement trauma-informed practice in their school.

Main findings

The main findings were:

- Immediately after completing the course, participants reported high levels of intention to implement trauma-informed practice in their education settings over the coming six months.
- Six months later, nearly three-quarters of participants (73%) reported they had implemented trauma-informed practice in their education settings.
- Initial intention was not predictive of implementation behaviour (action). Subjective norm was the biggest influence on implementation, meaning behaviour was strongly determined by systemic factors such as leadership support.
- Initial high scores in intention were predicted by attitude (towards the value of trauma-informed practice) and perceived behavioural control (i.e. their belief in their ability to implement trauma-informed practice). This was not surprising given that participants had self-selected to the course and were highly motivated.
- Analysis of open-ended responses in the follow-up survey identified more nuanced contextual factors associated with implementation. Participants almost unanimously nominated leadership support and "buy in" from their colleagues as instrumental facilitators or barriers to implementation.

Although this was a preliminary rather than a rigorous experimental study, findings yielded important understandings about implementation determinants in

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education contexts. The rapid uptake of training interventions for trauma-informed approaches in education suggests there is a vast demand for professional learning in this field. However, the risk is that highly motivated educators return to their schools only to have their efforts thwarted by a support-deficit from school leaders and colleagues. Results of this study point towards “whole school” approaches to professional learning. Future studies could investigate the feasibility and acceptability of such trainings alongside assessing further determinants relating to school environments and cultures.

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