



Understanding Trauma-Informed Practice

Taylor, S., Battis, C., Carnochan, S., Henry, C., Balk, M., & Austin, M. J. (2019). Exploring trauma-informed practice in public child welfare through qualitative data-mining of case records. *Journal of public child welfare*, 13(3), 325-344.

WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This article explores how one child welfare program used an extensive case review process to assess how trauma manifests in youth involved in the child welfare system and to understand caseworker efforts to engage with youth. The program was able to use this information to make recommendations on improving trauma-informed practices.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL FINDINGS?

Using qualitative data-mining techniques, researchers reviewed and analyzed 16 child welfare case records including emergency response reports, contact notes, case plans, and court documents. All cases involved multiple traumas including neglect, household substance use, household mental illness, psychological abuse, and/or incarceration of a household member.

The records included examples of how child welfare workers used elements of trauma-informed practice. Researchers examined these essential elements, as identified by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, and found these elements helped to:

- Maximize the child's sense of safety
- Assist the child in reducing overwhelming emotion
- Address the impact of trauma and life changes
- Coordinate services
- Use a comprehensive assessment
- Support and promote positive and stable relationships.

While most youth in the study showed signs and symptoms of complex trauma as documented in the case records, only 25% had a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR WORK?

Child welfare programs may focus more on a youth's behavioral health needs when the youth has a diagnosis of PTSD resulting from complex trauma.

Programs can effectively address complex trauma experienced by youth by:

- Understanding how trauma manifests in youth
- Screening for complex trauma
- Knowing the elements of trauma-informed practices
- Engaging youth in skillful trauma-responsive practice
- Providing sufficient resources to comprehensively address trauma

Efforts to comprehensively address trauma can result in better outcomes for youth.

