



EVALUATING EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS TO SUPPORT TRAUMA-AFFECTED STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT: Traumatic events happen in everyone's lives, and they can create impactful and irreparable consequences for those who experience them. In recent years, community events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and school shootings are becoming more prominent. For students in elementary schools, trauma can affect their performance, mental health, relationships, and self-esteem. It's up to school districts, administrators, and teachers to provide support to students who are affected by traumatic events. This can look like ensuring training is completed, creating multi-tiered systems of support, and establishing and cultivating loving classroom communities. This research paper analyzes the different educational efforts to support trauma-affected students and strives to create more trauma-aware schools, classrooms, and educators.

Introduction

Trauma affects everyone, at all stages in their lives. It can make or break a school year for students and can lead to yearlong mental health struggles. Traumatic events affect many children in schools every day, but they often aren't receiving the support that they need to get past these events. In today's school communities, there is not enough awareness amongst educators and school administrators about the prevalence and negative effects that traumatic events have on students. Even in the last few years, more and more students are dealing with trauma at home that can include parental dysfunction, drug use, family death, and others. However, there are some schools implementing training and awareness programs for educators that are reducing the effects of traumatic events on students. In one school, a therapeutic approach had positive effects that "indicated a decrease in trauma-related symptoms for students who received HEARTS therapy" (Dorado et. al. 2016). In the Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in School (HEARTS) program, teachers receive training on the effects of traumatic events on students as well as ways to teach these students in a more effective manner. This has been

successful in mitigating the effects of trauma on children and adults alike and should be used in every school nationwide to create trauma-informed school communities everywhere.

In school districts across the country, there is a lack of resources and support available to scaffold the learning and development of students experiencing trauma. The COVID-19 pandemic, along with the high presence of school shootings in the past few years have exacerbated the number of students suffering from traumatic experiences (Walkley & Cox, 2013, Grieg et al. 2021). These events impact not only the students experiencing them, but educators and school staff as well as entire communities. To mitigate these negative effects, there needs to be systems in place that can reduce the effects from traumatic events on students. The recent uptick in school shootings and the pandemic are not the only events that affect student performance and mental health.

Traumatic events such as divorce, family death, mental health, etc. greatly impact the way that students learn and experience school. "Childhood trauma can adversely impact academic performance, classroom behavior, and student relationships" (Berger 2019). These are all essential functions of children in the school



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environment, and all of them become impaired when students are experiencing traumatic events. This can affect other students, teachers, administrators, and the school community if there aren't systems in place to support students. After experiencing trauma, students may have lifelong mental health, trust, and emotional issues. However, there are ways that educators can intervene to ensure that trauma doesn't have a lasting impact.

Teachers are the backbone of classrooms and can make or break a student's experience in school. It's important that they are working to support students in any way they can. Two ways educators can support students in the classroom include building a strong classroom community as well as instructing according to student strengths. Positive psychology or using students' strengths to promote growth and healing has been instrumental in creating a trauma-informed school community (Brunzell et. al. 2016). Incorporating this tool in classrooms could be an important step to informing educators about creating a trauma-informed classroom community. This can also boost the classroom community that teachers have and encourage community building within schools. In addition, teachers can transform their community circles to better support their students and improve behavior. This can be done by implementing restorative practices in the classroom (Scheper et. al 2023). However, some teachers often have a "tried and true" method that works for them over the years and won't change their ways of teaching.

It can be difficult to ask educators to change their teaching methods after doing things one way for so long. This can be the hardest part of implementing trauma-informed teaching and building a trauma-informed community. However, implementing a required training can be a great starting point to giving instructors the tools that they need. A study found that incorporating a required training across an entire school system may be the best way

to create trauma-informed schools and communities (Blanton et. al. 2022). Although some teachers incorporated what they learned into their classrooms, the result was ultimately not effective in school or district-wide contexts. There is also no way to check if these systems are being used correctly in every school or every district. (Blanton et. al. 2022). The question I will be researching is, how can educators and school administrators work together to create a trauma-aware school community?

Literature Review

Firstly, in order to support students who are experiencing traumatic events, it's important to identify what constitutes "trauma" and how these events affect the learning and development of students. Trauma is defined as "an overwhelming experience that can forever alter one's belief that the world is good and safe" (Brunzell et al. 2016). This is a broad definition and can include events both small and large. Kids often don't even understand that they are going through a traumatic event until they reach adulthood. These experiences can range from parental divorce or death to community experiences such as school shootings or the COVID-19 pandemic (Walkley & Cox 2013). These traumatic events are more common than you would think, with around 40% of students experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event (Brunzell et al. 2016). Experiencing these events often or for a prolonged period can lead to toxic stress, which can dramatically alter the brain, stress response, and self-regulation skills. If a child is exposed to toxic stress for a long period of time, they may have lifelong effects such as mental illness, inability to form relationships, and anger issues (Walkley & Cox 2013). These experiences not only alter the way that children view the world, but also the ways in which they learn and develop. As children reach adulthood, these traumatic events often continue to affect their daily life in many ways and can alter the way they experience the world forever.



Supporting Trauma- Affected Students

After going through the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone's worlds were altered. Sick policies have changed, masks are seen as normal, and some people are still working from home. This traumatic event changed how we experience the world, and it's no different for other traumatic events that happen to children. According to a study done by the University of Melbourne, the effects of these events impact how students build healthy relationships and develop their self-regulation skills (Brunzell et al. 2016). These skills and relationships are the backbone of emotional intelligence as adults and if schools aren't well versed in supporting trauma-affected students, it will hinder the development of these skills. In addition to this, they are also more prone to experiencing things such as suspensions, expulsions, detention, failing, delays in various developmental domains, and being wrongly assigned to special education (Brunzell et al. 2016). These experiences not only impact student success, but students' opinions of school in general. If students don't enjoy school, they are less likely to try to be successful. Since these traumatic events affect students' experience and success in future grades, early intervention should be a priority. Providing teachers with the tools to use in their classroom can be a catalyst in preventing the failure of students as they progress to high school and through adulthood. In addition to this, allowing teachers to understand the prevalence of trauma in their students is important to influencing how much they care about this issue.

Gaining awareness is the first step to creating a trauma-informed classroom community. A lot of the time, teachers aren't aware of students experiencing trauma because they don't get to know their students. A great teacher will get to know each of their students, be curious about their lives, and be ready to support them. Once you know your students, you will know their strengths and their areas of growth. One way that teachers have gained awareness is to learn student strengths and teach to those. By emphasizing strengths in the classroom and

asking students to set goals in relation to them, we can mitigate some of the effects of trauma. In addition, it has been shown to "increase school performance, achievement, and wellbeing; and to be an effective tool in planning higher education and career paths with students" (Brunzell et al. 2016). This is a great curriculum element that should be given to teachers so they can increase the success of the students who experience trauma in their classrooms. By giving students a tool to use in building their future success, the traumatic events they are exposed to won't have as large of an impact. In addition, students will feel better about themselves, have something to work towards, and feel as though their teacher truly cares about them.

Caring deeply about students is an essential part of being an educator, as this allows teachers to build a relationship of trust and mutual respect. In addition to this, there are other pieces of a classroom that can impact student success and create a trauma-informed classroom community. According to a group of educators, there are six things that contribute to a trauma-informed classroom: "creating a sense of safety, practicing trustworthiness and transparency, utilizing peer support, employing collaboration, practicing empowerment and fostering voice and choice, and recognizing cultural, historical, and gender issues" (Blanton et al. 2022). By bringing these aspects into the classroom, teachers can create a trauma-informed community in the classroom in which children feel safe to share their struggles with the teacher. Peers can also be a form of support for one another, by offering support or recognizing that there may be multiple students experiencing different things. By teaching to strengths, teachers are empowering their students to recognize their strengths despite adversity. Lastly, recognizing the factors that may contribute to more traumatic events, such as gender, race, and sexuality, prepares teachers to better support these students in the classroom.

Teachers aren't just given a group of students with a thriving classroom community. It's an



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aspect of teaching that must be worked on every single day. This often involves a community circle or other community building projects. Although these are common for most teachers, they can be used differently to impact students more effectively. A newly researched practice called restorative justice is one way that teachers can respond to trauma in the classroom by focusing on community. These restorative justice practices are based on indigenous methods, and they work to “proactively and responsively prioritize relationships, community building, and self-reflection while repairing harm and holding those accountable when harm is caused” (Schepers et. al 2023). One of the main ways this is integrated in all classrooms today is with community circles. All students and teachers sit in a circle and answer a question, and this often works to build community, support all students, and establish trust among peers and teachers. However, the community circle is often used as “fun” and not in the ways it’s intended. To ensure that a community circle is effective, consider talking about shared classroom values, discussing issues that happen at recess, or working to “repair harm” (Schepers et. al 2023). The community circle includes six practices that create a trauma-aware classroom community: “empowerment; voice and choice, historical, culture, and gender issues, safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, and collaboration and mutuality” (Schepers et. al 2023). Most teachers have a community circle each day, so making it more intentional by focusing on issues that affect the classroom is a change that can create a trustful and supportive classroom community. This is another way that teachers can allow students to be the leaders in the classroom and can make educators more aware of their own bias.

The first step to becoming a trauma-aware educator is to be aware of their own bias. Each educator comes from their own backgrounds and has their own set of experiences. The way that teachers can use this to their advantage is to acknowledge this bias and use it to improve

their practice. One way this can be done is for teachers to continue educating themselves. Not every teacher will look for this on their own, so training must be made available to teachers by the school district. One program that already exists is called Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS), which is a vast prevention program that touches many parts of the school system to mitigate the negative effects of traumatic events on students. One of their goals is to support these students by ensuring that educators are well-informed and trained on topics related to caring for those experiencing trauma. They provide three levels of support, ranging from individual prevention methods to worldwide (Dorado et al. 2016). This intensive program is a great example of something that should be implemented in districts around the country. By providing proper training to teachers, support for students, and overall awareness, the effects of traumatic events on students can be minimized.

A whole-school approach is an intensive and supportive one that will support each level of the school system needed for real changes to be made. The HEARTS program begins at Tier 1, which provides support to all students, adults, and systems in the school. These range from “classroom training on stress” for students, to “skill-building workshops” for educators (Dorado et al. 2016). Moving up in Figure 1, the supports in Tier 2 get more intensive and individualized. Secondary interventions here include supporting at-risk students, wellness for staff that addresses teacher burnout, and revising discipline policies in the school. These efforts then move on to Tier 3, which is a more intensive support system (Dorado et. al. 2016). Students may receive individualized therapy, along with their families. In addition, Individualized Education Plan (IEP) assessment may begin here as well as providing extra supports in the classroom to trauma-impacted school staff and involving all student caregivers. These three tiers ensure that at each level, students and staff are supported, while also ensuring that



the district is improving upon practices and methods to ensure efficacy and evaluation of their individual systems. This is a supportive model that will improve upon teacher and staff knowledge of trauma, while also supporting students individually.

Another approach to teacher training is a systems-aware approach that engages teachers in discussions. These conferences encourage educators to share their own experiences, opinions, and beliefs when it comes to caring for

trauma-affected students. This is a great way for educators to get involved and informed about trauma-aware practices. In addition, it allows multiple teachers, administrators, and school personnel to work together to create a plan to improve their schools or districts. Along with this collaborative ability, the systems-aware approach creates “safe spaces” where multiple perspectives are heard to develop an inclusive environment for students and staff (Greig et al. 2021). Organizing a taskforce such as this can be a great way to involve educators outside

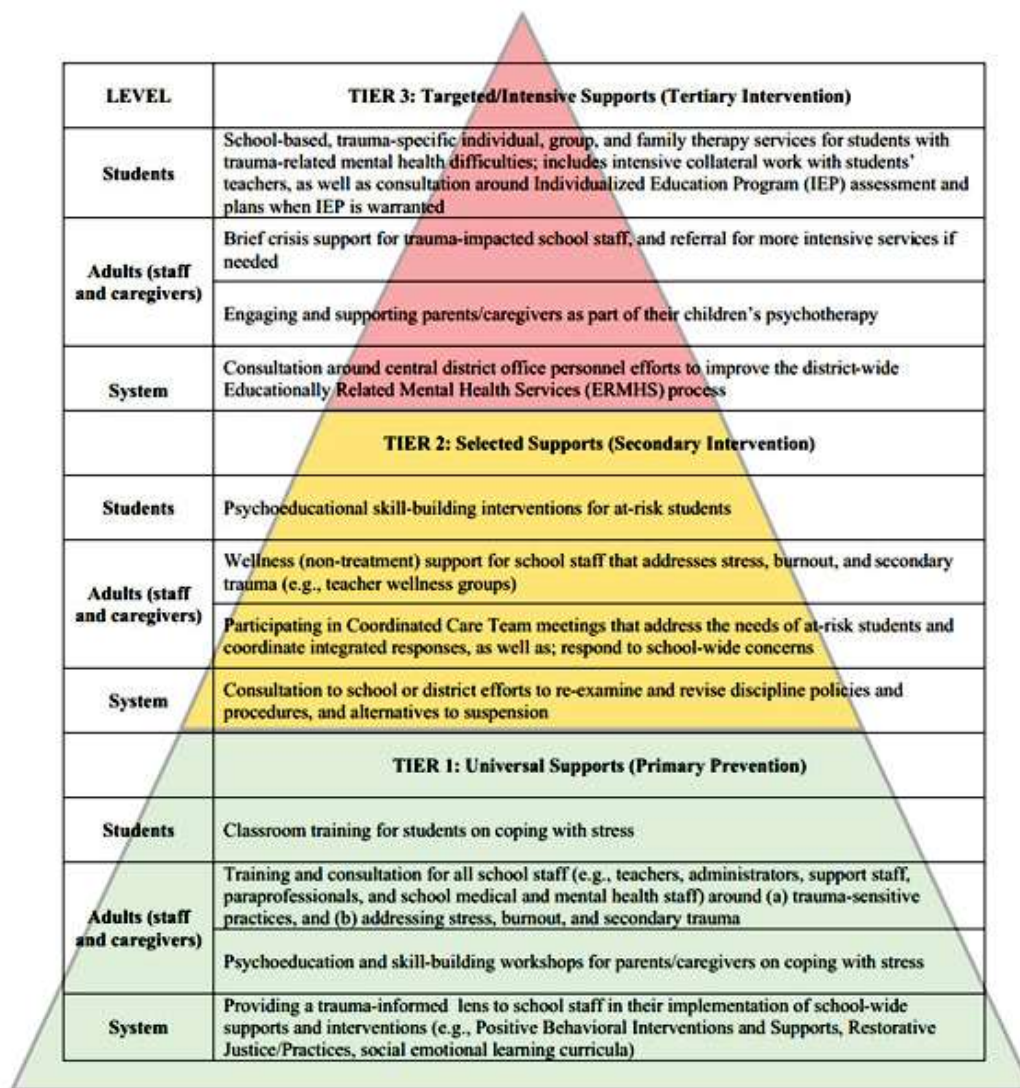


Figure 1: Examples of HEARTS tiered supports at three levels of intervention. Dorado et al. 2016



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required training. This taskforce can tackle tasks such as scheduling training, following up on teaching methods, and ensuring all children are cared for. This, in addition to monthly or tri-monthly trauma-informed training would allow for more awareness and approaches to developing trauma-aware communities. It would also promote a school community that discusses trauma openly and has plans to improve the way the school supports trauma-affected students.

Although these plans seem supportive, intentional, and effective, the school system is often not this way. For example, trauma-informed training is not offered in every district, and there are some limitations to these trainings that are not always considered. Although training is offered, evaluations of the staff after the training are not always completed. To see the effects of trauma decrease, educators must take what they have learned into practice in the classroom (Berger 2019). Teachers may not mean to forget what they have learned in these trainings but they have a lot of other things to think about. This may mean that enforcing a trauma-informed classroom is not at the top of their list of things to do. In addition to this, veteran teachers may not want to implement new ways of teaching. This, and the idea that change in a large system such as a school district takes time, are huge barriers to the implementation of these programs (Walkley & Cox 2013). Many new teachers may already know that changing anything in the school system can take years. Implementing an entire new training or task force can be difficult and time-consuming, but the importance of these programs is essential to scaffold the learning and development of the students, who should be the most important people in a school.

Although there are limitations, there have also been findings from the literature that have shown these programs to be extremely effective. The educators that participated in the HEARTS program stated that “they had significant increases in their understanding of trauma and use of trauma-sensitive practices, as well as significant improvements in their students’ ability to learn, time on task, and school attendance” (Dorado et al. 2016). These findings show that educators are learning from the training and taking what they learned into the classroom. This is a great first step to ensuring that educators become more aware of what may be happening in their students’ lives. It’s also important to note that the mental health of their students greatly improved after the HEARTS program was implemented (Dorado et al. 2016). The school that implemented this program also reported that students “improved in their adjustment to trauma, regulation, intrusions, attachment, and dissociation” (Dorado et al 2016). As we can see from these results, implementing an entire school approach to create a trauma-informed community greatly decreases the effects from traumatic events. Not only this, but it creates a trauma-aware community that has support at every level of the school system and prepares students for a successful life despite adversity.

Limitations and results aside, there are noticeable gaps in the research and literature available to analyze methods of mitigating the effects of trauma on students. Although there is ample research and evidence that trauma negatively impacts learning and development, there is not enough research on what schools or teachers can do to reduce these impacts. There needs to be more research on specific training methods and resources for teachers to be more prepared to meet the needs of their trauma-affected students. This means that more schools across the country should be creating and implementing programs that inform teachers and administrators about the negative effects of trauma and how to create a trauma-aware



school. In addition, it's important that educators and school administrators work together to establish training and resources if there are none available at their schools. This will allow the research to be supported by more training and results. The current literature is too scarce for the training that is offered to support trauma in the classroom.

Conclusion

Students experiencing trauma often cannot fully participate in school and aren't able to gain the necessary learning and development due to traumatic events. They need extra support and assistance from teachers to be successful. However, as the literature has expressed, there is not enough training available to educators and schools to meet the needs of these students. In addition, educators are overworked and underpaid, and often won't have the time or energy to learn new practices or techniques. At least 40% of students are experiencing trauma in schools right now (Brunzell et. al. 2016). This statistic needs to be addressed throughout the entire school system in order to make a change. The HEARTS training and systems-aware approach mentioned in the literature review have been successful but are not implemented in every district, or even every state.

Districts must prepare teachers with ways to support these students as well as create school or district-wide systems to support students experiencing trauma in the community. After having regularly scheduled training sessions, schools will become more aware of the signs of trauma and how to support those experiencing it. Teachers experience burnout from being overworked and unsupported with student behaviors, and these behaviors are often due to experiencing or witnessing traumatic events (Grieg et al. 2021). Regular training can also include ways to reduce stress or support mental health, which will be helpful to teachers experiencing burnout. By instructing teachers on how to best support these students, training

can also contribute to reducing teacher turnover. In combination, this will allow communities to build trauma-informed schools that have the tools needed to support those experiencing trauma.

Traumatic events affect a child forever by causing lifelong mental illnesses and negatively impacting their ability to build relationships. Mitigating the negative effects of these events can alter the course of their lives and improve their learning and development. To do this effectively, educators must be provided with training to increase their awareness of the effects of traumatic events. Increasing the awareness of educators will decrease the effects of traumatic events on students. However, training needs to be implemented district-wide at every level. This falls on school administrators and district personnel. The effectiveness of the teachers' curriculum and adaptation of training materials must also be observed throughout the school year. In addition, new training should be created often to support a system that is constantly striving to improve the lives of their students and teachers. Educators themselves can work to create a classroom community that is not only aware of trauma, but celebrates it. This can be done by focusing on positive psychology and restorative justice practices. To ensure that a school is truly trauma-informed and equipped to mitigate the effects of traumatic events on students, educators and school administrators alike must work together to create a system of support that reaches each student.



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UYGHUR FORCED LABOR: THE ROLE WE PLAY

Liam Hunter

ABSTRACT: Regardless of current existing humanitarian efforts, the Uyghur population in Xinjiang, China are subject to forced labor. Human rights advocates have classified China's treatment of Uyghur people as ethnic cleansing and genocide. This humanitarian crisis has a long-written history, yet nothing effective has been accomplished. America's foreign policy, the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA), has fallen short of its goals and failed to support those it was made to support. Approaching the second year since the creation of UFLPA, it is becoming increasingly important to alter the current trajectory. Attempts toward improving UFLPA to better support the Uyghur population are necessary for human rights movements globally. America must focus on utilizing its ability to publicly denounce countries while working toward eliminating e-commerce related to forced labor. Through my research, I propose policy change disabling the selling of forced labor goods through E-commerce websites and expanding labor laws onto offshore labor. I subsequently propose a national mindset change to repudiate countries backing China (whether willingly or not) in hiding human rights abuses.

Introduction

In this research paper, I will be analyzing the forced labor of Uyghur people in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China. I will be discussing the benefits, loopholes, and struggles of current U.S. foreign policy serving to assist Uyghurs in internment camps and forced labor situations. I argue that current U.S. foreign policy is lacking in both the economic and humanitarian aspects needed to support Uyghurs. Not to mention the existence of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act serving as an economic sanction on China. To effectively support the Uyghur population in China, a more thorough policy must be constructed. After discussing the history of Uyghurs and Xinjiang, the stakeholders involved, and the current U.S. foreign policy, I will go on to discuss policy recommendations to better combat the forced labor and humanitarian abuses on the Uyghur population.

This paper highlights and focuses on America's actions in foreign policy against

human rights abuses toward the Uyghur population. In preparation and research, I visited Washington D.C., and got the opportunity to speak directly with congresspeople, embassy officials, and prevalent NGOs. Coordinating with these influential figures, I was able to grasp the realistic struggles of U.S. foreign policy and human rights activism. Communicating with international affairs officers helped me understand the restrictions behind the current structure of U.S. foreign policy, further leading me to realize the importance of discussing its faults. This paper comes from the optimistic hope of human rights activism paired with a realistic understanding of current structural barriers.

Background & History

Uyghurs are a group of Turkic-speaking people who originated near central Asia. Their population is considered to be followers of the Sunni Islamic religion. The Uyghur territory was absorbed into Chinese rule during the Qing Dynasty in the 18th century. Shortly after, China