

ACADEMIC PRESENTATION • SAMPLE

Trauma-Informed Practice in Australian Youth Homelessness Services

Discipline: social work practice and human services • Focus: applying trauma-informed principles in frontline settings • Context: specialist homelessness services for young people aged 12 to 24 • Frame: an applied evidence review with practice implications

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Agenda

- Scope and background
- Aim and guiding questions
- Review method and evidence base
- Findings: trauma profile, principles, implementation and outcomes
- Recommendations for practice

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Background

- Around 28,000 young people present alone to homelessness services each year (AIHW)
- Many report histories of family violence, abuse or neglect
- Standard intake and behaviour-management models can re-traumatise
- Policy context: the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement

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Aim and Guiding Questions

- Aim: identify how services can reliably embed trauma-informed practice
- What is the trauma profile of young people who seek help?
- Which principles matter most to frontline delivery?
- What enables or blocks implementation in practice?

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Method

- Integrative review of 34 peer-reviewed and grey-literature sources
- Australian focus, supplemented by established international frameworks
- Thematic synthesis mapped against the Blue Knot practice guidelines
- Quality appraisal to weight stronger evidence more heavily

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Results, Trauma Profile

- An estimated 70 to 90 per cent report at least one adverse childhood experience
- High co-occurrence of mental ill-health and substance use
- Disrupted attachment and mistrust of services are common
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are over-represented

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Results, Core Principles

- Safety: physical and psychological, including predictable routines
- Trust and transparency in rules and decisions
- Choice, collaboration and genuine young-person voice
- Cultural, historical and gender responsiveness

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Results, Implementation Enablers and Barriers

- Enablers: reflective supervision, trained staff and stable funding
- Barriers: high caseloads, short-term contracts and staff turnover
- Organisational leadership shapes whether change endures
- Physical environment and policies must align with the principles

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Results, Outcomes Evidence

- Improved engagement and reduced early disengagement reported
- Fewer critical incidents where the principles are embedded
- Evidence is promising but often small-scale and short-term
- Few Australian studies use controlled or longitudinal designs

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Discussion

- Principles are well accepted; consistent implementation is the challenge
- System conditions can undermine even committed practitioners
- Cultural safety must be co-designed, not assumed
- Measurement of trauma-informed outcomes remains underdeveloped

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Recommendations

- Fund reflective supervision and trauma-specific training
- Redesign intake to prioritise safety, choice and transparency
- Co-design cultural safety with First Nations communities
- Adopt shared outcome measures across the service system

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Conclusion

- Trauma is central to youth homelessness, not incidental
- Trauma-informed practice is principled and evidence-aligned
- Implementation depends on organisational and funding conditions
- Consistent delivery and measurement are the priorities

References

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