

Educator Knowledge & Preparedness in Supporting Children with Trauma/Adversity

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Background

Introduction

In recent years, the Government of Canada has accepted 35,000 Syrian refugees (Hadfield, Ostrowski, & Ungar, 2017). The Canadian Government had put a high priority on the resettlement of families that have members under the age of 18 (Hadfield, Ostrowski, & Ungar, 2017).

Literature Review

Research shows that trauma and/or early adversity can have a negative effect on brain and behaviour development (Gunnar, 1998). Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE) can be a buffer to the negative effects of trauma. A well-trained and informed workforce can help shield some of the negative effects of adversity. This study explores the knowledge and preparedness of RECEs in trauma and/or early adversity.

Research Question

Do RECEs feel prepared and knowledgeable to support children that have experienced trauma and/or early adversity?

Methodology

Research Design

Quantitative research design using survey methodology.

Instrument

Online survey with eleven multiple-choice questions and one open-ended short-answer question. Questions explored issues such as professional development (PD) opportunities, supervisor support, trauma-informed environments, and confidence in supporting children with trauma/early adversity.

Procedure

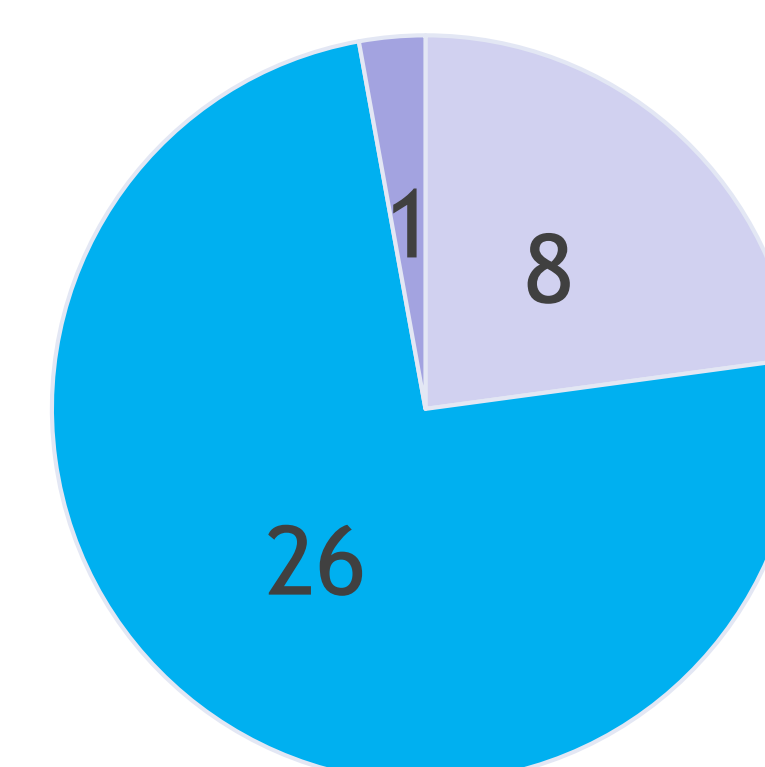
Social media and recruitment by supervisors of centres in the city of Toronto & Durham.

Participants

Thirty-five participants with at least five years of experience within the sector and in good standing with the College of Early Childhood Educators.

Results

Most RECEs do not feel they have the knowledge to support children who have experienced trauma and/or early adversity.

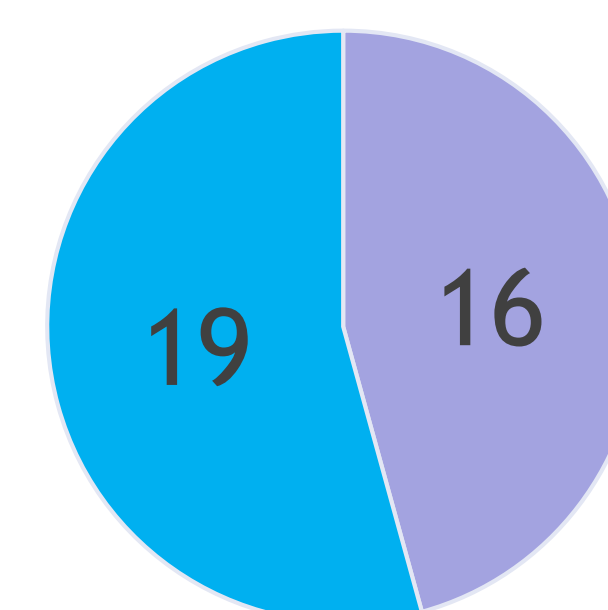


- Yes I feel I have the specific knowledge
- No I do not feel I have the specific knowledge
- I am not sure I understand trauma and early adversity.

Majority of RECEs do not feel prepared in supporting children with trauma/early adversity.

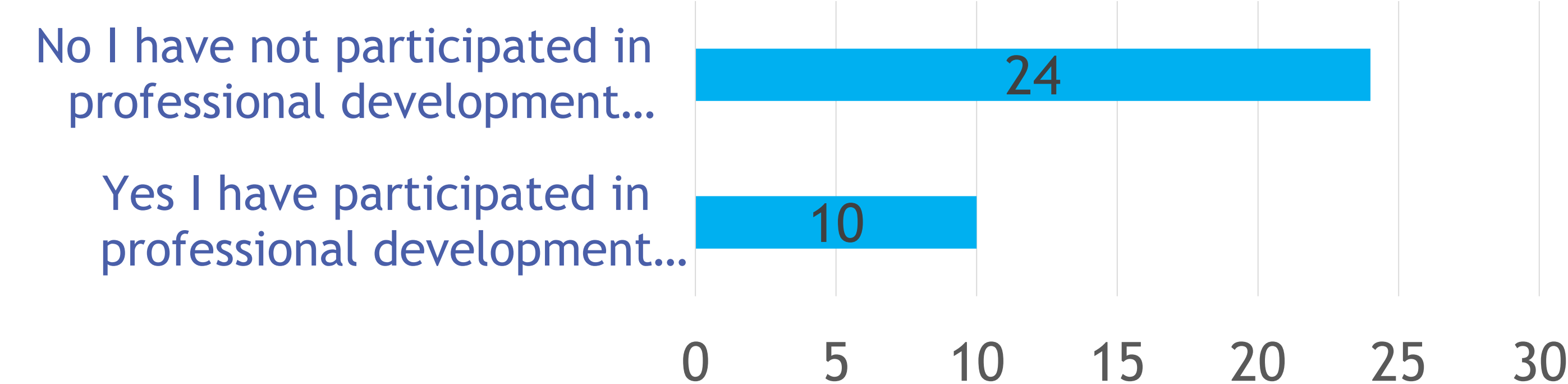


Over half of RECEs do not feel confident in being able to recognize the signs of trauma and/or early adversity in a child.



- Yes I feel confident in being able to recognize
- No I do not feel confident

Majority of RECEs have not participated in professional development that is specific to childhood trauma and/or early adversity.



Conclusion

The present study shows that the majority of participants, despite the level of education or years of experience, do not feel they have the specific knowledge or preparedness to support children who have experienced early adversity or trauma. In the current study, it was reported that 69% of participants have not participated in professional development that is specific to childhood trauma and/or early adversity. All participants answered that they would benefit from increased training and/or professional development in the area of supporting children with trauma and/or early adversity.

Limitations

- Time that was given to complete the recruitment of participants.
- Contact supervisors reporting that staff did not have time to come out of program to complete the survey.
- Small sample size.

Recommendations

- When obtaining a diploma or degree, there should be a course in how to be trauma-informed and how to support children who have experienced trauma and/or early adversity.
- When individuals are offered PD, it should be mandatory for all RECE to complete a course on trauma and early adversity.
- When centres are being visited by Assessment for Quality Improvement, there should be a section on the environment of each centre being trauma-informed.
- Changes in government policy should also be reflected in community services.

References

- Gunnar, M. R. (1998). Quality of early care and buffering of neuroendocrine stress reactions: Potential effects on the developing human brain. *Preventive Medicine, 27*(2), 208-211.
- Hadfield, K., Ostrowski, A., & Ungar, M. (2017). What can we expect of the mental health and well-being of Syrian refugee children and adolescents in Canada? *Canadian Psychology/Psychologies Canadienne, 58*(2), 194-201. doi: 10.1037/cap0000102