

Childhood Trauma and Reading Accuracy in Fifth Grade Students

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of childhood trauma on the reading performance of students enrolled in a fifth-grade classroom. It was hypothesized that students in a fifth grade Language Arts class who had experienced childhood trauma would demonstrate deficits in reading accuracy as compared to a control group of students who had experienced no childhood trauma. This study used a descriptive design that took place over a two-week period. A Screening Checklist that was developed by The National Child Traumatic Stress Network was used to identify students who had experienced trauma. The findings from this study indicated no statistically significant results, therefore the null hypothesis that there was no impact of trauma on student's reading achievement was not rejected.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

Trauma exposure has become one of the country's top public health issues (Hornor, 2015). Many American children are suffering from the exposure to trauma they have experienced. Trauma exposure impacts the brain and the body, and when a child is still in developmental stages, this poses a major concern. Duplechain, Reigner, and Packard (2008) have advised that trauma exposure has an adverse effect on a child's achievement in school, including their reading achievement. Reading is a complex process that must be learned; it is not inherent. Students must learn to decode words in order to understand their meaning. Teachers can measure a student's decoding skill by measuring their oral accuracy rate. When a student has a higher accuracy rate, they can comprehend a text and read proficient. Most students who are successful readers have had their developmental needs met. When students have been exposed to trauma, their developmental needs generally have not been met and the students are not going to achieve their potential.

This researcher became interested in exploring the impact of trauma on students' achievement in her role as a teacher in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. She observed that trauma has become more prevalent in schools and wished to learn more about ways trauma affects students' learning and what schools might do to provide support for these students

### **Statement of Problem**

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of trauma exposure on reading accuracy. It has been observed that students learn best when they are motivated and are able to concentrate on their learning. When students have been exposed to traumatic events, they have

suffered physical and mental effects that could hinder the way they learn and develop. Studies such as those reported by Johnson (2018) have found a link between traumatic exposure and underachieving in school. Students' reading achievement is a predictor of their success in school. Students must comprehend and interpret what they are reading at all levels and in every subject. In today's society, business and colleges are demanding skilled high school graduates, including reading proficiency. The Maryland Common Core standards establish clear guidelines to help schools provide appropriate reading instruction throughout their school years from kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. (About the Standards, 2020).

### **Hypothesis**

Students in a fifth grade Language Arts class who have been identified as facing childhood trauma will have lower reading accuracy rates as compared to students in a control group who have not been identified as having had exposure to childhood trauma.

### **Operational Definitions**

#### ***Trauma***

Through a study published in 1998, adverse childhood experiences (ACE) include a set of trauma exposures (Honor, 2015). This exposure includes emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, domestic violence, household substance abuse, household mental illness, parental separation or divorce, and a criminal household family member. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network has created a screening checklist to identify the students who have been exposed to this type of stress.

#### ***Achievement***

Reading accuracy is an important measure to analyze when students are processing a text. The Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment (Fountas & Pinnell, 2016) was the system used

for this study. By the end of second grade students should be reading with at least 98% accuracy in order to monitor their comprehension and problem solve through decoding. This means that fifth graders should be reading with 98% accuracy to proficiently understand a fifth grade text.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Overview**

This literature review discusses the impact of childhood trauma on the reading achievement of children who have experienced trauma. Part one of this literature review offers a context for the need of research related to this issue. Part two explains what is meant by childhood trauma. Part three examines the physical and psychological effects of childhood trauma on students who have experienced trauma. The relationship of childhood trauma and children's reading achievement is described in part four. The review concludes with a discussion of the importance of trauma-informed educational practices.

#### **Need to Address Effects of Traumatic Exposure on Children's Learning**

Although studies such as those reported by Duplechin et al., (2008) have concluded that the effects of traumatic exposure can hinder the psychological functioning of a child, there is no such conclusion regarding the effects of traumatic exposure and reading achievement. Honsinger and Brown (2019) report that traumatic events have negative effects on the cognition, behavior, and relationships of the children who have experienced them, and affect their overall academic achievement. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Developmental Needs, children who lack basic needs such as the feeling of safety are far less likely to reach their full academic potential (Duplechain et al.) Duplechain et al. explain that children need to feel safe in order to focus their energy on learning while in school, and children with exposure to trauma need to be supported and understood.

## **Definition of Childhood Trauma**

People of all ages are exposed to traumatic events that have hindered their overall functioning; however, children are a vulnerable subset of this group (McGrew, 2019). As defined by the Adverse Childhood Experiences study, (ACE), childhood trauma exposure includes emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, domestic violence, household substance abuse, household mental illness, parental separation or divorce, and a criminal household member (Kerker, Zhang, Nadeem, Stein, Hurlburt, Heneghan, & Horwitz, 2015). It is estimated that 90% of children are exposed to some sort of traumatic events in their lives (Hornor, 2015). Horner (2015) explains that the distribution of children who are exposed to childhood trauma is not random as it typically occurs within populations of low socioeconomic status. This researcher further states that these traumatic events vary in severity, explaining that while for some children the experience may have been one isolated event, most often, the trauma is chronic and has occurred within a child's family or social environment. When a child faces a traumatic event, children develop stress which can lead to experiencing long-term physical and psychological effects into adulthood. The body reacts to stress in ways that impact both physical and emotional health that can lead to both chronic and toxic stress.

## **Impacts of Childhood Trauma**

Traumatic events in childhood pose a serious threat to a child's physical and psychological well-being. These threats and their impact on a child's learning are described below.

### **Physical Threats**

Physical threats to a child's well-being relate to the way that the body reacts to stress. When the body reacts to stress, the hypothalamic pituitary-adrenal axis (HPA) and the

sympathetic nervous system respond to the stressor (Hornor, 2015). This researcher explains that these systems regulate an individual's response to stress and its impacts, suggesting that a child's undeveloped brain is suffering. When a child is exposed to this type of stress, changes in the development of the brain occur. The brain typically is not mature until the individual reaches about the age 25; therefore, areas of the brain that develop judgement, planning, and intellectual insight are compromised by the toxic stress causes by trauma (Kerker et al., 2015). Hornor explains that the brain develops quickly within the first few years of life and if a child is exposed to trauma or stress within this part of life, there is an even greater effect on brain development. Hornor states that the level of stress hormones in children also impact the maturity of the auditory and visual receptors in the brain. This is due to the development of cortisol in the brain, the hippocampus decreases in size which affects the working memory of a child.

There also is a relationship between traumatic experiences and the long-term health of an individual. Children who are exposed to traumatic experiences are at a higher risk of developing heart disease, cancer, asthma, autoimmune disease, and depression as an adult (Honsinger & Brown , 2019). Trauma also has an impact on the development of the immune and nervous system which can result in headaches, back pain, primary pulmonary fibrosis, osteoporosis, or coronary artery disease (Hornor, 2015). Kerker et al. (2015) explore the relationship between childhood stressors and adult at-risk behavior such as unhealthy life styles and risk-taking behavior. As a result of coping with stress, adults suffering from effects of childhood trauma sometimes overeat, start smoking, use drugs, and participate in risky sexual behaviors. Overall, the level of stress hormones within children who have experienced a traumatic event is unhealthy and can lead to lasting health effects as adults.

## **Psychological Factors**

Johnson (2018) states that traumatic childhood experiences negatively affect children's emotional, social, and behavioral responses. Johnson further explains that the neurophysiological response related to childhood trauma includes a fight, flight, or freeze response that includes aggression and defiance toward adults or complete unresponsiveness, both of which are associated with students falling behind in school. According to Johnson, children who have been exposed to trauma often experience cognitive deficits, emotional and behavioral disorders, unhealthy coping mechanisms, and deviant and unhealthy relationships. Additionally, Duplechain et al., (2008) explain that children who have experienced trauma develop anxiety, fearfulness, depression, and attention problems, asserting that when children's emotional energy is being used to process their traumatic experiences, they begin to exhibit the negative responses described above.

It is important to understand that not all children respond to trauma the same way. Some students develop resilience, which is particularly evident among students who have not experienced high levels of trauma. Hornor (2015) explains that some students have a genetic resilience to negative physiological factors that happen after a traumatic event. Other students have personality traits that provide resilience to stressful situations. These students are able to respond to these challenging emotions by turning them into a productive challenge. In addition, positive emotions such as humor or optimism also help a student recover from a traumatic event. If children who have experienced trauma have social support, they are more likely to be resilient. Hornor also reflects that spirituality and religion also can help a student understand and accept the traumatic event or stressor and help the child develop resilience.

## **Relationship between Childhood Trauma and Reading Achievement**

Reading accuracy is one way to measure a student's reading achievement. Reading accuracy is a student's oral reading ability. Accuracy is measured by tools such as running records, miscue analysis, and formal reading inventories.. Rodgers et al., (2018) describes three levels of accuracy: easy, instructional, and hard. Generally, a reading accuracy level that is below 90% accuracy is considered to be hard, 90%-95% accuracy is considered instructional, and accuracy greater than 95% accuracy is considered to be easy. Rodgers et al. explain that for students to learn most successfully they need to be reading with, or greater than, 95% accuracy. Teachers can build on student skills when they are reading with support on the instructional level; however, the ability to read with 95% accuracy or greater supports greater fluency and successful reading achievement.

Although currently there is no research that directly links childhood trauma with low reading achievement, there are data to suggest that trauma negatively impacts school experiences (Duplechain et al., 2008). Johnson (2018) reflects that reading is a process that is learned through motivation, concentration, and background knowledge. Further, Johnson states that trauma and the type of stress that it provides can inhibit a child's ability to acquire the process of reading. Johnson's examination of relevant research leads him to conclude that traumatic experiences can diminish comprehension, memory, trust, language abilities, and the ability to self-regulate, all of which are needed to become a better reader. Children who have experienced events that cause high levels of stress often have emotional and behavioral disorders that become barriers to their successful reading achievement. For example, students who are exposed to violence have an especially high rate of mental health problems (Duplechain et al., 2008). These problems can

manifest as anxiety and aggression, therefore making it difficult for these students to work with adults and causing subsequent disruptions to be more prevalent.

According to Johnson (2018), traumatic events may cause children who have experienced them to exhibit social challenges. These challenges may be exacerbated in the school setting. For example, children who have been physically or emotionally abused may have a hard time forming relationships with their teachers and other adults in their school. Duplechain et al. (2008) states that these students may fall behind socially as compared to their peers and they may perceive school as a place in which they do not belong. Such disconnect with the school environment may have a negative impact on their academic achievement in general, and also may include challenges with reading achievement. In addition, These researchers adds that students may long to feel as if they belong, resulting in engagement in unhealthy coping behaviors such as experimenting with drugs or joining a gang. Kerker et al. (2015) appears to support this information as well. Students that have been faced with trauma, may seek deviant associations. Students may also demonstrate anti-social behaviors that make it difficult for them to form positive relationships with or trust the adults around them. When children do not trust their teachers, they generally cannot be open to learning from them.

A study completed in 2018 included students in the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (FLDJJ) system who faced childhood trauma. This study examined the relationship between the students' childhood trauma and their high school graduation expectations. Results from this study implied that trauma reduced the probability that these students would find positive adult relationships, resulting in a low expectation of graduating. Evidence suggested that children who have been neglected or abused have difficulties forming bonds or trusting their teachers (McGrew, 2019). Without this trust of an adult in school, school can become another

place where the child does not feel safe and truly cannot learn. Duplechain et al., (2008) describe a study involving 162 elementary students in the mid-west that relates experiences of trauma with lower academic achievement, including reading achievement. Based on data from the study, researchers concluded that students who experienced violent trauma such as physical abuse, domestic violence, or had been victims of a physical assault were most affected and their reading achievement over time was the lowest among their peers (Duplechain et al., 2008). This study found that students were using much of their energy to suppress their traumatic experience rather than focusing their energy on their education.

### **The Importance of Trauma-Informed Educational Practices**

It is important for teachers to be aware of the students in their classrooms who have been impacted by trauma. When teachers know and understand this information, they can make trauma-informed educational decisions. Trauma informed care (TIC) is an approach developed by Harris and Fallot (2001) as a way to understand how trauma has impacted individuals' lives (Carello & Butler , 2015). Harris and Fallot identified five principles needed to address the needs of an individual who has experienced trauma. The principles are ensuring safety, establishing trust, maximizing choice, maximizing collaboration, and prioritizing empowerment (Carello & Butler). The most important principle is ensuring physical and emotional safety. As reflected in Maslow's Hierarchy of Developmental Needs as discussed by Duplechin et al., (2008), students need to feel safe within an environment in order to meet their potential.

The concepts related to trauma informed care have created change in educational practices used to meet the needs of students who have been affected by trauma. These practices involve using positive psychology in education to engage and build trust with these students (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2016). The foundation of this teaching model is to give students the

resources to cope with events within their life and within the classroom. It also provides students with a structured and controlled environment that fosters safety and predictability, which is key for students who have been exposed to trauma.

Brunzell et al., (2016) explain that providing an environment supportive of trauma induced care presents many challenges. In such an environment, educators must shift from thinking of themselves less of an expert and more of a facilitator. Educators also must consider their learning approach as a healing approach. These researchers describe two major areas of focus in trauma-informed learning. One area is to repair the dysregulated stress response in order to help develop self-regulation and develop mental strength for students. Further, Brunzell maintains that the need for students to self-regulate their emotions can happen daily in an educational setting. Educators who help students name these feelings and provide students with tools to respond will enable their students to grow mentally and emotionally. A second area of focus is to repair the disrupted attachment within student relationships. These researchers explain that a traumatic event or stressor can impact a student's ability to form bonds with their teachers, their peers, and other adults. Another important factor in trauma-informed learning is to help children form appropriate bonds. Attachment theory is a concept John Bowlby (1971) introduced to help understand that attachment can unconsciously change the way that individuals react to relationships ( as cited in Brunzell et al. 2016). Trauma-informed learning is built on the concept that children need to be taught how to protect and comfort themselves. These students need the opportunity to develop skills that help them cope, take responsibility, and build upon their strengths.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network has found using trauma-informed educational practices helps educators and students create a positive educational experience



(Brunzell et al., 2016). Teachers have the tools to employ positive intervention strategies that help students who have faced traumatic events. Teachers learn how to role-play to model positive reactions and emotions. Children spend most of their day with their teachers, giving teachers the tools to apply trauma-informed learning can help students regulate their stress and perform more effectively in school.

### **Summary**

Overall, the experience of trauma affects many students, resulting in lifelong mental and physical health problems. The issues that students who have experienced trauma face impact their relationships throughout their lifetime. Students who face trauma are at a higher risk of academic failure than other students. Children who have experienced trauma will need greater support to succeed. These students also will need to develop strategies that will help them succeed. Findings from related research indicate that students who have been exposed to trauma need to be given opportunities to build on coping skills and social skills that will help them become most successful.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

This study was initiated to determine whether exposure to childhood trauma has an impact on reading accuracy among fifth grade students. Results of the study will be utilized to better understand the impact of trauma on children's achievement.

#### **Design**

The research was a descriptive study in which two groups were compared. This design allowed the use of two independent sample groups, one who had been exposed to trauma and another group who had not. The independent variable for this study was the exposure to childhood trauma. The dependent variable was reading accuracy rates on a grade level text.

This study took place over a two week period. Students were screened using a screening checklist developed by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) to identify trauma exposure. Students then were assessed on their reading accuracy rate using a benchmark assessment.

#### **Participants**

The participants used for this research study included 43 fifth grade students from an elementary school in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. The school in which the study took place serves a small waterfront community with a population of approximately 8,800 residents. The school opened in 1968, serving a three-mile geographic radius. The school's population during the 2019-2020 school year was 593 students. Within this population, 80% of the students are White, 10% are Hispanic, 7% are two or more races, 2% are African American, and 1% are Asian.

The sample groups for this study were taken from two fifth grade classes that were taught by the researcher, having a total of 47 students. Among the sample groups, 60% of the students were male and 40% were female. Sixty-four percent of students in the sample group were White, 13% were African American, 6% were Hispanic and 17% were other races. Seventeen percent of the students in the sample group were FARMS Free and Reduced Meals Students (FARMS). Of students in the sample group, 13% had a learning disability. For the purpose of this study, students identified as having a learning disability were not included in the study leaving the group with 43 student participants.

### **Instruments**

There were two instruments used in this study. The first instrument used was a Trauma Screening Check list created by NCTSN. Teachers complete the checklist based on information they know about a child. Childhood trauma is limited to experiences defined by the adverse childhood experiences (ACE) study (Hornor, 2015). According to this study, childhood traumatic experiences include, but are not limited to child maltreatment, exposure to domestic violence, living with an impaired parent (mental or substance abuse), parental separation, poverty, and criminal household member. If a student has been identified as having a history in any of the checklist areas, students are considered to be exposed to trauma.

The second instrument used was the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (BAS). This assessment determines student's instructional and independent reading levels. Instructional reading level is the reading level in which a student should be instructed. An independent reading level is a level in which the students should be able to read and comprehend the text independently. These levels are used for placement within the classroom and for placement within a reading intervention. For this study, only the oral reading section of the

assessment was used. When teachers administer this section of the assessment, the student reads aloud a Benchmark Assessment book that is at his or her current reading level expectation. The teacher takes a detailed reading record. After the oral reading, the teacher is able to determine the student's accuracy by analyzing the errors and self-corrections. An error is determined if a student substitutes the correct word for an incorrect word. Another possible error would be a student inserting a word that is not in the text. Another form of error is omission, if the student omits the word completely. Finally, if the student sounds out or says the word incorrectly, that also is counted as an error. Self-correction, when a student corrects themselves after saying the wrong word, and repetitions are not counted as an error. Accuracy rates are found by dividing the correct number of words read by the total number of words in the passage.

### **Procedure**

The study began by screening all 47 students to identify members of the experimental group (the group who had experienced childhood trauma) and the control group, the group who had no evidence of experiencing childhood trauma. Students with an identified learning disability were taken from the population to ensure that their disability was not impacting the data. This left a sample of 43 students in the study. Among the 43 students, 16 students were identified as having been exposed to a childhood trauma by the Screening Checklist created by the NCTSN.

Over the course of two weeks, all 43 students were given the same Benchmark Assessment book. This text was "Earthquakes" by Katherine Herrenger. This text is a non-fiction text on a level U. Level U was used because it is identified as "on level" for middle of the year fifth graders (Fountas & Pinnell, 2016). The same text and running record were used for each student. The teacher used the same running record the BAS kit provided. Students read 226

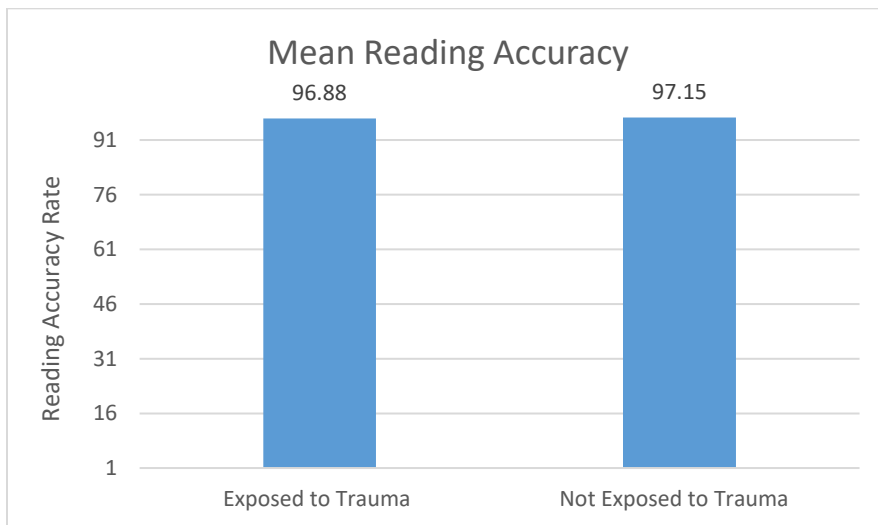
words aloud. They did not read the entire text and they only read the text once. Each student was given the assessment in the same setting, in a classroom at a back table with other students in the classroom sitting at their desks quietly. After students read orally, the teacher calculated their accuracy rate, generating a percentage. The accuracy rate was found by counting the errors the student made, and subtracting that number from 226 total words. Then, using the difference, the teacher divided the number of words read correctly by the total number of words in the passage to get an accuracy rate percentage.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This study examined differences in reading accuracy of fifth grade students by whether or not they experienced trauma. The descriptive study involved use of a screening checklist to determine if a student was exposed to childhood trauma. The checklist was completed by a teacher who had known the student for at least six months. The information used to complete the checklist was given to the teacher and is confidential. Accuracy rates were measured by each student reading aloud a text on a fifth-grade reading level.

Data were analyzed using the independent groups *t*-test between the two sample groups, namely students who did and did not experience trauma. An independent groups *t* test revealed that there was not a statistically significant difference in scores on reading accuracy measures between students who did experience trauma ( $M = 96.88, SD = 1.54, n = 16$ ), and those who did not ( $M = 97.15, SD = 1.61, n = 27$ ) with a small effect size,  $t(41) = -0.55, p > .05, d = 0.17$ . On average there was a -0.27 point difference between the groups.



*Figure 1.* Bar graph of mean reading accuracy of fifth grade students by whether or not they experienced trauma.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

This study examined the impact of childhood trauma on reading accuracy among fifth-grade students. Data analyses presented in Chapter IV indicated no statistically significant findings, and therefore the null hypothesis that there would be no impact of trauma on students' reading achievement was not rejected. There was no significant difference between the sample groups for reading accuracy when trauma was evident within the experimental group.

#### **Implications of Results**

In this research study, the impact of childhood trauma produced no significant effect on reading accuracy for grade five students. This means that in this study, childhood trauma did not reveal a significant impact on reading achievement. The types of trauma that these students faced included emotional neglect, multiple separations from parents, exposure to drug use, and homelessness/poverty.

Although the results indicated no significant difference between the groups, it was beneficial for the instructor to know which students had experienced trauma and which had not. With this information, the teacher became aware of the students' situation outside of school and was able to make more appropriate decisions regarding providing instruction and support for the students. Of those students who experienced childhood trauma, the students who had experienced emotional abuse and multiple separations from parents had the lowest reading accuracy rates.

#### **Threats to Validity**

Threats to the validity of a study can be external, which limit generalizability outside of the experimental setting, and internal validity in which the influences on the outcomes do not

relate to the independent variable. This experiment had threats to both internal and external validity.

One threat to internal validity was selection bias. Selection bias can be a threat to validity because there could be differences among participants at the beginning of a study due to bias. The experimental groups were students taught by one teacher in two classes. The teacher completed the NCTSN's Screening Checklist knowing what she had learned about a child. The teacher gained this information through conversations with the child, parent, former teachers, guidance counselors, and school psychologist. Even with this information about a student, relevant information still might be lacking. A child could have experienced childhood trauma but that information may not have been given to the teacher.

Another threat to the internal validity of the study reported in this paper was subject characterization. There may have been major differences among the participants in the study. Many students respond to trauma in different ways, and some students develop resilience (Hornor, 2015). According to Hornor, some individuals have inherited or developed personality traits that provide a positive emotional reaction to stress. Some of the students in this study could have been faced with trauma but chose not to talk about it or may have decided to be positive about the situation in which they found themselves. The teacher may not have known about the trauma a student has faced because of the way the student decided, or was able, to deal with the trauma and their emotions towards it.

Finally, location was another threat to internal validity. Location can be a threat to validity due to the environment in which the study was conducted and the available resources that were relevant to the study. Selecting a sample group from one school in one city is not a fair



representation of all students. In this particular school, childhood trauma is not as prevalent as would be the case in a school in an urban environment.

As for threats to external validity, experimenter effects represent a major threat. Experimenter effects refer to the possibility that an experimenter may unintentionally influence the performance of the participants. When giving a running record one teacher may respond to something that another teacher may not. In addition, since the researcher in this study had known these children for at least 6 months, the researcher may have missed something that a teacher hearing the students read for the first time may have noted. For example, if the student had a speech impediment, a teacher who had worked with the child for several months might be able to better understand the student. In addition, since the researcher knew the student's history with trauma, this knowledge may have influenced the results.

### **Connections to Previous Research**

Elements of this research study are similar to a study performed by Duplechain et al., 2008. These researchers investigated the impact of trauma exposure on reading achievement, selecting as participants elementary school students from an inner-city school district in the Mid-west United States who had been exposed to moderate and high levels of trauma. Their study focused on violent trauma such as shootings and death. The researchers first identified these children through use of a Traumatic Exposure Scale to determine their exposure to trauma. They used a standardized achievement test to measure the students' reading performance. The researchers followed student participants over the course of three years, taking into consideration variables such as demographics and the level of violence students had experienced. Findings from the study suggested that violence exposure affects reading achievement over time (Duplechain et al. 2008). Results suggested that regardless of the level of exposure to trauma,

students who had been exposed to trauma demonstrated lower reading achievement than their peers who did not have traumatic experiences. The researchers observed that students in the high level trauma group did not achieve less well than students in the low level trauma group. Findings revealed that once a child was exposed to a violent event, he or she had a harder time concentrating in school, and suggested that the energy that is needed to focus in school likely is used by students to suppress their traumatic experiences. The researchers stated that identifying these children early is the best way to provide support for them.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Findings from this study revealed no significant evidence to suggest children who have been exposed to childhood trauma read with a lower accuracy rate than their peers who have not had exposure to trauma. Very few studies have explored the relationship between childhood trauma and education. Most research on the topic has been very broad as it relates to a child's achievement in school. The research that identified a correlation between childhood trauma and children's achievement was very specific in that the research focused on a subgroup of students who were known to have had a high level of exposure to trauma. In addition, this followed the student participants over a three year period (Duplechain et al., 2008).

Future research that investigates how students with trauma respond to positive motivation from teachers and other school staff members over time is recommended. It would be helpful to learn how students' motivation, concentration, and overall academic performance changes during that time. Reading is a complex task for students to learn and requires motivation and concentration. With the support of a trusted adult, children who have been exposed to trauma can learn through the opportunities and support their teacher gives them. It would be valuable to measure the impacts of this type of positive exposure.

## **Summary**

The importance of this study is to inform teachers the impact of traumatic exposure may have on students. There is a need in the educational system to understand and learn how to identify these students and attend to their needs. Through this study it is known that trauma impacts children in negative ways. Although no direction relationship was found in reading accuracy rates, it is still unknown how childhood trauma impacts a child's reading achievement or overall school performance. Teachers have the responsibility to establish a caring relationship and set high standard for these students.

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