

July, 2025

Research Snapshot No.17

*Examining Early Childhood Expulsion Through a
Trauma-Informed Lens (2025)*

Mia Chudzik, Courtney O'Grady, Lynn Burdick and Catherine Corr

In the spirit of reconciliation PRECI acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.



Dr Christine Johnston

What you need to know

- + Children are more than three times as likely to be expelled from ECE settings than from kindergarten through grade 12.
- + Exclusion disproportionately impact boys, children of colour, children with disabilities, and children who have experienced trauma.
- + Trauma is defined as an event or series of events that impacts a person's ability to cope and impacts them emotionally, cognitively, behaviourally, and/or physically.
- + Rates of trauma are high in early childhood, with estimates suggesting that up to one in two preschool-age children experience trauma.
- + Previous research has found that quality, trauma-informed preschool positively affects child developmental outcomes.
- + Without sufficient training educators may feel overwhelmed and unprepared to support children with challenging behaviour leading to expulsion being seen as the only option.

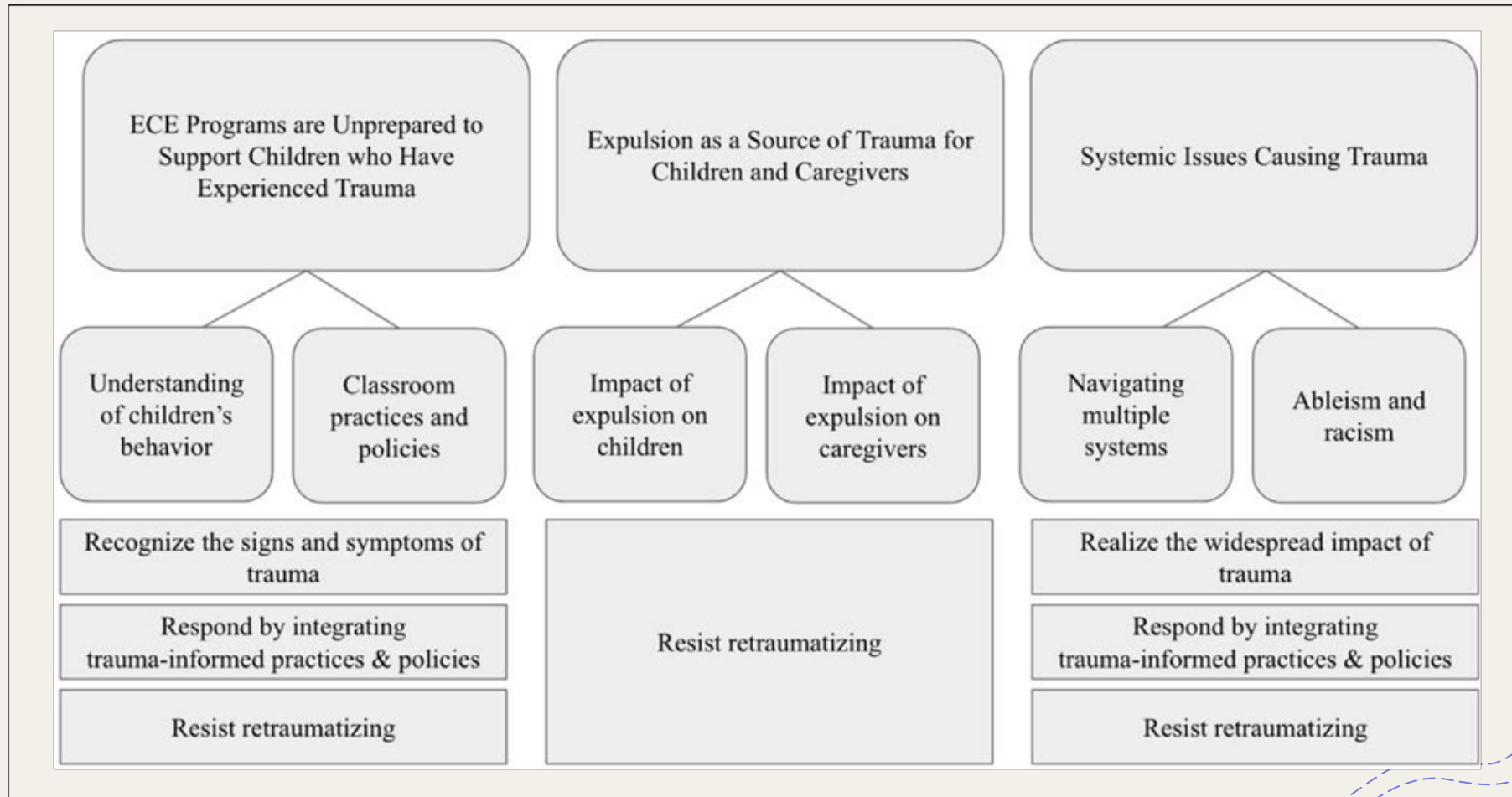
What is this research about?

- + This study was part of a larger project which examined caregiver experiences with expulsion in ECE programs.
- + This research set out to explore the ways in which the experience of early childhood expulsion contributes to the (re)traumatisation of children and their caregivers.
- + “Caregiver” was defined as an adult who saw themselves in a primary caretaker role for a young child (e.g., mother, father, foster parent, grandparent).
- + The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA, 2014) four key assumptions for Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) were used to frame the study, viz.
 - (a) realise the widespread impact of trauma,
 - (b) recognise the signs and symptoms of trauma,
 - (c) respond by integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and
 - (d) resist re-traumatisation.
- + Plus also applied intersectional lens of Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory

What did the researchers do?

- + Qualitative study using semi-structured interviews to explore 26 caregivers' experiences of suspension and expulsion in early childhood.
- + Participants were from across the USA with the majority identifying as white (n=23), middle-class (n=25), and female (n=24). They were between the ages of 26 and 48 and all said English was their primary language.
- + 19 of the children were male and 22 had a disability.
- + Interviews were conducted over the phone or by Zoom and lasted 26 – 70 minutes.
- + The transcripts of the interviews were analysed thematically using both deductive and inductive coding by three researchers and coding compared. Participants sent summaries of the transcripts for checking and able to make changes.

What did the researchers find?



How can you use this research?

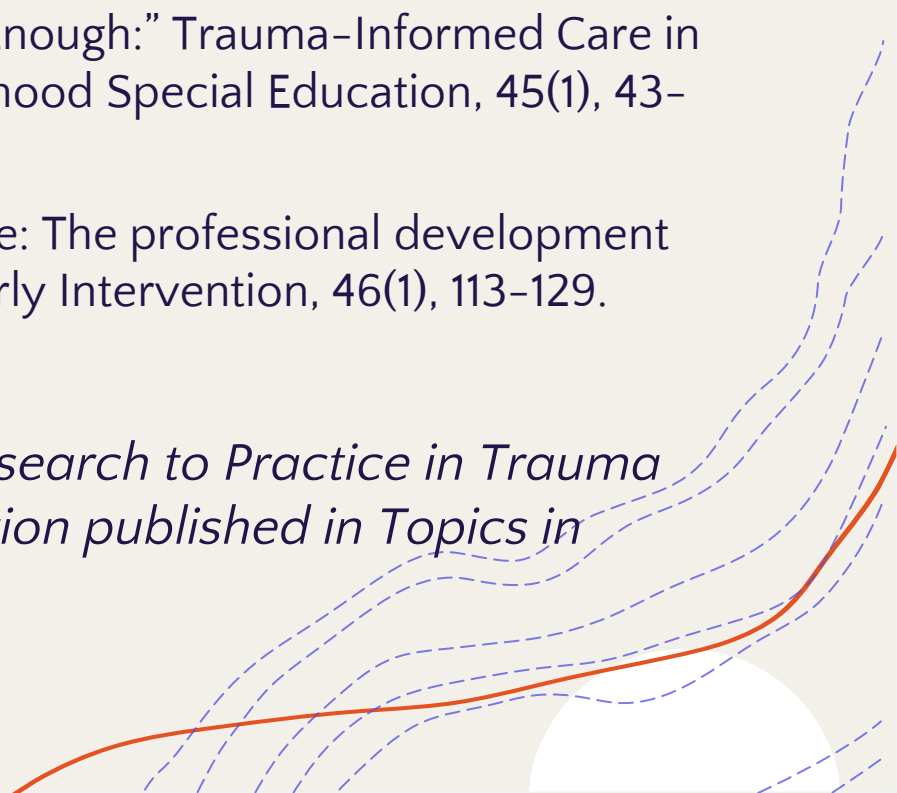
- + Use the framework to consider your setting's policies with respect to suspending and/or expelling children and the impact this may have on children and families.
- + Explore opportunities for professional learning around trauma-informed practice and the signs and symptoms of trauma.
- + Work to implement trauma-informed care as an essential part of family-centred and person-centred practice.

Where to from here?

Mia Chudzik and her colleagues have a number of other papers that might be of interest:

- + Chudzik, M., Corr, C., & Santos, R. M. (2025). Trauma-informed care in early childhood education settings: A scoping literature review. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 53(2), 477-488.
- + Chudzik, M., Corr, C., & Santos, R. M. (2025). "... We're Not Doing Enough:" Trauma-Informed Care in an Early Childhood Special Education Center. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 45(1), 43-55.
- + Chudzik, M., Corr, C., & Fisher, K. W. (2024). Trauma-informed care: The professional development needs of Early Childhood Special Education teachers. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 46(1), 113-129.

In addition, the article discussed is part of a special issue on *Research to Practice in Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care in Early Childhood Special Education* published in *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 2025, Vol 45(1).



About the researchers

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Chudzik, M., O'Grady, C., Burdick, L., & Corr, C. (2025). Examining early childhood expulsion through a trauma-informed lens. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 45(1), 32-42.

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!