

# Using Trauma-Informed Educational Practices to Foster Resilient College Students

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## Phase 1: Findings from a Self-Reported Questionnaire of Educators' Perspectives

### *Introduction:*

The COVID-19 pandemic caused an educational disturbance and vulnerability of collective trauma (Hitchcock et al., 2021). Recent studies indicate that college students are more likely to have Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) when compared to university students (Watt et al., 2022). ACEs include, but are not limited to child maltreatment, poverty, exposure to parental mental health, and family violence (Watt et al., 2022). The pandemic has placed college students, especially those with ACEs, at further risk of mental health disorders, sleep disorders, financial burdens, and isolation (Holzinger et al., 2021). As a result, these risks negatively impact their ability to learn, concentrate, and retain information leading to increased rates of truancy and dropout (Carello & Thompson, 2021).

Trauma-Informed Education Practices (TIEP) prioritizes empowerment and helps to foster resilient students, which can decrease truancy and increase graduation rates (Carello & Thompson, 2021; Mortaloni et al., 2022; Roman, 2020) as well as reduces the risk of vicarious trauma and burnout among educators (Carello & Thompson, 2021).

There is currently a gap at Seneca King Campus (SCKC) in how to support students and educators who experienced collective trauma due to the pandemic and even more of a gap in resources to adequately support students with ACEs. Phase one was designed to understand the current gaps that exist at SCKC from the educators' and phase two was designed to understand the gaps from the students' perspectives. Together the findings will provide meaningfully targeting resources to foster resilient students and educators as well as promote positive academic outcomes.

### *Study Design:*

The first phase measured the perceived impact of the pandemic and ACEs on students as well as knowledge on TIEP among current educators at SCKC. A self-reported online questionnaire was designed using Google Forms, which contained 23 multiple choice questions and three open-ended short-answer questions, was distributed via email to 234 part-time and full-time professors teaching in 29 programs offered at SCKC using a campus

wide faculty listserv.

**Results:**

The quantitative data indicated that only half of the educators reported feeling equipped to handle the ACEs and collective trauma disclosures from their students. Furthermore, these educators reported that they were able to adapt their teaching methods to meet the needs of these students. However, one third of the respondents reported feeling unequipped and needed support. Despite feeling equipped or unequipped, almost all of the participants wanted to learn more skills on how to best support their students and build resilience.

The qualitative data indicated that the respondents specifically would like to learn how to build rapport with students who are struggling academically due to ACEs and collective trauma, how to recognize students who have ACEs, strategies on how to manage ACEs disclosures as educators, how to support students in the post-pandemic environment, how to build resilience using TIEP, and resources they can provide to these students. An evidence-based and standardized toolkit available to all professors on TIEP at SCKC would help to foster resilient students and promote positive academic outcomes. In addition to the toolkit, additional training, workshops and/or educational resources may help to prevent role confusion, burnout and vicarious trauma among educators (Carello & Thompson, 2021).

**About Researcher:**

Roxanne Ramjattan holds a doctoral degree in Social Work from the University of Toronto, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. Dr. Ramjattan teaches practical and theoretical courses pertaining to social work, mental health, policy, and research. Dr. Ramjattan teaches at the undergraduate and graduate level, and continuously advances her teaching methods in various modes of instruction to help foster resilient students.