

Primary school aged children with a history of maltreatment: a scoping review on linguistic profiles and service provision

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Abstract

Children with maltreatment histories have complex needs, which often include language, literacy and communication (Lum et al., 2015; Sylvestre et al., 2015; Clegg et al., 2016; Hyter, 2021). Literature in the field is “rife with confounds” (p. 8) making it very difficult to determine whether there indeed is a relationship between childhood maltreatment and language development (Alvarado et al., 2023). This scoping review aims to investigate the linguistic profiles of Maltese bilingual 5-to-8-year-old children with and without a history of childhood maltreatment and to identify the multi-disciplinary services aiming to meet their needs. The review asks the following research questions: ‘Is there a relationship between language development and childhood maltreatment in primary-school aged children from diverse linguistic backgrounds?’ and, ‘What are the service delivery models aiming to meet the language and communication needs of these children?’ The scoping review considered publications related to language development of primary school aged children with a known history of maltreatment, including children with diverse linguistic backgrounds, following procedures outlined by the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI, 2020). All sources of evidence, including primary research papers, systematic reviews and meta-analyses, scientific and grey literature were considered. No limitations were placed on the date of publication, type of evidence/source, and the origin of the publication. The methodology was based on Arksey and O’Malley’s (2005) framework enhanced by Levac (2010) into a 5-phase process. Descriptive statistics were used to quantify text and to carry out frequency counts of data extraction items. Content analysis was conducted on qualitative textual evidence. The first author acted as primary screener, extractor and reviewer. Blinding of the reviewer was not possible. Critical appraisal of the findings was not within the scope of this review. This could be considered for future research. Practitioners’ evidence-based practice may be supported by this systematic collection of findings reported in the literature. Analysis of definitions of maltreatment will support the development of conceptual and operational definitions. Analysis of methodological choices will inform decisions around the measurement of variables such as the type, frequency, severity, chronicity of childhood maltreatment for the main study.