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# Factors that Increase Successful Parenting Skills in Adult Survivors of Childhood Trauma, Neglect, and Abuse: A Systematic Review

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Factors that Increase Successful Parenting Skills in Adult Survivors of Childhood  
Trauma, Neglect, and Abuse: A Systematic Review

by

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MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the  
School of Social Work  
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Social Work

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/ University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

Abstract

In this systematic review, I explored the topic of the parenting skills of adults who had experienced childhood abuse, trauma, and neglect and how that experience impacts their ability to become effective parents to their own children. The literature review provided information showing that adults who experienced childhood abuse may have a difficult time parenting their own children if they don't have the ability to form attachment, develop resilience and protective measures, and learn parenting skills. A focused literature search found twenty-three articles, three books, and various government websites that provided the information used in this research paper. A theme found throughout many of the articles was the importance of effective interventions when working with parents to help them improve their parenting skills. Another theme I was able to identify throughout the literature, was the impact childhood resilience has on the motivations of a parent. Often they are invested in avoiding the abusive or neglectful parenting techniques they experienced with their own children. Lastly, the importance of a healthy attachment bond between parent and child was the main theme mentioned in all of the literature related to a healthy parental bond. This systematic review notes the factors that contribute to successful parenting skills and the need for social work professionals to understand the implications for clients impacted by this issue.

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**Table of Contents**

Abstract.....Page 1

Acknowledgements.....Page 2

Table of Contents.....Page 3

Introduction.....Page 4

Literature Review.....Page 5

Methods.....Page 9

Conceptual Framework.....Page 13

Findings.....Page 14

Discussion and Implications.....Page 21

References.....Page 24

## Introduction

A sizeable number of children raised in the United States experience maltreatment in the form of abuse, neglect, and trauma. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services 2014 report on Child Maltreatment, approximately 702,000 children were victims of legally substantiated child abuse and neglect claims (Services, Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health & Human, 2014, p. 21). A parents adverse childhood experiences may increase the risks of maltreatment to their child. According to the World Health Organization, “having been maltreated themselves as a child or having difficulty bonding with their newborn” (World Health Organization, 2016) are both risk factors for occurrence of child maltreatment. Similarly, issues experienced within a family such as “family breakdown” (World Health Organization, 2016) may increase the risk factors for child maltreatment to occur.

Social workers who work within family systems are aware that childhood maltreatment is a preventable problem. Prevention can occur with parent education that “improves child-rearing skills, increase knowledge of child development, and encourages positive child management strategies” (World Health Organization, 2016). However, parents that have experienced childhood maltreatment themselves face additional barriers to preventing the intergenerational transmission of childhood maltreatment to their own children (Walker, 2007, p. 79). It is important that social workers identify useful solutions to help the parents and children challenged by this issue. This systematic review seeks to answer the question: What are the factors that increase successful parenting skills in survivors of childhood trauma, neglect, and abuse?

## Literature Review

### Childhood Trauma, Neglect, and Abuse

Childhood trauma impacts the life of an adult survivor in “elusive and fairly direct manners” (Basham, 2004, p. 265). The literature suggest that these survivors either thrive or fail to thrive in their abilities to create meaningful intimate relationships with appropriate attachments (Unger, 2014, p. 2). This would include the relationships survivors build with their own children. Apparent here is that children whose parents grew up in similar circumstances of trauma, abuse, or neglect exposure can experience completely different childhoods depending on their parent’s ability to form healthy attachment and social connections (Unger, 2014, p. 3). “A critical variable that determines the long-term effects of abuse or neglect appears to be the meaning that the victim gives the experience” (van der Kolk & Fisler, 1994, p. 2). This finding suggests that a skill, such as positive thinking can lessen the impact abuse and neglect play in one’s human development.

Parents who are survivors of childhood abuse, neglect, and trauma often do not have the capability to communicate their own true feelings to their children. Survivors of childhood abuse “often fail to develop the capacity to express specific and differentiated emotions” (van der Kolk & Fisler, 1994, p. 1). This lack of emotional intelligence will affect a child’s ability to develop the language needed to identify and communicate the way they feel about themselves (van der Kolk & Fisler, 1994, p. 2). “If a person has been treated cruelly and sadistically in his own childhood and has resolved his feelings about this, there is an increased likelihood that he will then repeat this pattern of parenting with his own children” (Walker, 2007, p. 80). This problem could easily become an intergenerational issue if an intervention is not made with the parent who struggles with these issues.

## **Attachment**

It's certainly reasonable to assume that a parent who experienced trauma, abuse, and or neglect in their childhood may have some attachment issues that impact their relationships with their own children. According to Bowlby, early childhood attachment experiences influence childhood development and impact attachment in adults. (Unger, 2014, p. 1). Clinical social workers who work with families in particular understand the importance of healthy attachment between parent and child.

“When a child’s attachment system becomes activated, the parent’s reciprocal care giving system should also become activated. In this way the child becomes comforted or soothed when distressed” (Walker, 2007, p. 82). Children need to form health attachment to their parents, if this doesn’t happen when they are children, they will face great difficulty attaching to their own children when they become parents.

A parent’s role in a child’s development is critical. It is important to understand the most appropriate way to foster parenting ability and skill in childhood survivors of abuse, neglect, and trauma. It is suggested that parenting ability is related to attachment and the parent’s resolution of their own past traumatic experiences. (Walker, 2007, p. 79). Clinical social workers may work with an adult to resolve issues experienced from childhood trauma which directly impact that adult’s parenting abilities.

## **Resilience and Protective Measures**

Adults who are able to survive and even thrive after having experienced childhood trauma, neglect, and abuse may have internal strengths that helped them develop resilience. According to Muller (1992) “adults who were hurt as children inevitably exhibit a peculiar



strength, a profound inner wisdom, and a remarkable creativity and insight” (Muller, p. xiii). Muller’s optimism suggest that it is possible to rework a negative childhood experience. And that resilience and survival are not elusive and unattainable theories but actual experiences and skills that adult survivors of childhood abuse and neglect bring with them, even if they are not able to express it in that way.

Adult survivors of childhood trauma, neglect, and abuse may have also been exposed to protective measures as children that helped them survive their painful childhoods. A positive mentor, for example could provide “the nurturance, protection, and guidance that children need for optimal development” (Werner & Johnson, 2004, p. 707). Some children connect with supportive adults in their life such as teachers or sports coaches who then serve as mentors. Other children may have a relative who can serve as a mentor and positive role model in their lives.

Another possible protective measure important to the development of a childhood survivor of trauma, neglect, and abuse are having opportunities for positive academic and social achievements in school. Giving a child a chance to gain and maintain a positive self-image. These protective measures, if available may offer a different and better outcome to these children once they become adults who need to build their own productive lives.

### **Parental Skill**

Parenting skills do not necessarily come inherently to survivors of childhood abuse, neglect, and trauma. Per Nolte, (1998)“parents can strive to teach certain values, but children will inevitability absorb whatever values are transmitted through their parent’s behavior,

feelings, and attitudes in everyday living” (Nolte, p. xvi). While the skills may not be inherent, it does not mean that these parents do not have the desire to learn them. For many survivors of childhood abuse parenting becomes a primary importance in their lives (Basham, 2004, p. 265).

A martial or similar type of intimate relationship is another potential way a survivor of childhood abuse, trauma, and neglect might develop positive parenting skills. Building an intimate relationship such as marriage can help a survivor become a more emotionally available parent. Intimate relationships such as marriage are the most impactful relationships children observe (Nolte, 1998, p. 200). Childhood abuse, neglect, and trauma survivors seek help in learning the skills needed to sustain a healthy intimate relationship in their most intimate partnerships. Building sustainable friendships with responsible adults, can serve as supports for these survivors.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it’s my hope that I was able to accurately communicate my interpretation of the research findings and literature I used in developing this review. The further exploration of this research will add to the field of clinical social work. It’s important that we gain the clearest understanding of our clients lived experiences. Sadly; trauma, abuse, and neglect are all possible pieces of that lived experience. This study will answer the question of what are the factors that increase successful parenting skills in survivors of childhood trauma, neglect, and abuse. The findings of this research will provide guidance and reassurance to adult survivors of childhood abuse, neglect, and trauma who struggle to become engaged and effective parents to their own children.

## **Methods**

According to Child Help, a national agency that works to prevent and treat child abuse annually more than 6.6 million children in the United States are estimated to have contact with child protection agencies (Child Help, 2016). While it is not known exactly how many of these children go on to become parents it is assumed many do and that their journey to parenthood is not an easy one. Useful knowledge can be obtained through this research, offering guidance and reassurance to adult survivors of childhood abuse, neglect, and trauma who struggle to become engaged and effective parents to their own children. If clinical social workers and other mental health professionals can disseminate the information presented and use it to offer appropriate and effective skills and strategies to clients working on healing from past trauma, this research will have made a difference in the lives of those most vulnerable amongst us. To identify and assess these interventions a systematic literature review will be completed.

## **Research Design**

A systematic literature review is described as an exhaustive synthesis of literature, using current quality research. The research must provide relevant evidence to analyze a research question (Petticrew & Roberts, 2005, p. 9). The purpose of this systematic review is to explore the research question: What are the factors that increase successful parenting skills in survivors of childhood trauma, neglect, and abuse?

## **Data Collection**

### **Inclusion Criteria**

The theme of the articles used in the systematic review focus on parenting skills of adult survivors of childhood abuse, neglect, and trauma. All of the articles included will have research

on parenting skills and trauma. Abstracts will be reviewed to determine an articles eligibility for this research project. The review will look at literature specifically focused on families that have at least one parent who is an adult survivor of childhood abuse, neglect, and trauma. All of the articles that will be included in my systematic literature review will be required to be quantitative, empirical in nature, and peer reviewed. All articles will include data gathered from one or more adult survivors of childhood abuse, neglect, and trauma who are also parents through means such surveys, interviews, parent and child observations regarding past abuses of the survivor and their current parental style or skills.

I looked at data with an experimental design. I looked at studies conducted from January 2000- present. I included participants who self- identify as having been emotional abused and neglected as children. The participants also had to have at least one child who is aged 1-18 years old. Studies included in my systematic review will only include research conducted with the United States in the English language.

The search terms for this systematic literature review include:

- Trauma
- Attachment Theory
- Survivors of Childhood Abuse/ Neglect
- Parenting Style/ Parenting Skills/ Parenting Competency
- Parenting
- Child Development
- Protective Factors
- Intergenerational

- Resilience

This search terms listed above have to appear in the literature's title, abstract, or key word index.

### **Exclusion Criteria**

Words of exclusion from the search will include: Childhood Physical Abuse, Domestic Abuse, and Domestic Violence. These exclusion terms were included due to the large number of extraneous articles with these terms that are outside the framework of the research subject.

### **Search Strategy**

The following electronic databases were used to obtain sources for this literature review are: Social Work Abstracts, PsycNET, and Family Studies Abstracts. The database searches were conducted using Summon and CLICnet databases, through the University of St. Thomas library network. The terms searched simultaneously were “adult childhood abuse survivor”, “parenting”, and “skills”.

### **Data Abstraction**

In order to organize my findings I created a data abstraction tracking form with the use of the Excel Microsoft program to help me clarify the research articles collected (Petticrew & Roberts, 2005). The form includes areas to record the population examined in the study, objective of the study, research design, sample size, measures used to collect data, and findings of research. Once the articles were collected, I reviewed them and developed codes for the different modes of resiliency (mentors, other protective factors) identified in the articles. The use of codes helps to increase the validity of the research due to making the research easier to

recreate (Petticrew & Roberts, 2005). The coding was then be imputed into the data abstraction form where the information was further disseminated to develop my findings.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

There are both strengths and limitations to conducting a systematic research design study. One strength to using this research design is that the systematic approach to the collection of data prevents including bias from the person conducting the research (Petticrew & Roberts, 2005, p. 126). Another strength of this research model also is that it is effective for finding holes in the current research and identifies areas where further study would be beneficial (Petticrew & Roberts, 2005, p. 127).

Although this study was designed to discover all relevant research that addresses factors that increase successful parenting skills in survivors of childhood trauma, neglect, and abuse. There were still some limitations to this review. First, most of the research on this topic is combined with other familial issues such as attachment theory. Therefore, this review was performed with a smaller sample of available articles that obtained limited information related solely to the development of various positive parenting styles. Additionally, the authors of the studies I used for this review are often duplicated. I found multiple articles that I thought would be useful only to discover they were earlier or later research articles of the same authors and had similar information. Because of this, there are a limited variety of different author's research findings.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Ecological Systems Theory**

The ecological theory is one that informs the work of social workers, both in micro and mezzo levels of practice. This theory provided the framework for my research because of the relations between the client population I researched and the various connections to be made within this system. “Ecological systems theory views the child as developing within a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment” (Berk, 2006). There are four levels that comprise a system of a developmental stages which contribute to this theory.

The first level within the Ecological theory is the Microsystem which consist of the things closest to the child such as the people in their lives, the places they visit, and the activities they participate in (Berk, 2006). This relates to adult survivors of child abuse, neglect, and trauma and their children because of their bidirectional parent-child relationship as well as the relationships both the parent and the child have with third parties. In a bidirectional relationship between a parent and child they affect each other’s behavior and social characteristics (Berk, 2006). A parent’s unresolved mental illness from childhood traumas will in this theory have an impact on the child. The third party is an individual outside of the bidirectional relationship within the microsystem who impacts that relationship in a positive or negative way (Berk, 2006). An example would be a divorced mother or father who have a negative relationship with each other and this spills over into the relationship with the child by way poor parenting practices experienced by the child (Berk, 2006).

The second level of the Ecological theory is the Mesosystem which is best described as being directly connected to the Microsystem (Berk, 2006). An example would be a middle school peer support group facilitated by a school social worker meant to offer support to children impacted by their parent's mental health concerns. This connects to children impacted by childhood abuse, neglect, or trauma because school is seen a protective factor for children and therefore may be the first place the family connects with regularly that recognizes the need for an intervention (Berk, 2006).

The third level within the Ecological theory is the Exosystem which are systems that don't involve children (Berk, 2006). An employee resource group staffed with therapist who privately meet with employees impacted by issues outside of work that affect their work performance would be an example of an Exosystem connection. Again it's reasonable to assume that an employee working through an issue from childhood that's a barrier to being an effective employee or parent may connect with a similar resource as a triage and or starting point to get help (Berk, 2006).

The fourth level within the Ecological theory is the Macrosystem which describes a client's life in terms of their cultural norms and customs and the laws that they obey (Berk, 2006). The values, laws, and customs of a client living in the United States will look different from those of a client living in Japan or India as the Macrosystem in those countries differ from our own.

While not a level the last piece of this theory describes the model itself as a chronosystem used to describe the changes that are expected to change within all the levels as changes throughout the lifespan occur (Berk, 2006). For the population of survivors of childhood abuse, neglect, and trauma and their families this change can show up in the form of a child protection



intervention or a mental health crisis that requires hospitalizations. It could even show up as divorce or the birth of another child (Berk, 2006). In closing, the Ecological Systems theory would best pair with the idea that children and adults faced with traumatic experiences are resilient. That the trauma, abuse, and neglect may only be one part of their experience and that they have strengths and networks in place to offer them support and help them recover. It's certainly a strengths based approach that social workers are trained to use in order to support clients be their best selves.

### **Time Frame**

The research for this paper was completed from September 10, 2016- April 1, 2017. A proposal was submitted to my committee on November 23, 2016. Articles were gathered and then selected to be included in the data. Once the articles were gathered, they were then examined for similar themes. The researcher has included these findings in the results. My final presentation on this topic will be given on May 15, 2017.

### **Findings**

After conducting a systematic review of the literature specific information was obtained to review the question of, "What are the factors that increase successful parenting skills in survivors of childhood trauma, neglect, and abuse?" This researcher describes a successful parenting style as engaging in skills that balance a parent's response, demands, and control of a child using positive application methods within the context of the parent-child relationship (Wolfe & McIsaac, 2011). This researcher identified three factors that contribute to success in parenting common throughout all the studies reviewed. First, parents took responsibility to

address their own mental health concerns and did the work necessary to address those concerns. Second, they engaged in positive family support structures that worked to strengthen the parent-child relationship. And third, they were internally motivated to be good parents to their children by breaking the maladaptive behaviors they witnessed from their own parents. These are the factors that this researcher observed to increase successful parenting skills throughout the literature reviewed. Please see the chart below labeled table #1 that notes the themes, objectives, and conclusions of the studies I reviewed that informed these findings.

Table 1:

<b>Study&amp;Theme</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Measures</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
<b>(Burt, Gunner, &amp; Lanzi, 2009)</b>  <i>Attachment</i>	44 Women	Various Questionnaire's	Maternal childhood abuse may have an impact on the mother/child relationship.	If left unresolved parents childhood trauma can negatively affect parenting style with their own children.
<b>(Ehrensaft, Knous-Westfall, Cohen, &amp; Chen, 2015)</b>  <i>Attachment</i>	Cohort 6-396 Men and Women with at least one child.	Various Interviews	A disrupted parent child relationship may develop when an adult becomes a parent to their own children.	Parents with a history of child abuse may benefit from parenting interventions to maximize the emotional engagement with their child.
<b>(Swartz, Mercier, Deborah, &amp; Curran, 2012)</b>  <i>Resilience and Protective Factors</i>	18- 10 women and 8 men	Survey and Interviews	Majority of study participants report childhood abuse does influence them as adults, that childhood abuse can be used as learning experience of what not to do as parent to their own children.	Teaching interventions to parents who are childhood abuse survivors that show effective and appropriate parenting techniques may lead to greater parenting competency.
<b>(Marcenko, Kemp, &amp; Larson, 2000)</b>  <i>Attachment</i>	127 women all with 1 or more children.	Questionnaire and Interview	Child abuse and neglect is an emotionally charged issues that makes it difficult to see family strengths.	To develop solutions it's necessary to understand the complex nature of childhood trauma. An understanding of family strengths are

				needed to effectively intervene and create new patterns.
<b>(Sandberg, Feldhousen, &amp; Busby, 2012)</b>  <i>Parenting Skill</i>	388 Women, 296 Men all reported as parents	Questionnaire	What risk and protective factors are present in relation to self-reported childhood abuse/ and later self-reported parenting skills?	Parents who report a poor relationship with their parents are invested in forming a better relationship with their own children.
<b>(Burt, Gunner, &amp; Lanzi, 2009)</b>  <i>Parenting Skill</i>	681 women all 1 <sup>st</sup> time mothers	Interview	Does a maternal history of abuse related to parenting knowledge and parenting behavior?	Offering parent coaching/training to parents exposed to abuse can improve parenting behaviors and enhance developmental outcome of children,
<b>(Schumacher, Slep, &amp; Heyman, 2001)</b>  <i>Attachment</i>	93 women with a child between the ages of 4-6	Two Interviews, Questionnaires	Can childhood maltreatment be a factor in reported or observed parenting difficulties?	Impact of chronic emotional maltreatment on parents as children does have an impact on interactions with their own children.
<b>(Mennen &amp; Trickett, 2011)</b>  <i>Resilience and Protective Factors</i>	348 total participants, 83 biological mothers	Multiple Interviews	Can factors that improve parenting attitudes and practices be discovered?	Interventions to improve parenting skills and psychological functioning are needed.
<b>(Pears &amp; Capaldi, 2001)</b>  <i>Attachment</i>	106 women and 73 men who were the parents of 109 children.	Questionnaires and Interviews	What is the association between a parent's history of abuse and the parents own abusive behavior toward their children?	There is a connection between childhood abuse and PTSD and depression experienced by parents who themselves were abused as children.
<b>(Fuchs, Mohler, Resch, &amp; Kaess.Micheal, 2015)</b>  <i>Attachment</i>	119 women who were the mothers of 63 boys and 56 girls.	Questionnaires And Laboratory Observations of Mother/Child Pairs	What is the impact of a maternal history of abuse on a mother's emotional availability to her child?	When there is a vulnerability in a mother's parenting skills caused by her own abuse preventative strategies should be engaged.

### **Mental Health Concerns**

All of the articles reviewed discussed the connection between a parents mental health concerns related to their childhood trauma, abuse, or neglect and their ability to be an effective parent to their own children. “Assessment of psychological functioning and intervention, when appropriate, may be the most essential component of improving their parenting (Mennen & Trickett, 2011).” The mental health concerns of parents are often directly tied to their parenting interactions with their own children (Bailey, DeOlivera, Wolfe, Elspeth, & Hartwick, 2012). Depression, for example is noted as a direct link to difficulties in the parent-child relationship. Depression may cause the parent to be emotionally withdrawn or feel negatively about their parental responsibilities and have low self-esteem which will impact the confidence a parent needs to be an effective leader with their children (Lang, Gartstein, Rodgers, Carie, & Meredith, 2010). Anxiety as a mental health concern is also present in a population of parents recovering from their own childhood trauma (Mennen & Trickett, 2011). In fact if untreated anxiety as well as depression can be such stressors to a parent’s normal healthy coping system that it leaves the parent vulnerable to being abusive to their children (Mennen & Trickett, 2011).

This researcher finds that the connection between a parent’s mental health concerns often related to their own traumatic childhood and the relationship they have with their children cannot be overstated. Childhood abuse is associated with a parent’s experience of depression, anxiety, and PTSD and poor parent-child interactions the parent has with their own children as an adult (Lang, Gartstein, Rodgers, Carie, & Meredith, 2010).

Parents who themselves experienced abuse as children are found to be willing to seek out mental health therapy because they are more aware of their own mental health concerns and the relation that has to parental challenges they experience (Sandberg, Feldhousen, & Busby, 2012).

This is an awesome finding that supports this researcher's theory that this population can become effective and engaged parents to their own children even if they did not have that experience with their own family of origin. When clients through the therapeutic process build skills that lead to successes in their parenting relationships they gain confidence needed to keep improving the parent child relationship (Sandberg, Feldhousen, & Busby, 2012).

### **Family Support and Education**

Many of the articles discussed the importance of programs and policies to support parents and families in a healthy developmental capacity. Parenting skills can be taught in both a preventive and improvement capacity. The literature states emphatically that positive interventions as opposed to some of the penal interventions such as child welfare referrals often used with families in crisis are more effective (Marcenko, Kemp, & Larson, 2000). "In this regard parent-training programs can be thought of as preventive programs designed to teach optimal parenting attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, which in combinations are likely to bring about optimal child development (Burt, Gunner, & Lanzi, 2009)." As clinical social workers an additional issue to consider are the values and beliefs we personally hold regarding clients who abuse, neglect, or cause their children to experience trauma. "Child abuse and neglect is an emotionally charged issue, and it may be difficult to consider family strengths in the face of such potentially dire consequences for children (Marcenko, Kemp, & Larson, 2000)." If a practitioner's personal views, prevent them from seeing the parents strengths it will be difficult to help develop their parenting skills by offering adequate education or support (Marcenko, Kemp, & Larson, 2000).

Based on this researchers findings the parenting skills this population would most benefit from learning are an understanding of appropriate childhood development stages, learning

appropriate boundary setting, developing emotional intelligence skills, learning conflict management skills, and being encouraged to be more confident in their parenting skills as they being to practice the skills learned (Lang, Gartstein, Rodgers, Carie, & Meredith, 2010). This population would find parenting interventions that teach skills which help them form stronger emotional attachment to their children beneficial (Ehrensaft, Knous-Westfall, Cohen, & Chen, 2015).

Interventions used to impact parental skill can occur in various formats, one of the most popular identified by this researcher were the use of trained home visitors. “The training of home visitors emphasizes reinforcing existing positive maternal behaviors and avoiding negative on ineffectual or punitive behaviors (Rodriguez, Dumont, Mitchell-Herzfeld, Walden, & Green, 2010).” The idea of having a trained parent educator come into the family home to address parental challenges speaks to idea of meeting a parent where they are on their parenting journey in their own space so interventions can be seen as more supportive and realistic by the parent.

### **Parental Motivation**

Throughout the literature the most influential factor this researcher identified of parenting success in survivors of childhood abuse, neglect and trauma were their own motivations to be good parents. It was clear many survivors had a resilience also described as “hardiness” that they accessed to help support their growth as parents (Sandberg, Feldhousen, & Busby, 2012).

The parent’s own motivation to be a good parent is clear. Having suffered abuse themselves they don’t desire that lifestyle for their own children (Swartz, Mercier, Deborah, & Curran, 2012).

A parent’s motivation to break the cycle of abuse while not easy is possible. To disrupt the pattern of abuse, a parent needs to develop supportive and meaningful relationships with others

(Swartz, Mercier, Deborah, & Curran, 2012). A parent also needs to understand and recognize the impact their own trauma has had on their life (Swartz, Mercier, Deborah, & Curran, 2012). Parents who are motivated to be good parents work to be competent. “Competent parents encourage their child’s development in a variety of ways, and match their demands and expectations to the child’s needs and abilities (Wolfe & McIsaac, 2011).” Initially these parents may struggle but their intention is to be different than the parents they themselves may have experienced. They have skills that are useful to teach their children such as being resilient, perceptive, creative, and determined (Muller, 1992). These are skills they may not even be conscience that they have the ability to teach their children. Social workers have the ability to engage this population by assessing their strengths and helping to address their parental challenges. In closing, this researcher has observed throughout the literature that a parent has to be courageous to break the cycle of abuse they experienced as children (Nolte, 1998).

### **Discussion**

The findings of the research found through conducting this systematic review of the literature show that the struggle’s parents impacted by childhood abuse, neglect, and trauma face are many when parenting their own children. The findings do support my literature review findings that state resilience and survival are not elusive and unattainable theories but actual experiences and skills that adult survivors of childhood abuse and neglect bring with them. Given the right motivation and resources these parents can gain the skills needed to become successful parents. They can overcome their challenges and be great supports to their own children. Helping parents to develop appropriate behavioral skills for example by providing

feedback of a role playing exercise designed to mirror parent child interactions is one way to offer support to this population.

Additionally, clinical social workers are skilled through our theoretical perspective of the ecological model which informs our work and how we understand the interconnectedness of various systems impact our client's lives. Parents are the sum of all their experiences traumatic or otherwise, all of which shape their parenting behaviors and beliefs. Social workers can disrupt negative patterns of parental behavior by offering support and education.

In closing, there are many complexities discovered through the systematic review of the literature discovered by this researcher. One is that a one size fits all approach wouldn't be appropriate with this population given that different forms of childhood abuse, neglect, and trauma lead to a variety of maladaptive parenting outcomes (Bailey, DeOlivera, Wolfe, Elspeth, & Hartwick, 2012). Parents experience various severities of mental health concerns that impact their ability to be emotionally available to their children. It's our responsibility as social workers to offer support and resources to these parents that encourage them to address those concerns.

### **Implications for practice and for future research**

In practice social workers will have the experience of working with many parents who are recovering from trauma, abuse, and neglect they experienced as adults. It's our responsibility to understand how these experiences can impact this population's attachment to their children and how that attachment forms their parent/ child bond. It's important to understand that the parents experience can have helpful and harmful effects on their own children. The parent's mental health has to be of concern to whomever is working with a family to address parenting concerns or the wellbeing of the family. The research does suggest that the result of childhood trauma, abuse, and neglect can lead to the development of insecure attachment. The research also



suggest that resilience is a protective factor experienced by many children living in harmful environments and that it lends to the ability for healing and the ability to eventually form healthy secure attachments.

Parental skills are not an inherent talent, they are part of a learned behavior. As social workers, we have the responsibility to help parents who are struggling to parent effectively, develop appropriate parental behaviors and parental skills. This systematic review shows that parents may also benefit from other social supports such as peer parenting support and individual psychotherapy.

In closing, I would suggest that additional research is needed to explore the relationship between an adults childhood experiences of abuse, neglect, and trauma and the connection this has to their experience as parents to their own children. Understanding this connection will add to our current knowledge about parenting skills and parent-child attachment.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this study include the geographic locations of studies, and the amount of participants in the studies found. The majority of the studies happened in the Eastern United States. I wonder what connections I would have been able to make if studies from other parts of the United States or other countries had been used. Similarly, of the studies none had a number of participants over seven hundred. I do wonder what types of connections could be made with a larger amount of study participants. Would I be able to further confirm my findings or would other findings I had not considered yet present themselves. Another limitation was that only one study was longitudinal by design so its difficulty to make connections to this population beyond the initial mental health assessment and treatment stages which may of lead this researcher to develop additional findings.

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