



Towards Trauma-Informed Employment
Services: Implications for Street-Level Practice
in the Delivery of Welfare-to-Work

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May 15, 2024



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Faculty of Arts

Trauma-informed practice in welfare-to-work and employment services: A scoping review

Australian Welfare and Work Lab Working Paper 01/24

May 2024

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This research was funded by a research grant from Joblink Plus.



Cite this publication as: Corbett E, McGann M, Considine M and Rejón R (2024), 'Trauma-informed practice in welfare-to-work and employment services: A scoping review'. Melbourne: the Australian Welfare and Work Lab, The University of Melbourne.

The Australian Welfare and Work Lab pioneers collaborative research with industry partners on new ways of commissioning and delivering employment services to help some of the most disadvantaged people in Australia into sustainable employment.

The Lab builds on a program of policy-engaged research that has been tracking the impacts of welfare reform on the frontline delivery of employment services in Australia and internationally for over 20 years.

The Lab is focused on developing collaborative research partnerships with industry and government to test practice innovations in welfare-to-work programs and to build the evidence base for 'best practice' models in the governance and delivery of employment services.

If you are interested in the Australian Welfare and Work Lab's projects or partnerships, you can contact the lab's research coordinator Dr Emily Corbett emily.corbett@unimelb.edu.au, or the lab's co-director Dr Michael McGann mmcgann@unimelb.edu.au.

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Background

This working paper deals with ‘Trauma-informed practice in welfare-to-work and employment services’ and was prepared as part of a research collaboration between the Australian Welfare and Work Lab and Joblink Plus to determine ‘Best practice models in employment services provision’. The development of a recognised and tested model of professional practice for assisting very long-term unemployed people constitutes a ‘gold standard’ but elusive objective for Australia’s employment support system. This is particularly so in the context of recent reforms which have seen a sizeable increase in the proportion of service providers’ caseloads that are very long-term (over 24 months) participants who may be experiencing enduring employment challenges. For example, when the Workforce Australia model commenced in July 2022, over 70 per cent of participants were registered with employment services for a year or more while over one in five had been participating in services for at least five years.¹

To date, there is little systematic (publicly available) evidence about ‘what works’ in this area of employment services delivery, nor is there a recognised and testable service delivery model for supporting highly disadvantaged jobseekers into sustained employment. To address this issue, Joblink Plus is partnering with the Australian Welfare and Work Lab on a multi-year study regarding best practice approaches to employment services. Joblink Plus is a for-purpose, not for profit organisation, that provides employment services and vocational training to a range of communities across rural and regional NSW. Over the past five years, it has been evolving the way it delivers employment services to embed principles of trauma-informed care at the core of frontline practice. The organisation estimates that the vast majority of participants on its caseload have experienced trauma at some point in their lives. Joblink Plus also delivers employment services in many regional communities with high proportions of First Nation Australians who may have collective experiences of trauma stemming from the ongoing impacts of colonisation. Indeed, across the wider Workforce Australia caseload, it is estimated that just under 20 per cent of participants are Indigenous jobseekers or refugees – cohorts that may have collective experiences of trauma. Approximately 40 per cent of participants are estimated to have a disability or serious mental health condition, which can also co-occur with experiences of trauma.² This suggests, as Scullion and colleagues observe in the context of the UK, that these employment services constitute ‘a system that routinely interacts with people who have backgrounds of trauma’ (Scullion et al. 2022: 2).

This makes it all the more striking that the delivery of these welfare-to-work services have been somewhat overlooked thus far, given the broader movement towards trauma-informed social services that has been gathering momentum since the early 2010s.

The aim of the collaboration between the Australian Welfare and Work Lab and JobLink Plus is to document, explain and evaluate the evidence-base for this practice model, as well considering its potential for wider adoption by other providers, nationally and internationally. The project will map the key features of the Joblink Plus’ model, trace how it has been developed over time and how it is embedded across the organisation, assess the uniformity of its application, and evaluate its similarity or divergence from established frameworks such as trauma-informed care. This will include undertaking longitudinal research on how it is being implemented by frontline staff and with program participants at the local level. Additionally, the project will benchmark the Joblink Plus’ practice model against other leading international examples of relational approaches to employability based on principles of co-production and the amplifying of participants’ agency over the service delivery process. As a precursor to the empirical fieldwork and data collection components of the project, a scoping review was undertaken of the existing knowledge base on applying principles of trauma-informed care within the context of delivering welfare-to-work and employment services to highly disadvantaged jobseekers. This working paper is the outcome of that scoping review.

1 Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) (2022). Workforce Australia Select Committee Inquiry Presentation: Caseload Presentation. 3 November 2022. Available at <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=a2fb5e48-dd2f-4868-8a0c-6c0c28d4a2d7>.

2 Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) (2022). Workforce Australia Select Committee Inquiry Presentation: Caseload Presentation. 3 November 2022.

Introduction

The past forty years have seen profound changes in the way welfare is imagined by policy makers and enacted by service providers with citizens. Although the contours and pace of these transformations vary substantially between countries, it is often said that there has been a ‘paradigm shift’ (Dingeldey 2007: 823) in welfare provision since the 1990s; one involving a transition from a ‘passive’ benefit system (where payments are compensatory, and eligibility is determined by financial need) towards an ‘activating’ welfare model based on limiting opportunities for workforce exit and conditioning income support to participation in various ‘employability’ measures. These include vocational training, work experience programs, and job search assistance and employment guidance services. Participation in these ‘welfare-to-work’ programs is enforced through (threatened) sanctions for non-compliance with activation requirements (what is termed ‘welfare conditionality’). For example, during the first 16 months of Australia’s new Workforce Australia employment services systems, 70 per cent of participants had their payments suspended at some point for breaching an activation requirement or not attending an appointment with their service provider (Casey 2023).

The activating welfare model blends so-called ‘enabling’ supports such as training and employment guidance services with more regulatory or ‘demanding’ welfare measures, such as mutual obligations requiring the fulfilment of various conduct conditions if recipients are to remain eligible for payments (Dingeldey 2007; Eichorst et al. 2008). This is based on the rationale that welfare dependency can be reduced through policies that encourage work and self-sufficiency (Carter and Whitworth 2017), although critics argue that activation amounts to a fundamental repurposing of welfare that is anchored in a neoliberal paradigm that redefines poverty as consequences of individual actions (Whitworth and Carter 2020; Whitworth 2016; Soss et al. 2013; Marston 2008). Benefits that previously were a right of social citizenship based on financial need must now be earned through claimants demonstrating their deservingness as active jobseekers who are striving to be economically self-sufficient in employment (Patrick 2012; Serrano Pascual 2007). The upshot is an increased focus on personal accountability, advocating an active ‘entrepreneurial’ mindset as the solution to unemployment (Whitworth and Carter 2014: 110), and the pursuit of ‘creeping conditionality’ (Dwyer 2004: 271) through more stringent job search requirements, more restrictive eligibility criteria, and penalties for non-compliance with behavioural demands (O’Sullivan et al. 2021).

Over recent years, the ‘activating’ welfare model has come under increasing scrutiny, especially in those countries where the turn towards activation has followed what is described as a ‘workfare’ or ‘work-first’ trajectory (Peck 2001; Bonoli 2010). That is, a model of activation which focuses on job-search motivation and supporting transitions from welfare-to-work via ‘perpetual job-search motion’ (Wright et al. 2020: 286). These measures largely conflate work and welfare to the point where welfare assistance is largely contingent upon the completion of state-mandated work-related tasks. This places a heavy burden on those who, because of health issues, age, disability, or caregiving duties, find it more difficult to work and depend on welfare payments for their livelihood. They face the demand to meet increasingly arduous reporting obligations as a condition for receiving financial aid, which frequently falls below the basic living expense threshold (Fletcher and Wright 2018). This is in addition to the impact of recurring discourses that stigmatise claimants as ‘dole bludgers’ (Hutchens 2021), ‘frauds’ (Martin et al. 2022: 648) and ‘cheats’ (Commonwealth of Australia 2023: 11). Stigma plays a crucial role in the cultivation of shame among many job seekers (Peterie et al. 2019), leading to a pervasive sense of inadequacy and worthlessness rooted in both self-criticism and concern regarding how others perceive us (Tangney and Dearing 2002: 3). Research indicates that shame can be a dominant emotion for those who are unemployed or navigating welfare systems (Peterie et al. 2019a; Patrick 2014). Shame is not only linked to higher levels of mental health issues, such as PTSD (DeCou et al. 2023), but is shown to negatively influence social behaviours including the propensity to seek support (Dolezal and Gibson 2022). When unemployment is framed as a matter of personal failure, feelings of shame become a widespread experience among long term unemployed cohorts (Peterie et al. 2019a).

Underpinning workfare is the belief that ‘the best way to succeed in the labour market is to join it’ (Lindsay et al. 2007: 541). This contrasts with alternative human capital development approaches to activation, which prioritise vocational skill development and building employability through well-funded training, work experience, and other ‘skill-enhancing’ (Sadeghi and Fekjær 2018: 78) programs. The objective is durable transitions into sustainable employment rather than rapid transitions from welfare into any job or short-term employment.

Historically, the human capital development model has been more closely associated with Nordic European countries and social democratic welfare regimes (de La Porte and Jacobsson 2012), whereas the workfare approach is characteristic of the trajectory that activation has taken in liberal welfare regimes, and especially Anglophone countries. However, in practice, countries have increasingly converged towards aspects of the workfare model. This development has been regarded as highly problematic by critics, who increasingly call into question the effectiveness of workfare policies – especially in supporting the labour market (re)integration of people who are very long-term unemployed and who experience complex employment challenges related to family breakdown, mental health issues, homelessness, criminal convictions, and/or substance abuse (McGann et al. 2019; Borland et al. 2016). For instance, studies of the evolution and delivery of Australia’s employment services system indicate that while ‘work-first’ oriented employment services have been reasonably effective at supporting those close to the labour market to return to employment (O’Sullivan et al. 2021), their effectiveness diminishes when it comes to supporting highly disadvantaged long-term participants (Borland et al. 2016). This observation holds true both in Australia (Parliament of Australia 2023), and in other jurisdictions that have followed a similar approach (O’Sullivan et al. 2021; Fuertes and Lindsay 2016; Greer et al. 2017; van Berkel 2015). Echoing the findings of sociological research on participants’ experiences of welfare-to-work services as being dehumanising, impersonal, and overly focused on meeting administrative compliance (Peterie et al. 2019), the forward to the recent Select Committee report on employment services likens Australia’s employment services system to a ‘fragmented social security compliance management system that sometimes gets someone a job’ (Parliament of Australia 2023: xi).

Beyond the concern that workfare policies are ineffective is a deeper worry that they can actually cause harm through their detrimental impacts on participants’ mental health and psychological wellbeing. While the objective of activation, sustainable employment, is well-known to have beneficial effects on people’s wellbeing and mental health, Carter and Whitworth argue that the ‘process wellbeing’ effects of activation must also be taken into account. By this they mean the impact that ‘the process of participation in activation schemes’ can have on participants wellbeing ‘*in and of itself*’ (2017: 798). Notably, in their study of the effects that the process of participating in the UK’s main welfare-to-work program – at that time, the Work Programme – had on participants wellbeing, they found that participants often were ‘no better off ... [and] quite possibly worse off’ (2017: 811) in regard to their psychological health than similarly situated unemployed people not participating in the service. Taking Carter and Whitworth’s criticisms of the UK Work Programme several steps further, Britain’s activation regime during the 2010s has been accused by critics of being ‘socially abusive’ (2020: 291) for the degree of ‘state cruelty’ and ‘non-lethal harm’ (Wright et al. 2020: 282) that agencies inflicted upon claimants via the ‘ratcheting-up’ of sanctions and behavioural conditionality (see Grover, 2019; Redman and Fletcher 2022; Wright et al. 2020). The process of claiming benefits during this period, critics contended, turned into an ‘institutionally violent’ (Redman and Fletcher 2022: 1) ordeal that brought psychological harm to the people it was supposed to support.

In light of this concern, there are now growing calls for welfare states to adopt alternative approaches to welfare-to-work or employability services animated by different logics of activation. For instance, several scholars have proposed ‘relational approaches to employability’ (Pearson et al. 2023) anchored in Sen’s ‘capabilities’ approach (Payne and Butler 2023) and the prioritisation of individual agency and human flourishing as the core objective of activation (see Whelan et al. 2021). According to these models, ‘relationships of respect and mutual support should be at the heart of any public policy intervention combating poverty and social exclusion’ (Pearson et al. 2023: 271).

Moreover, employability should only be viewed as a secondary objective of activation and never at the expense of people's wellbeing (understood in a broad, holistic sense) or freedom to pursue the life they have reason to value (Laruffa 2020). For example, developing the concept of a 'capabilities-enhancing' relational approach to employability, Pearson et al. argue that service providers should 'enable choices around health and wellbeing' and 'empower people to form attachments to community and strengthen relationships within and beyond the family' (2023: 272).

Related to this relational critique of workfare models are demands for principles of 'trauma-informed care' (Scullion and Curchin 2022: 96) to be embedded both within social policy (Bowen and Murshid 2016) and especially within social security systems responsible for welfare administration (Scullion et al. 2023). This follows an earlier turn towards principles of trauma-informed care in human and social services over the early 2010s, particularly in North America. To date, however, few studies have examined trauma-informed care in the context of welfare-to-work programs, active welfare models, and employability services. This is somewhat of a 'blind spot' in the literature on embedding trauma-informed practice in social policy and welfare systems, not least because citizen encounters with employment services and frontline activation workers are arguably critical to how they experience the welfare state more broadly. As Rice observes, 'the welfare state ... does not live in abstract regulations and legal texts but rather in the day-to-day interactions between caseworkers and clients in local welfare offices' (2013: 1055). Here, McDonald and Marston position advisors in employment services offices as 'the "engineers" of advanced liberalism' in that they are tasked with building claimants into active citizens 'capable of self-government' and managing their 'own risks' (2005: 381). Moreover, of all social services, welfare-to-work and employment services are especially salient settings for applying trauma-informed approaches due to the extent to which they can involve practices such as eligibility assessments, risk profiling and client classification processes that require participants to disclose personal information and sensitive biographical details such as whether or not they have been incarcerated, suffer from mental health issues, or are dealing with addiction (O'Sullivan et al. 2019; Caswell et al. 2010). These processes of assessment, classification, and disclosure can be experienced as deeply invasive and demeaning (Baumberg 2015).

In acknowledging the negative effects that interaction with employment and social security services can have for people, the aim of this scoping review is to examine what is known internationally regarding trauma-informed models and approaches *within employment service delivery and social security systems*. This exploration seeks to pave the way for reimagining how services can evolve to ensure they cater effectively to the diverse needs of all jobseekers. The paper proceeds by first introducing the concept of 'trauma-informed care'. This is followed by an outline of the scoping review methodology applied in this study before a detailed presentation of the findings from this scoping review. The paper concludes by discussing the parallels between trauma-informed models and other alternatives to workfare models such as relational approaches to employability and 'capabilities enhancing' activation models. We also set out an agenda for future research on embedding principles of trauma-informed care in the delivery of welfare-to-work and employment services.

Towards trauma-informed care (TIC) in employment services

The increasing prominence of trauma-informed approaches is a response to understanding that trauma is pervasive and that it impacts many life domains, often in deep and life-shaping manners (Fallot and Harris 2009: 1-2, Power and Duys 2020: 177). For instance, research shows that an accumulation of multiple adverse experiences can increase the risks of mental health issues, impair social and emotional functioning, and affect people's ability to undertake (and succeed in) formal learning (Skiba 2020: 489). Studies reveal that exposure to trauma can significantly disrupt one's ability to fulfill key life roles such as spouse, parent, and worker (Baumunk et al. 2023: 4). A landmark study revealed that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)—such as family suicide or growing up in a household where there is substance abuse—can have devastating impacts for many in early adulthood and beyond (Powers and Duys 2020: 175; Linnekaste 2021).

Growing recognition of trauma's prevalence and effects has led to a focus on the crucial role service systems play in either mitigating or exacerbating trauma-related challenges. Indeed, research suggests that people with histories of trauma are particularly likely to be clients of social services (Yatchmenoff et al. 2017: 167; Mahon 2022: 2; Elliott et al. 2005: 462), and to be interacting with welfare systems (Knight 2015: 25; Levenson 2020: 288). Consequently, if service users have difficulty with goal setting, focusing, prioritising, or other executive function skills, this should not be viewed as a character flaw or poor work ethic, but as a possible symptom of trauma-related dysregulated brain function (Power and Duys 2020: 178). Unfortunately, the contrary often occurs where engaging with social services can itself be re-traumatising (Yatchmenoff et al. 2017: 167) due to many common procedures and practices within welfare organisations being experienced as emotionally unsafe and disempowering for survivors of trauma (Elliott et al. 2005: 463). For individuals grappling with ongoing stigmatisation or historical trauma and adversity, the obligation to partake in mandatory employment activities or adhere to strict welfare reporting standards, for example, can trigger profound despair (Australia Council of Social Services 2021; Mills 2018; Batty et al. 2015). This raises important questions about whether incorporating trauma-informed principles into the design of welfare-to-work programs can better support disadvantaged participants to transition to sustainable employment and lead flourishing lives. It also brings into view related questions concerning the degree to which principles of trauma-informed care can faithfully be practiced in the context of mandatory activation programs in the first instance (cf. Larsen and Caswell 2022), and what institutional conditions and program adaptations might be required to reconcile trauma-informed care with the successful delivery of welfare-to-work or employment services.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) outlines a trauma-informed approach as one that requires an organisation or system at all levels to realise and understand trauma and its impact on families, community, and individuals. This entails recognising trauma symptoms, responding based on trauma-informed principles, and resisting re-traumatisation. This approach is grounded in six fundamental key principles, including ensuring safety, maintaining trustworthiness and transparency, fostering peer support, encouraging collaboration and mutuality, promoting empowerment, voice, and choice, and acknowledging cultural, historical and gender issues (SAMHSA 2014).

The push for TIC within employment services arises as a response to the widespread criticism of 'work-first' activation experiences, coupled with a search for alternatives that prioritise humanity and compassion. Between March 2020 and June 2021 in Australia, certain groups were overrepresented among those receiving unemployment benefits, including individuals aged 45-64, those with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and principal carer parents, who are often single parents (Australian Council of Social Services 2021). Notably, people with disabilities, older individuals, and women were significantly more likely to have been receiving unemployment benefits for two years or longer. These key demographic groups find themselves navigating and self-advocating within a system that is both bureaucratic and punitive (Australian Council of Social Services 2021). Thus, the push for integrating TIC principles into employment and welfare services stems not only from recognising that individuals accessing these services may have experienced past trauma, but also from the understanding that the current system and processes can be harmful. This recognition calls for a transformative approach in addressing the needs of those facing disadvantage, emphasising the need to reevaluate and adapt the way services are delivered to be more compassionate and responsive.

Method

Our study utilised a scoping review methodology as outlined by Arksey and O’Malley (2005) and further developed by Levac et al. (2010). This method involves a structured five stage process, with an optional sixth stage that incorporates stakeholder consultation to guide the research and validate the findings. The structure of this paper follows the five stages as described by Arksey and O’Malley (2005), which include formulating the research question, identifying relevant studies, selecting the studies, charting the data, and finally collating, summarising, and presenting the findings.

Stage 1: Identify the research question

The research questions for this review of the evidence were:

- How are trauma-informed models conceptualised in the context of employment services (and related employment support services such as career counselling, vocational training, and career guidance) and social security systems?
- Who are these models principally targeted towards?
- What is the rationale for delivering employment services in a trauma-informed way?
- What evidence is there about the impacts of trauma-informed models in employment services and social security systems?

Stage 2: Identify relevant studies

The selection of search terms for this review was determined through an initial exploratory search and a consensus-building discussion among the authors, aligning with the review’s objectives. The final search terms were implemented across broad social science databases including Web of Science, Scopus and google scholar. The final search strategy included:

These terms were searched for in the title, abstract, or key words of articles listed on the relevant social science databases. The rationale for including the terms ‘employability’, ‘welfare to work’, ‘activation’, and ‘active labour market policy’ in the search strategy is that these are all terms that are often used interchangeably with employment services in the social policy and public policy literatures. Hence, to avoid missing relevant studies we included all these terms in the search strategy. The terms ‘vocational training’, ‘vocational rehabilitation’, ‘employment guidance’, and ‘career counselling’ were included to also capture studies that focused on the relationship between employment support services and trauma informed approaches, but where these services may have operated outside the formal social security system or active labour market policy settings. This would include voluntary employability support services potentially offered by different levels of government, outside the mandatory activation system – in Australia, Victoria and Tasmania both operate parallel employment support programs outside the system of mutual obligations – as well as reintegration services provided by community organisations. Finally, the terms ‘social security systems’, ‘welfare administration’, and ‘social welfare’ were included to capture studies addressing the intersection between trauma-informed principles and the administration of income support payments (including, the monitoring of claimants’ compliance with mutual obligations). Since welfare-to-work programs operate at the nexus between employability support services and administering compliance with mutual obligations (or ‘welfare conditionality’), we deliberately included a focus on trauma-informed approaches at both the demanding and enabling sides of activation.

Trauma Informed *		Employment services		Vocational Training		Social Security Systems
(Care)		Welfare to Work		Vocational Rehabilitation		Welfare Administration
(Practice)	AND	Employability	OR	Employment Guidance	OR	Social Welfare
(Approach)		Activation		Career Counselling		
		Active Labour Market Policy				

Consequently, we have high confidence that our scoping review is based on an inclusive search strategy that would have captured the vast majority, if not all, studies trauma-informed approaches in the context of employability services, welfare-to-work programs, and active welfare models more broadly.

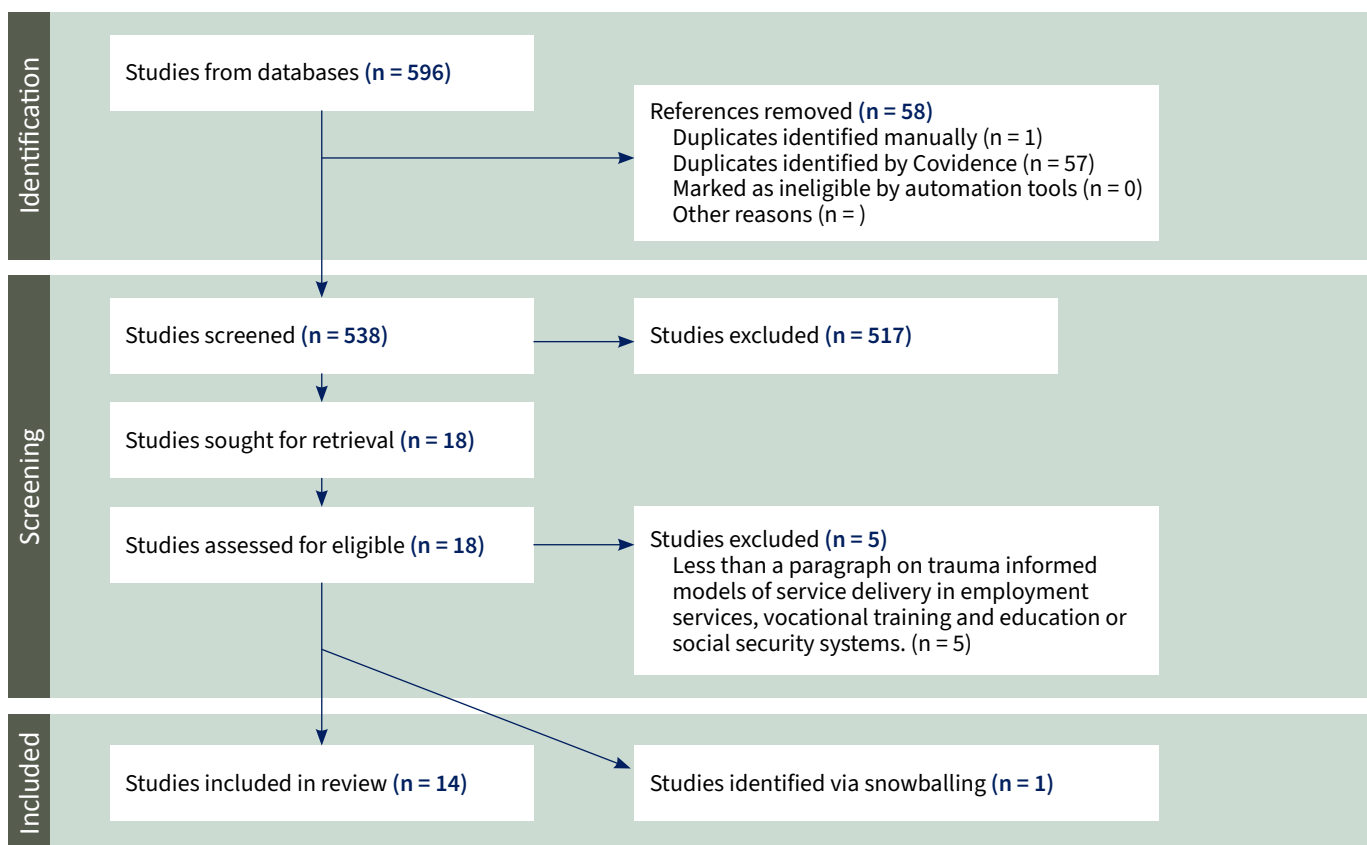
Stage 3: Study selection

After removing duplicates, a total of 596 articles were retrieved from the database search. The research team utilised Covidence to streamline the review process of titles, abstracts, and full texts based on predefined inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Table. 1 Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Articles that explore trauma informed models of service delivery in employment services (or active labour market/welfare-to-work programs), career counselling (or employment guidance), vocational training, or social security systems.	Articles about trauma informed models of service delivery in social services that are not directly focused on labour market reintegration, such as housing, mental health, child welfare and Alcohol or other Drug (AoD).
Articles must have written more than one paragraph on trauma informed models of service delivery in employment services, vocational training and education or social security systems to be included.	Articles about financial literacy training programs, without mention of implementing them into employment services or career counselling in a trauma-informed way.
Peer reviewed academic literature.	Articles about the role of occupational health nurses in implementing trauma informed practices in the workplace, without mention of implementation alongside employment service delivery, vocational training and education or social security system delivery.
Written in English.	
Published between 2000 - 2024.	

Figure 1. PRISMA



Stage 4: Charting the data

Adhering to the methodology described by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), we created a data charting frame to facilitate the extraction and analysis of information from the 14 studies ultimately included in this scoping review (See Table 2).

This frame was designed to systematically gather key information relevant to our research question, including the author and year of publication, the title and journal of the study, the country of origin, the study's aim and purpose, its methodology and the sample size.

Table 2t: Articles included in review

Author and Year	Title and Journal	Country	Aim and Purpose	Method	Sample
Topitzes, J., Mersky, J. P., Mueller, D. J., Bacalso, E., & Williams, C. (2019).	Implementing trauma screening, brief intervention, and referral to treatment (T-SBIRT) within employment services: A feasibility trial. <i>American Journal of Community Psychology</i> .	United States of America.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess the feasibility of integrating Trauma Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (T-SBIRT) within employment services for low-income urban residents. Evaluate the implementation of T-SBIRT in terms of its suitability, acceptability, client adherence, provider adherence (or fidelity), and intended outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-experimental design. Providers completed integrity checklists during intervention, service participants completed a post-intervention self-report survey. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N=83, 33.7% female, 66.3% male, low-income adults accessing employment services.
Topitzes, J., Bacalso, E., Plummer-Lee, C. T., Jonas-Gordon, S., & Mersky, J. P. (2022).	Trauma Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (T-SBIRT) Implemented within TANF Employment Services: An Outcome Study. <i>Journal of Social Service Research</i> .	United States of America.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate the implementation and outcomes of the Trauma Screening Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (T-SBIRT) protocol within Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) programming. Assess model adherence rates, participant toleration of the intervention, and the association of T-SBIRT completion with decreases in mental health symptoms and positive mental health screenings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-experimental, process evaluation design. Providers completed integrity checklists during intervention, service participants completed a pre and post-intervention self-report survey. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N=188, 94.1% female, participants from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.
Scullion, L., & Curchin, K. (2022).	Examining veterans' interactions with the UK social security system through a trauma-informed lens. <i>Journal of Social Policy</i> .	United Kingdom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate the interactions between UK veterans and the social security system through a trauma-informed lens, focusing on their experiences with the Work Capability Assessment and benefits system conditionality. Identify the impact of these interactions on veterans' psychosocial functioning and mental health. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative Longitudinal Research (QLR) with veterans, involving two waves of interviews across four locations in England. Qualitative interviews and focus groups with policy and practice stakeholders. Focus groups with 15 Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N=68, Veterans. Policy and practice stakeholders. N=15, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) staff.
Roberts, H., Stuart, S. R., Allan, S., & Gumley, A. (2022).	'It's Like the Sword of Damocles'—A Trauma-Informed Framework Analysis of Individuals' Experiences of Assessment for the Personal Independence Payment Benefit in the UK. <i>Journal of Social Policy</i> .	United Kingdom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the extent to which the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) assessment process aligns with the principles of Trauma-Informed Care (TIC). Identify experiences not captured by the TIC framework and evaluate the framework's limitations in understanding these experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative semi-structured interviews. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N=12, 4 male, 8 female, participants undergoing psychological therapy, assessed for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in the last three years.

Author and Year	Title and Journal	Country	Aim and Purpose	Method	Sample
Wright, G. G., & Chan, C. D. (2022).	Integrating trauma-informed care into career counseling: A response to COVID-19 job loss for Black, indigenous, and people of colour. <i>Journal of Employment Counseling</i> .	United States of America.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore how trauma-informed care (TIC) can be integrated into career development practices to address the unique challenges and barriers faced by historically marginalised populations, particularly in the context of COVID-19 job loss. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conceptual and exploratory. 	
O'Sullivan, D., Watts, J. R., & Strauser, D. R. (2019).	Trauma-sensitive rehabilitation counseling: Paradigms and principles. <i>Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation</i> , 51(3), 299-312.	United States of America.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline trauma-informed principles relevant to rehabilitation service provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conceptual and exploratory. 	
Chopp, S., Topitzes, D., & Mersky, J. (2023).	Trauma-Responsive Vocational Rehabilitation Services. <i>Behavioural Sciences</i> .	United States of America.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services for low-income Black consumers by integrating trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development and delivery of a training program. Focus groups. Module evaluation via Qualtrics surveys. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N=30 low-income, black consumers, focus groups
Chen, C. P., & Hawke, S. (2023).	Career counselling women survivors of childhood abuse. <i>International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance</i> .	Canada.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address the long-term trauma-related symptoms that women with histories of childhood abuse face. Examine the key career issues encountered by women survivors of childhood abuse. Explore how career construction theory can be integrated into a trauma-informed career counselling approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conceptual and exploratory. 	
Tarshis, S., Alaggia, R., & Logie, C. H. (2022).	Intersectional and trauma-informed approaches to employment services: insights from intimate partner violence (IPV) service providers. <i>Violence against women</i> .	United States of America.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand how IPV service providers understand the employment seeking experiences of IPV survivors. Investigate the ways IPV service providers respond to employment needs of IPV survivors and the challenges they face. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative semi-structured interviews. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N=10, female, service providers.
Powers, J. J., & Duys, D. (2020).	Toward trauma-informed career counseling. <i>The Career Development Quarterly</i> .	United States of America.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the integration of trauma-informed practices with career counselling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conceptual and exploratory. 	
Stoltz, K. B., Hunt, A. N., & Greenhill, C. (2023).	Trauma informed use of the career construction interview. <i>The Career Development Quarterly</i> .	United States of America.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the utilisation of the Career Construction Interview (CCI) within a trauma-informed approach in career counselling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conceptual and exploratory. 	
Gavin, T., Krishnamoorthy, G., Ayre, K., Bryce, I., & Trimmer, K. (2024).	Trauma-informed behavior support with youth in flexible learning and vocational education settings: Exploring the acceptability of an online trauma-informed education program. <i>Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth</i> .	Australia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate the acceptability of the Trauma-Informed Behaviour Support (TIBS) online education program for educators in flexible learning and Vocational Education and Training (VET) settings in Queensland, Australia. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative semi-structured interviews. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N=6, female, educators involved in flexible learning and Vocational Education and Training (VET) service.
Baumunk, M. J., Tang, X., Rumrill, S. P., Conder, S., & Rumrill Jr, P. D. (2023).	Post-traumatic growth and trauma-informed care in vocational rehabilitation through the lens of the conservation of resources theory. <i>Work</i> .	United States of America.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the existing literature regarding post-traumatic growth (PTG), trauma informed care (TIC), and the conservation of resources (COR) theory. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conceptual and exploratory. 	
Barrow, J., Wasik, S. Z., Corry, L. B., & Gobble, C. A. (2019).	Trauma-Informed Career Counseling: Identifying and Advocating for the Vocational Needs of Human Services Clients and Professionals. <i>Journal of Human Services</i> .	United States of America.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine how violence, poverty, veteran status, and historical trauma can impact career development as well as employment opportunities across the lifespan for clients and human service professionals in a variety of settings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conceptual and exploratory. 	

Stage 5: Collating, summarising, and reporting results

In the concluding phase of the scoping review, we present a descriptive summary and conduct a qualitative thematic analysis of the findings, as outlined by Levac et al. (2010). For organising, coding, and identifying primary themes, we utilised NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software.

Thematic analysis facilitated the organisation of the results as follows.

Descriptive Summary

Study Type and Measurement

Year of publication for the final 14 articles ranged from 2019 to 2024. However, only three articles were published before 2020. All articles were peer-reviewed papers from a range of disciplines including psychological and behavioural sciences, health and social policy, education, gendered violence studies, career studies and human studies. Most studies included in this review were conceptual/theoretical in design (n=7), five studies used qualitative methods and two used mixed methods.

Study Purpose, Location and Sample description

Studies were conducted in the United States of America (n=10), Canada (n=1), United Kingdom (n=2) and Australia (n=1). Study purpose varied including program trials/outcomes (n=4), examination of social security systems (n=2), theoretical exploration of trauma-informed practices within career counselling/rehabilitation (n=7) and exploration of violence and employment (n=1). Of those studies that employed empirical methods, samples varied and included low-income participants (n=2), veterans (n=1), mental health service recipients (n=1) and service professionals (n=3).

Results

How are trauma-informed models conceptualised in the context of employment services and social security systems?

Trauma-informed models are conceptualised as principles and frameworks that incorporate an understanding of the prevalence and impact of trauma in the lives of individuals seeking employment and social support. The literature suggests a variety of terms and approaches under the umbrella of trauma-informed care, indicating an evolving field with diverse applications. Terminology such as “trauma informed care” (Topitzes et al. 2019; Topitzes et al. 2022; Scullion and Curchin 2022; Roberts et al. 2022; Wright and Chan 2022; O’Sullivan et al. 2019; Baumunk et al. 2023; Barrow et al. 2019), “trauma-sensitive providers” (O’Sullivan et al. 2019), “trauma informed services/practice” (O’Sullivan et al. 2019; Tarshis et al. 2022) and “trauma-informed career counselling” (Chen et al. 2023; Powers and Duys 2020; Stoltz et al. 2023) point to a common recognition of the need to understand trauma, but they also highlight different facets of service delivery. This diversity suggests application of trauma-informed principles across various service stages and types, from broader organisational aspirations to direct service provision.

Studies often draw upon the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) guidelines, which articulate six key principles of a trauma informed approach including safety, trustworthiness, peer support, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural, historical and gender issues (Topitzes et al. 2019; Topitzes et al. 2022; O’Sullivan et al. 2019; Chopp et al. 2023; Powers and Duys 2020; Stoltz et al. 2023; Gavin et al. 2024; Baumunk et al. 2023; Barrow et al. 2019), with other articles referencing slightly different iterations (Scullion and Curchin 2022; Roberts et al. 2022; Wright and Chan 2022; Tarshis et al. 2022). Building upon these principles, several articles emphasise the necessity of a paradigm shift in service delivery, advocating for transitioning away from deficit-focused questioning (what’s wrong with you?) to a more compassionate, trauma informed perspective that asks, “what happened to you?” (Powers and Duys 2020; Scullion and Curchin 2022; Gavin et al. 2024). This approach aims to foster deeper understanding of the individual experiences that influence behaviour and engagement with services. Several articles highlighted the importance of an intersectional lens (Tarshis et al. 2022) when considering a trauma informed approach including consideration of how race (Wright and Chan 2022; Chopp et al. 2023) and disability (Roberts et al. 2022; O’Sullivan et al. 2019; Baumunk et al. 2023) contextualise experiences of trauma and service delivery.

Half (n=7) of the articles included in this review presented theoretical and conceptual arguments for incorporating trauma-informed principles using various theoretical frameworks and tools. Some of these included narrative approaches (Powers and Duys 2020) such as Career Construction Theory (CCT) (Chen and Hawke 2023), Social Cognitive Career (SCC) theory (Barrow et al. 2019) and tools such as the Career Construction Interview (CCI) (Stoltz et al. 2023) during career counselling. Others included the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Baumunk et al. 2023) in vocational interventions to support the career development of individuals with disabilities. Bridging theoretical frameworks with practical applications, several articles examined tangible implementation in real-world settings. These practical applications were evidenced in feasibility and outcome trials, including the Trauma, Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (TSBIRT) protocol used within employment services (Topitzes et al. 2019; Topitzes et al. 2022). Several articles utilised qualitative interviewing to determine the impact of trauma informed training modules for staff operating in vocational services (Gavin et al. 2024; Chopp et al. 2023), veterans’ experiences dealing with the UK benefits system (Roberts et al. 2022; Scullion and Curchin 2022) and IPV service providers perspectives on employment practices with victim/survivors (Tarshis et al. 2022).

Trauma-informed models are becoming increasingly important in employment and social services and appear to be conceptualised as essential for fostering an environment that acknowledges and addresses the complex needs of individuals impacted by trauma. The reviewed articles underscore a rising acknowledgement of trauma’s pervasiveness, and the necessity of delivering services that are safe, supportive, and empowering for service users.

Who are these models principally targeted towards?

Articles described trauma-informed models and approaches primarily targeting marginalised populations who face intersecting challenges. This includes black American communities with low income (Topitzes et al. 2019; Chopp et al. 2023) and Black Indigenous People Of Colour (BIPOC) (Wright and Chan 2022), recognising the impact of racial inequalities on experiences of trauma and engagement with employment/social security systems. Other targeted populations included veterans (Scullion and Curchin 2022; Barrow et al. 2019), people with mental health issues or disabilities (Roberts et al. 2022; Topitzes et al. 2019; Baumunk et al. 2023), Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) survivors (O’Sullivan et al. 2019; Chen and Hawke 2023; Powers and Duys 2020; Stoltz et al. 2023), and IPV victim/survivors (Topitzes et al. 2022). However, what is notable across the studies, is that the contexts in which trauma-informed models were being pursued or recommended were almost always targeted services for specific cohorts.

There were few examples of trauma-informed models being applied within the context of a generalist welfare-to-work program or by an employment services provider working with participants from a range of cohorts.

What is the rationale for delivering employment services in a trauma-informed way?

The rationale for implementing services in a trauma-informed way stems from the recognition that trauma exposure creates significant obstacles to securing and retaining employment, which are essential for long-term economic stability and health (Topitzes et al. 2019; Topitzes et al. 2022; Scullion and Curchin 2022; Roberts et al. 2022; O'Sullivan et al. 2019; Chen and Hawke 2023; Stoltz et al. 2023; Barrow et al. 2019). Furthermore, it's recognised that engaging in employment services (Wright and Chan 2022) and social security systems (Scullion and Curchin 2022; Roberts et al. 2022) can often worsen mental health issues connected to previous trauma, highlighting the necessity for support and service provision that is guided by trauma informed principles. This can benefit not only individuals, but family members, and reduce aggression from clients towards staff to improve workplace safety (Scullion and Curchin 2022). Moving away from a medical model that focuses on illness and limitations, to one that promotes capabilities and recovery, can alleviate psychological distress, and prevent the possibility of re-traumatisation (Roberts et al. 2022).

Trauma informed approaches that consider the broader context of people's lives, including the multifaceted aspects of service users' identities and the diverse effects of trauma, can help to mitigate systemic biases and stigmatisation by ensuring that services are accessible and equitable (Roberts et al. 2022; Wright and Chan 2022; Chopp et al. 2023; Tarshis et al. 2022; Powers and Duys 2020; Baumunk et al. 2023; Barrow et al. 2019). This necessitates a broader societal perspective, recognising that global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic have led to widespread and ongoing trauma affecting employment opportunities and mental health (Wright and Chan 2022). It is crucial for employment and social security service systems to acknowledge and respond not only to the impact of collective traumas, but to the interpersonal experiences of their users, such as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) (O'Sullivan et al. 2019; Chen and Hawke 2023; Powers and Duys, 2020), Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) (Tarshis et al. 2022; Barrow et al. 2019) and challenges related to disability (Baumunk et al. 2023; O'Sullivan et al. 2019; Chopp et al. 2023).

What evidence is there about the impacts of trauma informed models in employment services and social security systems?

Research regarding the impact of trauma-informed models in employment and social security services is largely theoretical and speculative in nature, particularly within the Australian context. Although there is an agreed need for additional empirical evidence, several studies only provide insight into the potential efficacy of trauma informed approaches.

T-SBIRT is a brief, structured intervention that aims to enhance access to healthcare by facilitating referrals, addressing stress and trauma through screening, evaluation, and discussion of coping strategies (Topitzes et al. 2019). The T-SBIRT Feasibility Trial, focusing on low-income individuals utilising employment services, revealed a high acceptance rate among participants to engage with the services offered without significant distress or the need for stabilisation (Topitzes et al. 2019). The study suggests that T-SBIRT can play a crucial role in enhancing healthcare access and addressing mental health needs of low-income individuals seeking employment. Following this, the T-SBIRT outcome study further supported these initial findings, reporting 98.5% adherence to the protocol by service providers and a 91.3% tolerability rate among those who completed the program (Topitzes et al. 2022). Notably, participants in the study experienced significant decreases in the severity of depression and PTSD symptoms, alongside a reduction in positive PTSD screenings, in comparison to a control group. Findings from these studies indicate positive effects on health, and engagement with health services, yet provide limited evidence of positive impact on employment transitions.

Two studies provided qualitative insights into the effectiveness of staff training programs grounded in trauma-informed principles (Gavin et al. 2024; Chopp et al. 2023). The Trauma Informed Behaviour Support (TIBS) multi-tier training program, utilised in whole-of-school practices, is a four-module course designed to equip educators with a comprehensive range of information and skills related to trauma-informed practices (Gavin et al. 2024). Tailored for the Australian educational landscape and piloted within a rural Queensland youth vocational organisation, the program underscores the significance of empathetic responses to student behaviour. Educators who completed the training reported an increased awareness of trauma and its impacts, leading to more supportive interactions with students. Positive feedback underscored the demand for content more specifically targeted at youth and vocational settings, alongside recommendations for a collaborative approach in developing program materials with direct input from educators and students to ensure relevance and effectiveness (Gavin et al. 2024).

Moving abroad, Chopp et al. (2023) explored the implementation and outcomes of a training series designed for staff at a Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) in a Midwestern state within the United States. This training was aimed at enhancing trauma-responsive, culturally, and racially responsive strengths-based services for low-income Black consumers. Feedback from staff indicated a positive reception, with requests for deeper dives into content, more time for discussions and suggestions for additional support and resources. The DVR plans to establish a Community of Practice for ongoing technical assistance and consultation, incorporating trauma informed practices and racial equity principles (Chopp et al. 2023).

Empirical studies on the implementation of trauma-informed approaches within employment and social security services are in their infancy and are yet show promising results. The T-SBIRT intervention provides initial evidence of the health and wellbeing advantages of trauma-informed protocols for low-income individuals seeking employment services. Additionally, staff training programs underscore the value of adopting trauma-informed educational practices, signalling a promising move towards more empathetic and effective responses to individuals affected by trauma. However, a critical evidence gap remains concerning whether delivering employment services in a trauma-informed way can improve employment outcomes for participants. None of the empirical studies to date have evaluated the vocational benefits of trauma-informed models.

Instead, positive outcomes to date appear to be at the level of process effects (more empathetic and supportive interactions with participants), preventing further traumatisation and engaging participants in allied health services while receiving employment support. These are indeed important benefits of trauma-informed practice in employment services, although the primary question of whether trauma-informed principles can contribute to more successful employment transitions for participants with complex needs remains unanswered.

Discussion

Our review reveals an absence of studies on trauma-informed methodologies within employment or social service systems prior to 2019, indicating this as an emerging field of study. As the conversation about the reform of these services progresses, there is an increasing demand from practitioners and scholars for these systems to embrace trauma informed approaches. This dialogue underscores a broader societal recognition of the pervasive impact of trauma on individual functioning and wellbeing. It acknowledges that, the path to employment for individuals who have experienced trauma is often fraught with challenges that are not addressed by conventional job support services.

This review highlights a significant gap in evidence concerning the efficacy of trauma-informed practices within employment and welfare services. Moreover, to the extent that studies have demonstrated positive impacts on service engagement and referrals to allied health services, there is little research available reporting *service-users'* experiences of these trauma-informed models and whether embedding principles of TIC in service delivery was regarded positively by program participants.

Limited data raises critical questions about effective strategies for implementing trauma-informed practices in a way that genuinely benefits service users. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of TIC principles against the backdrop of mandatory activation policies highlights the need for a significant paradigm shift in welfare service delivery. This shift necessitates a reimagining of how services can simultaneously uphold the tenets of trauma-informed care – such as safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, and empowerment – while navigating the constraints imposed by policies aimed at encouraging labour market participation. Indeed, the enforcement of behavioural conditions and sanctions seem at odds with the nurturing ethos that guides TIC principles. As the authors of one of the reviewed studies conclude, the focus in active welfare models ‘on monitoring compliance with behavioural conditions ... is difficult to reconcile with principles of trauma-informed care’ (Scullion and Curchin 2022: 109).

Proponents of related ‘relational’ approaches to employability frequently draw a similar conclusion about the ‘fit’ between a commitment to coproducing employment services with participants and communities to promote trust, collaboration, and the agency of service-users, and the mandatory nature of people’s participation in welfare-to-work programs. For example, Pearson et al. argue that ‘capabilities-enhancing approaches run counter to policy interventions that include welfare conditionality and high levels of compulsion’ (2023: 27) (see also Beck 2018; Edgell and McQuaid 2016). On the other hand, a study of Danish municipalities’ efforts to move towards a model of employment services where citizens co-design, create, and deliver services with job centres suggests that it may be possible to move services in a more relational direction and towards principles of co-creation even in ‘an environment of conditionality’ (Larsen and Caswell 2022). Although this will depend on increasing the ‘decision-power’ of frontline workers to tailor how they work with participants and to give service-users greater choice over the goals and means of activation. This will in turn depends on employment services being anchored in ecosystems of local support services, underpinned by high inter-agency collaboration, so that a pathway of supports can be availed. Moreover, frontline workers will also need to be up skilled in how to co-create these service pathways and work with participants in a relational way.

Expanding the lens to encompass broader alternatives to traditional workfare activation models, we find several possible synergies between trauma-informed approaches to employment services and the broader category of relational models of employability; that is, models of activation or employability services that are anchored in principles of co-creation/co-production and the pursuit of ‘capabilities enhancing’ supports (Lindsay et al. 2018; Pearson et al. 2023; Whelan et al. 2021). According to Burns (2013: 31), co-production ‘puts service users on the same level as the service provider ... it aims to draw on the knowledge and resources of both to develop solutions to problems and improve interaction between citizens and those who serve them’. At the grassroots level, co-production describes a practice where service users collaborate with frontline staff to tailor and implement their own services. This process can be supported through two additional mechanisms: ‘co-governance’ which entails various stakeholders engaging in the design and planning of employment services through collective decision making and responsibilities; and co-management, where stakeholders work together, combining their resources for the delivery of services (Brandson and Pestoff 2008). Taken together, these concepts advocate for a pathway to delivering services that is not only responsive, but also empowering by centring the perspectives and lived experiences of service users and prioritising the establishment of meaningful connections with service providers.

This is not to say that ‘trauma-informed’ approaches are synonymous with ‘relational’ employability approaches’ or ‘capabilities-enhancing’ employment services. However, they all share a common vocabulary of the critical importance of relationships of trust and collaboration between participants and service organisations that seek to empower participants through working *with* them to co-create their path to reintegration rather than activating participants by working on them or making decisions for them. Furthermore, all these approaches situate employment within a wider framework of wellbeing to emphasise how people’s participation in employment must itself be positioned in relation to their wider lives and other circumstances they may be dealing with.

At this point, research on ‘relational’ and ‘capabilities-enhancing’ models of employability is at a more advanced stage than research on trauma-informed approaches and potentially offers glimpses of the benefits of evolving welfare-to-work programs in a trauma-informed orientation (as far as principles of trust, collaboration, and empowerment are concerned). One example of this alternative employability model that has been extensively researched and documented in the literature is the Making It Work (MIW) program in Scotland. This was a welfare-to-work program focused on assisting lone parents in their transition to sustainable employment by promoting voluntary participation, personalised support, and tailored employability activities (Lindsay et al. 2018). Running from 2013 to 2017, MIW prioritised partnerships that were both local and collaborative, emphasising the sharing of resources through co-governance and co-management frameworks. This approach facilitated the creation of services that were not only personalised and comprehensive but also keenly attuned to the specific needs of lone parents, setting the stage for successful co-production (Lindsay et al. 2018).

The study reported that this environment empowered services users and gave them a sense of control over their path to employment. Research repeatedly underscores the detrimental effects and damage caused by impersonal and insensitive service systems on their users (Marston and McDonald 2008; Finn 2011; Peterie et al. 2019). In contrast, services that are tailored to the unique needs of individuals have demonstrated substantial increase in both engagement and commitment within these systems, enabling effective response to the specific, situational, and personal challenges faced by users (Garven et al. 2016 cited in Lindsay et al. 2018). Although the program’s achievements were partially attributed to significant funding, the study also emphasises the possibilities that employment services can realise through the implementation of genuine collaborative practices.

Conclusion: a research agenda on trauma-informed employment services

This scoping review underscores the growing recognition of trauma's impact on employment and social security service access, and the need for trauma-informed approaches in service delivery. While the evidence base is small, preliminary studies suggest that approaches can potentially improve outcomes for marginalised individuals. However, several limitations of the review deserve attention. These include a sole focus on English language studies and the challenges inherent in searching across electronic databases, which may have led to missing relevant evidence. The methodology, while comprehensive and enhanced by multiple reviewers, yielded only 14 articles, potentially not capturing the full scope of international research in more local venues. The absence of empirical data examining the impact of trauma-informed approaches on employment service delivery limits the ability to draw conclusions about their effectiveness. Furthermore, findings may not be directly applicable to Australia due to cultural and systemic differences across employment and social security systems in other countries.

We conclude by setting out a research agenda for future studies on trauma-informed care in employment services.

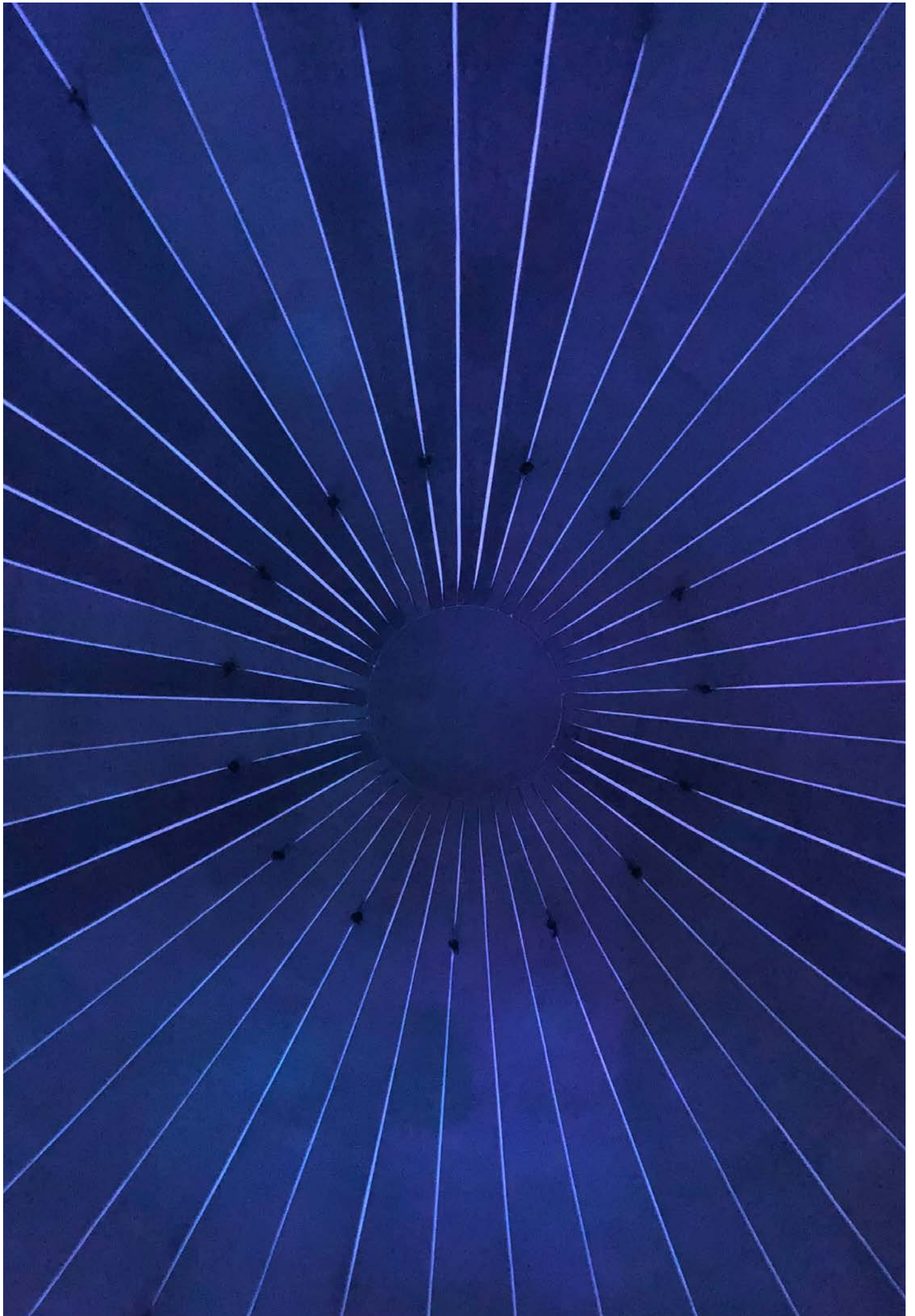
Research: Among the principal gaps in our current understanding of trauma-informed approaches in welfare-to-work and employment services is the effectiveness of these approaches compared with traditional workfare models. This in turn raises important value-laden questions about how effectiveness should be measured: for example, on outcomes such as transitions to employment and the sustainability of these transitions or perhaps broader wellbeing outcomes in domains such as health, housing, and community participation. Alternatively, effectiveness may also be judged according to intermediary effects such as higher levels of engagement in services, reduced staff turnover, safer workplaces, or increased participant satisfaction. Regardless of these questions over how to define effectiveness, there are almost no studies that have yet attempted to measure the impacts of trauma-informed approaches in employment services on outcomes for participants. Also missing is empirical analysis of the benefits of trauma-informed models *from the participants' perspective*.

In Australia (and internationally), there is a pressing need for empirical research to critically assess the impact of trauma-informed models within employment services and social security systems. This research needs to be dedicated to designing, implementing, and rigorously testing interventions grounded in trauma-informed principles. The objective should be to develop evidence-based practices that can be universally expanded, establishing a solid foundation for trauma-informed care within these sectors.

Future studies may consider how concepts such as 'co-production' could enhance trauma-informed care within these service systems. Research exploring co-production should examine the potential for collaborative processes between service users and providers in designing and delivering services that are not only trauma-informed, but also deeply personalised and responsive to individual needs. This exploration could shed light on innovative practices that empower users, promoting a sense of ownership and active participation in their employment journey. Understanding the dynamics of co-production in the context of trauma-informed care may offer valuable insights into creating more effective, user centred service models.

Practical application: The integration of trauma-informed training for staff is identified as a key insight from the reviewed data. This training should transcend theoretical concepts to also include practical skills crucial for addressing the needs of individuals impacted by trauma, particularly those grappling with long-term unemployment. Additionally, the ongoing enhancement of services via systematic feedback from both users and service providers is vital. Innovating new methodologies to assess the impact of services from a trauma-informed lens and refining practices will ensure that services are support, effective, and truly aligned with trauma-informed principles. Services could evaluate how elements of co-production, co-management and co-governance are currently manifesting within their organisations and explore methods to embed these practices further.

Policy development: Policymakers will be inclined to consider revising mandatory activation policies to better incorporate trauma-informed or co-production principles when evidence is made available to them. Changes might then consider adding more local flexibility, enhancing user choice, and fostering collaborative practices. The goal is to create a system that not only meets the immediate employment needs of trauma-affected individuals, but also contributes to their overall wellbeing and ensures their long-term success in the workforce. By adopting a trauma-informed approach that has been validated by research, policymakers can significantly improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of employment and social security services, making them more inclusive and supportive for all users, particularly those suffering the effects of long-term unemployment.



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