

Teachers' Knowledge Of and Attitudes Towards Autism: An Umbrella Review

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Umbrella review aim

To synthesise findings related to teacher-related factors in the education of autistic school students.

Background

Teachers play a key role in children's school experience, with research identifying that teachers' attitudes and knowledge can impact on educational practice outcomes. Given the challenges and disparity reported by autistic students in educational settings, this umbrella review was conducted to understand teacher-related factors that may contribute to the school experiences of Autistic children.

Method

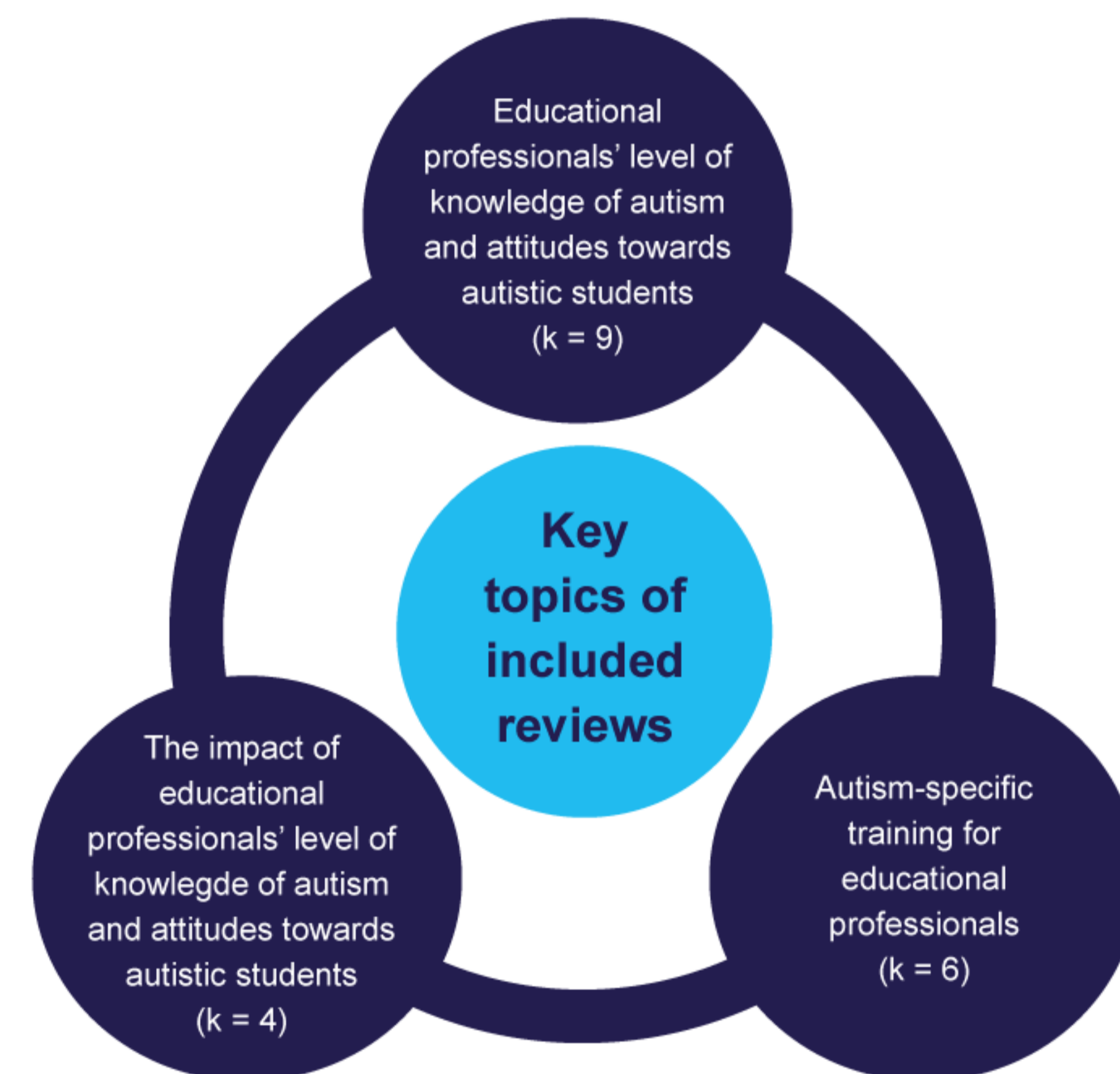
A systematic umbrella review was performed in March 2023 across ten databases. The review followed PRISMA guidelines and JBI methodology for umbrella reviews. It was preregistered on PROSPERO (CRD42023404635). Eligibility criteria included: a systematic review, published in a peer-review journal, reports on autistic students (self-report or by proxy), and discusses *teacher-related factors* within a primary or secondary educational setting.

Teacher-related factors included teacher training and education, attitudes, adjustments and pedagogical strategies, but excluded "interventions" that targeted social and behaviour "modifications", including ABA.

Results

From an original 2,534 studies, 12 reviews met inclusion criteria. These reported on 285 primary studies and included 20,236 teachers.

All reviews were rated as high quality using the JBI Critical Appraisal Tool for Systematic Reviews.



Key findings across reviews

+ Most teachers, regardless of demographics and experience, have a **positive attitude** towards teaching autistic students.

🎓 Initial teacher education programs are **"inadequate"** for preparing teachers to support autistic students.

📚 Teachers identify a **lack of autism training** and a desire to access **more autism-specific training** to support autistic students.

??? Many teachers find it hard to tell the difference between **autism-specific** and **general needs** of students with disabilities.

♀ Teachers have even more limited knowledge of **how autism presents in female students**.

🔗 Students and parents have **stronger trusting relationships** with teachers who understand the needs of autistic students.

🚫 Autistic students and parents report **poor knowledge of autism has led to teachers not providing accommodations**, misinterpreting autistic behaviour and impacting student well-being and learning.

Teachers with autism training, have higher autism knowledge, are more accepting of diversity, and report more self-efficacy for supporting autistic students.

Research gaps and future priorities

- 1 Identifying the knowledge and attitudes of teachers, non-teaching staff, and teachers outside of metropolitan areas using measures co-developed with autistic students;
- 2 Measuring the impact of teacher knowledge on attendance, academic performance, sensory considerations, teaching approaches, and student experiences; and
- 3 Co-development, delivery and evaluation of autism training for all school staff and teaching students, not just teachers.

Conclusion

While teachers may have a positive attitude towards teaching autistic students, multiple stakeholders (including teachers, autistic students, and their family members) feel that they have a limited knowledge of autism. This can impact teachers' ability to put in place appropriate supports and accommodations to support autistic students in school. These findings highlight the importance of including autism-specific knowledge in teacher training and ongoing professional development.

Community participation

Autistic and autism community members were involved throughout this umbrella review. Autistic and neurodivergent people, and members of the autism community, were on the authorship and review team. They provided input into the search terms, results synthesis and interpretation. Community involvement was not described in detail in any of the 12 included reviews. One review reported on community involvement in included studies.

Acknowledgements

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For more information

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