

Rising Above the Suffering: Assessing How Agricultural Educators with Traumatic Situations Utilize Past Circumstances to Support Students with Adverse Childhood Experiences

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Abstract

Agricultural educators have had a profound impact on their students since the SBAE program's inception. Many of these students have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and utilize their agricultural educator(s) as a role model due to the strong multi-year, teacher-student relationship they are able to form. This relationship is one of the most powerful strategies available to educators to mitigate the negative effects of ACEs that can last into adulthood. While agricultural educators are uniquely positioned to support students with ACEs, they often feel unconfident in their abilities, which can cause additional stress, often leading to professional burnout. This study sought to assess how agricultural educators who have experienced personal childhood trauma support students who might be experiencing ACEs. This study utilized responses from nine agricultural educators from Oklahoma and Louisiana who discussed their personal traumatic experiences and how they approach emotionally supporting students with ACEs. We used an inductive coding process, guided by open and axial coding to form themes and subthemes. Overall, we determined that agricultural educators have a passion for supporting students experiencing these negative situations, and most leverage their personal past traumatic experiences to connect with students. This support is driven by personal experiences, providing opportunities for mentorship, emotional support, and a positive teacher-student relationship. Adversely, this type of support could also cause educators to potentially overshare about past traumatic events, creating negative legal and ethical implications for educators.

Review of Literature

Impact of School-Based Agricultural Education

School-Based Agricultural Education (SBAE) has impacted students since the early 20th century. This program strives to prepare “students for successful careers and a lifetime of informed choices in the global agriculture, food, fiber, and natural resources systems” (National FFA Organization, 2024, para. 1). Currently, agricultural education represents 8,466 SBAE programs and 13,253 agricultural educators nationally (Foster et al., 2021). While SBAE has a widespread impact, agricultural educators can often profoundly influence students experiencing adverse situations, such as childhood trauma, often due to the

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proximity of the teachers and students (Norris et al., 2024). The Center for Disease Control (CDC; 2022) and the World Health Organization (WHO; 2022) described Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) as traumatic events occurring between the ages of 0–17 years old. Individuals facing ACEs can face long-term negative psychological and physical effects (Felitti et al., 1998; Gilbert et al., 2015; Goodman, 2017; Metzler et al., 2017; Monnat & Chandler, 2015; Murphey & Sacks, 2019; Petrucci et al., 2019). The CDC and WHO lead researching the impact of students experiencing these overwhelmingly negative situations including parental separation/divorce; parental neglect; drug use in the home; mental illness/suicide in the home; and/or physical, verbal, or sexual abuse (CDC, 2022; CDC, 2023; Felitti et al., 1998; Murphey & Sacks, 2019). To measure an individual's experiences with ACEs, the CDC (2022) and WHO (2022) developed a survey with 10 yes or no questions about the individual's childhood (see Table 1; Felitti et al., 1998). For every "yes" an individual responded to a question, one point should be added to their overall ACE score for a maximum of 10 points (Felitti et al., 1998).

Table 1*Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Questionnaire*

Question #1	Did a parent or other adult in the household often: Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? Or act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?
Question #2	Did a parent or other adult in the household often: Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? Or ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?
Question #3	Did an adult or person at least five years older than you ever: Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? Or attempt or have sexual intercourse with you?
Question #4	Did you often feel that: No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? Or your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?
Question #5	Did you often feel that: You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? Or your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?
Question #6	Were your parents ever separated or divorced?
Question #7	Were any of your parents or other adult caregivers: Often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at them? Or sometimes or often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? Or ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?
Question #8	Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?
Question #9	Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?
Question #10	Did a household member go to prison?

Note. We adapted Felitti et al.'s (1998) questions for this study.

The long-term effects of ACEs can undermine a child or adolescent's bio-psychosocial development and disrupt their ability to form meaningful relationships (Gilbert et al., 2015; Goodman, 2017; Petruccelli et al., 2019). Negative effects of ACEs can cause mental and physical health issues into adulthood (Felitti et al., 1998; Gilbert et al., 2015; Goodman, 2017; Metzler et al., 2017; Monnat & Chandler, 2015; Murphey & Sacks, 2019; Petruccelli et al., 2019; Reavis et al., 2013). While these long-term effects can be detrimental, ACEs are common, with 63.9% of adults having at least one ACE and 17.3% having four or more ACEs (Swedo et al., 2023). The frequency of ACEs also varies widely in other demographics, such as 19.2% of women having four or more ACEs, compared to 15.2% of men (Swedo et al., 2023). Furthermore, ACEs are more common among some minority populations, such as 32.4% of Native Americans, 31.5% of multiracial individuals, 23.2% of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, and 18.1% of African Americans having four or more ACEs (Swedo et al., 2023). Conversely, varying demographics with lower ACE percentages interestingly include only 8.3% of Asians and 12.2% of individuals with a college degree (Swedo et al., 2023).

Sadly, individuals with four or more ACEs are 10 times more prone to illicit drug abuse, seven times more prone to alcohol abuse, and 12 times more likely to attempt suicide (Reavis et al., 2013). Furthermore, the prevalence of ACEs makes the afflicted individual more prone to risky behavior, such as smoking, violent crime, drug use, dropping out of high school, unemployment, and more than 50 sexual partners in their lifetime (Felitti et al., 1998; Giano et al., 2020; Petruccelli et al., 2019). The prevalence of risky behaviors has also been known to subsequently increase long-term health issues, such as obesity, diabetes, depression, and cardiovascular disease (Metzler et al., 2017; Monnat & Chandler, 2015; Murphey & Sacks, 2019; Petruccelli et al., 2019).

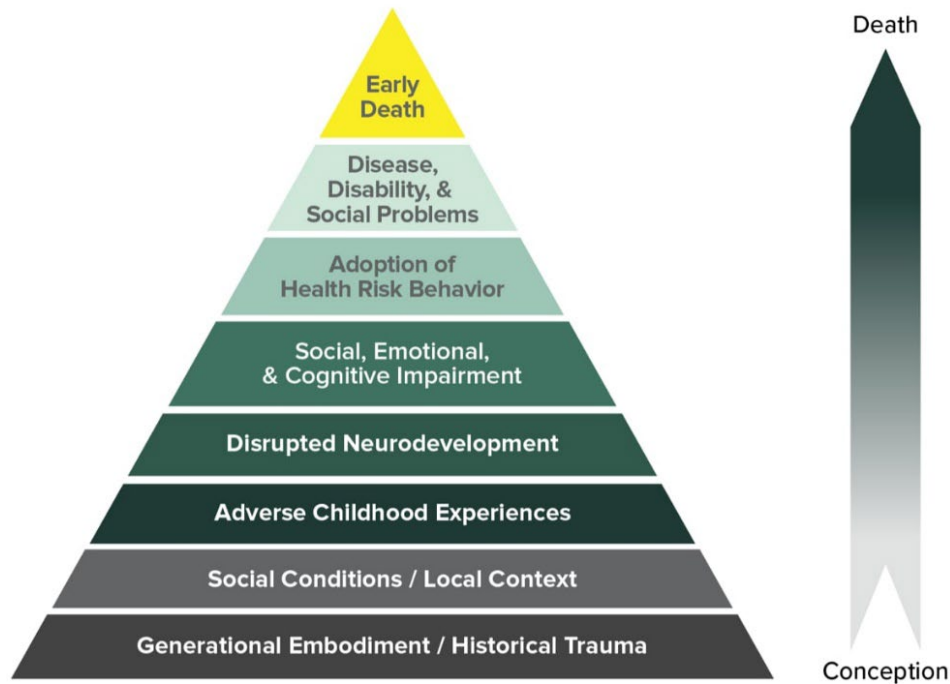
The most effective way for an educator to assist in mitigating the negative effects of ACEs is to support the student and assist them in developing the proper coping mechanisms through trauma-informed strategies (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018; Cavanaugh, 2016; Perry & Daniels, 2016; Pickens & Tschopp, 2017). Agricultural educators are uniquely positioned to emotionally support students through overwhelmingly negative situations because of strong teacher-student relationships (TSRs) formed through agricultural education (Bird et al., 2013; Schmidt et al., 2022; Watson et al., 2015). SBAE is offered to students from 5th to 12th grade (National FFA Organization, 2024), which allows SBAE teachers to form strong multi-year relationships with students (Norris et al., 2024). While agricultural educators may have the opportunity to support these students, many claim they are not confident in their abilities (Norris & Norris-Parish, 2024). Norris and Norris-Parish (2024) further determined that agricultural educators had the least confidence supporting students who had experienced sexual abuse, with 59.8% of educators claiming to have little to no confidence and only 16.4% being very confident or extremely confident. Conversely, 47.6% of agricultural educators claimed to be very or extremely confident in emotionally supporting students experiencing parental separation or divorce (Norris & Norris-Parish, 2024). A lack of confidence emotionally supporting students with ACEs can be stressful for educators (Schmidt et al., 2022). Too much additional, undue stress can also lead to professional burnout, which can be further enhanced by agricultural educators experiencing a significant amount of secondary traumatic stress (STS) from emotionally supporting students with ACEs (Schmidt et al., 2022).

Agricultural educators' unique positioning to be mentors and advisors, provides students with ACEs a positive adult figure who is essential to mitigating the negative effects of ACEs (Norris et al., 2024). Norris and Norris-Parish (2024) also found many agricultural educators have personal experiences with ACEs, with 50.8% having at least one ACE and 10.2% having four or more. In addition to ACEs, many individuals experience horrific and tragic events in adulthood that can also negatively affect mental and physical health (Cao et al., 2018; D'Andrea et al., 2011; Frankham et al., 2020; Kiely et al., 2015; Kristensen et al., 2012; Wiseman et al., 2013; Zineldin, 2019). The loss of a child or spouse (Cao et al., 2018; Kristensen et al., 2012), serious long-term injury from an accident (Wiseman et al., 2013), spousal divorce (Zineldin,

2019), financial stress (Frankham et al., 2020; Kiely et al., 2015), and many other events during adulthood can perpetuate negative mental and physical health issues for the afflicted individual (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence on Health and Well-being throughout Lifespan



Note. Developed by Felitti et al. (1998).

Agricultural educators are at an increased risk of stress-related health concerns (Schmidt et al., 2022) as 10.2% of agricultural educators have experienced four or more ACEs (Norris & Norris-Parish, 2024). Similarly, the combination of STS from emotionally supporting students with ACEs (Schmidt et al., 2022), navigating the negative bio-psycho-social effects of their personal experiences (Gilbert et al., 2015; Goodman, 2017; Petrucci et al., 2019), and handling traumatic events through adulthood (D'Andrea et al., 2011) could also increase health risks to this subset of individuals (see Figure 1).

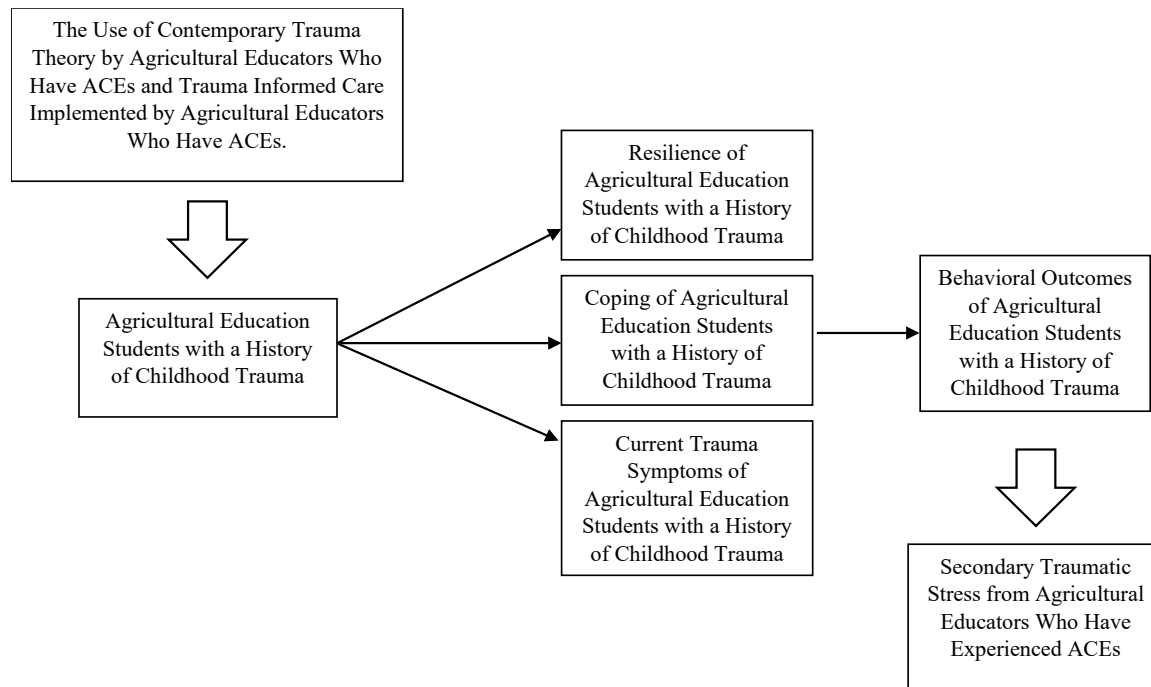
Theoretical Framework

The Contemporary Trauma Theory (CTT; Goodman, 2017; Van Der Kolk, 2014; Williams, 2006) served as the theoretical framework for this study. The CTT depicts how trauma-informed care can assist in mitigating the effects of ACEs and, ultimately, influence the behavior of individuals afflicted with ACEs (Goodman, 2017; Levendosky & Bутtenheim, 2010; Shapiro, 2010). ACEs can cause a “disturbance to bio-psycho-social functioning, healthy development, and brain performance in regions that are related to emotions, behavior, and executive functioning” (Goodman, 2017, p. 187). This interference with bio-psycho-social functioning can lead to negative and risky behavior (Felitti et al., 1998; Murphey & Sacks, 2019; Petrucci et al., 2019). The CTT relies on the resilience, coping mechanics, and current trauma symptoms of the afflicted individual to influence their behavior (Goodman, 2017).

Agricultural educators are uniquely positioned to administer trauma-informed care that can help mitigate the negative effects of ACEs (Norris et al., 2024). The multi-year TSRs that agricultural educators often form with their students allow increased access to these students, which can make them more effective at sharing trauma-informed care through the CTT (Norris et al., 2024). While agricultural educators may be effective at emotionally supporting students with ACEs, it can sometimes cause additional stress when emotionally supporting these students (Norris et al., 2024; Schmidt et al., 2022). Their potential lack of confidence when working through these situations, combined with many agricultural educators also experiencing residual effects from their personal trauma (Norris & Norris-Parish, 2024), can exacerbate their stress levels. Gaining a deeper understanding of how agricultural educators who have personally experienced trauma emotionally support students who may/may not have experienced similar situations can help further influence SBAE’s impact. The effects of agricultural educators’ support on the resilience, coping, and trauma symptoms of students experiencing ACEs shown in Figure 2. Additionally, Figure 2 illustrates how this support ultimately leads to improved behavioral outcomes of students with ACEs but can also lead to secondary traumatic stress in educators (Schmidt et al., 2022).

Figure 2

Effects of Contemporary Trauma Theory Being Used by Educators with Past Trauma



Note. Adapted from Goodman (2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess how personal traumatic experiences of agricultural educators influence their professional lives when supporting students with ACEs. The following research objective guided this study:

1. Describe how former traumatic experiences influence the professional lives of agricultural educators when emotionally supporting students with ACEs.

Methodology

We used a hermeneutic phenomenological case study design to investigate meaning from the participants' experiences with ACEs (Groenewald, 2004; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Engaging a hermeneutic approach to qualitative research allowed us to interpret themes from the personal experiences of the participants and use their stories to derive meaning (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Because lived ACE experiences are unique to everyone, the context of the study allowed themes to emerge with distinct, rich perspectives of educators who have experienced ACEs and who are now possibly mentoring students with ACEs (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Population

The two states selected for the study—Oklahoma and Louisiana—ranked higher than the national average for adults with ACE experiences (CDC, 2022); therefore, we purposively recruited individuals who personally experienced ACEs and who were teaching agricultural education. We used each state's open-access, agricultural education databases to send recruitment emails requesting participation in the study. Nine ($n = 9$) agricultural educators accepted the semi-structured interview invitation, including eight (88.9%) from Oklahoma and one (11.1%) from Louisiana (see Table 2). Seven (78.8%) participants were female, six (66.7%) were White/Caucasian, six (66.7%) taught in a rural school district, and eight (88.9%) held a bachelor's degree as their highest degree earned.

Table 2

Demographics of Participants

Identifier	State	Years of Teaching Experience	Ethnicity	Number of Agriculture Teachers in School	School Description	Highest Degree Earned
F1-Mia	Oklahoma	1	African American	1	Rural	Bachelor's
F2-Kim	Oklahoma	3	American Indian	1	Rural	Bachelor's
F3-Jean	Oklahoma	1	White	1	Rural	Bachelor's
F4-Shay	Louisiana	1	White	3	Urban	Bachelor's
F5-Joan	Oklahoma	11	White	3	Suburban	Master's
F6-Gail	Oklahoma	6	White	1	Rural	Bachelor's
F7-Ema	Oklahoma	3	American Indian	2	Suburban	Bachelor's
M1-Tim	Oklahoma	6	White	1	Rural	Bachelor's
M2-Ron	Oklahoma	17	White	1	Rural	Bachelor's

Note. To provide anonymity, we assigned each participant a numeric code and a pseudonym identifier (Allen & Wiles, 2016).

We first provided participants with a demographic questionnaire to describe the number of ACE experiences they personally encountered based on Felitti et al.'s (1998) 10 ACE questions. One participant (11.1%) marked two ACE experiences lived, which was the lowest number reported, and five (55.6%) participants experienced four or more (see Table 3).

Table 3*Number of ACEs Experienced by the Participating Agricultural Educators*

	# of ACE Experiences	# of Agricultural Educators	% of Agricultural Educators
0		0	0.0
1		0	0.0
2		1	11.1
3		3	33.3
4		4	44.5
5		1	11.1

Note. Participants selected which ACE(s) they personally experienced based on Felitti et al.'s (1998) 10 Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

Next, participants recorded which ACEs they personally experienced (see Table 4; Felitti et al., 1998). Participants ($f = 6$; 66.7%) most experienced Question #1, "Did a parent or other adult in the household often: Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? Or act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?" and Question #8, "Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?" Next, participants ($f = 5$; 55.6%) most experienced Question #6, "Were your parents ever separated or divorced?" No participants (0%) had experience with Question #5, "Did you often feel that: You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you?"

Table 4*Personal ACE Experiences of Participating Agricultural Educators*

Question	Yes (f)	%	No (f)	%
Question #1	6	66.7	3	33.3
Question #2	3	33.3	6	66.7
Question #3	1	11.1	8	88.9
Question #4	3	33.3	6	66.7
Question #5	0	0.0	9	100.0
Question #6	5	55.6	4	44.4
Question #7	1	11.1	8	88.9
Question #8	6	66.7	3	33.3
Question #9	5	55.6	4	44.4
Question #10	1	11.1	8	88.9

Note. Participants answered yes or no to each of Felitti et al.'s (1998) 10 Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) questions.

Data Collection

Two members of the research team conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) with participants from Oklahoma and Louisiana (see Table 5). Participants completed a demographic survey, including questions acknowledging which ACEs they personally experienced (Felitti et al., 1998), and then completed one-hour, semi-structured interviews via Zoom using a naturalistic approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Table 5*Semi-Structured Interview Questions*

ACE Area	Semi-Structured Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal Abuse • Physical Abuse • Sexual Abuse • Parental Mental Illness • Parental Absence Due to Incarceration • Parental Neglect • Parental Drug/Alcohol Abuse • Lack of Emotional Support at Home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever taught student(s) who has/have experienced _____? • If so, did you notice if these students were drawn toward agricultural education? • Did the student(s) ever confide in you about their situation? Why or why not? • What strategies have you found successful in supporting these students?

Note. We modified our semi-structured interview protocol from Felitti et al.'s (1998) framework. Due to the highly sensitive nature of each question, we asked follow-up questions when needed.

Data Analysis

Guided by a hermeneutic approach (Sloan & Bowe, 2014), we inductively analyzed the data (Bryman, 2016). We manually used open and axial coding to identify subthemes and themes following a constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965). To allow for an interpretive approach to the findings, we used explicit exemplary statements from participants to frame each theme (Bryman, 2016). We used Otter.ai (2023) to transcribe the interviews, and then we forwarded the final transcripts to each participant to conduct member checking (Birt et al., 2016). We triangulated data from the transcriptions, field notes, and entries from a reflexive journal (Nowell et al., 2017) to enhance trustworthiness and confirmability of the findings. One limitation in this study is the generalizability of the findings beyond the case study's participants (Bryman, 2016), as well as the smaller sample size. However, because qualitative studies using a hermeneutic approach seek to find meaning in relatively isolated situations (Sloan & Bowe, 2014), we determined that the findings had merit as we still met saturation (Bryman, 2016).

Findings

We sought to assess how the personal traumatic experiences of agricultural educators influence their professional lives when supporting students with ACEs. We used one research objective to frame this study.

RO 1: Describe how former traumatic experiences influence the professional lives of agricultural educators when emotionally supporting students with ACEs.

The primary theme that emerged was "agricultural education played a vital role influencing their lives growing up with ACEs." Three subthemes supported this theme.

Agricultural Educators Serve as Role Models who Create a Safe and Supportive Environment

The agricultural educators who participated in the semi-structured interviews in this study personally experienced between two and five ACEs that ranged from physical abuse, parental neglect, a parent in the house experiencing domestic violence, a household member being incarcerated, sexual abuse, parental divorce, etc. (see Tables 3 and 4). As personal victims of ACEs, several participants reported that agricultural education played a major role as a positive influence in their lives as adolescents (F1, F2, F3, F4, F6, F7, M1). For example, Kim (F2) stated:

My own personal experience with agricultural education rings true for [coping with ACEs]. As a high schooler in agricultural education [courses], there were some things that I was dealing with at home, and I found that all I wanted to do [was be in Ag Ed classes]. I just wanted to be in Ag class because of the relationships I had with my teachers and with the other students.

Kim (F2) further described that the impact of agricultural education provided students who had experienced or who were currently experiencing ACEs with access to positive role models in their lives. Similarly, after describing her traumatic experiences as a child, Jean (F3) stated, “I think teachers step in a lot. I know my [agriculture] teacher did. And I think that a student whose parent ...does not set a good example ... need a good example of an adult to watch.” Shay (F4), a second-year educator, also stated:

I have been through a lot of trauma in my life, and I connect really well with my students who have, too. Even though this is only my second year of teaching, I've already had five or six students come to me with problems at home or with other kids or whatnot. So, I really do think that the teacher relationship does draw the students in.

Mia (F1), a first-year educator, described her shock that she was able to emotionally support students with ACEs. Mia (F1) stated, “No, it's just so crazy to be in the position of answering these questions because I was that kid [needing support] ... so it's just like crazy to me that now that I am in those shoes.” Mia (F1) continued to describe the difficulty of supporting students with ACEs by stating, “I don't know how my teacher ever did this. But it's a lot. It's so hard ... I get very invested in my students, and so it breaks me in half whenever I just hear or see things like [students experiencing ACEs].”

Some agricultural educators who have experienced trauma in the past stated that they have encountered issues where situations in the classroom also affected their students' lives (F2, F6, F7, M1). Ema (F7) stated:

I have a student in my first class of the day. A freshman female student that reminds me exactly of me, just by the way she acts, and talks, and asks questions. And, I feel that we have those parents that were more overbearing ... I forgot to input a grade for her to where it dropped her from a 106 to a 102. And she asked me, she said, ‘[Name Redacted], I have a question about this.’ And, I could see the tears starting to well up, and she said, ‘I don't understand what went wrong here,’ and I said, ‘I have it right here. Everything should be fine.’ And she said, ‘Okay, because I've already been in trouble for this today. I don't want to be in trouble for this later.’

When further explaining the emotional toll that impacted her as a teacher supporting this student facing an ACE situation, Ema (F7) elaborated:

I hate that for her. It's a tough situation, especially because I don't want anyone to feel like that... she's a genius kid. I mean, she's so smart. She's great at everything she does. She is the most polite child I have met. The fact that a 102 isn't good enough ... [pause].

Many times, educators built strong connections with students through the agricultural content (F1, F7, M2). Mia (F1) explained that many students with ACEs have expressed that agriculture has become a “new outlet for them.” Ron (M2) even stated, “Usually, [students with ACEs] are drawn to a certain area of [agricultural mechanics] ... metal fabrication is kind of like therapy for them.”

Some agricultural educators also moved their careers to teaching to be proactive about supporting students facing ACEs prior to them escalating to self-harm or sickness (F1, F7, M2). When describing the struggles she experienced as a former medical professional who moved to teaching to support youth as a constant role model, Ema (F7) stated:

I had to get out of [being a medical professional] because I couldn't handle it anymore. I couldn't handle seeing things ... and suicide notes ... and everything like that. And, it was always kids. It was always kids who felt that they weren't adequate enough for parents, not peers, not other things like that. It was parents and family members were why the situation arrived. That's why I got into teaching because I wanted to try to be that person to fix it before it escalated to that type of point.

Agricultural Educators with Past Trauma Utilize Prior Experiences to Support Their Students Experiencing Similar Situations

Many educators felt that their past experiences helped them support students experiencing ACEs (F4, F5). For example, Shay (F4) described how she uses her personal experiences to help students cope with ACEs:

I use [personal experiences] all the time. Like, I won't tell them all the details. And, I always make sure that I filter out what I do say, but yeah, I'll share little snippets of how stuff made me feel. And, I'll ask them how did this make you feel? Well, it made me feel like this. How are you feeling? Let's talk about some similarities. Let's talk about how we get over that. Let's talk about it. That's kind of how I do it.

Shay (F4) continued to describe how sharing her personal experiences with students can sometimes help them carry the burden of what they are experiencing:

Not only does it typically help them bear the burden of what they're trying to go through, but it also connects us on another level to where we now have that really good student-teacher relationship to where that student trusts me. And, they typically end up taking another one of my classes, or they'll sign up for another agriculture class.

Similarly, when describing how she connects with students who face ACEs, Joan (F5) stated, “While I haven't had a parent die, my [sexual abuse] experience happened in college. And so, that is one that I understand more than maybe some of the other things because I didn't [experience] some of those other things.” Shay (F4) also described some situations where she does not share her past traumatic experiences as direct examples, but sometimes, she said she uses them to inform her reaction to the situation. For example, Shay (F4) stated:

As someone who has experienced [sexual abuse] myself, it's hard to go into a work field where it's only men. Because yes, it was only one man who did something to you, but that still ruins your perspective on every single man. Because that's just the way society is now. It is just the way we've learned, and the way students are learning to grow up. And so they are not comfortable being in a profession surrounded by mainly men because of what has happened. Just because it happened that once, that fear is now instilled in them.

Some agricultural educators also noted reassurance as a fundamental component of supporting students facing ACEs (F4, F5). In many situations, educators stated that discussing similar situations and reassuring a positive outlook helped them further connect with students. Shay (F4) elaborated:

As for helping them cope, it's easier to help someone when you've been through the same thing. I just kind of talk about my experiences, they share theirs. We talked about similarities and differences, how it made them feel, how I got over my issue, and how it could possibly help them get over their issue.

Agricultural Educators with Past Trauma Have an Intense Passion for Supporting Students with ACEs

Agricultural educators who had past traumatic experiences had a particular passion for supporting students experiencing ACEs (F4, F5, F7). For example, to describe her perspective on the role that teacher relationships play in helping students cope, Ema (F7) stated:

I had great parents, but they were just overbearing parents. My agricultural teacher knew that I could confide in that situation if there was something that just became too much. It was easy to call him and talk through it with him to find a better solution. Maybe just vent about it ... I could confide about it, and I try to do that with my kids.

In some situations, educators mentioned they used their past experiences as motivators for why they choose the profession (F4, F5). For instance, Shay (F4) stated:

My biggest thing is supporting the students because I know what it's like to not have that support at home from an adult. So, I just try to support them. I don't try to push agricultural education onto them. Mine is more of 'Okay. How can we help you get through the day? What do we need to help you?', and then as soon as they get better, I send them on their way.

Similarly, Joan (F5), after mentioning her sexual assault in college, explained how she supports students experiencing similar situations:

[I try to] let them talk about it. Letting them know that it was not their fault, and that they are not defined by it. Making sure you validate those feelings. It's like a ripple, it does come in waves. And, [by] letting them know that they are going to be able to get beyond this.

Finally, Joan (F5) further described her passion for students by stating:

I just want to find [the students experiencing ACEs]. They just need a lot of support ... just after they confide in you and have talked, and just telling them that it wasn't their fault. That's actually really the biggest thing. The shame and the 'I must have done something.' Helping them [students] unpack that [is key].

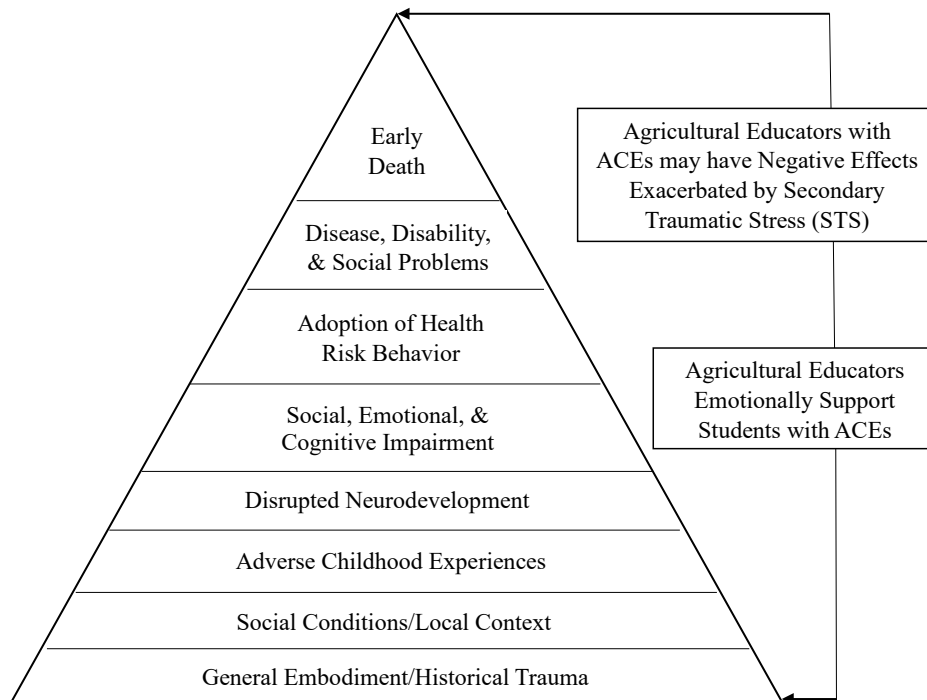
Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications

Agricultural education has had a significant impact on individuals who have faced ACEs (Norris et al., 2024). In this study, nine ($f=9$) agricultural educators elaborated on their personal experiences as an adolescent with each experiencing a minimum of two ACEs. In many instances, these experiences and their relationship with their secondary agricultural teacher inspired their decision to be involved with agricultural education as students, and later, as teachers. Three themes emerged as teachers described their personal stories with ACEs. First, for the study's participants, agricultural education played a key role influencing their lives growing up with ACEs, which is congruent to Norris et al.'s (2024) and Schmidt et al.'s (2022) findings. Educators elaborated how agricultural education courses gave them a space to belong, and in some places, be a distraction to the trauma they faced at home.

Second, agricultural educators with past trauma used prior experiences to support students experiencing similar situations. It is not uncommon for educators to draw on previous experiences to support students in need (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018; Cavanaugh, 2016; Perry & Daniels, 2016; Pickens & Tschopp, 2017); however, due to the highly sensitive nature of most ACE scenarios, the implications can be two-fold. First, agricultural educators can build even stronger relationships and connections with students who might be facing something similar because if a student trusts their teacher enough to share their personal situations, they might feel like they are not alone or living unseen (Bird et al., 2013; Schmidt et al., 2022; Watson et al., 2015). However, in some situations, it might also place unnecessary STS on the educators, especially if the situation is too similar to something they have experienced (Schmidt et al., 2022). If the educator has not fully coped or processed their own trauma, they might start to carry the additional burden from the student, which could be detrimental to the health and wellbeing of the teacher if it is not handled appropriately (Cao et al., 2018; D’Andrea et al., 2011; Frankham et al., 2020; Kiely et al., 2015; Kristensen et al., 2012; Wiseman et al., 2013; Zineldin, 2019). Agricultural educators who have experienced numerous ACEs are exposed to the negative health risks associated with trauma including obesity, cardiac disease, addiction, diabetes, etc. (Metzler et al., 2017; Monnat & Chandler, 2015; Murphey & Sacks, 2019; Petruccioli et al., 2019). These trauma-related repercussions combined with secondary traumatic stress and compassion fatigue (Schmidt et al., 2022) could compound these health risks (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Interaction Between the Negative Effects of ACEs and STS Experienced by Educators



Note. We modified this model using Felitti et al.’s (1998) framework.

Third, agricultural educators with past trauma have an keen passion for supporting students with ACEs. Agricultural educators’ top reason for remaining in the profession is their enthusiasm for student success (Solomonson et al., 2018). In some cases, this passion is the reason many teachers chose this profession. In many scenarios, these educators felt called or led to teach because they wanted to provide a

safe space for students that they may not have had as students growing up. This finding is consistent with Solomonson et al. (2022) who determined that an educator's attitude toward students and a passion for their success was one of the top factors leading teachers to retain their career as an educator. This passion for students furthers the calling that drives many teachers to teach, but again, could lead to a higher risk of STS due to the immense pressure placed on establishing safe connections and relationships with students.

Finally, just as the Contemporary Trauma Theory (Goodman, 2017; Van Der Kolk, 2014; Williams, 2006) outlines, trauma-informed care can assist in mitigating the effects of ACEs, and ultimately, influence the behavior of individuals afflicted with ACEs (Goodman, 2017; Levendosky & Bутtenheim, 2010; Shapiro, 2010). By relying on resilience, coping mechanics, and current trauma symptoms of the afflicted individual to influence their behavior (Goodman, 2017), individuals who have experienced trauma can recover mentally and physically. However, just as Norris et al. (2024) suggested, teachers cannot, and should not, replace professional counselors. In fact, one negative element of TSRs could be teachers who think they can, and need to, carry the emotional burden(s) of their students. This could lead to burnout and exacerbate the teacher attrition issue plaguing SBAE (Schmidt et al., 2022).

Recommendations for Future Practice and Research

The findings of this study suggest that agricultural educators with personal trauma use those experiences to build strong TSRs and support students with ACEs. This strategy could pose some legal and/or ethical concerns if the conversations become unprofessional or inappropriate. We recommend providing professional development to educators led by trained mental health professionals on how to navigate these concerns and support students with ACEs appropriately. While SBAE teachers are uniquely positioned to support students with ACEs, it is critical for educators to prioritize their own mental health and wellbeing, especially in situations where trauma-related repercussions combined with secondary traumatic stress and compassion fatigue (Schmidt et al., 2022) could compound health risks. Based on this compounding health risk concern, we recommend implementing intervention programs before the added personal pressure and STS contribute to teacher burnout (Schmidt et al., 2022). Additionally, we recommend that administrators surround school districts with access to emotional support groups and resources to empower educators to not carry the emotional burdens of their students alone, as well as having resources and processes in place to encourage individuals to seek professional help when needed. Furthermore, we recommend building collaborative communities for teachers and future teachers to leverage and remind them of their passion. If educators' innate passion for students can be leveraged, it could reduce stress, burnout, and attrition, and in turn, help positively contribute to the future of agricultural education.

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