

# ***Real Cases Project:*** **Human Behavior in the Social Environment**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **A. Overview of this Course within the Social Work Curriculum**

This course sequence, Human Behavior and the Social Environment (HBSE) aims to use the context of the child welfare system to help students develop an appreciation for the important aspects of the human condition. The course emphasizes the family as the basic unit of development and reciprocal influences between people and their environment. These influences are discussed within the context of social factors, societal, institutional, familial and biophysical forces. The interactions between family, individuals and environment form the foundation to the ecological approach to human development. Workers in the child welfare system must take all of this into consideration as they provide service to clients.

The course is focused on issues that deal with the development of the self in an ecological context, with specific attention to the study of the individual and family in the child welfare system. Emphasis is placed on the family as the basic unit of development and reciprocal influences between people and their environment. This applies to all HBSE curricula which may or may not be linked to the child welfare system. In those instances where this is linked to the child welfare system the focus is placed on life experiences and lifestyles of persons in vulnerable populations and at risk for crises, conflicts and dysfunction. Consideration is given to the capacity of persons to use organizational and community resources to improve their own and the community's life in response to mezzo and macro system forces.

## **B. Relevance of this Case Study to this Course**

A case study will be used to highlight relevant themes that have particular meaning to the study of human behavior. The case will enrich and expand the study of didactic course material. This will help the student to make connections between the child welfare system and the study of human behavior. The ANNA M. CASE is of particular relevance because of the focus on the safety of the children and caretakers. The vulnerability of the family is related to clarity of the balance between the risks and resources of the family and the environment.

## **C. Specific Learning Objectives Related to Using this Case in this Course**

At the conclusion of the course, students will demonstrate:

- Knowledge of the human condition in an ecological context.
- Knowledge of the impact of domestic violence on the developmental functioning of the person, both children and adults.
- Knowledge of the ecological view of person-in-environment through the study of the family, respective individuals, biological and psychological factors, as well as other socio-cultural factors in human growth and development.
- Understanding the development of the family and the individual across the life cycle.
- Developing an understanding of high risk situations with the ability to identify, report, assess and intervene in situations of domestic violence, child abuse and neglect.
- An understanding of the micro, mezzo and macro systems as they relate to human growth and development, with a particular focus on case issues.

## **D. Overview of this Teaching Guide**

1. One specific case example will be used to integrate all didactic HBSE material within the context of service delivery in the Child Welfare System.
2. The course is structured such that the case example is used as the window into the understanding of issues involved in services of the Child Welfare System, identification and evaluation of risks in micro, mezzo and macro systems that necessitate child welfare intervention.

Teaching methods include didactic lectures, small group exercises and written assignments.

Evaluation of students' mastery of the material will include:

1. Student writing a Weekly Reflective Journal, entries will be responded to by the professor weekly. This helps the student to process the material that is being taught and provides for the professor an indication of how well the

material is understood and the opportunity to provide supportive material in weak areas. At the end of the semester the students will review their journal and analyze the development of their knowledge base, their practice skills and professional self.

2. **Small Group Exercises and Role Play:** Student participation and evidence of their capacity to articulate didactic information from readings and application of same to the case situation.
3. **Written Work:** Possibly 2 short papers and one in depth Final Paper. Short papers are (a) History of Child Welfare in USA, NYC including identification of basic services to children and families. The second paper might be (b) "Circumstances that Suggest the Need for Child Welfare Involvement" or "The Role of Social Work in Child Welfare" or "Principles Upon Which Child Welfare Practice is Developed".

**Final Paper:** Students would have to research major themes such as domestic violence, complexity of decision to preserve the family or remove the child, provision of family centered practice interventions in child welfare, evaluating level of risk for children, involuntary service, agency collaboration or evaluation of parental dysfunction in domestic violence situations and the impact on developing children. Then the student would have to explore and analyze the theme as it relates to the specific case situation and develop a treatment intervention plan.

## TEACHING STRATEGIES

### A. Strategy One: Case Study Integration

#### 1. **Area/issue of the case study to be highlighted:**

This strategy focuses on understanding the various systems of the ecological perspective and development of the individual and the family.

#### 2. **Timing within the semester:**

The individual case will be used throughout the whole course. Case will be presented to the class at the beginning of the course with the instruction that this case represents an example of how we can understand human development and the relevance to child welfare work.

#### 3. **Teaching methods:**

- a. Initial lecture on micro, mezzo and macro systems; appropriately identifying and placing the family, extended family, community, school, legal system, child welfare system, community resources, policies, culture and values in each of the respective major systems.

b. Lecture on family development and stages of family development.

c. Individual self in the context of family and environment: students will be given assigned readings and class will discuss normative development using different theoretical perspectives. (See Appendix A.) Faculty will then facilitate a discussion of each individual in the family and their developmental stage at the time of the child welfare involvement. Included in this discussion would be definition and identification of risk factors.

The class will be divided into 2 small groups to discuss the stage of family development in the ANNA M. CASE. One group will focus on the normative developmental risks in the family, i.e. marital relationship, developmental demands of each child, individual pressures on each parent, cultural values and beliefs. The other group will focus on the normative necessary resources needed to meet the demands of a developing family, ie., capacity of each adult to parents the children, opportunity for each adult to meet own needs in terms of interests and occupation, capacity of each adult to participate in a healthy give-and-take relationship, capacity of each adult to recognize and respond to the developmental needs and safety of each child. Class as a whole will then discuss the ANNA M. CASE in terms of the balance of risks and resources and how this informed the resultant behaviors.

d. Nature of individual self and development: Class will be given assigned readings prior to class session. Class will be divided into 4 small groups; each group will choose a family member in the ANNA M. CASE for whom the group will act as advocate. Each group will present to the rest of the class a history of the case in relation to the specific issues of domestic violence, normative development, child safety, level of child welfare involvement needed, services recommended and needs of the individual. This requires a deep understanding of the person, issues and child welfare.

e. Assessment of self and family in relation to all systems: students will have prior assigned readings before this session. Session will emphasize the structure and process of child welfare involvement. Faculty will facilitate a discussion of the level of assessment needed at each point of contact.

A student will function as narrator describing the child welfare agency and responsibilities, as well as activity and action in the case. Each point of contact and assessment will be presented by student dyads and groups in the form of role play. After each role play, the narrator and faculty will summarize strengths and weaknesses, risk factors in the system, possible impact on normative development and functioning, needs of each

individual and family as informed by the assessment and identify questions and issues that require further assessment.

**4. Materials:**

Materials needed are the copies of the case examples.

**5. Supporting readings:**

See attachments of appendix and references.

**6. Evaluation plan:**

Students will develop an ability to apply the didactic material to case situation, develop role plays and evaluate the experience in writing and a narrative reflective process.

**B. Strategy Two: Domestic Violence and Assessment**

**1. Areas/issues of the case to be highlighted:**

Major issue to be highlighted is domestic violence and evaluation in the child welfare system.

**2. Timing within the semester:**

This strategy might occur in the second half of the semester.

**3. Teaching methods/activities:**

Teaching method will include lecture, discussion and role play.

a. Lecture on assessment in the child welfare system, domestic violence as reaction to developmental stress and poor coping skills, domestic violence as a traumatic experience and the possible impact on development and functioning for all individuals involved.

b. Role play of a mock Family Court Hearing in which each parent presents the case to the judge, the Child Welfare Worker presents the assessment of the situation and a final decision is made about the safety and welfare of the children with recommendations for services for the family.

**3. Materials needed:**

Materials needed are case example and reading materials.

**4. Supported readings:**

Same as Strategy One.

**5. Evaluation plan:**

Same as Strategy One

## CONCLUSION

### A. Recap

Faculty will re-introduce the first lecture with a focus on systems, the family as a basic unit of development and the need for staff in the child welfare system to have such knowledge to assess risk situations and provide needed services. The themes of individual and family development, risk and risk assessment and domestic violence will be discussed by the class.

Class will discuss application of ecological perspective to the ANNA M. CASE. In addition, class will identify needed services and ways to implement use of same for this family.

Finally class will conclude with a brief narrative reflective exercise identifying thoughts and feelings about the involvement of the child welfare system involvement in the case and how such involvement might enhance or impede future family development and resolution of problems.

### B. Suggestions for Future Courses

1. These cases could be used to teach about the impact of traumatic experience on subsequent functioning.
2. These cases could also be used to teach about the role, structure and process of child welfare work.
3. These are excellent cases to use to teach supervision in child welfare. The visualization of the clarity and purpose of the agency, understanding of the human condition and the skill of fitting all into the practice of social work are the foundation pieces of supervision in child welfare work.

## **APPENDIX TO THE TEACHING GUIDE FOR HUMAN BEHAVIOR IN THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT**

### **Appendix A: Course Themes**

#### **A. FAMILY DEVELOPMENT ACROSS THE LIFE CYCLE**

1. Definition of the family
2. Ecology of the family
3. Family as a social system
4. Family as the basic unit of development

#### **B. STAGES OF FAMILY DEVELOPMENT**

(Include different roles, goals, crises and conflicts)

1. Joining of individuals in marriage or committed partnership
2. Creating a home together
3. Couple with young children
4. Family with school age children
5. Family with pre-adolescents
6. Family with adolescents
7. Family with unattached young adults
8. Family in later life
9. Family and old age

#### **C. INDIVIDUAL SELF IN THE CONTEXT OF FAMILY, ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY**

1. Eriksonian Psychosocial Theory
2. Piagetian Stage Theory
3. Separation and attachment Theory
4. Socialization Process of Development
5. Risk Factors in Human Development

#### **D. NATURE OF INDIVIDUAL SELF AND DEVELOPMENT**

1. Biological base
2. Gender issues
3. Traumatic events (domestic violence)
4. Culture/ diversity and value development
5. Impact of risk factors

## E. SELF IN RELATION TO ALL SYSTEMS

1. Micro system
2. Mezzo system
3. Macro system
4. Person-in-environment perspective
5. Resilience, choice and will
6. Development of Pathology

## F. CHILD WELFARE

1. Historical evolution of child welfare
2. Supporting children from neglect and abuse
3. Involuntary service
4. Family preservation
5. Ethics and advocacy: special issues



## Appendix B: Reference List

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