SESSION 1: Introduction to High Risk Youth

- Who are high risk youth?
- What do we know about high risk youth?
- The rights of children and youth.

Lesson Plan:
1. Welcome and personal introductions (name, where you are from, program concentration [macro, mezzo, clinical], why take this course, and a place you would like to visit and why)
2. Review syllabus and assignments
3. Lecture on Intro to High Risk Youth
   a. Defining youth. Attention needs to be paid to the precise parameters of youth such that it is clear we are not talking about children below the age of 13 or young adults about the age of 24. Developmental considerations that make this 13 to 24 age group unique will be explored.
   b. High risk youth. Lay out the seven categories of social disadvantage that Barker and Fontes (1996) present as defining that which puts youth at risk. Include several other factors that are also sometimes discussed in scholarly literature.
      i. Engage students:
         1. Are there categories of disadvantage that are missing from this list?
         2. Are there categories of disadvantage that you would debate?
         3. Is there a different way to define high risk youth?
         4. How do you feel about talking about high risk youth? Is there any resistance within?
   c. Risk for what?
      i. In this class we will be focusing on youth violence, but high risk youth are also at risk for a number of negative health outcomes. Present these and ask students if they are a comprehensive list or if there other behaviors that are missing.
   d. Magnitude.
      i. Briefly discuss how many youth we are talking about and the basic demographics of these youth. The point here is to demonstrate that this is a significant and sizable group, but also many youth are not involved in youth violence.
4. Small Group Exercise:

1 Arrows have been inserted into document to highlight the different activities included in the syllabus. Note that activities that are repeated multiple times throughout the semester – such as lectures or videos – are not all highlighted with arrows. All required activities are highlighted at least once. Several other noteworthy activities are also highlighted.
a. Students will be placed in their randomly assigned learning communities -- the same as those that will be used in the online discussion board -- such that there should be 4 to 6 groups of five students. Each group will randomly be given the text to three of the 18 most relevant Rights of the Child as established by UNICEF. Students will be instructed to examine these rights, select the one that they feel is most relevant to our discussion of high risk youth, and articulate the ways in which this right is important to high risk youth. Groups will be asked to share their conclusions with the entire learning community.

5. Exit question (chew on this will you read and prepare for next week): How are the Rights of the Child -- particularly the ones discussed in class today -- relevant to youth violence?

6. Reminder: Discussion board begins next week and the web fieldtrip is due. Both will be discussed in class so be prepared.

7. Web Field Trip Prompt:
   a. Visit the Center for Disease Control and Prevention website and find three statistics that are relevant to your interest in youth violence and youth violence prevention. Be prepared to share these in class, to explain why you selected them, and what they mean for social work.

Required Readings:


SESSION 2: Youth Violence
   • Defining violence
   • The context of violence
   • The magnitude of youth violence

Web Fieldtrip:


Lesson Plan:

1. I-Clicker Survey. Considering that the topic of violence is so evocative and often very much shrouded in mystery and mythology in contemporary American culture, it is a worthwhile exercise to examine how students feel about violence and to explore the emotional charge that it so often carries.
The exercise will be for all of us -- including the instructor -- to take a survey that explores our emotions and thoughts and experiences surrounding violence.

a. Having taken the survey together, we will review the survey descriptives and discuss briefly in small groups and subsequently in the entire class what came up for us in the exercise.

b. This activity can make certain people feel vulnerable and it is important that the instructor be explicit in setting ground rules and be artful in the craft of facilitating a safe space for discussion.

2. Discussion groups.
   a. Break into discussion groups so that students can talk about what came up for them in the process of taking part in the discussion board.
      i. What stood out as particularly interesting?
      ii. Were there points of contention?
      iii. Were there questions that came up?
      iv. What was missing that needs further exploration?
   b. Students will be encouraged to bring the content of the discussion group into the lecture/PowerPoint/discussion that follows.

3. Brief lecture / PowerPoint on the definition at magnitude of violence.
   a. Use the Aisenberg article as a foundation to discuss the many definitions and manifestations of violence. Draw from technical and experiential definitions of violence. Emphasize the breadth and scope of violence that ranges from bullying to assault to violent repression and state violence.
      i. Invite students to share what came up -- in the discussion groups -- on the topics of defining violence and putting violence in context.
   b. Discuss the broad strokes of violence worldwide and in the United States.
      i. Invite students to share what they discovered as part of their web field trips. What were the violence statistics that stood out to them as particularly interesting, troubling, or relevant to social work.

4. Concluding question: What are the roles that social workers can play in the context of youth violence?

Required Readings:


**Additional Reading:**


**SESSION 3:** Public Health Frameworks and Youth Violence

- Youth violence is a public health issue
- Risk and Protective Factors
- How can a public health approach shape policies and programs?

**Lesson Plan:**

1. **Lecture/PowerPoint on Public Health Framework**
   a. Present a basic outline in terms of public health as a lens for viewing traditional medical and health issues. Transition to discussing social epidemiology and looking at the ways that social forces impact social health.
   b. Discuss the notion of risk and protective factors generally and touch on the broad strokes -- the domains of risk and protection -- of the risk factors for violence. Note that sufficient time will be given to each of these as the semester unfolds.
   c. Discuss cumulative risk and its importance in terms of youth violence. Use the graph's put together for the San Salvador sample to show the power of cumulative risk as measured empirically.
   d. Discuss resiliency and underline the fact that exposure to risk is not deterministic of violent behavior.
e. Talk briefly about the standard methods of public health interventions, both generally and for violence.
   i. Show clip of the “street cred” campaign that the Boston Public Health Commission is currently working on:
      1. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nU1JskraqnQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nU1JskraqnQ)

2. Public Health and Practicum Placements. At this point the discussion of public health has been rather abstract. In order to give the students an opportunity to actively engage the ideas in a context that is relevant to them, the students are asked to apply the concepts to the populations they work with and their practicum placements.
   a. Divide the students into groups of four or five -- as is possible -- according to the populations they work with in their practicum placements (i.e. youth and additions, domestic violence, individuals living with chronic mental illness, etc.)
   b. Discuss in small groups what the public health approach and its various concepts have to offer to your population.
      i. What does this perspective allow you to do that is helpful?
      ii. What is captured by its framework and what is missed?
      iii. Are there critiques of this framework for your particular population?
      iv. Try to envision what a public health framework might offer in terms of interventions.
   c. Report back to the class what was discussed by your group.

3. Closing question: What does the public health framework offer that an individualized or criminal framework does not?

Required Readings:


Additional Reading:


**SESSION 4: Institutional Risk Factors: Race, Ethnicity and Social Class**

- Race, ethnicity, and social class as risk factors
- The potential pitfalls of race and risk

1. **Lecture/Powerpoint on Racial/Ethnic Differences.**
   a. Begin with an analysis of the different theories that seeks to account for racial and ethnic differences in terms of youth violence. These theories are important because -- as, regretfully, is often the case -- conventional wisdom as to the origins of these disparities is often tinged with the not-so-subtle hints of racism and classism.
      i. Bio criminal perspective
      ii. Subcultural violence perspective
      iii. Structural perspective
      iv. Neighborhood/social process perspective (i.e. Sampson)
      v. Social developmental perspective (i.e. Catalano and Hawkins)
   b. Discuss briefly the challenges of immigration, acculturation and adaptation, and a culture of stress in the context of youth violence (Boutakidis et al.)
   c. Note that, despite all theories, most youth who are exposed to risk in the United States do not take part in violent behavior (Guerra and Williams). Again, risk exposure is not deterministic.

2. **View Video (30 min)**
   a. Let students know that this film includes some rather intense imagery that includes homicide victims, violence, and intense language. Any student who feels uncomfortable with such footage is welcome to take a break for the next 30 minutes.
   b. This first segment of the film, *Crips and Bloods: Made in America* tells the story of how systematic racism interacted with a new generation of African-American youth in Los Angeles leading up to and following black liberation and nationalism movements. It sets the scene for the emergence of the Crips and Bloods in the 1970s and 80s.
   c. **One minute paper:** What most stood out to you in this first 30 minute segment of *Crips and Bloods: Made in America*?
i. Discuss this question.

ii. Additional discussion questions might include:

1. How did the filmmakers draw connections between institutional racism and urban unrest?
2. In the context of our discussion on theory, what theories were you able to identify as at work in this film?
3. What did you think of African-American “clubs” in the context of systematic exclusion from organizations like the Cub Scouts?
4. Typically what took place in Watts is described as a riot. People in the film described in different ways, that is, in terms of political expression. What are you think?
5. The destruction of Black Nationalist organizations such as the Black Panthers had an impact in the African-American community. Are there ways today that political expression is stifled as well for marginalized groups?
6. What do you think about Langston Hughes’ question? Does it explode?

3. Concluding question: What you think of the relationship between political expression (or the opportunities to take part in a society as an active member) and youth violence? How much weight does this theory holds for you?

Required Readings:


Additional Reading:


SESSION 5: Community Risk Factors
- The impact of neighborhood crime, violence, and disorganization
- Collective Efficacy as a conceptual lens
- Exposure to community violence

1. Follow up from film:
   a. Last week's film was very intense and we discussed a number of very emotion laden concepts and realities. I just wanted to take an opportunity to open the space if there was anything that came up over the week as we thought about the film.

2. Discussion Groups:
   a. Go into discussion groups, talk about what was discussed, what was debated, and what questions remain.
   b. As a group, present to the class the three main points from the article that you read, bringing any critical perspectives to surface, and talk about the implications for social work.
   c. As each group does this, the instructor will interject to make sure that all important points are discussed.
      i. Students should be very clear on social disorganization theory, collective efficacy, and the impact of exposure to community violence.
         1. Slides will be prepared and the discussion group conversation will conclude with a succinct summary of each of these.

3. Experiential Learning Activity:
   a. At this point, all students will have taken part in an experiential learning activity. This discussion will essentially be an opportunity to
share what was written in the paper with other students in the conversation format.

b. Questions:
   i. How did the meetings go?
   ii. What were your assessments of the people you met with?
   iii. What were any strengths that you saw in the organizations and individuals you met with?
   iv. How about weaknesses?
   v. Any ethical dilemmas?
   vi. Most importantly, what did you learn -- from beginning to end -- by taking part in this activity? What would this learning mean for you as a social worker?
   vii. Has this experience changed how you view this course?

Required Readings:


Additional Reading:


SESSION 6: Individual Level Risk Factors
- Dispositional Risk Factors
- Behavioral Risk Factors
- Biological Risk Factors

1. Lecture/PowerrPoint on Individual Risk
a. Dispositional risk factors. These risk factors include low empathy, high impulsivity, low self-esteem, depression, exposure to trauma and negative life events, and delinquent beliefs.
   i. These are controversial and are not always found to be significant in empirical research studies. While the basics of these must be presented, there needs to be room to explore these as a class. As such, the presentation will be as informative as it will be discussion based.

b. Behavioral risk factors. These include alcohol and drug use, aggressive behavior during early development, and fighting. Emphasis should be placed on the fact that not everyone who does these things will take part in subsequent violent behavior. Again and again, we are talking about risk factors not deterministic factors.

c. Biological risk factors. Perhaps the most robust biological risk factor is gender: young men are much more likely than young women to take part in violent behavior. That said, as one journal article noted women are not all sugar and spice either.
   i. There is an emerging field of researching brain chemistry and development as it relates to high-risk behavior. While I did not require a reading on this topic, I will touch on some of the research of Michael Vaughn from St. Louis University and others. This again is controversial stuff, but it is fascinating and should at least be mentioned. Particularly, articles like:


2. Discussion:
   a. How can we balance social, community, and individual risk factors? Can we value all three? Is there a trump card?

3. Demographic Exercise: Students will be broken up into groups of 4-5 and given the following prompt (it should look familiar as it is basically a copy of part 1 of their final policy assignment – the point here is to practice feeling comfortable doing this kind of research):
   a. “Put together a briefing that presents the relevant demographic characteristics of the following city (instructor will assign Boston, Worcester, Detroit, Baltimore, Phoenix, and Chicago). As best you can, paint a quantitative picture as to the reality of youth violence, crime, and delinquency. Be as succinct as possible and maintain an awareness that quantitative descriptions are very important yet can be quite dull if not presented clearly and creatively. Use graphs or tables where appropriate. You have 45 minutes and will be graded on your effort.”

   b. Each group will have 5-7 minutes to report back
   c. A debriefing of the exercise will follow.
      i. What did you learn?
      ii. Anything that you’ll do differently for the official assignment?
4. **Survey Monkey**

   a. Conclude by asking students to participate in an anonymous Survey Monkey exercise in which they review how the course has been going over these first six weeks. Students will be asked to list three things that have been going well (what's working) and three things that they would perhaps like to see changed (what's not working so well). Several other measures will be used to examine how students are feeling and what can be adjusted to improve the overall class experience and learning. Students will be informed that will discuss this during the first part of next week's session.

**Required Readings:**


**Additional Reading:**


SESSION 7: Family and School Level Risk Factors

- Family and Domestic Risk Factors
- School-related risk factors

1. Survey monkey discussion:
   a. Thank the students for their participation and feedback. Discuss themes that arose as an attempt to create a safe space for discussing what can be improved and what is going well.

2. Discussion board:
   a. Break into discussion groups to identify key themes that emerged in the reading and to generate at least three questions that could be posed to the guest speaker during the second half of the class.

3. Guest speaker:
   a. Christian Mitchell, the reentry district manager for DYS in Boston, supervises a caseload of high level offenders of violent crimes in the Boston area. Christian will be asked to talk about risk factors for youth violence and gang participation, particularly those relating to family and domestic violence in school related risk factors.
   i. Christian will be informed that we have studied several of the risk domains and that students have taken part in an experiential learning exercise and have put together a list of questions for today's presentation.

Required Readings:


SESSION 8: Peer Risk Factors & Youth Gangs

- How do we define a youth gang?
- Youth gang members
• Gang membership and violence
• Gangs as international phenomena

1. Lecture/Powerpoint: Youth Gangs
   a. Touch on the debate regarding the definition of youth gangs, putting forth the Klein and Maxson Euro gang definition as the best current definition.
   b. Talk about the standard "profile" of youth gang members in the United States. This will include a discussion of the average age of youth gang members, age of entry, racial / ethnic identity, length of time spent in gangs, and a collection of risk factors that have been identified for gang membership (notably these overlap with the risk factors for youth violence)
   c. Talk about the relationship between gang membership and violence. In most gangs, violence takes place less than one would assume but nevertheless plays a central unifying role in the gang identity.
   d. In the 21st century, we really cannot talk about gangs as a domestic phenomenon alone. Discuss gangs along the Americas and the relationship between major US cities and major Latino gangs.
      i. Be sure to discuss Rocha article.
   e. Let students know that they should look for elements of the lecture as manifest in the film.

2. Watch the film (30 min): Crips and Bloods, Part 2
   a. Talk about the film in the context of the lecture. This segment of the film talks about gangs in Los Angeles, their multigenerational character, and frames the battles between the Bloods and Crips as guerrilla warfare. This is a very intense segment of film.
      i. What most struck you about this segment?
      ii. Were there elements of the lecture that you were able to see play out in the film?
      iii. 25% of black men will go to prison. What does this say about our society? What does this mean for high risk youth and social work?
      iv. One person in the film defines oppression as being complete when you have taught people to destroy themselves. How do you feel about the statement? What does it say about youth violence?

3. Concluding thoughts:
   a. This is the conclusion of examining risk factors and the manifestations of youth violence in society. From here on out we will switch gears and begin examining the prevention of youth violence. Over the next week, ask yourself how you feel about the prevention of violence:
      i. What should this look like?
      ii. Is it possible?
      iii. On what level or levels should we intervene? See you next week!
Required Readings:


Additional Reading:


SESSION 9: Programs, Policies, and Primary Risk

- What do we mean by primary risk? A review.
- Neighborhood Level Interventions
- Interpersonal Approaches
- The strengths and limitations of primary risk interventions

1. Brief Lecture/Powerpoint
a. Succinctly present what we mean by primary risk and discuss the basics of primary risk interventions. Here we are talking about youth that are placed at risk because of factors such as poverty and community disorganization -- we are not talking about youth who are actively taking part in secondary risk factors (such as alcohol or drug use, dropping out of school, etc.). These are kids were born into environments of uncertainty and concentrated disadvantage.

b. Sampson and collective efficacy are very important to be discussed in this lecture. Primary interventions are deeply rooted in collective efficacy and neighborhood organization. There is no bigger scholar than Sampson on this issue.

c. While we will not break up into discussion groups this time (probably time to shake things up…), students will be encouraged and prompted throughout the lecture to jump in and talk about the different strategies for primary risk interventions that they read about/examined in their discussion groups.

2. Ethnic / racial prevention activity:

a. Students were encouraged to choose to read about violence prevention in the ethnic/racial group of their choice. Groups of five or six will be randomly created. Hopefully, there will be some diversity in terms of what was read in each group. If needed, adjustments can be made so that the different chapters are represented in each group.

b. Students will be asked to discuss:

i. How did you feel about looking at prevention and different racial/ethnic groups?

ii. Was there any resistance within you to this activity?

iii. What are the benefits and drawbacks of conceptualizing youth violence prevention in this way?

iv. Compare the differences and unique points that you identified in your chapter.

1. What is your critical assessment of these unique interventions?

c. Finish the class with an entire class discussion on what most stood out and what was most relevant to social work practice.

3. Heads up for the next few weeks:

a. Students will be advised to read the chapter on school, family, and community interventions with especial care as a group activity will be based on this chapter the following week.

b. Students will also be informed about a 45 minute debate on the topic of suppression-based approaches versus non-suppression approaches that will take place during session 12. Each group will have 10 minutes to present their perspectives, each group will be given five minutes to offer a rebuttal to the opposing group, and then 10 to 15 minutes will be spent processing the debate itself. At this point, students will be broken into two groups -- those advocating for suppression and those in opposition to suppression -- and will be
advised that they should begin reading and preparing as a group. Particular readings that will be of relevance to this topic will be highlighted at this time as well additional online resources. Students should be prepared for an informed, graduate-level debate. A brief description of debate decorum will be provided as well. The debate will require groups to meet outside of the classroom to prepare.

Required Readings:


Read chapter on prevention with 1 or more ethnic/racial groups:


Each group reviews one segment:


- Parent and family (pp. 35-72) **
- Home visiting (pp. 73-109) **
- Social cognitive (pp. 109-149) **
- Mentoring strategy (pp. 149-192) **

SESSION 10: Programs, Policies, and Secondary Risk Interventions

- School-based interventions
- Interventions with high-risk youth
1. Lecture/PowerPoint on school, family, and community interventions.
   a. First define secondary risk.
   b. This lecture will draw heavily from the Jensen et al. (2010) which does a fantastic job of succinctly outlining effective approaches in these settings. The lecture will identify what is unique about each approach while also emphasizing the commonalities between the three particular approaches.
      i. Prevention insights and strategies will also be drawn from the other articles and students will be encouraged to actively participate in the lecture/conversation.

2. Case/problem-based learning:
   a. Students will be broken into groups of 5-7 and given a prompt describing a situation of youth violence in a school, family, or community setting. Particular details relating to race, culture, and other factors studied thus far in the class will be included in the prompt. These scenarios will not describe the situation of a particular youth, but rather a problem as manifest in a larger group or community. The groups will be given 45 minutes to put together as best they can a violence prevention plan in their assigned context. Students will be encouraged to draw from what they have learned so far in the course, the lecture material from this session, and any other sources of information they see fit. Given the size of the groups, students will be encouraged to consider breaking into smaller subgroups and distributing the tasks accordingly. At the end of the 45 minutes, the groups will give a 5 to 10 minute presentation describing the model they put together.

Required Readings:


Additional Reading:


Salas-Wright, Lesson Plan, p.17

SESSION 11: Tertiary Risk Interventions
- Intervention Programs for Violent Youth
- Resiliency in Youth

1. Intervention Case Example: ROCA in Chelsea, MA
   a. Examine the organization's theory of change, high risk youth intervention model, foundational theory, as well as programs and particular interventions

2. Discussion Groups:
   a. Discuss the articles that the groups have examined throughout the week. Examine how the group’s assigned article illuminates -- or fails to illuminate -- the example of ROCA.
   b. Also, in preparation for the guest speaker, brainstorm several questions that might incorporate the reading assigned for this week, the topics discussed throughout the semester, or any curiosities that may have emerged during the PowerPoint discussion/case example.

3. Guest speaker:
   a. Eugene Schneeberg is the director of operations of Straight Ahead Ministries (SAM) in the cities of Boston and Lynn. Eugene works closely with high-risk and gang involved youth on a daily basis and is without any doubt a field expert in terms of high risk youth intervention. Eugene is a graduate of Boston University and has been involved in local politics. Eugene always brings with him one or two of the youth from SAM who can share their experiences as participants. Eugene has been of great help in my research and is a very impressive speaker.

Required readings:


Additional Reading:


**SESSION 12: Programs and Policies for Gang Intervention**

- Prevention, suppression, and intervention
- The dangers of suppression-only approaches
- Multifaceted Gang Interventions

1. **Debate**
   a. The debate section will last approximately 45 minutes. As was noted above, each group will have 10 minutes to present their perspectives, five minutes to offer a rebuttal, and then the class will spend roughly 10 to 15 minutes discussing the topic more generally. During this time, any particularly salient points that have been overlooked will be discussed as well.

2. **Movie: part three of Crips and Bloods**
   a. This final 30 minute section of the film touches on the prison system (framing the prison as a contemporary "cotton field" for black men in America), the experiences of mothers and families, and highlights several gang and violence prevention programs currently active in Los Angeles.
   b. Discussion questions:
      i. We just concluded a debate on suppression and intervention approaches, what did viewing this film bring up in terms of that conversation?
      ii. One individual in the film compared the prison industrial complex to slavery or the cotton field for African-Americans in antebellum America. What is the truth in that statement?
      iii. As is often the case in academic environments, we have sometimes spoken of youth violence in very abstract and technical terms. Did this film changed the way you felt about anything we discussed in class? What about the faces of the mothers?
      iv. Gang and youth violence intervention programs were discussed. Is there room for social work in this environment?

**Required readings:**


Additional Reading:


SESSION 13: The Future of Youth Violence Prevention and Intervention
- Culture, intersectionality, and interrelatedness of forms of violence
- Resilience and Protective Factors
- Unanswered Questions

1. Presentations:
   a. One option for the final assignment was to give a 15 to 20 minute group or individual presentation on youth violence prevention with a particular community. Presumably half of the class will be given to these presentations. Students will present, be given feedback by their peers and the instructor, and be asked relevant questions.

2. Final Discussion (sitting in circle, images of youth on projector):
   a. The study of youth violence clearly involves a technical component: an understanding of the nature of violence, the magnitude of violence, risk and protective factors for violence, and different approaches to preventing violence in different settings and with different populations. While this element is undoubtedly important, we as social workers are also challenged to explore our own biases, feelings, experiences, and privileges as they relate to our clients and our
vocational domains. Work with youth involved in violent behavior and youth violence prevention is no exception to this. As we saw in our first discussion of our own feelings about violence during the second week of class, violence is a very charged issue and one that stirs up many emotions in most of us. In this final discussion, you will be asked to take 5 to 10 minutes to write down your thoughts in terms of three categories which we will subsequently discuss in group:

i. Have your feelings about youth violence changed over the course of the semester? If so, in what way? If not, are you able to explain why this might be the case?

ii. If you had only one minute to explain the most essential elements of what you have learned about youth violence and youth violence prevention to a non-social worker, what would you say?

iii. Most of us will not work directly with youth violence prevention organizations, but almost all of us will work with populations that are impacted by violence. How do you hope to integrate what you have learned about youth violence and youth violence prevention into your social work practice, be it clinical or macro.

Required Reading:


