SW 862

INTRAFAMILIAL SEXUAL ABUSE

I. COURSE RATIONALE

Although estimates vary, we know that a significant proportion of women and a lesser proportion of men experience some form of sexual misuse during their lifetimes. One form in which sexual misuse is expressed is that which occurs within the survivor’s family of origin, and estimates range as high as 25% of women who have had that kind of experience. Although men are also misused in families the occurrence is far less than for women, yet equally hurtful.

Given what we know about the demographics of sexual misuse, it will be virtually impossible for a social worker in clinical practice not to encounter this particularly hurtful and confusing experience, whether recognized or not. Yet, a very small proportion of social workers have appropriate academic and clinical training in this area.

This course will focus on sexual misuse which occurs within the family system. Contemporary social service programs vary greatly in terms of addressing this problem. In some instances, the helping process appears more traumatic than the original problems within the family. In other instances families are helped to regain a level of functioning that maintains the family unit without sexual misuse occurring. Theoretical, assessment and helping aspects of intrafamilial sexual abuse will be examined.

II. EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

The goal of this summer course is to assist the student in obtaining a comprehensive understanding of sexual misuse which occurs within the family system and development of some skills in the assessment and helping demands when working with abusive families. Although experience with sexual abuse may vary amongst students, the objective of learning from each other will be emphasized. Further, the issues in sexual misuse will be grounded in an understanding of human sexuality, family systems and the strengths perspective.

By the end of the students’ course of study in this class:

1. Students will have learned a comprehensive conceptual model of human sexuality which will serve as a context for understanding and helping in sexual abuse experiences. (2, 4)

2. Students will demonstrate a clear understanding of the two major perspectives which frame sexual misuse, that being the individual pathology perspective vs. the family systems perspective. (1, 5)
3. Students will have learned the characteristics of misuse within family systems and the use of this material for understanding misuse dynamics. (1, 5)

4. Students will critically analyze and demonstrate skill associated with the impact of vulnerable and marginalized persons who are more frequently sexually abused. (3, 5)

5. Students will develop conceptual models useful in assessment and plans for intervention, with particular attention to use of self in process. (2, 6)

III. CURRICULUM THEMES

The School has a commitment to educational approaches that directly and explicitly enhance the connection of theory and concepts to the needs of clients and the demands of everyday practice. This commitment is enriched by the following themes.

A. The School’s themes are:

1. Strengths Perspective – A perspective that recognizes and mobilizes the inherent strengths of individuals, families, neighborhoods, organizations and communities to discover and develop their own and communal resources and assets in their struggle for a better quality of life. This will be reflected in this class by attention to defining sexuality from a healthy perspective rather than a disease perspective, and by framing sexuality within family systems from a normal expectation set. Further, the consequences of viewing sexual abuse within families from an individual pathology vs. family system perspective will be examined and implications for assessment and intervention will be noted.

2. Critical Perspective – The capacity to engage in a deliberate and continuing examination of the assumptions underlying theories, methods and approaches used by social work in understanding and responding to human need. This will be reflected in the class by the development of conceptual and theoretical modes for assessment and treatment planning. Contrasting, and every contradictory, models will be examined for their differential conceptual leverage in understanding the abuse dynamic and suggested strategies for helping.

3. Social Justice – A commitment to greater equality based on a complex understanding of the effects of economic, political and social structures on people’s life chances, particularly as it relates to economic inequality and the availability of necessary social resources. This will be reflected in the class with continued attention to how wide-ranging expressions of vulnerability heighten the possibility for sexual misuse. Both micro and macro implications for prevention and protection will be identified.
4. Diversity – Understanding, valuing and engaging the broad range of differences and commonalities based on culture, ethnicity, race, geography, gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, and physical and mental abilities, particularly when those differences are the cause for discrimination. This will be reflected in the class by attention to how cross-cultural perspectives can yield very different views of the sexual misuse experience and how departures from societal norms can increase vulnerability and influence how helping resources are used on behalf of those who hurt.

IV. THE LIBERAL ARTS PERSPECTIVE

The purpose of a liberal education is the liberation of the human spirit and action, the intellect and energy. In like manner, we could suggest that the original purpose of social work was to liberate. We have been at times, committed to one extent or another to assist in the long and difficult process of helping those who are oppressed by others, by the political economy, and by the fear, loathing, and ignorance of individuals and institutions.

In all of our efforts, in the spirit of liberal arts education, we are committed to understanding the universal elements of the human conditions as well as the unique aspects of each individual, group, family and community’s experience. An understanding of the history of social work, its intellectual and moral roots is part of our commitment, as well as is bringing to bear the most current and generative knowledge in the biological, psychological, and social sciences on the nature of social work practice.

Finally, the liberal arts perspective commits us to understanding the importance of values and moral purpose in the development, accumulation, and employment of knowledge. What we seek is bodies of knowledge which allow us to understand the forces which restrain and restrict human energy, and which allow us to come to grips with moral and social problems which demean or debase the human condition and human possibility.

V. Professional Purposes and Values

This course challenges students to think critically about the use of interaction of ideas and values embedded in the literature on sexual abuse as they allow us to achieve social work’s purpose of enhancing interactions between people and their environments. This course examines how social work values and ethics guide our practice from assessment through evaluation of outcomes and considers the tensions inherent in operationalizing core values as they relate to work with vulnerable groups.

VI. PREPARATION FOR PRACTICE WITH DIVERSE POPULATIONS

We know that sexual misuse is an “equal opportunity” human hurt, crossing all ethnic, cultural, religious, class, sexual orientation, and disability groups, yet all of these diversities have unique issues of understanding, perspective, and openness to healing. Recognizing that variables
such as family instability, mental or physical disabilities, access to resources, power, privilege will all influence how the sexual misuse drama can be played out within family systems. Highlighting these variables through the process of the class will be strongly encouraged.

VII. **REQUIRED TOPICS (CONTENT THEME)**

- Conceptual Model of Human Sexuality
- Normal Family Sexual Life
- Individual Pathology vs. Family Systems Perspectives
- Types of Family Sexual Abuse
- Characteristics of Sexual Abuse Families
- Systems Perspectives on Abuse
- Traumagenic Dynamic Model
- Units of Work in the Treatment Process
- Adult Survivors

VIII. **REQUIRED TEXT:**


**OTHER READINGS:**


**IX. RECOMMENDED ASSIGNMENTS**

The primary requirement is attendance at all of the class sessions, since that is the context in which both content and process issues will be addressed. This is particularly the case since the class meets for three two-day sessions. It is impossible to make up missed classes. Missing a class (one day) will result in lowering the grade one below that for which the student contracted.

**Contract Options:**

C—Attendance at all class sessions.  
2-3 page Reaction Paper.

B—Attendance at all class sessions.  
4-6 page Integration Paper.

A—Attendance at all class sessions.  
10-12 page Major paper.

**Some Details:**

**Reaction Paper:** Select one of the readings from the bibliography or another which focuses on sexual abuse. This could include other books, journal articles, workshops, movies, etc. Your reaction paper should include: 1) Some description of a general or specific point being made by the author, 2) your personal reaction or opinion about the point being made by the author, and 3) the relevance to social work practice with sexual abuse.

**Integration Paper:**

Select an aspect of the conceptual model of human sexuality (or a sub-topic) and illustrate how it is relevant to an issue faced by families or survivors of sexual abuse. Examples might include how body image impacts upon adult survivor’s sexual relationships or how secret keeping within sexual abuse families might impact upon trust/betrayal issues in intimate relationships.
Major Paper:

Select some aspect of family sexual abuse that is of particular interest to you for further study. The paper should reflect a balanced attention to: 1) Description of the literature reviewed, 2) implications for social work practice, and 3) personal or professional implications. A minimum of four references must be used in the development of the literature review. A bibliography has been supplied for your guidance, but you may seek out any materials that will be useful in your focus of study.

X. SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

If any member of the class feels that he or she has a disability, please advise the instructor of such disability and desired accommodation as soon as you have written documentation. The instructor will work with you and the Services for Students with Disabilities Office to provide reasonable accommodations to ensure that you have a fair opportunity to perform in the class.

XI. INSTRUCTOR AVAILABILITY

OFFICE PHONE:
HOME PHONE

Try both, since I will not be keeping regular office hours at the University during the summer.

XII. INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY

In the event of inclement weather students should call the University (864-SNOW) to determine if classes are called off. If the University is operating, I am expected to hold class; however, accommodation will be made for students who are unable to attend. Students should contact the instructor if weather or driving conditions make it impossible for them to get to class.