WHEN THE NIGHTMARE IS REAL: TRAUMA IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE (CAMS-UA 104)

**Instructors:**

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**Course Description:**

Every childhood is fraught with complications, but some children are exposed to traumatic experiences that have a lasting impact on their development and health. Many children in New York City are still reeling from the effects of September 11th, yet these numbers pale in comparison to the more than three million reported cases of child abuse and neglect in the United States annually, in addition to the many more cases that go unreported. This course examines the neurobiological and psychological effects of trauma on children, adolescents, and their families. We investigate the impact of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse and neglect, war, terrorism, natural disasters, bereavement, and medical illness. In addition, we explore the concepts of vulnerability and resilience to discover why most affected children successfully traverse their trauma. Finally, we discuss the treatment modalities commonly employed with traumatized children, adolescents, and their families.

**Required Books for Response Papers:**

- Trauma and Recovery, Judith Herman *(1st response paper is based on this book)*
- The Boy Who Was Raised As a Dog: And Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist’s Notebook: What Traumatized Children Can Teach Us About Loss, Love and Healing, Bruce Perry *(2nd response paper is based on this book)*

**Books for Book Clubs: Choose 1 from each pair**

- *Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt **OR** *A Random Family* by Adrian Nicole LeBlanc
- *Bastard Out of Carolina* by Dorothy Allison **OR** *The Road of Lost Innocence* by Somaly Mam **OR** *Push* by Sapphire
- *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer **OR** *Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* by Ishmael Beah
- *The Fault in our Stars* by John Green **OR** *Poster Child* by Emily Rapp

**Assignments:**

1st Response Paper (Herman Book)  
2nd Response Paper (Perry Book)

**Exams:**

Midterm Exam:  
Final Exam:

**Grading:**

Attendance and Participation: **50 pts total (10%)**  
Article Summaries (x2) & Resilience Example (x1): **50 pts total (10%)**  
Response Papers (x2): **50 pts each**; 100 pts total **(10% each; 20% total)**  
Midterm: **100 pts** over lectures 1-4 **(20%)**  
Final Exam: **100 pts** over lectures 6-end **(20%)**  
Final Project: **100 pts (20%)**
Part I: Foundational Issues

Class 1: Introduction to Trauma in the Life of a Child and Adolescent – BROWN

There are approximately three million reported cases per year of child abuse and neglect in the U.S., the majority of which go unreported. In addition, many children are exposed to other types of trauma that have a profound influence on their lives. We will introduce the subject of trauma in the life of the child and adolescent and discuss the complicated epidemiology of abuse. The course goals, objectives, and requirements will be reviewed.

Required Readings


Class 2 : A Child’s World – BROWN

Research and clinical experience have shown that a child’s environment has a significant impact on development. We will review the various aspects of a typical child’s environment, including socioeconomic status, relationship with and attachment to caregivers, school setting and peer relationships. As a part of this exploration, we will review theories of attachment and parenting styles. Simultaneously, this week will set the stage for how trauma may interrupt, alter, or affect this environment and the ultimate journey to adulthood.

Required Readings


Class 3 : Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Other Mental Health Issues Related to Trauma – BROWN

This week we will provide an overview of the diagnosis, etiology, and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder from a biopsychosocial perspective. This discussion will provide the framework for a basic understanding of the psychiatric disorders that are associated with trauma in children. This framework will be built upon throughout the course as the different types of trauma are more closely examined and understood.
FIRST RESPONSE PAPER DUE TODAY

Required Readings


Bessel A van der Kolk. Developmental Trauma Disorder: Towards a rational diagnosis for children with complex trauma histories. Psychiatric Annals; May 2005; 35, 5; Psychology Module pg. 401

Class 4: The Effect of Trauma Related Stress on the Developing Brain: Nature vs. Nurture – MATHEWSON

Recent genetic and neuroimaging advances have allowed us to learn more about the effects of trauma and stress on the brain. This week we will look at the evidence related to the influence of the child’s environment on the developing brain. We will provide explanations of how both nurturing and traumatic environments impact the brain in childhood and adolescence. The ways in which trauma and stress influence a child’s genetic makeup, hormonal systems, and brain structures will also be reviewed.

LAST DAY to turn in 1st Article Summary (15pts)

Required Readings


CLASS 5: MIDTERM!!!

Make sure to be on time and prepared for your midterm exam! It is 20% of your final grade.

Part II: The Different Faces of Trauma

There are many types of traumatic events that children and adolescents experience in their lives. These range from physical and sexual abuse, to natural disasters, terrorist attacks, bereavement, medical illness, and community violence. This section of the course will review these various types of traumas. Through course work and clinical examples, we will highlight the social, educational, medical, emotional, behavioral, and psychological ramifications of trauma. We will also review various treatment strategies and models.
**Class 6: Maltreatment: Complexity & Psychosocial Consequences on the Child**

The definition of child maltreatment is a source of continuous challenge and disagreement. Is an unborn child being abused if its pregnant mother smokes crack? Is any type of corporal punishment physical abuse? This week we will explore the cultural, historical, and psychological complexities surrounding the definition of child abuse and neglect. We will examine the common problems associated with maltreatment, such as aggression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder and mood disorders. We will also provide an introduction to the Administration of Children Services (ACS) and foster care in New York City. Approximately 300,000 children in the United States enter the foster care system each year. On average, each child spends three years in the foster care system before either returning home or being adopted. Parental substance abuse is the most common risk factor for children to enter the system. In addition, many of these abusive parents were abused or neglected children themselves. We will explore the repercussions of intergenerational violence, parental substance abuse and domestic violence on the lives of children and adolescents. The current challenges faced by the foster care system and the effects of the child’s removal from the home will also be examined.

**Required Readings**

**BOOK CLUB DAY: Be ready to discuss Angela’s Ashes OR A Random Family**


**Class 7: The Sexual Abuse of Children and Adolescents – MATHEWSON**

Sexual abuse of children and adolescents is a widespread problem. Some researchers have found that at least 30% of women and 15% of men surveyed report being sexually assaulted by the age of 18. Sexual abuse can take many forms, from inappropriate fondling to child and adolescent prostitution. We will review the various forms of sexual abuse, its risk factors, consequences, and treatment. We will also discuss the ways in which sexual abuse has been understood throughout history and across cultures.

**Required Readings**
Final Project AGENCY/VOLUNTEER Information DUE on NYUClasses

BOOK CLUB DAY: Be ready to discuss Bastard Out of Carolina OR The Road of Lost Innocence OR Push


Documentary Very Young Girls
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycgaPw38fkc&list=PLk0WRfJocve32SXLIPrehXCFsIlREfMkj

CLASS 8 : War, Terrorism, and Community Violence – MATHEWSON

We will look at the experience of children living in areas where acts of violence or natural disasters have a profound impact on youth and on their environment. We will discuss children and adolescents who have grown up with chronic exposure to violence (e.g., boy soldiers, child refugees, and ethnic minority youth living in areas marked by crime). Furthermore, we will examine the impact of terrorism and disasters on children and adolescents. We will focus on the mental health consequences of the Oklahoma City bombing, school shootings, the World Trade Center Attacks of 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina.

Required Readings

BOOK CLUB DAY: Be ready to discuss Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close OR Memoirs of a Boy Soldier


Class 9: The Trauma of Living through a Life-Threatening or Chronic Medical Illness – MATHEWSON

Though chronic and life-threatening childhood illness is relatively rare, it always has significant effects on a child’s development. We will examine the trauma that these children face. We will also discuss the impact of receiving a diagnosis, undergoing medical procedures, and receiving treatment. Finally, the missed opportunities for normative childhood experiences and their bearing on children will be reviewed.

Required Readings

BOOK CLUB DAY: Be ready to discuss The Fault in Our Stars OR Poster Child


Part III: Hope for a Better Future: Understanding Resilience and the Treatment of Children and Families who have Endured Trauma

Vulnerability and resilience are immensely important in our understanding of trauma. Why some children are devastated and others virtually unscathed is an area of much debate, yet uncovering the mysteries of vulnerability and resilience are absolutely necessary if we are to design effective primary prevention and treatment programs. The course will conclude with a review of effective treatments and future areas of study.

Class 10: Resilience in the Wake of Trauma – BROWN

Some children continue to develop relatively normally in the face of trauma, while others suffer from the chronic repercussions of their experience. Researchers have tried to determine the possible factors that are protective for normal development versus the risk factors for psychosocial disability in the wake of a traumatic event. In 2003, a groundbreaking study by Caspi and colleagues showed that the resilience demonstrated by some subjects who had been exposed to severe maltreatment as children could be partly explained by a particular gene. We will examine the concept of resilience and the biological and environmental modifiers of risk and resilience in children exposed to trauma. We will also bring trauma to life by examining real life examples of people who have undergone extreme trauma but have been able to survive and turn their experience into something positive. We will discuss individuals who have translated their traumatic experiences into various forms of art, music, film, and literature.

SECOND RESPONSE PAPER DUE
Class 11: Therapeutic Interventions for Survivors of Trauma – BROWN

We will summarize our understanding of the diagnosis and treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. Our focus will be on individual, family, group, and social therapies and interventions. We will continue with our discussion of the treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. This week we will focus on the neurobiological effects of treatment, both psychosocial and medication, along with a thorough discussion of the pharmacological strategies for the treatment of trauma.

Required Readings

LAST DAY to turn in 2nd Article Summary (15pts) & Resilience Example (20pts)


Kelly CM, Jorm AF, Kitchener BA. Development of mental health first aid guidelines on how a member of the public can support a person affected by a traumatic event: a Delphi study. BMC Psychiatry. 2010 Jun 21;10:49.


Class 12: Projects & ALL Presentations DUE

Class 13: Finish Presentations
Class 14: Review for Final and finish presentations

FINAL EXAM!!!

Make sure to be on time and prepared for your final exam!
It is 20% of your final grade.