

Development on Purpose

Instructor Resources

Chapter Three: The Perspectives of Social Work from the Lens of Faith

Connection to 2015 EPAS of the CSWE

This chapter may be used to explore the following EPAS core competencies:

Competency 6: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

In looking at the chapter's themes, social workers are applying knowledge of human behavior and the social environment to engage with clients and constituencies.

Competency 7: Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

In looking at the chapter's themes, social workers are applying knowledge of human behavior and the social environment in the analysis of assessment data from clients and constituencies.

Competency 8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

In looking at the chapter's themes, social workers are applying knowledge of human behavior and the social environment in interventions with clients and constituencies.

Key Concepts and Terms

This chapter first defines the biopsychosocial perspective and then considers it in light of the biblical themes outlined in Chapter One. In teaching about the biopsychosocial perspective, a primary emphasis is the need to adopt a holistic perspective in order to grasp the dimension and depth of human behavior. This becomes even more poignant as one engages large-scale social problems without easy or pat answers.

The chapter moves on to consider the perspective in light of the biblical themes identified in Chapter One. The holistic emphasis is a point of congruence with the Bible. Limitations include the fact that the perspective is primarily descriptive and prescriptive. It simply describes things and does not point a case in a particular direction or toward the divine purpose outlined in this chapter (see page 44).

A description of developmental psychology may be unusual in a HBSE text, but it was included because of its rich contribution to HBSE. Particular concepts are described including equifinality, multifinality, and developmental pathways. These are also considered in light of biblical themes. The chapter makes the point that equifinality and multifinality are highly useful concepts, but do not tell the whole story. A Christian viewpoint acknowledges the role of the Holy Spirit and guiding, directing, and changing persons and environments. God can interrupt a trajectory and permanently change its course.

Lifespan developmental theory—the core theory in most HBSE texts and the basis for Part 2 of this text—is described and considered in light of biblical themes. Its organizing framework and chronological nature make it highly useful for identifying and studying various stages of life. However, it also lacks a purpose per se, serving more as a framework.

Finally, the chapter considers a risk and resilience framework and its relationship to biblical themes. Parallels are drawn between risk factors and sin [potentially] and mediation risk and redemption. A parallel between the Bible's discussion of suffering as an opportunity for growth and the nature of resilience is also highlighted.

Equifinality—a concept suggesting that different environmental inputs can lead to the same outcome

Multifinality—a concept suggesting that while persons may share similar early environments, they often demonstrate differing future outcomes

Reciprocal determinism—a concept that states that persons and their environment have a fluid, sometimes unpredictable, relationship in which each is changed by the other

Determinism—a belief system implying that outcomes are simply a response to things that have already occurred; they've been predetermined

Developmental Cascade—a developmental “chain reaction”; the idea that events or deficits can accumulate over time and result in long-term implications in individuals' lives

Developmental Pathway—a trajectory that indicates the general direction of an individual's development; while they are predictive, they can also be changed or altered

Ontogenesis—development from its earliest stage (e.g., conception) to maturity

Resiliency—the capacity to adapt successfully in spite of the presence of adversity or risk

Risk Factor—any event, condition, or experience that increases the probability that a problem will be formed, maintained, or exacerbated (Fraswer & Terzian, 2005)

Protective Factors—variables working to bolster resiliency

Developmental Assets—characteristics of individuals and environments that offset risk and optimize development

Developmental Relationships—relationships that facilitate growth through support and empowerment

Developmental Communities—communities that embody developmental assets and relationships, creating a rich context for potential flourishing

Discussion Questions

1. How does the biopsychosocial perspective provide a useful assessment or conceptual tool in social work? What are its limitations?
2. What is the relationship between risk factors and individual and systemic sin?
3. Discuss the concept of human resiliency in light of biblical concepts such as the need to depend upon God and our human family?
4. How is lifespan theory helpful in the study of HBSE? Are there limitations to the study of individuals according to their particular age and stage?

Class Activities and Assignment Ideas

1. In small groups, ask students to write “Suffering and the Bible” on one page and “Resiliency” on another. Ask them to develop a list of brief descriptors for each concept. Then ask them to find points of commonality and to write those on a separate piece of paper. Share those with the larger group and ponder together what “a theology of resiliency” might look like.
2. Ask students to choose a biblical story or character that illustrates true resiliency—growth despite adversity. Ponder together what we can learn about resiliency from this example.
3. Risk and resiliency are important contemporary topics. Many are studying ways to increase resiliency among persons at risk, the specific populations served by social workers.
4. The Search Institute has conducted decades of research on developmental assets, relationships, and communities. Have students take the relationship check at:

<https://www.search-institute.org/relationships-check>

While the quiz is designed for parents and those working currently with children, it highlights the types of relationships that facilitate development. After taking the quiz, reflect together on the power of relationships to strengthen and to weaken. Ask students which questions surprised them and why.

5. For an assignment, ask students to watch The Search Institute's 80-minute mini parenting workshop and then to write a 3-4 page reflection. Their reflection should identify both their personal reaction to their material as well as their primary "take-aways."

<https://page.search-institute.org/KCminiworkshop>

Alternately, ask students in small groups to present (or videotape) their own in-class, mini (10-15 minute) parenting workshop based on the 40 Developmental Assets which are located at:

<https://www.search-institute.org/tools-resources/free-downloads/>

6. Play this 3-minute [clip](#) from "*Won't You be My Neighbor?*", a documentary about Mr. Rogers. This is a scene with Mr. Rogers and a child, Jeff Erlanger, who is scheduled to undergo a major spinal surgery. How does Mr. Rogers build resilience within this remarkable boy? What do his actions suggest about our efforts to increase resilience within those facing adversity?