

Book Reviews: Services for Youth Troubled by Violence

Abela, J. R., & Hankin, B. L. (Eds.). (2008). *Handbook of depression in children and adolescents*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Borum, R., & Verhaagen, D. (2006). *Assessing and managing violence risk in juveniles*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Katzmann, G. S. (Ed.). (2002). *Securing our children's future: New approaches to juvenile justice and youth violence*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

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The clinical literature regarding mental health in youth and the effects that mental health may have on a youth's psychosocial functioning is most important for child welfare practitioners and social work clinicians. For any client, a multitude of risk factors that play into a youth population's mental health experience must be considered, such as psychological and biological processes, family relationships, and broader environmental effects. In social work literature, youth who experience mental health discrepancies from an optimally functioning peer group are often labeled "at risk" or "higher incidence" youth. The risks to which these children and adolescents may be susceptible are broad and have the potential to be extremely detrimental to the youth's developmental process.

One of the major risks that vulnerable youth face is exposure to and direct experience with violence. Being a victim and perpetrator of violence correlates negatively with youth mental health. Both the observation of violence and the direct victimization of youth have the potential to develop gravely negative outcomes for this population. Chronic and consistent exposure to violence can create a syndrome of violent behavior in the youth.

This article reviews three books that discuss mental health and mental health issues related to youth violence. The first, *Handbook of Depression in Children and Adolescents*, is a work that looks through a

clinical lens for an intensive investigation of the prevalent issue of childhood and adolescent depression. The second book, *Assessing and Managing Violence Risk in Juveniles*, focuses more specifically on risk factors that lead a youth to violence and how best to clinically assess these factors. The final book, *Securing Our Children's Future: New Approaches to Juvenile Justice and Youth Violence*, takes a macro approach, discussing the legal and political policies surrounding violent youth offenders in the juvenile justice system.

The *Handbook of Depression in Children and Adolescents* is a comprehensive work that delves into a wide range of information regarding youth and adolescent depression. The book itself is split into five parts, each one providing detail and insight into the multiple considerations that should factor into a social work professional's working knowledge of a population suffering from depression. With subjects ranging from frequency to treatment and prevention, this work takes an intensive look at a wide array of available theory, treatment efforts, and empirical research on child and adolescent depression.

The first part is an overview describing the prevalence of youth depression. This critical piece of the book allows the reader to frame the entirety of the literature. Depression is one of the most prevalent mental illnesses, and the authors state that frequency rates are of particular importance because depressive symptoms tend to

increase in mid-adolescence (Abela & Hankin, 2008).

The second part of the book looks more closely at the etiology of depression, utilizing the psychosocial factors contributing to this disorder. Each chapter specifically describes an element that contributes to depression, such as cognitive, developmental, biological, and genetic causes. Part 2 also devotes a fascinating chapter to adolescence and emotional regulation, and uses empirical findings to discuss the correlation of risk for depression and “abnormalities in emotion and the regulation of emotion in children” (Abela & Hankin, 2008, p. 170). Overall, this part lends itself well to readers who are interested in a more in-depth analysis of the internalizing factors of depression, particularly biological and developmental attributes.

The third part of the book covers an area that is vital for clinicians to take greater time to read and analyze. Part 3 discusses treatment options for childhood and adolescent depression. Although this work covers some of the well-known evidence-based treatment models, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, it also explores other interventions that have found some empirical success, such as interpersonal psychotherapy. This chapter is also interesting in that it describes other treatment paradigms, such as the ACTION treatment program and positive psychotherapy, that as yet lack the developed research needed to assess their efficacy (Abela & Hankin, 2008). Ultimately, the third part of this manual is beneficial to social work practitioners not only as a guide to interventions that have found success with adolescent depression, but also for its thorough exploration of the theory behind the therapeutic practice and information on the research processes that were used as evaluative measures to determine an intervention model’s efficacy.

The fourth part of the *Handbook* describes programming efforts to work toward the prevention of adolescent and childhood

depression. This was an extremely interesting set of chapters because it was the first place in the book in which the authors discussed a prevention approach to childhood and adolescent depression.

Each chapter in Part 4 described a program that has been researched and targeted to a youth population. This part would be quite interesting to social work practitioners, particularly those who work in program development, in community-based settings, or as school-based clinicians. Each chapter discusses the theoretical basis behind the program, empirical findings that were developed, and future research that should be conducted. As a social work practitioner, I found this section of particular interest because it provided a practical set of methods that could be used in natural settings of a youth population, and that also have the potential to provide long-term and consistent benefits to adolescents.

The final part of the *Handbook* describes a set of special populations that research has described as more susceptible to depressive symptoms: females as compared to males, children of depressed mothers, youth who have displayed suicidal ideation, and youth who have been victims of neglect or abuse (Abela & Hankin, 2008). Social work clinicians would benefit from taking some time to learn more about these specific youth populations, as the authors have found evidence that these populations are consistently—and at times, dramatically—more susceptible to depressive symptoms.

Ultimately, the *Handbook of Depression in Children and Adolescents* is an important work that provides an immense amount of detail and evidence regarding the startling rates of depression in youth, the factors associated with depression, efficacious treatments, and current prevention efforts to help alleviate child and adolescent clients’ depressive symptoms. This is a critical work for social workers who work with children and youth in a multitude of settings.

The second book, *Assessing and Managing Violence Risk in Juveniles*, discusses the trends in youth violence, the factors that often influence youth who become violent, and the assessment process that should be implemented with adolescents who have been exposed to or have been victims of violence.

This book is comprised of three parts. The first discusses the trends in violence, the risk factors involved, and the mental health disorders that are often contributing factors to youth who have a history of violence. Clinicians working with youth should particularly note the downward trend of youth crime in recent years (Borum & Verhaagen, 2006). Nevertheless, the authors caution those working with youth to note that although the trend is toward decrease, there is still a startling number of youths who participate in "murder, non-negligent manslaughter, aggravated assault, or other violent acts" (Borum & Verhaagen, 2006, p. 8). The authors observe that the increase in youth-perpetrated assaults correlates with a multitude of risk factors, including but not limited to psychosocial issues, abuse and neglect, fragmented family systems, substance abuse, negative views of the self, and difficulty with interpersonal relationships (Borum & Verhaagen, 2006).

After broadly defining the risk factors that contribute to making a youth vulnerable to committing or experiencing violence, the authors provide greater insight into the particular mental health disorders that often coincide with youth violence, such as conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, and co-morbid disorders like ADHD/substance abuse. Depression in particular was flagged as a predictor of violence, with one research study stating that "depressed children had levels of aggression equivalent to those of their peers with CD" (Borum & Verhaagen, 2006, p. 63). This part provides critical information that allows social work clinicians to more fully understand the trends in and correlates of youth violence.

The second part takes the trends and risk factors of youth violence and describes assessment processes that clinicians who work with youth can use. This part is devoted to expanding the assessment process. In other words, the authors have researched the efficacy of clinical assessment, which historically has been the sole assessment process for an at-risk youth.

In addition to the clinical assessment, these chapters describe the structured interview process. In such a process, the clinician does a careful exploration of the social developmental history, employs a data-gathering strategy, and analyzes the collected data to write an accurate and sensitive risk assessment (Borum & Verhaagen, 2006). Overall, this cluster of chapters is extremely beneficial for those social work clinicians who work in the juvenile justice system, or are responsible for defining and managing risk factors in a youth population (Borum & Verhaagen, 2006).

The final part of this book describes research-based intervention and treatment plans for youth who have symptoms of violent behavior. Some of the major treatment options that are analyzed and discussed in depth are institutional versus community treatment (including a description of community-based programming options), and intervention plans (specifically, a motivational interviewing approach in which the therapist helps develop goals and increase compliance, while building a therapeutic relationship with a youth population). Ultimately, *Assessing and Managing Violence Risk in Juveniles* is a successfully clear, concise, and informative read on the broad scope of youth violence, clinical assessment, and treatment.

The third book reviewed, *Securing our Children's Future: New Approaches to Juvenile Justice and Youth Violence*, was an extremely interesting and provocative work. This book looked not only at the landscape of youth violence, but also, and more specifically, at the legislative system and stakeholders who become connected to the youth violence issue.

The most interesting aspect of this work was its dedication to providing not only the author's perspective and analysis of youth violence, but also the perspective of the various participants involved in a violent youth's circumstances, such as the prosecutors, the defense attorneys, and the judges (Katzmann, 2002). These detailed accounts of the various stakeholders involved in the juvenile justice system provide an opportunity for readers to expand their experience past the theme of youth pathology—one of the central focal points of the two other books reviewed here—and instead develop a critical lens with which to analyze the *process* and outcome of youth violence, from both the youth's perspective and that of the legal system that inevitably becomes a part of the youth's experience.

The final half of the book focuses on programs that have been instituted in some cities, such as the Boston Gun Project (Katzmann, 2002). Additionally, there are chapters dedicated to specific issues, such as decreasing the rates of recidivism by youth offenders, streamlining probation practices in an effort to reduce violence, and potentially reducing violent images in the media (Katzmann, 2002). This book was an informative and valuable read for social workers who work with a youth population, particularly youth who may at some point experience or commit violence. It is a useful tool for clinicians who are interested in learning about and analyzing the political and legal policies that affect youth who have experienced violence.

The three books reviewed in this article analyzed various aspects of youth mental health and the effects that mental health status may have on their behavior, particularly their experience with violence. All three works described various components of a youth's functioning that may be part of a symptom of violence.

For the past two years, I have been a social work intern involved in children and adolescent populations that are inundated with violence. Each piece of literature I reviewed gave me a new perspective on how to clinically assess and address symptoms of youth violence. In particular, these books provided a critical analysis of the societal, familial, and internal key issues in violence research that allowed me to apply the research findings to my social work practice in a practical manner.

Overall, each piece of literature presented a need for mental health practitioners to become aware of the psychosocial components of and risk factors contributing to youth violence; a method by which to more thoroughly assess and evaluate a youth's perspective and systems; a set of interventions and treatment options that may help in violence reduction efforts for youth; and ways to improve youths' psychosocial functioning. Whether through a micro lens of clinical depression and treatment, or a macro perspective of the juvenile justice system, each book asked clinicians to take time to analyze and evaluate their youth population's environments, and utilize evidence-based treatment strategies to help that youth population work toward decreasing their exposure to and experience of violence.

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