

Book Review

Daley, M. R. (2015). *Rural social work in the 21st century*. Chicago, IL: Lyceum.

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Dr. Daley is a professor of social work at the University of South Alabama in Mobile. He is also past president of the National Rural Social Work Caucus and the Association of Social Work Baccalaureate Program Directors. In addition to this book, his commitment to rural social work is witnessed in his journal publications, which focus on such issues as ethics and burnout in rural social work.

Daley prefaces his book with the claim that the need for rural social workers outpaces the number of rural social work educational programs. His book attempts to both outline the need and present a realistic perspective on the specific and unique characteristics of rural social work. He begins the book by defining and explaining the differences between rural and urban social work. He provides an historical background for the development of contemporary rural social work programs. He also covers such important issues as the diversity of subgroups within rural settings. Daley gives much needed attention to how the model for rural social work must incorporate rural strengths and weaknesses while, simultaneously, acknowledging the “down home” character of rural communities. Finally, he addresses successful practices and challenges for the future.

Daley organizes the book so that the reader gains an understanding of the unique history and challenges of rural social work. He explains the differences in the skills needed for a rural versus an urban practice. Especially useful is his section on the various rural subgroups. He is able to dispel many of the myths that people seem to

have about rural areas by discussing the diversity of rural residents. Because of their different subcultures, different groups have different responses to social workers and different needs. Daley emphasizes the importance of adjusting one’s speech patterns and client/social worker interactions to fit the rural culture so as to gain community trust and acceptance. He illustrates that proximity and access plays a much larger role in serving clients adequately in rural areas than in areas where services are more plentiful and more accessible. His discussion of ethics in the rural setting is excellent. In small areas where everyone seems to know everyone, confidentiality is paramount to maintaining good client/social worker relations. His comparison of the generalist model and the down-home model of rural social work practice provides the reader with a clear view of what type of model works for which types of situations.

Overall, I would highly recommend this book for undergraduate or graduate students and for practicing social workers who are considering a career as a rural social worker. His writing style is clear and engaging. Daley’s book fills a serious gap in the present literature on social work by presenting a comprehensive overview of the state of rural social work today.