

Book Review

Cook, J.F., Alford, K.A., Uhrich, J., & Conway, P. (2015). *Rural families and reshaping human services*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Reviewed by Ottis Murray, Ed.D.
University of North Carolina at Pembroke

Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics, Volume 12, Number 1 (2015)
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This book consists of 15 chapters, an introduction, and 14 articles. The articles were originally published in the *Journal of Family Social Work* in Volume 15, Issue 5, November 2012, and Volume 16, Issue 1, February 2013. In this book, the articles are grouped into four topics or sections: Rural Families and Their Needs, Disparities and Rural Families, Family Practice in Rural Communities, and Rural Human Service Organizations and Providers.

Myriad elements comprise the mosaic of diversity, including age, class, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, where ones lives, nationality, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation and political ideology. This book takes a look at one aspect of diversity that affects families and access to human services, living in rural areas. (p. 1)

And with this beginning, the remainder of the introduction consists of defining four terms (i.e., rural, human services, informal resources and family), two pages that briefly describe the “challenges and strengths” in terms of rural families and context of place, and chapter summaries (note: each article is identified as a chapter).

In each article (chapter) the reader will discover interesting research, challenges, innovative approaches and some thoughtful analysis/ conclusions. However, overall I was dismayed by the book’s organization and failure in preparing the reader. There are no introductions to topical sections (e.g., Rural Families and Their Needs), only the articles. The “chapter summaries,” which are in book’s introduction, are just that, summaries, and as such very cursory.

The book could have benefited from a more comprehensive article to introduce the sectional topics. This would have been helpful to the reader as one prepares to engage topic, research and information that follow. This would greatly improve the flow of the book and eliminate the necessity of flipping back and forth to chapter summaries for the situational framework and/or context. Each article suggests, even begs well-deserved consideration, thought and perhaps at least a word or two from the authors. And yet, the reader is left hanging and moves along to the next article as one might do in randomly selecting songs from a jukebox.

The articles are worthy of reading, consideration and discussion. The authors fail in their obligation to provide a meaningful, overall framework to excite and drive such considerations and discussion. Perhaps there is a blind trust or hope

the reader will weave a suitable commentary that links and provides understanding to the changes and challenges involving rural families and the reshaping of human services. However, there are doubts. As an example of this trust, the final article (chapter) in the book, "Better Together: Expanding Rural Partnerships to Support Families," ends with the following excerpt:

This strategy can be especially effective in rural and small town communities where cooperative extension and community nursing have such long roots in the community and can provide a natural community, and can provide a natural complement to social work philosophy and practice. (p. 222)

And so ends the book. That's it. No final word from the book's authors, no commentary, words of wisdom, summary, or conclusions. In the beginning we are promised, "This book takes a look at one aspect of diversity that affects families and access to human services, living in rural areas" (p. 1). This book fails in its mission. Too often, blind trust is just that.