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From the Editor

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Contemporary Rural Social Work

Special Issue

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Peggy Pittman-Munke
Editor-in-Chief

CRSW is proud to present this issue dedicated to international social work. This is an important compendium of papers for a number of reasons. Guest editors, Dheeshana Jayasundara and Randall C. Nedegaard, were able to obtain submissions from a number of countries that are not usually represented in the literature available to social workers in the western world. Their thoughtful introduction to the issue underscores many of the differences between social work internationally and that in the United States. Globally, social work practice focuses on macro issues of importance to the community in contrast with the United States where social work practice tends to be conceptualized as micro practice, with macro issues viewed as an addition to, rather than the heart of practice. The authors also bring a different world view to their work and to their research. This difference in world view also reflects the differences between the way that social workers from collectivist perspectives view social work practice as compared with the way social workers from individualistic perspectives view social work practice. There is much to be learned from the perspectives of the global practitioners represented in this issue and lessons to be applied in both practice and teaching in rural areas.

Télez Cabrera in his article, *Building the Health Capability Set in a Purépecha Community to Assess Health Interventions*, contrasts and explores the dimensions that could be included in the health capability set to assess health interventions in Cuanajo, Mexico. He expands on previous work and uses in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore these dimensions. Cuanajo is a semirural indigenous Purépecha community located in western Mexico. The final objective of the study is to generate measures of outcomes in economic evaluations of health interventions to be carried out in this community, and the work presented in the article reinforces the dimensions that could be employed in the final step. The dimensions are: 1) physical, taking into account activities of daily living enabled by different health statuses; 2) mental, in the form of how positive feelings contribute to achieving health functioning; 3) social, considering how a minimal social life takes into account how relations with partners, family members, and friends provide love and support; 4) health agency, incorporating health knowledge and knowledge about how traditional medicine can affect or contribute to achieving health; 5) material conditions, which include housing facilities and monetary resources; and 6) community, how social pressure and security affect health functioning. The results can then be taken to the community to develop health related quality of life indicators. This model moves away from understanding health only in biomedical terms such as we commonly see in the United States to a much more holistic understanding of health. There is much in this article that could inform rural social workers trying to understand health issues in the communities that they serve. The article could also be useful as a framework for the study of human behavior along the dimensions posed in the study. The more macro focus of the dimensions

could be useful in moving students away from a narrow conceptualization of human development and human behavior.

Marcia Mikulak in her article *Colonial Subjugation and Human Rights Abuses: Twenty-First Century Violations against Brazil's Rural Indigenous Xukuru Nation* illustrates social work practice writ large within Brazil's Indigenous population, the Xukurus, as they fight for the return of their ancestral lands and against the human rights abuses perpetuated against them. This article is an example of social work as social justice practice. As a case study it offers practitioners and students a way to see how well documented social science research can in part ameliorate the injustices of colonial history, and demonstrates the potential for developing new paradigms of justice for a people for whom too often justice has been denied. For students of policy practice, the article offers a perspective that demonstrates the need for persistence, timing and gaining strong allies, as well as for celebrating each small milestone as a step toward ultimate success.

Arias et al discuss the *Impact of Education on Poverty Reduction in Costa Rica: A Regional and Urban-Rural Analysis* in their article which relates the relationship between levels of education and poverty for different planning regions in Costa Rico and for both urban and rural areas. Their findings come as no surprise; in both urban and rural areas, using the methodology of Unsatisfied Basic Needs, poverty is reduced by a substantial amount along multiple dimensions through the completion of even secondary education. The results are useful for social workers to consider. Policy practice, such as working to achieve higher levels of public education, has demonstrated results in terms of social mobility and reduction of poverty in Costa Rica and other developing countries. Material in this article could be used to help plan community campaigns for increasing educational levels in rural communities with low levels of education, low social mobility, and high poverty as well as to persuade legislators to fund these efforts, and communities to incentivize people to achieve this goal.

Kumar et al present the devastating impact of flood in their article *Impact of Floods on Rural Populations and Strategies for Mitigation: A Case Study of Darbhanga District, Bihar State, India*. Floods are one of the most disastrous and unpredictable acts of nature. The impact of human life is extreme. Rural areas are more severely impacted than urban areas in part because of poverty, limited infrastructures and access to resources and health care services. Floods not only damage property and infrastructure and but further decrease access to health care and social services. The primary author's experienced floods as an inhabitant of a flooded community. Drawn from the primary author's master's thesis, the article outlines the impact of floods in the rural areas of Bihar and points out the continuous marginalization and exclusion of flood-affected communities. This paper raises awareness of the issue and calls for global support to advocate for more effective flood mitigation strategies. Many of the issues raised in this paper are similar to the issues raised by Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana and neighboring states, as well as elsewhere internationally. Ideas for mitigation presented in this paper would be useful in macro practice classes dealing with disaster planning and in human behavior classes to help students and practitioners understand the effects of natural disasters, particularly floods, on people living in rural areas.

In her article *Ideas for Capacity Building and Educational Empowerment of Female Children in Rural Butaleja, Uganda: Applying the Central Human Capability Approach* de Silva discusses the use of the Capability Approach to empower female children. This article discusses how this approach can be effectively utilized within the setting of a small rural village in Uganda,

Africa to empower female children to create a valuable life that affects positive social change. Colonization left a devastating blow to the socioeconomic conditions among many ethnic communities in Uganda. However, Uganda's political outlays and social constructs further deepened the inequity gap between female and male children. This article has valuable information for rural social workers who are attempting to help rural children create a life for themselves that will also result in community change. Policy classes could use this article as a basis for analyzing rural communities in terms of resources and opportunities for success for different groups of children and in terms of strategies to bring about change. The article is an excellent resource for demonstrating how theory/models such as the Capacity Approach can be utilized to design practice interventions.

The book reviews are also illuminating and closely related to the theme of the special issue. Sujei Vega, author of the ethnography, *Latino Heartland: Of Borders and Belonging in the Midwest*, is reviewed by Annah Bender. Vega, herself an immigrant from Mexico, describes issues dealing with life situations as Latino and Latina Hoosiers. She vividly brings to life the current immigration and deportation issues and illuminates the difficulties for Latinos living in the Midwest as their numbers and presence increase in the midst of the economic and cultural backlash against Latinos. The current political climate both nationally and internationally brings increased salience to this issue. Vega's work also illuminates the complexity of Midwest rurality and many differences from the rural Southwest and its attitudes towards immigrants and immigration.

Pugh and Cheers book, *Rural Social Work: An International Perspective*, reviewed by Peter Kindle, attempts to survey the research on social work in rural areas in economically developed nations. However, it relies heavily on English-speaking countries as it emphasizes rural diversity and models of practice in rural settings with the hope of developing rural practitioners. There is an emphasis on the social rather than the demographic understanding of rurality and this work contributes little that is new to an understanding of rural social work. However, it is well worth reading for the examples of community development and social work practice in other English speaking countries. In contrast with other articles, Pugh and Cheers present a perspective on rural social work that highlights obstacles to overcome rather than a sense of possibility.

The final book reviewed, edited by Wayne Caldwell and reviewed by Kala Chakradhar, *Planning for Rural Resilience: Coping with Climate Change and Energy Futures*, is a compendium of ten chapters, of which all but the opening chapter are based on preparing rural communities near Ontario Canada for impending issues arising from climate change and peak oil. The authors of the chapters focus on innovative efforts to avert the consequences of both. These innovative efforts could be utilized by social workers in rural American areas that face similar issues. Rural planners will find this book useful as well will rural social workers who work in areas of the United States where similar issues are of concern.

In summary, this issue of the journal goes well beyond its intention, to present a broad discussion of rural social work globally. The articles are not only varied and excellent, but offer ideas from other perspectives to inform both practice and teaching in rural areas and to modify the United States perspective that is largely focused on micro practice to the broader macro perspective so important for success in rural social work practice. Enjoy this issue; I know I did.

Peg Munke