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The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 25
Issue 2 June

Article 11

May 1998

Review of *Children in the Urban Environment: Linking Social Policy and Clinical Practice*. Norma K. Phillips and Shulamith L. A. Straussner. Reviewed by Dorinda Noble, Louisiana State University.

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Recommended Citation

Noble, Dorinda (1998) "Review of *Children in the Urban Environment: Linking Social Policy and Clinical Practice*. Norma K. Phillips and Shulamith L. A. Straussner. Reviewed by Dorinda Noble, Louisiana State University.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 25 : Iss. 2 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol25/iss2/11>

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Perhaps the greatest weakness in the book lies in the author's failure to maintain a sociological distance that would seem appropriate. For example, she finds fault with society's emphasis on biological ties as the only means of constructing "real families," to the detriment of adoptive families. Social workers can certainly sympathize with this position, but her criticism seems to extend to all official involvement in adoption. Most social workers would recognize society's stake in adoption and family in general, even if they question specific adoption laws and agency practices.

Social workers in the field of adoption need to be knowledgeable about all aspects of adoption, including adult adoptees' and birth parents' perspectives. This book, while presented in a sociological framework that may not be familiar to most social workers and despite some flaws, provides background and data for social workers that broadens the base of knowledge for practice. For example, it provides a good review of the portrayal of adoption in the media, including television talk shows, movies, and books. The author also calls attention to the lack of valid data on the numbers of adoptive searchers, reminding us not to over-estimate their number based on the volume of their voices.

Adoption workers might take this book as a cautionary tale. If nothing else, it provides incentive to the profession to question practices that imply adoption to be a second-rate way to build a family and adoptive parents to require therapy during the application process. It is a lesson worth learning.

Terri Combs-Orme
The University of Tennessee

Norma K. Phillips and Shulamith L.A. Straussner, *Children in the Urban Environment: Linking Social Policy and Clinical Practice*. Springfield, IL. \$57.96 hardcover, \$43.05 papercover.

Children in the Urban Environment is an edited collection which deals with children living in those endlessly fascinating enclaves which we call cities, with all their diverse population, noise, activity, cultural opportunities, violence, overcrowding, social programs, pockets of wealth and power, and wastelands of poverty. Growing up safely and happily in these bustling centers of humanity is challenging at best, devastating at worst.

The authors of this volume examine children in cities from a variety of angles. They discuss social and economic factors—such as poverty, immigrant status, violence, and gang activity—that create and exacerbate stress in children's lives. The authors also look to the family and its tremendous affect on children, particularly when the family is headed by teen parents or is tainted by parental violence toward children. Family members with difficulties, such as AIDS or substance abuse, create emotionally trying and sometimes dangerous situations for children. The housing situation of children is not neglected: chapters on homelessness, out-of-home placement, and run-away children highlight the child's need for a place to call home. Throughout all the chapters runs a common theoretical thread: the ecosystems model, with its implication that both nature and nurture interact to affect children.

This book views these various subjects through the lenses of connecting social policy and clinical practice. Such a perspective is long overdue. Social work, and particularly children's services, has a crying need to see policy and practice, not as two separate entities, but as factors which operate in circular motion, feeding into and shaping one another. Richard Holody, the author of this book's chapter on children in out-of-home placements, asserts that "policy both frees and constrains the practitioner: it gives focus to the work but limits possible interventions and objectives . . . like all social welfare policy, foster care policy is a creation of history, reflecting the often conflicting components of American ideology. In short, it reflects tendencies that are wise and humane as well as short-sighted and self-serving" (p. 135).

Looking at policy and practice as interactive and mutually dependent allows clinicians, or front-line workers, to realistically expand their horizons, seeing their clinical work as part of a larger reflection of social beliefs and public inclinations. Conversely, for those whose main focus is policy creation and implementation, the perspective of this edited collection provides insight into how policy is translated into face-to-face interactions between workers and clients. In her overview of how children grow up in cities, Norma Kolko Phillips delineates ways that practitioners can operate on the micro, mezzo, or macro level to serve children. Though social work education has espoused the marriage of

policy and practice, works which demonstrate a happy union are few and far between. This collection, however, does link policy and practice effectively, combining policy assessment with practice guidance. A number of the authors are practitioners and, as Joel H. Straussner and Shulamith L.A. Straussner demonstrate in their chapter on how children are affected by community and school violence, the authors have been deeply involved in creating community and agency-based programs dealing with the issues which they address. The book's dual focus, however, is not equal; policy issues outweigh practice techniques in the book.

Children in the Urban Environment centers on youngsters in the big city, a reasonable focus, since many children's services are largely urban phenomena. However, many of the nuggets of wisdom in this book can be translated into smaller city settings or even rural areas. For instance, while the numerical majority of immigrants congregate in large cities, there are sizeable pockets of immigrants in non-urban areas, such as Vietnamese shrimpers in sparsely-populated southern coastal areas, or Mexican farm workers all along the migrant trail from border states to northern and midwestern states. Graciela M. Castex's article on immigrant children in the United States outlines many of the difficulties peculiar to youngsters who have been uprooted, but virtually every insight and intervention is applicable to immigrant children in urban centers, smaller communities, or rural areas.

Like all books dealing with contemporary issues in a changing society, this volume was outdated almost immediately in one respect: welfare. This volume was written in an AFDC world; the brave new world of TANF will look different, though we are unsure of the nature of those differences now. Clearly, recent welfare reforms will affect urban children and will surely be a subject of study in the coming days. The book also does not specifically address environmental pollution, a grave danger to children in some urban areas where children are exposed to toxins in the air, water, or physical structures. Nor does the book directly deal with lack of medical care in some urban areas, where many children are uninsured, clinics face staffing problems and constricted hours, and the hospital emergency room is often the only realistic choice for primary care.

Children in the Urban Environment is a well-edited book. Unlike many edited collections, this one reads well and evenly, so that the reader is not jolted from one writing style to another. The book is an excellent source of information about children's concerns. It can serve as a strong teaching tool for people struggling to understand and intervene in the challenges children face in contemporary society.

Dorinda N. Noble
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James Midgley and Michael Sherraden (Eds.), *Alternatives to Social Security: An International Inquiry*. Westport, CT: Auburn House, 1997. \$49.95 hardcover.

Commonly called "Social Security," the United States' most successful social policy—the Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance program (OASDI)—faces a significant financing problem.

The financing facts are relatively straight-forward. Here, as elsewhere, population aging, increased longevity, and a declining ratio of workers to retirees is putting the nation's largely pay as you go Social Security program "in the red." The best estimates project the combined OASDI trust fund as meeting all its obligations through 2028. Thereafter, anticipated revenues are sufficient to meet three-quarters of estimated trust fund obligations.¹

The interpretation of these facts is more complex. Some—defining the projected shortfall as evidence of impending collapse—see in the financing problem a window of opportunity to advance means-testing and privatization proposals as vehicles for shrinking the public sector. Others—including the author of this review—anticipate the need for moderate benefit reductions and revenue increases, but see no reason to radically alter the basic structure of this program which provides widespread protection to America's families. Still others—like the editors of this volume—are engaged in a serious search for new approaches.

The editors search has produced an excellent collection of essays, intellectually accessible to students and informative to experts and policymakers alike. Importantly, the introduction, authored by James Midgely, discusses the development of Social