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Review of *Social Work in Rural Communities*. Leon H. Ginsberg (Ed.). Reviewed by Marie D. Hoff, Boise State University.

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Leon H. Ginsberg (Ed.). *Social Work in Rural Communities*. Council on Social Work Education: Alexandria, VA. 1998. \$17.00 papercover.

When close to 77.5% of the population lives in urban areas, the problems and needs of rural America almost may seem like an afterthought for many social workers. And that fleeting thought may conjure up a picture of a traditional family farm with neat barns and happy children trudging off to a nearby school. Yet, the nonmetropolitan population of 55 million people in the United States "is larger than the populations of all but a few of the world's nations and nearly equals the population of France or England" (p. 6), according to Leon Ginsberg, in his third edition of *Social Work in Rural Communities*. A quick perusal of chapter topics on homeless children, AIDS, substance abuse, race relations and fundamentalist religion may startle the reader into curiosity as to how these and other contemporary social problems have penetrated rural America. Revelations demolishing other, perhaps idyllic, images of non-urban life in America are found in the wide range of topics treated in the text. Several of the important demographic features of rural populations described include statistics such as the following: ". . . less than one quarter of all rural counties are agriculture dependent' . . . At most, 10% of the nation's rural population lives on farms" (p. 117); around one-fourth of the nation's elderly live in rural areas (p. 214), but up to 50% of the elderly poor live in small towns and rural areas (p. 220). The faces of rural poverty (16.3% compared to metropolitan poverty rate of 12.7%) (p. 118) are remarkably similar to those at risk in urban areas (female-headed households, ethnic minorities, especially elderly women of color), but the rural poor face unique barriers to escape from poverty, in the form of social isolation, distance and lack of transportation, and social services.

Ginsberg's text has been a staple for this area of specialization since the first edition in 1976. Major texts addressing rural issues for social work can be counted on one hand; and there is only one major journal devoted to practice in rural settings. Thus, Ginsberg's updated version of this collection of readings and research studies remains an important resource for students and

practitioners. Most of the topics and contributing authors are new, making the text, essentially, a new and current resource.

The text is divided into four sections, totaling 21 chapters on a wide variety of topics: (1) Small community social work: concepts and definitions; (2) Social work practice in rural communities; (3) Rural people and special populations; and (4) Social programs and problems in rural communities. Some of the important chapter topics, in addition to those noted above, include sociological descriptions of rural communities and how their characteristics have changed in recent decades, poverty in rural areas, the important cultural aspects and practice implications of religion, the nature and extent of crime, delinquency, and substance abuse in rural areas, and the serious deficiencies in health care services in rural areas. While it is true that family farming comprises an ever smaller proportion of the rural economy, it was disappointing not to find even one chapter addressing the social, economic, and political implications of the near annihilation of a major traditional livelihood and lifestyle in America. The loss of family farms decreases cultural diversity in the United States. The increasing control of agriculture by agribusiness will have major effects on the cost and safety of food for urban and rural populations alike. These are important concerns for social work.

One of the strengths of the collection is that many of the chapters are well-founded in empirical research on rural conditions or based on practice research. Another strength is the inclusion of debate on the question of whether there remains a social work specialization known as rural practice. This text would be most suitable in a course on human behavior in the social environment or an elective seminar on social work in rural areas. While the chapters provide much valuable background knowledge and address important practice concepts and issues (such as crossing cultural boundaries, or utilizing existing rural networks), it is not a practice methods text. With this caveat in mind, I would endorse the text for instructors in both urban and non-urban social work programs to heighten understanding of the needs of 22.5% of the American population who live in non-metropolitan regions.

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