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Review of *Empowerment of Women for Promoting Global Health and Quality of Life*. Snehendu B. Kar

Abbie Nelson
Michigan State University

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Book Reviews

Snehendu B. Kar, *Empowerment of Women for Promoting Global Health and Quality of Life*. Oxford University Press (2018), 595 pages, \$69.95 (hardcover).

This book discusses the importance of the empowerment of women to promote global public health (GPH) and improve the quality of life, not only for individuals but for families, communities, and societies. Kar explains the theoretical underpinnings of women's empowerment from a public health, social science, and medical perspective, and provides empirical evidence to support the importance of this model all the while showing the importance of human service professionals supporting self-organized movements for them to have the most success. She presents the results of a meta-analysis of 80 case studies showing how women-led grassroots movements successfully improved the health-related quality of life (HRQOL) of their families and communities. Kar takes a strengths-based and solution-focused approach, viewing women as positive change makers who are not victims of the system, but who are capable of creating and maintaining systemic change through collaborative work and advocacy.

In chapters one through four, Kar discusses the theoretical viewpoints on empowerment and how this relates to women and GPH. Poverty and powerlessness are recognized by agencies such as the United Nations as threats to HRQOL, but different paths have been used to address these issues. One is to give aid to the poorest countries, and another is governments working to increase economic growth. The author outlines the drawbacks of each of these paths and advocates a third path, one that focuses on empowering the poor and powerless to enhance their quality of life with support from social agencies. Kar sees the four domains of empowerment as human rights, equal rights, health, and economics. The 80-some case studies she analyzes fall under one or more of these domains. The author argues that key issues impacting quality of life, such as

education, income, healthcare, and cultural practices, cannot be fully understood or pursued without addressing issues related to gender inequality. Therefore, for a model to be effective, it must include services to meet current needs as well as empowerment of women to reduce issues around gender inequalities.

Kar discusses the history of global public health and its evolution from an approach focusing on disease prevention and germ control based on germ theory to the current approach that also recognizes important underlying causes of poor health, such as poverty, lifestyle, illiteracy, harmful cultural practices, and lack of empowerment. She then examines major research paradigms used to study what determines health-related quality of life, such as cultural anthropological and biosocial approaches, that recognize the ways in which people's attitudes and actions towards health are influenced by their culture, as well as how values and motivation affect behavior related to health. She then explores issues such as acculturation and self-identity that particularly affect multicultural communities, their health outcomes and quality of life and how trust can help mediate these issues.

Chapter five discusses in more detail the empowerment theory and the EMPOWER model to be used for research and action. Each letter of the EMPOWER acronym stand for one of the seven empowerment methods used in the case studies that make up the meta-analysis. The author discusses using a five-level empowerment ecological model, addressing individual, family, community, organization, and cultural levels and shows the empowerment theories used on various levels in social work, public health, and nursing. The seven most commonly used methods by self-organized empowerment movements seen in action in the case studies are "E = Empowerment training and leadership development, M = Media use, advocacy, and support, P = Public education, participation, and grass roots movements, O=Organizing networks including cooperatives, unions, affiliations, and associations, etc., W=Work training and microfinance initiatives, E=Enabling services, emergency aids, crisis intervention, and R=Rights protection and promotion" (p. 195). The model also looks at the core supports needed for the movement to be successful, outlining them as "community and peer-support, organizational, resource support and external empowerment" (p. 197).

Chapter six further explores the process and criteria for the meta-analysis, followed by chapters that outline national and international case studies and how the model was effectively applied, as well as the challenges and obstacles faced. The author makes a strong case for why empowerment of women should be supported to increase HRQOL. She provides real life examples in the case studies, ranging from older well-known movements such as *Mothers Against Drunk Driving* to newer international movements like the anti-alcohol campaign ARRAK BAN in India, showing the range of effectiveness of the model among a variety of groups and countries.

Finally, Kar summarizes key learnings from the application of the EMPOWER model gathered from the qualitative findings of the meta-analysis and how these relate to six research questions. Important themes learned and discussed were that ordinary women can and do lead effective movements that improve HRQOL, motivated by survival and safety needs and unified by trying to protect their children from harm. The women introduced in this book came from different backgrounds and levels of status, but all have made large personal sacrifices to help their cause. Kar shows how unplanned events or disaster such can have unintended positive or negative effects on the empowerment outcomes.

This book is highly academic, which may impede some from reading it, but the case studies provide an excellent framework for the reader to understand how the model has been applied. It would be a great choice for a variety of professions that seek to improve global health, as well as those interested in female empowerment and the impact this can have on the individual and social level.

Abbie Nelson
Michigan State University