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The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

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Volume 47  
Issue 2 June

Article 14

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2020

**Review of *Living Well, Dying Well: A Practical Guide to Choices, Costs, and Consequence* by Judy Stevens-Long and Dohrea Bardell**

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**Recommended Citation**

Woodard, Jewel (2020) "Review of *Living Well, Dying Well: A Practical Guide to Choices, Costs, and Consequence* by Judy Stevens-Long and Dohrea Bardell," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 47: Iss. 2, Article 14.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.4418>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol47/iss2/14>

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Judy Stevens-Long and Dohrea Bardell, *Living Well, Dying Well: A Practical Guide to Choices, Costs, and Consequence*. Field University Press (2018), 254 pages, \$19.95 (papercover).

This is an excellent read that highlights the sociology of death by presenting research and personal stories told by families, caretakers, and healthcare professionals who work with the aging population. This book is not only beneficial for professionals but also families who are caring for an older adult. It is a practical guide that addresses how the system of living and dying is changing in America, the importance of having tough conversations about living and dying, what options are available for caring for the aging population, and what happens after we die. It is highly informative and conveys the message that learning about death is a lifelong process.

Stevens-Long and Bardell do an excellent job explaining and outlining how the system is everchanging. Families are now more spread out, the lifespan has expanded, and even the definition of death has changed. The distance in between families means that older people often live alone, or they become institutionalized once they are unable to take care of themselves. Also, people now live much longer than they ever have before, which impacts the cost of health care, retirement, and how an older individual is cared for. The definition of death has even changed. For many centuries a person was considered dead once their breathing or heartbeat stopped. However, because of improved technology and research there are now more ways to keep people living. Due to these changes, decisions about caring for an older family member and what a person wants in end-of-life care and after death are extremely important, though they make conversations about living and dying more complex.

The book suggests that conversations about death can be among the most difficult conversations people can have. However, the earlier we have those conversations, the easier that they will be. The author mentions starting where the problem is; for example, talking about who would care for a loved one's children or who would make final decisions on their behalf if they are incapacitated and unable to do so for themselves. They encourage people not to just talk about what needs to be done

after they die, such as funeral plans, but also to talk about long term care and advanced directives. This is an excellent portion of the book, as the writing is not only personable but very informative. They also go on to explain why it is important to have conversations about death early on. Often people feel like it is too soon to talk about dying; however, they note that it is only too soon until it is too late!

After reading about the changes in the death process and the importance of having conversations about death, the authors discuss the different options that are available when caring for an older adult. When caring for an older adult there are a variety of different things to consider, such as finances, comfort, and location. Since we are so spread out and older adults are now living longer than ever before, this changes the way that older adults are cared for. Caring for an older parent could mean one of you must move hundreds or even thousands of miles to live with each other. This can result in serious financial challenges, elder abuse, caretaker burnout, and other significant challenges. Medication, therapy, home health, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, senior apartments, palliative care, and hospice are all options now available when caring for ailing older adults. The book does a great job explaining the differences, the costs, and just what the pros and cons of each of these options are, connecting these options to the changing care system in America, underlining the importance of having conversations early on to prepare mentally and financially for some of the care options that are available for older adults.

A final section of the book highlights the importance of planning for death in advance of any emergency. One thing very different from a hundred years ago is the cost of funerals and the many different options that people have for how their body is handled once they are deceased. It is extremely important to plan these things out so that family members don't have to carry the financial and emotional burden of figuring out what a loved one wanted as their final wishes during the height of the grieving process. Some of the options people have after dying are being cremated, having a green funeral and burial, having a more traditional funeral, or just having a memorial service. All these things vary in price and demonstrate the reason why the

funeral industry is booming. The book highlights how the cost of funerals have increased over past years, making it imperative to prepare for these costs.

Finally, the book touches on grieving and mourning after the death of a loved one. It elucidates the stages of grief and emphasizes that although we all go through the same stages of grief, each one also grieves in a unique way as well, as we mourn and learn to accept our loss. People often go through identifiable stages of reconstructing their lives and learning how to live again. Mourning often is associated with negative emotions and it is a positive task for people to overcome their shock, disbelief, and denial. Overall, Stevens-Long and Bardell do an excellent job highlighting the importance of having conversations about living and dying, of connecting this to the changes in the dying process, emphasizing the importance of having conversations with loved ones early on, and outlining the different options that are available to take care of an aging population.

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Stephen M. Marson, *Elder Suicide: Durkheim's Vision*. NASW Press (2019), 169 pages, \$32.00 (papercover).

This very important book is a strong reminder that while we are pushed in academic culture, and American culture in general, to prize the new, the novel and the latest, there is still a treasure of wisdom and worth in the old foundational writings in social analysis. Probably many readers of this journal have some acquaintance with the name of Emile Durkheim, and are perhaps vaguely aware that one of Durkheim's major works was a study of the social contributors to suicide. But I venture to say that many of us have not actually read that tome, or like me, have only read parts of it. We can all benefit, therefore, from the fact that Stephen Marson has not only read it closely, many times over I suspect, but also has closely digested it and applied it to his work in teaching and practicing geriatric social work.