Introduction

Multicultural Issues in Social Work: Practice and Research

Multicultural Issues in Social Work: Practice and Research extends the collective vision of multiculturalism in social work practice that was presented in Volume I. Volume II reflects some of the major social and political changes that have influenced multicultural practice since 1995, the end of the period addressed in Volume I. The following changes have shaped both the content and the organizational framework of this book:

- **The Status of Multicultural Practice Research.** Emerging research has documented how large systems, as well as culturally biased research paradigms and methods, can disregard the marginalized voices and realities of oppressed groups. Conversely, culturally sensitive research has identified collaborative political action strategies and stakeholder research methods that lead to systems change and help diverse groups and communities gain their voices and enhance their capacities. Such research has implications for shifting the roles of professionals to make them more complementary to new active roles for consumers.

- **Professional Social Work Standards Related to Multicultural Practice.** NASW revised its Code of Ethics in 1996. Among other changes, the revised Code clarifies, strengthens, and expands ethical principles and standards required for social work practice in terms of social justice, sexual harassment; cultural competence; and social diversity, discrimination, and social and political action. Changes in these ethical principles and standards require practitioners to be more knowledgeable about the ethics involved and to improve their multicultural practice skills. Organizational resources are needed to support these professional and individual changes.

- **The Cultural Patterns and Political Circumstances among Diverse Populations Currently Immigrating to this Country.** The cultural patterns of groups coming to this country from similar parts of the world cover a tremendous range of values, traditions, and beliefs that service providers may not recognize as important within-group differences (for example, among Asian and Pacific Islanders, groups from different Caribbean islands, and latinos from various South American countries). Groups from countries with totalitarian political systems may have difficulties understanding this country’s democratic traditions, the political culture, and how to influence the system to address social justice issues. Practitioners in various settings will need to recognize and develop skills for responding to these subtleties in cultural patterns.

- **Implementation of Public Policy Related to Multicultural Issues.** Many policies passed by Congress before 1995 and other more recent policies that are being implemented are affecting multicultural practice and the quantity and quality of services available to a range of diverse groups. Those policies include welfare-to-work; managed care in health, child welfare, mental health; and affirmative action reforms in education, employment, and other civil rights areas. Such policies reflect a shift away from cultural tolerance and an appreciation of diversity in this country toward victim-blaming and cost-containment in social and educational programs. Hate crimes may have increased as part of this atmosphere of intolerance. Practitioners and administrators will need to improve their resource development, advocacy, action research, dissemination, and policy impact skills based on these social, political, and cultural changes.

The focus in Volume I, from a developmental perspective, was on clarifying the importance of multiculturalism, identifying multicultural issues, and defining and conceptualizing the nature of multicultural practice across various groups. This volume builds on that foundation by addressing a broader range of multicultural practice in more diverse settings and practice arenas. The book is organized into sections on multicultural practice, child welfare, education and youths, communities, health, long-term care, mental health and substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, and immigration. The chapters in each section provide an in-depth analysis of multicultural practice and related professional issues, as well as practical tools and cogent research findings for improving such practice.

Some chapters include implications for enhancing multicultural practice through innovative curriculum developments in social work education. The focus on diversity and multiculturalism in Volume II has been extended to include issues of gender and location in terms of the special needs and cultural strengths of rural populations. The also is a larger number of chapters on age-appropriate services for elderly people.

The breadth and scope of this book should challenge social workers and other helping professionals, as well as policymakers, to move beyond concerns about political correctness in their perspectives and actions. This book clarifies the dynamic balance required between supportive policy, research, and practice in the multicultural area and the related shift in language and thought that is necessary for real commitment to honoring diversity. Concepts
such as culturally informed, values-based, culturally relevant, social construction, alternative health practices, cultural values and health care decision making, cultural care practices, and culturally appropriate services reflect an emphasis on consumers' interpretations and meanings and on their role as experts. Consumers' perspectives about their cultural strengths, the quality of service networks, the effects of oppression and cultural privilege, culturally appropriate help-seeking behaviors, and their needs are highlighted in the book as well. In a complementary fashion, some chapters identify culturally sensitive roles for professionals, including those of partners, coaches, advocates, and nonexperts.

_Multicultural Issues in Social Work: Practice and Research_ is designed to assist social work students and practitioners in a broad range of practice settings and fields to improve the quality of and resources available for effective multicultural practice. Its contents are relevant to social work administrators in social agencies and other organizations, educators, researchers, community advocates, and policy analysts and reformers. The book should be useful also to students and professionals from other helping fields and related areas.

Many gifted authors have contributed to the expanded perspective about multicultural issues and practice presented in this volume. The breadth and depth of their work parallel an increase in the overall number of articles on this topic in the literature. This trend reflects an increased concern and commitment to understanding and disseminating multiculturalism within the range of social work practice. Furthermore, it provides fertile ground for the future development of practice literature in this extremely important area.

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