

The Social Work Experience

An Introduction to Social Work and Social Welfare

THIRD EDITION

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Mount Mary College

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University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh



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THE SOCIAL WORK EXPERIENCE AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL WELFARE

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With love to Fred (Fritz) Suppes and gratitude for inspiration, loyalty, and endless days of technical research; and to my mother, Lucille Brix Schultze, the first true feminist in my life, for her love and encouragement.

To my husband, Dennis Loeffler, with love and appreciation for his patience and support, and to my sister, Merritt Stites, with love and admiration for her many contributions to our shared profession.

About the Authors

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Foreword

An introduction to the social work profession is a critical element in providing new social work students, as well as other students who are exploring an interest in social work, with a comprehensive understanding of the profession. Such an introduction must be provided in nonjargon language that college freshmen and sophomores can understand. In addition, the text must provide an accurate description of the breadth and depth of our dynamic profession. Mary Ann Suppes and Carolyn Cressy Wells, two social work educators with a total of over 50 years experience in directing undergraduate social work programs, have accomplished that task with distinction.

In 1989, on the eve of the publication of the second edition of *The Social Work Experience*, Ronald Federico, a noted authority on baccalaureate social work education, wrote that Mary Ann Suppes and Carolyn Wells had succeeded in developing a social work text that provided an introduction to the profession and provided an "integration of knowledge—from practice and from theory" in a creative and effective manner.

In the third edition, Suppes and Wells have maintained that creative approach and responded to a number of critical concerns and changing areas of social work and social policy. The new edition is organized into three areas. The first part addresses social work and its context and includes discussions of the professional social worker, career opportunities, social welfare policy, and historical elements of the development of the profession as well as a discussion of poverty and populations at risk. The second part of the text provides excellent discussion of fields of services, including family and children's and elderly services, mental health, school social work, and social work in the workplace, in health care, and in criminal justice settings, as well as social work with persons with substance abuse problems. The final part looks toward the future and includes a number of major challenges for the profession.

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A unique aspect of this book is the inclusion of "debate boxes" which contain a proposition regarding a current social welfare topic and then provide perspectives in favor of and against that proposition. The inclusion of these debate boxes should provoke much discussion among students of diverse issues of import to the social work profession. In each chapter, the authors also provide exhibits, key terms, cyber sites, and discussion questions which help to illustrate and elaborate on the content and provide critical opportunities for students to integrate the content and to pursue further exploration.

Many of us in social work education have been concerned about the need for social work texts to respond to the growing multicultural nature of our society. This text contains a thoughtful integration of diversity content in chapter case studies and in the didactic content of the text. Each chapter begins with a case study, and many of these studies reflect human diversity. In a chapter on poverty and populations at risk, the authors question whether our society has achieved economic and social justice in light of the continuing, widespread existence of poverty, racism, sexism, ageism, and homophobia as well as handicapism. The book also includes ways in which our society has responded to these ubiquitous problems, as well as a provocative discussion on the current status of affirmative action in this country.

Suppes and Wells also updated a number of important social welfare areas in this text. These include excellent discussions of the 1996 welfare reform legislation and the Americans with Disabilities Act as well as the impact of the aging of the baby boomers on Social Security and Medicare in the near future. Other major problem areas that are updated include the feminization of poverty as well as the current increase of children and adolescents in poverty.

The authors' ability to integrate practice and social policy is excellent. One of the concerns that many of us who teach in the area of social policy have is that social work students are not provided with a balanced approach to practice and policy. Often, policy is an afterthought, and students continue through their social work education with a limited perspective on social policy. Suppes and Wells have done an impressive job of integrating social policy throughout this text. Not only is policy well addressed in terms of its importance to the social work profession, but current areas of import in social policy are discussed with a degree of clarity that reflects the authors' understanding of the level of sophistication of social work students at this level.

A new chapter in this text provides important information to the student beginning an examination of a career in social work. It anticipates questions students interested in making social work their profession may have, and it provides information on entry-level job searches, career paths, and job opportunities in the social work profession. It also provides important information on legal regulation as well as information on career facts and even employment projections.

Suppes and Wells conclude their book by examining a number of issues that they believe will be important to society and the social work profession in the future. They draw from demographic trends, political forces, economic conditions, and technological advances to frame their view of the future. They examine the future of the profession, taking into consideration the changing multicultural nature of our society, as well as the graying of America and the continuing impact of immigrants and refugees. The changing nature of the American family does not es-

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cape their assessments, and neither do technological advances in health care and the computerization of human services organizations.

The third edition of *The Social Work Experience* fulfills Suppes and Wells' commitment to develop a text that is generalist in orientation and that incorporates the ethics and values of the profession and human diversity issues. Suppes' extensive experience on the Council on Social Work Education's Commission on Accreditation and as a social work education consultant and Cressy's extensive experience in social work education plus both authors' knowledge of the Council on Social Work Education's Curriculum Policy Statement are reflected in this text's incorporation of populations at risk, diversity, values and ethics, and generalist practice. This text is timely, provocative, and reflective of the contemporary nature of the social work profession in this increasingly complex society. It will provide new social work students, as well as those considering the social work profession for a career, with an exceptional understanding of the breadth and depth of the social work profession and the challenges it confronts on a daily basis in improving the social well-being of all elements of American society

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Preface

One beautiful, crisp fall day several years ago two friends, both social work educators, set off by car for a conference 200 miles to the north. We were those friends and our conversation during that drive sparked the ideas that resulted in *The Social Work Experience*. We were both teaching introductory courses in social work that semester and, because our roots were in social work practice, we were frustrated by the lack of well-developed, contemporary case study materials. Authentic, current case material, we were convinced, would help students to identify with the real people who are served by social workers across the United States, and with the social workers themselves.

It occurred to us that we could create these materials ourselves from our own professional practice experiences and from the field learning experiences of our students. Our case studies could portray ethnically and racially diverse populations in both client and social worker roles. Some could illustrate baccalaureate social work students in field work practice. We could synthesize real-life situations of people we had known and thus avoid exact duplication of any actual cases. With these ideas and commitments, the book emerged.

Over the next months as the first edition of the book developed, case studies were designed which presented generalist social work practice with different systems levels and connected case materials with theoretical content. Common themes were integrated into each chapter: generalist practice, social research, ethics and values, and human diversity. Later, in the second edition, the theme of human diversity was augmented and expanded to include an examination of poverty, populations at risk, and social justice issues. Our concern for special issues relevant to women helped frame several of the case studies as well as the content of the text. The development of major social welfare programs in the United States was traced. The history of the social work profession was presented within each field of practice, to acquaint students with the social and political context of the times and with the persons who provided strong leadership in the development

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of the profession. The primary focus of the book was entry-level generalist social work practice, but the linkage between generalist and specialist practice was also presented.

The common themes integrated into every chapter of the first two editions remain the same in the third edition. However, presentation of these materials has been enriched and updated by several new case studies, debate boxes, cyber sites, and suggested research activities included in every chapter. An entire new chapter discusses important considerations in choosing social work as a career.

We remain committed to helping students understand the impact of politics and economics on social welfare policy. In our experience, the relationship of social welfare policy to practice is often not clear to students when they first explore the profession of social work, but it does become dramatically clear in field work when they experience the pain of underserved populations. The case studies in this book, therefore, were selected because they demonstrate how people suffer when human service programs are poorly funded. Both the case studies and the didactic content were developed to make clear the profound impact of legislation on social welfare policy and social work practice, and on the people served by social workers. For this reason, many of the case studies illustrate social workers in roles involving community intervention, advocating for people, and attempting to influence public policy. For, in fact, the role of the true generalist goes well beyond counseling relationships and therapy with individual clients. It calls for interventions with families, groups, organizations, and communities, as well as with individuals. It demands that interventions be based on the needs and problems of people, not on a social worker's personal expertise in a specific therapeutic modality.

All of the chapters in the text begin with a case study, which can be interesting but might also pose some problems. For instance, readers might make inappropriate generalizations from them, such as: all street people are alcoholics, mental illness is especially prevalent among Native Americans, or Asian people are all refugees. Another invalid inference would be the assumption that social workers need special life experiences, such as alcoholism and recovery, to be effective with specific problem situations presented by clients. Diverse racial and ethnic groups are depicted in the case studies, but not for the purpose of associating these groups with any specific social problems. Instead, the case studies show that when people need to use social services, their unique cultural identities must be acknowledged and respected, not ignored or violated. Case studies are a useful means to engage students and to help them explore the many dimensions of social work practice.

Critical thinking skills are essential to ethical, competent social work practice. The case studies in this text present learning opportunities that will challenge students to think carefully and critically, to recognize invalid assumptions in the situations, and also to analyze the many inappropriate generalizations made by society about the people that social workers serve.

A note about the terminology used in the text to indicate the two major levels of professional practice: "BSW" applies to persons who have been prepared at the baccalaureate level in schools accredited by the Council on Social Work Education; and master's-degree social workers are referred to as "MSWs." It should be noted, however, that many accredited undergraduate schools grant the BA degree (or the BS, BSW, BASW, or other variations). And, while the MSW is the more commonly awarded master's degree in social work, some of the degree variations

at this level include the MSSW and the MS. All such variations are incorporated into the text's BSW and MSW designations.

PREFACE

Today, as we put the finishing touches to the third edition, we wish to acknowledge and thank those who assisted us on this project. While the book is basically our own creation, it has been substantially enriched by the critiques and contributions of its editors and reviewers. Irving Rockwood, senior editor of the first edition, was instrumental in providing the transitional arrangements with McGraw-Hill that made the second edition possible. Ronald C. Federico's innovative ideas continue to shape the content of the book, in spite of his untimely death shortly after publication of the first edition.

For the third edition we wish to thank our editor Allison McNamara for her assistance, and we are grateful to the following reviewers for their helpful critiques and comments: Gloria Duran Aguilar, Thomas College; Mary Ellen Elwell, Salisbury State University; Leonard Gibbs, the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire; Waldo E. Johnson Jr., Loyola University, Chicago; Charles Jones, the University of Michigan at Flint; Teresa C. Jones, Michigan State University; Tim Kelly, the University of Georgia; Stephen M. Marson, The University of North Carolina at Pembroke; Taylor McGlawn, Rust College; John McNutt, Boston College; Dennis Myers, Baylor University; Andrew T. Nilsson, Eastern Connecticut State University; Kim-Anne Perkins, the University of Maine at Presque Isle; Jack Sellers, the University of North Alabama; and Marjorie P. Steinberg, Western Connecticut State University.

Our gratitude is also expressed to those who provided materials for or helped to design our composite case studies: Luz Brugos, Isaac Christie, Joe Daley, Jason Dietenberger, Michael George, Georgia Giese, Linda Ketcher Goodrich, Sandra Hill, David Kucej, Julie Kudick, Maureen Martin, Melissa Monsoor, Malcolm Montgomery, Jan Mowdy, Dolores Poole, Wanda Priddy, David Schneider, Delores Sumner, Deborah Trakel, Jeanne West, Judith Wettengel, Jodi Searl Wnurorski. We appreciate the exceptional library research assistance of Laurel Privatt at Mount Mary College. We are grateful to Clarone Hicks and Roberta Allickson for their technical assistance.

We are most indebted to the theorists and writers whose dream of generalist social work practice has inspired us. Along with hundreds of other social work educators, we are committed to keeping alive and strong the concept of generalist practice articulated by Betty L. Baer and Ronald C. Federico, among others.* It is our sincere hope that faculty and students alike will find this book helpful in understanding and appreciating the context and practice of social work.

Mary Ann Suppes Carolyn Cressy Wells

^{*}See Betty L. Baer and Ronald C. Federico, Educating the Baccalaureate Social Worker: Report of the Undergraduate Social Work Curriculum Development Project, Ballinger, Cambridge, Mass., 1978; and Educating the Baccalaureate Social Worker: A Curriculum Development Resources Guide, Ballinger, Cambridge, Mass., 1979.

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