

Social Work Macro Practice

Fourth Edition

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FOURTH EDITION

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To Karl, the anchor in my life.
FEN

To Judy, for a lifetime of encouragement and support.
PMK

To G-Y, Caitlin, and Alex
SLM

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Preface

Macro practice has come to mean many different things to different people, so we feel it is important to share our perspective at the outset. Over the years, we were intrigued to learn that previous editions of our text were being used at both graduate and undergraduate levels in courses on human behavior and policy practice, as well as in courses on community practice and human service organizations. It is likely that a wide variety of curriculum designs and different ways of dividing curricular content accounts for the varying perspectives on how this book can be used. We are pleased that so many faculty have found a variety of uses for the book and its content, but we would also like to take this opportunity to clarify our perspective about the purpose of the book.

We are aware that the history of social work as a profession has been marked by shifts in and tensions between intervention with individuals and intervention with and within larger systems. Early perspectives on the latter tended to focus primarily on policy-level involvements (especially legislative processes) and community organizing. As the need for social work administration and management content was recognized and incorporated into the curriculum of many schools of social work, this topic was also embraced as an area of concentration for those who wanted to work with and within larger systems. In order to manage oversubscribed curricula, students have often been forced to concentrate in *either* macro or micro areas, creating a false dichotomy, when social work of all professions is uniquely positioned to integrate both.

Therefore, as we taught our required foundation-level courses on community and organizational change, and as we worked with students and professionals in the field, we became aware of the changing dynamics of practice and expectations for practitioners. Both students and practitioners were working with populations such as homeless persons, members of teen street gangs, victims of domestic violence, chronically unemployed persons, frail elders, and other disenfranchised groups. Although social workers will always need casework and clinical skills to help people in need on a one-to-one basis, it was becoming increasingly evident to us that they were also expected to intervene at the community level. Typical activities included promoting the development of shelters, developing neighborhood alternatives to gang membership and juvenile incarceration, addressing chronic unemployment, and navigating the complexity of long-term care services as a community problem.

These activities are not new; many closely mirror the work of settlement-house workers in the early days of the profession. Yet, many social work students have traditionally seen themselves as preparing strictly for interventions at the individual or domestic level. It is unexpected and disconcerting when they find themselves being asked to initiate actions

and design interventions that will affect large numbers of people and take on problems at the community or organizational level. A major goal of this book, then, is to recapture a broader definition of *social work practice* that recognizes the need for workers to be able to bridge these distinctions if they are to provide effective services.

When social work practice with macro systems is seen as solely the realm of administrators, community organizers, program planners, and others, a vital linkage to millions of people who struggle daily with environmental constraints has been severed. Social workers who see clients every day, we believe, are the ones who are most aware of the need for macro-level change. Macro practice, understood within this context, defines the uniqueness of social work practice. Many disciplines claim expertise in working with individuals, groups, and families, but social work has long stood alone in its focus on the organizational, community, and policy contexts within which its clients function. The concept of the person-in-environment is not simply a slogan that makes social workers aware of environmental influences. It means that social workers recognize that sometimes it is the *environment* and not the *person* that needs to be changed.

Macro-level change may, but does not necessarily always, involve large-scale, costly reforms at the federal and state levels or the election of candidates more sympathetic to the poor, neglected, and underserved members of society. Sometimes useful macro-level change can involve organizing a local neighborhood to deal with deterioration and blight, sometimes it may mean initiating a self-help group and stepping back so that members will assume leadership roles. The focus of this book is on enabling social work practitioners to undertake whatever types of macro-level interventions are needed in an informed, analytical way and with a sense of confidence that they can do a competent job and achieve positive results.

Organization

Social Work Macro Practice is organized into five parts. In Part One, we begin by highlighting examples of macro practice in the interest of acquainting students with the rich traditions of macro-level change that all social workers inherit when they enter the profession. We address ethical dilemmas that social workers may face when using micro-level strategies, and provide an historical overview of macro practice and the diverse population groups served.

Part Two is focused on two components critical to planned change: understanding both problems and populations. We introduce the concept of analyzing macro systems, and we guide the student through the early phases of the process. Guidelines for problem and population analysis are incorporated into the chapters in this section, and students are referred to available literature and other resources to complete these analyses.

Parts Three and Four focus on community content and organizational content, the components that we have referred to as analysis of arena. These sections of the book are more comprehensive because the content is provided in the text itself. The content is designed to walk a student through a community and/or organizational analysis in preparation for proposing change that is relevant to the arena within which it will take place.

Finally, in Part Five we have designed a practice model for planned intervention that we believe is applicable to both communities and organizations, and that we sincerely hope addresses the realities of practice. We recognize the fact that when a caseworker or admin-

istrator becomes involved in a change effort, clinical or administrative responsibilities do not stop. By sharing organizing responsibilities with others and by clearly defining and analyzing the problem, population, and arena for intervention, we believe the busy practitioner can bring about organizational and community change necessary to improve the quality of life for the intended beneficiaries of the change.

A familiar dilemma we faced in preparing the book concerned organizing the material for the purpose of teaching in contrast to organizing it in ways that reflect the realities of daily practice. One comment we received on the first edition of the book was that it went too far in cautioning the reader to consider all alternatives and perspectives before proceeding with planned change. Certainly, we recognize that social movements and societal change would not occur if passion and risk taking did not incite people to action. However, we must always be mindful that we are attempting to reach an audience of new professionals who are just entering the field of social work. We would be remiss if we did not suggest that they critically consider the implications of their actions, for we believe that professionals have to be accountable for what they do. It is difficult to embrace this responsibility without recognizing the potential implications of one's actions. As in one-to-one practice, new professionals engaging in macro-level interventions need to act methodically early in their careers, in contrast to the practiced professional who can more swiftly accomplish the analytical work and move to action. We hope that the content of this book is helpful in developing that professional, analytical mind-set, and that social workers at all levels throughout organizations and communities are able to move skillfully from interventions with clients to interventions at the organization and community levels, depending on need.

Fourth Edition Features

For instructors who are using the book, it may be helpful to know that we have not changed the order of chapters, as we did in the third edition. Therefore, the basic structure holds, but content within each chapter has been thoroughly updated and revised.

- We updated all references and materials throughout the book, as well as added examples that relate to the use of technology. Every attempt has been made to cite the empirically based literature whenever it is available.
- Throughout the book, we added additional tables and boxes because readers find these features useful.
- In Chapter 1, we clarified the basic concepts of systems theory, updated comments from former students, and changed the assumptions about macro practice. In Chapter 2, we added to the historical perspective, focusing particularly on the role of women and adding references from feminist historians. Statistics on income inequities were added, several sections were combined, and ideological currents include up-to-date information on welfare reform, faith-based issues, and ideological conflicts about illegal immigration and gay marriage/civil commitments.
- Chapters 3 and 4 focus more on a strengths perspective, contain new examples, and present technological strategies for accessing the professional knowledge base for data and information on populations and problems.

- In Chapter 5, we reworked the ordering of theoretical material on community, updating and revising content. A new matrix guides the reader in understanding the differences between descriptive and prescriptive theories. Note that the title of Chapter 6 has changed from “Analyzing Communities” to “Assessing Communities” because we believe this more accurately describes the chapter’s contents. We added examples that focus on nonplace as well as place-based communities, recognizing that the assessment tool in the appendix can be used for both.
- In Chapter 7, we focused on making a theoretical chapter more user-friendly to students who may not be familiar with organizational theories. Some of the contemporary trends in theory development are presented as well. Chapter 5 on communities and Chapter 7 on organizations are now more parallel in how theoretical material is presented. Chapter 8 also carries a new title, “Assessing Human Service Organizations,” making it parallel to Chapter 6.
- Readers seem always to want more elaboration in Chapters 9, 10, and 11, so we added some detail, with the caveat that these chapters could comprise a book unto itself. We added examples that focus on community as well as organizational change, recognizing that community or policy-level outcomes are different from direct practice interventions. Many boxes have been added, intended to enhance the revised content.

In our earlier editions, students and faculty alike found that the frameworks we provided were user-friendly and easy to follow. We have kept those frameworks throughout the book and have strengthened them. However, we caution the reader to recognize that in our attempt to make these tools easy to use, we may falsely imply that step-by-step completion of all tasks will inevitably lead to success. Obviously, the world is far too complex for “cookbook” approaches that are followed in lockstep. Our intent is to provide tools and frameworks that have records of success and that offer a reasonable likelihood for future successes if used appropriately. We readily recognize that ours is not the only approach nor necessarily the best in all circumstances. We remain interested in any approach that provides students and practitioners with viable alternatives.

This book is designed to mesh well with a variety of contemporary policy texts. We have made every attempt to remind the reader that planned change approaches, such as the one presented herein, occur within a political environment that is constantly changing. We hope readers will always use our planned change approach with an eye to the political environment as well as to the iterative nature of how change processes occur.

Acknowledgments

As we finish this fourth edition, much has changed since our original 1993 publication. We are now scattered in three different geographical locations: Virginia, Arizona, and Wisconsin. We are indebted to colleagues and students at the three universities where we have worked who have given us constructive and helpful feedback throughout the years. Also, we thank colleagues who provided feedback as they used our text at other universities. We appreciate as well the efforts of a number of reviewers who provided careful and thoughtful assessments of earlier drafts. For this fourth edition, these individuals are Jong Choi, California State University; Gary Norman, University of Houston; Tracy Soska, University of Pittsburgh; and Robert Vernon, Indiana State University.

To our editor, Patricia Quinlin, we express our appreciation for her oversight, patience, interest, and assistance as we revised our text. To our developmental editor, David Estrin, we are grateful for his continued support, expertise, and humor throughout this fourth revision process.

Most of all, we thank those students and practitioners who, often in the face of seemingly insurmountable barriers, continue to practice social work the way it was intended. They intervene at whatever level is needed. They persist with what may appear to be intractable problems and work with clients who have lost hope until hope can be rediscovered and pursued. Their spirit and dedication continually inspire us in our efforts to provide whatever guidance we can for the next generation of social workers.

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