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# Understanding Human Behavior and the Social Environment

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Charles Zastrow

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Karen Kirst-Ashman

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# **Understanding Human Behavior and the Social Environment**

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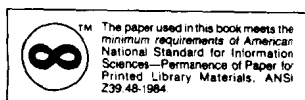
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# **Understanding Human Behavior and the Social Environment**

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Consulting editor: **Beulah Compton**

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*To Nick and Christopher*

# Preface

An 18-year-old man, who sees no reason to live anymore, threatens to kill himself. A couple suddenly separates after 23 years of marriage. A young family plagued by unemployment is evicted from their apartment and moves into a tent. A demonstration is staged because a local factory refuses to hire black workers. Why do people do what they do? The main focus of this text is on *assessment*; that is, material is presented to help readers understand the underlying reasons for why people act the way they do and to evaluate the strengths and deficits in the development of people. A wide variety of theories and research about human growth and development are presented. The theories cover both the internal and external variables that influence human behavior.

This text is especially written for use in undergraduate and graduate courses in human behavior and social environment (HBSE). As stated in the following accreditation guidelines, a curriculum requirement of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) is that every accredited social work program must provide content on human behavior and social environment:

In keeping with social work's person-in-environment focus, students need knowledge of the relationships among human biological, social, psychological, and cultural systems as they affect or are affected by human behavior.

The curriculum design by each program should identify a coherent approach to selecting research and theories that constitute the systems of knowledge in the social, behavioral and biological sciences to be offered to students. It should specify how this knowledge will be presented in a way that illuminates divergencies and interrelationships (Council on Social Work Education, 1984, Appendix 1, p. 7).

The person-in-environment focus is a key component of an ecological model of human behavior. For many years social work programs have struggled to develop a HBSE curriculum that covers all the extensive content desired in the Council's HBSE accreditation guideline. This text seeks to meet this guideline with the following thrusts:

- An ecological model entitled The Behavior Dynamics Assessment Model (described in Chapter 1) is used which allows the authors to present a vast array of theories and research to explain and describe human development.
- A life span approach is used which allows for a description of human growth and development from conception through later adulthood.
- For each age group, separate chapters identify biological, psychological, and sociological variables that influence development.\*
- Normal developmental tasks and milestones are described for each age group.
- Theories of abnormal development are presented.
- Human diversity factors (involving racial groups, ethnic groups, gender, and sexual orientation) are described.

A final thrust of this text is to present the material in an educational and readable fashion. Numerous case examples, photographs, and line illustrations are used in presenting provocative and controversial issues about human behavior. As much as possible, jargon-free language is used so that the reader can readily grasp the theory.

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\*In some cases the biological, psychological, and sociological variables overlap. For example, a midlife crisis often involves a combination of biological, psychological, and sociological variables. Therefore, the authors may, rather arbitrarily, include some material under one heading (for example, covering biological aspects) when a reader can make a strong case that it should be covered under some other heading (that is, psychological aspects or sociological aspects).



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Karen K. Kirst-Ashman  
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