

# Book Reviews

*Healthy Aging in Sociocultural Context* edited by Andrew E. Scharlach and Kazumi Hoshino. 2012: New York, Routledge. ISBN 978-0415636216

The United States – along with most industrialized nations and an increasing number of developing societies – is experiencing rapid population aging. More people age in the community and fewer people age in nursing homes or in other institutions. This is due to stronger preference to live in the community as well as the limited availability and high cost of appropriate long-term care institutions.

In the United States, today's physical and social infrastructure does not meet the unique needs of this growing population group. Compared with their cohort predecessors, today's older adults have more functional limitations and a greater burden of chronic disease. Today's older adults are also very diverse. Local and national policies will be needed to address growing concerns about racial and ethnic disparities in health status and access to appropriate care. Population aging and increasing diversity of older adults is not unique to the United States. Strategies from other societies to promote healthy aging can assist researchers, policy-makers, planners, and stakeholders in promoting the health and well-being of today's seniors globally.

This book, an addition to the *Routledge Advances in Sociology* series, is a product of multidisciplinary international collaboration. The project emerged from an international symposium on healthy aging held at the University of California, Berkeley. *Healthy Aging in Sociocultural Context* discusses the barriers and facilitators to healthy aging in several industrialized nations. The text examines differences in healthy life expectancies, the role of diversity and geographic mobility, and social transitions in the United States, Sweden, and Japan. The influence of cultural norms and values on the experience of aging and the adoption of policies to promote healthy aging are discussed in these different contexts.

The book contains ten chapters arranged in four parts. Part I discusses age-related trends and policies in the United States. Chapter 1 discusses predictors of healthy aging at individual and community levels. Chapter 2 contextualizes these trends through a discussion of aging-related demographic transitions and approaches to promote healthy aging. Chapter 3 provides a case study of diverse older adults in California to describe cultural variations in aging perceptions and experiences.

Part II reviews age-related trends and policies in Sweden. Chapter 4 describes demographic transitions and projections related to age, gender, and ethnicity in Sweden and subsequent implications for policy. Possible reasons why Swedes experience relatively healthy longevity are introduced. Chapter 5 considers culture and demographic trends of aging immigrant groups in Sweden.

Part III discusses healthy aging in Japan. Chapter 6 considers the benefits and challenges of national health insurance and long-term care insurance for an aging population. Chapter 7 describes demographic transitions in Japan. An intergenerational model – which can be used as a strategy to promote healthy aging – frames the discussion of family and cultural influences on aging trends and experiences. Chapter 8 describes the increasing diversity of older adults in Japan, primarily in the context of immigration. An overview of policies concerning aging in Japan is provided, and the implications of diversity on policies to promote healthy aging are discussed.

Part IV introduces current conceptual models of healthy aging. The major themes and implications of the book are discussed. Using an international perspective on aging, Chapter 9 provides a multidimensional model of support for older adults. Four dimensions of healthy aging (physical, social, psychological, and spiritual) are discussed, followed by recommendations to promote healthy aging. Chapter 10 (written by the book's editors, Andrew Scharlach and Kazumi Hoshino) discusses the major themes that emerged from the text, including aging, diversity, and cultural context. The authors present an integrated definition of healthy aging and describe aging-related similarities and differences between the United States, Sweden, and Japan. The authors suggest strategies to promote healthy aging through education, institutions, and community supports.

*Healthy Aging in Sociocultural Context* is not the first text to examine population aging from an international perspective. This text is a unique contribution to the transdisciplinary and emerging field of aging-in-place. One of its greatest strengths is the detailed discussion of aging trends and policies across aging societies (focusing on the United States, Japan, and Sweden). The authors extend beyond American Exceptionalism by discussing aging in nations with even more rapid age-related changes than those in the United States. The authors not only achieve this aim, but they are also able to weave through common themes (diversity and culture) that provide challenges

and opportunities at household, local, national, and global levels. The authors have managed to achieve this ambitious goal in a concise text of 134 pages.

This text will be a helpful and approachable resource for readers interested in: (i) understanding multiple factors that influence the experience and opportunities of healthy aging; (ii) learning more about healthy aging at individual and community levels; (iii) identifying relevant theories related to aging-in-place; (iv) identifying how culture influences the adoption of social policies, and also how healthy aging is prioritized and framed; and (v) developing an international perspective on population aging.

*Healthy Aging in Sociocultural Context* is a valuable resource for advanced students and scholars in multiple disciplines including (but not limited to): sociology/demography, social work, urban planning, political science and public policy, nursing, geriatrics, and gerontology. This text also provides useful strategies for nonacademic readers who are interested in promoting healthy aging in their families and communities and, as stakeholder advocates, to inform and change policy.

This book highlights the challenges and unique opportunities of population aging. Certainly, there is no “silver bullet” strategy to promote healthy aging in community contexts in policy or practice. Whether or not a strategy or policy will “stick” in a particular context is influenced by that society’s priorities (e.g., individual versus collective orientation). However, the reader of this text will develop a deeper understanding of which strategies are effective in certain contexts – and perhaps more importantly – why.

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*Social Policy in a Developing World* edited by Rebecca Surender and Robert Walker. 2013: Northampton, MA, Elgar. ISBN 1849809909

*Social Protection in Developing Countries: Reforming Systems* by Katja Bender, Markus Kaltenborn and Christian Pfeleiderer. 2013: New York, Routledge. ISBN 0415641039

*Social Assistance in Developing Countries* by Armando Barrientos. 2013: New York, Cambridge University Press. ISBN 1107039029

The study of social policy in the developing countries (or “Global South” as these countries are now known) goes back many decades. One of the first books on the subject was written by Livingstone in 1969 and in the 1980s several publications on what was then called the “Third World” emerged. One of these by

MacPherson and Midgley (1987) was specifically designed to promote awareness of social policy in the developing countries among Western social policy scholars. However, these books attracted little attention and Western scholars remained largely ignorant of the subject, perpetuating many widely held but erroneous beliefs about social policy in the Global South. Among these is the assumption that the developing countries are backward, impoverished, and riddled with violence and corruption, and that they have poorly developed and inefficient social services. Accordingly, it is assumed that they do not fit established welfare state typologies and are, as Gough and Woods (2004) proposed, best characterized as “insecurity regimes.” It is also suggested that they will benefit from international aid and the adoption of Western approaches. Another misconception is that little research has been undertaken in the field. For example, Haggard and Kaufman (2008, p. 1) claimed that the study of social policy in the developing world is of “recent vintage.” But, as has been mentioned already, the literature on the subject goes back to the 1960s.

The three books reviewed here challenge these myths and make a major contribution to understanding social policy in the Global South. They transcend the narrow “welfare state” perspective of much Western social policy inquiry and rely liberally on scholarship from the interdisciplinary field of development studies. Although development studies scholars have been largely preoccupied with economic development, they have recently begun to focus attention on social policy issues and are producing a substantial literature on the subject. Mainstream social policy scholars in the West are largely unaware of this literature but will benefit from its insights. Hopefully, a closer collaboration between social policy and development studies can be forged to promote a collaborative analysis of welfare institutions that is broad-ranging, recognizes the common as well as the diverse elements of social policy and social welfare around the world, and pays greater attention to the role of economic factors. The three books reviewed here show that this is an attainable goal.

The first book is an edited collection by Surender and Walker, which contains chapters that range eclectically over a number of topics, including the role of social security in the developing world, issues facing workers in the informal economy, the contribution of nonprofits, the role of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in poverty reduction, public works programs and their role in poverty alleviation, and the contribution of social entrepreneurship to social policy. Deacon, a leading authority on global social policy, contributes a chapter on globalization, and there is an interesting chapter on what is called “South to South” cooperation, which involves the