

Book Review

Social policy for an aging society: A human rights perspective, by Carole B. Cox. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, 2015, 211 pages, \$60.00 (paperback).

Worldwide the number of older adults is projected to grow at a faster rate than any other age group (Ortman, Velkoff, & Hogan, 2014) thereby making the critical examination of social policies directly impacting this population extremely important. *Social Policy for an Aging Society: A Human Rights Perspective* is the most recent social policy textbook authored by Carole Cox, PhD. Currently an associate professor of social work at Fordham University, Cox presents her third text in the context of the ethics and value sets of the social work profession. The text's premise is that adults across the lifespan can actively contribute as members of society and that it is the job of a just society to foster and enable older adults to live their later years with dignity and respect. Moreover, Cox argues that it is equally as important for society to advocate for policies, programming, and services relating to older adults' well-being. Throughout this text, Cox pays close attention to women and elder ethnic minorities, as they are both particularly at-risk subpopulations within older adults in America.

This textbook provides an overview of modern social policies impacting the lives of older adults and serves as a strong resource for professors and students in the fields of gerontology, political science, and social science, as well as allied healthcare professionals. This text may serve as a resource for professors teaching an "Aging Policy" course. Through authorship of this text, Cox makes a unique contribution to the knowledge base by providing readers with an understanding of the need to frame social policies through a human rights perspective, particularly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly, 1948), where standards are set to move beyond meeting the minimum basic needs of older adults into addressing their rights as active participants in today's society. The text provides a comprehensive history of aging in America and the challenges this nation has faced in addressing the rights of older adults. It urges readers to differentiate between needs and rights of humans in today's society. The continual need for policies protecting the social rights of older adults is emphasized in the history lessons articulated throughout this book. The text examines the paradox between the importance of harnessing seniors' skills and abilities and the dictates of federal policies which delineate the roles and contributions of older adults in society. For example, volunteerism is one way to value seniors' talents and ambitions to promote community integration; however, these activities are overshadowed and continually disregarded as a result of social policies that exclude and separate seniors.

The first chapter of this textbook begins by defining social policy and outlining the needs of older adults and concludes with an introduction of social policy and societal rights within the human rights perspective, which is the framework guiding this text. The chapter emphasizes the role of social work's values and ethics as well as employing a human rights perspective when analyzing the impact of aging-related policies. Cox urges readers to understand that federal policies can undermine the status of human rights, even when such policies outline provisions aimed at social justice.

Each subsequent chapter provides readers with an understanding of current aging-related policies. Chapters engage readers through discussion of up-to-date current events and hot topics. The end of each chapter includes an exercise for students to engage their critical thinking skills. Discussion questions are framed through a social work and human rights lens, which encourages readers to be aware of legislative policies as they impact the lives of older adults in America and to understand policies and subsequent programming as a call to advocacy.

Cox discusses a variety of topics including income, human rights, the right to liberty and security, health and the provision of health care services, employment, retirement, and family caregiving. Income policies are a major feature of this text, including Medicare, Medicaid, and the Social Security Act. Cox emphasizes that income policies must take into account the specific socio-cultural and health care needs of older adults and critiques policy programming such as Medicare and Medicaid for failing to meet all the needs of this population and presenting barriers to accessing services. Health and health care are discussed as human rights and physical and mental healthcare are identified as fundamental rights.

Cox argues it is the job of social policies to establish and encourage a human rights-based approach to foster integration of older adults within society, rather than using policies to outline the gaps in abilities and skills of older adults, which further discriminates against this population. She provides examples that demonstrate ways in which America's needs-based policies do an adequate job protecting the rights of seniors, but are still flawed and need attention.

Despite recent policy developments, Cox identifies a persistent overarching deficit in mental health care. This includes a lack of dementia-sensitive mental health care, which is an ongoing concern nationwide. Cox suggests that future federal planning must focus on improving the quality of health care services to meet the needs of especially vulnerable seniors affected by chronic, persistent illness.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) elders are a population which faces an increased risk of discrimination. As one of the most vulnerable groups of older adults, Cox states this sub-population is at risk for abuse and violation of every basic human right and needs special attention. There is a lack of policies which meet the needs of older LGBTQ seniors and this is an immediate threat.

The final chapters focus on policy challenges specific to cross-cultural aspects of an aging society. Across Europe, particularly Sweden, Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Australia, there will be an incredible increase in the population of older adults in coming years. Data show that older adults will comprise one in every four persons, with the majority being women. To account for the economic and social challenges associated with the demographic change, Sweden and Australia have established comprehensive policies taking into account the difficulties faced by older adults. Alternatively, developing countries struggle to support the needs of an aging nation, namely health care needs. Arguably, policies should promote social ties, engagement and activity, networking, and seek to improve the overall well-being for older adults.

Although this text is comprehensive in its nature, it may be a challenging read for bachelors-level students and entry-level practitioners. Additionally, while this text provides a complete overview of social policies related to older adults worldwide, its primary focus is aging in America and

state-side federal policy and program development. For students and/or practitioners studying cross-national policies focusing on older adults, this text may fall short.

In conclusion, Cox provides an informative read to educate practitioners and students across fields such as social work, nursing, medicine, political science, and gerontology addressing the shortcomings of America's needs-based policies. Cox provides readers with a description of the impact of social policy on fundamental human rights. This text assesses the ever-present challenges of aging well in present day American society, in addition to providing a substantial history of federal policy and programming and a brief cross-cultural comparison.

References

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Vivian J. Miller, LMSW, is a Licensed Master Social Worker in the state of Texas and has practice experience working with older adults in a variety of settings, e.g. community programming, skilled nursing facilities, and long-term nursing home care. Currently, Miss Miller is a doctoral student at University of Texas at Arlington's School of Social Work. Most recently, Miss Miller was awarded the pre-dissertation initiative award from the Association for Gerontology Education in Social Work (AGESW). Her primary research interest is in Gerontology with special attention paid to minority elders, dementia, and quality-of-life in healthcare systems, e.g., nursing homes, long-term care, and skilled nursing facilities.