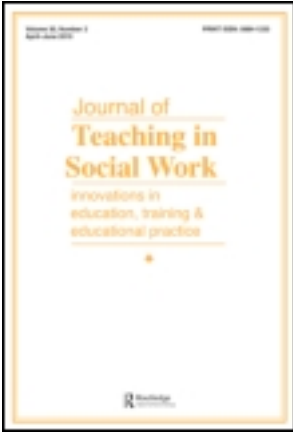


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### Social Work in Rural Communities, by Leon H. Ginsberg (Ed.)

Joanne Riebschleger Ph.D.LMSW<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Social Work, Michigan State University

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Leon H. Ginsberg (Ed.). (2011). *Social Work in Rural Communities*, 5th ed. Alexandria, VA: Council on Social Work Education (422 pp, \$30.00, hardcover, ISBN #13-9780872931466).

Leon Ginsberg's rural social work texts are among the most sought-after publications of the Council on Social Work Education. The fifth edition continues the momentum of a 40-year zeitgeist of swelling attention to rural people as a diverse minority group who comprise 21% of the American population while living on 83% of the land (USDA, n.d.). What is particularly intriguing about the fifth edition is the way the chapters collectively tell stories of working with *minority subgroups* existing within the minority status population of rural people. Further, these subgroups may be living in small rural towns or frontier areas in the United States and across the world. Most of the chapter authors are well-known educators or practitioners in the field of rural social work. In example after example, they show how social work research, policy, and especially practice can be applied in technologically enhanced, local-to-global social environments. Social work practitioners, policy makers, educators, and students are likely to seek out this new edition for its particular aim of enhancing minority-in-minority cultural competency skills required in today's increasingly interdependent world (Healy, 2008). Though only a few chapters offer newer studies, the fifth edition of *Social Work in Rural Communities* offers rich teaching resources.

Rural people are defined as "minority" by their limited population size and their experiences with social isolation, rural stigma, and less access to formal resources available in most urban/suburban areas. (Lohmann & Lohmann, 2005; Pugh, 2000). Among rural people, the subgroups identified by the authors include children, youths, elderly, women, poor, American Indians/American Natives, Amish, immigrants, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered. These subgroups may be categorized further as active citizens, planners, collaborators, resilient people, former prisoners, cancer patients, mental health consumers, and survivors of natural disasters and interpersonal violence. These populations serve as backdrop for a range of case studies, each one offering specific cultural competency strategies for serving diverse groups within local and international rural settings. Cultural competency strategies consist of (1) strength-based practices and empowerment approaches; (2) awareness of regional history; (3) participation in community events; (4) connections with extended family systems; (5) respect for elders and informal leaders; (6) creative new resource development and collaboration; (7) advocating for access to services and resources; (8) technology linkages; and (9) interventions that target micro-, mezzo-, and macro-systems. These strategies fit with social work generalist practice that is the mainstay of rural social work (Lohmann & Lohmann,

2005). The case studies focus on people living on the American East Coast, Appalachia, the South, the Midwest, and the West. Internationally, they focus on expanding the use of technology for people living in Greece, Germany, Russia, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Australia, Kenya, Egypt, China, India, North Korea, South Korea, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, and Iraq. One chapter is a study of empowering interventions designed to decrease poverty among rural people on the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean.

Most of the cases illustrate the presence of, and/or need for, technologically enhanced environments to help reduce isolation, connect subgroup minorities with others, allow easier access to health care providers, support home-based and outreach interventions, and increase access to social work continuing education and supervision. Such technology may take the form of media connections, such as television, radio, and cell phone contacts, and site-to-site direct and Internet-based social networking, podcasts, webinars, and blogs. The authors also point out the realistic barriers posed by unavailable or inconsistent technological resources in many rural communities.

The text is easy to read and absorbing. Many chapters feature excellent literature reviews. The case studies are largely constructed from the authors' social work practice experiences in rural areas, so they evoke the complexity of "real life" in rural environments. A particular strength of the case examples is that "problems" are offered along with potential solutions. For example, the description of ethical dilemmas of dual relationships is followed by hands-on recommendations on ways to prepare for and deal with them. The effects of rural environments on human development are well explained, as are the history and current state of social welfare systems deployed in rural areas. Despite one noted limitation—that only 4 of the 20 chapters include new research—the text is an excellent resource for teaching.

That diverse rural people live in technologically enhanced, local-to-global social environments is Ginsberg's overarching theme. The content is original and could be imparted across the social work curriculum within practice, human behavior, policy and, to some extent, research courses. The book is a good fit with stand-alone rural practice courses, field seminars, and generalist foundation practices courses. Social work practitioners, policy makers, educators, and especially students may use the text to build a shared professional quest for developing stronger minority-in-minority cultural competency skills so needed today in an increasingly interdependent world.

Joanne Riebschleger, Ph.D., LMSW  
*School of Social Work,  
Michigan State University*

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