

Book Review: Handbook of Minority Aging

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Book review

Over the last 25 years, there has been a growing interest in diversity issues across racial and ethnic groups within the field of gerontology. As a result, the need has emerged for an organized review focusing on the latest scientific research on the elderly from diverse racial and ethnic populations, a review that highlights the conceptual and theoretical models within and across different ethnic and race groups.

Handbook of Minority Aging, edited by KE Whitfield and TA Baker, is probably the first multidisciplinary literature review on minority aging. It provides a progressive compendium of research pertaining to aging among diverse racial and ethnic populations in the United States. In its 33 chapters, written by 69 contributing authors, the book focuses on the needs of four major racial and ethnic groups: Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, black/African American, and Native American. The book successfully summarizes the current knowledge of how these different populations age.

The book is structured into four parts, corresponding to each of the main areas of knowledge recognized as critical to the understanding of well-being in gerontology: sociology, psychology, medicine/nursing/public health, and social work.

Part one covers the psychology of minority aging: from social relationships to religion and spirituality, as well as stress, discrimination, and coping. The chapter by Abdou on lifespan and intergenerational adaptation through positive resources is especially enlightening and highlights the need for a more explicit theory of how culture, race, ethnicity, and other aspects of identity exert their influences on lifespan processes.

The eight chapters in part two of the book provide an elegant overview of our current knowledge of mortality and longevity and the medical factors that affect them. Highlights of this section include the overview of the history of medical treatment in the introduction section and the authors' proposals and approaches to developing health interventions. The chapter on the analysis of the mortality statistics for each of the major ethnic groups will perhaps attract the most general interest.

In part three, *Social work and minority aging*, we are introduced to the differences in end-of-life care among older minority groups, and a strong case is made for culturally competent care.

The last section of the book focuses on the current and future challenges posed by the rapidly aging population in developed countries and by the changes in the proportions of race and ethnicity. Of particular interest are the chapters that cover past population and

projections, social support, and social policy. The chapter on Medicare and the recent reform of the U.S. healthcare system is a welcome feature and makes for an informative read. However, although it is currently highly relevant, it will rapidly become outdated.

Generally speaking, all of the chapters are comprehensive and well referenced. However, the book does have some limitations. As the editors acknowledge, it becomes apparent that certain racial and ethnic groups were examined less than others. While this is a reflection of the existing literature, it results in some chapters focusing only on native white versus African American and Hispanic populations. Furthermore, the data, and therefore most of the book's conclusions, refer only to the United States and are not applicable to minority elderly groups in other countries.

Finally, the lack of a common structure between the book's different chapters makes it a tougher read and more difficult to know what to expect. For instance, while some chapters have an entire section on the future challenges in the field, others do not address the matter and would benefit from a discussion on where the authors believe the field is heading.

In summary, while practitioners of gerontology, family medicine, and any professional involved in the care of the elderly will find some practical guidance in the second part of the book, it will really earn a place on the bookshelf of anyone and everyone with an interest in US sociology and the development of public policy for the elderly. With the general aging of the population and the book's accentuation of current issues, this outstanding review will become an indispensable tool.