

РЕЦЕНЗИИ

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Book Review: Empowering social work: research and practice, ed. by M. Törrönen, O. Borodkina, V. Samoylova, E. Heino. Helsinki: University of Helsinki, Kotka Unit Kopijyvä Oy, 2013. — 247 p. ISBN 978-952-10-9058-5

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The book *Empowering social work: research and practice* can be described as a complex and multidimensional approach focused on theoretical and practical applications of empowerment construct as an important factor in achieving psychological and physical well-being for families and children that are immigrants.

Placed in a wider context, the construct of empowerment tackled in the book edited by Maritta Törrönen, Olga Borodkina, Valentina Samoylova and Eveliina Heino follows the principles presented by Isaac Prilleltensky in *Journal of Community Psychology*, March 2008 where he explores dimensions of approach for the construct of empowerment widely used in community psychology (Prilleltensky 2008).

Newbrough J.R., Speer P.W. and Lorion R.P. (2008) detach from Prilleltensky's exploration of empowerment construct the point of view that emphasizes its psycho political validity. The importance of this approach resides in the fact that it presents the transformative approaches that shift empowerment intervention beside improvement to structural changes. They consider power to be a cardinal concept in achieving well-being, promoting liberty and resistance to oppression and consider power to be both psychological and political, and not either psychological or political" (p. 116).

One of the important ideas that emerge from the book *Empowering social work: research and practice* is the fact that the dimensions of empowerment intervention can be used at different levels to create structural changes, one of them being at the level of individuals and of social services.

Empowering social work: research and practice is addressed to practioners in the field of social sciences from Sociology, to Psychology and Social Work, and they can find information about theoretical issues and practical approaches regarding the constructs of *empowerment* and *well-being* for vulnerable groups as well on the level of research as of intervention. It also provides models of good practice for creating repartees of intervention or/and research in other cultures confronted with the same category of problems and vulnerable groups. It also offers valuable information regarding vulnerable groups for policy makers that can understand better the needs and the problems that immigrant groups are confronted with when struggling to integrate in a different culture.

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A core issue of the book is the important role of social services and its significant impact on population, on vulnerable groups and on the specialists that are working in the system. Within the book there are presented realities from the social services systems in Finland and Russia.

Olga Borodkina, Maritta Törrönen and Valentina Samoylova (p. 22) point out that social work in Russia was established as a profession and an institution since 1991 and started its development influenced by European and American theories. It is also important to take into consideration the cultural determinative threats. The authors also mention the fact that the beginnings of using empowerment strategies in working with groups was around the year 1997, inspired by P. Parslow's work, *Principles of empowerment in social work*.

The book develops step by step a better understanding of the difficulties that immigrant families from Russia are facing in integrating into Finnish society emphasizing also the ways to overcome these problems. The information is completed by an informed presentation of the cultural background of the Russian society and of the difficulties it is confronted with in absorbing the policies of welfare.

For the editor's Maritta Törrönen, Olga Borodkina, Valentina Samoylova and Eveliina Heino presenting research and models of good practice for creating well-being in social work services came in the line of previous preoccupations as the book *Empowering social work: research and practice* is the result of project Empowerment of Families with Children developed from 2011 to 2014.

The book is broadly divided into three main parts. The *First Part* examines theoretical issues related to the wider construct of well-being and the ways to achieve it in social work through empowerment as a strategy and as a result. The *Second Part* focuses on emphasizing qualitative methods of research in working with the disempowered when taking into consideration aspects of language and culture. The *Third Part* points out ways to approach children and young people when they are in the situation of immigrants with or without their families.

Through the chapters of the book there can be noticed the fact that special attention is given to the importance of concepts' cultural understanding and the way they are translated. In the years of globalization societies have to absorb models of good practice that are both a way to find a common language with other societies when facing similar problems, and a tested tool that they know it already works.

The authors Maritta Törrönen, Olga Borodkina and Valentina Samoylova presented in the *First Part* named *Empowerment theory and social work*, an approach of the empowerment models that are useful tools for achieving well-being for clients of the social services. There are emphasized the focal points, the strengths and tools of the intervention aiming to empower people to get mastery of their own life. The presentation of the theoretical frame that point out models of good practice in using empowerment construct in social sciences can be an important source of information on one hand for researchers and on the other, for practitioners that want to learn how to approach well-being through empowerment interventions.

In the first article Maritta Törrönen, Olga Borodkina and Valentina Samoylova discuss the understanding of the complex construct of well-being and empowerment as part of it by raising the issues of mutual relations seen as empowering and the importance of trust as individual/personal choice and social relations (p. 16).

Empowerment as a current trend of social work in Russia, the second article of the first chapter, written by Olga Borodkina, Maritta Törrönen and Valentina Samoylova present the state of social work services in Russia. The authors also points out the fact that

developing, specializing and enhancing social work through empowerment strategies can become an important tool of social inclusion and prevention of social problems. In a risk society prevention is very important, and “prevention can be successfully implemented through empowerment, and empowerment in social work means empowering individuals, groups, communities, organizations and social workers” (p. 22). In the article there is also mentioned the main feature of an empowerment approach that is “to shift from the problem based/anchored approach to vision/solution and action oriented approach” (p. 24).

Within the second article there are presented models of empowerment-based practice that are of valuable use for the practitioners in the field of social sciences namely the models of Cox and Parsons (1994) and Gutierrez et. al. (1998), Lee (1994, 2001) and Sadan (1997) (p. 26). There are also emphasized valuable bench-marks for empowering social work practitioners in overcoming obstacles and developing new required services. The authors stress on the importance to extend the empowering methods in social work to families with children in order to improve their socio-economical status and psychological well-being.

The third article from the *First Part* examines the fact that cultural traits involved into the development of different attitudes have to be taken into consideration when approaching a disempowered, namely a person that needs assistance from the state through social services. The authors raise the issue of the importance of state policies toward families and children in moving from a centralized to a welfare state. It gives a glimpse of problems that families in risk situation are confronted with and of the development of social policies in Russia when experiencing the process of modernization. Through the article emerges a complex image of the public policy toward families and the risks they are confronted with, by analyzing the issues in relation with the problems resulted from the past inertness’s, with the way of adapting to present challenges and to aims of the public policies in the year 2020.

In the conclusion of the third article Valentina Samoylova, Olga Borodkina and Maritta Törrönen argue on the importance of a holistic view over the family and the consideration given to both parents’ roles, as at present beside the mother, there is the need to emphasize the father’s emotional and social role beside the economic one. And it is also important to see the children as important members of the family, as important as their parents.

The *Second Part* of the book, entitled *Empowering families and individuals* brings forth qualitative methods of approaching the disempowered: case studies, semi-structured interviews, interviews in the presence of a cultural interpreter and diaries of family workers. The problems immigrant families with children are confronted with, the way they are sustained by social services and their unique way of coping with all the problems that are facing are presented through structured case studies.

Within the first article of the *Second Part*, Annika Lillark discusses empowerment stages (Hur 2006) in relation to “salutogenic theory (...) that defines human being as capable, resourceful and able to create a sense of coherence and an attitude toward life” (Antonovsky 1969; 1987; Eriksson, Linström 2011, cit. by Lillrank, p. 67). Following recent studies (Hokkanen 2009; Hur 2006) the author points out the idea of empowerment as an endlessly evolving dynamic development when it is understood as both thought and action.

Eveliina Heino and Nadezda Kärmeniemi raise an important issue when discussing the importance of cultural interpreter’s support when interviewing immigrant families as a way to enhance subjective empowerment as part of creating well-being. The authors emphasize the elements of cultural interpreter work that refer to emotional support through acceptance and empathy, language support, conveying information and creating an atmo-

sphere of trust (Heino, Kärmeniemi, pp. 102–110). They conclude on the fact that cultural interpretation in situations of working with immigrant clients can be a holistic and effective working method (Heino, Kärmeniemi, p. 111).

In the third article Marja Katisko approaches the importance of achieving the state of empowered both at individual level and at social level for families with immigrant background. The article gives a documented and synthesized image of the immigrant families' perception and perspective upon social services in Finland and the support they provide. Based on the conclusions emerging from the recorded information the author proposes future measures for social services' intervention.

Within the fourth article Olga Borodkina and Yulia Fionik approach the problem of vulnerable groups living with a disease. It refers to the sensitive problem of social assistance of people living with HIV/AIDS in Russia. The authors raise the issue of empowering both social workers by raising the problem prevention and approaching clients with multiple problems and people living with the disease. There are also presented important aspects regarding the forms and methods for empowerment and work with families and children affected by HIV/AIDS.

Susanna Rautio focuses on presenting an important tool for the social worker involved in sustaining families with children, which is the diary of the family worker. It stresses on the role of the father in the family and the ways he can be involved in creating family's well-being. In this case empowerment results at clients' level refer to improved parenting skills and a more satisfying family life. The author also raises the issue of the importance of ethical considerations in working with families and registering data about them in the professional's diary.

The *Third Part* of the book, with the title *Empowering Social Work with Children and Young People* gathers three articles that deal with specific ways of approaching and sustaining children and adolescents from immigrant families.

Minna Veistilä proposes a deeper understanding of children's well-being in the acculturation process by analyzing the stories of well-being – children and parents are encouraged to negotiate activities together in order to construct the child's well-being, that is based mainly on contextual and customized constructions (pp. 191–193). The author also points out the four elements for achieving the child's well-being — namely “having”, “being”, “doing”, “loving”, and the three dimensions of well-being that are “material”, “social”, “mental/spiritual” (p. 192).

In the second article Mervi Kaukko explores special conditions of participation and empowerment of unaccompanied minors, especially girls by using action participatory research. The author points out the importance of finding suitable culturally sensitive techniques to enhance participation of unaccompanied children, some examples of the solutions proposed through participatory research being creating group activities for children of different background and making the silence voices heard by participation.

The last article of the book approaches problems of multiculturalism and racism in a mixed society and proposes models of intervention for disempowering everyday racism and empowering anti-racism. The authors, Antti Kivijärvi and Eveliina Heino are providing a complex image for approaching multiculturalism proposing anti-racist practices for prevention and intervention in both cases being discussed examples of direct and indirect practices (p. 238). Following qualitative and quantitative research the authors emphasize the fact that “peer relation is the most important factor affecting the overall experienced well-being of young people” and conclude on the relevance of “creating solidarity across group boundaries” (p. 239).

In conclusion, the editors of the book managed, through the content of the selected articles, to bring forth a coherent and complex image of the requirements, strengths and vulnerabilities of social services and assisted groups and provide tools for exploration, prevention and intervention for using empowerment strategies in creating well-being, both at the level of research and practice.

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