Title
One nation, underprivileged: why American poverty affects us all

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7dn7m49b

Journal
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIAL WELFARE, 14(1)

ISSN
1369-6866

Author
Berrick, JD

Publication Date
2005

Peer reviewed

Book Reviews

One nation, underprivileged: why American poverty affects us all by Mark Rank. 2004: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 0-19-510168-5.

It is ironic. The wealthiest nation in the industrialised world suffers the highest poverty rate. The US poverty rate, tenaciously holding at about 16 per cent, has been unyielding in the face of numerous public policy initiatives over the last 40 years. The principal cash assistance programme for poor families, TANF, was overhauled in 1996; healthcare services, education, childcare services and housing assistance have all undergone significant state or national policy reform in recent decades. Yet in this nation of plenty, the unemployment rate remains at approximately 5.5 per cent, 18 per cent of children live in food-insecure households, and infant mortality – a key correlate of poverty – remains the highest among industrialised nations.

Mark Rank's fresh perspective on American poverty is a welcome addition to the significant literature base in this field. Blending qualitative data – including the voices of low-income parents attempting to navigate welfare bureaucracies – with quantitative data on poverty patterns, the book is highly engaging and thought-provoking.

In Chapters 1 and 2, Rank provides an overview of poverty issues in the USA, including an examination of income inequalities, characteristics of the poor and the human dimensions of poverty's effects. Chapter 3 reviews the principal causes of poverty, including the traditional culprits: individual attributes and lack of opportunities. Rank introduces two additional variables in his explanatory model: social class, and structural inadequacies. Using longitudinal data, Rank develops a life-course perspective on American poverty, showing the cumulative likelihood of experiencing a poverty spell. In his analysis we find, for example, that by age 55, almost half (45 per cent) of all Americans will experience at least one year of living as poor. Rather than an isolated phenomenon affecting a marginal population, these new data help to build his argument regarding the structural characteristics of US poverty.

Having established the breadth and depth of the problem, Rank takes the reader into new territory by asking: Why should we care? Again, rather than holding fast to a more traditional approach, Rank offers three perspectives pushing us to care. The first is a review of poverty's direct and indirect effects on all of us. If we cannot be compelled by altruism, perhaps we can care for the sake of self-preservation. Rank then takes the social science reader down an infrequently travelled path. Drawing upon an extensive analysis of the Old and New Testament of the Bible, Rank suggests that shared Judeo-Christian values call us to action. And lastly, the fundamental responsibilities of citizenship demand that we address this pressing social concern. This section of the book sets Rank's work apart from other texts on American poverty. Combining solid evidence with moral reasoning, Rank builds a persuasive argument that poverty is an affront to the essence of our collective national character and is, in fact, un-American.

Rank's proscriptions for solving this long-standing conundrum are wide-ranging and ambitious. Efforts to enhance human capital, build assets, raise wages and create jobs are but a few of the solutions offered. This is not a simplistic list. Rank goes beyond many authors by thoroughly describing each alternative, along with its likely effects. Implementation of any or all of these measures, however, would be politically challenging in these times.

Rank's book is a must-read for students and scholars studying the poverty problem. It is emotionally moving, intellectually stimulating and it inspires us to action.

Jill Duerr Berrick
University of California at Berkeley

Equity choices and long-term care policies in Europe by August Osterle. 2001: Ashgate Publishing Co. ISBN: 0 7546 1841 2.

This volume is an ambitious attempt to bring conceptual clarity and empirical rigour to the study of long-term care policy in Europe. The author centres his conceptual concerns on the notion of equity and applies a framework he develops to the current status of long-term care policy in Austria, Italy, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

Because, as August Osterle indicates, long-term care (LTC) has been both underdeveloped as an arena of public policy and under-investigated as a topic of social policy research, there is much of value to be found in these pages. The contextual issues are nicely set forth in the book's opening section. Beyond speaking to the usual 'graying of Europe' arguments, Osterle presents interesting data on the large numbers of 'solitary living' individuals in Europe, a phenomenon that will place pressures on the traditional informal caregiving efforts of family members. He also makes an important connection between policy efforts now well underway across Europe to encourage older workers to remain longer in the labour force, a development that will further limit the supply of informal caregivers, many of whom are over the age of 60.

Osterle's presentation is also useful in comparing LTC with other social policy arenas. In comparison with pensions and health care, LTC is notable for 'the unpredictability of the intensity of care needs' (p. 16) and in its inextricable connection to the informal world of family care and responsibility. In the case of pensions, the metric is money, and in the case of health care – at least theoretically – the metric is professional knowledge and skill. LTC, on the other hand, most frequently involves ongoing, low-technology, physically demanding and dignity-diminishing care most often associated with 'activities of daily living' – eating, bathing, dressing and toileting. These services have traditionally – and burdensomely – been provided by family members. In these ways, this book raises important questions involving a complex set of policy interventions against a backdrop of the massive costs that might be associated with modern welfare states' giving parity to LTC against questions of income and health care.

Beyond these most useful observations, Osterle has set a very ambitious agenda for himself. Arguing (correctly) that there is insufficient conceptual clarity to both LTC policy and research, he sets out to demonstrate how the core welfare state principle of equity can bring greater analytical rigour to the world of LTC. He first indicates that several dimensions that have been used in welfare studies do not do justice to equity. These include discussions of social welfare sectors (for-profit, non-profit, public and informal), public-sector roles (regulator, purchaser, funder and service provider), and bases for social welfare eligibility (public assistance, social insurance). What is needed, he argues, is a framework to understand equity choices that can, in turn, be used to contrast equity choices in different countries.

Osterle seeks to develop an equity framework around three interrelated dimensions: (a) what is to be shared (kinds of

goods), (b) among whom are they shared (subjects of the allocation procedure), and (c) how are they shared (the principles according to which goods are allocated). This tripartite approach reappears periodically throughout the book in a series of somewhat duplicative, somewhat inconsistent and frequently opaque discussions that are difficult to follow and integrate. The approach becomes clearer well into the volume, when a series of sub-headed discussions lead the reader through these three dimensions, which are, in turn, bifurcated into 'resources to be shared' and 'burdens to be shared'. Noting that 'equity objectives are objectives in terms of a fair distribution of resources and burdens' (p. 102), Osterle then identifies four such equity objectives: minimum standards, supporting living standards, reducing inequality and promoting social cohesion. The third of these is then sub-divided into horizontal and vertical inequalities, and the fourth is divided into personal autonomy and social rights and responsibilities.

Following the presentation of these dimensions of equity objectives in welfare states, the author turns to his empirical examination of LTC policy in Austria, Italy, The Netherlands and the UK. These discussions are quite abbreviated (3–5 pages) and are organised along programmatic rather than conceptual lines: residential care, domiciliary care, payments for care to care-receivers and to caregivers, informal care and the financing of long-term care.

The chapter that then follows attempts to join the conceptual discussion of equity choices to the programmatic elements of the respective countries. Some general conclusions are reached, such as there being a relatively high level of public responsibility in The Netherlands and a low level in Italy; in-kind payment used disproportionately in The Netherlands and payment for care programmes used a good deal in Austria; and out-of-pocket payments are important in all of the countries.

Through no particular fault of the author, the unfortunate culmination of the extended theoretical discussion addressing questions of equity and the rather abbreviated discussion addressing questions of care in each country is that no particularly clear patterns emerge. Toward the end of chapter 5, Osterle sets out explicitly to address whether or not choices made in the four countries 'fit with the basic equity objectives' (p. 160). These individual discussions are careful and true to the country-by-country programmatic findings; sadly, they generate few conclusions in which equity and care criteria form discernible patterns. Thus, Osterle's penultimate conclusion toward the end of chapter 5 finds that 'equity choices in long-term care are characterised by an enormous complexity with regard to all of the dimensions examined in this study. Investigating to what extent these choices support the achievement of specific equity objectives underlines that the design of long-term care systems does not follow a clear concept of equity objectives' (p. 167).

His concluding chapter offers some interesting insights on long-term care issues facing these and other countries, especially those focused on lack of recognition of informal care burdens and the most useful policy posture for the public sector to take in addressing questions of long-term care. Yet, his final conclusion joining his equity framework to the 'empirical world' can only be described as disheartening: 'The conceptual and empirical analysis has shown that respective choices by welfare states are a complex combination of various resources and burdens to be shared, different units among whom these goods are shared and principles that are often used as mixed principles in the actual allocation leaving also room for additional implicit principles' (p. 172).

One comes away from *Equity choices and long-term care policy* in Europe in admiration of the painstaking conceptual and empirical efforts Osterle has made, but one also emerges frustrated at how little there is to be taken away from a book where the author (and the reader) have made so much effort. The volume would have benefited from better editing and translating, but it is greater parsimony that would have led to a better balance between input and outcome.

In terms of readership, the book is best suited to individuals specialising in questions of comparative health and social policy. For purposes of course adoption, usage would be most appropriate for advanced courses in social policy analysis, health policy, long-term care policy and comparative public policy.

Robert B. Hudson
Boston University

Social assistance dynamics in Europe. National and local poverty regimes edited by Chiara Saraceno. 2002: The Policy Press. ISBN: 1 86134 314 0.

Social assistance dynamics in Europe is a remarkable piece of academic work. It provides, combines and analyses data from a variety of sources in a way that is rarely seen in comparative projects: historical data, in-depth qualitative interviews with recipients of social assistance, detailed information at the local and country level and lastly data on social assistance dynamics from eight cities in five European countries. The book is so rich, in methodological approaches, in data, in interpretations and theoretical insights, that a short review can hardly pay it full justice. This review includes first an overview of the book, and then an assessment of some key issues.

Chapter 1 offers a comprehensive introduction to the book. Some fundamentals and assumptions are spelled out. It gives a useful and decent account of previous comparative research on social assistance. Among other things, it points out quite correctly that hitherto almost all previous comparative work has focused on differences and similarities in institutional designs and thus has not looked into how these designs have influenced the composition of the claimants and how long they receive social assistance.

Chapter 2 explores the idea of cities as local social and economic systems. It does so by analysing the historical development of the cities included in the project, examines the recent socio-economic transformation and the groups at risk and gives an account of the different welfare models in each city, in particular the private-public mix. All in all, this chapter provides valuable background information that the authors draw heavily on in later chapters.

Chapter 3 focuses on the institutional features of the different poverty regimes. Among the themes addressed are the cultural and political contexts that help define, or construct, 'poverty' in the different cities. More specifically, the chapter focuses on eight dimensions: bureaucratic versus discretionary power, family versus collective solidarity, universal versus category-based orientation, selectivity, recipients' duties, generosity and duration activation measures. Many of these dimensions provide clues for interpretation of the empirical data on risk of receipt and duration.

Chapter 4 addresses the question: Why do some people experience higher risks of receiving social assistance than others? The answer is given by exploiting both quantitative and qualitative data collected by the project. The quantitative approach allows the authors to identify sociodemographic groups that are over- or under-represented among beneficiaries. The qualitative interviews provide material for the construction of a typology based on how life events are tackled. They distinguish between single crisis events, accumulation of crisis events and cases of early exclusion.

Chapter 5, in many ways the main chapter, looks at paths through and out of social assistance. Here duration data from eight cities are analysed, addressing several important issues. In

particular, the 'chronicisation' effect is analysed. This term refers to the claim that people who receive income support gradually lose their capacity to live autonomous, independent lives. The authors prefer this term to the more familiar term 'dependency', because to test the latter, data on a control group of an unassisted population are required, they argue. A chronicisation effect is assumed to take place if the exit rate is declining in a piece-wise constant model.

The ambition of the final chapter (6) is a bold one; it aims to deconstruct the 'myth of welfare dependence'. The chief message in this chapter is that their evidence gives little if any support for the dependency hypothesis. Other important political implications are pointed out, e.g. that universality and generosity are promising if the aim of social policy is social integration.

With this book one might say that the third generation of research on social assistance dynamics provides a truly comparative perspective. This new generation couples institutional analyses with longitudinal data revealing complex interactions between rules of eligibility, means testing, time limits, activation schemes and the labour markets, and that these separately and interactively influence who becomes entitled and how long claimants stay on aid. An original finding is that the level of dynamism is more pronounced in cities in the social democratic welfare states than elsewhere, a finding also supported by Norwegian data (Dahl & Lorentzen, 2003). In a European context at least, this trait is rather unique and appears to be related to liberal eligibility rules, relatively generous means testing and perhaps also to the presence of activation schemes, i.e. to the institutional design of a specific welfare state model. In nearly all settings though, lone mothers remain on aid longer than other groups.

A derivation of the notion of moral hazard would be that countries or cities with the most generous benefits are expected to have the longest duration times. This book demonstrates that this is hardly the case. In general, the data do not confirm this hypothesis because there is no systematic association between generosity and duration. They even find that cities with the most rigorous means testing also have the longest duration times, indicating that to make the leap from assistance to self-sufficiency requires resources. The authors argue that low benefits and harsh means testing may actually be a risk for prolonged receipt of social assistance.

On the basis of the analysis of the duration data in chapter 5, the authors reject the notion of dependency in chapter 6. The problem is that in chapter 5 they claim that they cannot address the notion of dependency because they lack appropriate data, i.e. randomised experimental data. This seems almost forgotten in the last chapter where they aim to crack the dependency myth. What they can logically claim in chapter 6 is that very little evidence of chronicisation is present. And indeed, this finding is crucial and valuable in itself. It seems that they have to make up their mind: either they have to relax on the requirement that it takes a randomised controlled trial to put the dependency hypothesis to test; or, if they refuse to do so, they have no case for cracking the dependency myth, in which case the title and main message of chapter 6 ('Deconstructing the myth of welfare dependency') is misleading and does not keep what it promises.

At least three lessons can be drawn from Saraceno et al.'s work that stand out as particularly important: (1) dependency theory has little to offer; (2) local institutions matter; and (3) the poor are (or try to act as) rational actors, with their limited resources and within restricted opportunities. The book is a must read for scholars in social policy as well as policymakers and politicians in charge of social policy.

Espen Dahl
Oslo University College

Reference

Dahl E, Lorentzen T (2003). Dynamics of social assistance: the Norwegian experience in comparative perspective. *International Journal of Social Welfare* 12(4): 274–301.

Case management: policy, practice, and professional business is perhaps the first comprehensive attempt to examine the various practices and types of case management in an effort to identify common elements, underpinnings and frameworks. The authors have written 'a normative, prescriptive, and critical commentary on case management directed at advanced students in the health and human services' (p. x), which will provide the reader with an 'original and more complete way of conceptualizing case management' (p. xiv), leading to 'better client outcomes' (p. xvi). This ambitious project is organised in four sections, entitled 'Case management as policy', 'Case management as practice', 'Case management as professional business' and 'Reflections'.

The first section traces the historical roots of case management (CM), postulating that CM has emerged in response to major policy imperatives. In this regard, the authors cite three major policy areas that have stimulated CM as a service delivery modality: community care, welfare reform and managed healthcare. They then provide case studies of each, illustrating how each policy initiative resulted in somewhat different service imperatives. A convincing case is made that CM, *per se*, is probably not new. A variety of service providers have, for many years, incorporated many of the elements of what we now call case management. What is relatively recent is the *professionalisation* of CM, and all that implies – specific terminology, delineation of activities and, in some cases, codes of ethics and/or certification. The major contribution of this book is the placing of CM practice in its policy context, urging practitioners to maintain perspective on 'the complex and demanding landscape of policy' (p. 21). In this regard, mention is made of shrinking resources, 'involuntary' clients and the pervasive need for accountable usage of resources.

To incorporate all of this into a useful and integrated template for practice, however, requires going one step further than the authors have gone. In the US case (which the authors give minimal attention to), the so-called 'prison industrial complex' creates an overlay of control/threat/opportunity for the provision of services which cannot be ignored or simplistically acknowledged in the 'cultural competence' section given that ethnic minorities are vastly over-represented in this sector. A more useful, and less fragmented paradigm might be 'a continuum of voluntariness' of client participation, which views legal stipulation and poverty through the same lens. In this paradigm, client choice is restricted as social control increases, yet there are *always* choices for clients to make, and case managers should be thorough, honest and explicit about outlining and maximising the choices that do exist. Clients reliant on public services, for example, already have more restricted choices than those with private resources. Clients involved in the criminal justice system have even more restricted choices, but always have some. Ethical CM practice requires highlighting such choice.

The second section of the book, entitled 'Case management as practice', is perhaps the least innovative part of the book. In this section the authors delineate the activities/functions of case managers. These have generally been adequately documented many times before – intake, assessment, planning, implementing, monitoring, advocacy and evaluation. What is new, given the authors' model of CM practice in the policy context, is an

examination of some of the ethical dilemmas created in this practice. It is pointed out that the term 'care management' would be a more appropriate term than case management (p. 130). The book would be of more use to practitioners by being even more explicit about what is, in many cases, 'resource management', and the resulting ethical conflicts. Confronting these realities head on allows us to think more clearly about ethical decision-making. For example, our assessments of clients, plans, referrals etc. are not based solely on their needs, but are done in the context of what is available. Case managers thus struggle with questions like, 'Which of my clients is likely to make the best use of limited drug treatment slots, hospital beds, training slots, employment interviews etc.?'. Indeed, the ultimate decentralisation of care rationing is the case managers' allocation of her own time and attention given generally overwhelmingly large caseloads. Client assessments and plans are thus *relative* rather than absolute. In the absence of informed prognostication tools helping case managers estimate which clients are most likely to make the best use of scant resources, it is likely they will default, wittingly or not, to value-based judgements (remember the concept of 'the worthy poor'?).

The book is, on balance, a thorough examination of the dilemmas encountered in the many different types of CM and provides crucial context for understanding them. As such, it successfully bridges the gap between policy and practice encountered by students. The debate format of controversial issues raises most, if not all, of the ethical/professional issues involved in the practice of CM, and as such, creates important awareness for current and future practitioners. Though the authors fall somewhat short in their efforts to 'improve outcomes', this is, nonetheless, a useful volume that would find appropriate use in social-work education in policy or introductory practice courses.

Peter Manoleas
University of California at Berkeley

Family centres and their international role in social action. Social work as informal education edited by Chris Warren-Adamson. 2002: Ashgate. ISBN: 0-7546-1424-7.

Over the past ten years, child welfare professionals and academics have begun to recognise and address a cultural change in childcare practice. This change has become known as 'Family Support Initiatives' in the USA, 'New Directions' in Western Australia', 'Strengthening Families' in New Zealand and 'Reshaping' or 'Refocusing' in England. It is marked by a shift in emphasis from care management in child protection as the dominant discourse in child welfare, to a more balanced approach that seeks to develop voluntary and preventative services that both educate and support families. A diverse range of publications accompanies the cultural change. These offer insights into the tensions and dilemmas facing policymakers and social work professionals. Initial publications argued for and provided evidence of the need to shift from an investigative approach to safeguarding children to both safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children through a more balanced approach between preventative and tertiary interventions (see e.g. Department of Health, 1995; Parton, 1997; Thorpe, 1994). These publications were followed by others that provided a strategic overview as to how this shift could be achieved (see e.g. Berg & Kelly, 2000; Holman et al., 1999; Parton & Mathews, 2001). A third wave of publications takes forward discussions at a micro level, exploring ways in which professionals can work with service users to ensure that the spirit of the cultural change is embedded in practice – *Family centres and their international role in social action: Social work as informal education*, is one of these publications.

This edited book explores one aspect of family support provision – family centres. Family centres within the text are defined as 'local resource centres' and include settlements, social action centres, community education centres and community mental health centres. The focus of the book is on education and the different types of collective practice that are used in family centres to promote effective outcomes for children and families. The book sets out to demonstrate the 'global interconnectedness' of challenges in meeting the needs of families. Hence, practitioners and managers who work in family centres around the world have contributed to the book. However, six of the fourteen contributory chapters centre on practice in England. In addition, the introductory chapter, written by the editor Chris Warren-Adamson, refers to practice in the UK rather than providing an international overview of refocusing issues.

The majority of authors offer detailed descriptions of specific work done within the centres. For example, Paul Montgomery and Claire Cook describe how a group of mothers identified what they wanted from a parenting course and how workers in the family centre worked with the mothers to develop a flexible programme that met the needs of the mothers. Terri Fletcher and Mo Romano report on the development of a project designed to address child sexual abuse prevention in a community context. They summarise the lessons learned, enabling others to learn from and build on their work. The contributors also demonstrate ways in which they have attempted to tackle the issues of social integration that often challenge staff in family centres. Vasso Gabrilidou, Elpida Ioannidou and Evi Hatzivarnava explore the different needs of middle class and working class families and describe ways in which two family centres in Thessaloniki in Greece established programmes to meet these different needs. Robyn Muford and colleagues focus on their experience of using community development principles to engage families from a wide range of cultural backgrounds in a centre in New Zealand. Service users who use a pre-school and family centre in Cork City Ireland write the most powerful chapter in the book. They describe through their own stories the blocks and barriers to participation in family centres. This chapter makes salutary reading, providing vivid accounts of the anxiety and apprehension experienced by parents approaching family centres.

It is all too easy for hard-pressed child welfare professionals to be overwhelmed by the challenges of the job. The authors in this book demonstrate that, despite worldwide problems of limited resources and the demands of child maltreatment work, it is possible to educate and empower parents, enabling them to provide an environment that promotes the development of their children. However, having read the book I was left with a sense of frustration, believing that the editor has not made the maximum use of the material. The concluding chapter is perfunctory; only half a page is spent on 'putting it all together'. The book could have been enhanced if the editor had used the rich material provided by her contributors to draw together the lessons learned and concluded with a detailed evaluation of what works in family resource centre practice. For example, she summarises the different methods used in family centre practice but does not pay attention to the point made time and again by the contributing authors that it is the *process* of working together with service users rather than the method alone that is the key to success. Therefore, it is up to the readers to draw their own conclusions and make the connections between the examples included in the book and principles for effective family centre practice. In my opinion, it is worth making that effort.

Jan Horwath
The University of Sheffield

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