

Toward the Development of Rural Community Psychology

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This special issue reflects the culmination of a variety of efforts over a 5-year period by a small group of community psychologists. At the same time, however, it is also just one of the first steps on a path whose direction remains uncertain.

Until 1979 community psychology had concerned itself almost exclusively with urban issues and developed intervention models appropriate for urban areas. Until that date, virtually no articles dealing with rural issues had appeared in the *American Journal of Community Psychology*. The three articles that most closely dealt with related issues (Kahn, McWilliams, Balch, Chang, & Ireland, 1976; Kahn, Williams, Galvez, Lejero, Conrad, & Goldstein, 1975; Tyler & Dreyer, 1975) all dealt with Indian reservations. None of the major textbooks in community psychology as of that time identified specific rural issues, needs, or problems, although programs done in "rural" areas (in many cases large college towns) were mentioned. Articles about rural communities appeared in other journals, but there was little linkage between them, with no real foundation existing or being developed for a rural community psychology.

This is not surprising. Barton, Andrulis, Grove, and Aponte (1976), in a survey of the content of graduate training programs and internships with a community psychology/community mental health component, examined the time devoted to 36 areas. While urban-based action programs were ranked 5th by universities and 6th by internships, rural community action programs were ranked 31st and 35th, respectively. Considering that many of the universities and internships are located in urban settings, urban issues are address-

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ed. Although some large universities are located in what otherwise would be rural areas, the large college towns bear very little resemblance to rural communities. Similarly, most would agree that community psychology crystallized in the 1960s, a decade devoted to urban issues.

Paradoxically, at the business meeting of the Division of Community Psychology (Division 27) of the American Psychological Association, in New York City in 1979, a group of individuals expressed shared concerns over the absence of attention to rural issues. By the next year the Division had formed a Task Force to deal with rural issues, and this group remains active and vital. Members of this group brought two major books to fruition (Childs & Melton, 1983; Keller & Murray, 1982) and a third is nearing completion (Murray & Keller, in press). The *Journal of Rural Community Psychology* has been published since 1980. After 1980 a number of articles dealing with rural issues appeared in the AJCP.

All of these events have helped to develop a foundation for rural community psychology, although this field of study is still in a very preliminary stage. One might ask whether there will be a separate rural community psychology, or community psychology as applied to rural communities. A case could be made for either, but it is best perhaps to suspend a decision until more work has been done. The consensus of individuals in this field is that understanding a rural community requires a different set of concepts than would be used with an urban community, and that interventions take considerably different approaches (Heyman, 1983).

The presentation of this special issue is a move toward recognizing the different needs of rural communities and the possibilities existing for community psychologists working in rural areas. It is at the same time an acknowledgment of how much remains to be done.

Regarding this special issue, a number of individuals were asked to submit manuscripts in areas of expertise, while other individuals responded to a general call for papers. All of the manuscripts were reviewed in the usual process used by this journal. Some manuscripts were rejected while others were withdrawn as a result of the review process. An acknowledgment of the reviewers appears elsewhere in this issue, but it must be said that their generous contribution of time and energy was indispensable.

The articles appearing in this issue address a variety of issues of importance to community psychologists wanting to work in rural areas. It is also hoped that these articles will provide more traditional, urban community psychologists, with an appreciation of the diversity, complexity, and needs of rural community psychologists. The articles in this issue represent interdisciplinary efforts. Some may find this too broad or distant from mainstream community psychology, others may find the articles too traditional. Although community psychology often pays lip service to the contribution from other fields, rarely are attempts made to integrate such contributions. This luxury

cannot exist for rural community psychology. Rural sociologists, child and family development programs, and many others have been working in rural areas, and were developing knowledge bases and intervention patterns before community psychologists began addressing rurality. To ignore these major contributions because they do not fit our frameworks, or are sometimes couched in different terms or methods of presentation, would be tragic.

It was not possible, in this issue, to cover all of the topics desired. Although we have certain cultural stereotypes of rurality, which at best picture a bucolic existence, we also denigrate rurality with images of poverty, bigotry, ignorance, and conservatism. Rural areas, in fact, are quite diverse across the country, and any rural community needs to be understood for itself. In this issue, the article by Mary Beth Kenkel presents an overview of rural community psychology, and presents a general model for primary prevention. Susan Keefe develops a model from rural Appalachia, perhaps America's most famous rural area, dealing with services and natural support systems. The next two articles deal with children in rural areas. Gotts and Purnell present issues relating to the needs of children in poor, underserved areas, and interventions to improve education in these areas. Consistent with a developmental theme, Scheidt looks at the special problems and needs of the elderly in the rural midwest. Olson and Schellenberg examine a very topical issue, farm stressors, and examine how community psychologists can be of help to the hard-pressed farm families.²

This project, which from planning to completion, has taken 4 years, is recognized as only a beginning step. It could not have been done without the efforts of those who contributed manuscripts and those who reviewed them, but the Division of Community Psychology must be thanked for its help and support, and Jack Glidewell, the Editor of this journal, must also be thanked for his guidance, patience, and support.

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²In an issue of the AJCP soon to follow, D'Augelli and Hart discuss the problems faced by gay men and women in rural areas, and the related impact on families. Many of the concepts devoted could apply to almost any persecuted or unfavored minority in rural areas. A paper by Damien McShane presents Native American issues by a Native American. While urban professionals often have trouble dealing with rural subcultures, this is exacerbated in dealing with Native American, Latino, and other communities. McShane also presents us with directions Native Americans may take as they develop their own structures to deal with psychological issues and psychologists. But for space limitations, these articles would have appeared in this special issue.

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