Foreword

Concepts of empowerment have been present within our field for over a century, but it was not until the last third of the twentieth century that we made efforts to develop empowerment as a form of practice. In the first volume of this series, Simon (1994) made a significant contribution by identifying how "the empowerment tradition" has been a consistent theme within the social work profession since its inception over a century ago. She distinguished the empowerment tradition from paternalistic traditions by a focus on themes of self-determination, social justice, and methods that enhance the ability of individuals, families, groups, and communities to act on their own behalf. The empowerment tradition was at the roots of much of the work conducted by settlement house workers, by social group workers, and by radical and other progressive social workers.

Despite this tradition and history, the use of the term "empowerment" to refer to specific methods and processes in social work was not widespread until the late 1960s, when social workers involved with communities of color began developing theories and methods specific to empowerment practice. Since the publication of Barbara Solomon's book, *Black Empowerment*, in 1976 the concept of empowerment has been the focus of an increasing amount of social work literature. For example, prior to 1978, *Social Work Research and Abstracts* listed no articles that had been published on the topic. Currently there are more than 300, the majority of which have been published in the past decade.

The development of empowerment theory and practice in social work is inextricably connected to the development of ethnically sensitive and

culturally competent services. Early works on empowerment by Solomon (1976), Gallegos (1982), Pinderhughes (1983), Leigh (1985), and others focused specifically on the experience of people of color. Although we have now moved on to applications to many other populations (Gutiérrez, Parsons, and Cox 1997), the central concepts and methods remain rooted in the experiences of people of color.

Early work on empowerment focused on the significance of power dynamics when understanding and working with communities of color. The authors emphasized the identification and delineation of direct and indirect power blocks in assessment and practice, self-knowledge regarding power dynamics and one's own social location, the use of ethnographic interviewing methods to comprehend the experiences of those who are culturally different, collaboration with natural helping networks, and engaging communities in confronting structures of inequality (Gallegos 1982; Leigh 1985; Pinderhughes 1983; Solomon 1976).

Empowerment is now understood as a multidimensional construct that can refer to both a goal and a process. In our recent book in this series, Edith Lewis and I (1999) identify what we consider to be the building blocks of empowerment—consciousness, confidence, and connection—that are critical to the process. Many in our field are contributing to our understanding of empowerment and how social workers can work toward social justice. This growing body of knowledge can lead to more effective multicultural practice.

It is in this spirit that Freeman's book makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of empowerment and of the different ways we can approach issues of substance abuse. The problem of substance abuse continues to grow in our society, with a significant impact on the problems and issues that concern social workers (Levine and Perkins 1997). Substance abuse is deeply connected to problems of un- and underemployment, family and community violence, personal and property crime, and poor health and mortality. Developing strategies to effectively prevent and treat substance abuse would enhance our ability to improve conditions for our most vulnerable populations.

This book challenges us to transform our thinking about substance abuse and to move beyond our existing focus on individual deficits. Instead, it proposes that we look at how interlocking systems in our society contribute to substance abuse problems and how to develop interventions that effect multiple levels of change. Indeed, Freeman asks us to analyze the language

we use in our "war on drugs" to understand how that metaphor predisposes us to focus on changing individual behavior without looking at it in its bio-psycho-social context. In each chapter, she takes a close and careful look at how substance abuse issues can be addressed at each level and type of practice with an empowering and strengths-based approach.

In addition to its substantial contribution to practice literature, this book also advances our understanding of empowerment. Freeman begins with a useful and comprehensive review of the current work on empowerment in social work and related fields. She does a masterful job of integrating different perspectives and theories into one that is directly relevant to substance abuse. This discussion is grounded in current results from research on empowerment methods. However, her greatest contribution is the original research upon which the book is based. Freeman informs her discussions with original qualitative research that looked at substance abuse programs and program participants in depth. The results inform our understanding of empowerment and support the practice model that she presents throughout the book.

Thus this book makes a fine contribution to this series. The intention of the series editor, Alex Gitterman, has been to advance our knowledge of empowerment while exploring its application to different problems or populations. Through Edith Freeman's knowledge of empowerment, her original research, and her application to practice, this volume has much to offer to practitioners and scholars alike.

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