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A.G.

**HANDBOOK OF SOCIAL
WORK PRACTICE WITH
VULNERABLE AND
RESILIENT POPULATIONS**



CHAPTER 1

Social Work Practice with Vulnerable and Resilient Populations

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Through our teaching and practice experiences, we have become distressed by the increasing degradation and distress faced by large sectors of the client population served by social workers. Students and professionals confront daily the crushing impact of such problems as mental illness, substance abuse, disability and death, teenage pregnancy, and child neglect and physical and sexual abuse. Clients suffer from the debilitating effects of such life circumstances as homelessness, violence, family disintegration, and unemployment. The miseries and human suffering encountered by social workers in the new millennium are different in degree and kind from those encountered in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The dismantling of the welfare state, the consequences of welfare “reform,” and foreclosures are examples of newly devastating social phenomena.

Social workers in practice today deal with profoundly vulnerable populations, overwhelmed by oppressive lives, and circumstances and events they are powerless to control. The problems are often intractable because they are chronic and persistent, or acute and unexpected. When community and family supports are weak or unavailable and when internal resources are impaired, these populations are very vulnerable to physical, cognitive, emotional, and social deterioration. Yet, in spite of numerous risk factors and vulnerabilities, a surprisingly large number of children, for example, mature into normal, happy adults. Why do

some people remain relatively unscathed and somehow, at times, miraculously manage their adversities? Why do some thrive and not simply survive in the face of life’s inhumanities and tragedies? To more fully understand the human experience, this book examines vulnerability and risk factors as well as resilience and protective factors.

Defining and Explaining Life Conditions, Circumstances, and Events

After a brief introduction about the respective population, contributors analyze the definitions of the life condition, circumstance, or event. What are the different political and theoretical definitions and explanations of the condition, circumstance, or event? What are the effects of the definitions and explanations on the larger community, service providers, and service users? With certain “personality conditions” such as chronic depression, schizophrenia, and borderline personality, and with certain addictions such as alcoholism, growing evidence suggests potent predisposing genetic, biochemical factors. Researchers’ studies have, for example, analyzed the life careers of identical twins separated at birth and have used other tracking designs to find significant genetic linkages to alcoholism (Cloninger, 1983, 1987; Doweiko, 2006; Palmer et al., 2012), bi-polar disorder (Gallitano, Tillman, Dinu, & Geller, 2012), depression (Pirooznia, Seifuddin, Judy, Mahon, Potash, & Zandi 2012), and schizophrenia (Gejman, Sanders, & Duan, 2010).