

## Book Review

Fong, R., Lubben, J. E., & Barth, R. P. (Eds.) (2018). *Grand challenges for social work and society*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Reviewed by MaryAnn Thrush, Ph.D., MSW  
Lincoln Memorial University

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Social work professionals are in a position to provide a unique perspective on current social problems. Instead of isolating an issue, the social work view is inclusive; it examines the big picture and the connections among elements of the issue. This view of reality resembles a network rather than a linear experience: Everything is related to everything else. This perspective, the individual within a context, is foundational in *Grand Challenges for Social Work and Society*. Another foundational idea is solving our social challenges through relationships among individuals, organizations, and disciplines. Researchers, educators, practitioners, and policy makers all have perspectives that, when combined, can provide innovative and comprehensive solutions. Psychologists, sociologists, law enforcement professionals, and health care professionals can collaborate to enrich society instead of trying to preserve singular territories. Even the American dream elevates individuals who *do it on their own*. The difficulty is that our problems have become so large and so complex that it “takes a village” to find remedies. Transdisciplinary, cross-sector, and interpersonal relationships based on the individual within a far-reaching context is the core of *Grand Challenges for Social Work and Society*.

Collaboration and inclusion used to solve specific challenges also describe the five-year process of culling out 12 social challenges from 80 seminal ideas. *Grand Challenges for Social Work and Society* summarizes in the final chapter the ways we can meet the challenges in the present and in the future. The 12 chapters in between describe social

challenges and the ways researchers, educators, practitioners, and policy makers work in harmony to create innovative, evidence-based solutions.

Chapters 2 and 3 address health challenges of individuals of all ages. Chapter 2 describes the behavioral health problems affecting the well-being of our youth. Research evidence supports preventive measures as the best approach to address the emotional and behavioral health problems experienced by more than 6 million young people. To respond to these challenges, preventative programs need to be developed and implemented to improve the well-being of all children.

Chapter 3 continues the theme of health care by addressing inequality. Health care inequality affects everyone, at all levels of social strati, through environmental hazards, traumatic stressors, alcoholism, racism, and other negative factors. Programs that strengthen health care systems require the involvement of policy leadership, care delivery systems, and research, both within social work and across disciplines. Social work can take a leadership role in these areas due to an understanding of the needs of the individual, an ability to facilitate interdisciplinary partnerships, and an appreciation of the complex pathways that lead to health care inequality.

Chapters 4–7 focus on challenges and solutions for family violence, productivity in ageing, social isolation, mass incarceration, and homelessness. Family violence includes child maltreatment, intimate partner violence, and the link between the

two. Estimates of 6 million reports annually of child maltreatment illustrate the scope of the problem. Chapter 4 describes the types of evidence-based programs that address family safety and well-being. Chapter 5 details the need to be productive in older adulthood. Chapter 6 addresses isolation in both older and younger populations. The problem of homelessness is examined in Chapter 7. Social work is poised to take the lead in finding solutions for all four challenges through initiatives that include interdisciplinary and cross-sector professionals. Collaboration among universities, nonprofit groups, government entities, and businesses can provide social support programs needed to address these issues and populations.

Chapters 8 and 9 discuss the impact natural and social changes have on the individual. Environmental changes such as climate change and natural disasters influence human health and well-being, and technological changes can support or hinder human health and well-being. Chapter 9 suggests innovative technology such as wearable sensors that monitor body systems used to improve self-management and treatment. Partnerships among social workers, social media companies, software engineers, health researchers, and direct providers support and innovate advances in prevention and early interventions.

Chapter 10 describes the problems and solutions within the criminal justice system by changing the narrative and building social capital for previously incarcerated people. Currently, the image the public has of ex-offenders is far from reality. Labeling ex-offenders as outcasts from society affects not only individuals, but their children, extended family, and community. As with the previously discussed challenges, the solution will require multiple disciplines and programs. Employment, housing, education, and health care professionals all need to be part of the initiative because of the interdependence of these social areas. Without a job, it is difficult to find housing and vice versa. Without quality mental, physical, and behavioral health care, it is difficult to remain employed, and

without basic education, the challenge to transform lawbreakers into productive citizens becomes much more difficult. Studies indicate that within 5 years, more than 70% of previously incarcerated individuals are returned to prison or jail. All these problems are amplified if the individual is part of an ethnic or racial minority (Chapter 13).

Chapters 11 and 12 discuss the strategies for reducing economic inequality and building financial capability. As with the other challenges, the solution is found in transdisciplinary and cross-sector collaborations. The solutions require education provided by knowledgeable professionals who see the big picture—social workers.

*Grand Challenges for Social Work and Society* is an incredible compilation of evidence-based solutions to our greatest challenges. The material is logically presented, clearly written, and most importantly, addresses the challenges by identifying measurable outcomes, transdisciplinary and cross-sector collaborations, and grounded research. It is clearly possible for our grand challenges to be successfully resolved. Additionally, in a time of social disarray, *Grand Challenges for Social Work and Society* elegantly presents solutions and, equally important, offers hope.