



Book Review

Book Review of Health Equity, Social Justice, & Human Rights

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H, F., McKay, & Taket, A. (2020). *Health Equity, Social Justice, and Human Rights* (2nd ed.). New York, New York: Routledge.

H *Health Equity, Social Justice and Human Rights* helps readers understand how basic human rights function as building blocks for reducing inequities in health and advancing social justice goals for all people. Fiona H. McKay, a Senior Lecturer, and Ann Taket, an Emeritus Professor in the School of Health and Social Development at Deakin University serve as the book's primary contributors. McKay's research interests in human rights with a focus on vulnerable populations and Taket's interests in examining interventions geared to reducing health inequities inform this text. McKay and Taket begin their discussion by situating their text, citing "low levels of awareness of human rights in the public workforce [and] by public health students, and in the general public [as...] highlighting the need for a book such as this" (pg.1). The authors attempt to establish this book as comprehensive and accessible, giving a historical and global view to human rights systems. The book also "aims to encourage the reader to appreciate the value of critical approach to health and human rights" (pg.1).

Chapter 1 introduces ideas that serve as a framework for the larger text. Taket and McKay identify "the many ways that human rights approaches can be used to support health and social welfare advocacy and action in order to achieve social justice and health equity" (p.4). The next three chapters of the book explore this issue by sharing the historical roots of human rights systems from global, national, and regional perspectives. This comprehensive view helps readers define human rights and develop a baseline understanding of how human rights systems develop and change over time. McKay and Taket use these initial chapters to define key terms and chronologize key human rights systems and the resulting policies. These sections present readers with a substantial amount of information, but often fail to synthesize the information for readers drawing clear links between each chapter or explaining decisions that would help readers, especially students, understand some of the text's larger goals. For example, the aim of Chapter 3 is described as "incorporat[ing] different examples of the operation and effectiveness of systems" but the chapter fails to present a framework for measuring effectiveness.

A nother central theme of the book is the relationship between health and human rights, the authors showcase how these components influence each other. The use of case studies allows readers with varying levels of knowledge to engage with this discussion. Access to healthcare and human rights exist in a mutualistic relationship where "human rights violations can directly affect health" and "the promotion of human rights [are also] connected to social determinants of health, for example, rights to education [...] and employment lead to reduced vulnerability to ill health and promote health" (p. 66). To ensure health equity we must also ensure that human rights are protected. Equitable access to health services

and support of human rights also create foundations advancing social justice movements. Chapter 5 also stresses the importance of encouraging individuals and communities to embrace “empowerment education owing the aim of such work to provide people with the tools needed to take control of their own lives and to participate in different sectors of society” (p. 78). This chapter is a thoughtful discussion of rights-based approaches to health, finally moving beyond a historical overview and moving to more of a critical appraisal. For example, discussing governments, not-for-profits, and for-profits even when “very little attention has been given to the role of for-profit enterprise in the realisation of the right to health,” allows readers to interrogate the role each of these actors play (pg. 71).

The next few chapters of the book discuss human rights as they apply to special populations like children, refugees, people with disabilities, and those that have been discriminated against because of the color of their skin or religion. These chapters provide readers with the historical context for establishing rights for the named populations and how various conventions within the United Nations work to uphold these rights for each group. The chapters work together to emphasize how groups of people are directly impacted when specific human rights are enforced or challenged. The book closes with a few chapters describing how human rights are upheld by monitoring and responding to breaches in human rights, and advocacy groups like NGOs. Each chapter supports the book's overarching theme of promoting a human rights-based approach to combating health inequity.

Mckay and Tacket describe this book as a valuable reading for “students, practitioners, and researchers concerned with combating health inequalities and promoting social justice” (p. i). The book uses historical frameworks, case studies, and discussions to link human rights, access to health services, and social justice movements. The text focuses on presenting the evidence and providing several examples to make it accessible for McKay and Tacket’s identified audiences. I recommend this text as a companion to a textbook, serving to provide global and historical views to a larger discussion about health and human rights. This book can also serve as a refresher for someone with a deeper understanding of the topics discussed throughout the book.



Dr. Nakita Dolet received a doctoral degree in Lifelong Learning & Adult Education with a focus in Online & Distance Education from Pennsylvania State University in 2018. In addition to her degree, she has over a decade of experience working in student support positions. She is currently serving as an Assistant Director of Graduate Student Support.

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