



Book Review

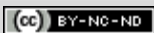
Review of Freidus, Andrea, and Dena Shenk. *Voices of Long-Term Care Workers: Elder Care in the Time of Covid-19 and Beyond*. 2024. New York: Berghahn Books. pp. 218. Price: \$182 (eBook).

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Voices of Long-Term Care Workers: Elder Care in the Time of Covid-19 and Beyond is a ten-chapter book co-authored by anthropologists Andrea Freidus and Dena Shenk, with additional chapter co-authorship with Christin Wolf, Boyd Davis, Megan Davies, and Sandra Staudacher. Throughout the course of the book, the authors analyze the impacts of Covid-19 on the long-term care sector through the lens of long-term care workers. Drawing on data collected in North Carolina during the height of Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020 and 2021, the book provides an impactful snapshot of societal and organizational responses to crises and is a useful example in how to conduct an applied anthropological project and rapid qualitative assessments.

This research analyzes emergent policies during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic and involves remote interviews with seventy-six people working in the long-term care sector in central North Carolina. Interviewees range from people working in administrative and non-governmental advocacy groups, to working in long-term care residential communities and to administrators and workers providing hands-on care in long-term residential care communities such as nursing homes and continuing care retirement communities. Interviews were also conducted with workers in home and community care settings.

With this book the authors make two major contributions to the anthropology of aging and medical anthropology, and to the health and social service professions such as nursing studies and social work. One major contribution is the documentation of social response, labor, and care relations of long-term care workers. This crucial documentation allowed first-hand testimonies during a time of uncertainty. As the authors outline, the pandemic highlighted long-standing issues related to human infrastructure and exposed the labor conditions of care workers. Other studies conducted in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic emphasize similar structural issues, including negative impacts of systemic underfunding, chronic staff shortages, and lack of resources on patient and worker care and safety (e.g., Badone 2021; Estabrooks 2023; Titley et. al. 2022). In speaking with workers across eldercare sectors, this book is crucial in providing in-depth descriptions of workers' experiences with extended passages of first-hand accounts, documenting everyday concerns of long-term and community-based care that emerged during the height of the pandemic with a breadth that other research has not.

Voices of Long-Term Care Workers illuminates long term workers' abilities to adapt to meet the emergent challenges of Covid-19, and the emotional toll of this work. It is especially effective in documenting specific strategies and actions taken. For example, in Chapter Three, "Home and Community-Based

Programming during COVID-19: Finding Resilience in Crisis,” the authors outline how programs found ways to creatively adjust to serve the needs of their clients. Community-based programs immediately contacted participants by phone to determine urgent needs and provide emotional support, while homecare agencies that previously relied only on in-person means to assess new clients quickly adapted to online meeting tools and enrolment forms. When day program services that provided meals to clients were suspended workers coordinated with regional nutrition services and food banks to implement home delivery and meet the needs of hundreds of clients who would have gone without.

Alongside documenting specific examples of immediate and creative responses, the book includes powerful passages giving voice to front-line workers’ in-the-moment concerns and recommendations. For instance, it highlights workers’ reflections on personal protective equipment, on the information or lack thereof that they had about Covid-19, and how workers were balancing concerns about cross-contamination between workplaces and work and home, labor conditions, and the physical and mental health and safety of clients. In discussing the emotional impact on workers in Chapter Two, “Challenges in Providing Care in Residential Long-Term Care Communities: ‘It Spread Like Wildfire’”, the authors outline four affective motifs of fear/anxiety, sadness/grief, anger/frustration, and trauma/stress. Regarding anger and frustration, the authors highlight how much of this was directed at policies and procedures that didn’t consider workers’ perspectives and experiences, as well as in relation to the broader community for not taking Covid-19 seriously enough and not following health guidelines. Speaking to potential future pandemic or health emergency situations, workers voice the demand for not just guidelines that may be implemented inconsistently but mandated requirements that can be enforced. With practical recommendations and insight on public health response and labor conditions, this work will be of interest to policymakers, public health professionals, and those working in long-term care and related sectors.

The second major contribution of *Voices of Long-Term Care Home Workers* is as an example of how to conduct a rapid qualitative assessment and its evidence for the value that applied anthropological approaches can bring to informing practical social response. Rapid qualitative assessments are characterized by the collection of timely information to directly inform interventions, policy, and programming, have a condensed data collection timeline (from a few weeks to months), and are usually team-based such that data can be analyzed quickly and cross-checked efficiently while remaining rooted in anthropological theories. While used in other applied fields, such as user experience design and some applied public health research, as the authors note rapid qualitative assessment are marginalized compared to other research designs within anthropology. While anthropology traditionally rely on longer-term fieldwork and participant observation, particularly for the purpose of informing policy and action amid evolving social crises rapid assessments enable local knowledge to be amplified and communicated.

Conducted remotely during a global pandemic, there are limitations to what this research could document and discern in terms of detailed ethnographic observations of the everyday work of care and more pronouncedly older adults’ experiences of receiving care. Insights rely primarily on interviews with front-line care workers who were willing and able to contribute to the study during this challenging time. However, the method of rapid qualitative assessment was selected in part in response to these conditions and the data collected serves as important historical documentation of the impacts and response to COVID-19 in the long-term care sector. With clear reflections on methods and process throughout, this work will be of interest to instructors and students at undergraduate and graduate levels interested in applied research careers, including students in anthropology, sociology, and health fields including public health, nursing, and social work.

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