

BOOK REVIEWS

G. Palanithurai (ed.), 2008, *Dynamics of New Panchayati Raj System in India - Volume VI, Capacity Building*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing, ISBN: 13:978-81-8069-506-3, hard cover, pp.317+xxiv, price: Rs.850

The Panchayati Raj system, introduced by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, transfers many powers hitherto vested with the state governments to the local bodies. These institutions such as the Panchayats at the levels of village, block and district besides the municipalities and the city corporations consist of elected representatives of the people. The amendment is an amazing instrument of decentralisation of governance and evolution of participative democracy at the grassroots level. The devolution of powers and responsibilities of the Panchayats are listed in the eleventh schedule of the Constitution. The massive devolution of powers and funds, and relocation of the officials have created problems in the effective implementation of the Panchati Raj. The most important challenge is to ensure that the elected representatives are made capable of effectively carrying out the enormous responsibilities entrusted to them by the new framework of the self-governing institutions. The aforesaid challenge involves also a change of mindset of the various functionaries connected with the local bodies. Effective implementation of the new tasks requires capability building of the stakeholders, especially the representatives. They are to learn what powers are vested with them for the benefit of the people whom they represent. Knowledge of the intricacies of various provisions and skills in the management of human and financial resources are required of them. Therefore, it is imperative to impart some training to them so that they are better empowered to discharge their responsibilities.

The Seventh Round Table Conference of the state ministers of Panchati Raj held in Jaipur in 2004 prepared a document suggesting comprehensive measures to increase the capacity building through training

imparted to the local body members and its functionaries. The design of the training programme was brought out in a document called 'National Capability Building Framework for the Panchayati Raj Elected Representatives and Functionaries'. This contains details of the selection of the people to be trained, content of the framework, description of the courses, training methodologies, the logistics of its implementation, the development of the training materials, the selection and training of resource persons, and the financial implications of the whole process of the envisaged training. This document is reproduced in the appendix of the book under review and it carries the most useful information to the readers. There are 22 lakh (now over 30 lakh) elected representatives and 8 lakh (now over 9 lakh) officials who deal with the Panchayats. These functionaries include the Panchayats' own employees, junior engineers, agricultural officers, health workers, education officials and so on. It is envisaged that at least a sample representative group from all the categories have to be sensitised and trained. It is estimated that at least Rs.2097 crore are required as capital investment and a revenue expenditure of Rs.989 crore is necessary for the first year alone. The actual fund available with the Central Ministry of the Panchati Raj consists of a mere Rs.280.5 crore per annum. The rest has to be met by the donor agencies and the non-government organisations (NGOs).

The main objective of the book is to present the case studies of the training programmes carried out in some states, chiefly by the NGOs. Such case histories are reported from the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana and West Bengal. S.K. Singh examines the contents of the document discussed above and operationalises them for the benefit of the trainers and the training organisers. Yatindra Singh Sisodia discusses the document further and describes the efforts of the government and the NGOs in arranging training programmes in Madhya Pradesh. Dilip Kumar Ghosh's paper contains the details of the scenario in West Bengal in the light of the government's efforts in imparting training to the Panchayat members. Y. Bhaskar Rao deals with capacity building exercises in the state of West Bengal. He further dwells upon different methods adopted, such as those by the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) that can be applied for the training exercises.

G. Palanithurai focuses upon the training organised by the Gandhigram Rural University in Tamil Nadu. In fact, this is the sole paper in the volume that comprehensively deals with all the aspects of training given to the Panchayat members. The university has trained 10584 elected members of the local bodies covering 4426 Panchayats in the state. The exercise was followed up by evaluation studies in order to gauge the strengths and the weaknesses of the training. The methodology of the training not only emphasised capacity building but also laid stress on information dissemination. It is commendable that the university has established a helpline centre for all the representatives who can draw upon its knowledge resources. G. Uma and J. Vanishree deal with the women leadership training programmes in Tamil Nadu. They discuss the training given to the women members at the Gram Panchayat level through the auspices of the Hunger Project that is supported by the Royal Norwegian Embassy.

Purvi Das narrates PRIA's model of capacity building exercises carried out in different states. Here too, the training was given to the women representatives of the Panchayats. The book has also a paper on the initiatives of the Hunger Project for training the women Panchs and Sarpanchs. In partnership with a select group of women, it has organised such training courses in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and in Karnataka.

Rakesh Hooja's paper is an academic exercise discussing the vision of the Planning Commission on the training programmes to be organised both for the officials and the non-officials of the Panchayati Raj institutions. Based on its recommendations, the Indira Gandhi Panchayati Raj Evam Gramin Vikas Sansthan, which is the recognised state institute for rural development in Rajasthan, has produced the Panchayati Raj Training Reference Material. The second part of the paper discusses the contents of the above reference manual. Mahi Pal in his paper deals with the training given to about 80 Zilla Parishad functionaries in Haryana organised by the Haryana Institute of Rural Development. A joint paper by K. Subha, B.S. Bhargava and Mangala A. Nayak examines the Panchayati Raj scenario in Karnataka and narrates their experience in conducting training programmes through satellite.

Most of the papers, unfortunately, introduce and discuss the need for the training for the elected representatives and the functionaries connected with the Panchayats, *ad nauseam*. This repetitive and long winding discourse kills the joy of reading a book which deals with a vital aspect of the Panchayati Raj system. The editor could have exercised better discretion. This book is the sixth volume dealing with the dynamics of the Panchayati Raj. The name of the editor of the series, if any, is missing from the book.

Pariyaram M. Chacko

Professor of Sociology (Retired), 50/306B Prasanthi Nagar, Road No. 2, Edappally, Kochi – 682 024. Email: pariyaramchacko@rediffmail.com

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Sushma Pandey, 2008, *Psycho-Social Aspects of Domestic Violence*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing, ISBN 10: 81-8069-533-6, hard cover, pp.230+iii, price: Rs.500

Domestic violence appears to be a universal phenomenon witnessed in every stratum of society with variations in its form and intensity. The objective of the book under review has been to unravel the different forms of domestic violence with its social and psychological implications on the family, especially on women and children.

The book is based on the results of an empirical study undertaken by the author in the Gorakpur district of Uttar Pradesh state in India. Respondents of the study comprised of a sample of 140 women and 120 children. The samples were drawn from a large segment of rural and urban population belonging to the different strata of society. For eliciting information from the respondents, a set of research tools, such as personal data sheets (for women and children), domestic violence checklist, marital conflict scale, life stress scale, women empowerment questionnaire, child abuse checklist, child behaviour questionnaire and aggression questionnaire were used in the study. The author has somehow missed to report when the research study was conducted.

The book has discussed the behavioural patterns of domestic violence in relation to its antecedent factors and consequences. The author has made commendable efforts to trace the patterns of domestic violence in relation to a number of contextual and psychological factors. The study reveals that domestic violence and related behavioural phenomena are rooted in the socio-economic and familial conditions of women in both rural and urban settings. For instance, the data of the study reported in the book indicate that incidence of domestic violence has been higher in families belonging to the low socio-economic and occupational status, low caste/tribal groups (scheduled castes/ scheduled tribes) and Muslim community. Psychological factors, that have been found to contribute to the occurrence of domestic violence, include those related to marital conflict, life stress and women empowerment. Women of urban areas have been subjected to physical abuse more than their rural counterparts. The demographic factors related to domestic violence discussed by the author include age, education and health. It may be mentioned that categorisation of health and education under demographic factors together with age is inappropriate.

Further, the book provides the readers with the data on the negative impact of domestic violence on the children who are directly or indirectly victims of violence in their homes. Domestic violence and its impact on women have been widely discussed. As different from those works on domestic violence, the present book has made a special effort to pay attention to a less unexplored area of domestic violence, viz. children as victims of domestic violence. Thus the book has shown that domestic violence is not only damaging to the dignity, physical health and psychological well being of women, but also ruining the overall development of children.

The subject matter of the book is presented systematically with a blend of theoretical, conceptual and empirical studies with details of the various aspects of domestic violence prevalent in our present society. The findings of the study have been analysed in the light of the macro and micro level theories of violence. The book has provided a theoretical framework to understand the psycho-social dynamics of domestic violence and its consequences. The case studies cited are indeed useful in providing an in-depth picture of the various settings of domestic violence and its impact on the victims.

The book has drawn practical implications from the results of the empirical study. Concrete suggestions have been made in order to minimise the incidence of domestic violence in the society. The author has also presented preventive intervention programmes — long as well as short term — to deal with the perpetrators and victims of domestic violence. They could be of much help to the practising psychologists and social work professionals in dealing with cases of domestic violence. The book has also indicated areas for further research related to domestic violence, especially its impact on children, and pointed out the need for designing innovative intervention programmes in order to generate greater awareness among women, other members of the family and the larger society.

Finally, though every effort has been made by the author to present the data of the empirical study in a form easily understandable to the readers, too many tables of all minute data presented mechanically in a uniform manner have made the reading of the part of the book on the analysis of the data dry and monotonous. However, the author deserves to be complemented for her painstaking piece of research work on a sensitive issue of our times — domestic violence.

Celine Sunny

Chief Coordinator, Research Institute, Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Kalamassery, Kochi - 683104, Kerala. E-mail: research@rajagiri.edu

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Zubair Meenai, 2008, *Participatory Community Work*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing, ISBN 10: 81-8069-409-7, hard cover, pp.228+xii, price: Rs.450

The development sector has been devising new strategies in achieving human development. The two important streams of perspectives in development evolved by the end of the last century and still prevailing, are the right-based and participatory approaches. Though distinct in themselves, both are interrelated in their conceptualisation and application. Participation has become the catchword with the increased application of participatory approaches and participatory development. The social work community and non-government organisations (NGOs) have been the torch bearers of this intertwining of participation and development process. The book *Participatory Community Work* by Zubair Meenai analyses social work in the light of participatory approach.

As a fitting prelude to participatory approach, the theme of the book, the first chapter discusses contemporary social work and community work. It begins with tracing the history of professional social work and points out that the concept of welfare state, though largely an economic concept, has significantly contributed to the development of professional social work. The discussion on the philosophical principles of social work and the different types of social work lacks professional touch. But the sociological explanations, theoretical foundations and ideals of a community, provided in this chapter, are helpful for a comprehensive understating of the concept of community. The discussion logically advances to deliberations on social capital. On this solid conceptual foundation of community and social capital, the author enters into the discussion on community organisation, one of the primary methods of social work establishing its link with community work. The NGOs have adopted different strategies in community work, where right-based approach and accountability are essential mandates.

In the remaining four chapters the book gives an exhaustive account of participatory approach in its attitudinal, skill and practical spheres, and the discussion moves progressively from concept, attitudes and skill, through tools and methodologies to participatory monitoring and evaluation. The

concept of participation, as it is vividly understood with its ramifications, is placed at the centre of the discussion on development. In the second chapter of the book the author explains that there are numerous arguments in favour of participation and participatory development, that puts people as the major propeller of development and gained centre stage where many other approaches, like the trickle down theory did not yield the anticipated benefits. Further the author points out that one of the major influences on the development of the participatory approach worldwide has been the seminal and decisive work by Paulo Freire. From him it has been owned up by international agencies, NGOs and various governments. For instance, the decentralisation process in India inevitably followed participatory approaches. Many international agencies pioneered participatory approaches in the management of their project cycle. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) by Robert Chambers has established participatory methodologies. Participatory methods are to be used not only for improving the quality of programme delivery, but also for transforming the root causes of poverty and social exclusion. The human right perception of participatory approaches is implied in this programme of action. These are the notable points of participatory development presented by the author in the book.

An important change that is happening in participatory approaches is the one in the attitudes of the social worker. The author elaborates on the set of attitudes, skills and key principles that need to be cultivated for undertaking effective participatory work. A further list of auxiliary and supplementary skills, centred on the skill of advocacy and required in the participatory process, is also given in the book. The contemporary NGO activities move on to advocacy, campaigning work, networking and social audit. The intertwining of participatory approaches with these advanced applications of voluntary work is a prerequisite for social work intervention in the in the modern world. The third chapter competently deals with this aspect of the NGO activities. The last part of the third chapter attempts to effectively link the participatory approaches to the project cycle, in the context of the "Logical Frame Work Approach." The various tables in this chapter provide a clear picture of the sequential narration of the various steps in the community work and the respective application of participatory approaches.

The quintessence of participation lies in the attitudinal change rather than in the tools and methodologies. The main cause of the failure in the participatory approaches and in the use of PRA is misunderstanding of tools

as the epitome of PRA. The tools of PRA, always reborn in the hands of the practitioner, have found varied avenues of application in community work, research, training and in management. The basic tools of mapping, ranking, interviews and role plays continue to be important in the community work as well. The fourth chapter of the book discusses the tool and methods of participation.

Participation necessarily provides an empowerment experience for the participants. This aspect is brought out in the last chapter on participatory monitoring and evaluation. The author comments that “PME (Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation) ‘flips’ the traditional ‘top-down’ development approach to a ‘bottom-up’ approach, which encourages, supports and strengthens communities’ existing abilities to identify their own needs, set their own objectives and monitor/evaluate them.” The novel features of participatory monitoring and evaluation make it preferred to the conservative monitoring and evaluation. Participation should give spaces for cross cutting themes of development like environment and gender. The author brilliantly incorporates the gender component in participation and arrays various designs for assessing it.

The annexure of the book carries the universal declaration of human rights, declaration on the right to development, a checklist for a community profile, wealth ranking to identify and understand the poor, and three frames for gender analysis and planning. While the annexure used for community study is relevant and useful in community work, the first part on declaration of human rights seems to be out of place in the book that concentrates on the practical dimensions of participation. Similarly, the participatory methods and tools, in use over two decades and abundantly available in published literature and handbook of various organisations, need not have been given so much space in the book.

The book has firmly emphasised on the process and importance of participatory community work. It makes a significant contribution to the community level application of participation, as compared to many books that just describe the conceptual aspects of participation and PRA. The author’s own experiences and the community interventions undertaken with the students of social work may have amply contributed to the practical insights in application found in the book. The work is contemporary in nature as it engages in the discussion of the current agenda of development and

NGOs. The tables, charts and diagrams in the book are useful, especially to non-professionals, to have easy comprehension of the practical dimensions of the participatory approaches. The concept of participation, which is the main theme of the book, has percolated into every domain of social work and civil society organisations. The contents of the book are resourceful as they have been linked to the knowledge developed in other similar works. On the whole, the book is a ready reference on all matters related to participation and development.

P. V. Baiju

Lecturer in Social Work, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady, Kerala-683574. Email tobaiju@gamil.com

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Celine Sunny, 2009, *Wife: The Key to Success*, Delhi, The Women Press, ISBN 978-81-89110-13-0, hard cover, pp.177+xiv, price: Rs.495

“Behind every successful man there is a woman.” We have been hearing this quote since ages. But very rarely has anyone made a deliberate effort to highlight the role played by a woman especially as wife in the success of her husband. She is a hidden character who is pillar of support in the ups and downs that a husband faces in his life especially jobs. The book “Wife: The Key to Success” is part of Empowering Women Worldwide series which aims to show us certain perspectives of empowered women from a wider angle. The book focuses on the contributions of executives’ wives to the husbands’ career advancement. It is permeated with theoretical and practical information on how women need to think and put their thoughts into practice, and thereby enrich themselves and everyone who is in their periphery, be it family, work place or society at large, especially the husbands. The negative aspects have to be left behind and positive attitudes are to be emphasised at all cost. In many ways women are still not heard, and this book highlights various aspects of gender inequality and deals with it with reference to empowering them. Gender bias is common all over the world. And how does one go about dealing with it? Removing it? That is what we aim to know, to find out.

The book as the title suggests speaks of the importance of a corporate’s wife in the advancement of her husband’s career. Foremost is, that she takes care of the home and hearth, so that he can be spared of the responsibilities of the household chores, that include looking after the children’s needs too, and get on with his work without any stress. The book is divided into six sections taking in the various aspects of how to go about the same. A husband in his hour of need turns back to the wife who is expected to be there always as the anchoring person. An important aspect of her empowerment is that she should be aware of his work, work culture and life style so that she can be a great conversationalist as and when the demand for the same arises.

The wife has the power which can make or mar her husband’s career. It is her relationship with the immediate bosses that counts and also her interaction with their spouses. Her education and empowerment can greatly enhance the same. There has to be balance in it all. The main highlight of the book is that it is the job of the wives to see that their husbands do not have any stress regarding home, hearth and children.

The book reflects on the milieu of gender inequality, role of the executive, his wife and her distinctive personae. A comparison also has been made between the contributions of the wives of the executives of the 20th and 21st centuries. All this runs over the six segments into which the book has been divided. The success stories of a few executives depicted in the book are indeed appealing and thought-provoking which has made the book more interesting and realistic, leading the reader gently to enjoy the sweetness of the various aspects of executive lifestyle. The quantitative and qualitative information supplemented by the author has made the text a substantial one enriched with real life situations of the executives and their wives.

Women are considered integral part of any society and they have to be given a voice. Education is one aspect that can help in empowering women and bringing them into mainstream. It is the only means to achieve economic independence, and personal and professional growth. In section one on “Gender Inequality” the author has looked into the aspects of inequality and how it has stayed in this state over centuries and how now it is changing slowly in favour of women. The second section looks into the “Generalised Role of the Executive’s Wives.” An executive is always on the move and unless he has support he cannot successfully perform his role. His wife has to be his inner strength, and has to look after the family and children keeping him relatively free from other responsibilities so as to pursue his professional goals. Socialising has become the norm in the contemporary world of corporates. Here the wife has to be an active participant looking after his needs of being upwardly mobile and be seen in the right company. “Characteristics of An Executive and His Wife” are highlighted in section three. It is pointed out that both an executive and his wife should have

awareness of the business world and also understand each other with good rapport. Only then they can work cohesively. Both of them need to be dynamic in their thinking as well as dealings. A comparative analysis of how women have contributed in the executive's growth over the centuries has been made in the section on "Wives' Contribution to Executive Growth - Yesterday and Today An Empirical Approach." In this section the author has tried to draw attention to the fact that women are different not only biologically but also emotionally. They are considered stronger and can also be good decision makers. Housekeeping is very important which has to be done in a proper organised way. It helps the executive in achieving his goals in a much better way in so far as he is free from his housekeeping duties. All this has been supported by the "Case Studies" in the fifth section which only helps in emphasising what has already been mentioned theoretically.

Conclusion: Without women, men do not fare well. Woman has to be supportive, and at the same time should have independent way of thinking and be dynamic in her approach. She should always bear in mind her husband's professional growth and goals in his career. Another aspect that should not be ignored is the love and affection between the executive and his wife. Without mutual understanding, no relationship works. There has to be mental tuning and also mental satisfaction for both without which any relationship would crumble and hence the professional growth of the executive would not be achieved. Good education, general awareness, knowledge of the corporate world and belief in oneself are of utmost importance for the wife of an executive. And under all circumstances, she has to be supportive of him so that he can bring out the best in him in all his activities. The wife also has to have proper insights into the political system, local as well national. She should also be familiar with the work arena. In a way all this leads to enhancing her awareness and empowering her, and thereby making her part of the system. She has to be a contributor. Many a time, a wife can better handle emotions, understand the pulse of people and can make good conversation by empathising. This book redefines the arena of women and speaks of empowering them with higher consciousness, which in turn enables them to contribute to the betterment of society. It ought to make a good reading for the wives of all those who want to climb the corporate ladder.

However, I felt that the title is a serious drawback. In fact it detracts one from picking the book. No self-respecting wife would pick it. Also it is a bit over priced.

Ushvinder Kaur Popli

Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi – 110025. Email: ananduk1@rediffmail.com

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Jagannath Pati (ed.), 2007, *Adoption: Global Perspective and Ethical Issues*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing, ISBN 81-8069-442-9, hard cover, pp. 314+xxxvii, price: Rs.650

Adoption once was a straight forward, although terribly flawed in-country process whereby “worthy” orphaned children were placed with “worthy” families who wanted to adopt them. Non-worthy orphans were placed into orphanages. The social imbalance between the child’s family of origin and the family of destination was blindingly lopsided but then, historically adoption has always been a grossly uneven exchange between rich and poor. Early on, for the most part, adoption was defined by classism, ageism, racism, gender discrimination, and homophobia to name a few. A sense of *noblesse oblige* was not uncommon on the part of adoptive families (and agencies) despite the fact that, had these families been able to biologically produce children, they would not have considered adoption.

In the world of the 21st century adoption has morphed from the above, into at times a trans-racial, cross-ethnic international process involving scores of comparatively less developed countries supplying thousands of their children to more affluent Western nations. This transformational process is aided by specialised attorneys, contracts, multinational adoption agencies and international treaties. However the argument as to whether this type of adoption is ethical has not abated. In other words, how should a child’s “best interest” be operationalised, by allowing parentless children to remain in their birth country with Western countries helping to develop in-country services or by removing the child from their birth culture to be reared in the affluent West?

The aptly titled monograph under review, “Adoption, Global Perspective and Ethical Issues”, edited by Jagannath Pati (Deputy Director, Central Adoption Resource Agency, New Delhi), examines some of the issues involved in the new world of adoption. Under three headings (Children’s Issues, Global Adoption Issues,

and Ethical Issues) twelve papers are presented. Some of these papers are written by adoption researchers with well established, respected, international reputations namely, Victor Groza, Rene A.C. Hoksbergen and Paul Sachdev. In the spirit of self-disclosure, during the course of my career, I have either met or worked with all three.

The papers appearing in this 2007 monograph were presumably solicited by the editor during 2005-2006 while on a Fulbright at California State University, Long Beach. I mention these dates because while the monograph itself is two and half years old, the pieces in it are somewhat more than that and in the fast moving world of adoption, in some cases events have (considerably) overtaken some of the book’s discussions. For example since this book was published, (1) China has drastically revised adoption eligibility, (2) Korea, Vietnam, Russia and Guatemala have eliminated or severely curtailed foreign adoption, (3) Ethiopia and Azerbaijan have increased foreign adoption and (4) in the United States the Hague Adoption Convention went into force on April 1, 2008.

The initial chapter of this work is not related to adoption *per se* but to general topics of how institutionalisation impacts a child’s development and ability to attach; children’s rights (in England); and childhood as a social construct.

The second chapter deals directly with adoption issues, namely, open adoption, inter-country adoption into the United States and a somewhat curious polemic on identity and inter-country adoption. This third piece invokes Derrida (the originator of Deconstruction), Sartre and Fanon amongst others. It contains such exaggerated and provocative sentences as, “The history of trans-national adoption particularly in the United States is linked inextricably with the history of U.S. military occupation and involvement overseas” (p. 142) as if just about all of Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand were mere bystanders in adopting other nations’ children. Additionally, if the statement had even a modicum of truth, how then to explain inter-country adoption from Russia, Eastern Europe, former Soviet Republics and China? I don’t recall any United States “military occupation” in any of the countries cited.

Chapter three has several interesting pieces on ethical issues in adoption, the first of which deals with the complexities involved with medical technologies (e.g. IVF) and their impact on population manipulation. In the United States surrogacy and embryo adoption are alternatives to adoption for only an extremely small number of people due to their prohibitive expense. This piece also examines the looming effect on gender imbalance in China due to its one child policy resulting, demographers predict, in an over supply of men to proportionately fewer women. The piece on “escorts” speaks indirectly to early bonding of newly adopted children with their adoptive families. The authors correctly state that the best case scenario is to have the adoptive parent(s) personally escort their new family member to their new home. This reviewer still has vivid memories of his late 1970’s experience escorting three Korean infants to the United States and placing them into the arms of their waiting United States parents. Heritage camps and a final chapter on the rights of children conclude this monograph.

In sum, all things considered, I would agree with the blurb on the book’s inside cover, that indeed this text should be generally useful to “adoption agencies, students of social work and researchers.”

Howard Altstein

Professor, University of Maryland, School of Social Work, Baltimore, MD 21201, USA. Email: haltstein@ssw.umaryland.edu