
BOOK REVIEW

Ponzetti, J. J., Jr. (Eds.). (2003). *International encyclopedia of marriage and family* (2nd ed., Volumes 1-4). Macmillan Reference USA. 1838 pages. ISBN# 0-02-8656762-5

The four-volume *International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family* was a collaborative project under the leadership of James J. Ponzetti, Jr., with five associate editors. Ponzetti, in the Preface of the Encyclopedia, states “Of all the institutions that have shaped human life, marriage and families have been the most important... [At the same time,] different societies have different conceptions of what constitutes a marriage or family” (p. vii). He describes the work within these volumes as “a compendium surveying the shared patterns and amazing variation in marriage and family life in a rapidly changing multicultural world” (p. viii).

Each of the entries included in Encyclopedia is composed by family scholars with unique expertise and experience on the issues or country about which they are writing. These scholars represent a wide range of disciplines such as family science, home economics, psychology, sociology, social work, gerontology, history, law, and theology. Contributors include leading authorities such as Margaret E. Arcus, Scott Coltrane, Stephanie Coontz, David H. Demo, Mark A. Fine, John DeFrain and Nick Stinnet, and Ross D. Parke, as well as newer professionals with the necessary academic expertise.

Each of the more than 300 entries carefully documents the research findings on the topic, and is accompanied by cited references and suggestions for further readings. Very importantly,

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each article also has international scholarship integrated throughout the entry. The work offers comprehensive coverage of relevant topics having to do with marriage and family life, including entries on topics such as adolescent parenting, attachment in a variety of family relationships, child abuse, cohabitation, gay and lesbian parenting, and widowhood. Other interesting topics such as commuter marriage, dowry, global citizenship, interfaith marriage, intergenerational parenting, menstrual taboo, relationship metaphors, sandwich generation, and wedding ring are covered. Fifty countries (e.g., Australia, Iran, Greece, Peru, Zambia), representing various parts of the world, were included and issues discussed about these countries were informative. Twelve entries dealing with unique racial and religious groups (e.g., Basque families, Hutterite families, Yoruba families) were also selected for inclusion.

The Encyclopedia is organized in such a way as to maximize usefulness. Figures, tables, and photos accompany select entries. Furthermore, cross references guide the reader to related articles. Finally, a comprehensive index is available in the fourth volume of this reference work to assist the reader in securing information on a subject.

The International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family is designed to attract a wide audience. This work could be appreciated by general readers, as well as students and scholars who are interested in issues related to marriage and family around the world. The types of readers who would benefit from this work are: public library patrons who want to expand their understanding on the dynamics of marriage and family life around the world; high-school and college students seeking international family information; and professionals and educators in marriage and family, sociology, psychology, communications, and related disciplines. This work is particularly useful for those teaching courses dealing with diversity and ethnicity.

A few perceived strengths and weakness need to be mentioned here. The first strength of this work is that individuals around the world, with or without training in the field of marriage and family, can gain ample information to broaden their knowledge on the issues of marriage and family from an international perspective. In a rapidly changing, multicultural world, the second strength is the broad scope of entries in this reference relating to the dynamics of marriage and family life from an international perspective.

One weakness in this work is that a list of major associations, organizations, and institutions dealing with common marriage and family issues is not provided, which may limit the opportunity to better understand a particular issue. Also, relevant website addresses relating to different academic programs, major professional associations, organizations, publishers, or research agencies around the world could be included in the appendix as well which may further assist the reader in finding additional information. Although the bibliographies do provide some internet sites, they are few in light of this technological era.

In conclusion, the *International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family* is a valuable tool for individuals who are interested in an interdisciplinary and an international understanding of marriage and family. I recommend that this valuable work be added to institutional and individual libraries.

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