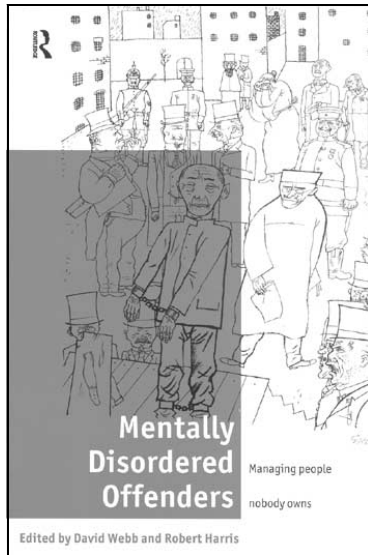


reviews

Mentally Disordered Offenders. Managing People Nobody Owns

Edited by David Webb & Robert Harris. London: Routledge. 1999. 173 pp. £15.99 pb. ISBN: 0-415-18010-4



This collection examines the difficulties of categorising mentally disordered offenders and asks whether they are doomed to marginalisation (Harris) as neither offenders nor mentally disordered.

The contributors are agreed that this is not a homogeneous group and that most people with mental health problems who offend pose no risk to the public. They recognise that many of the most marginalised do not need the definition of seriously mentally ill, but are made vulnerable by the multiplicity of their mental health and social care needs. Preston-Shoot rightly argues that when deliberating on policy and practice in this area, we must consider the social and economic context and the impact of professional and organisational structures on events leading to the crisis. He urges upon us a message practitioners will recognise; that eligibility criteria and operational procedures have become more important than the relationship and as a result social work is losing its human purpose.

The status confusion of mentally disordered offenders is a consistent theme throughout, as is the consequent importance of a multi-disciplinary approach, flexibility and of balancing risk, needs and liberty on a case-by-case basis. Many contributors are nevertheless drawn to risk and mental illness at the most serious end of the spectrum, with little discussion

on how we manage the remainder who spend most of their lives in the community in poor housing with little support.

There were times when one wondered what the benefit of bringing these pieces together in one volume was, other than the (not unimportant) honouring of Hershel Prins. The chapters vary widely in tone and quality: some being rather dense analyses of what others rightly treat as a practical issue. Some are simply a summary of current legislation and practice in the area. The one on review tribunals, while interesting, was not really concerned with mentally disordered offenders at all.

Of course, variety is the spice of an anthology and most people working in the field will find something useful and stimulating in the arguments made in this book. It highlights the damage done by excessive legalism and by a reliance upon inquiries-with-hindsight to determine policy and procedures. It leaves one with the heartwarming conviction that it is alright to bring humanity into practice. As Prins says "... [the world is] a messy and unpredictable place, but everyone ... has to do his or her best to get by decently, and to try to do more good than harm along the way".

Crispin Truman Director, Revolving Doors Agency

Mental Health and Growing Up

Edited by Guinevere Tufnell for the Royal College of Psychiatrists and Faculty of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. London: Gaskell. 1999. 36 factsheets. £10.00. ISBN 1-901242-43-9

It was with mounting enthusiasm that I read these excellent factsheets. There are 36 in total and most topics pertinent to child and adolescent psychiatry are covered. The sheets are designed to be photocopied and freely distributed, mainly to parents and teachers, although six sheets are directed towards young people. At only £10.00 a pack they are extremely good value for money.

The cover sheet lists 26 individual contributors, many of whom are recognised experts in child and adolescent psychiatry. The sheets themselves are clearly written in a style that manages to convey the essential facts without being either too technical or patronisingly simplistic. Issues covered include discipline and your child; dealing with tantrums; attention-deficit problems and hyperactivity; divorce or separation of parents; deliberate self-harm; and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Each sheet follows a similar format. Problems are defined and placed in context, possible aetiological factors are listed and key questions regarding diagnosis and further management are answered. The authors deal with complex issues with sensitivity and the overall approach is measured and cautious, so reducing concern about possibly overwhelming parents or young people with information. This tactfulness is not at the expense of being instructive and the guidance given is refreshingly direct. The warmth and understanding that is conveyed regarding the predicaments faced by children, young people and those looking after them is also appealing.

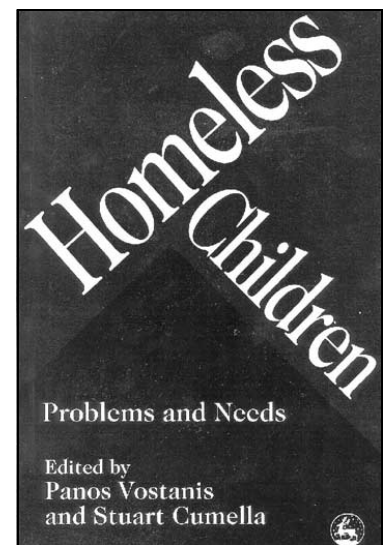
On a practical level, it is helpful to be able to give written material to families, particularly when this can be followed up by further discussion. Many of the sheets end with a section on sources of further information, with the names of relevant organisations, books, websites and even journal references.

These factsheets can be highly recommended as a valuable clinical resource for anyone practising in child and adolescent psychiatry.

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Homeless Children: Problems and Needs

Edited by Panos Vostanis & Stuart Cumella. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publications. 1999. 200 pp. £15.95. ISBN 1-85302-595



This excellent short text highlights the extent to which children and young people are disadvantaged by homelessness. The number of families in temporary

accommodation and homeless centres is estimated to include 170 000 children and 7000 adolescents. Consideration is given to how current systems should attempt to address the special needs of these homeless young people and their families.

Through a critical evaluation of recent research the authors present a comprehensive review of the situation of homeless children and their families. Readers from all backgrounds will find this book of benefit as it reflects on the appropriateness of provision from different agencies, including education, health, housing, voluntary and social work services.

By considering the complex pathways to homelessness, the association with domestic violence and marital breakdown emerges. The assertion that homelessness

may represent an extreme form of adaptive problem-solving for some families highlights that despite the 'zero tolerance' to violence advocated by the UK Government, becoming homeless may still be the only escape from intolerable circumstances for some families. Necessary changes to UK Government policy to prevent homelessness as a result of domestic violence are discussed.

The increased risk of health problems accompanying homelessness, including a disturbance in psychological development and the increased prevalence of mental health problems, is discussed. Preventative needs-based approaches are advocated, as are interventions that support resilience in the child or parent and rupture the cycle of adversity.

In adolescents numerous changes in the provision of care and the prevalence of domestic violence are associated with being homeless. The over representation of statutory involvement with this group emphasises that in spite of service intervention a large number of young people do not gain the skills and the support necessary for independent living.

By documenting the intractable relationship between homelessness and secondary disadvantage, the book highlights the urgent need for effective inter-agency collaboration to improve access to appropriate services and achieve an improved outcome for this vulnerable group of young people and their families.

Judith Piggot Lecturer in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, University of Glasgow

miscellany

All About Depression

The Mental Health Foundation has produced a free booklet entitled *All About Depression* for anyone who is feeling down or supporting a friend or relative with depression. The booklet describes the symptoms of depression, including problems with sleeping, change in appetite, lack of energy, difficulty in making decisions and feeling worthless. It explains the different types, including manic depression and seasonal affective disorder, and the ways of coping through self-help techniques such as setting achievable goals for yourself, having a good network of friends and talking through problems. It also looks at the impact of exercise, diet and complementary therapies, as well as the different types of antidepressant medication, counselling and talking treatments available.

All About Depression includes a step-by-step guide on how to find specialist support through health services, voluntary organisations and helplines. At the end of the booklet there are details of publications to read and organisations that may be able to provide further help. To obtain a free copy of the booklet send a SAE to The Mental Health Foundation, 20/21 Cornwall Terrace, London NW1 4QL; tel: 020 7535 7420; <http://www.mental-health.org.uk/bkdepress.htm>.

Mental Health Action Week

Mental Health Action Week 2001, organised by the Mental Health Foundation, will take place Monday 16 to Sunday 22 April 2001.

Every year one in four people in the UK will experience some form of mental health problem. Mental Health Action

Week is an annual event, first started in the 1950s, that aims to raise the public's awareness of the issues surrounding mental health.

On Tuesday 17 April the Mental Health Foundation will launch the results of a survey examining mental health, stigma and friendship. In addition, local groups across the UK will be working together with the Mental Health Foundation to organise a series of events and exhibitions, aimed at improving mental health services across the UK.

For further information please contact Lesley Warner, Mental Health Foundation; tel: 020 7535 7422 (out of hours 07721 587 643); e-mail: Lwarner@mhf.org.uk.

Depression Alliance

Depression Alliance is the leading UK charity for people with depression. It works to relieve and to prevent this treatable condition by providing information, support and understanding to those who are affected by it.

In 1979 it was registered as a charity and by the mid 1980s a free newsletter was being distributed to the organisation's 600 members. Self-help groups were established and the organisation also began to produce its own information sheets. Since this time Depression Alliance has undergone a period of tremendous expansion and development. Informed by the experiences of people who have experienced depression and by extensive research, it also campaigns to raise greater awareness of depression among the general public. Depression Alliance has made real progress in supporting those affected by depression, and in changing the way in which the public

looks at the condition. It is now recognised by the media, health care practitioners, psychiatrists and Government agencies, as well as those affected by depression, as the UK's leading charity in this field. It is partly funded by Government and corporate grants, but is increasingly reliant on the generosity of the public to continue and develop services.

By highlighting examples of good practice, Depression Alliance and sponsors Lundbeck Limited present awards with the aim of improving the recognition of the signs and symptoms of depression and enabling more effective treatment. Dr William McCallion, a general practitioner who helped his patient overcome depression after her experience in the Omagh bombing, was announced as the overall winner for the UK of the Lundbeck Award for Good Practice in Depression 2000.

Award nurse treats alcohol problems in Orkney Islands

An alcohol specialist nurse has won the Mental Health category of the *Nursing Standard* Nurse 2000 Awards for treating people with alcohol problems at home. Jane Burgon works on the Alcohol Home Detoxification Service in the Orkney Islands. She travels from island to island, providing a tailor-made treatment that is monitored and controlled by the patients, to allow them to withdraw rapidly from their alcohol dependency. Prior to her service, patients had only their general practitioner to turn to. Without ongoing support both patients and their general practitioners were isolated. She now treats 35 people at any one time, visiting those with the most severe symptoms twice a day.