

Book Reviews

FAMILIES

Families Without Hope. A Controlled Study of 33 Problem Families. By W. L. TONGE, D. S. JAMES and SURAN M. HILLAM. *British Journal of Psychiatry* Special Publication No. 11. Royal College of Psychiatrists. 1975. Pp xi+156. Price £4.00.

This volume represents a welcome new departure in the *British Journal of Psychiatry Special Publications*. For the first time a whole issue is devoted to a single study. There is clearly a place for certain types of investigation being reported in this way when, as here, easy access is needed to a quantity of closely interlocking data.

The problem families studied were all those living in a defined area of Sheffield who had contact with three social agencies or with two agencies one of which was involved in intensive family casework. A comparison group of families was obtained from the same area. All families contained a man and a woman living together and at least one child under the age of 18. The investigators used intensive interviewing, psychological testing and, when indicated, physical examination and inspection of hospital records. Many subjects in the problem group had laboratory tests. Police records and children's school attendance records were also consulted.

The first chapter is devoted to a selected but sensitive review of various concepts related to problem families and poverty. Succeeding chapters group the findings under headings such as 'The Physique and Health of the Parents' or 'The Children and their Social and Developmental Handicaps'. Presentation is aided by histograms in the text and an Appendix of tables. In each chapter data from other relevant studies are compared and discussed.

This investigation provides a useful description of a clearly selected group of families with multiple difficulties who have extensive or intensive contact with social agencies. As such it is a valuable contribution to the literature on problem families. However, it is important to view the findings in the context of other research. A recent review of the cycles of disadvantage (Rutter and Madge, 1976) suggests that 'problem' families are not qualitatively different from families in the general population. This view is supported by the Sheffield study's failure to find a clear typology of problem families.

Several negative results were of particular interest, such as the lack of relationship between child psychiatric disorder and delinquency in the problem family children.

The authors are clearly aware of the difficulties surrounding the assessment of personality disorder and the danger of attributing causal connections in cross-sectional studies. Furthermore, they confess themselves forced by the material to examine social pathology which could not be ascribed to psychiatric disorder. Nevertheless, they place considerable weight on the high rate of personality disorder in the men in the problem families. The reliability of their assessments was not tested, and they themselves comment on the unreliability of retrospective biographical material. Some may feel that interpretation is carried too far by the suggestion that the families were without hope. Depression in the women was no more common than in some urban studies (Brown, Bhrolchain and Harris, 1975) and applied to a minority, albeit a large one. A lack of planning may not always be equivalent to a lack of hope. Rates of psychiatric disorder in the children also compared favourably with one London survey (Rutter *et al*, 1975). This Sheffield research, like other studies of problem families, provokes interest in how individuals in these situations manage to remain psychologically healthy.

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REFERENCES

- BROWN, G. W., BHROLCHAIN, M. N. & HARRIS, T. (1975) Social class and psychiatric disturbance among women in an urban population. *Sociology*, 9, 225-54.
RUTTER, M. & MADGE, N. (1976) *Cycles of Disadvantage: a Review of Research*. London: Heinemann.
— COX, A., TUPLING, C., BERGER, M. & YULE, W. (1975) Attainment and adjustment in two geographical areas: I. The prevalence of psychiatric disorder. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 126, 493-509.

Principles of Family Psychiatry. By JOHN G. HOWELLS. New York: Brunner/Mazel. 1975. Pp xiv+464. Index. Price \$17.50.

This book is intended as an outline of principles of family psychiatry, addressed chiefly to the psychiatrist. The author has written extensively in this field, and throughout the book there are recurrent echoes of previous work, principally *Family Psychiatry* (1963)