

Book Reviews

Young People and Mental Health

Peter Aggleton, Jane Hurry and Ian Warwick (Eds.)

Chichester, UK: Wiley, 2000. pp. 217. £17.99 (paperback).

Young people and mental health is a straightforward accessible guide to a wide range of mental health issues affecting adolescents. The book is aimed at a broad audience – health professionals, teachers, youth workers, social workers and parents. The 12 chapters (written by 16 authors) are all short and highly structured. Each chapter describes the nature of the mental health issue, its definition and context, incidence, prevalence and outcomes. Risk factors are explained, along with healthy protecting behaviours, treatments/interventions and their outcomes. Each chapter concludes with priorities for interventions and research. There are seven chapters devoted to specific mental health issues with the latter half of the book providing a worthy complement by discussing special groups and special needs (e.g., homosexuality and learning difficulties), and special contexts and settings (e.g., the “looked after” and homeless, bullied). While to a certain extent full chapters on rarer disorders such as autism have been sacrificed for these contextual chapters, placing these issues as equally important as the disorders themselves is itself a powerful statement.

The introduction goes to some length to delineate what age group is being referred to by the terms young people and adolescents. However, many authors stray below and above the agreed definition, sometimes for context but sometimes as irrelevance and lack of focus. Most of the mental health issues included in the book are not exclusive to young people; some authors are prone to discussing the broader issue with some passing references to studies involving this population. However, most chapters are able to broaden the focus and set the adolescent problem within the context of the family or community, or the adult disorder.

On the basis of the first two chapters the reader could be forgiven for thinking that the book is not to do with mental health, but is instead about failed legislation and its consequences. In the chapters on alcohol and drug use there is detailed description of the apparent inadequacies and paradoxes in the legality of drugs/alcohol education or social programmes, albeit with laudable discussion of productiveness of non-demonization in working with this population, and the destructive nature of labelling users “addicts”. In “Young People and Drugs”, (which is focused largely on dance drugs), the author has open contempt for drug laws, and discusses these at length; however, little is made of other realistic and pragmatic solutions, such as the benefits of addressing social deprivation. The author suggests that we should “look for something more dynamic and positive about this popular form of activity (drug use)” (p. 33). It is possible that discussion of this kind of liberal approach is unsuitable for some of the book’s intended audience, such as teachers and parents. A later chapter, “Sexuality and Mental Health Promotion: Lesbian and Gay Young People”, emphasizes the importance of collaborative work among different agencies and the value of mental health promotion from a much less critical stance than chapters 1

and 2. Similarly, in “Young People, Mental Health and Homelessness” there is positive discussion of the need for statutory and non-statutory organizations to work together as an interdisciplinary team, remaining sensitive to multiple levels of causation.

The section on specific mental health problems continues with “Emotional Disorders in Young People”. The explanation of gender/genetic differences is slightly insufficient, but overall the author does a good job of cautiously summarizing a vast area and providing developmental background. The “Eating Disorders” chapter provides comprehensive analyses of symptoms, and honest conclusions regarding incidence, prognosis and effectiveness of existing treatments. Surprisingly, cultural issues are entirely unreported.

The chapter on “Serious Antisocial Behaviour” stresses the importance of the long term view, making the excellent positive statement: “studies to date reinforce the need always to focus on areas of strength and not only the presence of risk factors, however poor the prognosis for trajectory into adult antisocial behaviour” (p. 100). The chapter describes violence, sexually inappropriate behaviour and arson, and is quick to raise the issue of where to draw the line between normality in adolescence and severe, longer-term problems. In the section on special groups and special needs, the chapter on “Young People with Learning Difficulties” also highlights the presence of continua. Consequently, a broad range of issues are discussed, and it is beneficial for the reader to have a certain level of familiarity with the diagnoses of schizophrenia, autism/Aspergers, ADHD, ADDS, Down’s syndrome, and “emotional and behavioural difficulties”, all of which are mentioned at some point in the chapter. The author states an ambitious claim at the start of the chapter, to provide: “an evaluation of the extent to which challenging behaviours are socially constructed; suggestions regarding the concept of ‘quality of life’ for young people with learning difficulties and mental health problems; and examples of effective interventions strategies” (p. 148). Given the brevity of the chapter, this aim is largely achieved. There is discussion of challenging behaviour and the pathologizing of difficult children, raising the issue of where “intervention programmes can become impositions of ‘normal’ behaviours that fail to challenge racial, sexual and class stereotypes” (p. 159). There is continual reference to social context, both in its role mediating the description and diagnosis of disorders, and in the subsequent provision of educational, health and family support services.

In “The Mental Health of ‘Looked After’ Young People” the vital links between psycho-social risk factors in adolescence and childhood, and lifetime incidence and prevalence of disorders are highlighted. Social policy initiatives are discussed. This chapter is distinctive in that a number of pages are devoted to research methods and longitudinal data, providing the context for the comprehensive review of risk and protective factors and preventative strategies. This emphasis is also seen in “Bullying and Harassment in and out of School”, which also provides an evidence-based summary of findings and successful interventions.

Given the large proportion of the population at which the book is aimed, it would be easy for it to have become overly simplistic. However, *Young people and mental health* remains thought provoking and informative. For those with little or no prior knowledge of the mental health issues that affect young people, this book is an excellent way to learn a great deal; moreover, for those already working in the field, the book provides good coverage of many areas, with most chapters making reference to up-to-date research. This book would be of

use to trainees, health and clinical psychologists and researchers for a good summary of a wide range of issues.

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Cognitive Behavioral Treatment of Irritable Bowel Syndrome: The Brain-Gut Connection

Brenda B. Toner, Zindel V. Segal, Shelagh D. Emmott and David Myran

New York: Guilford, 2000, pp. 188. £21.50 (hardback).

Written by Brenda Toner and her colleagues, who have worked extensively on psychosocial aspects of Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), this manual provides a thorough, yet accessible, introduction to the current understanding of IBS and cognitive behavioural approaches to its treatment.

The book is divided into two main sections. The first considers the role of biological, psychological and social factors in the onset and maintenance of IBS. Research into brain-gut interaction and co-morbidity of psychiatric disorders is then briefly summarized, but the main focus is a review of previous trials of psychological treatments for IBS, which include psychodynamic therapy, hypnosis, relaxation and cognitive-behavioural therapy. Following an evaluation of these, the authors' own treatment study, showing the superiority of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) over psycho-educational intervention and conventional medical treatment in the reduction of depression and gastrointestinal symptoms in IBS, is presented. The second half of the book outlines this program, which is designed to be carried out in a group format across 8–12 treatment sessions.

One of the particularly interesting aspects of the book is the attention paid to gender socialization and social stigma as factors that may help to explain both the high proportion of female outpatients with IBS and some of the psychological characteristics of the patient group (e.g., a particular concern over positive self-presentation). The need to consider gender as an important variable in therapy is addressed, with the authors arguing that a particular conflict exists between socially desirable sex-typed behaviour (e.g., compliance, submissiveness and passivity for women) and behaviour that is regarded as psychologically healthy. In addition it is pointed out that the symptoms of functional gastrointestinal disorders (for example, bloating and gas) are particularly socially unacceptable for women. Finally, sexual and physical abuse, which are reported by a high proportion of female patients with IBS, are noted and interpreted as a gender-related risk factors.

The second section of the book starts with guidelines for the appropriate assessment of clients including their psychological state and the availability of social support, cognitions about symptoms, current coping-style and suitability for cognitive behaviour therapy. An important consideration is the fact that widely held beliefs may prevent clients from becoming engaged in therapy or finding psychological treatment approaches acceptable. These include the view that doctors regard IBS as a psychiatric disorder, that severe pain must have an organic cause, or that doctors believe that IBS patients are benefiting in some way from the "sick-role". Ways of introducing and challenging these beliefs are outlined and

the manual contains sample scripts around which discussion could be based. Indeed, it is argued that questioning these views and acknowledging the reality of symptoms is of central importance leading to clients becoming more willing to challenge and overcome a range of psychosocial difficulties and problem behaviours.

Key themes, to be addressed in early sessions, include an introduction of the cognitive behavioural model of IBS, consideration of the relationship between thoughts, feelings, behaviour and symptoms, pain management and bowel performance anxiety. A number of optional themes are suggested, with therapists able to tailor the program to meet the needs of the group. These include shame associated with having IBS, the role of suppressed anger and the need for assertion, and the desire for social approval, perfectionism and control. Essential points to be addressed are given along with sample questions relating to each topic. Case studies from the authors' own clinical experience put the themes in context, adding to the clear and readable nature of the book.

Beyond its use as a manual to guide health care professionals in the management and treatment of patients with IBS, this book allows the reader to gain considerable insight into the nature of chronic IBS and the psychological characteristics of patients. The clinical experience of the authors provides fascinating reading since it touches on issues that have not yet been the focus of much empirical work. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in Irritable Bowel Syndrome or the use of cognitive behaviour therapy to treat functional disorders.

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