

Book reviews

An Introductory Study Guide to Public Health and Epidemiology. By Nigel Unwin, Susan Carr & Joyce Leeson, with Tanja Pless-Mullooli. Pp. 152. (Open University Press, Buckingham, 1996.) £45.00, hardback; £12.99, paperback.

On average two hundred books are published in the UK each year on epidemiology and public health (British Library Catalogue). This one is worth a second look and serious consideration.

In terms of content, the material covered goes a long way to addressing at a basic level the central tasks of public health doctors as outlined in the Acheson Report (Public Health in England, 1988). The authors state that the book will introduce ‘students and practitioners of nursing to the public health perspective’. However, readers who are not of this profession nor intending to become so should not be dissuaded from reading this book. The contents are not specifically nursing orientated but very neatly balanced to be of relevance to all working in the public health arena.

Naturally no single text could hope to address comprehensively all the sciences and disciplines that underpin public health and the issues that impinge on the health of a population. However, this book does provide a comprehensive introductory guide to most of the key features. It is carefully structured, starting with an introduction to information that is routinely available and how to appraise its usefulness critically. This is followed by four chapters addressing the issue of measurement of health problems: how to measure; how to record the frequency of occurrence; the level of risk associated with the problem; and assessing the evidence. Chapters six and seven are concerned with the causes of ill health/disease and ways of promoting good health. The final four chapters look at what is needed for health, how to identify those with health needs and the effectiveness of health care provision. To put health and the health care provided today into perspective and to raise an awareness of how the health environment has changed and is likely to continue to change, both the historical background and the changes that have occurred over the last two centuries in health and the health services are discussed.

This is an introductory text, but hopefully it will serve to raise the reader’s interest to want to know more. This they can easily do by reading further in specialist epidemiology texts and in the literature of the individual disciplines that comprise public health, such as health promotion, health services and disease management. There is one key topic not addressed in this book that is essential information for both practitioners and students of public health. The book contains a negligible amount on statistics and statistical tests and presents no calculations. Readers will need to supplement their knowledge on statistics from other sources.

The authors have used a structured format throughout the book. Each chapter provides a series of thought-provoking questions and exercises which help to initiate and focus the reader’s thoughts and ideas. The objectives for each chapter are clearly

defined and each summary consists of a set of further questions which embrace the contents of the chapter. Finally, the book is well written, the language is clear, and the concepts clearly and simply explained and easily understood.

JEAN PETERS

*School of Health and Related Research,
University of Sheffield*

Maternity and Reproductive Health in Asian Societies. By Pranee L. Rice & Lenore Manderson. Pp. 320. (Harwood Academic, Amsterdam, 1996.) £36.00.

For women in the fertile age group 15–44 years, 20% of the total burden of disease, on a worldwide basis, is due to reproductive health problems, that is, those associated with pregnancy and childbearing and sexually transmitted diseases. The estimated contribution to total burden of disease from this category is even greater in Asian countries; however, the extent is unknown as the estimates documented recently by Murray and Lopez are considered to be conservative. In a part of the world where there is substantial scope for decreasing this component of the total burden of disease, effective health promotion relies heavily on accommodating local beliefs and practices. This book is a treasury of intimate knowledge of local beliefs, customs and current practices within several south-east Asian countries and is therefore an indispensable source of information for anyone tackling this task.

The editors of this book both hold positions in Australian universities, and the book begins with a substantial introduction from them on the general issues which the chapters address within specific societies. There are fourteen chapters, each focussing on a range of related issues within a specific society. The contributions of all authors are based on an intimate working knowledge of reproductive issues within the society they describe. The subject matter for the book has been organized into three parts: Birth and its Inflections; From her Womb; The Workings of the Body: Issues of Sexual Health.

Part I provides fascinating accounts of the beliefs surrounding pregnancy held by people from Japan, northern Bali, southern Thailand and the Philippines. By way of examples, frequent sexual activity is proscribed during pregnancy as it is believed by the Balinese from the northern village of Buleleng that sperm is required for fuelling the fetus. It is believed by pregnant women from Hatyai in southern Thailand that if their husbands are promiscuous they may develop vaginal bleeding during pregnancy. An appreciation of the beliefs in such physiological power of the father during gestation underscores the need to think laterally when assessing potential influences on maternal health.

Accounts are given of the types and use of antenatal care in southern Thailand and the Philippines, and the changes that are taking place make interesting reading and are supported by recently compiled statistics. Contraception in Indonesia and the Philippines, and the success or otherwise of various strategies, is given extensive coverage in this section, along with local views on family size and spacing.

Part II, 'From her Womb', covers the sociocultural contexts of giving birth for the Hmong women of northern Thailand and the Cambodian refugee women along the

Thai–Kampuchea border, and a further two chapters are devoted to villages in rural East Lombok (Indonesia) and the last one to Taiwan. The sociocultural diversity associated with the management of reproduction in the societies of south-east Asia is well-illustrated by these societies and highlights the need for any outside agency to be well-versed in the local management before attempting to make changes.

The last part of the book deals with issues of sexual health in north-east Thailand, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Indonesia, and revisits the Hmong of northern Thailand. Again, the diverse beliefs are striking, particularly in relation to blood. There is some overlap with Part I; for example, some of these chapters include a section on contraception.

This book is compulsory reading for anyone planning to conduct health promotion programmes or intervention studies relating to pregnancy and childbearing and sexually transmitted diseases in any of the specific societies which have been covered. It is also a valuable text for the comparative information that is provided with respect to belief systems and for those wishing to understand the basis of current health practices or to monitor the transition from traditional to more contemporary style medicine. This is a book to read rather than a source of readily found information; however, as each chapter deals with a single society, this does not detract from its value.

It is obvious that women's preferences for and reasoning when choosing their medical options reveal much about which interventions will be successful in improving maternal health. Such information for specific societies is not always forthcoming, but this gem fills many gaps.

JILL SHERRIFF

*Department of Nutrition, Dietetics & Food Science,
Curtin University of Technology, Australia*

The New Rich in Asia. Edited by R. Robison & D. S. G. Goodman. Pp. 253. (Routledge, London, 1996.) £50.00, hardback; £15.99, paperback.

This volume consists of a collection of papers in which the nature of the newly emerging middle classes in Asia is described, and their impact on their own societies and the region in general is considered. Authors of various chapters attempt to identify the characteristics of the 'new rich' of East and South-east Asia historically, politically, economically and socially, and the ways in which they influence politics, ideology and culture. In addition, they examine the ways in which the organisation of social power, gender and the household, as well as the relationship between the state and the economy, have changed with their emergence.

The first chapter, an overview written by the editors, defines the new rich as the new entrepreneurial classes which have risen in the past two decades and whose influence challenges the world of hierarchy and elitism in all countries. In Asia, these classes are not universally the bearers of a bourgeois culture of rationality and secularism; they may equally embrace authoritarian rule, nationalism or religious fundamentalism. This chapter sets the scene for subsequent chapters which are country-based case studies.

The first of these is by Rodan, who considers the emergence of the substantial middle class in Singapore, which came as a consequence of rapid economic development. Class transformations have led to escalating political tensions as the authoritarian and paternalistic rule of the People's Action Party is increasingly questioned by those denied social mobility and who are the traditional constituency of the party. The next two chapters, by Kahn and Robison respectively, consider the rise of the middle classes in Malaysia and Indonesia. Following these, the case of the middle class in the Philippines, the one country experiencing economic failure among the newly industrialising nations of East and South-east Asia, is described in a recent historical context by Pinches. Similarities in the political role of the middle classes have been drawn between the Philippines and Thailand. In the Philippines the overthrow of Marcos was largely at the hands of the middle class, and reforms since that time have been driven by this sector of the population. In Thailand, the emergence of the middle class has been associated by some with democratisation during the 1990s. However, Hewison, in a detailed economic analysis of Thailand's situation, points out that while the expansion of capitalism may have enabled the middle class to grow, political power and benefits continue to lie heavily in a significant capitalist minority.

In considering the case of Hong Kong, Shiu-hing divides the new rich into four categories, all of which support private property rights and capitalism, but which differ in political orientation. These are: (1) the local bourgeoisie who see politics as a means to achieving profits; (2) the mainland Chinese bourgeoisie who are perhaps more profit oriented than their local counterparts; (3) the local middle class liberals who fully support Western values such as human rights and democracy; and (4) the local middle class nationalists who are critical of Western values and have a strong sense of belonging to China. The play between these different sub-classes has contributed to the cultural and economic strength of Hong Kong. The extent to which this continues to be the case in post-transfer Hong Kong remains to be seen.

In considering South Korea, Cotton and Hyung-a van Leest describe a country in which rapid economic and social change has eroded old social structures while altering expectations, particularly of the new middle class. Korea is still emerging from an authoritarian state to a more democratic one, and is a country where the middle class is still largely torn between the drive towards modernism and democracy, and traditionalism, where hierarchy and the privileges of personal connections are paramount. In the case of Taiwan, Chu argues that the growth of the middle class with the economic liberalisation and political democratisation of the late 1980s has had considerable influence on the development of the political system since then. The new rich are not a homogeneous group, and they have yet to reproduce themselves institutionally and ideologically. In contrast, China, in the absence of a free-market economy, is more experimental, and has led to a large number of middle class groupings based upon the economic nature of their enterprise. Goodman, in his chapter, shows that the nature of ownership and the political role of these new groupings is at an early stage of evolution.

Collectively, these essays show the new middle classes in Asia to have many common features, but also a number of important differences, and generalisations across countries are likely to be at best superficial. This is a very readable volume which

will be of value to those interested in processes of social differentiation, and the importance of capitalism as a force for social change, as well as to those interested in economics in Asia.

STANLEY J. ULJASZEK
Curtin University, Australia

Long-term Consequences of Early Environment: Growth, Development and the Lifespan Developmental Perspective. 37th Symposium of the Society for the Study of Human Biology. Edited by C. J. K. Henry & S. J. Uljaszek. Pp. 253. (Cambridge University Press, 1996.) £35.00.

This book deals with a very important, and until recently little studied subject, the influence of environmental factors in early life on later stages of growth and adulthood. Thirteen contributions listed in this volume were presented at the 1994 Symposium of the Society for the Study of Human Biology held at the University of Oxford. They discuss various aspects of early environmental impacts on growth and development and health, including nutritional, epidemiological, social and psychological factors.

In the introduction, the editors briefly describe the concept, structure and major topics of this publication. The following three chapters elaborate on this area. In the first of these, Bogin considers human growth in evolutionary perspective, focusing on human childhood as a unique stage in human life history as compared to non-human primates. Uljaszek then discusses some important definitions (e.g. the term 'early environment') and puts human growth and lifespan in an evolutionary framework, with greatly extended adulthood being 'a striking feature of contemporary human populations' (p. 27) which consequently leads to new challenges. He also considers some major mechanisms of future outcomes of early environmental influences. The subject of the fourth chapter is human sex ratio and its biosocial determinants. Although, as Worthman justly points out, this topic has been studied by many scholars, he introduces some important dimensions to this problem emphasising so-called 'gender selection' as different from sexual selection and mainly concerned with sex-differentiated social selective pressures.

The subsequent ten chapters relate to more particular topics. In the first, Cameron reviews some antenatal and birth factors and their links to the growth of the offspring, showing that birthweight is the most valuable predictor of future growth success or failure. The following chapter (Golden) deals with the effect of early nutrition on later growth, with some special emphasis on the importance of intrauterine development for the whole course of postnatal growth. Under-nourishment and its influence on body composition and metabolism through mechanisms of hormonal control is the subject of Chapter 7 (Wooton & Jackson). The next paper also deals with nutrition, the author (Henry) focusing on early and later nutritional needs, showing the relationship between them, between organ size, and energy metabolism across growth and development and into adult life.

Like most of the contributions in this very stimulating volume, Chapter 9, by Mela & Catt, examines another inadequately studied problem, that of ontogenetic changes in chemosensory function, concluding that humans have great plasticity in their food

preferences. The shortest but one of the most important contributions is that of Barker who offers his now well-known model relating intrauterine growth to risk of coronary heart disease in adult life. He shows that, in terms of birthweight at least, 'big is healthy'. Chapter 11 (Goodman) concentrates on dental enamel hypoplasia as a marker of early life stresses in some ancient populations. This approach is now very popular among palaeoanthropologists. Of the three remaining papers, two deal with the influence of childhood environment on future development of sexual behaviour (Richards), and with onset of puberty and female fertility later in life (Rosetta). The concluding chapter (Garruto) focuses on the development of neuro-degenerative diseases as connected with early life events.

The book is very well designed, planned and edited, although some references are missing. Despite this small fault, the volume offers very stimulating reading and is a valuable source of information for students and scholars in a range of related scientific disciplines, such as bioanthropology, auxology, epidemiology, nutrition, psychology and physiology.

ELENA GODINA
Moscow State University