

## Reviews

Ursula Adler Falk and Gerhard Falk, *Ageism, the Aged and Aging in America*, Charles C. Thomas, Springfield, Ill., 1997, 271 pp. hbk, ISBN 0-398-06765-1; pbk, ISBN 0-398-06766-X.

This book provides a detailed overview of various aspects of ageing and the circumstances of older people in America. The twelve chapters cover the nature of prejudice; how ageism works; ageism in the health system, the economy, the family, education, literature and popular culture, government and law; the influence of religion; sex and gender; and the future of ageing in America. The book is clearly written and the material is presented in an accessible way with relatively little use of jargon or technical language. It is also liberally sprinkled with examples that help to bring the text to life for practitioners working with older people. In these respects, this is a useful book and one that tutors or trainers will be able to use to good effect in obtaining a wide variety of examples of ageism in practice across a range of aspects of social life.

However, this is not to say that the book is without serious drawbacks. Despite its strengths, I found it to be extremely limited in its conceptual focus. The discussion and underpinning conceptualisation of ageism are very narrow and individualistic. The emphasis is very firmly on the psychology of the individual, albeit with some recognition of the role and significance of broader group and familial factors. Constant reference is made to prejudice, without adequate acknowledgement of the role of prejudice as a manifestation of underlying cultural and structural patterns of discrimination and inequality. We are left with the distinct impression that the problem lies in individual attitudes, rather than across the range of personal, cultural and structural factors that contribute to the maintenance of ageist structures of power and subordination. The structural dimension of the socio-political context of ageing and ageism is almost entirely absent from the analysis – indeed, analysis is something that is in relatively short supply, with the bulk of the material being very descriptive in nature.

This book has been written as if the critical gerontology perspective, with its emphasis on the structural roots of ageism, had never seen the light of day. This is reflected in the relative paucity of discussion of the themes and concerns of critical gerontology in relation to the economy, political structures, ideology and power relations, and the absence of any reference to the works of theorists and researchers in this important and now well-established field of inquiry.

The neglect of the significance of language as a factor in reinforcing ageist structures and patterns of behaviour is also a telling weakness. The fact that dehumanising terms such as ‘the elderly’ and ‘the aged’ are regularly used in an uncritical way shows a distinct lack of awareness of some of the subtle operations of ageist discourses. The fact that terms like ‘man’s existence’ are

also used indicates that the links between language, discrimination and power have not featured in the authors' study of the field of ageism.

This book is not without value for students and practitioners in the field of applied gerontology, but its very narrow focus omits major features of the complex underpinnings of ageism and distorts its subtleties and intricacies by making personal prejudice the focus of attention, rather than just one aspect of a multifaceted social phenomenon.

North East Wales Institute

NEIL THOMPSON

Peter Lloyd-Sherlock, *Old Age and Urban Poverty in the Developing World: The Shanty Towns of Buenos Aires*, Macmillan Press Ltd., London, 1997, 261 pp., hbk £50.00, ISBN 0 333 68286 6, and St. Martin's Press, Inc., New York, 1997, ISBN 0 312 17502 7.

It is a bonus for the lazy reviewer if it is possible to discern gaps in a researcher's data, or fallacies in the general principles which he deduces. Unfortunately for this lazy reviewer, Peter Lloyd-Sherlock has amassed a complete and astonishingly detailed set of data. His arguments are valid and have great potential for wider application.

But why Argentina? Especially when the main title refers to 'the Developing World'? Argentina is capable of a high level of technological achievement and social sophistication. What reference then can Argentina have to the developing world? Would not Lloyd-Sherlock have been better advised to have taken his research project to Bolivia, or Burundi, or Bangladesh?

The book points out that, over the next 25 years, the developing world will face a problem relating to the increase in the numbers of elderly, and supposedly non-productive, people within the population. Britain and France 'aged' over a long period, when still two of the strongest economies in the world. Argentina is a country which has been ageing more rapidly over a period when it could reasonably be classified as an economically developing country within the usual meaning of the term. So the Argentine experience is an example of what another hundred or more countries may expect to undergo during the first quarter of the next century.

This book covers all those many aspects of political, social and personal life which relate to ageing. It is objective and unaffected by dogma. If 'scholarly' means detachment from the individual human experience, it is not scholarly although written by a scholar. It is able to put aside the dark glasses of some scholars and look sensibly at the reality of people scavenging for food in rubbish bins of the shantytowns – a symptom of the failure of welfare measures. The writer melds earthy interviews with global statistics to form a fascinating, instructive and challenging whole.

His coverage of the incomplete Argentinian pension and social benefits system is exhaustive and referenced to other modes such as the much vaunted Chilean system. There are aspects of the mix of official and privatised provisions which make interesting reading at this time of economic quandary in the so-called 'developed world'. An important aspect of the Argentine benefits programme is the failure to control bureaucratic traps and delays.

There are examples of people spending five years in completing the application process. The reader might wonder about the role of political bias in attending to these petitioners. Lloyd-Sherlock probes beneath the superficial 'membership numbers' to reveal reliable figures of those actually profiting from programmes such as the Chilean system. It does appear that Argentina has a system which could work, given some ruthless revision and supervision of procedures. The underlying message may be that a universal government-funded system, such as some may have envisaged for, say, Britain, is not likely to be viable in Argentina, or other countries in the developing world.

The writer does justice to the willing, if somewhat uncoordinated, activities of the voluntary organisations such as CEPEV, which began as a study and advisory group and soon found itself distributing food parcels. Many people best know Argentina through the musical and film 'Evita', and its 'chocolate box' presentation of Eva Peron and her social welfare foundation. Lloyd-Sherlock is justifiably agnostic, if not atheistic, about the foundation, set up by the woman of whom my children, in the 1950s, were taught 'Your true mother is Eva Peron'.

'Evita' does not occupy many words of a well-focussed book, but one reference may be salutary for international aid organisations. This is the failure of other institutions to accept what this reviewer has long argued: that Argentina, and similar countries, having reached the present level of ageing and development, are the best sites for innovative projects and more detailed research. Money should not be poured into short-lived welfare schemes where the process of ageing is less well charted. It is demoralizing also to hear of a British agency saying that, because of public attitudes, it cannot raise funds for Latin America.

Lloyd-Sherlock's book provides ample evidence that optimum sites for research into the implications of, and appropriate responses to, an ageing population are to be found in the developing world. It also has important lessons for more developed welfare states in respect of the inadequacies of the best-intentioned programmes.

'ConsultAge' and Centre for Social Gerontology,  
Keele University

KEN TOUT

Mary M. Burke and Mary B. Walsh, *Gerontologic Nursing: Wholistic Care of the Older Adult*, Mosby Year Book Inc., 1997, 2nd edn.  
650 pp., £25.00, ISBN 0 8151 1331 5.

The second edition of such a comprehensive text as *Gerontologic Nursing* is a colossal undertaking, which has been achieved with a high degree of scholarship. This is primarily an educational book, written for students of nursing, moving the focus of care towards the wholistic, and aiming to promote wellness, and incorporating the growing eighty-five plus age group.

However, whilst the title of the book denotes a new dimension towards the care of the older person, this is not fully realised within the majority of the text. This has a tendency to reiterate the familiar, with new areas of knowledge appended. A central area of concern is the lack of a perspective from older

adults themselves, and a corresponding apolitical passivity from the fraternity of nurses giving care.

The contents of the clinical nursing chapters link theoretical knowledge to practice in a clear and useful manner, and yet the inter-disciplinary nature of gerontologic nursing is missing. Several chapters stand out for their ability to consider wholistic care: sections on mobility, nutrition, sleep, cancer and drug interactions provide and integrate knowledge. The last three chapters which consider issues on planning, ethics and new pathways for nursing, actually set the agenda for the book.

It is recognised that there are difficulties in trying to encompass all aspects of wholistic nursing whilst simultaneously addressing key issues on health promotion and the needs of frail elderly people. In these authors' eagerness to produce a universal text, the essential requirement of addressing and integrating the emotional, as well as the technical, milieu of nursing older people has been avoided.

The book is a valuable contribution to an ever-increasing domain of nursing, but as a testimony to nursing's response to old age, it veers towards the conservative. This is illustrated by the fact that the focus of the majority of chapters is on the bio-medical perspective, a model losing its predominance within nursing in Britain and other nations.

At £25, with plentiful illustrations and useful data, this book is an excellent buy and a worthy set text book for nursing undergraduates. But, as a nurse educator, care home owner and manager, I was left pondering how successful this book would be in challenging and enthusing its readers.

The School of Nursing Midwifery and  
Health Visiting, University of Manchester  
and  
Thornage Residential Care Home,  
Denton, Manchester

LESLEY WADE

Peter Decalmer and Frank Glendenning (eds.), *The Mistreatment of Elderly People*, Sage, London, 1997, (2nd Edition) 278 pp, hbk £45.00, ISBN 0 7619 5262 4, pbk £15.99, ISBN 0 7619 5263 4.  
Yvonne Joan Craig, *Elder Abuse and Mediation*, Avebury, Hants, 1997, 218 pp, hbk £35.00, ISBN 1 85972 615 1.

The abuse and mistreatment of elderly people is not a new phenomenon; however it is only comparatively recently that it has been fully recognised as an area of concern in the UK. Accordingly, the available literature in this country was somewhat sparse until the early 1990s. These two books are recent additions although covering somewhat different subject matter.

The edited collection by Decalmer and Glendenning is a revised and expanded version of their previous successful collection of readings. It includes a number of perspectives and different disciplines. It is therefore a welcome addition to the literature as it provides a much needed overview of the major research, theoretical and professional perspectives on the topic.

The book considers abuse and neglect in institutional and domestic settings.

It attempts to address questions of family and kinship, gender, social policy, including the public response to this problem. It opens with a useful discussion by Glendenning of the social context in which elder abuse occurs, including the perspective of wider societal and attitudinal frameworks in relation to old age. This is followed by two chapters concerned with defining abuse and neglect, and with the clinical presentation and management of such situations. Elder abuse in America is also detailed at various points throughout the book, although care needs to be taken when transferring these experiences to other contexts. There are revised chapters which deal with such areas as the clinical implications of abuse; issues for social workers, nurses and GPs; and models of prevention.

Griffiths, Roberts and Williams provide an updated chapter on legal perspectives, which explores such areas as criminal prosecution, civil actions, false imprisonment, wrongful interference and negligence. The Law Commission report on incapacity (Law Commission 1995) is mentioned in the conclusion to the chapter, which strongly indicates that some changes in the law are necessary, particularly in the area of mental incapacity and protection of vulnerable adults. There is an interesting and useful chapter by Phillipson concerning sociological perspectives, which has been revised to consider some of the recent relevant research findings on family and kinship networks.

The chapter by Nolan examines caregiving and the satisfactions of caring. It is particularly valuable in its exploration of the links between abuse and conflicting, yet intimate, relationships within the context of caring for older disabled individuals. Future work may serve to consolidate some of the findings from this useful review.

This book should be read widely by professionals from different disciplines but it is not without weaknesses. This is to be expected in an area which only recently was acknowledged as meriting concern, and where much work remains to be done. The editors admit, for example, that issues concerning the abuse of elders from ethnic minorities have been omitted from this second edition due, as in the first edition, to a lack of relevant and reliable research studies. Additionally, it is slightly disappointing that there is an absence of exploration of the possible links between elder abuse and other forms of family violence. The book contains eight new chapters, including welcome perspectives on gender and psychology. Although it is longer than the first edition, some of the contributions seemed to be rather short and in danger of being somewhat superficial.

The book by Craig is a single-authored text and represents a substantial amount of work conducted by the author in relation to her PhD studies. As the title indicates, the book concerns the potential use of mediation in situations of elder abuse. In relation to mediation as a distinct form of intervention at a minimal level, this builds on the earlier work of Roberts (1986). Craig suggests that such mediation is of particular value in relation to elder abuse, particularly in the early stages of conflicts in relationships. Many situations of elder abuse concern relationship difficulties of long duration, however, and may not easily be assisted by such techniques (Homer and Gilleard 1990).

The first part of the book considers theories of mediation and moves to an exploration of how these might be utilised in situations of abuse. Some of the

emerging critiques of such forms of dispute resolution are also covered. The second section recounts experiences from America, including the use of mediation and advocacy skills by long term care Ombudsmen. The author discusses what she learnt from visits to California, Georgia and Kansas about the use of mediation.

The final section is concerned with European perspectives, describing the development of the Elder Mediation Project in the UK and a Norwegian elder abuse project which utilises mediation amongst other techniques of intervention. Some interesting case studies are included. The final chapter looks at relevant UK developments, and policy issues in relation to European initiatives. A brief conclusion acknowledges that the author's suggestions remain somewhat tentative and provisional, and stresses the need for further, more detailed, research in this area.

Although it contains some useful material, the book is lengthy and includes many extensive quotes. In places the accessibility of the book becomes somewhat problematic. Lengthy sentences reduce both readability and meaning. This points to the main limitation of the book. The Decalmer and Glendenning text is useful in increasing awareness, knowledge and understanding about elder abuse and neglect and should, as the first edition did, attract a wide readership. In contrast, Craig's book is in my view much less likely to be read by practitioners, and in some respects is more of a specialist text. It contains some useful ideas and material but is less likely to be widely used.

## References

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University of Hull

BRIDGET PENHALE

Scott A. Bass, Robert Morris and Masato Oka (eds), *Public Policy and the Old Age Revolution in Japan*, Haworth, N.Y., 1996, 189 pp, \$34.95, ISBN 0789 00012 1.

The process of ageing in societies and the adaption of policy and service systems to this are almost universal. Japan is of particular interest due to the rapid rate of ageing of its population. It is developing a comprehensive strategy for responding to this increase in demand, through the Gold Plan and the development of long term care insurance. This book is therefore of considerable value in that it makes some relevant material easily accessible to an English-speaking audience.

The volume consists of a selection of chapters covering the pattern of change in health and social care services, the mechanisms of funding these systems, aspects of employment for an ageing population and retirement policies. Some

of these papers are written by Japanese authors and others by US writers, some have been published in the *Journal of Aging and Social Policy*. The opening chapter gives a brief overview of policies for successful aging being undertaken by Tokyo Metropolitan Government. The twin foci are care for the severely frail and bedridden aged and health education. This combination, advancing both preventive and targeted interventive strategies, is of some interest to other societies where the latter is the predominant strategy. The chapters on employment provide very clear opportunities for comparison. Japanese policies for supporting the employment of older workers appear to contrast significantly with those in many western societies. The distinction is between an active governmental promotion of a role for older workers and the passive government role found elsewhere. This higher employment participation rate may be attributed to the pressure of the cost of living on the need to work, or to the effect of pension provision.

The involvement of older people in society is discussed in relation to the initiative of Silver Resource Centres and the special programmes for retirees. These settings offer temporary part-time paid work for older people and reflects the value system that work offers positive fulfilment. These centres contract with employers and the public sector as well as providing their own economic activity. Members are paid dividends and there is an interesting parallel here with the development of work programmes in mental health services. The centres also offer home help services with older people contributing to the development of care at home. This is of considerable interest in the light of the potential labour shortage in home care in Japan. More material about the nature of social care provision and the health and social care divide (reflected in separate ministries at Central Government level) and how this is to be managed in the future, would have made the book of wider interest but was unfortunately lacking.

Overall this book provides material which may be sought elsewhere but, in view of the relevance of the Japanese experience and the difficulty of obtaining much material in English, this collection is of considerable interest. Despite changes in arrangement for long term care insurance (Ikegami 1997), it is a useful introduction to the changing service systems in Japan.

### Reference

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PSSRU  
University of Manchester

DAVID CHALLIS