

Unemployment and Health: A Review of the Literature 1979–1986. Compiled by Lesley Grayson. Letchworth: Technical Communications. 1986. Pp 27. £8.00

The interest in the health effects of joblessness has risen roughly in proportion to the dramatic increments of unemployment rates in the late 70s and early part of this decade. In 1980 the Karolinska Institute in Sweden¹ had compiled over 680 references on the subject, and since then the literature on the subject has probably doubled in size. The researcher attempting to wade through this mass of often conflicting information has to struggle to make sense of the comparative findings in different countries and settings, as well as the qualitative changes in response to unemployment depending on the particular socioeconomic conditions at national and regional levels.

For many it may not appear surprising to find that this type of research often discovers associations between a social life event, such as unemployment, and diverse health factors, especially in the initial phases of that event, whilst individuals and social groups are making adjustments to sudden changes outside their control. This applies both to an individual's personal experience of losing his or her job, as well as to societies as a whole. Research that has been carried out at one particular time is likely to have substantially different findings if replicated a few years later. Hence the importance of longitudinal studies. But as the author of the present compilation accurately points out, research into this field has received little support from grant bodies or the Government, and longitudinal studies are extremely rare. One has to confine oneself, frustratingly, with discrete snapshots, hoping that by careful editing one can obtain something like a full feature film, but then that method is highly questionable.

The research conundrum of whether unemployment causes ill health or whether those ill are most likely to lose

their jobs may interest some, but few can now argue against the confirmed findings of higher ratios of morbidity in a broad spectrum of health indices in unemployed samples, especially in men in their middle years. Despite the fact that the medical profession has shown concern about the impact of such statistics on health provision, many are at a loss when it comes to finding a role for themselves when faced with this sort of distress. But a greater understanding of the predicament of the jobless does enhance the possibility of empathic therapeutic interaction with unemployed patients and their families, and alert clinicians to the "vital role they have to play in helping the unemployed gain access to the range of services available, and in minimising the adverse effects of unemployment on health".

Lesley Grayson's compilation is a useful contribution for anybody interested in an organised reading of the subject, mostly of research carried out in this country. It is prefaced by a very competent introduction, overlooking the whole field, drawing heavily on a series of articles by Richard Smith in the *British Medical Journal*. She then divides the literature into sections, covering general issues, mental and physical health, nutrition, alcohol and drug abuse, mortality, suicide and parasuicide, everyday life, families and children and finally, responses to the problem. Each entry has a short paragraph outlining the main issues covered, without critical comment. She does not claim it to be a comprehensive bibliography, but I think she has selected a balanced and most apposite collection, and one that psychiatrists in all fields would be unwise to ignore.

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REFERENCE

¹KAROLINSKA INSTITUTET (1980). *Unemployment and Health. A Bibliography*. Department for Social Medicine, Lulea, Sweden.

International Academy of Law and Mental Health

Membership of the Academy is open to mental health professionals and members of the legal profession involved in mental health matters. It includes a subscription to the *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*. Registration

fee: General Membership—US\$50.00; Member in Training—US\$25.00. Information: Abraham L. Halpern, MD, New York Medical College, United Hospital, 406 Boston Post Road, Post Chester, NY 10573, USA.

The Behavioural Sciences and Dentistry Group

This group has now evolved into a formal organisation. Its aims are to change the perception of the nature of dental practice by introducing behavioural sciences into dental undergraduate and postgraduate education, co-ordinating research and improving patient management in general dental practice. Several satellite groups have been set up around the country and the national group will hold its next meeting on 16 May 1987, which will be concerned with the

management of anxiety. The annual membership will be £10.00, payable to the Behavioural Sciences and Dentistry Group, and will include reduced fees for meetings, regular updating on the group's activities as well as local/regional group membership. Undergraduate students may register free. Information: Dr C. Feinmann, Department of Oral Medicine, Eastman Dental Hospital, 256 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8LD.