

Reviews

Yan-chi Kwok (ed), *Ageing in the Community: Research on the Designing of Everyday Life Environment for the Elderly*, World-Making Workshop, Hong Kong, 1999, 131 pp., pbk HK\$70.00, ISBN 962 85444 2X.

In this book the authors argue an impassioned case for the inclusion of older people, and for a sensitive consideration of their needs, in urban renewal planning. In the context of Hong Kong, one of the world's most rapidly developing and changing cities, this process is seen in an extreme form. Architects are increasingly concerned with the dynamics of cities, with flows of goods, people, ideas, information, and money; with ways in which technology can add to the interconnections between business and consumer, between home and work; and the intermingling of leisure, tourism and commerce. This is very different from earlier views of how a city should be laid out, with main thoroughfares defining and segregating residential, industrial, business and cultural areas.

In shifting from one model to another, older people are likely to be marginalised because, as the authors point out, they are widely considered to be 'inactive', and therefore do not 'fit' within an essentially dynamic model of the city. Consequently, no provision is made for their continuing presence by architects and planners. In Hong Kong the tendency is to 'move needy older people from one area to another where social services can be offered more economically.' As an alternative, the authors argue the case for an 'inclusive' approach to urban renewal, and set out some very succinct guidance based on research into the living conditions of older people in a selected water-front area.

At first sight, the book appears to document a piece of academic research, and it would be easy to pass it over as a dry report of mainly parochial interest. But to take it as such would be to miss its real value. As someone who rarely reads a book from front to back, I plunged into the final chapter – the section on design proper and my particular concern – and then tried to understand how the authors came to such specific and structured design guidance and recommendations by working my way back through the book.

Unpacking the text in this way reveals the motivation of the authors more effectively, I thought, than a conventional reading. What emerges is a sharply focused picture of the lives and living arrangements of older people in Hong Kong. Although the sample of individuals studied is small, the combination of in-depth case studies along with general statistical and descriptive data about older people in Hong Kong and the Wan Chai district in particular, supported by interviews with professionals working in related fields, rounds out the picture convincingly. The broader context is the changing face of the city, and the design guidance is based on the premises that provision should be made in urban renewal programmes for older people to age in place, that this provision should go beyond meeting their survival needs to address their social and

psychological needs and that, in attempting to integrate living, working and leisure within a new vision of the modern city, older people should not be excluded.

This approach is strongly influenced by the seminal publication *A Pattern Language* (Alexander *et al.* 1977), and the attempt to extend that theory in relation to older people and urban renewal is welcome, drawing attention, as it does, to the particular problems facing cities in transition, and to the marked differences – and also the similarities – in the living situations and social needs of older people in urban areas. This small book is based on a short, 12 month study, by the Research Group on Urban Space and Culture at the School of Design, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and hopefully is a prelude to an expanded working of a design philosophy which seeks to understand and meet the social and psychological needs of older people through more effective planning and interior design. The design and layout of the book is excellent, it is well referenced, the text is very accessible, and it will be of interest to people from a wide range of disciplines, who are involved in caring, planning and designing for older people, but I missed an index and page numbers in the contents section to help me find my way around.

Reference

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Mike Brogden and Preeti Nijhar, *Crime, Abuse and the Elderly*. Willan Publishing, Cullompton, 2000, vii + 191 pp., pbk £16.99, ISBN 1 903240 03 4.

Crime, Abuse and the Elderly is the first British book that aims to bring together existing research in Britain and the USA on the experiences of elderly people as both victims and perpetrators of crime. As such it fulfils its claim to be breaking new ground and may be considered a valuable reference book.

Opening with the intriguing illustrations of Lizzie Borden (who killed her parents) and Harold Shipman (a doctor who killed many elderly patients), the thesis is presented that ‘the elderly are always viewed as disposable’ (p. 2). Their victimisation is reconstructed as ‘abuse’, more amenable to welfare than criminal justice intervention, and their perpetration of crime as being ‘neutralised’ through explanations of individual pathology. Traditional criminology, it is argued, has resisted engagement with ‘the elderly’ (sic) because it has focused instead on ‘street’ and ‘stranger’ crime. It has also colluded with ageist stereotypes which minimise the harm caused by elder abuse and deny the rationality of elderly criminals. Yet, with an increasingly ageing population, this neglect is hard to justify, and the authors argue that

criminology must start to take greater account of older people's experiences of crime and criminal justice. More controversially, it argues for a shift from welfare to criminal justice interventions to address those experiences – a change of focus from needs-based to human rights-based approaches.

The book seeks to debunk many of the mythologies surrounding the mistreatment of elderly people. It challenges the myths of the *golden age*, when older people were treated with respect, and of the *golden isles*, where elders in non-Western societies still are. Drawing on scholarly historical texts, the authors demonstrate that there are, and have been, 'few sanctuaries in which older people are free from victimisation' (p. 36).

Received criminological wisdom asserts that elderly people, who are amongst those groups least likely to be crime victims, nevertheless fear crime the most. Brogden and Nijhar argue that this analysis is based on a false homogenisation of older people and fails to take account of their differential crime susceptibility in terms of residence, gender and life-style. It also ignores the greater susceptibility of older people to crimes committed in private or in care institutions. Once this is acknowledged, it is clear that many older people's fear of crime is realistic and rational and based on their own personal history and experience.

Having established that elders are more active in the understanding and construction of their own environment than traditional criminology concedes, the authors turn their attention to elderly criminals and ask whether the 'liberation' of older people is resulting in an 'elderly crime wave'. Such evidence as exists is almost entirely North American and is inconclusive. Crimes by elderly people still represent a minute proportion of all known crimes but that proportion is increasing and there is justifiable concern about the increasing numbers of older prisoners. This latter may be due more to ageing recidivists and longer sentences (that is, prisoners growing old) than to more people turning to crime in their old age. Consequently, the authors do not argue for a specific 'criminology of the elderly'. Rather, they challenge the assumption that criminals and crime victims are predominantly young (and male) and argue for the wider application of existing theories of crime and criminal justice.

Arguing for criminology to take greater account of older people is not the same thing as arguing for greater criminal justice intervention in their lives, although the authors seem to assume that one follows the other. There are good reasons for regarding the criminal law as a blunt instrument for dealing with elder abuse (Phillips *et al.* 2000) and it is not clear why welfare and criminal justice interventions are considered by the authors to be mutually exclusive. ('Concerns with justice rather than with remedial treatment and welfare should be the new priority' [p. 153]). There is no mention in this book of restorative justice and the concept of diversion for older offenders is dismissed as 'not appropriate' (p. 141). Why not? At a time when many criminologists are concerned about any measure which may increase the prison population even more rapidly than it is already increasing, the authors seem oblivious to the implications of calling for greater criminal justice intervention. Do we really want our prison population expanded with stressed carers and elderly thieves?

The strength of *Crime, Abuse and the Elderly* lies in the wealth of studies to which it makes reference. It does, however, have a number of weaknesses. The structure of the book is confusing and its written style is uneven in quality. The overuse of subheadings and the seemingly random appearance of short sections entitled 'Overview' give the book a sense of fragmentation. Sentence construction and punctuation would occasionally embarrass a competent undergraduate and there is a general lack of precision in the use of language which is frustrating when one is trying to follow the development of arguments. Indeed, the use of the term 'the elderly' is now widely considered to be mildly insensitive.

Crime, Abuse and the Elderly is a pioneering and controversial book which perhaps deserves to have its shortcomings overlooked. Nevertheless, there is a danger that they will detract from its central message – that criminology has something important to contribute to and to learn from the experiences of elders as both victims and perpetrators of crime.

Reference

Phillips, J., Worrall, A. and Brammer, A. 2000. Elders and the criminal justice system in England. In Rothman, M. B., Dunlop, B. D. and Entzel, P. (eds), *Elders. Crime and the Criminal Justice System*. Springer Publishing Company, New York.

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ANNE WORRALL

Jacki Pritchard, *The Needs of Older Women: Services for Victims of Elder Abuse and Other Abuse*, Policy Press and Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Bristol, 2000, 119 pp., pbk £16.95, ISBN 1-86134-209-8.

This report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation is the result of a project undertaken by Jacki Pritchard in relation to the abuse of older women. Effectively, this is a final report of a needs assessment undertaken by the author. The report details the project and its findings, and makes a number of recommendations concerning practice in this area. Whilst there is much anecdotal information about elder abuse, the voices of the victims themselves have rarely been heard. This report is therefore likely to be of interest to those people who are concerned about the abuse of older people and the development of appropriate responses. It is especially timely because of recent initiatives announced by the Department of Health relating to the abuse of vulnerable adults (DOH 2000).

The project took place over a period of 18 months and consisted of a multi-faceted approach to identify the needs of older women. Essential quantitative data were collected, together with qualitative information. In three northern social services departments, monitoring systems were set up. These systems collated statistical information concerning vulnerable adults known to the departments, explored practices and outcomes in this area and also identified older women who were victims of abuse who might be potential participants in the project interviews. A series of focus groups were held with over 300 older

people, and in-depth interviews were held with 27 older women who were victims of elder abuse. In addition a number of social workers and social care staff from the departments were interviewed and participated in focus groups.

The first chapter provides a brief introduction to the project. The principal aims were to identify women victims of elder abuse; to conduct a small study to identify the extent of earlier abuse in the victims' lives; to identify types of abuse; to examine the victims' needs and to explore the resources and services needed. There is a thorough description of the issues relating to access and other ethical matters. The definition of elder abuse promoted by the Social Services Inspectorate in 1993 was used in the study (DOH 1993). An appendix details other definitions.

The book does not contain a literature review; rather, the second chapter describes the methodology of the study. The lack of reference to recent work in this area is a major shortcoming of the book; some sort of a synopsis of up-to-date work would have been very useful both for readers new to the topic and practitioners on familiar territory. The sample of victims for interviews was obtained on a referral basis through contacts with workers in the community. The 27 women, identified as elder abuse victims, were asked about their life history, previous experience of abuse, knowledge about other victims, what help the victims had received, and their own needs. Qualitative data were coded and checked by an independent researcher.

The third chapter details the results of the quantitative data analysis. This produced some basic statistics about the 186 cases that were identified as vulnerable adult victims of abuse. Of the total number, 126 were aged 60 and over and 97 were older women. Two-thirds of the 98 identified abusers were male and 45 per cent were aged 60 years and over. The abuser was the son of the victim in 21 of the 98 cases; the daughter in 16, and the husband in 15; thus, these three sets of relatives accounted for more than half of the relationships that existed between victims and abusers.

The majority of the 27 women interviewed were over 75 years old and most of them (some 19) were living at home. The women had experienced multiple types of abuse (20 had been financially abused, 18 emotionally, 14 physically, three sexually, and three were neglected by others). In answer to the research question about previous abuse, of the 14 women who had experienced abuse earlier in life, seven had been abused as children and 13 were victims of spouse abuse. The practitioners involved in the study suggested that some victims did not label certain actions as abusive; however, the author wryly notes that victims appeared clearer about what constituted abuse than the practitioners did.

The next three chapters detail the narratives of the interviewees, and readers are almost made to feel as if they were with the women as their stories are told through lengthy excerpts from transcripts. The women talk about their experiences of childhood, relationships, and their perceptions about their situations. They tell us what they need, emotionally, physically, and financially. The most important needs identified by the women were to have someone to listen to them and to believe them. Additionally, the women wished for their supporters to be trustworthy, to maintain their privacy, and to help with practical advice and assistance. A lengthier, unprioritised list of

needs and resources is also provided. The analysis of the qualitative data appears, unfortunately, to have been somewhat superficial.

Pritchard also explores the needs of practitioners in this area. She found that attitudes about working in this field were predominantly negative, and suggests that the social stigma attached to older people, which results in their lower status, carries over to people who work with them. Practitioners had insufficient knowledge about the long-term effects of violence and abuse and were pessimistic about being able to help victims. There appeared to be a tendency for practitioners to ‘rescue’ victims rather than to assist them to make choices from a set of options.

Practitioners generally discuss issues of abuse with those who have experienced abuse on an individual case basis. This book collects the views of the women involved to try and provide some coherence. Although the study focused on women, it is of wider applicability. One example of this is the finding that assistance over a longer period was frequently patchy in nature, or not forthcoming. Readers will gain some insight from the stories presented, but more importantly are also likely to discover common themes concerning the dynamics of abuse and the needs of those women involved.

References

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BRIDGET PENHALE

Miriam Bernard, *Promoting Health in Old Age: Critical Issues in Self Health Care*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000, 194 pp., pbk £15.99 ISBN 0 335 19247 5, hbk £50.00 ISBN 0 335 19248 3.

Promoting Health in Old Age: Critical Issues in Self Health Care is well placed in the series of publications entitled ‘Rethinking Ageing’. Miriam Bernard provides a readable and stimulating review of current knowledge that invites the reader to *rethink* the role of health promotion, self health care and self help in maintaining the wellbeing of older people. She brings together the key points from the literature in these areas, and grounds this information in her extensive experience with the UK Self Health Care in Old Age Project. She then articulates the implications for policy making and practice.

The book provides solid evidence for an ‘active ageing’ approach that sees older people as important resources to their families, communities and nations. This new paradigm, which turns on its head the notion the negative stereotypes of older people as diseased, disabled and dependent, is precisely the approach that the World Health Organization supports.

The challenge for policy and practice is to find the appropriate balance in lending support to three aspects of care and support in older age: self health care (what older people do for themselves), informal support (help from family members, friends and peers) and formal support (health and social services

and old age pensions that are primarily the responsibility of the state). How, Miriam Bernard asks, do we tread the fine line between promoting and encouraging individual responsibility for health without letting it tip over into victim blaming; and between care and security provided by the state and by individuals and families? The Self Health Care Project provides some answers in its main criteria of participation, accessibility, informed choice, skill development and empowerment. All of these reflect the fundamental principles in the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, which all countries have pledged to use in the design of policies and programmes that 'add life to the years that have been added to life' (United Nations 1991).

Miriam Bernard provides some practical examples in terms of what works and does not work when putting these principles into practice. She is honest about the mistakes and oversights; for example, that it never occurred to the project organisers to include older people as fellow researchers until the end of the project. She also argues that while the Self Health Care Project is a worthy model that offers many lessons for replication, it is completely unrealistic to think one can take down a pre-packaged health promotion programme, introduce it to a group of older people and let it take its inevitable and successful course.

In conclusion, Miriam Bernard is clear that community development works with older people and she calls on policy makers to support these initiatives with older people themselves as the key leaders. She stresses the need to reduce inequities and break down existing barriers to the enablement of active ageing, and she suggests the need for health policy to be preventive and holistic as opposed to curative. The ageing of the population is a global phenomenon that deserves immediate attention. Books such as this one can help to inform policy and practice around the world.

Reference

United Nations, 1991. *United Nations Principles For Older Persons*. New York: United Nations.

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PEGGY EDWARDS

Prue Chamberlayne, Joanna Bornat and Tom Wengraf (eds), *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science: Comparative Issues and Examples*, Routledge, London, UK, 2000, pp. 346, £15.99 pbk, £50.00 hbk ISBN 0 415 22838 7.

As we age, our 'biography' increases, so a methodology which identifies the biographical method as illuminating has potentially much to offer gerontologists. This edited book focuses on biographical approaches in the social sciences and investigates its development, theoretical underpinnings and demonstrations of its use. The book is divided into two parts: the first outlining the methodology and its context, the larger second part providing a series of 10 examples of biography in use.

For gerontologists it will be affirming to note that gerontology is recognised as one of the social science and research worlds which have realised the potential of biographical methods. The editors, in their extensive introductory chapter, link this to the conjoining of oral history and gerontology and the fruitful partnerships which have emerged. As they note, gerontology has often been open to historians and mainstream sociologists. Its focus on a discrete process or 'client' group has generally welcomed other disciplinary and methodological variety. But, as the editors point out, there are numerous and inter-related influences on biographical methods. Among these are work around memory, the insights of feminism and the ubiquitous post-modernity constructs.

In the editors' view the use of narrative in gerontology has provided a spur to biographical methods. Gerontology has promoted the normality of biographical investigation and legitimated it as a social function. It has influenced studies of childhood and younger adulthood, drawing their researchers to consider the place of biography in the methodological spectrum.

Examples of this occur in the second part of the book. It should be noted however, that it is not a gerontological text but one offering a variety of illustrations from most aspects of the lifecourse. As the editors admit, the origins of the collection lie in collaborative work and relationships around welfare research. Three main illustrative chapters focus on older age directly and these prove useful in drawing gerontologists in to the complexities of the theoretical discussions. Bornat, Dimmock, Jones and Peace (Chapter 13) for example, outline the approach of their research into changes in family life, particularly around break-up and reconstitution. The opportunities provided by a biographical approach enabled respondents to reflect on their personal stories and interleave these with public discourses about family disintegration and dysfunction. In the context of change older people seemed able to search for some coherence and sought to maintain a sense of both personal and family integrity.

Annette King draws out a similar theme in her work on the experience of home care in West Germany (Chapter 17). Again, recipients revealed that while matters of organisation and policy are important, being on the receiving end of home-care is mediated by personal experiences and expectations. As King argues, people have an active and dynamic relationship with welfare intervention, even when extremely frail in health.

The biographical method also helps interpret the experience of caring. Jones and Rupp provide an interesting analysis of one interview from a series of interviews held in London (Chapter 15). While the case study explored in their chapter is drawn from an interview with a mother caring for a disabled son, the method is clearly transferable to other situations. This chapter has great value in painstakingly setting out the process of thematic field analysis and would be a useful guide to those wishing to develop their use of the approach.

Among the other illustrative chapters of the second part of this collection are several with interest and some relevance to gerontology. Hollway and Jefferson, for instance, use biographical studies to explore the fear of crime (Chapter 8); Middleton and Hewitt detail the building up of biography for people with

profound learning disabilities (Chapter 14); and Andrews asks how the process of German reunification has undermined the identity of East Germans.

It may be obvious that this book is very much a collaborative effort between British and German researchers. The basis for this lies in recent cross-cultural research, but also in the wish of the editors to link in with a methodology that has status and sway in Germany, particularly in mainstream sociology, but also anthropology and rural studies. Cross-cultural studies often seem to focus on developing mutual understandings of policy or organisation, so this concentration on method is particularly illuminating.

As a reference point, and as a useful collection of research debates and examples, this book looks set to become a valuable addition to methodology studies. Its additional use in comparative studies provides an in-depth demonstration of the value of working closely with others from different academic traditions.

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