

Book Reviews

Editor: Sidney Crown

Alcoholism and the Family. Edited by SATORU SAITOH, PETER STEINGLASS and MARC A. SCHUCKIT. New York: Brunner/Mazel Publishers. 1992. 322 pp. US \$25.00 (pb).

It has long been noted that alcoholism tends to run in families. However, it is only in recent decades that clinical and research attention has formally focused on the investigation of the possible mechanisms involved in the intergenerational transmission of alcoholism. Similarly, only relatively recently have therapeutic interventions included families as well as individual alcoholics. This book, which consists of a series of papers presented at the Fourth International Symposium of the Psychiatric Research Institute of Tokyo, brings together the work of researchers and clinicians from the United States, Japan and Scandinavia. In so doing, it provides the readers with an interesting and diverse range of insights into the state of existing knowledge and opinion concerning the role of genetic/biological and social/environmental factors in the development and course of alcoholism, the effects of alcoholism on the family system as a unit in society, and the development of appropriate and effective interventions for treating families with an alcoholism problem.

The book is divided into five sections and each section is followed by the transcript of relevant participant discussions. The first two sections concentrate on genetic factors in alcoholism. Family, twin and adoption studies are concisely reviewed and various perspectives on the attempt to classify alcoholics into sub-types are presented. A chapter by George Vaillant underlines the need for longitudinal research to shed light on the interaction between environmental and biological factors in the onset of alcoholism, while another by Marc Shuckit highlights the value of cross-sectional work. Section Three is concerned with issues of mental health. The fourth section is devoted to family models and includes chapters which focus on systems, cultural approaches to the study, and understanding of patterns of interaction and functioning in alcoholic families. The final section of the book is concerned with therapeutic interventions. Family work being undertaken in the United States and Japan is described by a number of contributors. This section also includes an interesting chapter by Claudia Black on coping strategies which might be used by children in alcoholic families.

Given the countries of origin of the participants, it is not surprising that the focus of the book is on American, Japanese and Northern European work. Indeed, it is impressive to have a collection of articles on alcoholism and the family by such an international group of authors in one book. I did feel rather disappointed, however, that the Western European viewpoint was totally absent (although Marcus Grant does present findings from Eastern Europe). One gets the false impression that no one in this part of the world is interested in alcoholism and the family. My only criticism of the book would be to say that the scientific and the descriptive are combined in a way that does not always work and that there is, furthermore, some overlap between the sections. There is also a surprising number of typographical errors in the book which some readers may find irritating.

All in all, I feel that this book would make a very good introduction to the topic for those interested in learning about alcoholism and the family.

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Alcohol in Human Violence. By KAI PERNANEN. New York: Guilford Press. 1991. 280 pp. £22.50.

It is often assumed that alcohol and violence are causally linked, but the complexity of the association is ignored. This book presents findings from a study of the prevalence of aggressive behaviour and its relationship to alcohol, among the residents of a community in north-western Canada. The community studied was Thunder Bay, a 'city' with a population of 112 500 (1981 census), situated on the northwest shore of Lake Superior.

The book contains nine chapters; the first two are of an introductory nature, outlining the reasons for the research and reviewing the literature. Chapter 3 describes aims and methods. Three different and complementary methods of collecting data were used: interviews with a representative sample of residents; a census of all police reports over a 12-month period; and systematic observations in 28 bars and taverns in the community. Chapter 4 details the aggression experi-