

Book reviews

EDITED BY SIDNEY CROWN, FEMI OYEBODE and ROSALIND RAMSAY

Toxic Turmoil

Edited by J. M. Havenaar, J. G. Cwikel & E. J. Bromet. New York: Kluwer. 2002. 279 pp. £44.00 (hb). ISBN 0 306 46784 4

Havenaar and his colleagues have collected a set of essays about the effects of man-made ecological disasters into a single volume that does not hang together as well as it might. Havenaar muddies his own waters considerably by beginning and ending the book with reference to September 11, which was a terrorist outrage rather than an event affecting the ecology of the city. Many of the chapters are very good indeed – in particular, Wessely points out that the French military do not have a Gulf War syndrome, since French medicine does not recognise such a disorder, and that the Danes – who were vaccinated against neither chemical nor biological warfare – nevertheless reported high rates of symptoms after service in the Gulf. Murthy and Baxter contribute excellent chapters on the Bhopal disaster and on other chemical catastrophes, respectively.

Havenaar excoriates the news media for spreading disturbing stories after such disasters – but governments (including our own) have not been as forthcoming as they might about nuclear disasters, and it is the duty of a free press to dig out stories that officialdom wishes to suppress. He is correct in arguing for the prompt release of accurate information, but sometimes, as Yzermans & Gerson point out in their account of the El Al crash in Amsterdam, it takes some time before it is possible to say exactly what the toxic risks are.

I drew somewhat different conclusions from those drawn in the final chapter: the heterogeneity of the consequences of the various disasters was more striking than were the commonalities. The nature of the toxic substance(s) released and the character of the host population are crucial determinants of the resulting harm; fear and uncertainty about risks also contribute greatly. In the case of the first Persian Gulf War and the El Al crash, there was a period

when dangers were unknown and fear took hold of the affected populations; by contrast, in the disaster in the Tokyo metro the resultant damage seems to be largely accounted for by the known toxic effects of the sarin that was released.

The near elimination of the Aral Sea is described as a ‘diluted disaster’ rather than an unmitigated disaster for the damage has crept up on the population over years, and the resultant morbidity is no higher than that measured in the Russian Federation, which bears the responsibility for these events. Not mentioned at all is the destruction of the rain forests in Brazil, or the fact that large areas of Africa and Asia are impossible to cultivate because of landmines and cluster bombs. Both of these are man-made ecological disasters – and it hardly seems sensible to describe either as ‘diluted’. It is also likely that some of the disasters described have psychological consequences more in common with those produced by a natural disaster such as a hurricane, earthquake, volcano or flood than they have with the man-made ecological disasters mentioned.

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Psychological Therapies with Older People. Developing Treatments for Effective Practice

Edited by Jason Hepple, Jane Pearce & Philip Wilkinson.

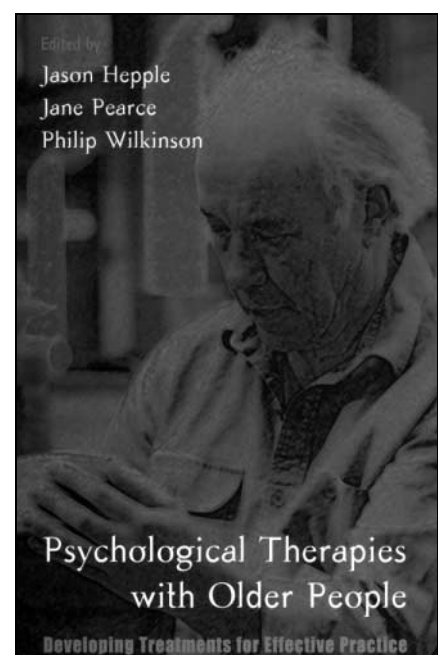
Hove: Brunner–Routledge. 2002. 190 pp. £15.99 (pb). ISBN 1 58391 137 5

This is an ambitious book. The main chapters cover five forms of brief psychological therapy: brief psychodynamic, cognitive–analytic, cognitive–behavioural, interpersonal and systemic. Each of these is described in terms of background and theory, and then exemplified by case

studies. The book follows a format similar to that of a number of other publications (e.g. Eells, 1997), but it is the only one that exclusively examines psychological approaches with older people.

The contributors are to be congratulated on producing a good overview of the various forms of psychotherapy currently in vogue. However, I have some concerns about the breadth and pacing of the material. For example, some of the case studies were so abridged that they were of little help. Some of the patients also seemed to be classic textbook cases, responding so rapidly to the treatment protocols that it made one wonder whether medication was ever necessary.

My only other disappointment concerned the final chapter, which discusses the empirical status of the different forms of therapy. Although the authors rightly state that there is scant evidence regarding the efficacy of some of the psychotherapies, they fail to do justice to the existing evidence. This is an unfortunate omission, especially as I presume that one of the aims of the book was to encourage people to use psychological treatments. Also, in view of the poor empirical status of three of the five therapies, it would have been more interesting for the final chapter to be a little more daring, speculative or controversial. For example, it could have been used to hypothesise about the effective components of the therapies, in terms of both generic and therapy-specific components. Indeed, a discussion of the effective ingredients of



change would have been stimulating and would relate to the section on 'selection of therapy'.

On the whole, I think that this is a helpful addition to the growing literature on psychotherapy with older people. Despite my reservations, I will be happy to recommend the text to my postgraduate trainees.

Eells, T. D. (ed.) (1997) *Handbook of Psychotherapy Case Formulation*. New York: Guilford Press.

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Early Prediction and Prevention of Child Abuse. A Handbook

Edited by Kevin D. Browne, Helga Hanks,
Peter Stratton & Catherine Hamilton.
Chichester: John Wiley & Sons. 2002. 404 pp.
£34.95 (pb). ISBN 0 471 49122 5

This is a useful and wide-ranging book. There are thirty-eight contributors, whose skills range from social work to law and mental health. There is a helpful mixture of practitioners and researchers. The work originates in the UK and the USA, with two contributions from Australia, but, as is commonly the case, there are no other European contributions and none from the rest of the world.

The first section, on prevalence and prediction, describes evidence on data collection concerning child maltreatment. This indicates some marginal decrease in prevalence but also reminds us that child

neglect is underestimated and underevaluated and that the prediction of rare events such as fatal child abuse remains highly problematic (a theme relevant no doubt to those within the Royal College of Psychiatrists who are concerned about proposed mental health legislation which may oblige doctors to predict all forms of adult dangerous criminal behaviour). The chapters on multi-disciplinary child protection and the collection of evidence are, in my view, particularly valuable to psychiatrists, who tend to become involved at a later stage in legal proceedings.

The next section, on primary and secondary prevention, is most helpful to those who are attempting to plan community-based child mental health services.

The third section, on tertiary prevention and helping children and families

affected by child abuse, contains a useful overview by Lucy Berliner (University of Washington) of therapy for children traumatised by abuse, a literature search on evidence as to whether it is possible to break patterns of intergenerational abuse (Egeland *et al*), and a well-referenced chapter on the difficult interventions necessary if children are failing to thrive or are emotionally abused (Iwaniec *et al*). The chapter by Bullock & Little, from the well-respected Social Research Unit at Dartington in the UK and the University of Chicago, is helpful in clarifying the rules by which children's services are governed and implemented, and gives an update on practice issues, outcome and evaluation studies.

If I have one criticism, it is that the final section, on working with offenders, is heavily slanted towards work with those who have committed sexual offences against children and does not, in my view, give enough thought to the effects on children and adolescents of violence from one parent to another. The concluding chapter, by Lynch & Browne from London and Birmingham, provides searching comments on children from ethnic minorities, those with disabilities, asylum-seekers and other critically important issues for current medico-legal practice across the world. The legal system of the UK is emphasised and debated preferentially, but the principles for practice throughout this book apply to children everywhere and I strongly recommend it.

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