

## Book Reviews

**The Australian National University, National Health and Medical Research Council, Social Psychiatry Research Unit: Annual Report for 1986.** World Health Organization: Collaborating Centre for the Epidemiology of Mental Disorders. Pp 34.

This Report marks 12 years of the Unit's existence. It covers the two main current areas of research in the Unit:

- (1) aetiological factors in neurosis and minor psychiatric disorders;
- (2) the epidemiology of mental disorders in the elderly.

A considerable investment has been made in latent trait analysis as an approach to teasing out the aetiology of anxiety and depression. The interest of this group appears to have shifted from social networks, which are only briefly mentioned in the Report, to personality variables, particularly neuroticism and introspection. Presumably this is in response to their previous findings that depression is more closely related to the patient's perception of the adequacy of his social network than to the actual availability of support. Research effort had been directed towards the measurement of neuroticism in the general population.

The work on the elderly has included the identification of risk factors in Alzheimer's disease, one strategy being the study of monozygotic twins discordant for the condition. Attempts have been made to refine the diagnosis of mild dementia and to assess the burden on relatives of caring for the frail elderly.

The Unit has been highly productive considering that the scientific staff consists of five members. The director, Dr Scott Henderson, is spending eight months as Visiting Professor at the Institute of Psychiatry until September of this year.

J. LEFF

*MRC Social Psychiatry Unit  
Friern Hospital  
London N11*

**Overview of Mental Health Practices in Primary Care Settings, With Recommendations for Further Research.** By G. Wilkinson. US Department of Health & Human Services; Mental Health Service System Reports Series DN No. 7. 1986. Pp 77.

This booklet reviews just over 200 recent papers on mental illness occurring in primary care settings, and does so in a very readable way. The area is broken into five major areas: epidemiology, diagnostic practices, therapeutic practices, referral & consultation and outcome studies. Within each area the author presents recent findings in prose rather than attempting short summaries of the various papers, and each section ends with his own recommendations for further research.

The booklet is essentially an update of an earlier monograph in the same series<sup>1</sup> in which some 350 papers up

to 1978 were each briefly summarised, and it is derived from the same author's recent book<sup>2</sup> in which 415 papers that appeared since the original monograph are presented using the same 'short summary' format. The book from Tavistock will probably be easier to obtain on this side of the Atlantic, and certainly contains far more data. For those wishing to have instant access to short summaries of a large number of papers, the latter is probably the best buy.

The present booklet is perforce highly selective, and the account given of the various papers tends to be uncritical: the author has presumably selected only those papers of which he approves. The various recommendations for further research struck this reviewer as being distinctly unexciting, as there seemed to be some major lacunae: nothing on the need to examine the validity of "diagnoses" made in this setting; nothing on the need to provide and evaluate training courses for GPs and other primary care workers, and not enough on the need for research into new patterns of working relationship between primary care staff and the staff of the multi-disciplinary mental illness service. The author is surely right to insist on the need for more studies of interventions, although I found his recommendation that "there is also a need for small-scale, local, exploratory therapeutic evaluation on a scale hitherto unknown" to lack precision. It would have been more helpful to those who might be influenced by his suggestions had he given some examples of the sort of problem which still needs illumination in this area: for example, what are the effects of an illness label in this setting, to what extent does simple counselling alter the observed outcome in mood disorders, and what is the optimal management for those presenting with somatic presentations of affective illness?

These are relatively minor complaints. The book will undoubtedly serve a valuable purpose in acquainting workers in the United States with recent work in this country, and providing it is obtainable it should provide a useful source book for researchers in this country.

DAVID GOLDBERG

*University of Manchester*

### REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup>HANKIN, J. & OKTAY, J. (1979) *Mental Disorder & Primary Medical Care: An Analytic Review of the Literature*. National Institute of Mental Health Series D No. 5.
- <sup>2</sup>WILKINSON, G. (1985) *Mental Health Practices in Primary Care Settings: An Annotated Bibliography 1977-1985*. London: Tavistock.

*Requestors may obtain a free copy of this book by applying to: Public Inquiries Branch, National Institute of Mental Health, Parklawn Building Room 15C-05, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, MD 20857, USA. Please include an address label with the request.*