

A Multidisciplinary Handbook of Child and Adolescent Mental Health for Front-line Professionals

Dogra, A., Parkin, A., Gale, F. and Frake, C. (2002) Jessica Kingsley, £14.95, 303pp.

I work in a local specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), which is multidisciplinary and multiagency in its staffing, and which offers, as part of its remit, support, advice and consultation to primary and community services. As I also sit on the CAMHS Strategy Group, where one of our tasks is to look at our current structures and how primary, community and specialist services inter-link, I was particularly interested to be given a copy of this book to review.

I was prepared not to be impressed - please note that 'child mental health' and 'child psychiatry' are not one and the same thing! Psychologists remain touchy about this, and then I started to read it. This book is aimed at non-specialist staff who work with children, young people and their families where mental health issues are being raised (e.g. in primary care settings). The challenge for the authors is therefore to explain what can often be complex issues to staff who may well lack much in the way of formal training in this area of mental health. In my view, the authors manage this in a clear and coherent way, without being patronising.

The book is well laid out, well referenced and very accessible. Part one defines mental health, looks at how mental health needs in young people can be met, and how assessment of that need is done. This also contains a useful section on how to refer to a specialist CAMHS services and what information to include. Two minor points: first, it does say that a full mental state examination should be carried out if a specialist assessment occurs, and that only a psychiatrist should do this. The majority of referred children do not, in my opinion, need to see a psychiatrist. Second, if you use the questionnaires recommended in the text, you may be at risk of over-identifying problems. These questionnaires should therefore be used as part of an assessment rather than as a screening tool.

Part two summarises child development, and also family development. These are two good and thorough summaries of current theories, rooted in normality rather than abnormality. Part three addresses the causes of mental health difficulties in children and young people and also considers both protective and adverse factors. Both of these chapters are balanced and accessible. Part four deals with outlines of the specific mental health problems that might be encountered, in addition to learning and development problems. There is also a useful section on major disorders. Part five addresses treatment and management strategies, drawing a distinction between what can and should be done in a primary care setting, and what should be referred on to a specialist service. A final section reviews relevant law in this area - a useful summary.

I have some minor quibbles with the authors, such as their recommendation that if three sessions of counselling do not work to begin to alleviate depression, then medication should be considered. The authors also offer a fairly detailed overview of specialist therapies, but I would hope that primary care workers do not inadvertently take this as an invitation to try these out without appropriate training and supervision. Also, the section on parenting group work only looks at behavioural interventions, when something as rich as 'mellow parenting'

is not mentioned. Finally, each chapter has some exercises and case studies, which I sometimes found simplistic and a little obvious.

Despite this, I would recommend this book for everyone in primary care who works with children and young people (for example, health visitors, social workers, paediatric nursing staff and junior doctors in both CAMHS and paediatrics). In addition, I would also recommend it to trainees in my own discipline as a useful, relatively brief and accessible summary to orientate them at the beginning of a placement.

Jill Smith

Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Gateshead