

Book Reviews

Dementia Care

Adams, T. and Manthorpe, J. (eds) (2003) London: Arnold, £18.99, 260 pp.

This wide ranging and engaging book is for professional staff and policy makers employed in service design and provision relating to people with dementia and their carers. It seeks to give a perspective on developments and changed understandings of dementia during the last twenty years and succeeds admirably. Additionally, and usefully, it also discusses practice issues. This turns the book from a review of academic research and social thinking into a much more practical and applicable handbook from which good practice can be designed and implemented. The contributors are all well versed in dementia issues.

The editors present the book in three sections. The first of these - 'Approaches to Practice' - considers how people with dementia have been viewed as in terms of a variety of medical, social, behavioural and disabling features. The importance of valuing people and the policy and practice issues that stem from that are explored.

The second part of the book considers person-centred practice and usefully draws on a number of approaches, illustrating practical methods that can be applied. These include working with people in the early stages of dementia, managing and improving communication, counselling, addressing physical and palliative care needs and issues facing younger people with dementia. Again these are clearly written and illustrated. They also point readers to relevant sources beyond the text.

The final section of the book considers practice systems. It helpfully considers how families can be helped to cope with dementia, opens up issues of development of ethnically sensitive services to scrutiny and usefully looks at the issues surrounding the support and supervision of staff who work in services for people with dementia. The section ends with two final chapters on elder abuse and people with dementia and maintaining quality in care practice.

Once or twice in the book (inevitably I suppose in a book written largely by people with an academic

background) jargon takes the place of clear and understandable language. This is perhaps most noticeable in the first chapter and could have the effect of preventing a more casual reader from pressing on if they were determined to start at the beginning and end at the end. This is a minor complaint as the chapter is helpful in setting the scene but it could equally have appeared later in the book. Again in the chapter on communication the author talks about "olfactory, gustatory and tactile sensations" when most of his readers would use 'the senses of smell, taste and touch'. Whilst it may be unfair of me to select isolated incidents sentences to illustrate a point I would plead with all who seek to write such books to consider plain English.

Although the chapter on group psychotherapy is very useful in considering the benefits of such work it does feel a little like a theory in search of a home when you realise that the base sample was only 42 people of whom only 25 people finished the groups, with baseline data available on only 19. This should not diminish the positive messages coming out of the work but might help practitioners to feel better if they get different results.

Throughout the book, the authors present a series of useful case studies to illustrate good practice. This is very positive and should assist managers and planners in considering the message they wish to give staff about the standards and levels of interaction they expect. One of the principal themes of the book is that staff should be discouraged from seeing the behaviours and circumstances of people with dementia as 'difficult'. However many of the staff who are working in the closest contact will be among the lowest paid and least advantaged in terms of training. Readers of this book should seek to use their new found knowledge to permeate the lessons downwards as well as across and up organisations in order to better equip staff to take an active and positive approach. In this respect Mark Holman's chapter on staff support and supervision is wholly welcomed.

Finally this is a book best not read from start to finish. Whilst the book does form a whole the information can be absorbed in bite size chunks on

a need-to-know basis. Everyone is unlikely to need all the information found here although many, like myself, will benefit from having it available. If you are engaged in any way with services for people with dementia then buy this book and read it. It can only do good.

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Understanding Older Homeless People

Crane, M. (1999) Buckingham: Open University Press, £16.99, 209 pp

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Published as part of the OUP's 'Rethinking Ageing' series, this book tackles an uncomfortable and neglected subject.

The book opens by quoting Ralph McTell's 'Streets of London' in full. From this stark depiction of abandoned people the author proceeds to contrast the apparent increase in public sympathy for homeless people with the easy target that they continue to make for public commentators and policy makers.

The perspective of homeless people as either objects of public charity or as social deviants is reflected in traditional studies of homelessness. These have focused either on homelessness as a social and welfare problem or as the consequence of individual homeless behaviour. In her introductory chapters Crane briefly examines the history of the concepts and theories of homelessness, reaching the conclusion that existing theories generally fail to provide an adequate understanding of why people become, and remain, homeless. Often these theories illustrate only part of a highly complex picture.

Drawing on a broad range of source information, but focusing primarily on data from interviews given by participants in Crane's own Four Cities Study (1997) and the later Lancefield Centre Study (1998), Part I explores individual biographies and pathways into homelessness. These are described as the breakdown of family households, itinerant

working lives, mental illness and stressful events. The author proposes a new understanding of homelessness and presents two hypotheses to explain the reasons for and the processes leading to homelessness.

Part II looks at the types of interventions and services required by homeless older people to help them resettle in conventional society. Again Crane draws on a breadth of information, including direct testimony from homeless older people. She concludes that, by paying attention to individual circumstance, attitude, problems and needs, resettlement is achievable. The way forward, she suggests, is for resettlement to be the ultimate goal of all service providers working with older homeless people. This must be recognised as a process, requiring a continuum of services, leading people along a pathway back to permanent tenured housing. At the same time specialist interventions and services are needed nationwide to prevent older people becoming homeless.

Reading this book I found myself reminded all over again of just how invisible this group of people is. How convenient it is to close them out of our consciousness. After all we do not even know how many people actually are homeless in the UK. Attempts to enumerate Rough Sleepers alone highlighted the failure to agree on a definition of this group, still less locate them. Homeless older people in particular tend to be well hidden and hard to engage.

Crane has a vast depth of knowledge of her subject. Her respect for her subjects is apparent. Their experience and their understanding of their situation is reflected unadorned on to the page. She uses people's own voices to tell the story as far as possible.

Among the many nuggets of information that caught my attention was a reference to the effect of the definition and application of the label, 'statutory homeless'. Young and middle aged women tend to be protected by the legislation as they have children or are pregnant. Older women do not meet this qualification and so are not protected and are more likely to become homeless. Thus homeless women are more likely to be older.

For single men homelessness can occur at any age. More men than women therefore grow old on the streets. However very few people survive into extreme old age on the streets. They either meet an untimely end or are somehow swept up and back into the system.

Crane argues cogently for greater, more determined effort to prevent homelessness. Events and states that trigger and contribute to homelessness and the processes and pathways that people take to become homeless are identifiable, she suggests. Crane uses her observations to develop hypotheses about the aetiology of homelessness. Above all she argues for a greater and more detailed understanding of the route taken by each individual into homelessness.

This book makes no secret of the ugliness of homelessness. Of the extreme debilitation that can occur and, for some, how easy it can be to slide into this condition. Crane issues a challenge for policy makers. The problems of homelessness can be resolved, but at a cost. Just how much is society prepared to invest in its more vulnerable members?

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**Growing Older in Socially Deprived Areas:
Social Exclusion in Later Life**

Scharf, T., Phillipson, C., Smith, A.E. and Kingston, P. (2002) London: Help the Aged. £15.00, 124 pp.

The frustrating thing about some research reports is that they do not allow for broad discussion on the issues raised, but of necessity concentrate on the results and direct implications of the research programme itself. Where the research is of less than good quality that perhaps is no great loss. But in the case of this report, where the research is sound, the results are interesting and the themes important, such a lack is all too frustrating. Which is not to denigrate the report itself, but only to note the sense of anticipation it inspires for the broader and deeper discussion one hopes will follow.

This report presents findings from an ESRC project – *Older People in Deprived Neighbourhoods: Social Exclusion and Quality of Life in Old Age*, which was carried out by researchers based at the Centre for Social Gerontology, Keele University, in three of the most deprived electoral wards in England. The broad aim of the project was to measure the impact of social exclusion on older people in these areas, and the effect it had on their perceptions of neighbourhood and community. A survey methodology was used, using research tools developed from group discussions in each area and major national surveys such as the General Household Survey and the Survey of Poverty and Social Exclusion in Britain (Gordon et al, 2000). The researchers interviewed 600 older people by questionnaire, and a further 500 took part in face-to-face interviews. This was supplemented by 130 in-depth interviews. Particular attention was paid to the experience of black and ethnic minority groups. The end product is a valuable report that is a pleasure to use. Results and analyses are presented under four headings: deprivation and poverty in later life; older people's experience of crime; perceptions of neighbourhood; and social exclusion. The multiple nature of deprivation is stressed throughout, and there are nicely presented case studies and well defined research and policy implications in each section. The report is well structured, accessibly written, and attractively presented.

The problems older people face in terms of material deprivation and actual experience of crime in such locations are considerable. The report not only highlights the extent to which the majority of older people in these areas suffer social exclusion through low income and a hazardous environment, but also the profound contribution they make to, and concern they have for, their communities. Such assets should not be seen as reinforcing stereotypes about 'supportive' working class communities. There is a real need for urban planning that enables rather than inhibits social interaction, and for public measures to tackle crime and the despoilment of the environment.

The complexity of 'multiple deprivation' requires measures that are sensitive to the experience of

those it affects. One of the outstanding conclusions of this report is that many measures fail to respond to the particular circumstances of different groups of older people living in different areas. Indices of deprivation are often imposed and inappropriate. An emphasis, for example, on a lack of paid employment as an indicator of social exclusion obviously fails to capture the nature of social exclusion for those outside the labour market. But indices that recognise take up of benefits as a measure of poverty may also fail to take account of those groups who have difficulty negotiating the benefits systems in the first place. This particularly applies to groups where language barriers or lack of relevant documentation may make the system seem impenetrable. Even attempts to impose spatial definitions on lived environments can prove problematic: in one telling example informants made it clear that for them their definition of neighbourhood had little to do with the administrative boundaries adopted by the survey. Rather, informal and social ties reinforce a sense of place and identity.

This is an insightful entry into the debate on social exclusion beyond employment, and to the experience of exclusion for those older people living in locations where poverty is concentrated. Not only does it help to quantify the problem, it grounds it in experience, and indicates that the hope of such communities lies in part within. One can only look forward to similar studies elsewhere, and to a growing debate on the impact of environment on ageing.

Reference

Gordon, D, *et al* (2000) *Poverty and Social Exclusion in Britain*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York.

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