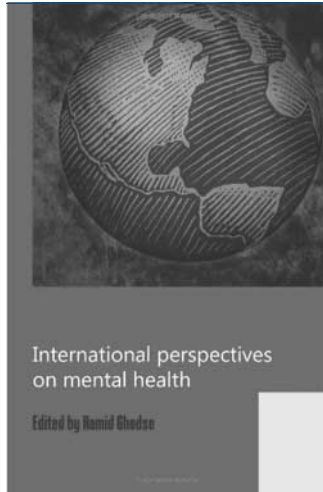


Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode
and Rosalind Ramsay



International Perspectives on Mental Health

Edited by Hamid Ghodse.
RCPsych Publications. 2011.
£40.00 (hb). 512pp.
ISBN: 9781908020000

A formal compendium of statistics about mental health services, teaching and research in countries across the globe would be a useful resource for researchers in public mental health, and is to some extent provided by publications from the World Health Organization, such as its *Mental Health Atlas*. An informal compilation of perspectives on psychiatry in different countries might be useful for clinicians looking for key contacts or planning their travels, and can to some extent be provided by a good internet search.

Ghodse's volume comprises articles commissioned for the journal *International Psychiatry*, and falls somewhere between a formal atlas and more informal internet sources. Articles are often written by senior figures in the field (and in some cases by the only psychiatrist in a particular country), and many provide insightful perspectives that might be otherwise hard for readers to come by. I read the contributions from Africa with particular interest, and picked up a range of ideas and facts that I had been unaware of.

At the same time, there is a good deal of variation in the approach taken by different contributors to this volume, perhaps reflecting in part the variation in mental health services across the world, and certain regions receive particularly short shift (there is no contribution from China, and only 18 countries from Africa and South America are included). The idiosyncratically interesting facts from one country might be somewhat irritating to a reader who is hoping to carefully compare services, teaching and research across countries.

This collection of pieces raises important questions about the optimal mental health policies, service provision, training schemes and research agendas for advancing psychiatry across the globe. Concluding chapters, perhaps for each major geographic region, or for the volume as a whole, outlining the alternative approaches that have been taken and their advantages and disadvantages, would have been welcome. It seems timely to summarise and integrate the growing theoretical and empirical literature on strategies for enhancing public mental health.

Overall, I think Ghodse and his contributors have done the field a service through this compilation. Readers interested in psychiatry in different parts of the globe will, however, benefit by also consulting a range of other formal and informal sources.

Writers interested in providing comprehensive approaches to global mental health may be inspired by the country vignettes offered here to move forward with such projects.

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The Moon and Madness

By Niall McCrae.
Imprint Academic. 2011.
£17.95 (pb). 250pp.
ISBN: 9781845402143

This is a wide-ranging book. Although the focus is on the purported relationship between mental illness and the lunar cycle, it touches on much more. The richness and breadth of sources of this disquisition is both the strength and weakness of this book. From the ancient Greeks to our day, there has been fascination with the possibility that the Moon is capable of influencing mood, behaviour, diseases such as epilepsy, and mental illness. By the 19th century, Leuret and Moreau, working in France, had conclusively demonstrated that the lunar cycle had no role in or influence on seizure frequency in epilepsy. Despite numerous investigations yielding the same result for mental illness, there remains reluctance to accept this conclusion.

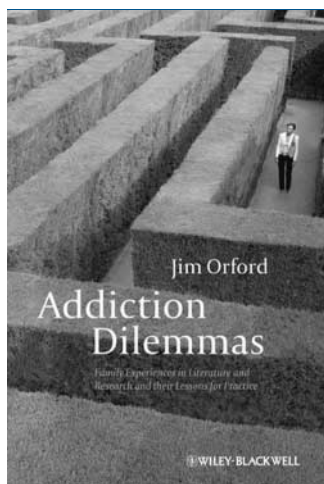
McCrae traces the origins of the belief that the Moon can exact influence on mental states and behaviour. His exploration of the history travels through both Western and Middle Eastern antiquity onwards to medieval Europe and then to our own times. Even though the overt interest is in the nature of lunar influence, there are diversions into the history of ideas in general, the history of science and of psychiatry. The narrative thrust of the book often moves without much announcement from one subject to another, for example from the *Malleus Maleficarum* to astrology and back to lunar cycles. No doubt, the excursions are learned and the writing is elegant. Yet, there is a patent lack of focus.

Chapter 5 deals with the modern psychiatric literature. It is unclear how comprehensive the review of the literature is. This was the author's opportunity to address his chosen subject with vigour, rigour and exactitude. However, it was a disappointing chapter, as it dealt with the issues in a superficial manner, substituting the use of tables for a critical overview of the material to hand. What was needed was a forensic analysis of the literature. Unfortunately, this was not forthcoming. The book might as well have ended with the quotation, 'Just as we cannot prove that werewolves, unicorns and other interesting creatures do not exist, we cannot prove that the Moon does not influence behaviour' (p. 108, uncorrected proof), rather than continuing for another three chapters.

McCrae's strength as a writer is his erudition. His sources are wide, his writing at its best is clear, startling and stimulating. He is a conceptual thinker who sees the links and symmetries between disparate subjects. But in the end the book is disappointing.

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**Addiction Dilemmas:
Family Experiences
from Literature
and Research and Their
Lessons for Practice**

By Jim Orford. Wiley-Blackwell.
2011. £29.99 (pb). 234 pp.
ISBN: 9780470977026

This is an interesting book of 22 short chapters examining the experience of the addict's family. It is ambitious, exploring diverse family relationships and spanning cultures as far as Aboriginal Australians. Chapters cover several topics, including interviews based on Professor Orford's extensive research with relatives and examination of a number of literary figures and their associates, and of pieces of fiction. For example, a brief extract from a play or novel is presented; or biographical accounts from Caitlin, wife of Dylan Thomas, or Sara, wife of Samuel Taylor Coleridge; or imaginary (but based on research experience) interviews with relatives of addicts. The types of addiction range from drug and alcohol to gambling, including compelling accounts of laudanum addiction. Each chapter ends with a commentary drawing together pertinent points, followed by questions and exercises, which would be suited to a wide range of student and professional groups.

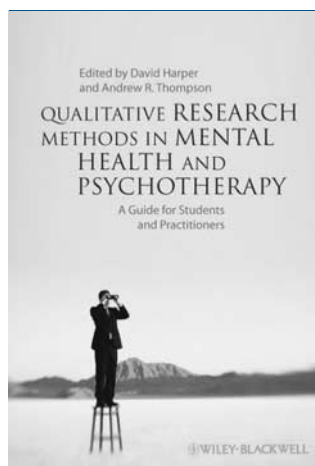
Despite the disparity of material, there is a clear theme highlighting the similarity of relatives' experiences across cultures and history. Examples include British Sikh wives, grandmothers, and the mothers of both Pete Doherty and Charles Baudelaire. Inevitably some differences emerge – in poorer societies and in societies with different marital customs, in different addictions and in individuals – but the commonality of reactions is marked. There is debate regarding the merits of tough love and a softer approach, and the reader is encouraged to draw their own conclusions.

If any criticism can be made, it might be that the chapters are very short, which makes examination of individual examples and ideas rather superficial at times. In my view, the literary and biographical examples are the most powerful, and invite the reader to explore these further. Although the book may lend itself best to a student readership, its diversity and links to the addiction literature will make it of interest to a wide range

of professionals, as well as all who have had any personal contact with addiction.

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**Qualitative Research
Methods in Mental
Health and
Psychotherapy:
A Guide for Students
and Practitioners**

Edited by David Harper
& Andrew R. Thompson.
Wiley-Blackwell. 2011.
£29.99 (pb). 272 pp.
ISBN: 978-0470663707

This is a very useful book that introduces qualitative research in mental health contexts for those wishing to better understand the approaches behind papers they read. It is also a source of specific guidance for those considering doing their own research.

The structure of the book, across and within chapters, is cleverly designed to promote effective use of appropriate methods. There are three sections. The first introduces the basic tenets; the second includes chapters on each of a range of approaches, and the third addresses research quality and future directions. This works well. In particular, it sets the various qualitative approaches in the wider mental health context. This will help students and trainees to gain an appreciation of the underpinning and implications of the different traditions and so make an informed choice of method to address their particular research question.

The editors have drawn together contributions from many experienced researchers with genuine expertise, leading to generally high-quality contributions covering many of the main approaches. Within the chapters on approaches, the consistency of a uniform set of straightforward, practical headings makes each easy to follow, and allows quick comparison between methods. In addition to the more obvious 'how to' content, particular sections that are valuable include those on the type of questions each method best suits and on service user involvement. My only disappointment was the lack of coverage of some of the less verbally focused qualitative methods such as ethnography and participant observation. The integrative chapters contain some of the major highlights of the book, including the thoughtful set of recommendations for ethical practice in chapter 3, the material on asking the right questions in chapter 5, and the considered and balanced overview on judging quality in chapter 16.

In a field that at times feels dominated by obfuscating jargon and a cult-like zeal, the editors have produced an accessible, illuminating text that will be of great value to those wishing to gain an introduction to this essential and developing area of mental health research.

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