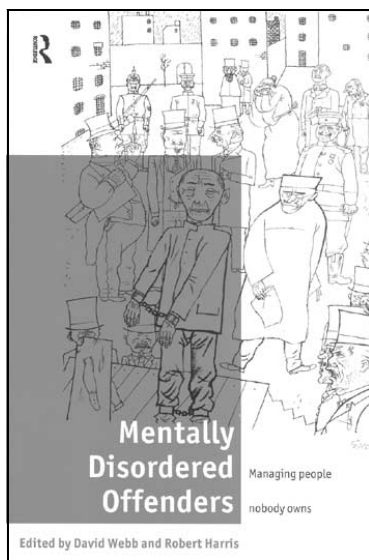


reviews

Mentally Disordered Offenders. Managing People Nobody Owns

Edited by David Webb & Robert Harris. London: Routledge. 1999. 173 pp. £15.99 pb. ISBN: 0-415-18010-4



This collection examines the difficulties of categorising mentally disordered offenders and asks whether they are doomed to marginalisation (Harris) as neither offenders nor mentally disordered.

The contributors are agreed that this is not a homogeneous group and that most people with mental health problems who offend pose no risk to the public. They recognise that many of the most marginalised do not need the definition of seriously mentally ill, but are made vulnerable by the multiplicity of their mental health and social care needs. Preston-Shoot rightly argues that when deliberating on policy and practice in this area, we must consider the social and economic context and the impact of professional and organisational structures on events leading to the crisis. He urges upon us a message practitioners will recognise; that eligibility criteria and operational procedures have become more important than the relationship and as a result social work is losing its human purpose.

The status confusion of mentally disordered offenders is a consistent theme throughout, as is the consequent importance of a multi-disciplinary approach, flexibility and of balancing risk, needs and liberty on a case-by-case basis. Many contributors are nevertheless drawn to risk and mental illness at the most serious end of the spectrum, with little discussion

on how we manage the remainder who spend most of their lives in the community in poor housing with little support.

There were times when one wondered what the benefit of bringing these pieces together in one volume was, other than the (not unimportant) honouring of Hershel Prins. The chapters vary widely in tone and quality: some being rather dense analyses of what others rightly treat as a practical issue. Some are simply a summary of current legislation and practice in the area. The one on review tribunals, while interesting, was not really concerned with mentally disordered offenders at all.

Of course, variety is the spice of an anthology and most people working in the field will find something useful and stimulating in the arguments made in this book. It highlights the damage done by excessive legalism and by a reliance upon inquiries-with-hindsight to determine policy and procedures. It leaves one with the heartwarming conviction that it is alright to bring humanity into practice. As Prins says "... [the world is] a messy and unpredictable place, but everyone ... has to do his or her best to get by decently, and to try to do more good than harm along the way".

Crispin Truman Director, Revolving Doors Agency

Mental Health and Growing Up

Edited by Guinevere Tufnell for the Royal College of Psychiatrists and Faculty of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. London: Gaskell. 1999. 36 factsheets. £10.00. ISBN 1-901242-43-9

It was with mounting enthusiasm that I read these excellent factsheets. There are 36 in total and most topics pertinent to child and adolescent psychiatry are covered. The sheets are designed to be photocopied and freely distributed, mainly to parents and teachers, although six sheets are directed towards young people. At only £10.00 a pack they are extremely good value for money.

The cover sheet lists 26 individual contributors, many of whom are recognised experts in child and adolescent psychiatry. The sheets themselves are clearly written in a style that manages to convey the essential facts without being either too technical or patronisingly simplistic. Issues covered include discipline and your child; dealing with tantrums; attention-deficit problems and hyperactivity; divorce or separation of parents; deliberate self-harm; and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Each sheet follows a similar format. Problems are defined and placed in context, possible aetiological factors are listed and key questions regarding diagnosis and further management are answered. The authors deal with complex issues with sensitivity and the overall approach is measured and cautious, so reducing concern about possibly overwhelming parents or young people with information. This tactfulness is not at the expense of being instructive and the guidance given is refreshingly direct. The warmth and understanding that is conveyed regarding the predicaments faced by children, young people and those looking after them is also appealing.

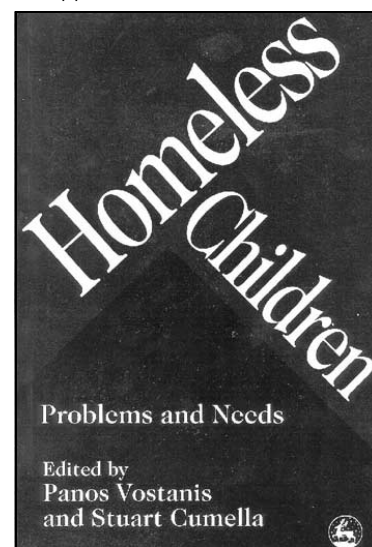
On a practical level, it is helpful to be able to give written material to families, particularly when this can be followed up by further discussion. Many of the sheets end with a section on sources of further information, with the names of relevant organisations, books, websites and even journal references.

These factsheets can be highly recommended as a valuable clinical resource for anyone practising in child and adolescent psychiatry.

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Homeless Children: Problems and Needs

Edited by Panos Vostanis & Stuart Cumella. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publications. 1999. 200 pp. £15.95. ISBN 1-85302-595



This excellent short text highlights the extent to which children and young people are disadvantaged by homelessness. The number of families in temporary