Book reviews

smokers often inhale considerably more carcinogens than machine measurements would indicate.

The book is well presented and illustrated with bar charts and graphs. Professor Nicholas Wald and Dr Stephanie Kiryluk have taken pains to present the maximum amount of data as clearly as possible, with the able assistance of the other editors.

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Director, Action on Smoking and Health

Housing and health in West Belfast: a case study of Divis Flats and the Twinbrook Estate. Eds: Blackman T, Evason E, Melaugh M, Woods R (Pp 54). Belfast: Divis Joint Development Committee, 1987.

The study is a comparison of the extent of self reported ill health in adults, and of ill health in children as reported by the "mother figure", between two deprived areas of Belfast, the Divis Flats and the Twinbrook Estate. The study was undertaken at the request of residents in Divis in order to determine whether the bad housing conditions in the Flats had an adverse effect on health independent of that of socioeconomic deprivation.

The main result was that, indeed, respiratory conditions and psychological distress in both children and adults, and diarrhoea and vomiting in children, were reported more frequently in the Divis Flats than in the Twinbrook area. However, at the time the survey was commissioned, four of the original twelve blocks in the Divis Flats had been demolished, and the remaining eight were to be refurbished. This was contrary to the wishes of the residents, who wanted to be rehoused.

As the data were selected by interview, and the interviewers were mostly local women, the potential for interviewer bias was substantial, although interviewer training (of an unspecified type) was carried out. Respondent bias is also likely to have been a significant problem, since a much higher proportion of residents in the Divis Flats than in the Twinbrook area reported that they thought that the housing defects had an impact on their health. The authors make reference to other studies where self reported measures of ill health and of housing defects have been found to be in reasonable agreement with other sources of information, but these validation studies cannot be taken as applicable in the present context. Positive features of the study are that the response rate was high, 85% or more in both areas, and that potential confounding variables such as income and smoking behaviour were considered.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive now accepts that the Divis Flats should be demolished, and this will provide an opportunity to evaluate the effects of improved housing. The long term effects of a high prevalence of smoking and of potential asbestos exposure will need to be taken into account.

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Daughters who care. Eds: Jane Lewis, Barbara Meredith (Pp 194; £8.95) London: Routledge, 1988.

Since the late 1970s there has been a steadily growing body of published research dealing with the experiences and needs of informal carers, although this has remained small in comparison to the large amount of clinical and health services research addressing issues to do with the care of disabled people. Much of the research on carers has been largely descriptive, focusing on needs for support. Relatively little has dealt with the social construction of caring relationships over time, the emotional and psychological components of caring and the quality of relationships between those who care and those who are cared for.

Jane Lewis and Barbara Meredith have attempted to address some of these issues in this book. They offer a detailed account of the experiences of 43 daughters, all of whom had ceased caring for their mothers on a co-resident basis within the preceding 10 years. All of the women interviewed were volunteers, all lived in the Home Counties and two thirds were described as coming from middle class backgrounds. The in depth interviews dealt with the decision to care, the nature of caring and how this changes over time, the mother-daughter relationship, the carers' "other lives", informal and service support and the continuing legacy of caring even when it has ended. Their objective was both to develop a vocabulary and methods of researching caring relationships and to provide a dynamic account of these relationships.

The book provides a detailed account of the lives of these 43 carers under the various headings mentioned above. It goes beyond the straightforward documentation of carers' needs and explores the historical construction of the relationships and the ways in which caring changes over time. It is less successful in providing a more generalised theoretical or methodological framework. There is at times too much descriptive material and insufficient discussion