

methodologically suspect, while the negative studies are accepted uncritically! The book ends with a chapter by Peter Skrabanek which is, as expected, witty and provocative, but makes no contribution to the scientific arguments.

At the beginning the reader is exhorted to "read on and make up your own mind about environmental tobacco smoke". I still have not made up my mind about it. That would be impossible from such a partial book.

ASTRID FLETCHER

Department of Medicine  
Royal Postgraduate Medical School  
Hammersmith Hospital, London

**Life after Ninety.** Mike Bury, Anthea Holme. (Pp 198; £35.) Routledge, London, 1991. ISBN 0415 04165 1

One of the most profound achievements of the twentieth century in Britain, and indeed in other parts of the western industrial world, has been the reduction in premature mortality. Instead of being welcomed as a triumph of public health, the resultant "greying" of the population is presented as a social disaster which threatens the social and economic wellbeing of both older people and the young who it is supposed will have to make "sacrifices" to care for their elders.

In such simplistic arguments and debates the use of stereotypes abounds. Typically people aged above pensionable age are presented as a homogeneous social group; preretirement differences, such as class, gender, or ethnicity, are assumed to be of little importance. Furthermore this postretirement age group is presented as being dependent, socially isolated, and ridden with ill health.

Gerontologists and other researchers have been actively engaged in refuting these simplistic stereotypes and in deconstructing the pensionable population into its constituent elements. A key distinction is often made between those aged under and over 75 years. However, to date there have been fewer studies of the "oldest" old, ie, those who survive into their ninth and tenth decades. This book is an important new contribution to our understanding of the experience of very old age. Bury and Holme present the results of a survey of a representative sample of people aged 90 years and over. Although the population studied was heavily dependent and a little over one half lived in institutions the authors show that life after 90 can be of high quality. One important aspect of the study is the demonstration of the importance of social inequalities in influencing who will reach very old age—the poor having much less chance of survival than their more affluent contemporaries.

This is an excellent book which is highly readable and deserves the widest possible readership.

CHRISTINA VICTOR

Public Health Research Unit  
Department of Public Health Medicine  
Parkside Health Authority  
London

**The Initiation of National Nutrition Policies: A Comparative Study of Norway and Greece.** Elizabet Helsing (Pp 300.) Styx Publications, Groningen, 1990. ISBN 90 72371 18 6.

Most countries have long had food policies based on economic issues but nutrition policies relating to health are rare. This book examines several aspects of the setting up of nutrition policies in Norway and Greece. The two countries make an interesting comparison for they have much in common—small, mountainous countries, small populations, limited agricultural land, extensive coastline, and a history of food shortages, but obvious differences such as climate, traditional diet, political situation, and patterns of diet related disease.

This book is written by Elizabet Helsing who is the Nutrition Officer in the European Office of WHO. She has made major contributions by putting nutrition into the forefront of any discussion of the chronic diseases in Europe. Her views are therefore of particular importance. However, the book does not make easy reading. It is based on Helsing's PhD thesis and does not seem to have been rewritten for publication and a broader readership. It is tedious, with numerous subheadings, wordy definitions and much repetition. And yet some of the analyses are superficial, with no consideration of the economics, and sadly, the actual nutrition policy of Norway, which was well ahead of its time, is not described in any detail. The section on Greece, with no nutrition policy, is almost twice as long. I missed any feeling for the author's perspective, which is surprising in view of her WHO role.

There are many unfortunate typographical errors and omissions, and it is sometimes hard to distinguish these from the unusual use of English and strange paragraphing. Nearly one third of the book is an abridged version in Greek. The references are extensive and the work does contain a wealth of interesting information, but on the whole I found this a frustrating and disappointing book.

ANN RALPH

The Rowett Research Institute  
Aberdeen

**Smoking Behaviour from Pre-Adolescence to Young Adulthood.** Eds A V Swan, M Murray, L Jarrett. (Pp 231; £30.00.) Avebury, Aldershot, UK, 1991. ISBN 1 85628 033 0.

This book describes a classic and well known longitudinal study of young people's smoking. The research covered a period from 1974 to 1984, starting when the cohort of children was 11 or 12 years of age. Surveys were carried out at intervals until they were 21 or 22. Smoking prevalence and uptake were analysed in relation to a wide range of background factors.

Analyses included parental smoking and attitudes; hobbies, sports, and spare time interests; training; part time jobs; positive reasons for and against smoking; attitudes to

school; realisations of health hazards of smoking; peer pressure. At the young adult stage, facts relating to employment were added. The more subtle psychological beliefs held by children about smoking and effects of advertising were not included.

It must be borne in mind when reading this book that, although a classic, this study is now historical and may not reflect the current situation with regard to young people's smoking. This effect is also seen in some of the concepts expressed in the introduction when research into children's smoking was in its infancy.

Many of the study findings have already been published as papers, and two useful features of this book are that it lists the references to these 21 previous publications and that it presents the study as a whole.

The book is useful methodologically because it contains a considerable amount of information on the methods of analysis used. For example, 90 of the 231 pages are the questionnaires in full in their original layout. A breakdown of the variables used for analysis is also provided. With additions and updating in the light of the current knowledge and information needs, these questionnaires would provide a useful basis for the development of similar surveys. The descriptions of the complex analytical methods used, though possibly bewildering to non-statisticians, could also be very useful.

Overall, this book provides an invaluable overview of smoking among teenagers growing up in the 1970s and helps to provide a guide for constructing such studies in the future.

ANNE CHARLTON

CRC Education and Child Studies Research  
Group  
University of Manchester

**ABC of AIDS,** 2nd edition. Ed Michael W Adler. (Pp72; £10.95.) British Medical Journal, London. ISBN 0 7279 0267 9.

It is four years since this popular book, composed of articles first published in the *BMJ*, appeared. Much in the world of AIDS has changed in this time and the second edition reflects this. Earlier omissions are corrected with the inclusion of sections on the problems of drug abuse and on HIV infection in children, while original material has been rewritten and updated.

The book's total length is slightly increased to 72 pages within which an impressive range of subjects has been tackled. The basic sciences relating to the epidemic, epidemiology, virology, and immunology, are succinctly described, and HIV disease is reviewed by body system. The publication's practical emphasis (its primary audience is the health worker faced with HIV/AIDS for the first time), is underlined by several chapters which address management issues within specific patient groups and strategies for prevention, counselling, infection control, nursing care, and drug treatment of infection. This is achieved with a minimum of unnecessary duplication, and, in a subject where facts have a very limited shelf life, is, for the most part, up to date.