

BOOK REVIEWS

The Imprint of time: Childhood, History, and Adult Life. By MEJ Wadsworth. (Pp 251; £25.50.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991. ISBN 019-827360-6

The valuable contribution of the 1946 birth cohort study to the understanding of factors affecting health, educational achievement, and the relation between child's health and risk of ill health in adulthood is widely recognised. The eligible population in the study included all who were born in England, Wales, or Scotland during the week starting the 3rd March 1946. The author presents the main results and interpretations from this study in a social and historical context. The book is divided into eight chapters, five of which cover a period of life: birth, the pre-school years, the school years, adolescence, and adulthood. Another chapter compares the study sample with their offspring and occasionally with their parents, covering in this manner a large part of the 20th century. The first and last chapters are the introduction and conclusions. Each of the chapters has a vivid description of the main events occurring when the cohort went through that period of life. The reader is helped to remember the changing characteristics of postwar Britain that may have influenced the group. The author is concerned with giving the range of results in a variety of topics: health, growth, emotional problems, home circumstances, education, and their interrelations. There is less concern with discussing alternative interpretations of the results and the weaknesses and strengths of the research methods. By using this approach the book is accessible to lay people and any specialist would be able to consult the original papers given in the list of references (unfortunately not always proof read).

If one has to find a criticism of the book it is the repetitive assertion that social class differences in health have not changed over time, although a table provided by the author (table 2.1) challenges this viewpoint. The interpretation is misleading as occupational classification is fraught with difficulties in a period characterised by profound changes in work division that the author himself recognises.

The book is plentiful in information, some predictable, some surprising and interesting. I have been hearing to satiety that children nowadays perform worse than their parents three decades ago. Wadsworth shows, comparing the cohort group and their offspring, that this assertion is so much thin air. Test attainment in the study group and their children showed that the offspring group are much better in reading skills and vocabulary than their parents, especially in the manual social classes. So much for intuition.

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Food and Health Data. Their Use in Nutrition Policy-making. Eds W Becker, E Helsing. (Pp 171; SFr 26.00.) Copenhagen: WHO (European Series No 34), 1991. ISBN 92-890-1125-4

What do people eat and who eats what? Food balance sheets, household budget surveys, and individual level studies all provide data on the dietary patterns of individuals. This book makes a critical assessment of these data sources, examining what each can and cannot tell us, and how they should be used. It also has a chapter on health monitoring in relation to diet which relates back to a previous book from the European Office of WHO, *Healthy nutrition*, which showed us what we in Europe should be eating, and why. Before policies are formed to promote healthy eating, it is necessary to know what we eat already. Both books are intended as a guide to all those who could and should contribute to people's nutritional wellbeing: food producers, manufacturers and retailers, ministry officials, policy makers, and those in positions that entail decision making on food, such as caterers and hospital administrators.

This short book (171 pages) is well produced with good clear print, helpful headings, sensible diagrams and tables, and an attractive front cover. Each chapter is written by experts with practical experience of the topic covered, and includes a good set of references for those who need to follow up in more detail. There are 20 contributors from 11 European countries and yet the English is clear and concise throughout—no doubt a tribute to the editing.

Whether or not this book reaches its target readership it would be a useful introduction to anyone interested in food consumption patterns.

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Design Concepts in Nutritional Epidemiology. Eds Barrie M Margetts and Michael Nelson. (Pp 420; £30.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991. ISBN 0-19-261873-3

As a field of enquiry in epidemiology and public health, nutrition has certainly come of age. Although everyone is exposed to nutrients, the difficulties of linking nutritional exposures with disease outcomes perhaps explain the continuing low status of nutrition in the undergraduate medical curriculum. *Design concepts in nutritional epidemiology* is a text that could be used by medical students, but most of its readers will be postgraduate students of nutrition and epidemiology.

Oxford University Press has now published two major texts that address many of the same questions, with only a short time between them. Comparison will be made, here and no doubt elsewhere, with Willett's *Nutritional epidemiology*, released in 1990. As the second arrival, this new book faces a greater challenge in the market, although it is a formidable work.

Design concepts gives a general introduction to epidemiology that would escort nutrition students with the capacity for learning quantitative methods to a level where research

could, indeed, be conceived and designed. Chapter 1, for example, contains useful appendices on the preparation of research grant applications and questionnaires. Nutrition students may find, however, that the chapters on technical nutritional matters overlap their other books, just as the present reviewer found much common ground between this and the standard epidemiology texts. Yet all epidemiologists would benefit, for example, from the high standard of the chapter on covariate measurement errors.

Chapter 4 (on food consumption) and chapter 5 (on existing nutritional data) will be of greatest interest in Europe. This is not a text for developing countries, although there is basic advice aplenty for the survey planner. The description of biochemical markers of nutrient intake covers many of the same topics as the long chapter in Willett's text, but with many different references, attesting to the rapid growth of the literature in nutritional epidemiology. How soon will this field demand its own journal?

Design concepts in nutritional epidemiology has a wider coverage of epidemiological principles than Willett's text. The latter contains three reviews (of vitamin A and lung cancer, dietary fat and breast cancer, and diet and heart disease) in the space saved. Both should be required reading in nutritional epidemiology courses. *Design concepts* may be preferred in Europe, and by nutritionists learning epidemiology.

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Risk factors for Cancer in the Workplace. By Jack Siemiatycki. (Pp 325; £72.50.) London: CRC Press, 1991. ISBN 0-8493-5018-2.

The main body of this book describes a population based case-control study of men aged 35-70 years conducted in the Montreal region of Canada. The study involved 3730 subjects with histologically confirmed cancers and 533 population controls were interviewed. Each subject was questioned in depth about his work history, with particular attention being paid to possible occupational exposure to any of nearly 300 chemicals, and about a range of potential confounding variables. Analyses were carried out for 23 cancer groupings including, in the case of lung cancer, morphological subcategories. A generic problem with this kind of study is the choice of appropriate controls. Here analyses were conducted using two different control groups, the population controls and a cancer control group comprised of a subset of cancers differing according to the cancer being analysed as a case. A large part of the book tabulates odds ratios and confidence limits (adjusted for age, income, smoking and, for some cancers, other variables), relating each cancer grouping to each of the substances, occupations, and industries considered. Only for the lung was a clear excess of significant associations observed over that expected, and most if not all of these associations seemed to be as predicted by published reports. The book makes no attempt to highlight or discuss the interpretation or importance of pre-