BOOK REVIEWS

Women and Health. Patricia Smythe. (Pp 182; £9.95) Zed Books, London, 1991. ISBN 0-86232-983-3.

As a volume in the "Women and World Development" series developed by a joint UN/NGO group, this book is intended to provoke debate and improve policy and practice affecting women's status. Since the publication of *Women, Health and Development Information Kit* in 1981 (its precursor) there has been some sign of progress for women in terms of legislation, but much less in terms of social and economic relationships. At least problems are more visible now that more health statistics are categorised by gender.

It is the poorest women who suffer most from being refugees or the effects of economic recession, debt, and structural adjustment but all women are affected by last decade's trend of growing intolerance and the defence of sex discrimination on grounds of culture, religion, or economic necessity. Because of the interlinkages between economy, social status, politics, education, environment, nutrition, endemic disease, and demographic factors, many women are locked into a descending spiral of ill health. The many factors influencing women's health are described and graphically illustrated with case examples, statistics and photographs. Although half the world's population, women account for two thirds of the world's working hours, receive only a 10th of the world's income, and own only 1% of the world's property. Pointing out this inequity is intended to fuel action. The aim is to make an irresistible case for change because it will require a fundamental change in attitudes among developing countries and international donors to make investment in women a development priority.

Information about disease and health services is specific but jargon free. Case studies, a resource guide, and suggestions are included so the book can be used as a basis for study and planning for action. For anyone concerned about the state of women's health globally, about why it is the way it is, and what the consequences are, this book is an excellent starting point.

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Accidents in childhood and adolescence: the role of research. Eds M Manciaux, CJ Romer. (Pp 217; Sw F 35) WHO, Geneva 1991. ISBN 92-4-156119 X.

In July 1992 the *Health of the Nation—a strategy for health in England*¹ identified the reduction of accidental injury in childhood as one of its key targets. England, like Scotland, Wales, the United States, Sweden, and Australia is beginning to recognise accidental injury as a major public health problem and to seek ways of preventing it.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has long considered accidents as a serious

problem and in *Accidents in Childhood and Adolescence* contributions from experts around the world are brought together in a seminar organised by the WHO and INSERM (Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Medicale) in Paris. Three complimentary approaches to the study of accidental injury prevention are covered: epidemiological, psycho-sociological, and technological and the complex nature of both the problem and its solutions are well demonstrated. The book also highlights the problem of accidental injury in developing countries: accidents are at least as numerous as in industrialised countries and their contribution to overall mortality is increasing both in relative and absolute terms. Chapters include accident mortality and morbidity in developing countries and a case study from Cuba.

The book provides a useful review of the problems of data collection and emphasises the lack of availability of adequate morbidity data. Reflecting the location of the seminar on which it is based, many of the contributions are from France. Although some of these are of interest, other demonstration programmes such as the Statewide Child Injury Prevention Program in the United States or the Fälpö Study in Sweden are not referred to in the book and would have strengthened the arguments developed. The chapter from Australia provides useful insights into the community development approach in injury prevention. The emphasis of the book is on the need for preventive action to be based on better epidemiological understanding of the problem and of the urgent need for more research into the whole field of injury prevention to inform policy. Both these messages require wide dissemination.

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¹ Secretary of State for Health. *Health of the nation—a strategy for health in England*. London: HMSO, 1992.

Human cancer: epidemiology and environmental causes. By J Higgison, C S Muir, N Munoz. Cambridge Monograph on Cancer Research. (Pp 577; £65) Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992. ISBN 0-521-41288-9.

The authors have set themselves an ambitious task in attempting to summarise the epidemiology of human cancer, its geographical and population distribution, and known and suspected causes. But by combining a text book approach with the monograph they have successfully blended basic principles and core information with sophisticated up to date studies in the extensive and varied field of cancer epidemiology. Their achievement is an invaluable data source and reference manual for anyone working in the cancer sphere.

After the brief but interesting historical introduction, which includes the background to the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), the 552 pages of text are divided into four main sections.

Part I reviews the epidemiological methods and limitations of cancer studies simply, clearly, and concisely, with lots of good examples. On the basis that much of the application of epidemiology to cancer research is at the molecular level, a chapter on laboratory methods in epidemiology is

included. This spares the reader having to plough through standard textbooks of general epidemiology or genetics, although a basic knowledge of both is probably important.

Part two "Causative factors in human cancer" provides a comprehensive overview which is awesome in its width and depth of presentation. The complex interactions of the three main determinants of cancer—the environment, genetics, and lifestyle—are explored with individual chapters devoted to a variety of factors ranging from chemical and occupational to tobacco, alcohol, and sexual behaviour and physical factors such as UV light and thermal chronic injury. Each chapter provides a good reference source for further enquiry.

Part three "Legal and ethical considerations" focuses mainly on the US experience and the ethical responsibilities of researchers. Perhaps the brevity of this chapter results in an oversimplification of the issues or my own biases show through, but I would have liked to have seen this section better developed. The fluoridation in water test case in Scotland could have been used to show the range of ethical issue which need to be considered when imposing population public health interventions. But the outcomes and implications of this test case were not discussed, and the readers were left with a misleading picture of the influence of cancer epidemiologists.

The final section "Total and site specific epidemiology" comprises over half the book, summarising the descriptive epidemiology and aetiological inferences of the principal cancer sites at international level. It also includes a separate section on cancers in children. Each site is carefully laid out to follow a predetermined structure and format, but some cancers comply less well than others. No doubt future editions will tidy up the loose ends, but this is the section which I see having greatest use and application as a reference source.

In the foreword of this remarkable book, the authors suggest that it is for the general scientist. They do it a disservice. It has much wider applications both as an invaluable aid for undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and as a useful reference for health policy makers and planners of cancer services at both national and local level. The next edition will iron out the problems and I hope improve on the public health policy in the ethics section but I hope it gets the wide readership it deserves.

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Geographical and Environmental Epidemiology: Methods for Small-Area Studies. (Pp 382; £45) Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992. ISBN 0-19-262280-3.

This book, which has over 50 different contributors, has five main sections. Section one contains a general discussion of the principals underlying geographical epidemiology and the potential strengths and weakness of ecological studies, well illustrated with examples. Different types of small-area studies are identified along with pitfalls associated with them. There is a checklist for those intending to investigate a suspected cluster of disease. Finally there is a discussion