Dependence Syndrome as a specific diagnostic entity occurs, despite Dependence, in some cases a frank repudiation of the Alcohol by Sukal on complementary therapies for the treatment of Alcohol education should be. Finally, there is an unusual and interesting chapter effectiveness. Also, there is a lack of clarity as to what the aims of the away from treatment considerations, there is a review of evidence-for problem drinkers, which of course is now becoming standard treat- models of treatment were very encouraging. It may well be, of course, that when an individual has made the decision to move to the ‘action phase’ of stopping drinking, providing the treatment is thoroughly performed and of a high professional standard, it does not matter which particular type of treatment is used. Heather gives an excellent account of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy approaches and Motivational Interviewing. As stated above, it may be that motivational interviewing is one of the most important subjects to emerge in the treatment field, for, assuming that treatment has an effect, unless they reach treatment they are not likely to benefit. Various authors also describe a useful model of home detoxification for problem drinkers, which of course is now becoming standard treat- ment. Away from treatment considerations, there is a review of evidence-based alcohol education in schools and the difficulty of proving its effectiveness. Also, there is a lack of clarity as to what the aims of the education should be. Finally, there is an unusual and interesting chapter by Sukal on complementary therapies for the treatment of Alcohol Dependence.

The above volume attempts to provide balanced and informative reviews of some of the key topics likely to interest those with a serious concern about drinking patterns and levels of alcohol-related problems. As would be expected, such a book is bound to be a ‘pot pourri’. Firstly, however, its range of topics is indeed very wide and the quality of reviews of these topics very high. It is interesting that the vast majority of authors are not medically qualified, and running through at least some parts of the book is an ambivalence to the concept of the Alcohol Dependence Syndrome. For example, in the initial chapter, whereas Alcohol Dependence Syndrome is recognized as a diagnostic entity, this model is not really accepted. It is also stated that many individuals with alcohol problems deal with their drinking difficulties themselves. Presumably the thousands of individuals who flood to treatment agencies, as individual practitioners have experienced, are those who cannot do this. This dichotomy is continued in the chapter by Ritson and Paulie, who seem to accept on one page that there are cellular mechanisms of physical dependence, whereas on the following page they say that ‘psychological, social and cultural factors have more powerful overriding effects’ — referring here to these effects in relation to dependence. A valuable contribution is made by Moira Plant, which includes a very useful and commendably brief summary of drinking in pregnancy, which will probably be enough for doctors to retain. Mckechnie and Cameron show how drinking problems can be reviewed at different levels: on an intimate interpersonal level; how they are perceived by family and friends, and finally, as they are perceived by professionals. Again, the authors seem not to accept the diagnostic entity of the Alcohol Dependence Syndrome, although their approach is interesting in diverting us away from the hospital clinic to the way excessive drinking can be interpreted within family and community. There are three excellent chapters on the economic aspects of consumption and drinking patterns in relation to gender and age groups. One looks at the concept of harm minimization, which is not something often talked about by individuals in the field. This approach accepts that people will drink and does not try to reduce consumption, but does try to reduce the harmful effects of consumption. Various studies are quoted, including one in Torquay where for a period strong regular enhancements of drinking laws were shown to reduce the harmful effects of drinking. Studies in other countries are also mentioned.

To a clinician, perhaps the most important chapter is that by Heather, ‘Reviewing the Psychosocial Treatment Approaches and The Findings of Project Match’. Heather seems genuinely surprised that the Project Match approached the approach recommended the Twelve Steps was effective. He also stresses correctly how, although Project Match was not a clinical trial, the results in those three types of models of treatment were very encouraging. It may well be, of course, that when an individual has made the decision to move to the ‘action phase’ of stopping drinking, providing the treatment is thoroughly performed and of a high professional standard, it does not matter which particular type of treatment is used. Heather gives an excellent account of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy approaches and Motivational Interviewing. As stated above, it may be that motivational interviewing is one of the most important subjects to emerge in the treatment field, for, assuming that treatment has an effect, unless they reach treatment they are not likely to benefit.

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It would seem that, although this book follows modern fashion in being at best ambivalent about the role of biological factors in Alcohol Dependence, in some cases a frank repudiation of the Alcohol Dependence Syndrome as a specific diagnostic entity occurs, despite the fact that it has become used in standard medical and legal classificatory systems.

Overall, the book does succeed very well at producing articles both in relation to treatment, the effect of alcohol, epidemiological studies, alcohol education effectiveness and other topics. Individuals will differ as to which chapters they select as most relevant to themselves. For the doctor involved in treatment, the chapters ‘Drinking at Crossed Pur- poses’ by Mckechnie and Cameron, the chapters by Heather, Bennie, McKinn, Campbell and Sukel under the heading of ‘Clinical Response’ are of the most interest. This is a very useful book for those currently working in the field, and is highly recommended.

BRIAN D. HORE


This welcome text addresses the important issue of what might become of people who are the children of problem drinkers. The authors have produced a lucid and accessible, though extremely scholarly, overview of available factual information, theoretical issues and practical implications related to this Fascinating topic. The core of the book is an original study. This builds upon a wealth of evidence suggesting, though not uniformly, that people who are raised by parents at least one of whom is a ‘problem drinker’, may subsequently be at high risk for alcohol problems or other life problems. The background to the new research is ably set out. Some individual case histories are described at length. Moreover, a comprehensive and critical review of past research is provided. This encompasses epidemiology and a number of theories concerning mechanisms of transmission (e.g. genetic, environmental) of drinking and other behaviours by parents to their children.

The new research that is described was conducted in order to investigate what the consequences might be of being raised by a problem drinker/problem drinkers. The investigation involved a comparison of 164 people aged 16–35 years, who were the offspring of such adults, and a comparison group of 80 people, who were not. These people were interviewed twice, the second interview being conducted one year after the first. There was a good mix of open and closed ques- tions, allowing for the collection of a wealth of information. This enabled the complexity of these relationships to emerge. Not surprisingly, the findings of this investigation were both numerous and quite complex. The offspring of problem drinkers reported more discord and negative experiences, together with less happy and cohesive family lives than the offspring of problem drinkers. The investigation involved a comparison of 164 people aged 16–35 years, who were the offspring of such adults, and a comparison group of 80 people, who were not. These people were interviewed twice, the second interview being conducted one year after the first. There was a good mix of open and closed ques- tions, allowing for the collection of a wealth of information. This enabled the complexity of these relationships to emerge. Not surprisingly, the findings of this investigation were both numerous and quite complex. The offspring of problem drinkers reported more discord and negative experiences, together with less happy and cohesive family lives than the offspring of problem drinkers. The authors ‘...overall, and with certain exceptions, the children of problem drinking parents studied here, as young adults were as well adjusted as their peers’. This finding is important and, to some readers, will be unexpected. The authors emphasize the wide variations in how young people adjust and react to having a parent who drinks in a harmful way. They also concluded that: ‘Positive mental health as a young adult is best predicted by contemporaneously measured variables.’ The practical implications of this study and of other related evidence are considered. It is suggested that the children of problem drinking parents could be advised that they are ‘at risk’ in certain respects. They acknowledge that this recommendation is debatable from an ethical point of view. They conclude with a plea to break down reluctance to consider the links between the family and alcohol problems and vice versa. Richard Velleman and Jim Orford are to be congratulated for producing a major work. This is likely to remain the key book on this subject for the foreseeable future.

MOIRA PLANT

It is always a real pleasure to read anything written by Dwight Heath, Professor of Anthropology at Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island. He has made numerous important and fascinating contributions to the alcohol field. This new book, true to form, is enjoyable and informative. It has been produced as part of a series of works commissioned by the International Center for Alcohol Policies (ICAP), based in Washington, DC. ICAP is funded by eleven major beverage alcohol companies. Other books in this series have dealt with drinking patterns, alcohol and pleasure and alcohol and emerging markets. These books have all been of a high academic standard and have brought together some invaluable material. Sadly, this has all been produced in the form of expensive hardback volumes. This will inevitably limit their availability and appeal.

_Drinking Occasions_ sets out to present a series of thoughtful essays dealing with some fundamental issues. The latter include where, when, how and why people drink, what they drink, who drinks and who does not drink. These themes are addressed against an international context and with reference to important scientific questions, such as the adequacy of evidence and research methods. One does not have to be an anthropologist to understand and appreciate the material that has been written and provides a wealth of supporting material, much of which will be new to most of the potential readers. As noted by Marcus Grant (President of ICAP) in the foreword, relatively little attention has been paid in the extensive literature on alcohol problems about ‘the vast majority of drinking occasions, namely those which lead to feelings of subjective well-being and social cohesiveness’.

_Drinking Occasions_ certainly goes some way to compensating for this desideratum. The book is also full of insights and examples. These are drawn from many cultures and help to illustrate the complexities as well as some of the commonalities that make the relationship between moderate, harm-free drinking and heavy, problematic or inappropriate drinking so fascinating. It should, however, be stressed that there are not two quite separate worlds of drinking, the harm-free and the harmful. These are simply ends of a continuum. Individuals often move backwards and forwards along this continuum at different stages of their drinking careers.

_MARTIN PLANT_


Many of us will remember our first faltering steps into the field of alcohol problems, where often a naive ignorance of the issues and lack of knowledge were overcome by youthful energy and exuberance — and we got on with the job. If you can remember back to those days you will recognize the benefits of a book like this. In many ways, it is an introduction and instruction guide for the naive therapist. The editor has drawn together various strands of knowledge which he wished he had known at the start of his career into one easy-to-read and informative book.

The book is divided into a series of short essays on a variety of alcohol-related topics written by an internationally renowned group of experts. The first half of the book discusses general and epidemiological topics, including the pharmacological effects of alcohol, typology of drinking behaviour and social aspects of drinking. There are essays describing the physical effects of alcohol and related health problems and the use of alcohol in special groups of drinkers, including the old, young and those with mental illness. I thought the essays on gender-specific issues and young adults were particularly good. There were also discussions on the role and the impact on families of a drinking relative and how to develop services to help family members. There is also an interesting essay on the cultural context of drinking and the importance of the sensitivity of services to cultural issues. Finally, an excellent review of the literature on alcohol in the workplace is given.

The second half of the book is concerned with the response to alcohol problems. It includes essays on prevention and education, motivation to change and assessment, also the management of alcohol withdrawals, detoxification and subsequent therapeutic interventions.

The final three chapters have interesting discussions on the nature of multi-disciplinary team working and advice on aiding communication between client and therapist and between professionals in a team. On occasions, the brevity of the essays limits an adequate discussion of the topic, but even then the chapters are well referenced to direct the readers to sources of more in-depth information. The majority of the chapters begin with interactive pre-reading exercises, and contain useful case studies and a series of self-assessment questions with answers which are informative. The editor has therefore fulfilled his dream to produce an excellent introductory guide for an individual embarking on a career working with alcohol problems. After reading this book, those initial faltering steps will be far steadier.

CHRIS DALY


This book is a lightweight, written by some of the real heavyweight authors of alcohol studies in Europe. That is all the more surprising, since any one of them should easily merit publication as a stand-alone review article in a refereed journal. The problem, of course, is that this book provides comprehensive coverage of an area which is not comprehensively covered. The map is at best a sketch map, containing many areas marked ‘unexplored’.

The authors acknowledge that the relationship between bodily health and alcohol consumption is much better studied and understood. We know much about alcohol-related morbidity and mortality. We even know a lot about the health benefits of moderate alcohol consumption, even though those benefits may be no greater than that which could be achieved by exhorting middle-aged men to take half an aspirin a day. But when we examine social consequences, we have hardly even started the mapping process.

So the authors of this multi-author book start at the very beginning, with a definition: ‘Social consequences of alcohol are changes, subjectively or objectively attributed to alcohol, occurring in individual social behaviour or in social interaction or in the social environment.’ (pp. 3 & 14). They are quite clear that consequences can be positive or negative, but only Kai Permanen, always a delight to read, and Jurgen Rehm give more than a glance at social benefits. The other authors keep peering over the landscape of negative consequences: criminality, impaired work and school performance, family disruption, accidents, suicide, violence and problems with public order and safety. There are a lot of social problems about, and the degree to which they are deemed to be alcohol-related is a matter for proper debate — and in this book that debate recurs. So it should, just as in the world of physical problems the degree of alcohol-attributable risk of a number of diseases has been elucidated, with a greater or lesser degree of success.

But if there are all these social as well as physical problems associated with our alcohol use, then why on earth do so many of us keep using the stuff? Why as a society do we tolerate spending 1–3% of our gross national product on mopping up the social harms associated with its use? Presumably because we, as members of civil society, deem that it is worth it, that those benefits listed in the table on p. 12 — relaxation, feeling less stress and subjectively well, improving social events, general subjective well-being, cognitive function, group cohesion and cultural identification and integration, and taxation revenue — are so worth having that we will pay the price. And yet this book makes precious little attempt to quantify those benefits. So the book is, indeed, a sketch map. But it is worse than that. It is a sketch map which focuses on only part of the topology. It is obvious why: because nobody has made a serious attempt to look at how many people stay in unfulfilling employment because they know they can have intoxicated time out on pay day; at how much employment is created by people meeting in drinking environments; at how many relationships are created and/or kept together; at how much employment is created by people using alcohol to drown their sorrows. These feel like questions that almost should not be asked, because they are difficult to answer and because to ask them might be seen as attempting to be an apologist for alcohol producers.
The last two chapters of the book (by Martin Plant on harm minimization and Marja Holmila on community initiatives as strategies for implementation of the European Alcohol Action Plan) are different from the others. They are not harm mapping exercises. They examine the practicalities of minimizing those harms, by all manner of means, from mobilizing public opinion to providing toughened glasses for the consumption of beer. The book has no index, but each chapter is immaculately referenced.

For all its limitations, this book is hugely worthwhile. It is an elegant and erudite attempt to gather data which are notably dispersed in the alcohol literature. It is not the authors’ or the editors’ faults that there is such a lot missing. It is by the production of books such as this that we realize just how complex is the topography of the landscapes in which we work; and how much more we need to know.

DOUGLAS CAMERON