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Special Children-Special Risks: The Maltreatment of Children with Disabilities

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Special Children-Special Risks: The Maltreatment of Children with Disabilities, edited by James Garbarino, Patrick E. Brookhouser and Karen J. Authier. New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1987, 311 pp.

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All too often, an edited book turns out to be a collection of disparate articles brought together more by the editor's apparent desire to publish than any real effort to explore a particular issue or question. Two or three of the articles may well be worth reading, but often these articles are already in print. The remaining articles are of little value. *Special Children-Special Risks* does not fall into this category. This book proposes to bring together the knowledge and concerns of experts from diverse areas of expertise and experience to examine one issue—abused handicapped children. The editors have produced what they promised.

An indication that this book is not the typical edited work is the first chapter, written by the senior editor, James Garbarino, President of the Erikson Institute for Advanced Study in Child Development. Garbarino focuses on the subject of inquiry, the abuse and neglect of handicapped children, and presents several research problems related to this particular area of inquiry.

The first problem is conceptual. Despite "volumes of research, theory, and speculation on the topic, there is still no totally satisfactory definition of abuse" (p. 3). The second problem is directional. It is difficult to determine if abuse or neglect followed the handicap or if the handicap was the consequence of abuse or neglect. Garbarino argues that even if the latter is true, these children are at even greater risk for subsequent abuse or neglect. Even so, the ambiguity of both definition and time of abuse constitutes a major obstacle in research on the maltreatment of handicapped children for it precludes a precise identification of the population to be investigated.

A third problem is the complex etiology of child abuse and neglect in general. Recognized factors include personal resources of the parent, characteristics of the child, the relationship between a particular adult and a particular child, the immediate situation, and the cultural norms with respect to appropriate child care. Despite these problems, Garbarino suggests that recognizing the special issues involved in protecting handicapped children and designing methods for intervention outweigh the need to determine the level and conditions of risk. His goal is pragmatic, the protection of handicapped children. As a result, the book offers a wealth of information on a variety of issues related to the topic.

Carl Dunst, Carolyn Cooper and Faith Black, from the Human Development Research and Training Institute in Morganton, North Carolina, examine the issue of community support for families with handicapped children. These researchers expand the traditional model that defines maltreatment as a function

of risk factors, and introduce a set of intervening variables. Using this model, promising approaches in the prevention of maltreatment are presented and recommendations are made. Susan McHale and Wendy Gamble, Pennsylvania State University and University of Denver respectively, review the literature on the role of siblings and peers and conclude that despite the incidence and risk of abuse by siblings and peers, the positive potential in handicapped child/sibling or peer interaction outweighs the risks. Suggestions for promoting positive relationships are outlined.

Garbarino joins Karen Authier, Administrative Director of the Center for Abused Handicapped Children and Director of the Family Support Systems at the Boys' Town National Institute for Communication Disorders in Children, Omaha, Nebraska, to discuss the role of educators. Perception of the role of schools ranges from the school as part of the problem to the school as the solution to the problem. The authors attempt to deal realistically with issues such as responsibility for identification and reporting of abuse, and responsibility for maximizing the potential of the child. They neither condemn nor defend the schools, but rather explore potentially positive contributions.

James Whittaker, School of Social Work, University of Washington, reviews the literature on incidence of maltreatment of handicapped children in out-of-home residential care. Factors both within and outside these institutions which contribute to or decrease maltreatment are discussed and concrete suggestions for prevention are made.

I found the chapter by Helen Howerton, National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, particularly interesting. Tracing the role of the Federal government from the 19th century to the present, she concludes that attention to existing legislation, rather than more legislation, is needed to prevent abuse or neglect.

Patricia Sullivan, Center for Abused Handicapped Children, Boys' Town National Institute for Communication Disorders in Children, and John Scanlan, St. Paul-Ramsey Mental Health and Hearing Impaired Program, St. Paul, Minnesota, explore therapeutic issues; Patrick Brookhouser, Director of the Boys' Town National Institute, for Communication Disorders in Children, looks at medical issues. Both chapters outline structural problems in various health care systems as well as problems associated with the handicaps in particular. Again, realistic suggestions for intervention and prevention are outlined.

Gary Milton, University of Nebraska at Lincoln, focuses on the legal rights of the parent. Similar to Howerton, Milton argues that new legislation may not be the answer and suggests that rather than blaming either service providers or parents, the problem may rest in the child protection system itself.

William Modzeleski, Office for Victims of Crime, Washington, D.C., reports on abused handicapped children in the criminal justice system and explores problems related both to the protection of and intervention for handicapped victims. Finally, Robert McCall and Thomas Gregory from the Father

Flanagan's Boys' Home, discuss the positive role of the mass media in creating awareness, setting agenda, changing attitudes, imparting information and promoting action. Unfortunately, they do not discuss the negative role of media in sensationalizing maltreatment or reinforcing stereotypes. Sullivan and Scanlan touch on this, but I would have liked more in the chapter devoted to mass media. The section on working with the media, however, is excellent, particularly the part on preparing for an interview.

Overall, the articles are clear, concise and readable. The major contribution of this book is the extensive review of literature on child abuse in general, sibling and adult aggression, neglect within and outside the home, and the abuse and neglect of handicapped children in particular. A bibliography is included at the end of the book for easy reference. The secondary contribution is the practical aspect of the book. A number of authors present detailed suggestions for both prevention and intervention, suggested materials and relevant addresses are presented in the appendix.

Because of the emphasis on structural rather than psychological factors, the book should be of interest to class-room sociologists, as well as researchers, clinicians, and other professionals who work with handicapped children. Because of its readability, it is also a book that would be useful for parents of handicapped children as well as other lay persons who come in contact with these children and their families.

Journey into Sexuality: An Exploratory Voyage, by Ira L. Reiss. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1986. 282 pp.

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The author states his purpose in writing this book at the outset: to offer a societal-level interpretation of human sexuality (p.1). The ensuing chapters are, indeed, devoted to an explanation of the social structural forces that relate to sexual practices in a society. For those of us who have tired of psychological, biological, or culture-specific explanations of human sexuality, this book presents a truly sociological approach.

The first two chapters set the framework. The search for cultural universals that reflect social system properties yet permit cross-cultural variation leads to a definition of human sexuality as "those scripts shared by a group that are supposed to lead to erotic arousal and . . . produce genital response." Two key elements of sexuality, physical pleasure and self-disclosure are linked to this definition. The case for these definitions as a starting point is built by a discussion of the approach, research examined, theories considered, and the route to