Emphasising strength

Risk and Resilience: Adaptations in Changing Times
Ingrid Schoon
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2006
Pb £49.00 (ISBN 0 521 54156 5)
Reviewed by John Toland

Resilience is the phenomenon whereby individuals show positive adaptation despite significant life adversities. As an educational psychologist I am very interested in this concept with its emphasis on strengths, and how it can be applied with clients. The fundamental question is: What are the best ways of taking the findings gained from studying naturally occurring resilience and applying these to change the course of development in children who have little chance of resilience without intervention?

Much previous work on resilience has been American; it was therefore with great interest that I read this important book based on work done in Britain. It is large-scale, and its conclusions are authoritative and robust. It draws on data collected from the 1958 National Child Development Study which together comprise a sample of 30,000 individuals. The size of the sample and the time periods involved mean that very significant conclusions can be drawn about the nature of resilience. These are then used to inform and guide the development of effective interventions for different at-risk populations of young people. I will find this extremely useful in my own ongoing work to try to promote resilience in looked after and accommodated young people.

This book goes a long way towards answering the fundamental question posed above and I think it is required reading for all psychologists working with children.

Dr Rebecca Williams works for the Arfon Learning Disabilities Team, North Wales.

More than medication

If you wish to read a book that gives a comprehensive history of the growth of the critical psychiatry movement combined with present day critiques of the mental health system, then this is an excellent text. Some of the most prominent and influential authors in the field have contributed chapters for example, Lucy Johnstone and Terry Lynch, so there is plenty of thought-provoking, easily accessible reading exploring the ways in which mental illness is constructed in society through the process of diagnosis.

As a whole the book seeks to encourage the reader to think about people’s distress within the psycho-social context of an individual’s experience. It comprehensively challenges the view of mental illness as something solely connected with brain pathology, that can be treated with medication. It promotes a collaborative approach to mental health problems, with practitioners working in alliance with those who present with distress.

This is an essential text for all who practice within mental health settings and an interesting read for all who have questioned why medication has historically been seen as a solution to individual distress.

Amy McKee is a trainee clinical psychologist on the Staffordshire & Shropshire course.

Critical Psychiatry: The Limits of Madness
Duncan Double
Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; 2006;
Hb £50.00 (ISBN 10 2300012 89)
Reviewed by Amy McKee