has been carried out on sexual abuse and Black women. To date much of the existing work on this subject has come from America. The available research indicates that the incidence of abuse occurs about as commonly in the Black communities as it does in the white communities. Yet it does not get talked about. Often the reason for not speaking out is the fear of exposing the Black community to stereotypical judgements by white people. Melba Wilson writes from the conviction that the taboo against speaking out must be broken.

In this book Wilson does not aim to produce statistical data on the incidence of sexual abuse in Black communities. She interviewed about twelve – mainly African-Caribbean women. The reader is not told how many Asians were interviewed and how the interviewees were selected. Wilson also includes secondary information – ideas of those who work with Black women survivors, as well as any research on Black women survivors. She challenges theories of the Black family that emerged out of the Euro-American frame of reference. She articulates Black feminist philosophy, principles and theory, creating the framework for a Black feminist understanding of child sexual abuse.

Through careful analysis of the autobiographical and fictional work of Black women writers such as Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, Buchi Emecheta, Joan Riley and Opal Palmer Adisa on incest and the voices of individual women, Wilson challenges

the myth that sexual abuse does not happen in the Black communities. The book also raises important issues in relation to the curious anomaly Black women are caught in. On the one hand, sexual abuse is not supposed to exist in Black communities: this brings about a reluctance to raise it as an issue. On the other hand, sexual abuse exists to such an extent that it is almost considered normal by many inside the Black community.

If I have a major criticism, it is the treatment of Black people as a monolithic group. There is a need to explore the similarities and differences between Black women survivors of Asian and African-Caribbean origin. This will further our understanding of the ways in which cultural influences lead to sexual abuse and the implications of incest within the different communities.

The final section provides a useful list of resources which are invaluable for Black women survivors of incest and child sexual abuse.

This book is long overdue. The amount of work published for, by and about Black women is totally negligible and Black women's voices have gone unheard. Melba Wilson gives a voice to Black women survivors of incest and child sexual abuse.

The book will be of interest to a wide audience. It merits extensive readership and debate. It should be able to achieve both, not least because of its accessible and thought-provoking style.

Lena Robinson

Hardship and Health in Women's Lives

Hilary Graham

*Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire:
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The work of Hilary Graham has consistently provided a persistent

and powerful voice on behalf of the overwhelming structural poverty faced by many women raising children in our society and this book is particularly timely in the present climate of 'lone-parent bashing' which is reaching astonishing and totally unacceptable proportions by the present government.

Using sources such as social surveys, official statistics and subject-

tive experiences, Graham graphically sketches out the features of hardship encountered in women's lives, and the subsequent consequences with their own health and that of their children.

The first chapter provides an excellent introduction to the uses and abuses of social science research, by describing both the potential and the limitations of the sources. There is a growing awareness that feminist researchers cannot afford to simply dismiss these methods, that it is important to recognize them while acknowledging their shortcomings and Graham demonstrates how official statistics and large surveys can be made accessible. She then discusses the classification and categorization of complex concepts such as social class and ethnicity, with the inevitable reductionism involved in the collection of data by these methods.

Having stated the shortfalls, Graham then proceeds, chapter by chapter, to blend these sources to provide a vivid illumination of the domestic circumstances and responsibilities of women caring for children. These encompass routes into motherhood, housing, responsibility and caring, paid work, financial management and health status, and show that with careful explanation, the statistics can give stark, hard-hitting messages. For instance, when Graham discusses a table showing the discrepancy in tenure between two-parent and lone-parent families, (24% of the former are in rented accommodation rather than owner occupied as compared to 65% of lone parents, rising to 88% of lone parents with disabled children), she points out that public sector housing is the 'residual' sector, occupied by those households who do not have the income to buy their own home, and who struggle against disadvantage. This may well be stating the obvious, but sadly is very necessary in this climate which substitutes 'scrounging' for 'needing' and vilifies

the lives of women who are already struggling enough.

The accounts of managing money, including the dangerous temptations of consumer credit, portray another side of the story of how well some women do cope. 'Coping' is a central issue in the discussion on the effects on health of the accumulation of disadvantage in these factors and Graham has always treated the thorny issue of the on-going increase in cigarette-smoking among women on low income with sensitivity, pointing out how it is used as a means of 'getting through' – a strategy which helps as well as hurts (p.183), although she by no means underplays the potential damage to mothers and children.

Throughout the book, Graham is very careful to emphasize that women are not a homogenous group, that they are differentiated by social class and ethnicity, and that to be non-white and on low income can result in multiple disadvantage (there are three times as many ethnic minority women in temporary homeless accommodation as there are white women, for instance). She shows that women are also disadvantaged by disability (their own or their child's) or by their sexuality. There is, of course, the danger of using statistics in this way to further marginalize or pathologize the lives of the large number of women who do not fit the 'cosy' categories so embedded in the hegemony of our society. However, this book does seem to transcend the trap of depicting women purely as 'social problems'. For instance, when discussing the role of children in the household, Graham highlights the positive aspects such as the emotional support children give their mothers, which does not necessarily damage their development but may enrich it. The use of the qualitative material is essential in this process as the inclusion of women's own voices illustrates the complexities of their situations and the richness of their lives

despite the hardship, and Graham's tone ultimately demonstrates admiration rather than condescension: 'Mothers emerge from the patchwork of their lives as survivors. They are not the powerless victims of oppression but are agents of their lives, actively engaged in caring for health and struggling against hardship' (p. 202). No doubt this book will be criticized for regurgitation of the

same old material or of overstating the case by those who continually suppress the gendered voice in inequality but it provides a powerfully concise and highly accessible resource, not only in academic terms, but in the political struggle against the oppression of women.

Gillian Bendelow