Good Practice in Working with Victims of Violence

edited by Hazel Kemshall and Jacki Pritchard

London: Jessica Kingsley Publishing (2000) ISBN 1 85302 768 5
(224 pages, £30.00)

Reviewed by Claire Lawrence

As the editors state in their introduction, the long-term care and assessment of victims of violence has been given a low priority in current literature. Accordingly, this edited collection aims to present a wide range of situations that can leave individuals or communities victims of violence. In doing so it seeks to highlight the lessons and service implications for those working with such victims. Compared to this relatively tangible goal, the book's further aims and objectives appear to be less clear. The various chapters all contribute to a general message of awareness-raising about the particular issues of victimisation involved in each specific situation. There is, however, a lack of an overall theme to or presentation of the individual chapters, and as a result the volume suffers from its otherwise admirable attempt at breadth.

That said, there are some extremely informative and well-written chapters, which offer insights, evidence and action points for the practitioner. One example is the chapter by Hoel and Cooper examining the phenomenon of bullying at work. It is likely that this topic will become increasingly significant to employers and policy makers over the next few years, and these authors provide a coherent and focused examination of the phenomenon, its causes and manifestations. The contribution is supported by evidence from studies conducted in the UK and in Scandinavia. The wider implications for the way in which work is structured are then drawn. This chapter follows a section on adult bullying, which becomes almost redundant in the light of Hoel and Cooper's examination.

Similarly, the final chapter, by Marie Smyth, investigates the aftermath of political division. This offers a succinct and thoughtful account of the troubles in Northern Ireland, and of the emergence of data illustrating the levels of distress and the implications for practitioners. This chapter also highlights a crucial point that is almost completely absent elsewhere in the volume: that is, the vulnerability of those working with victims of violence. Smyth deals with this subject in the context of working with victims of sectarian violence, especially when the worker belongs to the community associated with the attack. Smyth goes beyond this, however, and also discusses the emotional impact such work has upon professionals and offers some useful steps to deal with this pressure.

There are other chapters worthy of note. An example is the initial chapter by Walklate, that offers an interesting overview of the development of victim support agencies and the political influences on the provision of service. However, this book is best perceived as a resource: most readers will find some chapters useful and relevant to their work or interests, while others may only be marginally useful to them. It fails in some ways because it tries to accomplish too much, and does not keep a tight enough rein over the nature of the material covered in each chapter. As a result, there is some lack of coherence. Chapters range from empirical examinations of the problem in hand, followed by possible interventions and problems for the practitioner, while others provide

case-study accounts which appear to present unchallenged solutions to complex problems. For those in policing and the security industry the book will have some useful things to say and will certainly raise some awareness of the variations between different groups' experience of violence. The usefulness of the book in terms of offering best-practice advice, however, remains somewhat equivocal.

Claire Lawrence
University of Nottingham