

BOOKS

MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF HIV/AIDS IN WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Pamela Powell. Norwich, UK: University of East Anglia, 1992. £5.50

This monograph gives a meticulously-referenced overview of the current information about HIV/AIDS and the development of social work services since 1988, with comprehensive cover of the current facts. However, the several referrals to prolonged life-expectation with earlier and more effective treatments for HIV-related infections could be misleading as it is the quality, rather than length, of life which can be improved with these.

What this monologue fails to do is to highlight sufficiently the issues for women. It concentrates on the implications of HIV infection for childbearing, excluding the ramifications for wider relationships with sexual partners and family, and for earning capacity. It is more specific on issues for children, reflecting current experience and knowledge. Of particular importance is the reference to The Children's Act 1989, but more ideas could have been offered about the particular challenges to parents and social services that relate to HIV infection inherent in the Act.

The strengths of this monograph lie in the painstaking research and in pointing the reader, through the bibliography, in the direction of developments and areas of interest for women and children. It is refreshing to have a reference work that makes few assumptions and reports on the research and facts as known. Further reading on women and children is becoming available as the heterosexual transmission becomes more prevalent in the U.K. Since this monologue is written from a social work perspective it should complement the other publications on HIV and women^{1,2,3,4} which focus on the issues for service, approaches to counselling and a broad survey of the social work perspective.

Riva Miller
Aids Counselling Co-ordinator

1. Johnson MA, Johnstone FD (eds). HIV and Women. London: Longmans, 1993.
2. Holingsbaum N. HIV, AIDS and Children: a Cause for Concern. London: National Children's Bureau, 1991.
3. Sherr L. HIV in Mothers and Babies. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Scientific, 1991.
4. Bamford M, Gaitley R, Miller R. HIV-AIDS: a social work perspective. Birmingham, UK: BASW Publications, 1988.

*Post free from publishers.

CHILDREN'S LAST DAYS

Anna Farmar. Dublin, Ireland: Town House, 1992. £4.95.
To be told your child is suffering from a life-threatening disease is surely one of the most fearful things that can befall a parent. Anna Farmar's moving and honest book is an account of parents' reactions to this almost

unendurable shock and of their subsequent journeys through increasing illness until they come face to face with their child's death. Because Anna Farmar herself has suffered the loss of her daughter from cancer, I believe she was able to interview these bereaved parents with the compassion and understanding which exists between people who have experienced this great sadness.

These are accounts of people trying to continue normal family life in the face of the enormous disruption which terminal illness brings. Many spent weeks, even months, in hospital with their children coping with painful treatments and with doctors and other professionals who are, in the main, the compassionate experts you would expect. Unfortunately there are stories of insensitive, off-hand encounters and lack of communication at a time when the utmost support and kindness should be available.

The children themselves are spoken of with the greatest of love, 'the special children', showing such bravery and endurance. The special needs of adolescents are mentioned - towards catering for their age group alone would be very welcome. Many practical aspects of situations which may arise for families are covered, from coping financially (extra expenses, like travelling to and from hospital) to learning the varying methods of pain control.

This is a practical and comprehensive study, showing how the hope and love in the human spirit can cope with bitter experience, and should be valuable to professional carers and bereaved parents alike. Having lost a son myself after a long illness, I found much to share with in these heartfelt accounts.

Brenda Bridgeman
Housewife

LOSING A PARENT

Fiona Marshall. London: Sheldon Press, 1993. £7.99 pb.*

This is a comprehensive survey of what it means to lose a parent, covering a great deal of ground and taking in many aspects of this particular loss over a wide age range. It also includes a thoughtful chapter on terminal illness, helpfully linking the knowledge, fear or denial of the coming death with the feelings of grief afterwards.

There are good sections dealing with the relationship with the parent who has died and the changed relationship with the parent who remains. I would, however, have welcomed more on the effects on a marriage or partnership when the parent of one of the partners dies. Partnerships come under considerable stress at such times, mutual misunderstandings can arise or intensify, which can greatly add to the pain and confusion of the actual loss.

The author's understanding is both wide and deep but she does not include any of her own experiences. Instead, she uses case material to illustrate her points. This lack of a 'personal voice' does mean that the passion and immediacy present in Rebecca Abrams' book¹ are absent. Because such a wide range of family situations and attitudes is covered, only a comparatively small amount of material may find a direct echo in each individual reader.

The author writes clearly and intelligently and, for the most part, avoids jargon, although some does creep in. For example, she refers to 'family personas' breaking down. However on the whole she has succeeded admirably in organising her complex material into relatively straightforward language. The tone is understanding, compassionate and mature. It acknowledges the reality and legitimacy of 'childish' and irrational reactions when a parent dies, but places them firmly in the context of the individual's unfolding and development towards full adulthood. The authentic howl of pain and rage is kept in the background.

This is a 'wise counsellor's' book which offers acceptance and reassurance. It is a welcome addition to the literature on the death of a parent which, until very recently, has been a neglected area.

Caroline Morcom
Counsellor

1. Abrams R. When Parents Die. London, UK: Letts 1994.

*Available from Cruse Bereavement Care, 126 Sheen Road, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1UR

WORKING WITH DISASTER

Tim Newburn (Ed). Brighton, UK: Pavilion, 1993. £17.99

This worthwhile addition to the literature on this subject gives the first-hand experiences of a number of professionals involved in various areas of disaster work, with the main emphasis on organisational issues. Each contribution is well-written and readable.

One minor quibble might be that issues concerning voluntary agencies were not included. A more serious objection is that schools-based issues have not been given quite the emphasis that they deserve (although this is not the fault of the author of the chapter on the subject). This is important, as the problems of agencies failing to work together seem to become magnified, particularly where a school is the focus of tragedy.

The final overview chapter loses some of its power by tending to focus on the preceding chapters in turn. More impact might have been made by some broad brush strokes on the organisation of disaster services, for example, pre-planning, across-agency training and pre-major disaster

conjoint work. Coordinated preparation is the only way that inter-agency rivalry can be averted.

However, this should not diminish the fact that many of the crucial lessons for avoiding unproductive work and staff burnout are here. Managers from many different agencies should read this book.

Peter Hodgkinson
Clinical Psychologist

VIDEO

GRIEF

Penny Casdagli and Shadin Khosru. London, UK: Neti-Neti Theatre Company, 1994. £49.95 + p&p.†

Evidently considerable efforts by all concerned have gone into making this 58 minute video, based on an original stage play and presented in Bengali, Sign Language and English.

In the play, Eddie's sudden death has a powerful effect on his twin, Amy, and their friends. Amy finds passionate and dangerous ways of expressing her grief until discovering that there are many kinds of loss and that the process of mourning, however painful, can lead to change.

Unfortunately the Bengali conversations seem to be memorised translations, which suffer a lack of clarity due to poor pronunciation and accent. Older generations of immigrants, unaccustomed to this style of drama, may find the dramatised and interposing dialogue difficult to follow, and may also find the open talk about love affairs off-putting. Also, some aspects of the video are misleading: Muslims (who form the vast majority of Bengali speakers) would more commonly pray when visiting a grave, rather than leave flowers there.

However this is, above all, a very welcome development in bereavement care for today's multiethnic society.

H M S Rahmam
Imam

†Available from the Neti-Neti Theatre Company, 44 Gladsmuir Road, London N19 3JU

CORRECTIONS

Bereavement Care, Summer 1995; 14, No 2.

Bereavement groups with a difference (p14): the captions for the photographs should have read *Margery Pike* on the left, and *Margi Abeles* and *David Oliviere* on the right.

Gran-Gran's Best Trick (p23): this book review was written by *Brenda Freedman*, Bereavement Psychologist, and not *Brenda Bridgeman*.

Bereavement Care, Winter 1994; 13, No 3.

Working with bereaved fathers (p30): Exploring Parenthood's telephone number is 0171 221 4471.