

## Book Reviews

**Refugee Children - Theory, Research, and Services**, Frederick L Ahearn, Jr and Jean L Athey (eds), Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1991 (230 pp). (ISBN 0-8018-4160-7). Price £30.

This collection of authors will be familiar to those working in the field of refugee children's services in the United States. The mental health issues discussed do not stray far from that focus. While not written for use in other countries, it still provides a body of relevant information regarding children, mental health and refugees that could be useful in emergency settings. The title suggests a purely theoretical approach, but the book itself is divided into three fairly practical and applicable sections on *Theoretical Overview*, *Research Studies* and *Services and Treatment Issues*. The most informative comes at the beginning of the book with a thoughtful and well written overview of mental health issues for refugee children by the editors, Jean Athey and Frederick Ahearn.

The *Theoretical Overview* starts with reference to the early Freud and Burlingham studies of children in 1943, under the heading of "Stress and Coping", then moves on to the "Refugee Family and Child Development" and then the "Larger Community and the Refugee Child". Within these three areas such topics as trauma, loss, deprivation, coping, culture and social relations are touched on. Following the review, John Berry's theory of acculturation is presented; while it is generally applied to the integration of refugee families into host countries, the basic premise of how minority groups are integrated and/or isolated from the mainstream culture, is certainly applicable where refugees are seeking asylum, even temporarily, within a larger, host country. Third in this presentation of theoretical approaches is a timely discussion of child abuse and maltreatment definitions within a cultural context and a view to cross-cultural examination of such events.

As stated in the chapters on *Research Studies*, the amount of research available on the emotional and social adjustment of refugee children is quite limited. This section focuses on three different countries, the first of which examines the many variables influencing adaptation of Indo-Chinese adults and their adolescent children. These variables are then assessed for their effects on psychological distress. This is followed by a study of Cambodian children, documented as having experienced massive trauma and the resulting effects over time. The third study looks at the correlation between levels of exposure to violence prior to arrival in a new country and how present stress adds to the difficulties of Central American

children. Subsequent chapters on stress, trauma and adaptation are useful in the repetition of recognisable behaviours of children within different cultural settings.

The final section concerning *Service and Treatment* is understandably focused on provision of services within the United States. However so little has been written to date on mental health services for refugee children that the chapters presented will be of interest to anyone working with refugee mental health. Joseph Westermeyer's chapter on psychopathology among refugee children is a good example of identifying emotional problems within a cultural context, emphasising the need to always work within a cultural framework. The case examples illustrate this point, and he concludes with an interesting presentation of a model treatment programme, again pointing out that "therapeutic modalities are not uniquely culture-bound". Finally the brief presentation on pharmacotherapy and adaptations of therapy for different cultures stimulates important questions concerning such methods, especially within an emergency setting.

The information of service delivery in "Recovery and Rebuilding" is difficult to translate from resettlement to emergency settings but it includes interesting points for service providers to consider in their overall approach to children, families and linkage within a community. The book closes with a reminder of the importance of continuing efforts to research, document and prepare information on the crucial role the community and family play in children's survival under extreme trauma and stress.

*"Survivors are the bridge between the past and the future. Their experiences have given them a view of life to be shared in order to spur personal and social change. They are the voices that challenge complacency and the denial of reality as they know it" (Families After Trauma, Moffat and Moffat, 1984).*

Reviewed by Jan Williamson, International Consultant for Refugee Children's Programmes

**There are No Children Here - The Story of Two Boys Growing Up in the Other America**, Alex Kotlowitz, Anchor Books, Doubleday, New York, 1991 (323pp). (ISBN 0-385-26552-5). Price US \$12.

One might question the relevance of a book written in the United States to the developing nations of Africa. Yet the appalling reality of poverty and violence in US inner-city public housing projects portrayed by Alex Kotlowitz, a writer for the **Wall Street Journal**, is far closer to life in the impoverished, civil war-torn areas of some developing countries than most Americans would imagine or admit.