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Antisocial Behaviour by Young People

By Michael Rutter, Henri Giller & Ann Hagell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1998. 478 pp. £13.95 (US\$21.95) (pb). ISBN 0-521-64608-1. £37.50 (US\$57.95) (hb). ISBN 0-521-64157-8

Official statistics show that crime rates have shown a considerable rise over the last half of the 20th century, with only a few

national exceptions such as Japan. In the UK, notifiable offences per 100 000 members of the population quadrupled between the early 1950s and the late 1970s and then doubled again by the early 1990s. Time indeed to review the literature.

This book comes as the result of a research project, funded by the Department of Health, carried out between 1995 and 1998 and is a major international review of the research evidence on antisocial behaviour. Michael Rutter and Henri Giller were responsible for a similar review 15 years previously (1983). This review uses a multi-disciplinary approach bringing together clinical, social and criminological perspectives. There has since been a great increase in research findings, changing approaches to theory, as well as a changing pattern of questions deriving from policy and practice.

The focus of the book is on acts that involve breaking the law and which may, or may not, result in prosecution, as well as on the individuals who engage in such behaviour. The breadth of antisocial behaviour, so defined, operates as a dimensional feature that most people show to a greater or lesser degree. Most attention has been paid to the age period 10–19 years. Having considered conceptual and methodological issues the book focuses on three main aspects of antisocial behaviour: what it is like in descriptive and historical terms, what causes it, and whether interventions or preventive strategies can be helpful in ameliorating it.

It is clear that the understanding of antisocial behaviour has developed considerably since the last review, especially as the result of large scale, prospective longitudinal studies, as well as because of the quality and amount of official statistics, and meta-analyses of evaluations of prevention and intervention programmes. Results have appeared in a cumulative, rather than a startling, fashion, however.

Each chapter has a useful conclusion and a summary of the main points made, although these are no substitute for reading the chapters in full. I found the reviews on gender differences, ethnic variations, and prevention and intervention particularly interesting and areas where clearly more research is needed.

This book provides an excellent, critical review of antisocial behaviour written with clarity of style. It is a most important contribution to our current state of knowledge and essential reading for anyone interested or involved in the field. Both as a source to be read in depth and for reference it can be highly recommended for both departmental libraries and personal book shelves.

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