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## Troubled Youth, Troubled Families

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**Troubled Youth, Troubled Families**, by James Garbarino, Cynthia J. Schellenbach, Janet Sabes and Associates. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1986. 356 pp. cloth

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In *Troubled Youth, Troubled Families* the authors demonstrate that adolescents are over-represented among those victimized by coercive intimate relationships. They are less visible victims than the very young and the very old because they are physically and intellectually better able to defend themselves, hence more likely to be mislabeled as the aggressor. Many of society's "delinquents" and "runaways" are better understood as reacting to the violence or neglect of others, usually parents or step parents, rather than as initiating these behavior, *de novo*.

*Troubled Youth, Troubled Families* is built around a study of 62 families, some troubled and some not. It assumes that the problems of the young are generated within family contexts and that it may be possible to identify families at high risk for developing patterns of abuse. If high risk can be predicted, then interventions can be designed to prevent abuse.

The authors make a promising start on accomplishing their task. They delineate the nature of abuse and its context very well. The reviews of the abuse literature which permeate the volume are impressive in scope and depth and they alone make the book worth reading.

Unfortunately, the research itself does not deliver what it promises. It uses structured interviews, questionnaires and some quasi-projective devices to gather considerable material about the families, and then analyzes the material using cross-tabs and regression analyses. As a correlational study building on a small data base, however, there are limits to the amount of significance which can be generated. Moreover, while some of the research instruments used have proven track records, the instruments which have been designed specifically for this study have only their face validity to recommend them.

The book itself is also unevenly written. Because it has so many authors (there are 10 credited "associates"), it lacks a sharp focus and consistent style. Therefore, at some moments it is pithy, and even literary, while at other moments, it is confused and clumsy.

Nevertheless, the topics covered are provocative and important. Among these are the relationship between abuse and delinquency, an overview of the runaway problem, a review of social competence in adolescence, the effect of socioeconomic stress on family functioning, and the impact of stepfamilies on children. What is said about these issues is not particularly startling, but it does seem to be substantially true.

We learn, for instance, that remarriage and large families increase the risk

of abuse. High risk families seem to be "cohesively enmeshed" and the parents heading them apparently provide less support and more punishment for their children. These families also tend to be more conflictual and to have undergone more life changes than non-abusing families. They do not, however, show defects in cognitive functioning.

The authors note the contributions of parental risk factors, but do not make the mistake of assuming that teenage children make no contributions to their own situation. An adolescent's own social competence affects how he/she will respond to parental pressures and whether these responses will invite an excessive parental rejoinder. Not surprisingly, incompetent teenagers seem to be more given to problem behaviors.

Another point which deserves notice is that stepfamilies seem to be more at risk for abuse than families that have not been reconstituted. Given the current prevalence of divorce and the tendency of some behavioral scientists to minimize its destructive aspects, the present study provides a useful corrective. It draws attention to the fact that new families which emerge from combining the fragments of former families are subject to special stresses. Many new roles must be constructed to supplant the old ones which may not have been completely relinquished. The resocialization process may be painful and confusing. Reaction to this pain and confusion may only make matters worse.

The clinical sociologist who comes to this book will find it studded with familiar conceptual trappings. Its authors are at home discussing "systems," "roles," "definitions of situations," "the looking glass self," "SES," "power," and other sociological variables. They are also familiar with G. H. Mead, W. I. Thomas, and C. H. Cooley. A family's definition of its situation is given a prominent place in explaining why some families slip into abuse. Therefore the reason why some families with poor economic resources respond abusively while others do not is explained in terms of perceived role satisfaction. Apparently parents who do not define their role resources as inadequate do not find their frustrations building to uncontrollable levels.

Much of what *Troubled Youth, Troubled Families* is about is how social contexts, especially families, affect individual fates. It emphasizes that patterns of abuse can only be understood by examining individual, family, community, and cultural factors. For some strange reason, however, this is described as an "ecological" rather than a "sociological" approach. One can only suppose that this is a way of avoiding a tilt toward the social as opposed to the psychological aspects of human behavior. It may be that one is seeing latent "sociology-phobia." If so, how sad.

Finally, we must consider the relevance of the work to sociological practice. Despite its avowed goal of saying something applicable to practice, the book has only one chapter devoted to intervention strategies. While this is workmanlike and comprehensive, it essentially trots out the "usual list of sus-

pects," that is, the standard methods currently used in the treatment and prevention of family and individual problems. It suggests therapeutic and educational techniques, which probably do have value, but which are not new and which are in no way derived from the research at the heart of the book.

**Social Support and Health: An Annotated Bibliography**, John G. Bruhn, Billy U. Philips, Paula L. Levine, and Carlos F. Mendes de Leon, New York and London, Garland Publishing Co, 1987, 504 pps. \$64.00

An Appreciation by David J. Kallen

The concept of social support has been receiving increasing attention in the social science and medical literature since the early 1970s. This volume, edited by an Associate Editor of this Journal and his colleagues brings together in one place an annotated bibliography of over 1200 publications in social support which appeared in the literature between the early 1970s and 1986.

The book is organized into seven main sections: 1) Social support theories, 2) Social networks, 3) Social support, physical health and illness, and rehabilitation, 4) Social support, mental health and mental illness, 5) Social support and life cycle issues, 6) Social and cultural factors and social support, and 7) Social support strategies and applications. Each area is further subdivided by topics (i.e. specific disease categories in section 3). There is an author index and a topic index.

The book has the strengths and weaknesses of an annotated bibliography. There is no clear theoretical orientation; rather the selection seems to be relatively comprehensive and eclectic. Each selection includes a brief statement of the audience most likely to be interested in the particular publication. The index is comprehensive enough to be helpful in looking for fairly specific topics (i.e. elderly service programs, work environment). At the same time, the researcher or practitioner interested in general topics will need to look carefully through a number of pages in order to make sure that all relevant articles are found.

This is a useful book for practitioners and researchers concerned with issues of social support. Having these citations in one volume will save hours of library searching, or of searching of electronic data bases. The summaries and interpretations are useful guides for which articles might be obtained and read and which are not relevant to the interests of the particular reader of the book. Bruhn and his colleagues have provided a real service in bringing these materials together.