

Innovative Strategies for Promoting Health and Mental Health Across the Life Span

David S. Glenwick & Leonard A. Jason. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company (www.springerpub.com). 2002, 376 pp., \$47.95 (hardcover).

This ambitious book is composed of 15 chapters organized into four broad sections titled Preventive Science, Problems of Parenting and Youth, Problems in Adulthood, and Community and Societal Issues. Each chapter is also divided into four sections: the Importance of the Issue, A Critical Review of the Current Research, A Case Example, and Future Directions for Preventive Programs.

Implementing preventive interventions is particularly important at the primary level before a medical or environmental problem becomes chronic and extremely resistant to treatment. However, most societal problems such as drug and alcohol abuse, unprotected sex, HIV-AIDS, poverty and racism are well entrenched and call for intervention at the more advanced secondary or tertiary level where achieving success is difficult at best.

Fortunately, the studies and case examples presented in this text provide numerous examples of successful interventions at the secondary or tertiary level such as changing laws and/or enhancing enforcement of laws already on the books. For example, raising taxes on alcohol use, increasing the legal age for drinking and decreasing the blood alcohol level for a driving while intoxicated offense have decreased alcohol-related driving fatalities. Simply enhancing enforcement of the law already on the books—such as prohibiting minors from purchasing cigarettes—has decreased teenage smoking. The text shows how the introduction of relatively small innovations such as these can have rather large payoffs. Other successful health-related innovations include disseminating information on how one becomes infected with HIV-AIDS and supplying safe needles to drug users.

The text also explores rather novel areas generally considered out-of-bounds for community preventive programs. For example, the text offers a chapter on preventing marital discord. Certainly, there is a need for marital programs for those who want it. Getting married is a risky proposition today with more than half of the current marriages eventually ending in divorce – often the children, the divorcing couple, and society in general are painfully buffeted about in its wake. Marital therapy can be helpful, but unfortunately, most couples enter counseling too late, often enduring an average 6 years of marital distress and conflict before seeking help. Peter Fraenkel and Howard J. Markham, the authors of this chapter, cite a program that attempts to work with couples before they get into trouble in their marriage. It teaches couples how to identify their destructively communication patterns, how to constructively express complaints and how to recognize hidden issues such as control, commitment, trust, or different ethical and religious values. The results of this program are favorable. Intervention couples as compared to the control group were more likely to stay together and showed higher marital satisfaction one and half years after participating in the study.

Perhaps the boldest and most comprehensive intervention program is aimed at healing our broken inner-city communities that have been devastated by poverty, divorce, teenage pregnancy, drugs, violent crime and the impediments of blatant and institutional racism. Obviously, attacking the problems in inner cities is a huge undertaking. Multidimensional intervention models are necessary. Maury Nation, Abraham Wandersman and Douglas D. Perkins in their chapter in this text provide a model that tackles the economic problems, physical deterioration and blight, social incivilities, disrupted social networks and political weaknesses associated with many inner-city communities. The authors suggest that four factors need to be

emphasized in a large-scale model: comprehensiveness, empowerment, identification and utilization of assets and sustainability. No doubt, the cost and logistics of these comprehensive community-based intervention programs tend to frighten timid politicians and funding agencies that want concrete results. Perhaps, it is ironic that America spends billions waging war to bring democracy and to rebuild the infrastructure of Iraq, while politicians such as Governor Pataki of New York vetoes such relatively inexpensive preventive programs such as The Achiever that serves as a vehicle for youngsters in the inner city of Buffalo to escape their shackles of poverty and racism. This is not a cost saving measure. The savings of improving our urban ghettos is immeasurable. Certainly, politicians and directors of funding agencies need to spend some of their time, energy and money revitalizing America's urban communities to break the ongoing insidious and dehumanizing cycle of poverty, illiteracy, violence, divorce, incarceration, chronic illness and addiction. Where are their priorities?

Overall, I found this book to be clear, well written and instructive. I strongly recommend this book to the layperson and researcher alike. I hope that this optimistic book can serve as a stimulus not only to increase funding substantially for but also to stimulate researchers to study the effects of preventive programming.

Robert J. Maiden, Ph.D.
Alfred University
Alfred, New York