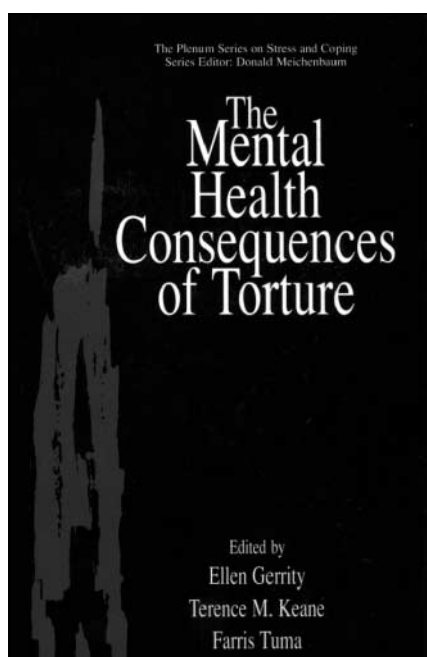


Book reviews

EDITED BY SIDNEY CROWN and ALAN LEE

The Mental Health Consequences of Torture

Edited by Ellen Gerrity, Terence M. Keane & Farris Tuma. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum. 2001. 375 pp. \$49.50 (hb). ISBN 0 306 46422 5



This multi-author volume arises from a report by the Working Group of the US National Institute of Mental Health on the mental health consequences of torture. The establishment of the Working Group was stimulated by representatives of South Africa who attended a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency research conference on the survivors of torture in April 1997.

One of the psychological responses to torture is, of course, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and a number of the authors, as well as Terence Keane, will be recognised as experts in this field. Unfortunately, a consequence of this is that a number of chapters appear to have no particular connection with torture but could be included in a general book on PTSD. For example, chapters on psychosocial models and neurobiological models will be very familiar to those knowledgeable about PTSD. However, if one knew

little about the topic, these chapters in themselves would be insufficient as a general introduction.

I felt that the book failed to provide a coherent account of what is unique about torture in comparison, say, with domestic assault or rape.

There are some chapters of interest, in particular the one written from the perspective of survivors by Sister Dianna Ortiz, which contains a number of harrowing quotations, which put the topic in perspective. There is too much repetition in the introductory sections of many of the chapters. Others, for example on refugees and asylum-seekers, are brief and somewhat superficial. All are, however, generously referenced and this is of value.

I fear that the result is not untypical of a multi-author volume produced via a working party and that it will not add greatly to the treatment and care of survivors of torture.

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Use of Drugs in Psychiatry (5th edn)

By John Cookson, David Taylor & Cornelius Katona. London: Gaskell. 2002. 416 pp. £20.00 (pb). ISBN 1 901242 29 3

Those of us who have 'grown up' with earlier editions of this book, originally authored by Brian Barraclough, will welcome its 5th edition. The format is still small enough to fit into a pocket, but at over 400 pages of higher quality paper the limits of portability have almost been reached. Staggered tabs printed over the outer edge of the pages divide the book into three sections.

The first section covers general topics such as history, classification of drugs, methods of evaluation, pharmacokinetics

and dynamics, principles of prescribing, cost and issues of consent. This last identifies the book as essentially English. A short summary of consent to treatment in other English-speaking countries such as the USA, Australia or even Scotland would not have come amiss, both to make the book travel better and to enlighten the English reader about principles of ethical and legal issues.

The second part covers the whole of psychiatry, including aetiology, diagnosis, general management and drug treatment. Some useful tables give risk factors for violence and the Positive and Negative Syndrome Scale (PANSS) items. Trial results are summarised consistently, using number needed to treat as a clinically intuitive effect size.

The final section gives a systematic review of psychotropic drug classes. Although generally the advice given is sound, there are some idiosyncratic opinions: for example, 'In general the risks of continuing these drugs [chlorpromazine, etc.] during pregnancy will outweigh the risk (to the mother and the future child) of untreated psychotic illness' (p. 300). There is an exaggerated emphasis on the separation of atypical antipsychotics from classic antipsychotics. Their chapters are pointedly separated by one on anticholinergic medication. I had always assumed that the

