

Working with abused children

Book review

Hobbs, C J, Hanks, G I & Wynne, J M (1993) **Child abuse and neglect: A clinician's handbook**. Edinburgh: Longman.

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This book is a practical and down-to-earth introduction to the major forms of abuse and neglect which fall under the broad umbrella of child maltreatment. Issues relating to the clinical presentation, differential diagnosis, and clinical management of child abuse and neglect are dealt with in a systematic, although somewhat cursory, fashion with separate chapters being given over to each of the major abuse categories.

Although the text constitutes a useful *introduction* to the field, the authors fall somewhat short of achieving their stated objective: that is, of providing practitioners with a detailed working manual for the detection and management of child abuse cases. The main reason for this shortcoming is that the authors fall into the trap - not uncommon in the field - of attempting to condense too much information into too small a space. As a result: (a) complex processes, such as for example the diagnostic process in child sexual abuse, are reduced to simple checklists of procedures; (b) important background and contextual factors (for example, the social context of maltreatment, ethical and theoretical concerns) are either ignored or given only cursory attention; and (c) a crucial ideographic perspective is sacrificed in favour of the vagaries of nomothetic description.

In this context, the text is best viewed as a useful "starter-kit" for those who would like to familiarise themselves with diagnostic and management issues in child maltreatment. The serious reader or concerned practitioner will, I have little doubt, be less than satisfied with this introduction and will be required to supplement their reading by referring to more detailed and specialised texts on the topic.