

addressed and twelve different treatment options presented. There is also discussion of investigational strategies for the treatment of rapid cycling, mixed episodes and atypical bipolar mood disorder, focusing on study design and offering suggestions for study methodology for this challenging condition.

The book is an easy and comprehensive read. Providing insight into present knowledge of the diverse manifestations along the full spectrum of bipolar disorder, it gives an overview of gaps in knowledge remaining to be studied. The book's strength is that it not only determines issues that are weakly presented in the research arena but it also looks at methodological and study design issues that can help to improve future research. The weakness is that when addressing effectiveness of specific pharmacotherapeutic possibilities it does not always fully address the issue of adverse events. This would include those capable of resulting in patient- or physician-initiated discontinuation of treatment, problems that could arise from using specific drug combinations and the genetic differences that may be important in this field. This is an interesting book worthwhile for both clinicians and researchers in the field of bipolar disorders.

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### Alcohol, Gender and Drinking Problems: Perspectives from Low and Middle Income Countries

Edited by Isidore S. Obot & Robin Room.  
World Health Organization. 2005. 235pp.  
US\$45.00 (pb). ISBN 9241593504

Alcohol consumption is enmeshed in social and cultural norms and problems relating to drinking can not be considered in isolation from these. Because the place of gender within social and cultural interactions is unique and has important ramifications for the behaviour and habits of men and women, this book addresses a topic of central significance to the consideration of how alcohol consumption may affect health, defined here in the broadest sense.

The book presents the reports of the project, 'Gender, Alcohol and Culture: an

International Study' (GENACIS), conducted in Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, India, Mexico, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Uganda. The first of its ten chapters provides an educative discussion of why it is important to examine gender differences in the use of alcohol. Chapters two through nine are reports of the project from the participating sites. Chapter ten attempts an integration of the main findings of the project. It shows that, when it comes to the use of alcohol, grouping of countries on the basis of development or region may be rather simplistic as the differences within these groupings are often large and complex.

Epidemiological evidence suggests that differences between males and females in regard to their use of alcohol are narrowing, with more recent birth cohorts showing closer similarities than earlier ones. Such narrowing of gender differences is probably more pronounced in low- and middle-income countries, especially those of Africa and Asia, where traditional restrictions on female drinking are beginning to wane as a result of various social changes, not least those related to urbanisation and globalisation. Anyone wishing to examine how social changes influence alcohol consumption will benefit from an understanding of the trend in gender patterning of drinking provided this book.

The book is enriched by the broad cultural contexts in which the studies were conducted. However, it has to be read within the constraints of the methodology of GENACIS. The focus of the surveys was

on documenting gender differences in drinking patterns in the various study sites. Even though several of those sites used epidemiological approaches to sample respondents, and their results can be considered as representative of the regions where the studies were conducted, readers need to be aware that the data presented are not national profiles of drinking behaviour and are certainly not meant to highlight cross-national comparisons of alcohol use. What the book provides is a rich source of information about the dynamics of alcohol use in which the gender of those who drink and those who do not offers an opportunity for us to understand the social influences shaping trends in alcohol consumption. That information should interest policy makers across the globe.

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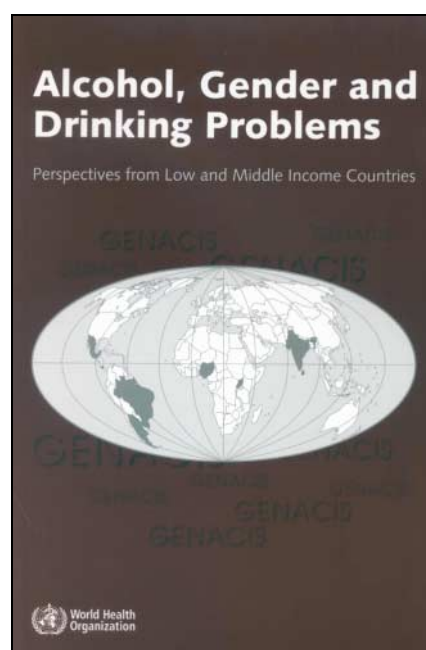
### The science of well-being

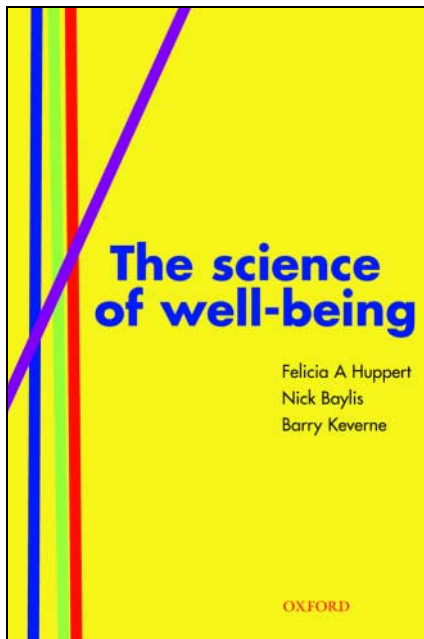
Edited by Felicia Huppert, Nick Bayliss & Barry Keverne. Oxford University Press. 2005. 546pp. £80.00 (hb); £35.00 (pb). ISBN 0198567510 (hb); 0198567519 (pb)

This timely book coincides with initiatives (National Institute for Mental Health in England, 2005) for mental well-being at individual, neighbourhood and societal levels.

Argyle (1992) pioneered UK research on 'happiness' and health, developing the Oxford Happiness Inventory. Influential commissioners scorned positive outcome measures for funding psychiatric services, claiming 'It's not our job to make people happy'. Cronin de Chavez *et al* (2005) reviewed weaknesses in past research: single disciplines working in isolation cannot capture the multi-faceted nature of wellness. A trans-disciplinary meeting on the sciences of well-being took place in 2003 at the Royal Society. Unforgettable talks delivered there by Americans Fredrickson, Seligman and Putnam can be found among the 20 chapters of this new book.

*The Science of Well-Being* overlaps, but only in part, the transactions of that seminal event (Royal Society, 2004). Since 2003, interest in wellness has grown. Kahnemann contributes an excellent





chapter on international, cultural perspectives ('Living, and thinking about it'). American and British authors dominate this book, but examples from low- and middle-income nations are included in Delle Fave and Massimini's chapter 'The relevance of subjective well-being to social policies'. Their insight into well-being for people with disabilities, related to the World Health Organization's *International Classification of Functioning*, is illuminating. Another chapter with international dimensions, Galtung's 'Meeting basic needs', includes diverse theories (from Bhuddist *panetics* to Cuban *bienes fundamentales*) but is so poorly written the impact is diluted. Uneven literary quality is the Achilles' heel of multi-author books. The most disappointing chapter ('Relationship with reality and its role in the well-being of young adults') is written in some sort of short-notes style. However, many chapters are eminently readable, bringing fresh material on brain evolution, physical activity, nutrition, work and well-being. Burns's beautiful chapter 'Naturally happy, naturally healthy' illustrates the significance of connecting with nature. NHS Health Scotland could benefit from Huppert's chapter 'Positive mental health in individuals and populations'.

Overall this book offers a rich variety of perspectives from synaptic to spiritual. Without a 'science' of well-being, opinion-makers will continue to make tragic errors about patients' wellness, such as 'health promotion makes people ill' (Fitzpatrick,

2006). The editors of this trail-blazing book make no attempt to 'integrate' all the disciplines represented. Perhaps someday such an integrated science will become a pillar of psychiatric training?

**Argyle, M. (1992)** *The Social Psychology of Everyday Life*. Routledge.

**Cronin de Chavez, A., Backett-Milburn, K., Parry, O., et al (2005)** Understanding and researching wellbeing: its usage in different disciplines and potential for health research and health promotion. *Health Education Journal*, **64**, 70–87.

**Fitzpatrick, M. (2006)** How health promotion makes people ill. *British Journal of General Practice*, **56**, 231.

**National Institute for Mental Health in England (2005)** *Making it Possible: Improving Mental Health and Well-Being in England*. NIMHE.

**Royal Society (2004)** The science of well-being: integrating neurobiology, psychology and social science. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, **359**, 1331–1451.

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### Social Capital and Mental Health

Edited by Kwame McKenzie & Trudy Harpham. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 2006. 176pp. £25.00 (pb). ISBN 1843103559

Social capital, embraced by New Labour and the World Bank, is currently the intellectual equivalent of Marmite, loved and loathed in equal measure. Cause of, and solution to, all of life's problems – or Emperor's new clothes? Like most agnostics, the editors of this book are not entirely sure but hedge their bets, just in case. Arguments for and against are marshalled in the best British tradition of fair play. On the one hand, social capital is the 'missing link' of social epidemiology, the glue required for effective societal functioning; on the other, it is poorly theorised, inadequately defined and unreliably measured. Up until now an industry in social capital research has been driven, and sometimes undermined, by the intuitive appeal and conceptual elasticity of the term itself. While this makes for great sound bites, the rhetoric is rarely matched by high-quality evidence. And when the findings do

not fit, the theory is changed instead. If you cannot explain something by too little social capital then maybe the problem lies in too much of the wrong kind?

This neat, readable little book confronts these inconvenient truths head on, and makes an excellent starting point for sceptics, too. The editors have sandwiched reports from five innovative studies in between balanced reviews of current theory and practice. Even if there is a hint that the best bits of cutting-edge research have been saved for peer-reviewed publication, these primary research narratives make compelling reading. Where else would you find an evocative account of an idyllic summer's afternoon on a city farm in Camden (complete with blackberry picking) juxtaposed with a death-defying description of working with teenagers in urban Columbia, homicide capital of the world?

While unlikely to convert many heretics, this book does make clear what is needed if social capital research is ever to deliver on the promises of its evangelists. If nothing else, the concept has encouraged people to look afresh at social ills and has inspired genuine efforts to relieve suffering and hardship.

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