
Book Reviews . . .

The Family in Australia: Social, Demographic and Psychological Aspects; Second edition

Jerzy Krupinski and Alan Stoller (eds.)

Pergamon Press Australia 1978
312pp.

According to the editors the book has been completely revised since its first edition in 1974. However, if the mere updating of tables is excluded, only eight of the nineteen chapters have been revised. There is one new chapter (Balmer, on the rural family) and one chapter has been excluded (Young, on family services). Finlay has revised the chapter on 'The family and the law' in terms of the new Family Court; 'Families in poverty' (Harper) has been revised to incorporate the findings of the Poverty Inquiry; Hollingworth has revised the chapter on community services in terms of changing welfare ideologies; and the chapters by Krupinski and Krupinski and Yule add recent survey research on family relationships. Kelly's 'Sociological aspects of family life' incorporates much of the new literature (unfortunately often in footnotes), and also shows a change in interpretative framework. The editors have partly re-written the concluding chapter, mainly in terms of refuting Kelly's analysis. It is disappointing that so little recent sociological material, besides that produced by Krupinski and his co-workers, has found its way into the revised edition. The reason appears to be that the editors consider much of the recent work to be 'more or less provocative' (p.278) and not worthy of inclusion in a book concerned with 'hard' facts.

The main theme which emerges from the book is that the conjugal

family remains the fundamental institution in the 1970's as it always has been. The different articles are slotted into the main theme in one of two ways. Many describe the 'average' or 'model' family and show that most Australians marry, most children are conceived within marriage, and family relationships are mostly good. In addition, most families own their homes, are influenced by religious ideologies, and are in the process of creating a new ethic in which sexuality will be as free from guilt and enjoyable as cooking and football. Other articles discuss families with problems, e.g., ruralites, aged, immigrants, Aborigines and poor families. These families have special needs but can be helped to become 'average' families — or The Family in Australia. The possibility is not considered that those 'special' families may need support to establish alternative family structures rather than support to become 'average'. As a result, most of the suggested remedies focus on the husband in his role as provider, though Barwick does suggest that Aboriginal non-nuclear families are viable and should not be interfered with, and Harper proposes that all family types should be given income security in the form of child endowments, not male wages.

Kelly's article alone questions the social necessity and desirability of the nuclear family. She takes Krupinski to task for analysing the family without any mention of concepts like capitalism, power, dependence of women, sexuality, etc. The editors attempt to cope with this criticism by presenting her article as an exercise in the sociological imagination rather than being concerned with scientific validation; she is said to fall in the

trap of confusing facts and ideologies; she is labelled iconoclastic. This assessment is unfair since the article is well documented and by no means extremely radical. Secondly, the editors point out that the Royal Commission on Human Relationships is in agreement with them that the family is the most influential institution but fail to mention that the definition used by the Commission included not only nuclear families but also one-parent families, de facto marriages, extended families, and communes. These are alternatives which Kelly suggests are becoming equally viable as the nuclear family.

Two Income Families

The two income family receives scant attention. The editors see 'little justification for both parents to work when there are young children in the family' (p.281), and favour wages for housework rather than shared parental roles. They report that this latter alternative is not workable as evidenced by the Swedish experience — only ten fathers per year utilize the legal opportunity to swap roles with the mother. The source of this statistic is not reported (this is characteristic of several chapters). However, a recent Swedish government report states that 2% of fathers took leave from work to care for babies in the first year of the new law (1974) and 10% in the fourth year of operation (1977). When the editors propose that Australia needs a national family policy they do not mention policies such as parental leave or the provision of child care; their focus is on marriage guidance, family planning, male work training, income support schemes and home ownership.

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The editors accuse Kelly of being overtaken by the 'sociological imagination'; Kelly would be justified in making the counter-accusation of 'abstracted empiricism'. Some chapters drown the reader in tables. Balmer's article on housing takes the prize with eleven tables, the second place is taken by Krupinski. With the exceptions of Mol (on religion), Colliver (on socio-economic aspects) and Harper (on poverty), the figures are not interpreted and the reader is left pondering the relative merits of indices and survey findings. Krupinski tends to draw sweeping conclusions. For instance, he concludes that most families are happy and the fact that his data indicate a very substantial minority is not, does not merit elaboration. Some chapters, on the other hand, are disappointing in that little or no evidence is presented, e.g., those on the rural family (Balmer), sexual behaviour (Wood *et al.*), and immigrants (Banchevska).

The book has two aims: to be educational and practical. However, few people working or teaching in the field will find their understanding greatly increased and it is not appropriate as a text because the articles are of uneven quality. The general public will not find the book readable, even though the editors give the impression that it is written to help Australians in general understand family problems and help those families with problems to deal with them. I am amazed at the number of reprints (3) of the first edition and can only conclude that the book has sold so well because there is no other book with a similar title. The practicality of the book consists in proposing types of help for those families that 'make excessive demands on health and

welfare services' (p.4). These proposals are mainly concerned with improving the husband's employment situation through work training. Some contributors are aware that it is tricky to draw policy implications from data pertaining to individual families without also doing a structural analysis of, for instance the housing market, the economy and the labour force. Even so, most end up on an individualistic note, e.g., Banchevska proposes that immigrants be selected for 'strength and greater maturity' (p.194) and Finlay states that 'the problems affecting families today are mostly not legal ones' (p.124), without discussing how the law deals with child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, abortion, occupational equality, etc. The book contains many statements about how things 'should' be, but few directions about how to get there. Nonetheless it ends on a positive note — poverty will diminish, leisure will increase, working-class families will get more opportunities, the male-female relationship will not disappear, and Australia will avoid the calamities of over-population, pollution and technologies because of its relative isolation and willingness to learn from others' mistakes.

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The Changing Family — making way for tomorrow.

Eds. Jerald Savells and Lawrence Cross.

Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
1978. 474pp. No price.

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As the title indicates, this book is future oriented and attempts to grapple with current issues and trends and their possible implications for the future. Future oriented books have now become common as we begin to realise some of the implications of the technology we have created. This book is more substantial than most of its type inasmuch as forty one contributors have been brought together and the views expressed are divergent and sometimes conflicting. The variety of views and the number of subjects covered make the task of the reviewer extremely difficult. We shall begin by handing out the awards.

"The Changing Family" has a number of virtues. In the first place, it brings together in one volume articles previously published in sources some of which are not readily available in this country. Some of these articles have appeared in scholarly journals and some in more popular magazines.

In the second place, more than two thirds of the articles appeared in the last three years and this gives the book a very contemporary flavour.

A further advantage for the reader is that the book is divided into thirteen sections which encompass most of the topics in debate at the present time; for example alternative life styles, the