

Adolescent drug abusers

Christina Andersson: *The Children of Maria. Adolescent Substance Abusers, their Families and Education.* Acta Universitas Upsaliensis. Uppsala Studies in Education 46, Uppsala 1993, 136 p.

"The Children of Maria" is a doctoral dissertation about the clients at Maria ungdomsenhet (Maria adolescent unit) in Stockholm, a unit specialized in working with drug abusing adolescents. Most of the book consists, however, of a review on the research done in Sweden and abroad on how drug abuse among adolescents is related to variables such as the family, the school and the peer groups, and the interaction among these.

In the introductory bibliographical overview of the field, Christina Andersson chooses to categorize the findings made about the relations in the family and how these seem to affect drug abuse. The categories used are the following: emotional relations in the family, the control strategies imposed by the parents, possible forms of deviant behavior among the parents and the family structure. The relations between school and drug abuse are analyzed within the categories: problems in school, and drop out from school. The peer group influence, finally, is analyzed within the categories: friends using drugs, partner using drugs, and kind of friends chosen.

The overview of the literature is well organized according to the variables mentioned above, and therefore rather convenient for the reader. A review of this kind is useful when a brief outline of the field is needed. It can also be serviceable as a tool for researchers that are choosing topics to be studied. Christina Andersson shows in her thesis that she is also very capable of applying these experiences in her own empirical work. Although, the review part of the work has perhaps grown a

bit too extensive in relation to the rest of the text.

The starting point for the empirical part of the work is the clients at the Maria adolescent unit during 1988. As in the overview section, this part also concentrates on the relations between the clients on one hand and the family, the school and the friends or peer groups on the other. The frame of the research problem is thus well defined. As shown already in the review section, these are factors that in many respects affect the drug habits among adolescents. It is therefore challenging for the research to dive deeper into this area and to try to get the best possible data.

The kind of data Christina Andersson utilizes consists of the case histories made at the unit. These histories include the records therapists have kept on the adolescents, and it is these that the author is dependent on for available data. This is, in my opinion, a weakness in her work.

It is inevitable that records of this kind vary enormously in terms of the quality of the data, a fact that the author herself also recognizes. The staff with medical training are accustomed to making these kinds of case histories and therefore the medical information about the clients tends to dominate the record. When other types of information about the clients is needed, as in this case, it is questionable whether the histories reveal the scope and depth of information that is needed.

Without knowing exactly what kind of information the records at Maria adolescent unit contains, I would assume that the variation in this respect is great. When using data from case histories it is necessary that the research perspective is narrowed according to the limits prescribed by them. Even if much more work would have been required, I would assume that Andersson could have found more suitable data had she also gathered information that focused specifically on the questions of the thesis, for example by interviewing some of the clients. By combining data from interviews with records from the case

histories, it would have been possible to make a more thorough analysis on how the drug abuse patterns among the adolescents are affected by the family, the school and the peer groups.

In my experience the questions raised by Christina Andersson are important when you want to understand what kind of mechanisms create drug abuse among adolescents, and it would therefore have been good if she had had the courage to make some theoretical reflections on her findings. Her thesis is purely descriptive, and as a reader I would have appreciated a somewhat less neutral approach. It is, of course, satisfactory if you can show that your findings are in line with the results made by others, but it is not enough. But research should also offer new insights and raise new questions.

Astrid Skretting

Nordic alcohol policy: facts and polemics

Helge Kolstad (Ed.): *Nordic alcohol control policy. Description and assessment of alcohol political measures in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The Norwegian Temperance Alliance, Oslo 1993. 120 p.*

The book "Nordic Alcohol Control Policy" deals with a central topic in the Nordic societies and in the welfare politics. It was published in 1993 by the Norwegian Temperance Alliance in cooperation with the temperance movement, the alcohol monopolies, social policy authorities and alcohol researchers. The book deals with the similarities of the policies in the different Nordic countries. Therefore the title "Alcohol control policy in the Nordic countries" might have been more appropriate.