

BOOK REVIEWS

POPULATION AND MENTAL HEALTH

Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Meeting
World Federation for Mental Health
Amsterdam, August, 1963

HENRY P. DAVID, EDITOR

Berne, Switzerland, Hans Huber, Publishers, 1964, Swiss Francs 14.

The Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the World Federation are prefaced by the following statement by Henry P. David, their editor:

“In one of its rare public statements, the Executive Board of the World Federation for Mental Health declared in January, 1962, that among ‘the most important international problems of the 20th century is the very considerable acceleration of population growth . . . and the fact that some of the most marked increases are coinciding with the poorest natural resources.’ The Board noted the anxieties and tensions generated by rising expectations, and the mental health problems associated with both advocacy and condemnation of population control. It concluded that ‘the ways in which these questions are answered in the various societies of the world are of the greatest importance, both directly and indirectly, to the mental health of people all over the world.’

“According to United Nations statistics, the present world population of three billion is expected to double before the end of the century, with the steepest increases projected for those regions where social and cultural change is most accelerated. Aligned with these trends are related needs for effective mental health program

planning and preventive services within an increasingly urban industrial society. It was against this background and the growing focus on population problems by the United Nations that the World Federation accepted the invitation of the Dutch Federation for Mental Health to hold its 16th Annual Meeting in August 1963 in Amsterdam on the topic of *Population and Mental Health.*"

The title is misleading, in the sense that there is no systematization of demographic data that would give background and focus or lead to testable hypotheses concerning measurable relationships between population trends; changes in population composition, and socio-economic differentials in mortality, fertility and migration, on the one hand, and changes in the incidence and prevalence of mental disease, on the other. Most of the 19 plenary papers are diffuse and speculative and, with few exceptions, devoid of observational and statistical data, with either demographic or psychiatric content. Only two of the 19 contributors are, by definition of membership in the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, "demographers" (Professors Steigenga of Amsterdam and Mertens de Wilmars of Louvain), but they do little to clarify the research issues that might be involved. Steigenga begins with United Nations projections, (and some adaptation of statements from the "urban sociologist, Kingsley Davis") but with no indication of the assumptions involved or of specific source references. He concludes that "it is reasonable to expect an absorption by the larger cities of at least one-third of the total population increase in the second half of this century. In the year 2000 the urban population throughout the world *will be* five times as great as the urban population of 1950. . . . At the end of this century, the total urban population [presumably, the population in cities of 100,000 or more] *will be* at least equal to the total world population at the beginning of the century" (p. 68, italics mine).

Mertens de Wilmars' paper on "L'individu et la société dans la civilisation industrielle" is classified by the editor as one of the two dealing with "basic considerations," the other being by Querido, Professor of Social Medicine at Amsterdam. De Wilmars' paper

is speculative and meliorative in focus and includes a bibliography of 78 items, with frequent references to these items by number but without regard to content or relevance. The present reviewer could identify only four of these 78 as at all relevant from the population standpoint, namely, two by Sauvy, one by Malthus, and one UNESCO compilation of African materials, edited by Forde. The remaining 74 presumably have something to do with "anxieties and tensions," and range from the life of Sigmund Freud and S. De Beauvoir's "Le deuxième sexe" to histories of science and technology, to books on small groups and industrial psychology, to "la fonction de l'orgasme." Querido's paper begins and ends with an allegory concerning life among porcupines and is otherwise devoted primarily to a critique of Malthus.

Technical papers which were available to participants and delegates, are listed only by title (pp. 176-177), organized as follows:

- Demographic Themes
- Research on Therapeutic Processes
- Education and Delinquency
- Environment and Mental Health
- Industrialization and Mental Health
- Mental Action and Social Change
- Community Organization for Mental Health
- Attitude Studies
- Studies in Adaptation

Abstracts of most of them are available upon application to the authors. The three papers on Demographic Themes deal with: 1. "the mental hygiene of the people of Guadeloupe, Antilles Françaises," 2. "uses and limitations of demographic data for community planning of psychiatric outpatients clinics," and 3. "a proposal for obtaining uniform information on psychiatric patients in various cultures." The third of these is apparently not available even in an abstract. Of the four papers on Environment and Mental Health, two deal with geriatrics, one with "mental health on a new Housing Estate near London" and the fourth with "over-population consequences on the moral and mental health—birth control." Only

the two on geriatrics are available in abstracts. The one report on Industrialization and Mental Health is apparently available, in toto, from the organizer. In the other groupings, several reports on psychiatric aspects or the psychology of family planning and sterilization may have been relevant to the general topic of the conference, but in the listings, as given, there seems to be the same lack of focus and relevance that was all too obvious in the proceedings of the plenary session.

DOROTHY SWAINE THOMAS