

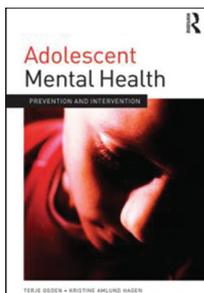
\*\*\*\*\*

## YOUTH AT RISK

### Adolescent Mental Health: Prevention and Intervention

Terje Ogden & Kristine Amlund Hagen

Routledge, 2013, PB, 224pp, £22.22  
978-0415689175



Adolescent mental health is emerging as an important discipline within many professional fields, not least within general practice and the launch of youth mental health as an RCGP clinical priority. Improving our understanding of why some young people end up experiencing poor mental health, abusing substances, and getting involved in behaviour which causes them and society misery is increasingly important as we recognise the value of early intervention in those aged 10–24 years.

This book, written by two psychologists, seeks to bring together a synthesis of current scientific findings on effective intervention and prevention strategies in an accessible and concise format. Although billed as appealing to an audience of students and practitioners it is largely geared to those working in academic environments wishing to revisit the accepted frameworks for looking at adolescent behaviour and for seeing at a glance the range of therapies and interventional approaches used in the recent past.

The opening chapters are useful in setting the scene with a review of the many changes occurring during adolescence and the importance of context: schools, families, peer relationships. The authors describe their motivation for writing the book as stemming from wanting to understand more about those teenagers who do not emerge from adolescence ready to be full participants in adult society. This is an important standpoint leading them to look at risk, and how programmes, including universal, targeted, and individual therapies, can address and modify risk with varying degrees of success.

There is much less about resilience and the emerging understanding of the

importance of 'connectedness' to support young people exposed to adversity in handling the multiple challenges in their lives and to thrive. Work by Resnick and colleagues in the US has demonstrated the importance of an 'asset-based approach', which looks at both risk and resilience.

The book covers the expected areas of 'externalising problem behaviours', 'internalising disorders' (anxiety and depression) and substance abuse, which of course can, and often do, coexist. There is a lengthy section on the strengths and weakness of evidence-based practices, which would be a useful resource for students new to the area but less appealing to clinicians who may read this book to learn more about what makes a difference in practice.

**Jane Roberts,**

RCGP Clinical Champion for Youth Mental Health and Chair, RCGP Adolescent Health Group.

**E-mail:** [jane.roberts@rcgp.org.uk](mailto:jane.roberts@rcgp.org.uk)

<http://chairrcgpahg.blogspot.com/> / @Jane\_0308

DOI: 10.3399/bjgp14X681949

\*\*\*\*\*

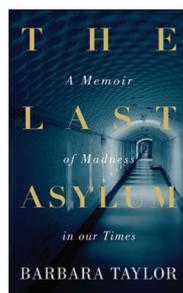
## STONE MOTHER

### The Last Asylum:

### A Memoir of Madness in our Times Barbara Taylor

Penguin, 2014

HB, 320pp, £18.99, 978-0241145098



On a recent Friday afternoon I had a desperate phone call from a local vicar. He had no idea what to do with a patient he'd found weeping inconsolably in his empty church. I knew her well. Her life had caved in recently when some devastating family secrets had broken dramatically at the worst possible time triggering a breakdown which neither I nor several contacts with the Crisis Team had done anything to help. All I could say to the bewildered priest was that she really needed asylum — in it's kindest sense. She needed to go away to a safe place.

Asylums generally have a grim reputation with both the public and professionals. In her book *The Last Asylum: A Memoir of Madness in our Times* Barbara Taylor, Professor of Humanities at Queen Mary University of London, writes powerfully of how asylum was crucial in her recovery from severe mental illness. She was a successful academic before having a severe breakdown in the 1980s resulting in several admissions to the Friern asylum in North London. I recognised her vivid description of life inside, as I had trained at a similar large hospital; St Bernards in West London.

She tells the story of her own descent into madness unflinchingly. Yet this is not a clichéd misery memoir, it is wonderfully written: it kept me engrossed and made me care about what was happening to her. Her analysis of mental health services flows naturally out of this narrative, giving it a much greater authority than any dry academic analysis on its own would. Care was far from ideal but it did at one level fulfil some fundamental needs:

*'The mental health system I entered in the 1980s was deeply flawed, but at least it recognised needs — for ongoing care, for asylum, for someone to rely on when self-reliance is no option.'*

But this was at the time the big asylums were being closed, mental health services were being radically reorganised, and care in the community was going to be the Brave New World. Would she have survived today, with crisis teams, care plans, and acute wards without a 'stone mother to hold me'? 'It's a tough call', she concludes.

The book stands alone as an enjoyable read and has a happy ending as she does find stability, love, and a new family. For a GP it is an eye-opening view of mental illness from the patient perspective. It also helped crystallise eloquently my jumbled thoughts and unease at the way current mental health services seem to focus on preventing admission at all costs: the last approach some of our most disturbed patients need.

**Emyr Gravell,**

GP, Llanelli

**E-mail:** [emyr.gravell@gmail.com](mailto:emyr.gravell@gmail.com)

DOI: 10.3399/bjgp14X681961