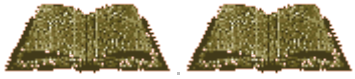
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Book Reviews: Technical Books Section



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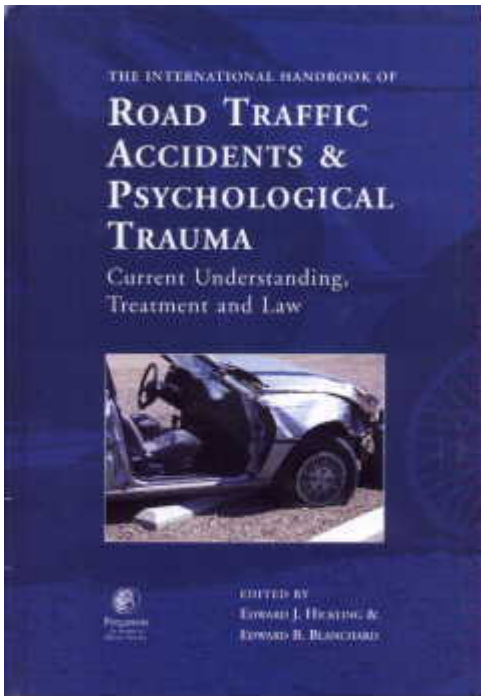
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A VERY ENLIGHTENING AND ENRICHING EXPERIENCE

The International Handbook Of Road Traffic Accidents And Psychological Trauma - Current Understanding, Treatment And Law, 1st Edition, *edited by* Edward J. Hickling & Edward B. Blanchard. Hardcover: ; Dimensions (in inches): 0.75 x 9.50 x 6.50.
Pergamon Press, An imprint of Elsevier Science Ltd, The Boulevard, Langford Lane, Kidlington, Oxford OX5 1GB, UK. Publication Date December 1, 1999. 448 pages, ISBN 0-08-042760-X. Price $110.00, Euro 110.00

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This book is a compilation of the articles that were presented at the conference '*road accidents and the mind: an in-depth study of the psychological symptoms after road accidents*' that was held in Bristol in 1998. In that conference people from various fields of life like physicians, psychologists, lawyers, jurists etc. had come and presented their views regarding road traffic accidents and their various psychological, legal, moral and social aspects. In other words this book presents their views in a printed form.

The editors start off the book by giving a brief overview of the various ways in which people react following road traffic accidents. This includes various names by which these disorders are known as. The long list of normal reactions to trauma that have been mentioned have come as a surprise. The common belief that road traffic accidents lead only to physical injuries has been disproved by this list. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder [PTSD] and Acute Stress Disorder [ASD] have been described very effectively and efficiently.

...The high point of the book, according to us is the chapter "Psychological Distress In Police Officers Attending Serious And Fatal Road Traffic Accidents"... Another important thing that has been mentioned in the book is the difference between malingering and exaggeration. This is more important in cases of psychological trauma in which the methods of finding truth are highly subjective and the stakes involved are very high. So every physician who is dealing with road traffic accidents should be able to find the difference between the two in order to do proper justice to the victims of these accidents...

In chapter 4, the authors have described about the various medical, social and legal consequences of road traffic accidents. The medical consequences have been described in great detail. But the problem lies with social consequences. The mere mention of the word along with a paragraph and a table are not sufficient enough description of such an important topic. The same problem lies with the legal consequences. They have also not been given due care. We know the editors probably have no choice in the material of the chapter as they have merely written what the authors had presented in the seminar. Still it is always better to supplement the information so that it is complete.

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The high point of the book, according to us is the chapter *Psychological Distress In Police Officers Attending Serious And Fatal Road Traffic Accidents*. Both in our practice and otherwise we have not encountered any person who has looked at the problems that the police officers and the paramedics have to face. They are usually the first ones to visit the scene of road traffic accident and so are the ones who generally witness it unchanged. The psychological trauma that they have to undergo because of this is usually immense but somehow this aspect of road traffic accidents has not been given the kind of importance that it demands. So its inclusion in the seminar as well as in the book is commendable. Another important thing that has been mentioned in the book is the difference between malingering and exaggeration. This is more important in cases of psychological trauma in which the methods of finding truth are highly subjective and the stakes involved are very high. So every physician who is dealing with road traffic accidents should be able to find the difference between the two in order to do proper justice to the victims of these accidents.

Section 2 of the book has been devoted to Post Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD). It has described the causes of PTSD, who are the people who develop these disorders and who are ultimately cured, the effects and consequences of these disorders. It has been found that PTSD are the most common psychological disorders following RTA. They are also the most long lasting disorders and some of the most difficult conditions to treat. Their understanding requires a great deal of medical and psychological knowledge. So their in-depth description goes a long way in helping people understand these disorders and their proper management. Mentioned separately, but something that could have been clubbed here, is the psychological treatment (section 4) of these disorders. An important aspect in this is a full chapter devoted to the management in children. That's because children react differently to these stressful conditions and so the way they should be handled is quite different from adults.

...It is always very difficult to review a book based on the proceedings of a conference if one has not attended the conference. Still we feel that the editors have done a really good job first of all of presenting the conference in the form of a book and secondly by including as much of the content of the conference as possible. We give the editors full credit for their effort and say that going through the book has been a very enlightening and enriching experience...

Section 3 has been devoted to legal issues of road traffic accidents. The legal issues are usually some of the most difficult issues to deal with for simple reason that legal language is very difficult to understand. Added to this are the grief and suffering of the accident. All this combine to lead to "litigation stresses" (chapter 17). These are the stresses that the victims have to undergo because of the various criminal and civil cases that run because of the accident. Very rarely does someone think about these problems of the victims and their inclusion makes the reader aware of their existence and importance. Also important is the compensation that has to be awarded in these cases. This aspect of RTA has been dealt with very efficiently in chapter 16. here the authors have described how the amount of damages are calculated and awarded and the difficulties that are faced both by the jury and the lawyers while dealing with this.

Every book that is based on the proceedings of a seminar, suffers with the advantages and disadvantages of such an endeavor and the present book is no exception. The biggest problem that is encountered in this kind of a book is that of repetition and incoherence. Although it is much less of an irritation in this book as compared to some other similar efforts that we have reviewed, it is

still present. This may be acceptable initially but after a while one starts feeling annoyed by this. We know it is an inevitable problem of a venture of this type and, frankly speaking, we ourselves do not have any solution to this problem, still we would say that something must be done to make the book a little more interesting.

"A picture can say what a thousand words can't" is an old saying. Since we didn't attend the conference, we are not aware how many, if any, photographs were shown in that. But it is our guess, based on our experience, that a lot of them must have been shown. If that is the case then some of these must have been included in the book. But since we are not aware of the proceedings of the conference, we can give the editors the benefit of doubt regarding this point.

It is always very difficult to review a book based on the proceedings of a conference if one has not attended the conference. Still we feel that the editors have done a really good job first of all of presenting the conference in the form of a book and secondly by including as much of the content of the conference as possible. We give the editors full credit for their effort and say that going through the book has been a very enlightening and enriching experience.

-Puneet Setia and Avneesh Gupta
Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology,
Maulana Azad Medical College,
New Delhi, India



Dr. Puneet Setia is working as a resident doctor in the department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology at Maulana Azad Medical College (MAMC), New Delhi. His research interests include Forensic Radiology, especially the use of radiology in demonstrating coronary narrowing at the post-mortem examination. He is associated with Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology as a writer and book reviewer. He can be contacted at puneetsetia@rediffmail.com



Dr. Avneesh Gupta is a Senior Resident doctor in the department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology at MAMC. His research interests include cranio-cerebral trauma. Dr. Gupta has written a very erudite thesis on cranio-cerebral trauma, which can be accessed by clicking here. He is associated with Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology as a writer and book reviewer. He can be contacted at avneeshgupta2000@yahoo.com

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