BOOK REVIEWS

Evaluation in Health Promotion: Principles and Perspectives.

Evaluation continues to present health promotion researchers, practitioners, and policy makers with many challenges—conceptual, theoretical, and practical. All organizations and individuals involved in health promotion are familiar with the pressure from inside and outside the field to demonstrate that health promotion “works”. Proving that health promotion is a “worthwhile” investment for government, non-government organizations, the community sector, and the private sector is a major external pressure on the field. Ensuring that practice is “evidence based”, of high quality, and effective is a powerful internal pressure.

In many ways, it is little wonder that evaluation continues to challenge us. As this book highlights, there are multiple definitions and no general theory of health promotion. The work addresses the complex array of factors that influence the health and wellbeing of individuals, communities and populations, and practitioners and researchers in the field draw from a variety of disciplines to plan, implement, and evaluate our work. These complexities have been compounded by a growing understanding that different sociocultural contexts approach health promotion in general, and evaluation in particular, in different ways. In recognition of this, the book is limited to evaluation work in western, industrialized societies. However, overall, the book reflects the view that methodological issues should follow, not lead, the design and implementation of health promotion and its evaluation. And there are, after all, many existing texts on research methods for health promotion evaluation.

The book is intended, principally, for experienced practitioners, researchers, and policy makers—for professionals who have grappled with many of these issues in the course of their work. It is not a “how to” guide—rather, it explores the current state of the science and art in relation to contemporary health promotion and its evaluation.

The chapters are relatively brief, providing an informed summary of the literature and evidence rather than an in-depth exploration of the topic. Nonetheless, the analysis and discussion are not superficial. Each of the chapters addresses a major debate in contemporary health promotion, illuminates the current state of the science and art in relation to contemporary health promotion and its evaluation.

The contributors have outlined conceptual, theoretical, and practical issues that must be addressed if we are to improve the quality and range of evaluation of health promotion initiatives to change settings, policies and systems. There are, of course, many remaining questions with regard to the practice of health promotion evaluation. Reading the book highlights the large gap between the technical capacity that is available to guide and undertake effective evaluation and the relatively limited application of this in practice. The book did not seek to address this gap, although the recommendations to policy makers essentially seek to bridge it. But much more will be needed if the ideas and challenges presented in the book are to be translated into action. The systematic, routine adoption of the concepts and methods explored in this book will be the next challenge.

In all, the book is highly recommended as a conceptual guide to contemporary health promotion evaluation.

M Wise
Executive Director, Australian Centre for Health Promotion, University of Sydney; marylwy@health.usyd.edu.au

Driving Lessons. Exploring systems that make traffic safer.

This book arose from the multidisciplinary “Mission Possible Traffic Safety Conference, Traffic Safety Summit ’98”. The aim of the conference was to challenge traditional thinking and roles in traffic safety and the book is intended to continue this process. That is, just another collection of submitted papers presented at a conference, but rather invited articles on relevant, creative, and non-traditional topics written specifically for the book and designed to continue the discussion and debate that started at the conference.

The 20 chapters are divided into three parts covering the personal, institutional, and technical aspects of driving. Each chapter is written by a different expert, most authors are Canadian and a couple are from the USA. Each chapter underwent editorial peer review, a variation on a health promotion intervention, and the evaluation of methods to ensure this a further challenge.

The introductory chapter is on cybernetics, a topic I am not familiar with. Nevertheless, the framework and application to traffic safety was clear and I found it useful. Chapters in the personal section put driving in a social context. Contributors wrote from professional backgrounds in mental and physical health, social, and cultural analysis. Each chapter covers a different aspect of cognitive and behavioural influence on driving.

Section two covers institutional systems, the law, the economy, the media, and education. Among the topics is the conflict of traffic safety and business economics, one of the several aspects of road safety that are not
usually included in academic journals. Voluntary organisations and their influence on the traffic related court system are also included.

In the third section, on technical aspects of driving, some interesting questions are asked. For example, if we know so much and if we have the technology to control some unsafe aspects of driving, why is driving not safer? The fact is that no-one drives perfectly all of the time, so that perhaps the aim is to cater for the imperfect driver, so that our mistakes are not necessarily fatal.

I enjoyed reading the articles and pondering the mix of culture, economics, politics, and social behaviour that is involved in driving. I found my thinking extended beyond the usual topics of road-user behaviour, medical outcomes, and road engineering. The thorough reference list was helpful, although the omission of an index was a disappointment.

Anyone with an interest in traffic safety should find the alternative ideas in this book interesting and stimulating.

C Adams
RACWA Research Fellow, Injury Research Centre, University of Western Australia;
cadams@dph.uwa.edu.au

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**CALENDAR**

**XXII Congress of the International Association for Suicide Prevention**
10–14 September 2003, Stockholm. Details: Congress Secretariat, tel +46 8 5465 15 00; fax +46 8 5465 15 99; email iasp2003@stocon.se.

**19th International Traffic Medicine Conference 2003**

**Canadian Injury Prevention Conference 2003**
23–25 November 2003, Ottawa. The meeting will build on the national conference held in 2000 and will focus on unintentional injury, violence, and suicide prevention. Organised jointly by Smartrisk, Safe Kids Canada and the Safe Communities Foundation, it aims to highlight the latest science and best practices in policy and programs; bridge the gap between research and practice by highlighting specific policy and practice recommendations stemming from Canadian research and targeted research needs identified through community practice; encourage networking and collaboration between different sectors to promote action and policy change; facilitate participation from stakeholders representing vulnerable populations; build momentum for sustained action from stakeholders at the municipal, regional, provincial, and national levels; and further the activities of the Canadian Injury Research Network and the Canadian Institutes for Health Research in building. Details: www.safekidscanada.com/CIPC/default.html.

**7th World Conference on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion**
6–9 June 2004, Vienna. The major objectives of the conference are strengthening violence and injury prevention as an aspect of national public health policy and programs; producing synergy of the combined efforts of various violence and injury prevention disciplines; exchanging the most recent experiences in research and practice; and facilitating participation of experts from low income countries. Details: www.safety2004.info.