



2010

*Children Families and Social Exclusion: New Approaches to Prevention.* Kate Morris, Marian Barnes, and Paul Mason. Reviewed by James Midgley.

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## Recommended Citation

Midgley, James (2010) "Children Families and Social Exclusion: New Approaches to Prevention. Kate Morris, Marian Barnes, and Paul Mason. Reviewed by James Midgley," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 37 : Iss. 2 , Article 16.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol37/iss2/16>

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homelessness.

Less strong is the organizational logic of the three volumes. At times, it feels as if there is redundant content between the volumes (such as the demographics and trends of homelessness) as well as within volumes, such as the discussion of criminalization of the homeless in Volume 3. With the three volume structure however, it would be difficult for each volume to be comprehensive without some duplication of content. On the other hand, given the very slender size of each volume, it seems quite feasible for this project to have been constructed as one larger volume with three subsections on faces of homelessness, causes of homelessness, and solutions to homelessness. However, these are very minor objections to what is certainly the most thorough, analytical, and honest discussion of one of the most perplexing social problems in America. This volume not only encapsulates the arguments of the previous thirty years, but deepens and extends them for the current complexity of the issue.

*John Q. Hodges, Western Carolina University*

Kate Morris, Marian Barnes and Paul Mason, *Children, Families and Social Exclusion: New Approaches to Prevention*. Bristol: Policy Press, 2009. \$36.95 papercover.

The importance of prevention has been emphasized in social work, criminal justice and social welfare for many decades but unfortunately, it has not been given the priority it deserves. Although everyone agrees that it is more important to prevent rather than respond to social problems, resources have traditionally been disproportionately allocated to remedial interventions. One problem is how to translate the ideal of prevention into concrete policies and programs that can be evaluated, reformulated and adopted to achieve prevention goals.

This book reports on a major prevention initiative in the field of child welfare which was introduced in Britain in the early years of this century by the Labour government in the wake of a series of child abuse cases which attracted a good deal of public attention. Although British child welfare policy

has long emphasized the need for preventive action, these cases revealed that the traditional child protection approach had failed to prevent children from being neglected abused and even killed by their caregivers, many of whom are family members. Recognizing that a more effective approach was needed, the government began to allocate resources to non-profit organizations operating at the local level that targeted specific groups of at-risk children. Four distinct groups were identified, including children with disabilities, black and minority ethnic children, the children of Gypsies and Travelers and refugee and asylum-seeking children. A special organization known as the Children's Fund was created to identify suitable community-based organizations and to provide resources for a variety of prevention projects targeted at these children. In addition to the work of the Children's Fund, the Labour government had previously introduced a national childcare program known as Sure Start which was modeled on Head Start in the United States. It also introduced a cash stakeholder grant for all newborn children which pays a small sum to establish a savings account.

Morris, Barnes and Mason provide a lengthy discussion of these developments. They examine child welfare from the perspective of social exclusion, which is a currently popular term in European social welfare circles, but which is similar in many ways to the more conventional concepts of poverty and deprivation. The authors review preventive strategies in child welfare, focusing particularly on the work of the Children's Fund and the various legislative instruments the government has used to promote its prevention agenda. The book also examines a variety of evaluations of the work of the Children's Fund, pointing out that although community-based prevention efforts face problems, much has been achieved.

In view of the paucity of literature on prevention in child welfare, this book will be welcomed by anyone working in the field today. There is currently widespread disillusionment among practitioners, politicians, academics and members the public about the effectiveness of the child welfare system in the United States. The British experience may not provide a ready-made solution, but the efforts of British colleagues to work closely with local, nonprofit organizations to implement

community-based prevention strategies deserves to be carefully considered when child welfare prevention policy is being formulated in the United States.

*James Midgley, University of California, Berkeley*

Lynn M. Nybell, Jeffrey J. Shook, and Janet L. Finn (Eds.), *Childhood, Youth and Social Work in Transformation: Implications for Policy and Practice*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. \$60.00 hardcover.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the world's most widely ratified human rights treaty, became the first legally binding international document to incorporate civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights into child welfare more than two decades ago. Although the United States has signed the convention, it continues to share the distinction with Somalia as being one of only two countries that have not yet ratified the document. Lynn Nybell, Jeffrey Shook, and Janet Finn contend that not only has there been a notable absence of domestic debate or discussion about the convention but, in their experience, most social workers in the United States have little or no familiarity with this treaty. Readers may find that having a general understanding of the Convention's history, and the resulting standards that were negotiated for a decade by an interdisciplinary group of international stakeholders, will assist them with accepting the fundamental premises of the text—that concepts of childhood and youth are socially and culturally constructed and that traditional developmental psychological notions of childhood are insufficient for understanding children's voice and agency.

The text is organized thematically into three parts with a shared set of underlying premises. Each of these premises challenges the social work profession's ideas about childhood that are grounded in developmental psychology literature. The first premise rejects the notion of biological universality and instead embraces nonlinear socially and culturally constructed discourses about youth and childhood. The editors challenge policymakers and those charged with policy implementation