



Kimberley Society

Book Note

Aboriginal Children, History and Health: Beyond social determinants edited by John Boulton. [Routledge](#), Oxford, UK, 2016, 238 pages, ISBN 978-1-138-95524-0 (hardback). Also available in paperback and eBook. Prices vary greatly. Some retailers offer attractive discounts.

There are fewer more pressing concerns in today's Australia than the health and wellbeing of future generations. In *Aboriginal Children, History and Health*, the focus is clearly on Indigenous young people, social, cultural and economic issues, and medical practice. A particular interest is remote and regional settings, especially the Kimberley, and contextual emphases are made plain at the outset. With co-authors such as anthropologist Gaynor Macdonald, historians Christine Choo and Rani Kerin, and endocrinologist and pediatrician Ze'ev Hochberg, pediatrician and editor John Boulton draws attention to a complex of matters currently faced by young people, their families, and communities and organizations that influence the why, when and how of Aboriginal health.

A key critique that runs through each author's chapter is the dominance of 'Western' health, embodying as it does evolutionary and historical models that tend to rely on ideological and epidemiological approaches. These regularly overlook the impact of the 'colonial frontier' on people's everyday lives and circumstances for example, the need to look beyond the limits of poor nutrition and overcrowding to their cause and effect, the adequacy or otherwise of service delivery, and community responses to these.

One of the book's strengths is the qualitative material it includes, such as Coolibah's Story, and the conceptualization of 'growth faltering' (Chapters 10 and 12) as a means to understand the difficulties that arise as childhood evolves. Of poignant and vital consideration is Chapter 11 where Hochberg and Boulton concentrate on how poor living conditions, health and inadequate nutrition are becoming increasingly accommodated by many Aboriginal people themselves, as well as the health professionals with whom they interact. It would have been helpful to see this significant matter expanded, for example, to show how health professionals might adopt alternative or lesser-known local practices to better explain the long-term impacts of nutritional (and emotional) stress to avoid it becoming a tolerated status.

Aboriginal Children, History and Health will be a helpful resource for those new to Indigenous health issues and/or interested in the Kimberley. While a book that contemplates Aboriginal life and health in the way that this one does could have benefited from a range of past, present and continuing Indigenous voices from the Kimberley and elsewhere, and inclusion of an enhanced language map readily available from a local organizations would have been a great improvement on the one showing at Plate 1, the references listed at the conclusion of each chapter reveal a solid overview of relevant literature.

A book worth its measure, at the same time it is an enduring tragedy that texts such as *Aboriginal Children, History and Health* continue to be researched and written. Like so many others, I yearn for the day when a book with the same title will carry a very different and more encouraging message, not only for Aboriginal young people, but also for the health professionals among whom they work.

Sandy Toussaint