

Book Reviews

Terrence Sullivan (ed), **Injury and the New World of Work**, UBC Press, Vancouver, 2000, 357 pp.

Reviewed by Michael Quinlan*

This book, while essentially a collection from Canadian researchers, should have appeal to a wide audience interested in occupational health and safety (OHS) or changes in the world of work and how these are affecting OHS. This book brings a number of very capable Canadian researchers together from a range of disciplines, and given the institutional and other similarities between Canada and Australia the contributions have obvious interest for an Australian audience. Further, for those like myself, interested in Canada this book is a boon.

However, the appeal of the book is far wider than this as it addresses some very important issues – issues now the subject of growing debate in industrialised countries. These issues include how are the shifts of employment away from manufacturing and primary production to the service sector affecting the overall incidence of injury and disease and how is the growth of precarious employment and management techniques like lean production impacting on prevention, compensation and rehabilitation? Other issues addressed are more long standing but equally important. These include the OHS experiences of women workers, the role of psychosocial factors (ala Karasek et al) in worker health, effects of firm level practices on injury incidence, the effect of joint health and safety committees, difficulties determining some occupational disorders, problems posed by soft tissue injuries and disability management.

Another major strength of this book is its strong focus on compensation and injury management. Despite its importance (and not simply as one of the most significant categories of social security insurance) workers' compensation and rehabilitation occupy a generally low profile in academic research and policy debate (except where the issue of cost-burdens on employers and government budgets come into play). This book achieves a

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rare and welcome balance here. While prevention is not neglected the aspects of compensation, injury management and rehabilitation are addressed in a careful and illuminating manner.

When reviewing an edited book it is often easy to identify several chapters that shine above the rest, or several with major flaws, and single them out for special treatment. This is not the case with this book. Most chapters are well crafted and make excellent use of empirical evidence to substantiate their argument. I gained a lot from Aleck Ostry's chapter shifting employment patterns and the incidence of injury in British Columbia. I also found value in Gunderson and Hyatt's chapter on the implications of workforce change; Kerr's chapter on psychosocial factors; Chung, Cole and Clarke's chapter on women, work and injury; Harry Shannon's chapter on firm level practices; O'Grady's chapter on health and safety committees and Frank and Maetzel's chapter on determining occupational disorders. However, this selection reflected very much my own interests and should not be interpreted as reflecting on the quality of the other chapters. I am sure other readers will make different choices.

In sum, this is a valuable collection. The editor, Terry Sullivan, has done an excellent job of bringing the material and contributors together. Trained as a sociologist before spending time within the Canadian government apparatus, Terry was until recently president of the Institute for Work and Health in Toronto. The Institute is a focal point for OHS research in English speaking Canada (with another especially powerful group of French-speaking OHS researchers based in Quebec, including Katherine Lippel, Karen Messing, Michel Vezima and Chantale Brisson). Well-edited collections deserve recognition. Too often in recent years it seems one encounters edited books that smack of being put together in a hurry, lacking in coherence and consistency in quality of contribution, and with all the other marks of poor editing. This book does not fit into this category. It has been professionally edited by a scholar with a good command of the subject and with a clear eye to providing the reader with a coherent final product. There is a good introductory chapter and subject index to aid the reader. The main sections of the book make sense and all have introductions explaining their content and role. Finally, the contributed chapters bear the marks of careful editing in the sense that the presentation is good and there are no glaring disparities in quality. Hence reader choice of which chapters to focus on can be solely based on the degree of interest with the issue they address rather than be also being influenced by having to avoid chapters below the mark in terms of quality. In almost all cases I was impressed by the wide literature used by the authors although I would have preferred a single

bibliography as opposed to placing the references at the end of each chapter. I know this is the normal practice for many edited books but I think a single list of references at the end of the book is more user-friendly.

Notwithstanding the last very minor criticism, this is a book well-worth having. The book should be compulsory reading for those involved in a number of current policy debates, such as the reconfiguring of workers' compensation regimes. It would make them more aware of the externalities associated with narrow cost-cutting interventions and also long term trends that hardly fit the image of an inexorable shift toward healthier working environments.