

Saving working children is a labour of love

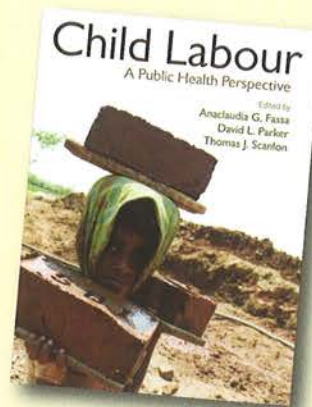
To many of us based in the UK, the term 'child labour' will evoke faded images of soot-covered children working in mines during the Industrial Revolution. But far from being confined to Victorian Britain, child labour remains a significant issue across many parts of the world today.

Child Labour: A Public Health Perspective provides an insight into this complex issue which spans disciplines ranging from public health and education to law and economics. Children have always worked, both within and outside of the home, and in an appropriate environment, work can be conducive to children's development and their transition into adulthood. But mostly, child labour is problematic and causes significant mental, physical and emotional damage. Estimates suggest that worldwide, there were 211 million working children aged 5-14 years in 2004, and, unsurprisingly, the majority of this burden

is carried by deprived and low income populations.

Enforcement of national and international legislation against child labour is variable, but rather than point the finger at lax governments for ignoring the issue, the authors acknowledge the many interacting and conflicting forces at play. Using a series of case studies, they illustrate the role that local culture, societal norms and economics play in driving and perpetuating the existence of child labour. Insightful examples are given of situations in which families living on the brink of poverty have no other option but to send their children to work. In some regions, cash transfers to families of children who attend school have been successful in reducing the prevalence of child labour, but the authors warn against one-size-fits-all approaches. Long-term and sustainable solutions, they argue, will require multi-agency action which takes account of local cultural and economic contexts.

The authors, whose backgrounds range from public health through social work to economics, are united not only by their expertise in child labour but also by their rights-based and life-course approach to their analyses. They succeed in highlighting the central issues without overlooking or downplaying the



overarching complexities involved.

Their book makes a compelling case for an important public health issue requiring urgent and multi-organisational action.

Gracia Fellmeth

Child Labour: A Public Health Perspective

Edited by Anaclaudia G Fassa, David L Parker and Thomas J Scanlon

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Fiery Dorling preaches to the converted

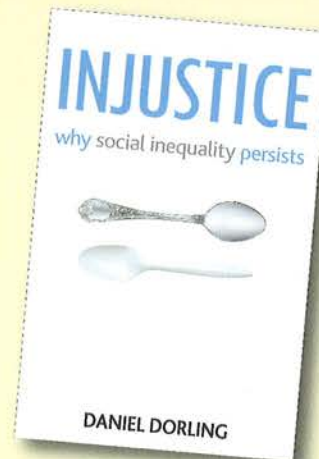
Reading the recent press coverage of the attacks on this month's interviewee Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett's *The Spirit Level*, I was struck by a particular phrase that Wilkinson used. He feared that the criticisms from right-wing thinktanks scuppered any chance that ideas about inequality would ever escape "from the left-wing ghetto". Danny Dorling's latest tome doesn't do much to allay those fears. Unashamedly partisan, *Injustice* is a polemic, preaching (albeit convincingly) to the converted.

That's not to say that it's not a well-delivered sermon. Dorling's prose is passionate, punchy and peppered with examples and pop-culture references. For a concise primer on the roots of inequality, and why it matters, there is little better. In the wake of swingeing public sector cuts and a Coalition budget that the Institute for Fiscal Studies damned as "regressive", certainly the publication of *Injustice* could

not be more timely. Persuasive arguments about how deficit reduction measures should not widen our already gaping inequalities are sorely needed. Dorling's thesis is that injustice is ingrained in a society where "greed is good" and prejudice against immigrants or the poor is natural, and Dorling certainly has the evidence, and compelling anecdotes, to back these assertions. Dorling is a geographer by training, but *Injustice* leans more towards a historical treatise. Impressively drawing links between everything from depictions of the Victorian poor, to the mapping of contemporary global income distribution, it's an impassioned and informed plea for greater social justice.

However, *Injustice* will do little to persuade naysayers. There is scant effort to disguise the indignant tone of Dorling's voice, and this haranguing tenor can become quickly tiresome, even for those sympathetic to his presentation of the evidence. Where Wilkinson and Pickett's analysis is cool and calm, Dorling's is fiery and fuming with barely suppressed anger at those he holds responsible for the prevalence of "injustice".

As he revealed in the last issue of *Public Health Today*, Dorling has had audiences with both the current and present administrations, but one is left



wondering if the important messages contained in *Injustice* might be even more influential if they were couched in less strident terms.

Peder Clark

Injustice: Why Social Inequality Persists

Daniel Dorling

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