

### Firesetting and Mental Health

edited by Geoffrey L. Dickens, Philip A. Sugarman, and Theresa A. Gannon. RCPsych Publications, London, England, 2012, 278 pages, \$52.00 (paper).

In the United States alone, 62,807 arson offenses were reported in 2008, and the average dollar loss per offense was \$16,015.<sup>1</sup> Arson is an easy crime to commit. Law and mental health invariably intersect in the examination of firesetting behavior.

There is more literature on juvenile firesetting than adult firesetting. The book does justice in addressing this lacuna. In their laudable undertaking, the editors invited experts from the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States to bring together research evidence, theory, and practitioner perspective. Toward this goal, the editors have indeed done a superb job.

The book is divided into 2 parts: the first is devoted to addressing theory and research, while the other is about practice and law. The former comprises 8 chapters, whereas the latter includes 5 chapters. Each chapter is relevant, illuminating, and well written. A chapter on firefighter arson is of special interest in the adult literature. The authors have explored literature on firesetting behavior of the firefighter—a perplexing presentation.

The book heavily rests on data from the British Commonwealth and the United States; its applicability however, remains unclear in Asia, Africa, and South America, which account for the bulk of the world's population and land.

Firesetting as a behavior has several determinants. Chapters on theory and research shed light on many underlying causal, contributory, and epidemiologic aspects of firesetting. The relevance of culture and religion—2 major psychosocial forces—in understanding this complex behavior is, however, scantily addressed. Two chapters elucidate typology of, and differentiation among, firesetters.

The section on practice and law offers a wealth of information for mental health and legal practitioners. Basic tips for a proper assessment of the firesetter are offered. However, the legal framework, as noted above, is more applicable to the United Kingdom, British Commonwealth, and United States. Notably, a chapter on treatment and interventions for firesetters is included. A chapter close to home is on fire risk and safety in psychiatric care, as a massive fire in a Russian psychiatric hospital in 2013 caught global attention.<sup>2</sup>

Overall, in 278 pages, the editors and authors have commendably packed a wealth of information on the subject, especially as it relates to the adult population. In that respect, the book will be a welcome reference text for mental health practitioners and legal experts interested in adults with firesetting behavior. Apparently, this is a rather underresearched area, and this book nicely reviews the available literature. Those interested in research will also find it very useful in much needed heuristic explorations, especially in much neglected areas of neurobiology and treatment of pathological firesetting behavior. Hopefully, the compendium will also spur scientific and legal interest in this domain in other parts of the world. It is an important, interesting, and informative read.

#### REFERENCES

1. US Federal Bureau of Investigation. Arson. Uniform Crime Report Crime in the United States, 2008. <http://www2.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2008/documents/arsonmain.pdf>. Updated September 2009. Accessed July 25, 2014.
2. Fire in Russian psychiatric hospital that killed 38 stirs anger over state's neglect. *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/27/world/europe/fire-at-russian-psychiatric-hospital.html>. Updated April 26, 2013. Accessed July 25, 2014.

**Rudra Prakash, MD**  
rudra.prakash@va.gov

**Author affiliation:** Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, Nashville, Tennessee.

**Potential conflicts of interest:** None reported.

*J Clin Psychiatry* 2015;76(1):e124 (doi:10.4088/JCP.14bk09381).

© Copyright 2015 Physicians Postgraduate Press, Inc.