

BRITISH AND FOREIGN OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS

A STUDY OF INDIVIDUAL CHILDREN'S DIETS

By E. M. Widdowson

(Medical Research Council. Spec. Rep. Series. No. 257. Op. 196. 1947. H.M. Stationery Office. Price 6s.)

An investigation was carried out between 1935 and 1939 on the diets of British children. 1,028 individuals up to the age of 18 were studied; 916 were healthy middle-class children and each age from 1 to 18 was represented by at least 20 boys and 20 girls; while the remaining 112 children were diabetics or the offspring of impoverished parents. The outstanding fact which has been brought out by the investigation is one which might be expected, namely, that similar individuals differ enormously and unpredictably in their food habits. This applies with great force to the energy value of the diets, but it is equally true of the proximate principle, minerals and vitamins, and still more true of the foods themselves. These extraordinary departures from the average are compatible with normal physical development. These findings indicate that individual requirements must differ as much as individual intakes, and that an average intake, however valuable statistically, should never be used to assess an individual's requirement. Vegetarian children were up to average in height even though their diets were low in calories, protein, and vitamin C. Diabetic children and children of unemployed parents were generally below average in height and weight; the diet of the former contained fewer calories but more protein and fat, while that of the latter contained more bread but less milk, meat, and dietary essentials. The work is of great value since it puts on record in great detail the dietary habits of children in the period immediately before the 1939-45 war. It is clear that it is impossible to legislate for individuals from a knowledge of the average. The work also helps to explain why one person will keep fit and put on weight while another grows thin and loses weight while each lives on the same rations.

In this volume there is a wealth of data which cannot readily be condensed into a small space, and since the

work is not immediately concerned with the industrial population, it is advised that those particularly interested in the subject should consult the original.

K. M. A. P.

THE INCIDENCE OF NEUROSIS AMONG FACTORY WORKERS

By Russell Fraser and others

(Industrial Health Research Board. Report No. 90. 1947. H.M. Stationery Office, London. Pp. 66. Price 1s. 3d.)

This is a study of 3,000 male and female workers in 13 light and medium engineering factories. It confirms an impression which is evident to any practising physician that there is a considerable amount of neurosis in the industrial population: the authors deciding that in this random sample the incidence could not have been less than 8 per cent. for definite neurosis and 16 per cent. for minor neurosis. The incidence was nearly the same in both sexes, though slightly higher in females. Neurotic illness caused between a quarter and a third of all absence from work due to illness; this was the equivalent of an annual absence of three working days by every man studied and of six days by every woman. It was found that the incidence of neurosis was less than usual among those who had more than average domestic responsibilities while doing less than 75 hours work per week, among those who had more than average social contacts, and among those who found work congenial. It was, on the other hand, above usual in those working more than 75 hours per week, those with inadequate diet, restricted social contacts and interests, home worries and abnormal responsibilities, or doing boring, uncongenial, very light or sedentary work or work requiring skill inappropriate to the worker's intelligence, or assembly, bench, inspection, or toolroom work, or work requiring constant attention, and in those working where lighting is unsatisfactory or work programmes offer little variety.

K. M. A. P.