

FAMILIES IN CONFLICT: THEORIES AND APPROACHES IN MEDIATION AND
COUNSELLING [Butterworths, 2000, xiv + 411 pp (including index): S\$160]

IN the last 5 years, there has been a proliferation of local publications relating to the appropriate dispute resolution process of mediation. *Families In Conflict: Theories and Approaches In Mediation And Counselling* represents the latest offering from Butterworths in this rapidly expanding field.

Families In Conflict: Theories and Approaches In Mediation And Counselling brings together the efforts of judicial officers, legal and social work scholars,

counseling professionals, mental health professionals and medical professionals in one book that seeks to address issues facing families in conflict.

The book is divided into three parts. Each of these parts seeks to address a specific aspect of the subject matter. Part I deals with the issues of Marital Conflict. Part II focuses on Family Violence and Part III deals with the legal perspectives on the issues involved.

The 10 chapters in Part I are varied and cover various aspects of Marital Conflict. Chapters 1, 4 and 5 for example are more conceptual, covering broader notions of conflict resolution like the process of mediation (Chapter 1), Interests-based mediation (Chapter 4) and Negotiating Behaviour (Chapter 5). Other chapters deal more specifically with strategies and techniques that can be used in family mediation (Chapter 2) and mediation in the family court (Chapter 3). Of course, it is important to remember that when talking about marital conflict, it is not just about the processes and methods to resolve that conflict, but also the ways to work with those who are affected by marital conflict. Hence, this part also has chapters that look at family and divorce counseling (Chapters 6 and 8), how to measure the success of these counseling processes (Chapters 9) and working with children who are caught in the midst of the marital conflict of their parents (Chapter 7). There is also a chapter on community services in Singapore (Chapter 10) which provides a useful list of organizations providing support services for families in conflict and crisis.

Part II features 6 chapters dealing with Family Violence. The focus shifts to working with the perpetrators of family violence as well as the support services that are available to assist families facing family violence. There are chapters looking at the physical and psychological consequences of family violence (Chapters 16 and 11 respectively). This part also specifically looks at the possible treatments available for the perpetrator of family violence (Chapter 12). Two chapters set out the support networks available for the victims of family violence (Chapters 13 and 14) and there is a chapter devoted to family violence counseling (Chapter 15).

The 4 chapters in this final part cover the legal aspects of families in conflict. These aspects are the division of matrimonial assets under the Women's Charter (Chapter 17), the maintenance of wives and children (Chapter 18), custody matters (Chapter 19) and issues of protection from family violence (Chapter 20).

This book is commendable for its multidisciplinary content. It is an important reminder that when dealing with something like family conflict, there are always many different perspectives to the problem. Clearly, this book not only covers the legal aspects of the topic but also taps into view points from psychology, counseling, social work and medicine.

There are some aspects of this book which, in the opinion of this reviewer, could have been improved. First, some of the chapters overlap in content with one another and the effect to this reader is that the book does not gel as well as it could have. Perhaps this is unavoidable when dealing with such a multidisciplinary topic.

Secondly, the chapters in the book are of varying quality. Some chapters are purely descriptive and informational whereas others consider the subject matter in more depth. Chapter 10, for example, almost entirely consists of contact details of community services in Singapore. While this is useful and the author of the chapter does indicate what each service addresses, in this writer's opinion, would be more appropriately reproduced as an appendix to the book.

Finally, it is not clear for whom the book is targeted. Obviously, some of the information will be of interest and use to legal professionals. However, some other parts of the book seem more appropriate to a lay audience. Again, perhaps this is intended as a resource to a large audience. If this is so, then it more than serves its function.

At the end of the day, this book is a useful starting point for anyone working with families in conflict. It will provide that person with a specific direction to move in and in which to do further research. By doing so, it is hoped that, as the Senior District Judge Mr Richard Magnus expresses in the preface, “the sharing of these thoughts [in the book] will bring about a greater understanding of the nature of, and solutions to, family conflict.”