

Preface

In the 1990's a new approach to sexual and reproductive health was adopted at international conferences and promoted by international organisations. Yet many professionals involved in the delivery of sexual health services, information, and education lack a clear understanding of aspects of this approach—both within and outside of Finland. Therefore, we decided to edit a book—in both Finnish and English—that explains basic components of this new international perspective on sexual health and describes Finland's experience with this new framework as an example of this new approach.

Questions that this volume addresses include the following: How is sexual health defined? Why are sexual health issues important? What are the determinants of sexual health? How does the new approach to sexual health proposed by international health, sexuality, and family planning professionals vary from traditional views? How well do institutions in Finland meet the sexual health needs of the population? What is the current state of sexual health in Finland and which aspects need improvement? How can health professionals, educators, researchers in academia and government, social workers, legislators and policy makers promote sexual health? These are questions that we address in this book. The answers are provided by almost 30 experts of sexuality and sexology. Since the 1960's, Finland has generally adopted a non-moralistic health approach to problems linked to sexual behaviour, such as teenage pregnancy and abortion and sexually transmitted diseases. As a result of new policies, current teenage pregnancy and abortion rates are only half of those in the 1970's. The incidence of sexually transmitted diseases also declined. In the 1970's, some 15,000 new cases of gonorrhoea were reported every year, and in the 1990's this rate was reduced to about 200 new cases. Which specific policies have contributed to the dramatic changes in these indicators of sexual health? For this book we asked Finnish authorities to tell the story of developments in their area of expertise in sexual health.

Finland has become a leader along with the Netherlands and other Nordic countries in providing high quality sexual health services and education. Nevertheless, the international community is not generally familiar with Finnish sexual health policies. We hope that the model of sexual health presented here and applied to Finland will be useful to describe and evaluate sexual health in other countries. Finnish professionals may also find the model and information in this book helpful to evaluate, revise, and develop new sexual health programs.

The first Chapter describes basic elements of the new perspective and defines sexual health. Chapters 2 and 3 use the new views and definitions to lay the foundation for models or explanations of sexual health, from both macro and micro perspectives. The next chapters provide descriptions of sexual health services and sources of information

and education. Subsequent chapters focus on the sexual health needs of specific population subgroups—children, adolescents, non-heterosexuals, the disabled and the elderly. In the final chapter we summarise and evaluate the state of sexual health in Finland with respect to criteria defined by the new international approach to sexual health and determinants discussed in the first part of the book.

Contributors were given specific guidelines to follow in describing their area of expertise related to sexual health services or subgroups. They were told to discuss public attitudes, laws, benefits, strengths, weaknesses, and needs related to their service or population subgroup. In addition, they were asked to include statistics that could be compared to other countries, if appropriate, and also to describe the extent to which a preventive approach has been adopted in attempting to minimise sexual health problems. If applicable, authors were also told to include issues related to rights, access, cost, quality and equity.

We are most appreciative of the interest and enthusiasm of the contributors to this book and hope they know that we are grateful for their efforts in making this project a success. We also thank sexual health professionals, who work at the Finnish National Research and Development Centre for Health and Welfare, the Polytechnic School of Health and Social Care in Jyväskylä, and the Family Federation of Finland for their general guidance and support. Thus, a special ‘thank-you’ is extended to Maija Ritamo, Sari Kautto, Sirpa Valkama, Dan Apter, Raisa Cacciatore, and Pia Brandt. We also gratefully acknowledge resources made available to us by the Population Research Institute of the Family Federation of Finland and the Department of Sociology of the University of Helsinki.

Because most contributors to this book are Finnish, the translations of the Finnish chapters into English posed a major challenge. The English and Finnish languages have very different structures, and ideas expressed in one language cannot be directly captured by word to word translations without loss of meaning. Special thanks go to Olli Stålström for his careful and thorough job in translating half of the chapters to English. In addition, we are grateful to authors who were able to translate their own chapters. And we thank Mika Takoja for the layout of the book.

We hope this volume will serve as a basic sexual health textbook for professionals, their students and clients in universities, polytechnics, and other organisations offering sexuality information, education, and services. Ultimately, our goal is to enable readers to discover new ways to promote sexual well-being and sexual rights in the new millennium.

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