

Sirpa Valkama and Kari Kaimola

## 19. Sexological Teaching at the Jyväskylä Polytechnic

As part of the Family Planning 2000 Project of the Finnish National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (*STAKES*), training and development work started in sexology and sexual and reproductive health at the Jyväskylä Polytechnic in 1995. Development and training began in conjunction with the Family Planning Resource Centre of Middle Finland. The purpose of this Resource Centre is to improve the service know-how of family planning within multi-disciplinary networking. The Jyväskylä Polytechnic has served as the co-ordinator of co-operation in the network. In addition, this Polytechnic has performed both regional and national assessments of professionals in dealing with issues and problems connected to sexuality in their work.

Widespread interest and debate about sexual questions, for example, about modern expectations concerning the quality of sexual life and partner relationships, have produced challenges that require further education for professionals in social and health care fields. Research indicates that professionals in these fields do not have the skills to adequately address sexual issues in work situations with their clients. Clients also feel that they do not receive the best possible services in this area (Poikajärvi and Mäkelä 1998, Sihvo and Koponen 1998). Compulsory courses dealing specifically with sexuality in educational programmes leading to a degree are rare (Nykänen 1995). Therefore, it is necessary to develop additional education programs to help professionals handle the sexuality concerns and problems of clients in their work.

In Finland curricula for the professional training of those in the social and health care fields has been fairly stable since the early 1970s. Attempts to add comprehensive sexological courses to this training have only occurred since the middle 1990s. The first sexological unit for such training is starting at the Jyväskylä Polytechnic and plans are underway to develop and offer education for both degree-oriented and professional development programmes. The curricula of these programmes differ from those of the university by recognising practical needs of work life. The goals of the sexological training are to increase the ability of professionals to acknowledge and handle sexual matters at work, meet the developmental needs of students preparing for work in social and health care, and help professionals prepare for changing job situations.

The most important goals in the Jyväskylä sexological training involve promoting sexual and reproductive rights and health and examining sexual issues throughout the entire human life span. Sexuality is viewed from a comprehensive framework which includes

ethical, medical, social and psychological perspectives. In the programme, good sexual health is viewed as a broad-based positive life energy instead of only with respect to the traditional illness-health dichotomy. Sexual health issues occur for people in all life stages and involve the attainment of individual autonomy and personal resources such as communication skills, the capacity for empathy, a positive body-image, as well as sufficient information required to carry out choices in a responsible way. The purpose of the program is to prepare its students to function effectively in the large field of sexology.

The health programmes of the Jyväskylä Polytechnic prepare students for careers as nurses, public health nurses, and midwives. There are 320 hours of sexological teaching in the training leading to a degree. In this training students are encouraged to examine their own sexuality and life situation as well as forms of sexuality in the surrounding society. Feedback from the students regarding the experience of studying their own and varieties of sexuality have reinforced the importance and value of this part of their training.

Presently sexological training is offered as further education for professional development to multi-disciplinary student groups. These include many types of professionals such as physicians, psychologists, nurses, social workers, rehabilitation experts, and researchers. Thus, these students are already experts in their own professional field. Currently the programmes which have been completed are *Sexology I : Basic sexology*, 800 hours and *Sexology II : Sexual Counselling*, 1600 hours. The program *Sexology III : Special expertise in clinical sexology*, 1600 hours will be started in the near future. The curricula of the courses offered at the Jyväskylä Polytechnic have been developed in co-operation with professionals in Sweden, Norway and Denmark in a working group of the Nordic Association of Clinical Sexology (NACS). The final program was adopted at the Nordic Sexology Conference held in Norway in 1999. New curricula are also being developed for sexological pedagogy and scientific sexology. Education in these areas will be carried out as multi-media training with the use of the Internet.

In the sexological professional development programmes, students can examine their own beliefs, attitudes, and values concerning sexuality during *Sexual Attitude Reassessment (SAR)* courses. From courses based on real situations, students can build their own professional identity and meet and work on their own issues and boundaries with respect to sexuality. In the Jyväskylä Polytechnic there is a special place called *Adam and Eve* which provides students a stimulating, innovative and inspiring learning environment. In *Adam and Eve* there is a large collection of sexological educational material and equipment illustrating the diversity of sexuality. The learning environment is suitable for those who want to develop their practical skills to understand sexuality and its diversity in counselling, care or teaching.

In sexological education, the first sexological teaching clinic in Finland is currently being established in the Jyväskylä Polytechnic to provide students an opportunity for guided

training. For example, the teaching clinic will provide medical examinations and counselling, personal and couple therapy, and telephone counselling. Several projects will start at the clinic in 2000 including an examination of problems and treatment methods in two areas, sexual inhibition and incest.

The training of a sexual counsellor includes the development of a project by each student. The goal of the project is for students to apply what they have learned in the courses in a way that benefits the whole working community. In this project students with their team analyse their own needs — related to developing skills to deal with sexual issues in their jobs — and the needs of those they work with. There are three parts to the project: designing the plan, carrying out the project plan, and evaluating it. Experience has shown that the work project greatly facilitates the acquisition and internalisation of new information and knowledge for a working community. This has been evident by an increase in internal training, more consultations related to the topic, more attention to sexual health services, and by individuals recognising their own area of expertise.

The unit responsible for sexological training at the Jyväskylä Polytechnic co-operates with other expert organisations on a regional, national, and international level. Studies and applied research carried out together with various universities guide activities and the development of projects that support this Polytechnic's work in sexology. In addition, the sexological unit has received support from STAKES and the Finnish Sexological Association.