

Women's Health: What's sex/gender got to do with it?

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Ways to answer the question

Sex/gender in relation to difference in women's health compared to men's health

gender dynamics between health care providers and patients

Consideration of the social construction of sex/gender and how it affects women's health

We are going to try to look at all three.....

Significance

Considerations of sex/gender have implications in the delivery of quality health care services at the individual and population based level.

Additionally, considerations of sex/gender provide a level of explanation for numerous health disparities and outcomes.

| | |
|--------|--|
| Sex | The biological classification of living things as male or female according to their reproductive organs and functions assigned by chromosomal complement |
| Gender | A person's self-representation as man, woman, non-binary or who that person is responded to by social institutions based on the individual's gender presentation. Gender is often rooted in biology and is shaped by environment and experience. |

Sex/gender

Combined term of sex and gender acknowledging that the discrete meanings of these terms are not easily separated in research and practice

Definitions of Health

Absence of Disease?

Additional Aspects

Spiritual

Emotional

Social definition

What is your definition?

WHO Definition of Health

Health is a "state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity"

Therefore, the prerequisites for health include:

Freedom from the fear of war
Equal opportunity for all
Satisfaction of basic needs for food, water and sanitation, education and decent housing
Secure work
Useful role in society
Political Will
Public Support

What is Women's Health?

Traditionally: Reproductive Health
Breasts to Thighs
Childbearing Years
Relationships between women and pregnancy required for "survival of society" and is thus a public health focus

Women's Health Movement

Consumer Oriented
Grass Roots Activism
"Taking Back" our bodies
medicalizing
pathologizing
paternalistic
Key Strategy: Access to information and expanded knowledge

Women's Health Movement

Critical Issues:
Civil Rights Movement
Women's Movement
Second Wave Feminism
Role of women as health care reformists
Inclusive of ALL WOMEN....NOT!

Early research....

The Physician's Health Study: aspirin and heart disease (1989)
The Multiple Risk Factor Intervention Trial: 73-82 evaluating correlations between BP, smoking, cholesterol, and heart disease in 12,866 men/ 0 women. (1982)
National Institutes on Aging: Baltimore Longitudinal Study of Aging '54-'75 which excluded women despite 2/3 of individuals over 65 being female.
First study to investigate estrogen use for heart disease was on men.

FDA clinical trials

Until 1988, clinical trials of new drugs were routinely conducted predominately on men,

even though women consume approximately 80% of pharmaceuticals in the U.S.

Dosages

Acetaminophen eliminated at 60% rate of men

Valium never subjected to RCT including women yet 2 million women per year consume it for anxiety

Not all bad though...just not as strong

Framingham Heart Study: epidemiologic study of cardiovascular disease in both men and women (1948 +)

Nurse's Health Study I and II: observational studies (1989+)

Sea of Change in the 1990's

The NIH Revitalization Act of 1993 required the following:

Women and minorities and their subpopulations be included in all NIH supported biomedical and behavioral research, in phase III clinical trials in numbers adequate for valid analysis of differences in intervention effects, cost not be the basis for exclusion, support for outreach program to recruit these individuals for clinical trials.

Expanding research

2000's

Women's Health Initiative

Menopause, heart disease

Routine breast and cervical cancer screening recommendations

2010's

- Health disparities

- cesarean rates/normal birth

- autoimmune diseases

2020's

Pandemic and vaccines

Women's Health Research

Today: Beyond reproduction to comprehensive health considerations:

NIH research in women's health is defined as the study of diseases unique to women or diseases with a higher prevalence in women than men or disease that present differently in women than in men.

Women's Health Today

Women are the decision makers in families regarding health care

Targeted marketing of Women's Health Programs

Increased numbers of female physicians
Access to expanded health insurance
Enhanced funding for research
Office of Research on Women's Health at NIH
Increased use of female participants in research
Women's Health Medical Specialty
Universal coverage of birth control

Perspectives: How we see the world
Perspectives on Health

Biomedical
Genetic
Evolutionary
Disease based
Socially Constructed
Individual and societal
Ecology and environment
political

Social Construction

We know the world as we perceive it
Our perceptions are based on social learning
'Reality' and 'truth' are situational

Social Construction

The manner in which something is, is a result of the social forces that have constructed it to be so...

Is it biological or socially constructed?

Socially constructed processes serve to support the status quo and thus patriarchy

Social construction of women's health

What is defined as health or disease is rooted in a social context

What is recognized as an issue for women's health is directly related to our assumptions of sex/gender

Socially constructed processes (education, media, medical services) serve to support the status quo

What is Feminism?

Male bashing/Anti men?

"The radical notion that women are people, too"??

Anti-Sexism?

What is Feminism?

One definition of many: A perspective that acknowledges the oppression of women within a patriarchal society, and struggles towards the elimination of sexist oppression and domination for all human beings. – bell hooks

Conflicting representation

Oppression is “not having a choice” -bell hooks

Feminist Perspective

- Equal worth of all human beings
- The personal is political
- Personal experiences are linked to social patterns
- Question assumptions

What is women's health from a Feminist perspective?

- Consideration of women's health within the context of how women live their lives collectively and individually.
- Considers health as influenced by the intersections of sexism, racism, class, nation status, within a framework that acknowledges the role of oppression as it affects women and their health as individuals and as a group.
- Rejects androcentric models as normative
- Challenges the medicalization of health care and the pathologizing of normal physiologic processes
- Seeks social and political change

Components of a Feminist Perspective in Women's Health

- With women not for women
- Uses heterogeneity as an assumption rather than homogeneity
- Seeks to minimize or expose power imbalances

Strategies for Analysis of Women's Health from a Feminist Perspective

#1 Look for what has been left out or what we do not know

#2 Analyze your own role or relationship to the issue or topic

#3 Identify women's agency in the midst of social constraint and the biomedical paradigm

#4 Consider the social construction of sex/gender and how its assumptions may limit options or presume choices made within the context of health. This includes the social construction of health itself.

#5 Explore the precise ways in which gender defines or affects power relationships and the implications of those power dynamics in terms of health

#6 Identify other significant aspects of an individual's or group's social position, and explore the implications of that position as it relates to health issues

#7 Consider the risks and benefits of generalizations and speaking in terms of groups versus individuals