

Male exclusion in sexual health care: a matter of human rights.

Tereso, Alexandra (ESEL - Nursing School of Lisbon; ISCTE – PhD Candidate in Sociology) e-mail: alexandra.tereso@esel.pt

BACKGROUND

In Portuguese national health programmes, sexual health has been considered as a component of reproductive health. Dominant perspectives shaping men's sexual health emphasize women as subjects and men as means to reach maternal and child health.

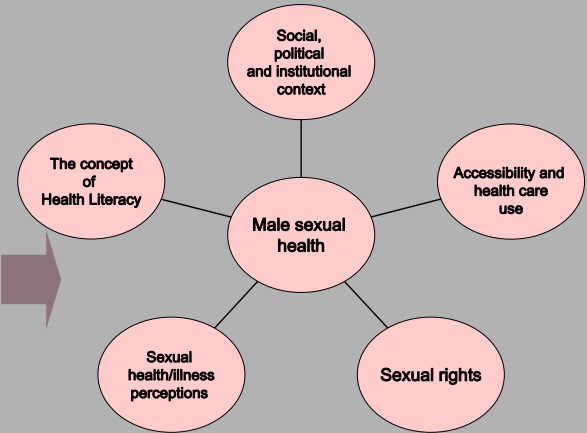
In the last years, the impact of sexual dysfunctions, STI and infertility problems gave visibility to the need to implicate men in sexual health care. However, men haven't achieved a status as an entity in its own right in the sexual health care. Men and women have different perceptions, behaviours and health care needs and there's an emerging recognition of gender as an important determinant of health status with impact in sexual illness vulnerability.

Sexual health care is a right of citizenship that concerns to individual behaviours, social conditions, access to health care, sustainable and adequate health care services. The right to health protection implies educational health resources that can help men as citizens to make informed health decisions.

AIM

Develop a research project that approaches men inclusion

- analyse political, social and ideological context of health programmes and health care services: accessibility and use among men;
- understand men sexual health/illness perceptions and their role in health care behaviour;
- investigate possibilities and constraints of the promotion of sexual men's rights as a dimension of the health care professionals practice.



Dimensions in discussion

Male Sexual Health

Sexuality is constructed through the interaction between the individual and social structures. Full development of sexuality is essential for individual, interpersonal, and societal well being;

Sexual health is recognized by governments, health and social providers as an area of health needs requiring assessing, planning, and services.

The acknowledgment of a necessity to address sexual health issues at individual and strategic level is juxtaposed by the fact that health care strategies used to promote it have been constructed around a very narrow view of what constitutes sexual health.

A tradition of sexual health work is associated with STI and the prevention of unplanned pregnancy. In this context male inclusion have been made under a "deficit perspective" related with women morbidity. But does the sexual health approach respond to men's sexual health needs?

The Concept of Health Literacy

- As an individual right - enable individuals to seek and use information - responsibility and autonomy in their health;
- As public health imperative - improves overall population health;
- As an essential part of social capital - low literacy is a strong contributor to health inequalities;

Sexual Rights

"Sexual health care should be available for prevention and treatment of all sexual concerns, problems and disorders."

"Sexual rights are Universal Human Rights based on the inherent freedom, dignity, and equality of all human beings. Since health is a fundamental human right, so must sexual health be a basic human right."

The right to gender equality in sexual health should be searched when the inequality means exclusion and should be avoided when equality means subordination and loss of identity.

Accessibility and sexual health care use among men

Sexual health is considered as a component of reproductive health and as no visibility as a separate area of work in its own right. Gender mainstreaming was included in health programmes as a concept but there's no evidence in sexual health care services.

Men access to primary health concerning sexual health issues is related with symptomatic evidence or with STI diagnosis. Reproductive health programmes that include sexual health are designed for women as subjects and the accessibility by a man on his own is not considered.

Social, political and ideological context

It's not usual to discuss that men have sexual rights and that they are related with the liberation of oppressive norms such as the right to express their feelings (like weeping). Some cultural aspects related with masculinity that have impact in illness vulnerability;

Traditional emphasis on women's health and family planning had result in men's sexual health needs being overlooked. Promoting men sexual health imply: discuss actions in other sectors in order to create a supportive environment, develop non-discriminatory projects, acceptable and sustainable sexual health education and programmes;

In Portugal biomedical ideology emphasize diagnosis and treatment procedures and create some ethic issues related with: Justice and equity (lack of awareness of gender-specific men sexual health needs); Autonomy (the right to be informed and to an informed choice); Beneficence (the right to an holistic gender approach to health - that evolves more than the disease process specific to gender).

Sexual Health/Illness Perceptions

Health protection behaviour and sexual health care use among men seem to be related with male perceptions of health/illness. In Portugal health services utilization by men are usually related with symptomatic development and men are less informed than women about health;



CONCLUSIONS

Appropriate research, comprehensive approaches and suitable evaluation methods can contribute to fulfil men's sexual health care needs and help them to promote equity and the sexual rights effectiveness. Bibliography research suggested the importance to develop investigation about men perceptions of sexual health/illness, about men needs and expectations related with sexual health care in order to increase knowledge and understanding of gender specificities, and to promote optimal sexual health as an affirmative view of sexuality for women and men.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Beauchamp, T.; Childress, J. *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*. 5th Ed. New York: Oxford University Press. 2001.
- Collumbien, Martine; Hawkes, Sarah. "Missing men's messages: does the reproductive health approach respond to men's sexual health needs?" *Culture, Health and Sexuality*. 2000. vol.2.Nº2.135-150.
- Kickbusch, Ilona; Wait, Suzanne Wait; Maag, Daniela. *Navigating Health: The Role of Health Literacy*. Alliance for Health and the Future, International Longevity Centre-UK. 2006.
- Luck, Mike; Bamford, Margaret; Williamson, Peter. *Men's Health: Perspectives, Diversity and Paradox*. London: Blackwell. 2000.
- Lundgren, Rebecka. *Research Protocols to Study Sexual and Reproductive Health of Male Adolescents and Young Adults in Latin America*, Division of Health Promotion and Protection Family Health and Population Program- PAHO. 2000.
- WHO. *Gender and Reproductive Rights*. WHO: Copenhagen. 2003.
- WHO. *Sexual Health*. WHO: Copenhagen. 2003.
- WHO. *Progress in Reproductive Health Research: Sexual Health - a new focus for WHO*. Copenhagen. 2003.