

Handbook on Gender and Health

Edited by Jasmine Gideon.

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As an early-career researcher in the early 1970s, I read virtually every scholarly book and article on the social sciences of gender, as well as the mass-market books on feminism. Indeed, I owned most of them. As publications about women and gender proliferated, 'keeping up' became harder, and most of us in academic women's studies (where I worked during the 1980s) acceded to the necessity to focus more tightly on a particular dimension of feminist writing and scholarship. My speciality became the women's health movement, and the politics of women's health policy and services. As publishing within the specialties also ballooned, it became increasingly difficult to keep up even with a more narrowly defined sub-field. Enter the 'handbook': an edited collection, structured and introduced by appropriate experts with commissioned or previously published chapters designed to 'cover the territory'. For advanced students, lecturers or researchers, such handbooks – when done well – could save time, give ready access to material that might otherwise be hard to obtain and help scope a changing field. When done poorly, handbooks were quick-and-dirty publications designed more to serve the CVs of the editors and contributors (often the same people) than to advance understanding of the field. Happily, the handbook under review is of the former type.

Gideon's book contains 32 chapters (including a detailed, scene-setting introduction) divided into eight sections that highlight policy, work, migration, health systems, households, social activism, sexuality and rights. The majority of the 56 contributors are drawn from the UK, Europe and Canada, but quite a number are based in South America and sub-Saharan Africa. While a few names represent 'founders' of contemporary work in gendered health (Lesley Doyal, Marcia Inhorn,

Steve Robertson), most are early- or mid-career researchers and include several PhD students.

The contributions to this collection are well written and have been carefully edited. The introductory essay situates the volume within the social determinants of health, aiming to move the discussion beyond the 'add women' tactic on which much writing on gender continues to rely. There are empirical case studies from various disciplinary perspectives drawing on research from a range of settings and sources. Chapters analyse and critique policies and programs, including some (relating to ethnic conflict, social exclusion, migration) that are superficially irrelevant to health but that – taking a social determinants approach – are shown to be crucially related. Many chapters are marked by nuanced theoretical insight. I was glad to see discussions of neo-liberalism and climate change, both outside the scope of what would have been included in a more conventional consideration of gender or health. And yes, there are several chapters about men's health and masculinities; the title indicates, after all, that the collection is about *gender*.

Taken together, the contributions are a valuable global and multidisciplinary resource. My only complaint may be parochial, but it was a pity the editor did not seek out a contemporary contribution on women's health policy in Australia. As the first country in the world to have a National Women's Health Policy (1989), and as the home of an innovative and (despite obstacles) durable women's health movement, this seems a significant omission. Australia is represented, however, by a contribution from James A. Smith and others on the use of a gender lens in public health discourses on men's health. And I appreciate that editorial decisions always entail difficult choices about what to leave out, even from a book of 600 pages (including a comprehensive and useful index).

At a cost of £185 (~A\$300) for the print version, this handbook is unlikely to be sitting on the desks of many academics or practitioners in the global north, let alone the global south. But I hope it will be purchased by libraries and made available as a resource for those engaged in research, policy formulation or service provision in the field of health broadly defined. Those who genuinely care about the quality of the work they do will find here material to help them understand more fully how gender and health are social determinants of one another, and how their operations can and must be considered together.