

## Book Review

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**Shikha Dixit & Arun Kumar Sharma (2017). *Psycho-Social Aspects of Health and Illness*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company Pvt. Ltd, Pages: 352, Price: Rs.1350/- (Hard Bound), ISBN: 9789351252764**

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Health is a multidimensional concept that focuses on the comprehensive fitness of an individual. The health of an individual does not remain restricted to only physical aspect rather it also takes into account the psychological and sociological perspective that are related to mental health challenges, health beliefs and health care system. Health psychology is an imperative emerging field that has immensely inspired health care professionals towards broadening their perspective on health related issues. Research in the area of health psychology has drawn considerable attention to the role of psychosocial aspects related to health and illness. As put forth by Spector (2004) 'We learn from our own cultural and ethnic backgrounds how to be healthy, how to recognize illness and how to be ill. Furthermore, the meanings we attach to the notions of health and illness are related to the basic, culture bound values by which we define a given experience and perception' (p. 5). While highlighting the significance of psychosocial understanding of health and illness, Kleinman (1980) states that socially organized response towards illness amounts to an imperative part of the health care system.

In today's world researchers believe that an individual's social systems, lifestyles, personalities and cognitive processes must be included while conceptualizing health and illness. The volume edited by Shikha Dixit and Arun Kumar Sharma presents an interdisciplinary social scientific approach towards health and illness precisely in Indian context. In this volume there are 15 chapters that set the tone for discussions on the core issues related to health initiatives, emerging issues in health policy and planning, health care and social representation of mental health and illness among women, children and defence personnel. All the chapters in the volume follow a particular sequence making it easier for the reader to understand the psychosocial issues involved in health representations.

The present text is divided into four sections: Health Cognitions, Health Care and Health Initiatives, Mental Health and Mental Illness, and Health Challenges. The array of researches present in these sections broadens the horizon of the readers with respect to the understanding of the concept on health and illness from varying perspectives. The first section on Health Cognitions comprises of four chapters that looks at the psychological perspectives of health. The first chapter is an attempt by the authors to understand cancer patient's perceived illness severity and the way it varies from biomedical disease severity. Understanding patient's perceived illness severity on various dimensions suggests a holistic and patient centered approach to cater to the psychosocial needs of patients. The second chapter outlines the way how people from different culture understand health and manages their health related problems. In particular, the authors present a case of physical and mental health problems of women belonging to the Kharwar tribal group of Uttar Pradesh. The third chapter is an empirical study that examines the relationship of illness beliefs and optimism with subjective well-being and post traumatic growth in cervix cancer patients. The health beliefs held by the patients significantly influences their adaptive resources such as hope of recovery and decision about the future course of action (Dalal, 2000). Chapter four provides conceptual discussion pertaining to illness cognition and model of illness representations that serves instrumental for adopting positive health behaviours for developing patient centred health management.

The second section pertaining to Health Care and Health Initiatives covers four chapters taking into account both psychological as well as sociological perspective of health. The first chapter under this section focuses on integration of scientific and alternative systems of health care, like AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy) towards promoting health behaviour. The second chapter is based on research from secondary data and outlines the concept of health financing, health spending in the world and its impact on the health indicators and the status of health in India, its policies and the recent reforms in the health scenario and the challenges faced in health financing. Chapter three presents sociological conceptualization of disease, illness and health care in India. The authors suggest that several conditions like lack of public health facilities, absence of basic health goods, social discrimination and marginalization, medical indifference, corporatization, overmedicalization, profit orientation and privatization create the disease-friendly 'habitus' and 'social worlds' for the vulnerable and distance them from the interventions of health care. Under these conditions, the poorly designed health programmes and policies and their deficient implementations make the contributions of limited health care facilities insignificant. Chapter four addresses the association between immune, neurological and endocrine functioning of the body and the implications of these linkages to manage people suffering from illnesses and stressful events.

The third section of the volume Mental Health and Mental Illness covers three chapters. The first chapter under this section pertains to discussion related to mental illness and mental health, relationship between social structure and mental health and policy perspectives on mental health in India. The authors suggest mental health services to become integrated part of primary, secondary and tertiary health services. Chapter two emphasizes on the role and involvement of families in mental illness care by exploring the Indian concepts of mental illness and different healing traditions. The third chapter presents a qualitative study that explores the social representations of mental health, mental illness and health seeking behaviour in the urban middle class Indians.

The fourth section on Health Challenges pertains to the aspects related to reproductive health and health challenges in child health care and armed forces. The first chapter under this section is a review based research chapter which aims at understanding the present scenario of health, health care services and related issues with regard to children in India. The chapter calls for the need of awareness and interdisciplinary approach towards building a healthier society, based on the principles of rationality and inclusion, catering to the majority needs of its population. The second chapter discusses the prospects of rapid decline in childhood mortality in the foreseeable future. The third chapter discusses reproductive health with life-cycle approach and psychological aspects based on review of literature. The last chapter presents issues of suicide and elaborates upon the risk factors for suicide in military environment. A model has been proposed by the author that provides a comprehensive explanation of the interplay among various domains of a soldier's life that includes personal, familial, interpersonal, occupational and environmental factors and the dynamics of risk versus protective benefits caused by this interplay. Further the chapter emphasizes upon building soldier strengths and inculcating resilience at the individual, interpersonal and organizational fronts.

The book covers a wide spectrum of health issues from theoretical standpoints to practical concerns. It provides a holistic understanding of health in India from diverse disciplines like psychology, population studies, sociology and administration. Though most studies in the book are restricted to Indian scenario, but it could have been more enriching by covering studies at global level. Nonetheless, the subjects addressed in the volume provide an interesting insight into some key areas pertaining to psychosocial aspects of health and illness. This book is a good treatise for its easy-to-digest sections and would function well as a textbook guide that could be referred to when required. It is worth reading for the academicians, students and NGOs working in the field of health.

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