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Sexual Function and Wellbeing Special Interest Group: What's in a name?

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The sexual function and well-being specialist interest group (SIG) of the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV aims to improve the quality of care given to patients presenting to Sexual Health clinics with sexual dysfunction and provide a forum for education, training and research. It recently changed its name to reflect the positive evolution from a problem-orientated Sexual Dysfunction SIG.

The emphasis on sexual function aligns with the World Health Organisation definition of sexual health as 'a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being about sexuality; not merely the absence of disease dysfunction or infirmity' (1). It brings in the bio-psycho-social model of care, which is reflected in the shift of the SIG membership from doctors to a truly multi-disciplinary group of doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, psychologists, social-scientists and sex-therapists.

In the shift toward a more positive perspective on sexuality, the SIG has included 'wellbeing' in their name. The term 'sexual wellbeing' is commonly used in research and clinical practice but is interpreted in different ways (2, 3). Traditionally, it has been narrowly understood as a synonym for sexual function or satisfaction. However, there is a growing recognition of sexual wellbeing as a multidimensional concept (4), distinct but overlapping with sexual

pleasure, health, and justice (5). Drawing from the fields of positive psychology and subjective wellbeing, we subscribe to a definition of sexual well-being focusing on thoughts and feelings that represent a summation of sexual experience and expectations for the near future (5). This understanding includes several dimensions such as comfort with sexuality, sexual self-esteem, self-determination, safety and security, respect and resilience. These dimensions are relevant regardless of one's sexual activity or relationship status. Importantly, sexual wellbeing is not fixed and can improve, or decline, based on new or reinterpreted experiences. This perspective opens possibilities for intervention and improvement. Psychosexual therapy can address sexual difficulties, while positive sex education and high-quality sexual health services can also contribute to enhancing sexual wellbeing.

Framed in this way, a focus on sexual wellbeing can support new insights into sexual health disparities at a population level and show how societal and structural factors influence individuals' capabilities and freedom to experience sexual flourishing (5,6). Moreover, it helps explore the complexity of sexual issues throughout the lifespan, identify barriers to accessing services and treatment, and understand the intricate intra and interpersonal factors that shape individual thoughts and experiences, including feelings of shame or conflicts within relationships.

By focusing on sexual wellbeing, we shift away from a risk-centric approach and instead gain a deeper understanding of everyday sexual expression. This perspective acknowledges the impact of structural influences such as socio-economic inequalities and social identities, as well as the close links between sexual wellbeing and mental health.

So, what's in a name? Positive language creates a change for the better in our perception and action, creating collaboration, advancement and new opportunities; just as the "wrong" language can perpetuate stigma and discrimination. A holistic approach considers the wider determinants of health and health disparities, sexual safety and security, and focuses on empowerment to reclaim one's sexual agency. Our name matching these goals, brings it back to our aim of improving the quality of care to those presenting with sexual problems and support more holistic education, training, and research.

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