

Evaluation in Health Promotion: Principles and Perspectives

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This text is the laudable product of a substantial and far-reaching international collaboration under the auspices of the WHO. Stemming from the establishment of a European working party on evaluating health promotion, this book primarily comprises working papers commissioned by the working party across a variety of areas within evaluation. Sensibly, the brief was specific, to review appropriate approaches to evaluation within the field of health promotion in developed countries, excepting interventions designed to facilitate individual behaviour change or disease prevention. Thus it is designed to provide background reading in the theoretical and practical issues related to evaluating health promotion as conceptualised by the Ottawa Charter. Further, the rationale behind evaluating health promotion, informed by a broad view of what constitutes evidence, drives this text. Where it focuses on these methodological issues it is at its best, however too many chapters are devoted to individual settings and evaluation strategies which are on offer and often more easily digestible in other fora.

The first three chapters of this book provide a sufficient, though dense, treatment of key issues in the evaluation of health promotion initiatives. It starts with an interesting exploration of the multi-disciplinary and inter-sectoral dimensions of what health promotion, and indeed what it isn't. This leads to discussion of the sources of misunderstanding within health promotion research itself, based on the voices of various traditional academic disciplines. The authors take the view that health promotion is explicitly political and value-laden in direct contrast with some of its contributory disciplines. Thus they approach health promotion as an explicitly empowering activity, focusing on community action rather than on interventions at the level of the individual and with programmes of activity that strive to be responsive and malleable to the positions of stakeholders, which include target populations. Therein lies the challenge for experimental and quasi-experimental designs; true health promotion interventions are designed to be impossible and indeed unethical to control.

This book provides some interesting chapters on evaluating and tracking policy and its impact, economic evaluations of health promotion and the use of health impact assessment as an evaluation tool. However the contributions are somewhat uneven in depth and overall quality and the concluding chapter presents a generic model for planning and evaluating health promotion which although potentially useful is hardly new. I would recommend some of this text to new students of health promotion, and some of the introductory chapters to those who have been critical of the area and specifically its research base.

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