

Nick Manning and Nataliya Tikhonova, editors. *Health and Health Care in the New Russia*. England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009. xvii, 314 pp. Hardcover \$114.95, ISBN 978-0-7546-7427-6.

For years, the media has blamed Russia's high mortality on the deleterious effects of rampant alcoholism. However, Manning and Tikhonova offer a broader perspective and more accurate account of the reasons behind Russia's health crisis. *Health and Health Care in the New Russia* is the final book of a trilogy, which presents qualitative and quantitative research, describing the impact of state reform upon society. Essentially, this book examines the transition from communism to capitalism. Due to widespread belief that Russian health problems stem from the abuse of alcohol, the research presented in this book is necessary to examine underlying policies and social conditions affecting Russian health and to explain why life expectancy in Russia is lower than in other countries of equivalent economic development. This point is strongly stressed by Nataliya Tikhonova at the beginning of Chapter 2. In addition, several authors highlight social policy recommendations.

The first chapter provides an introduction to the Russian health crisis and presents the overall findings of the research. While alcohol "...is undoubtedly important as a proximal cause to excess mortality," the authors of Chapter 1 highlight the factors explaining alcohol consumption and how the government has tried to address the issue (p.13). The government's role is a central theme throughout the book because it is the leading actor in creating social policy. In Russia, civil society organizations are not yet strong enough to promote alternative social policy options. This has had lasting consequences, as the government-enforced economic reforms of the 1990s led to unintended social costs. Furthermore, Moscow continues to ignore the link between health and poverty, as the author of Chapter 2 indicates. Poor health prevents people from keeping a steady job, which can lead to poverty and the inability to afford health care. In addition, as one's health continues to deteriorate, this can lead to the person losing the social contacts, which assist him when times are difficult.

The remaining chapters are divided into three sections: Health Beliefs, Health and Social Structure, and Health and Social Action. Beginning in Chapter 2, various survey answers are referenced throughout the book to provide the reader context to understand issues that are sometimes tediously described by the authors: A 44-year old woman from Voronezh says, "Children now are not as healthy as we were at their age.... And again, it's the nerves: the fact that things aren't going to work out for children in the future, the material insecurity, it has an impact on children" (p.30). Use of tables and charts helps in comparing health indicators, which describe how people of different ages perceive their health. For example, the table on page 33 clearly shows that it is atypical for those over 40 to be in good health or to lead "a socially and economically active life" (p. 32). However, people are still going to work regardless of their health because they are afraid of being fired and losing that "means of existence" (p. 32).

How societies understand health determines their behavior toward it, and this is no different in Russian society. According to survey findings presented in Chapter 3, Russians are not taking responsibility for their own health because under communism health check-ups were mandatory. Russians have the attitude that they do not have control over their own health, and males particularly have a stoic attitude toward health

and ignore symptoms so as not to show signs of weakness. According to the authors, this is the main reason for the low life expectancy among men. Even if social policies are changed, the attitudes of Russians toward health must also change in order for there to be health improvement.

According to the data, Russians believe that the greatest effects of income inequality are health-related and stress-related. Chapter 4 gives a brief, yet comprehensive overview of the relationship between health and poverty in Russia. The quotes in this chapter are especially insightful: "...if the State allows such wealth to exist alongside indigence, then it's a State that is next to worthless," says a 40-year old unemployed economist (p.93). This chapter helps to introduce the following three chapters, which discuss poverty and health as well as employment.

Chapter 5 lays blame on the government for persistent poverty in Russia. Specifically, the government is not doing enough and its policies are intensifying social inequalities. This chapter in particular does an excellent job of using various indicators to support findings.

While healthcare in Russia is free and universal, in practice, "lack of access to good-quality health care is a serious problem for the poor," who are the ones that need it the most (p.129). The author of Chapter 6, Nadia Davidova, explains very clearly the unique and important role of social capital in the health of Russians. Russians must rely on social networks because they cannot rely on the government or underdeveloped civil society organizations. When people are poor or sick, their social capital declines (p.145). Social policies must tackle social exclusion.

The stark difference in the health situation that exists between men and women in Russia, due to the reform policies, is outlined by Inna Nazarova in Chapter 7. Among all ages and all classes, there is a gap of over ten years in life expectancy between men and women. Nazarova quotes Zaslavskaya that the "total socio-demographic cost of the radical reforms has been 650 million years of human life" (p.149). An explanation of how Zaslavskaya came to this astonishing statistic would have strengthened its credibility for the readers of this book. In data from in-depth interviews, one in four respondents said that because of working conditions, their health had deteriorated during the time of the reforms.

Inna Nazarova also compares the in-depth interviews, conducted by their research team, with the qualitative research data of the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS), an extensive survey of households on the effect of the reforms on health and welfare from 1992 to present. Chapters 7 and 8 outline the ways of improving accessibility and quality of medical care. These serve as sound social policy recommendations not only for the Russian government, but for other governments as well.

Chapter 9 presents research that implicates policy changes. The author, Irina Popova, introduces what survey respondents called "political perestroika." These were the political reforms that caused stress and disrupted several aspects of people's lives. In other words, tensions increased as demands increased, and people could no longer care for themselves. By quoting interviewees, Popova demonstrates to the reader a glimmer of hope; that people are using alternative resources to improve their health, including social connections, and asserts that social policy should "create... conditions that support people's active approaches to employment and increase their effectiveness" (p.225).

Social policy must also address gender differences in health. Because women have other responsibilities such as their families, if they need to change jobs or if they were to lose their jobs, they have something else to devote themselves to. Women caring for their families feel needed. On the other hand, if men change or lose their jobs, they can lose their social status. Chapter 10 shows that this directly affects one's health behavior. Therefore, a policy that promotes healthy behavior should acknowledge these gender differences.

The final chapter of the book describes the lives of ten Russian households during the reform years. It was very fitting to end with this chapter, as the reader is left with a lasting impression of how deeply the reforms impacted each household.

The research presented and the conclusions that have been drawn are significant and reliable because of the various methods used to obtain the data. Besides using in-depth interviews and life stories, the authors employ data from Russian research centers, including the RLMS and the Pan-Russian Representative Survey. Research scales such as the GHQ (General Health Questionnaire) and the EuroQol EQ 5D scale (a scale of self-rated health that has been used in other countries as well) were also used to confirm or disprove the data. Disproved hypotheses (see chapter 9) were also presented, and this provides vital information for future researchers in the field.

What would have been helpful is to include a section either in Chapter 1 or in an additional chapter following Chapter 1 explaining the methods used to collect the data. These methods are explained in detail in the Appendix, but it would have been useful, especially for a novice in methodological health research, to have briefly reviewed methods, such as EQ 5D and RLMS surveys, in the introduction to comprehend the methodologies discussed in subsequent chapters.

The editors of this book have organized an impressive in-depth work on the health situation in Russia and Russian attitudes towards health. The data presented and confirmed by various research methods is useful in understanding the current state of Russian health and why in the year 2000 Russia had one of the highest rates of population decline due to natural causes. More important are the policy prescriptions presented throughout the book. Many books that present research findings only present the findings; it is refreshing to read about how researchers suggest *applying* their research.

For those studying health and health policy, not only as applies to Russia but to other countries as well, this book is an essential read, as it outlines reliable research methods that could be modeled elsewhere. For those interested in learning more about why the state of Russian health is so grim, this book presents numerous valid explanations, which run counter to the conventional explanation. Russian policymakers as well as Russian citizens would benefit from reading this book. The reasoning behind the policy prescriptions would be useful for policymakers, and the very 'Russianness' of the book, including the Russian phrases at the beginning of each chapter, may provide citizens with hope and an urge to strive for better health behavior and encourage better health policies.

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