

*A Health Handbook for Women with Disabilities* by

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**‘Women with disabilities often discover that the social stigma of disability and inadequate care are greater barriers to health than the disabilities themselves.’** This book has been created to help women in ‘developing countries’ by giving useful advice, proper medical information and above all by promoting confidence and equality. It advocates ***not special treatment but equal treatment*** and it works on boosting self and general confidence in women to expect the same treatment as others and at the same time giving lots of information to allow women to be pro-active for themselves and take responsibility for their health. The book also recognizes the importance of support networks, care givers and the role of health workers. It provides advice for them but also encourages healthy relationships, promoting self-respect, clear boundaries and good communication.

It also encourages creation of social revolution at the roots of education in nursery school – challenging ingrained perceptions and attitudes from the start. This book is aimed at girls AND women – tackling puberty through to the menopause, sexual health, general and emotional health with the emphasis at all times on self-respect and confidence and strength gained from peer group support. It promotes equality, destroying urban myths by educating and encouraging non-judgmental attitudes. When opinions of people around you need to be changed, the onus is very much on you educating society and where social provision lets you down, taking responsibility and planning for your own needs with your own support system – friends or family members is the key to maintaining dignity, self-respect and power while still fighting for changes to be made. The book even tells you how to make alternatives from family planning sponges to crutches and ‘walkers’ with things ‘at hand’ around the home.

Even though it is very easy to read with short sentences and paragraphs, with clear headings and useful illustrations, it does not ‘dumb-down’ the content at all. Obviously much time has been taken over tackling complex issues around disability and health in a plain and simple but thorough and intelligent way. It defines disability – explaining ‘impairment’ as well as the medical and social models of disability. Importantly, it separates ‘illness’ from ‘disability’ highlighting this as something the medical profession does not necessarily do – and it includes a lot of information enabling women to self-diagnose STDs through to bed sores with sound medical advice every step of the way. A lot of the issues covered in the book resounded in me and I was impressed by the very clear and down-to-earth way it discussed things, it taught me to think about, for example, how charity workers or foundations go into a village and build a well which disabled women can’t access, meaning that they are excluded and unequal and a role and status they may have had before has actually been taken away.

All the way through the book there are first-hand experiences of women so you do not feel alone – the writers have brought together women’s experiences in 42 countries to produce a comprehensive and incisive book.