

VULNERABILITY THEORY IN PRACTICE: the challenges and opportunities of using vulnerability as a framework for action

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Questions for today

- What is vulnerability?
- How can we use it?
- What are the challenges and opportunities?

A bit of context...

- My own research
- The context of England and Wales: changing nature of crime, growing concerns with harm and vulnerability
- Practitioners from different agencies increasingly aware that a relatively small group of people responsible for large number of calls to emergency services
- Austerity

What is vulnerability?

- ‘A universal, inevitable, enduring aspect of the human condition’ (Fineman, 2008: 8)
- ‘There is a lack of consistency as to how vulnerability is defined’ (HMIC, 2015: 10)
- Vulnerability not necessarily visible, multiple types of vulnerability might coexist in the same individual
- *Which* vulnerability to prioritise?

How can we use it?

- Conceptually, as a notion that is used by practitioners to facilitate cross-agency cooperation, mutual identification of problems and possible solution
- Common aim: tackling vulnerability

We recognize that, in an area as small as ours, a lot of the helping agencies, or the statutory agencies, are seeing the same people. (...) We haven't gotten anywhere near success, but I do think that a shared vision is one of the things that help us drive the work across, whether it's social care, whether it's police, probation, or the NHS. I think that shared vision is quite an enabler for that, has been really helpful...

How can we use it?

- Operationally, vulnerability now used as a criterion for the identification of service users, especially from hard to reach constituencies
- Efforts to reconfigure support services to meet the needs of vulnerable individuals: safe and well visits, the MEAM approach
- Vulnerability used to assess levels of need and manage access to services

What are the challenges?

- Lack of consistency: a person could be considered vulnerable in one area but not in another, with consequences in terms of the service provided to them
- Hard to collate data on vulnerable individuals and their victimisation/prevalence
- Growing need (even more so because of Covid-19) and limits to capacity: how to make sure that those in the greatest need are helped? How sustainable is intensive support?

What are the opportunities?

- Vulnerability as a gateway for thinking more broadly about the the overlap between crime and poor health, and the factors that impact both – especially at the local level
- Preventative work to tackle ‘wicked problems’: crime, poverty, violence
- Policy innovation: LEPH

References

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Any questions?

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