



Conceptions of vulnerability across the housing sector

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Briefly:

- *Policy and External Affairs Manager, Cymorth Cymru*
- *Recently finished MSc in Welsh Government and Politics*
- *Really interested in frameworks and theoretical underpinning of practice (sorry!)*



Why vulnerability?

- *Because we use it all the time*
- *Inspired by Crisis / Frameworks Institute report*
- *Because we use it all the time.*

YOU KEEP USING THAT WORD



I DO NOT THINK IT MEANS WHAT YOU THINK IT MEANS



The question

The Housing (Wales) Act and ‘Material Things’

Or: To what extent were ‘impacts on vulnerable people’ considered before and during policy decisions made by Welsh politicians and officials during the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, and what can be learned from that in terms of consideration of vulnerability in wider Welsh policy?

One big problem with that...

I had to answer what vulnerability meant!





Quick note

- *10,000 words into 15 minutes, something had to go*
- *Lots of stuff not included about political process, lobbying strategy, which is another 50% of the work!*
- *Main focus today on vulnerability and our conceptions.*
- *Still based on interviews with experts, asked about vulnerability and the lobbying / legislative process.*



Some conceptions

- *Frameworks institute identifies public conceptions, some work well as conception of vulnerability (Universal Social Forces, Some Sit at the Brink, Government as Protector)*
- *Significant strand in literature about rationalism being weak tool for analyzing vulnerability*
- *Vulnerability can be seen as “potentiality” – does this weaken case to act on existing vulnerability? (Butler’s precarity)*
- *Huge body of literature, and had to give a basic overview, and settle on...*



Hurst: trying to define

- *Hurst (2008) noted problem of defining vulnerable persons.*
- *“although we agree that this notion has a strong pull, we cannot account for this pull, justify it, or define its limits.”*
- *“cannot know who should be afforded the protection due to vulnerable persons, or what form this protection should take”*



CIOMS²

- Those with limited capacity or freedom to consent
- Junior or subordinate members of a hierarchical group
- Elderly persons
- Residents of nursing homes
- People receiving welfare benefits or social assistance and other poor people
- The unemployed
- Patients in emergency rooms
- Some ethnic and racial minority groups
- Homeless persons
- Nomads
- Refugees or displaced persons

Source	Cited examples of vulnerability in human subjects research
Belmont report	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Racial minorities• The economically disadvantaged• The very sick• The institutionalised
45 CFR 46 ¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children• Prisoners• Pregnant women and fetuses
Declaration of Helsinki	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Incompetent persons• Persons susceptible to coercion• Persons who will not derive direct benefits from participation

- *Harm based definitions*
- *Consent based definitions*
- *Comprehensive definitions*



“I propose that vulnerability as a claim to special protection should be understood as an identifiably increased likelihood of incurring additional or greater wrong.”



The Hurst Principles

- 1) Is there an identifiable potential wrong?
- 2) If yes, are some people identifiably more likely than others to incur this wrong, or likely incur it to a greater degree?
- 3) Who shares in the duty to minimize, or avoid, this wrong, and does it include us in any way?
- 4) What should we do to minimize this increased likelihood or degree, or to compensate for it in ethically justifiable ways?

Practice takeaway?

- Does my organization or my idea of vulnerability work with Hurst Principles?
- Is there a way we can use these principles to assess if action is needed, and if so, what we have a duty to act on?
- Can this inform my research priorities?



Interviews

- Some interesting comments!
- Linking vulnerability to social model of disability?
- Pattern-based conceptions within political class (examples of listing, etc)
- Vulnerability used practically as rationing in scarcity system
- Bit of a quagmire!
- *Tended* to be categorisable into four distinct 'typologies'
- *Although!* Important to note most practitioners took a "synthesis" approach, combining all four.



Four typologies

LEGAL: broadly matches with Pereira, individual tends to appeal to legislation as source of their view of vulnerability.

PATTERNIST: an individual who subscribes to this view of vulnerability might engage in listing. Also can lead to people being missed off list, or lack of clarity. Assumption-based as well. Often seen amongst individuals who have learned it, or been briefed.

PRACTICAL: this is the idea of “common sense” vulnerability, often seen amongst practitioners, who “just know”, or “it just makes sense”. Street level bureaucracy, “gut-feeling”, etc.

SYSTEMIC: Systematic exacerbation or inducement of vulnerability. Poverty towards homelessness for example, disability towards isolation. A system creates and worsens vulnerability and implies a moral duty on us to change systems.



Potential usage

- **Policy analysis:** what typology of vulnerability is being used, and is it cognizant of systemic influences?
- **Systems change:** are we fully aware of all the elements of the system, and whether or not the *system itself* is set up to tend towards a particular typology? (e.g, Pereira) Without identifying these underlying assumptions, can we change systems?
- **Practice improvement:** what ideas of vulnerability do individuals have, is this impacting on how they view their role? (e.g, individuals have the power to change systems, do they see themselves in that way?)

Practice takeaway?

- What is my own typology?
- What is my organization's typology?
- Do all my colleagues work towards the same conception?
- Are we aware of the limitations of each conception?
- How do people see themselves?



Questions?

Happy to answer any, as well as other questions on the thesis – can't quite cover everything!