

Book review

Family Carers and Caring: What's It All About

*Edited by Alisoun Milne and Mary Larkin
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The book provides a comprehensive overview of what is known about unpaid family carers. It brings together different discourses and dimensions of carers. It highlights key issues and challenges faced by unpaid family carers. Milne and Larkin draw from the broad literature including academic research, policy, law, socio-demographic trends and use these to make the case for why the book is needed.

The book is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on definitional issues and challenges. It draws attention to the complexities of care, contested nature of care and impacts on who is defined as a carer. The chapter includes data on the number of carers, it foregrounds intersectional factors contributing to the increased demand of family carers in the UK and internationally. Chapter 2 outlines the profile of family caring in the UK, patterns and trends including, who gives care, who carers support, reasons for caring and complexities of caring. The chapter includes socio-economic and demographic challenges. Chapter 3 foregrounds the impact of caring on carers, drawing attention to both positive and negative impact including for example, the emotional, financial hardship and physical impact as well as the rewards of caring in what the authors described as having a “feelings of self-worth, gratification and a sense of ‘doing good’” (p.41).

The chapter includes analysis of intersectional factors affecting unpaid family carers. It contains a table of key policies and strategies aimed at supporting unpaid family carers in the four nations of the UK which those interested in comparative analysis of policy would find helpful.

Chapters 5 focuses on conceptual and theoretical context of carers. The chapter is structured around the following key areas: “Conceptualising Care: Approaches and Lenses” and “Understanding the nature of care and caring”. The chapter is compelling, a must-read, it is academic, analytical and interesting, the discussions centers on different dimensions of care and caring and discourses on carers. The chapter also touches on the construction of carers in policy, mainly from the UK context. Chapter 6 builds on earlier chapters drawing attention to inequalities. It focuses on social justice, social citizenship and right. Milne and Larkin make a case for a full-care system that has at its heart social justice, social citizenship and rights. They use case examples to illustrate the relationship between care and justice. The case examples are compelling, they highlight different ethical challenges within caring relationships as well as issues raising from resource allocation, the lack of resources and the practice and policy implications for provision of support and services for both the cared for person and carers. The concluding chapter explores five key topic areas. The first two focuses on the connection between care, caring and carers, social risk and social protection, examples include primary risk – becoming a carer and secondary risk resulting from poverty, unemployment and physical injury. The remaining three

center on democracy and social justice, care relationships (care is viewed as integral to human relationship) and carers rights and empowerment. This draws on rights within law but also highlights limits as rights are framed within the context of eligibility.

The book is underpinned by research, policy, law and social justice principles. It makes valuable contributions to the field by bringing together different discourses on what is known about unpaid family carers in the UK and internationally. The book is a welcome addition to the field. It is timely, particularly in the UK context as campaigners continue to draw attention to key issues faced by unpaid family carers as well as a benefit system that appears to be failing unpaid family carers (Gulland, 2024).

The book will appeal to those with an interest in and or are working with unpaid family carers, researchers, academics, practitioners and students both in the UK and internationally. The style of writing is accessible, it is academic and yet easy to read. It is thoughtfully written and a joy to read.

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Reference

Gulland, J. (2024), "How does carer's allowance in the UK construct family carers? History and recent developments", *International Journal of Care and Caring*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 98-113, doi: [10.1332/239788221X16716339335353](https://doi.org/10.1332/239788221X16716339335353).