

Book review

**Austerity's Victims:
Living with a Learning
Disability under
Cameron and May**

Edited by Neil Carpenter
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This book examines the impact of austerity on a group of people who Carpenter feels are rarely mentioned in the public debates: people with learning disabilities. It begins with a description of people with learning disabilities and then goes on, in Chapter 2, to describe the government policies which were aimed at reducing spending. Carpenter outlines the negative impact of these cuts on disabled people in general.

In Chapter 3, Carpenter then describes the average UK income and spending for individuals across the UK. In Chapters 4–8, he goes on to illustrate the differences between the standards of living of the “average” UK citizen and people with learning disabilities living in the UK. He does this through using five detailed case studies which examine the lives of people with learning disabilities who are living independently. He describes the changes in their funding arrangements over time and the impact of these changes on their lives. He makes comparison between reduced spending per week of a people with learning disabilities living in Cornwall in comparison with the UK average.

Chapter 9 pulls together the key themes emerging from the case studies. Carpenter describes the changes in the quality and quantity of support that people are receiving and the negative impact of these reductions on people's quality of life. For some of those who feature in his book, questions were asked which enabled them to quantify the impact of the changed support on their quality of life. Self-reported satisfaction with their overall quality of life has reduced. Other people presented in the case studies described the impact of living with a learning disability and the impact of reduced support on their social inclusion and participation. For example, one man reports “This isn't life. It's no fun” (p. 46). Another man

describes feeling lonely, saying ‘No-one to visit. Nothing to do in the evenings – only the telly’.

The case studies are powerful and personal illustrations of the impact of the cuts on people's ability to take part in everyday activities and experiences. People's lived experience seems at odds with public perceptions of those living on benefits. For example, in the media, people with disabilities who are living on benefits are often portrayed as scroungers, with such views have been linked to abuse (Pilkington, 2012).

In the final chapter, Carpenter describes the impact of austerity on services for people with learning disabilities, describing the ways in which social care is currently being underfunded and how these cuts place limits on the quality of life of those in receipt of support. This is a highly personal account of the impact of austerity on the lives of people with learning disabilities living in Cornwall.

The issues that Carpenter highlight are in no way limited to Cornwall. Those interested in this area may also be interested in recent research (Malli *et al.*, 2018) in this area. Their systematic review on the impact of austerity on the lives of people with learning disabilities suggest a disconnect between the funding available to support the needs of people with learning disabilities and people's support needs, with funding no longer being aligned to needs. They found similar adverse effects on quality of life, particularly around social support, with people and their carers becoming increasingly socially isolated.

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References

Malli, M., Sams, L., Forrester-Jones, R., Murphy, G. and Henwood, M. (2018), “Austerity and the lives of people with learning disabilities. A thematic synthesis of current literature”, *Disability & Society*, doi: 10.1080/09687599.2018.1497950.

Pilkington, D. (2012), “‘Scroungers’ rhetoric over benefits fuels abuse says charities”, *The Independent*, 6 February, p. 1.