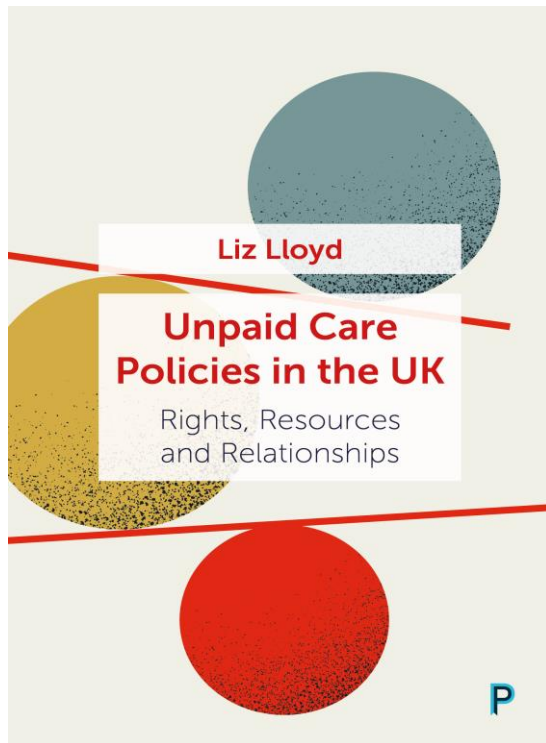


Unpaid care in the social care system: recalibration or reconceptualisation?



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Lessons from the history of policies on unpaid care

- Unpaid care made care in the community a possibility in the 1990s.
- Turbulence in social care has placed extreme pressures on unpaid care
- Unpaid care has provided a solution to the problem of meeting increasing demands in the context of spending cuts and austerity
- Policies have promoted the ideals of choice and control while reducing choice for those in unpaid care relationships
- Carers' organisations have succeeded in securing a place in the policy process at all levels

	England	Scotland	Wales	N. Ireland
1995	Carers Recognition and Services Act	Carers Recognition and Services Act	Carers Recognition and Services Act	
1999	Caring for Carers Strategy	Scottish Strategy for Carers		
2000	Carers and Disabled Children Act		Caring about Carers Strategy in Wales Carers and Disabled Children Act	
2002		Community Care and Health (Scotland) Act		Carers Strategy and DP. Valuing Carers Strategy
2004	Carers Equal Opportunities Act		Carers Equal Opportunities Act	
2006	Children and Families Act			Caring for Carers
2006			Work and Families Act	
2007			Pensions Act	

	England	Scotland	Wales	N. Ireland
2008	Strategy: Carers at the Heart of 21 st C families and communities			
2009				Review of support provision for carers
2010	Recognised, Valued supported	Caring Together Strategy	Carers Strategies (Wales) Measures	
			Equality Act	
2014	Care Act		Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act	
2016		Carers (Scotland) Act		Expert Advisory Panel
2018	Carers Action Plan 2018-2020	Carers Charter		
2021		Implementation plan	Strategy for Unpaid Carers (Wales)	
2022	Health and Care Act		Charter for Unpaid Carers	Reform of Adult Social Care consultation

Unpaid carers -still campaigning

- Changed balance of responsibility for care towards unpaid care
- Recognition of carers – better than in 1995 but partial
- Better understanding of carers' circumstances (2024 publicity on earnings limit and loss of Carer's Allowance)
- Support for unpaid care overlooked in wider policy context
- Rights of carers have become uncoupled from those of service users – no apparent change in perspective
- Carers regarded as 'co-workers' in some settings, co-clients in others but mainly 'background resources'
- Campaigners still call for recognition and improved rights, an end to carer poverty, regular breaks from caring
- Policy makers still declare support for 'heroic' unpaid carers

Recalibration: towards a shift in the balance of service provision and unpaid care

- Enhance choice in taking on an unpaid carer role and setting limits
- Enhance choice over type of services available and flexibility in making use of them
- Enable flourishing of family relationships, free of pressure of heavy care responsibilities
- Continued input from families would still keep cost of care down

Question remains - *what would be a fair balance?*

Not all about lack of resources - other factors to consider

1. Eligibility – who decides who is eligible to receive publicly funded support and what thresholds apply?
2. Should services for people with care needs be provided so as to allow carers *‘to have a life of their own outside of caring’*? What about the impact on service users?
3. What about the impact on carers of services provided for service users? eg management of Direct Payments

Reconceptualisation – because recalibration alone is insufficient

- Conceptual challenges: No boundaries to the concept of care (Daly 2021)
- Cultural values and struggles over these shape experiences of care
 - Abhorrence of dependency
 - Characterisation of people with care needs as burdensome (particularly in context of demographic trends)
 - Dominant political drive to cut public spending has reduced ‘care’ services to bare minimum of personal (bodily) care needs
- Services can exacerbate rather than relieve needs
 - ‘precarity’ in care

Considerations for policies and practices

1. Universality of the need for care
2. Care as diverse and widespread phenomenon not as defined activity. Policies are ambivalent on this point
3. Concept of care seen as antithetical to promotion of independence
4. Idealised perceptions of unpaid care and carers
5. Care/support needs are dynamic not static
6. Care as a social risk? Taking into account the secondary risks associated with unpaid care

Attention to need in private arrangements – the ‘hidden carer’

- Responsibility on carers to ‘come forward’ and identify themselves as carers
- The carer identity as a prerequisite for support
- Crisis level practice as the norm
- State interventions in private arrangements.

'A theory of care is incomplete unless it is embedded in a theory of justice' (Tronto 1993,166-167)

- Inequalities in power within care relationships generate an urgent need for principles of fairness to underpin policies and practices.
- A focus on individuals *and* on the relationship between them.
 - Optimise fairness in arrangements for care
 - Consider the past and potential future of the relationships of care
- Particularly important where individuals lack mental capacity (Clough 2014)

In practice

1. Professionals paying attention
 - I. A striking lack of reference to professional practice with unpaid carers within social work texts
 - II. Dismal history of carer assessment in social work (Seddon and Robinson 2015)
 - III. Need for intervention before crisis
2. Inevitability of conflicts of interest – professional skills in dealing with these are needed (Clough 2014)
3. Support for care relationships and openness to the perspectives of all interested parties

Conclusions

1. The legacy of policy action on unpaid care is poor. While some carers have benefited in some ways, progress is partial at best
2. A recalibrated balance of care is needed as between public services and unpaid care
3. A reconceptualisation of the role of the state in relation to private care arrangements is needed – within a recalibrated system.
4. Practical steps are possible that focus on relationships of care to resolve/manage conflicts of interest and optimise justice and fairness

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