

Disability, Austerity and Inequality: Overcoming Discrimination in the 21st Century

Date(s) Friday 21st September 2012 (09:00-16:30)

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The impact of the economic downturn and subsequent government policies related to these austere times have been felt by the whole country, but particularly by disabled people. It is well documented that the extra costs of disability are substantial (Zaidi & Burchadt 2005) and that disability increases the risk of poverty, while poverty creates the conditions for increased risk of disability (Emmett 2005). In the UK, between 50-60% of disabled people live in poverty and are particularly vulnerable to cuts in public sector services. The Disability Living Allowance has been cut; statutory, voluntary and private sector organisations are forced to tighten their belts; the NHS and public sector more generally are facing radical transformation; and reforms to Welfare and Higher Education will also affect disabled people disproportionately. The demand for charity services has recently increased, while donations have become sparse (BBC News 2009). Concurrently, the media's reporting of disability issues has become increasingly hostile, more regularly conflating disabled people with 'benefit cheats' and 'scroungers' (Inclusion London 2011; see e.g. Thornhill 2011), and such representations may be a causal factor in the rise in disability hate crimes (Johnson 2011). The 'most terrifying possibility', according to Sheldon (2009), is that 'budget considerations might have an increased impact on who does and does not receive life-saving treatment', thus bringing in a form of 'involuntary euthanasia [...] by the back door'.

The full impact of the current austerity regime for disabled people is as yet unknown, but it seems clear that while the introduction of the DDA acts (1995, 2005) has moved us forward in bridging the equality gap, austerity measures are reinscribing vulnerabilities and producing new forms of discrimination. The workshop will bring together a range of people who are disabled or have an interest in disability issues to discuss the urgent, multiple and complex effects of austerity, with a view to determining fruitful directions for further academic research with potential for significant impact.

References Emmett, A (2005) Disability and Poverty In E. Alant & L. Lloyd. (Eds.), *Augmentative and Alternative Communication and severe disabilities: Beyond poverty. Chapter 4, pp 1-8. London: Whurr Publishers.* BBC News. 2009, April 17. Charity donations hit by recession. BBC. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/> (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/>) go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk_news/7946518.stm. Inclusion London (2011) *Bad News for Disabled People: How the Newspapers are Reporting Disability.* Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research & Glasgow Media Centre. Johnson, Wesley, 'Disability Hate Crimes Up a Fifth', *The Independent*, 8 September 2011. Sheldon, A (2009) 'Recession, Radicalism and the Road to Recovery?', *Disability and Society*, 24.5, 667-71. Thornhill, T (2011) '£33,000 benefits cheat who had SEVEN jobs while claiming he was wheelchair-bound', *Daily Mail*, 24 August 2011. Zaidi, A & Burchadt, T (2005) 'Comparing Incomes when Needs Differ: Equalization for the Extra Costs of Disability in the UK', *Review of Income and Wealth*, 51.1, 89-114.

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