

Vulnerability and Care

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In post-industrialised western societies, the growing number of older individuals is the result of changing demographics and also the success of medicine. One consequence of living longer is the need for assistive services to accomplish the activities of self-care. Such services include help with housekeeping, cooking or tasks of a more intimate nature such as help with dressing or bathing. Understandably, the provision of such services has changed drastically as they became paid activities. The consequences of the commodification of care labour have been analysed (Armstrong et al, 2009a; Armstrong et al 2009b; Kontos, Miller and Mitchell, 2010; Lanoix 2011, 2013) and this paper furthers the investigation by focusing on the manner in which institutional regulations can increase the vulnerability of paid care workers. My analysis centres on non-profit nursing homes as they more clearly illustrate the impact of regulatory frameworks.

In the first part of the paper, I review the context of institutional caregiving. I use two examples of workarounds to illustrate the manner in which care workers can circumvent the rules and regulations of institutions. In the second part, using the writings of Dejours (1998) on labour and suffering, I show how care workers are often engaged in a slippery slope of bad care. I argue that this gives rise to pathogenic vulnerability and further marginalizes care workers. This further impacts care workers as it burdens those who are already immersed in precariousness.