ABSTRACTS BOOK OF 3rd WORLD CONFERENCE ON QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

See Me! Biographies of the Hidden City
Research as Advocacy

Lesley Gornall

1Department of Social Work, Social Care and Community Studies,
Sheffield Hallam University, UK

Cooper and Whyte (eds. 2017) outline the violent and isolating impact of austerity policies on increasing numbers of vulnerable people across the UK. The concerns outlined are reinforced by an increasing body of research, providing further evidence of the factual basis of the damning country report by the United Nations Human Rights Committee (2016). This undisseminated report listed 73 action points related to the planned replacement of the Human Rights Act with a diluted Bill of Rights against a backdrop of issues relating to poverty, food insecurity, rising homelessness, increasing insecure work contracts and diminution of workers’ rights, lack of parity between mental and physical health in service planning, limited support for refugees and asylum seekers, limited childcare, removal of housing benefit to under 21s and failure to ensure payment of the minimum wage to under 25s causing poverty and homelessness, failure to regulate corporate tax and ensure income to support the population. In October 2016, in the aftermath of the BREXIT referendum, the EU Commission on Racism and Intolerance (2016) Report on the UK highlighted the role of press and politicians in normalizing overtly xenophobic and racist behavior.

Despite the increasingly compelling body of evidence, and an indictment of the policy focus delivered in the results of the 2016 General election, there are only the smallest of changes to national policy, and the people affected most ‘denied recognition’, (Honneth 1995), disconnected at a structural level, socially invisible, prey to stigma and disdain.

This paper represents an attempt to overcome that disconnect and link the hidden narratives of austerity across a city with those able to effect local change. It will more fully analyse the impact of, and responses to, austerity at a local level across one industrial northern city. Using established local professional networks, the paper will initially provide results from a research pilot recording the biographies of one group of those ‘unseen’ lives touched by austerity, and seek to reconnect those biographies with policy makers, and social change agents, at least at a local level. The aim of the pilot will be to trial approaches to supportive, research conversations which extend the concept of intersubjectivity to ‘recognise’ individual participants, and enable a ‘forum of participation’ (Delcroix & Inowlocki, 2007). In empowering people to co – produce local solutions to local issues, it is hoped that the research process will be a process of reconnection, rekindling a sense of control, ability to exercise influence over individual and community lives and, as a consequence, well being. The research design will seek to identify pressure points, points of disconnection and potential connection, points with the potential for support, (re) actualisation and change, with a view to helping identify specific issues and solutions.

Keywords: austerity, biographical methods, policy influence, invisibility, disconnect, exclusion, lived experience.

References

