

Clients, Consumers, Citizens? The Privatisation of Adult Social Care in England

Bob Hudson

Bristol, Policy Press, 2021, pp. v +188, ISBN 978 1 4473 5569 4 (hbk), 24.99

The key aim of the book is to chart the shift of adult social care as being historically for 'clients' towards it being currently for 'consumers', with a hope that it becomes the domain of 'citizens'. The first thing to say is that the notion of the existence of a 'client, consumer or citizen' realm in adult social care is not new, as Hudson is aware of through his referencing of the important work of Janet Clarke (2006) and Hugh McLaughlin (2009) in the book. What this book does do well is update what has happened in the last 20 years or so, with an up-to-date account of the impact that Covid-19 has had on adult social care (spoiler alert – it's not good). Throughout the book, Hudson makes the point that adult social care has led a precarious existence in comparison to health care. This is important context to understand the current travails of adult social care. Based on the title, the book can essentially be divided into three parts. The first part outlines the historical focus in adult social care on 'clients' as demarcated with the developments from the Victorian age through to the 1970s. There is already a wealth of literature about developments in welfare in relation to this period, so it is unclear from the reader what the content of this section adds to the literature.

However, when in the second part Hudson details the current context of adult social care through the lens of 'consumers', the book provides a fascinating insight as to why we are where we are today. In particular, Hudson provides a clear discussion of how the quasi-market in which adult social care works to limit positive development and reform within the sector, but also works to limit the possibility of there being significant change away from this model. In effect, it is a description of policy failure, specifically of how trying to run a system that at its best is based around social needs and actions on 'consumerism' has major 'dilemmas', as Hudson puts it. Indeed, the failure of other 'consumer' based approaches to welfare, most notably recently of the probation service reforms, reinforces the importance of Hudson's book to policy makers and the like. Hudson also identifies that the shift to the consumer has thrown up some important emergent fields for future adult social care researchers, most notably self-funders and informal carers. A consideration of absence of the direct voices of citizens with lived experience of social work would perhaps also have been relevant here, at a time when social work as a profession is increasingly respecting and including such voices in policy development.

The book then shifts to its third focus of 'citizens', through which Hudson endeavours to make the case for the shift to a system of adult social care based on citizenship, or more specifically social contract theory. Bearing in mind the disaster of the current system, this is a laudable aim, but it suffers from the fact that the notion of citizenship itself is not really well set out by Hudson, so it is unclear what the end result should be. He does mention the models of citizenship given by T H Marshall

(1950) and Richard Titmuss (1997) as examples of citizenship, but these are too brief. To argue that adult social care needs to be based on citizenship needs a more detailed understanding of citizenship itself. Additionally, it does feel as if some of the information presented in the Conclusion should have been presented in this Chapter.

The book then details the impact that COVID-19 has had on adult social care, and how this has reinforced already existing issues with adult social care. This provides a relevant and up to date account of the state adult social care, and will be of interest to a wider audience. However, structurally this chapter feels as if it belongs before the section on citizens, as it is essentially setting a context for the changes that Hudson proposes.

Beyond some minor structural issues, such as all chapters not having an Introduction, and the order of some chapters such as 5, 6 and 7 not flowing, the book is generally clear and well written. The book is bold in trying to set out a vision for social work based on citizenship rather than consumerism, but this is done in a limited way that is under theorised and so undercooked.

Hudson's book will be of interest to those concerned with social work policy making and policy analysis, and to a lesser extent social work theory. Its direct relevance to frontline social workers is less clear, as the book is concerned primarily with overarching policy rather than the day-to-day social work.

References

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