

Title: Money, friends and coping day to day : an inclusive research project exploring poverty and social capital in the lives of people with a learning disability

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Awarded: 2012

Abstract:

People with a mild learning disability who live independently and do not get support from services make up the largest group within the learning disability population. This thesis describes an inclusive research project which, through using a grounded theory approach, enabled seven people from this group to explore their own lives taking a lead in the direction of the research. The project focuses on the strategies they used to cope with day-to-day living, their experiences of poverty, and the support received from their social networks and social capital. The research also explores issues of identity and labelling and how to give this excluded group a voice. The fieldwork took place between 2010 and 2011 with data being collected from ten focus groups, unstructured interviews, action research and notes from observations and reflections. The research found that, for this group, many aspects of day-to-day living were a challenge. They also endured poverty, other social problems and health issues, all of which exacerbated their social exclusion. They were all found to benefit from strong 'bonding social capital' from family and close friends but lacked 'bridging social capital' to people outside their social networks, although small local organisations such as churches provided vital support. The research group members were clear that they wanted to be understood by mainstream services as having a learning disability, so they could get better support. They found the involvement in inclusive research to be empowering, choosing to continue with it beyond the research project.