

Understanding the Links Between Cognitive Impairment and Exploitation: Protocol for a Scoping Review of the Literature

Project Team

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Background

This review is one part of a wider project investigating the connections between cognitive impairment and/or neurodiverse conditions and exploitation in England. Funded by the Nuffield Foundation, the project is underpinned by the social model of disability (Shakespeare, 2006) whereby structural and institutional factors intersect with an individual's lived experience to create the conditions where exploitation occurs.

Within this review, we use cognitive impairment and neurodiversity as umbrella terms for a range of phenomena where a person's capacity, functionality and mental processing may differ from a widely perceived norm. We recognise there exists considerable scholarly and practitioner debate around the use of such terminology including issues related to self-identification and definition. Whilst acknowledging these challenges, this scoping review uses both terms to ensure the intersections between a broad range of conditions and differences and exploitation are explored; including those which may often be overlooked (Robinson, Gardner & Grey, 2021:7). We recognise that there may not be a simple causal relationship between cognitive diversity and exploitation; wider institutional and societal factors, such as race, class and gender, also impact on the lived experience of cognitive diversity and exploitation (French, Derdel & Kelly, 2009). Therefore, we use "cognitive impairment" to refer to a notable impairment in cognitive functioning (Roy, 2013).



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We also include prominent neurodiverse conditions such as Autism and ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) that affect functioning in more subtle ways (Mcgee, 2012). Mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia, are also included where they may impact on an individual's capacity and functioning (Vincent-Gil & Portella, 2021; Harvey & Keefe, 2012; Castaneda et al, 2011).

Exploitation is mistreatment or abuse of a person for diverse types of personal gain, often in the context of a power disparity. This power disparity can arise from the relative vulnerability of the victim, for example through age, financial or citizenship status, physical or cognitive impairment. Exploitation is a broad spectrum (Skrivankova, 2019) which may range from extreme forms including slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour to crimes involving property or finance such as cuckooing. Robinson, Gardner and Grey (2021) identify that individuals' may be exploited through criminal, sexual, financial, spiritual or labour-related activities. There exists overlap between forms of abuse and exploitation, and vulnerabilities that may expose someone to abuse may also expose them to exploitation. Nevertheless, this study is limited to exploitation where the perpetrator gains from abusing or mistreating the victim in the form of financial, social or political recompense (UN, 2017: 7). Accordingly, there are often third parties or specific "subcultures" (Roe-Sepwitz et al 2014), such as criminal or social networks, present which nurture such exploitation.

Review Aim

To investigate cognitive impairment and neurodiverse conditions as possible factors which increase an individuals' vulnerability to exploitation.

Review Objectives

1. To develop an overview of the range of literature available.
2. To clarify key concepts and definitions in relation to cognitive impairment, neurodiversity and exploitation.
3. To identify knowledge gaps and areas for future research.

Methodology

In comparison to systematic reviews, scoping reviews answer broader questions about the size, variety and nature of the evidence base of a particular issue. They are particularly useful for summarising the findings from a body of knowledge that is heterogenous in methods or disciplines (Tricco et al., 2018). Given this focus, a scoping methodology will be used to answer the research aim and objectives for this review. The conduct and reporting of the review will follow the PRISMA extension for scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR) (Tricco et al., 2018).

Methods

Search Strategy

A multistage search strategy will be employed to identify relevant literature:

- (1) Electronic Database searches.
- (2) Google search and review of the first 10 pages of hits.
- (3) Forwards and Backwards citation tracking of included studies.
- (4) Searches of relevant NGO websites.
- (5) Call for evidence on social media.

Electronic Database Searches

The following databases will be searched from 1998 to present day:

- (1) PsycINFO (Online database of psychological literature).
- (2) MEDLINE (Online database of health and medical journals and other news sources).
- (3) EMBASE (Online database of health and medical journals).
- (4) CINAHL (Online database of nursing and allied health literature).
- (5) ASSIA (Applied Social Sciences).
- (6) SCOPUS (Social Sciences).
- (7) The Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (CENTRAL).
- (8) ICTRP (WHO online database of clinical trials).
- (9) PILOTS (Online database, Published International Literature on Traumatic Stress).
- (10) Online Library of Dignity (Danish Institute Against Torture).
- (11) SCIE (Online database of UK social care and social work information and research).
- (12) OpenGrey (Online system for grey literature in Europe).

The search strategy will include keywords and MeSH terms (where relevant) related to cognitive impairment, intellectual disability, and mental health. These will be combined with keyword terms for human trafficking, modern slavery, and exploitation. All search terms will be adapted as necessary for the different bibliographic databases. In addition to the database searches, we will also complete a general search on google and review the first 10 pages of hits.

Forwards and Backwards Citation Tracking

Forwards and backwards citation tracking will be completed. Forwards citation tracking will be carried out using google scholar. Backwards citation tracking will involve reviewing the reference list of all included studies.

Searches of Relevant NGO Websites

Searches of relevant NGO/third sector websites will also be undertaken. Due to the difficulties establishing a representative sample of organisations and the time and resource available, organisations will be selected on the following basis via a rapid web search and expert recommendation:

- (1) UK based.
- (2) National focus (either UK or devolved nations).
- (3) Have a web presence.
- (4) Fit with the review's definition of either exploitation or cognitive impairment.

Call for Evidence

A call for evidence inviting individuals and organisations to submit evidence will be distributed via social media and the projects' partner organisations.

Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible for inclusion in the review, papers will need to:

- (1) Report original data collected via quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methodological approaches.
- (2) Present extractable data related to people who have a cognitive impairment and/or neurodiversity and have experienced exploitation (as defined by this review).
- (3) Cognitive impairment and/or neurodiversity needs to be a precipitating factor for exploitation and not a consequence.
- (4) Be published from 1998 onwards.
- (5) Be written in the English Language.

Papers will be excluded from the review if:

- (1) They were published prior to 1998.
- (2) They are not written in the English Language.
- (3) They do not report original data. For example, Editorials, Opinion Articles and Book Reviews. Other literature reviews will also be excluded.
- (4) They are Theses or dissertations.
- (5) They present no extractable data related to people with a cognitive impairment and/or neurodiversity who have experienced exploitation.
- (6) They present data related to people with a cognitive impairment and/or neurodiversity but there is no evidence of exploitation.
- (7) They present data related to exploitation but there is no evidence of cognitive impairment.

No limits to geographical region will be applied. If the research team report the same study in multiple papers, only the main study report will be included.

Critical Appraisal

To assess the quality of included studies the QualSyst Tool by Kmet et al. (2004) will be used. With this tool, items of each study are scored against a checklist based on the degree to which the specific criteria were met or reported (yes =2, partial =1, no =0). Any items that are not applicable are marked as such and removed from the calculation of the summary score. The obtained scores are represented as a percentage and these are used to define quality as strong (>80%), good (70-80%), adequate (50-70%) or limited (<50%). Studies will not be removed from the review based on quality score alone.

Data Extraction

All articles identified by the database searches will be downloaded into reference management software and screened at the title/abstract level for inclusion in full-text review by one reviewer. A second reviewer will review the lower of 20% or 250 returns. Two reviewers will independently review the full text of the first 20% or 20 screened papers (whichever is lower). Differences will be resolved by discussion or with reference to a third reviewer if consensus cannot be reached. Thereafter, queries about inclusion following full text review will be resolved through discussion with the second reviewer.

Following inclusion in the review, data will be extracted using a standardised extraction form by one reviewer, the second reviewer will verify the extraction data from up to 10 papers.

The following data will be extracted:

- (1) Bibliographic information.
- (2) Study design.
- (3) Setting.
- (4) Sample selection.
- (5) Recruitment methods.

- (6) Sample characteristics.
- (7) Intervention description (if applicable).
- (8) Control type (if applicable).
- (9) Primary and secondary outcome measures (if applicable).
- (10) Timing of outcome measurement (if applicable).
- (11) Attrition rate (if applicable).
- (12) Data analysis methods.
- (13) Main Findings.
- (14) Stated Limitations.

Data Synthesis

Due to the anticipated heterogeneity in the evidence base a statistical pooling of data will not be possible. A narrative synthesis will therefore be employed based on the guidance for the conduct of narrative synthesis within systematic reviews (Popay et al., 2006). This will be an iterative process and will involve the development of a preliminary synthesis, exploration of relationships within and between studies, and the assessment of robustness. Discussion and critical reflection amongst the research team will be a core component of undertaking the synthesis.

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