

## Book Review

### *Policing Vulnerability*

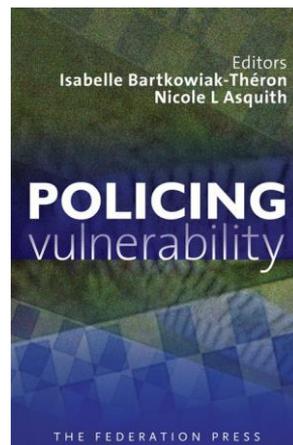
by Isabelle Bartkowiak-Theron and Nicole L. Asquith

The Federation Press, Sydney

2012, 320 pages

ISBN-9781862878976

Reviewed by Emma Colvin



In this edited collection, the editors begin by asking important questions about the way vulnerability is perceived, categorised and dealt with by police. In particular, they unpack the terminology around vulnerability and examining the way markers of vulnerability have been addressed in academic research, critiquing siloed approaches that focus on primary dimensions of diversity that do not account for people presenting with multiple markers of vulnerability. The authors encourage a respectful approach to discussing vulnerability that focuses on individual agency rather than emphasizing disadvantage. This is refreshing, especially as there is sometimes a tendency in scholarly writing on vulnerability to be paternalistic. Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith stress the importance of cultural competency in policing and assert that it can be an asset rather than an encumbrance.

This collection comprises work by authors that interrogates policing and vulnerability at all stages of contact. The book is split into five sections that are based on the progression through the policing process from first contact through to sentencing and punishment, providing critical analysis on crucial stages of intervention.

The first section of the book examines the first point of contact between police and vulnerable people. This is a stage that can set the tone for future interactions and early intervention, as such it has the potential to inform those working at the coalface on how to effectively manage these first points of

contact. Stanford's chapter interrogates risk dynamic in constructing and categorizing risk. While she highlights the inherently political nature of risk dynamics within a neo-liberal system, her research found that in practice workers interacting with vulnerable people tend to take a less conservative approach. Based on her findings she encourages workers to take a reflexive approach. Doctors Bartkowiak-Theron and Corbo Crehan's following chapter further critiques the categorisation of vulnerability and delves into assumptions about vulnerable group membership. They question the assumptive nature of the legal system when markers of vulnerability are identified, noting that just because a person may be a member of a group that has been identified as vulnerable, this does not necessarily signal a certain level of disadvantage. Bartkowiak-Theron and Layton's chapter provides a useful analysis of police recruit education, exploring effective ways of educating recruits on interactions with vulnerable people.

Part two broadens the focus from first response to deviancy, commencing with Winter and Asquith's study on quality of life policing in Tasmania. They recommend that police involved with community programs need to exercise awareness and community engagement rather than take a 'top-down' approach to community policing. The role of the police liaison officer is critiqued by Bartkowiak-Theron, who argues that while the role is important both within the police organisation and the community, a siloed approach may not be the best way to respond to people with multiple markers of vulnerability. Clifford's chapter on use of force, the media and vulnerability is particularly pertinent to law enforcement practitioners in light of recent cases that garnered significant media attention, e.g. Tyler Cassidy and Roberto Curti.

In part three, which focuses on police responses to vulnerability, Herrington and Clifford look at responses to mental illness. The "joined-up" approach discussed in this chapter may be of help to police and other agencies at the frontline of mental health policing. Egan-Vine and Fraser's chapter on police response to refugees raises important issues when dealing with CALD communities. This section is concluded by Asquith's discussion of complaint-making, which may prove of interest to those working with vulnerable people in helping them approach police. Part four transitions to vulnerability and custody, including a chapter by Huntley that examines the, to date, relatively under-researched area of acquired brain injury. Lorana Bartel's chapter on indigenous deaths in custody demonstrates that more than 20 years since the Royal

Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody there is still some way to go in addressing the Commission's recommendations. Readers involved in police investigation may also find Roberts and Herrington's chapter on psychological vulnerability and investigation proves useful.

The final section of this collection examines the transition of vulnerable people from police to the next stage in the process with Bartels and Richards examining vulnerability in the courtroom, Robinson addressing restorative justice and diversionary options and Graham examining desistance from crime. While this section covers interactions that do not necessarily directly involve police, it provides an important picture of the pathway vulnerable people tread throughout the criminal justice system.

While offering practical solutions grounded in empirical evidence and scholarly research the editors rightly note that the efficacy of these solutions is reliant on resourcing and political support. This book may primarily act as a guide for police when dealing with vulnerable people, its use and interest readily extend beyond serving police officers and recruit training to anyone working in the social and criminal justice sector.

#### ABOUT THE REVIEWER

**Emma Colvin**, BA, MCrim, is a lecturer in Justice Studies at Charles Sturt University. She is currently completing her PhD in criminology at Monash University examining the use of therapeutic bail in the Australian state of Victoria. Her research interests include therapeutic jurisprudence, bail, remand, and vulnerability in the criminal justice system. She is currently working on a collaborative research project looking at out of home care service provision and children in care who are entangled in the criminal justice system.

- o O o -