

RELATIONSHIPS AND RECOGNITION

What policy says about young people with disability and their support workers working together

This paper explains how policy is important in supporting good relationships between young people with disability and their support workers. It has two sections:

- If you want to get some quick information, you can read just this first page.
- If you want more information, please read the complete summary.

QUICK SUMMARY

What are policies and why do they matter?

Policies are like rules. They tell people who work in government or organisations how they should work with people with disability to do a good job. They also let people with disability know what they can expect from the government or from their service provider if they have one.

There are many different policies for working with people with disability. Some are made by organisations that support them, some by governments, and some by international organisations such as the United Nations.

What did we do?

We wanted to know if disability policy helps make good relationships between people with disability and their support workers. We read lots of policies to see what they said about it.

What did we find?

Many policies said things about how people with disability should be supported, but few actually talked about 'relationships'.

'Big' policies like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) say

that it is important that people with disability are respected, and that relationships work well. These policies are about human rights.

Then the government, services and community organisations make sure these 'big' policies happen in people's lives every day.

Most of the time policies talked about the rights of the person with disability OR the job of the worker. Few policies talked about young people AND workers at the same time (their relationship together). Policies about working together are important, because we know that good relationships are a way for people to feel respected.

Some policies are about making sure people with disability get their rights (with the help of their support workers). An example is a policy that says a worker's job is to help people to make choices and decisions when they want that help.

Some policies are about what shouldn't happen in relationships between young people and their support workers. These policies are about balancing people's rights to choice with their right to be safe.

Because the NDIS is making lots of changes to disability support right now, this is an important time to think about how young people and their workers work.

OUR POLICY ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

With the NDIS prompting changes towards choice of provider, individualised approaches and packages, person-centredness and self-directed funding, relationships will be increasingly important in people having choice and control over both the types of service and the support they receive. Little is known, however, about how disability policy positions relationships between people with disability and their support workers to support this change.

Policy review

The policy review was done in three stages.

In the first stage, the policies from international, national, state and organisation levels were collected. These included key policies from each level that appeared to be relevant to relationships between young people with disability and their paid support workers.

These were grouped as either:

- International law
- Legislative acts
- State disability policy plans
- State implementation guides that interpret national regulations and set state standards

We also examined policies from two case study organisations.

We then searched for specific words within the policies (see Table 1 on page 3). We chose words based on previous work that had looked at what makes relationships work well. For this, we turned to the work of Axel Honneth (1995). He believes that if someone is “cared for, respected and valued” they will feel good about themselves. He thinks that other people will also see that they are important too. Feeling these things helps people feel important and included. They start to see how they can be part of making life better for themselves and others. Honneth calls this “developing their identity” and is in line with disability policy that aspires to be “person-centred”.

When an organisation acknowledges the rights of a service user through its policies and procedures, recognition flows to the service user in a downward direction (Ikaheimo, 2015). Policies and practices that emphasise people’s rights tend to produce attitudes of recognition within an organisation’s workers (Niemi, 2015). Importantly, good relationships can also exist where organisations might not promote recognition.

We looked at each policy document or grouped documents to see where the search terms did and did not appear.

Table 1: Search words found in policy

Policies	Rights	Relationship	Supportive	Capacity	Choice	Participation	Respect	Risk	Safety	Dignity, integrity	Interaction	Inclusion	Independent	Protect	Responsibility	Citizen	Friendship	Conflict	Autonomy	Together	Trust	
International																						
UNCRPD	x	-	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	-	-	
Federal																						
NDIS Act	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	x	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	-	-	-	
National Disability Strategy	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	-	-	x	-	-	
National Standards	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	x	-	
Workers' Rights	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	x	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
State																						
Inclusion	x	x	-	x	x	x	x	-	x	-	x	x	-	x	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	
Disability Service Standards	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	-	-	x	-	
State Policy Plan	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	
Implementation guides	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	
Organisation																						
Employee Induction	x	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	x	
Discipline, antidiscrimination	x	-	-	-	x	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Person-centred support	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	x	-	-	x	
Service management	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	
Service access	-	x	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Rights policy	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	-	-	
Participation and inclusion	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	-	x	x	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	
Total policies with text	15	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	12	11	10	10	9	7	4	4	4	4	3	2	

The final stage of the policy review was a content analysis, to look at how the policies refer to people with disability, workers, and the relationships between them. In particular, we were interested to identify if, and how, policy considers and supports the conditions for recognition in the relationship between people and workers.

What we found

We found differences in the way relationships are mentioned and how conditions for recognition of people with disability and support workers are discussed, depending on each policy. International and national policies are more likely to focus on the position of the person with disability. Organisational policies are more likely to also include acknowledgement of the support worker, mainly reflecting their responsibility to implement the policies.

Some national policies directly refer to relationships, with a focus on facilitating the person's control over decision-making. The state and organisational policies reference the international and national policy aspirations concerning the rights of the person and respect from the worker, but also tend to discuss what is or is not possible to protect against risk of harm. The tensions between choice and safety in policy create potential struggles for recognition – something that policy cannot solve but organisations need to manage.

The ways the policies talk about the relationship between people with disability and workers is mostly about the rights of people with disability and the responsibilities of support workers. The more closely aligned the policy is to the role of the worker, the less the role of the person with disability is acknowledged. Likewise, the more emphasis in the policy on rights and respect for the person with disability, the less the worker's role in the relationship is mentioned. The policies do not usually talk about the relationship as a mutual partnership and that is significant as mutual partnerships provide a strong indication that respect is practised (Honneth, 1995).

The findings demonstrate the need to ensure that policy is not too complicated with lots of social and political demands but instead should lay the groundwork for how human rights, freedom, identity and justice are to be realised together. This is important in making sure a person's rights will be respected as they participate in various activities and decision-making processes.

Conclusion

This policy analysis is an important beginning for a study currently underway on relationships between young people with disability and their support workers. In particular, the analysis gives the project a deeper understanding of the ways in which policy positions these relationships and creates conditions for recognition to be experienced. The analysis found that while the rights of people with disability and the rights of workers are unevenly emphasised in policy, each is acknowledged at different policy levels. While the relationship between them is often positioned as an opportunity for expression of these rights, current policy also highlights struggles over recognition as rights, risks, responsibilities and freedoms are put side by side and are sometimes conflicting, within a complex and ambitious policy shift.

The policy analysis did not look at the ways policies are operationalised or ignored, or how they shape or reflect the day-to-day support practice, where the relationships happen. These elements are also important for good relationships between people with disability and workers, and we look at those in other phases of the study.

References

- Honneth, A. (1995). *The struggle for recognition: The moral grammar of social conflicts*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Ikäheimo, H. (2015). 01. Conceptualizing Causes for Lack of Recognition: Capacities, Costs and Understanding. *Studies in Social and Political Thought*, 25.
- Niemi, P. (2015) The Professional Form of Recognition in Social Work. *Studies in Social and Political Thought*, 25.