

This essay will define the concept of advocacy, how it relates to power, oppression and how people can become empowered through agency, in the concept of social care, how they identify problems, and provide help and support to the client, with the aim of empowering them to make their own decisions.

There are many different aspects of advocacy, it is important that first we establish what advocacy is. According to the Advocacy charter the definition is.

Advocacy is taking action to help people say what they want, secure their rights, represent their interests, and obtain the services they need. Advocates and advocacy schemes work in partnership with the people they support and take their side. Advocacy promotes social inclusion, equality and social justice (advocacy QPM (2014) Revised Advocacy charter and code of practice).

In the Social Services and *Well-being (Wales) Act*, (2014) sec 180) Advocacy defines as “advocacy services”. A service that provides representation, care and support to individuals.

Advocates are there to safe-guard the vulnerable and give a voice to these discriminated against. They should speak on behalf of those needing a stronger voice, gain information and support vulnerable people make more informed decisions about their needs and future. Social care plays a large role in safe-guarding the vulnerable, they identify those in need and what support is available according to that need. *The social services and wellbeing (wales) act (2014)*, says that in cases of safeguarding the local social care worker would assess the situation and decide if an advocate was appropriate. It is very important that the person gets the right support, to make what could be very difficult decisions .

Moss defines the advocacy role as “one who pleads the case for another” moss (2015 p18) in social care. This could be supporting a client when claiming benefits or help to find a job, this would include filling in forms and identifying what the client was entitled too and what their strengths would be in the work place. They would also support those with disabilities both physical and mental.

The role of the advocate is to stand up for the vulnerable, and to help that person understand what is going on, more importantly to give them the tools of empowerment and speak for themselves. When taking this into account in the context of Social Care, Karen Morgaine, Moshoua Capous-Desullas (2015 cited in The national association of social workers (nasw) the largest member group of social workers in the united states, notes in the preamble, 2008 para.2) tells us that the main focus of Social Care is to identify problems, look at their needs, while paying attention to the vulnerable and oppressed. Supporting the client in poverty, and to then find the help they need thus improving their wellbeing.

One now needs to look at the influence of power and how this leads to oppression. Social Care plays a large role in safe guarding vulnerable people, it is for them to understand the client's needs and identifying the support required.

“power can be defined as the degree of control over material, human, intellectual and financial resources exercised by different sections in society” Aisa pacific Bureau of adult's educations (ASPBAE) 1993, study undertaken with FAO's Freedom from hunger campaign as quoted in *Woman's Empowerment in South Asia-Concepts and practices*, Srilatha Batliwala, ASPBAE/FAO (Draft), 1993

The above quote tells us that there are many degrees of power, either as an individual or through social power. This means some groups can have more power over others as they are a collective. Also, how Power can be executed through first as an individual and secondly through social divisions, for example gender, caste age ethnicity and race. These divisions are also thought to include education religion and in some cases what family you are from.

Morgaine Capous-Desyllas (2015 Lynn Parker 2015 p 214). Lynn Parker explains how Social Care workers have to asses the level of power during their first meeting with a client. During the meeting things like if there are any child care issues? what is their income? how is their relationship with their parent or partner. Also, if and how this affects the client. These first impressions will give the care worker a guide to the level of power in the home, such as if there is an abusive parent or partner. Any power struggle will lead to oppression eventually. Thompson (2016 page50) tells us that oppression comes from discrimination, being treated unfairly. He suggests that to reduce oppression you must discover what discrimination has caused it. He also implies that a Social Care worker's power can be oppressive, they can be insensitive and not relate to the client, on sometimes very sensitive issues, it is commented that social care workers can take an “individual approach and thus failing, to see appreciate wider social patterns” Thompson (2016 cited Mills 1970 p19).

When looking at agency we need to first define it, Sen (1999 p 152) describes agency as “Greater freedom enhances the ability of people to help themselves”. (Depelteau F 2008 p51) writes of a need for ‘individual freedom’ regardless of ‘social structure’, It should come from the individual, but is often affected by class or a feeling of depravation. However, Senn (1999 p 152) describes ‘agency’ as when a person is free to do and achieve’. From this we are told to have agency is the ability to be free and be able to change their direction. This will contribute to their wellbeing, when applying this to the concept of social care. Jeffery (2011 p 3-7) suggests that understanding agency will lead to more freedom, for those working in social care. Liz Jeffery implies there has been a huge change in the influence of agency over the last twenty years. One example of this is the introduction of hospices. These were put in place with the intention of offering end of life care, to people suffering from incurable and debilitating diseases. Giving them agency in their own choices, and care to die with dignity.

As mentioned above the influence of power often leads to oppression. Thompson (2016 p 17) implies that oppression comes from being treated unfairly. If someone has the power over another, that person would eventually become oppressed. It is also suggested by Thompson (2016 p 17) that oppression is caused by discrimination. Those discriminated against are usually women, the disabled, ethnic minorities and from social class. Laird (2008 cited (Dominelli 2002 p 22) as offering an interesting view on oppression, and social care. It is suggested that a black disabled woman could be oppressed due to gender race and disability. While a female social care worker could also be oppressed for gender but could still be oppressive due to her position. This offers a glimpse of oppressive and oppressed. It is important to find a way of empowerment to help people who are oppressed to start to recognize how to help themselves. Clifford, Burke (2009 cited Lukes 2005 71-73) say that making decisions is an exercise of power. It is important to remember that not everyone has the ability to make decisions for themselves. This would be seen as 'non-instructed advocacy', when the client would not be able to instruct the advocate. It is still important to protect the client's rights and to ensure they are being treated fairly and more importantly their needs are taken into account. Advocacy QPM (2014)

When looking at social care and empowerment, Jansson (2016, p2) implies that the care workers role should meet the client's basic needs. He goes on to say how it is important that clients have the right to the resources they need to improve their lives, Paulo Freire provides an interesting quote on this "In order for the oppressed to unite, they must first cut the umbilical cord of magic and myth which binds them to the world of oppression"(Freire, 2017, p148). He implies that everyone has the power to become empowered, they must look inside themselves to find it, the people should unite, and this will give them the strength to stand up to the oppressor.

In conclusion looking at advocacy in the context of social policy, the advocate should look at all the above issues. Addressing the needs of the client, what influences will be a factor, such as what caused the need for an advocate in the first place. It is important to work with the client and any other agencies involved. Providing the client with the ability to make decisions and come up with a plan that empowers them. Enabling the client to use their own voice through self-advocacy, defined as "When individuals represent and speak for themselves" (*social services and wellbeing (wales) act 2014* chapter 8).

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