



BSA Virtual Annual Conference 2022:
Building Equality and Justice Now

**The 'Cacophony' of life and death: the impact of the
pandemic on persons with disabilities in Ukraine**

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Context: War in Ukraine.



Photo: urban street in Ukraine devastated by war. Photo by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine:

<https://www.facebook.com/mvs.gov.ua>

Research Project.



- Focused on the impact of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities.
- Designed and delivered together with the National Assembly of People with Disabilities & Institute of Sociology (NASU).
- Funded by GCRF/AHRC.
- Methods/data collection (all between May and November 2022):
 - Phase 1: online survey of OPDs from across Ukraine (n=108)
 - Phase 2: interviews with people with disabilities from ten regions in Ukraine (n=301)
 - Phase 3: written diaries and audio and video-testimonies self-recorded by internally displaced people with disabilities. (n=20)

Impact of C19 on persons with disabilities.

Two key dimensions: availability and accessibility coalescing into 'de-prioritisation'.

Key impacts (coding and thematic analysis):

- Impacts on health + availability and accessibility of healthcare.
- Impacts on psychological wellbeing, mental health, and social isolation.
- Restricted Mobility.
- Reduced access to social services, social support and education.
- Additional barriers faced by specific groups, including internally displaced persons with disabilities.

More details: www.covidanddisability.com



Key themes

- The politics of bracketing and recognition
- The politics of abandonment, endurance and exhaustion
- The accumulation of 'quasi-events' and 'small breakages' in everyday life (and deferred ethical response) vs. 'spectacular events' and catastrophic ruptures
- The shattering of pre-pandemic rhythms of everyday life and care
- Wrecking of spatial/temporal situatedness
- Pushing the 'rock bottom' further down



The issues of time and space

‘The issues of time and space are important...[and] these issues need to be thought together rather than separately’

Stuart Elden (Introduction to Lefebvre’s Rhythmanalysis (Elden 2013: 1).

Everyday rhythms: products of ‘interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy’ (Lefebvre 2013: 25)

Arrhythmia: a conflict wrecks harmony between different rhythms – ‘a divergence in time, in space, and in the use of energies’ (Lefebvre 2013: 78).



Rhythmanalysis, Abandonment, Late Liberalism and COVID-19

Elizabeth Povinelli: 'unequal distribution of life and death, of hope and harm, and of endurance and exhaustion' (2011: 3)

Late liberalism: 'the shape that liberal governmentality has taken as it responds to a series of legitimacy crises in the wake of anticolonial, new social movements... a belated response to the challenge of social difference' (Povinelli 2011: 25)

Pandemic, capital and neoliberalism

de Genova (2021): responses to COVID-19 revealing ‘the grotesque disparities in how illness, death, and suffering are unevenly distributed...a toxic matter of both class and race’

New datasets: aggregating suffering in a statistic yet demonstrating the co-location of COVID-19 death and infection with multiple forms of disadvantage

UN: around 15 per cent of the world's population live with disability

One of the interviewees in our research: ‘we were already at the rock bottom...the pandemic has just made it deeper’

Abandonment and endurance (endurance rather than resilience)



Abandonment and Endurance

‘...social logics of belonging and abandonment’ always carries with it the material condition one belongs to or is abandoned from (Povinelli 2011: 31).

Substance and endurance (and exhaustion): ‘its strength, hardiness, callousness; its continuity through space; its ability to suffer and yet persist’ (Povinelli 2011: 32).

Ursula Le Guin’s : “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”

Le Guin: denies ethics read from the perspective of future ends in which current suffering can justify the future good.

Durative present: to understand ongoing social harm and to focus on forms of suffering and dying, enduring and expiring, that are ordinary, chronic, and cruddy rather than catastrophic, crisis-laden, and sublime’ (Povinelli 2011: 13).

Quasi-events

Quasi-events: events that 'never quite achieve the status of having occurred or taken place...[events that]...neither happen or not happen' (Povinelli 2011: 13).

COVID19: a crisis of unimaginable proportions – requiring action and response.

Political and Economic Responses: transforming the crisis into a series of quasi-events in which all types of violence - symbolic, structural and often physical – have been folded into everyday routines of those whose difference has been bracketed, deferred and removed (temporarily or permanently) from recognition and the ethics of response

Bracketing persons with disabilities: multiple failures to address the gaps which emerged as a result of specific policy responses

Quasi-events



Quasi-events: barely perceptible acts of letting die' (Povinelli 2011: 94).

...if others can see the corpses, which are placed near the shower rooms or in the shower rooms of the wards, until they [hospital staff] have time to move the corpses, sighted people can still enter [the shower room], but people with visual impairments they fall over these corpses. [A representative of the Ukrainian organisation of persons with disabilities]

And on Tuesday... I was in a terrible state. And the doctor on duty arrived late in the evening [for a home visit] and immediately said that it was covid. He wrote a long list of drugs and said: "quickly go to the pharmacy, start injecting now, do it now, this minute." And my friends brought these medicines at 10 pm. So, we started making injections. My daughter and I (she also has a disability) were left on our own: no one would come in, everyone was afraid. So, my daughter, who was also sick, had to inject me. So, it was just the two of us...she crawled around me making these injections. [Phase 2 Interviewee]

'It is hard to pull a thisness out of the ongoing flow of the everyday because so much decomposition happens below the threshold of awareness and theorization' (Povinelli 2011: 132-133)

The ordinary does not exist.

Shattered Rhythms

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Pre-COVID: persons with disabilities - bracketed with a quasi-recognition afforded by the state under pressure from civil society activists and the Ukraine's vibrant disability movement.

Temporal and spatial impacts:

- compression of space & its simultaneous annihilation by immobility and the increasingly technocratic means of public health emergency management
- compression-annihilation converging with range of temporal dissonances - the arrhythmia of feeling 'stuck', feeling 'suspended in time' in a shrinking space of isolation, lockdowns, closures and erasures.
- Space: morphing into a temporality of waiting and deferral
- Pre-COVID quasi-recognition: trembling and shattering too
- 'we are all in this together': common and undifferentiated good – pushing the rock bottom of quasi events further and further down

Deathscapes

The peril of others calls us to respond with care, to bear witness, to rescue and to keep faith even, and perhaps especially, in the midst of deathwork. If we cannot stop the killing, we can ensure that human violence will be known; it will be opposed, and its toxic justification will be refused'. (Rose 2022: 6)

'Murdered Ukrainians Lie in the Streets of Bombed Bucha'
By Anton Logov
Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/RymiArtGallery/photos/pcb.719084859460380/719082626127270/>



Thank you!



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More information about the
project (including project
reports):

www.covidanddisability.com

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