

## BOOK REVIEW

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# Handbook on ageing with disability

Putnam, Michelle | Bigby, Christine,

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The *Handbook on Ageing with Disability*, edited by Michelle Putnam and Christine Bigby, provides an in-depth insight into the experience of individuals ageing *with* disability, which they distinguish from ageing *into* disability, across a spectrum of disability categories. The population ageing with (heterogenous) disability is growing. This growth is associated with life expectancy increases, alongside the development of health and social care services, advocacy, the recognition of rights for persons with disabilities, and medical and rehabilitation advances in the treatment of historically ‘untreatable’ conditions.

The authors describe the limited scope of research on ageing with disability, which sits at the intersection of multiple fields of study, with much of the evidence emanating from high-income countries of the world. The necessary focus of the Handbook on nations with ‘advanced’ economic and social sectors—which the editors’ foreground in the opening line of the book’s preface—results from the dearth of literature from lower-income countries. Disabilities have not attained the same level of recognition and rights in the “developing” world, yet one-fifth of the world poorest have a disability. Nonetheless, the strong link between disability in early and mid-life, and disadvantaged economic, social, psychological and health outcomes, even in high-income nations, demonstrates the need for public policy responses to reduce these inequalities across the life course.

Academic, personal and clinical experience from the 65 contributors creates a robust and unique compendium of knowledge. The Handbook offers a guide to encourage further knowledge production in the field and to develop services, programmes and policies that address the needs of people ageing with disabilities. The book reflects the authors’ vast expertise, although exemplars from researchers in disability studies or gerontology from low- and middle-income countries would have strengthened the Handbook.

The editors identify overarching themes that thread together authors’ individual contributions, namely: chronic conditions and accelerated ageing; barriers to community participation; ageing and disability policies and care; and the lack of expertise in the field. The Handbook begins by framing the ageing with disability experience in Part One, critically examining concepts of ‘successful ageing,’ ‘self’ and a ‘life course perspective,’ advocating for the integration of critical disability studies with critical gerontology, while providing an introduction to the health challenges people with disabilities face and the ethics of existing policy arrangements. Part Two will be of particular interest to those interested in research on the experience of ageing with cerebral palsy, deaf blindness, serious mental illness, traumatic brain injury, multiple sclerosis and autism spectrum conditions. Equally, part four focuses on the more extensive literature on ageing with intellectual disability, addressing issues relating to health and wellness, and the experience of frailty, dementia and end-of-life care. Parts three and five are relevant to policy and service design, exploring barriers and facilitators to the participation and integration of persons ageing with disability in the community, considering health and social care and the possibilities of bridging ageing and disability knowledge and support

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systems. Usefully, each chapter concludes with 'suggested readings' for those who wish to delve deeper into the ideas introduced by the authors.

The Handbook offers a comprehensive and accessible introduction to ageing with disability, and a foundation on which to build further knowledge in the field. The authors do a stellar job in amalgamating research and evidence from ageing with disability literature, providing a detailed 'snapshot' to guide (a) students and academics interested in this emerging field, (b) health and social care professionals and practitioners involved in care for persons ageing with disability and (c) stakeholders and policymakers concerned with the design and development of appropriate, inclusive services, systems, interventions and support.

Throughout the Handbook, the authors call for policy and practice to recognise the needs of people with disabilities throughout the life course, not only in later life. Specifically, they advocate for bridging ageing and disability theory and social policy. Notwithstanding the timeliness and relevance of this Handbook, the policy recommendations emanating are largely relevant to approximately 20% of the world's population living with disabilities—those in high-income nations from where the evidence stems—and call for the promotion of funding, advocacy, service development, collaboration and integration to create an environment supportive of individuals with disabilities and their families. The Handbook is a powerful reminder that more research is required to understand the needs of persons ageing with disabilities globally, and how best to address them.

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