

The other side – sketching the landscape of care?

Published 8.9.2024

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In the August of 2024, if you put the phrase *"care crisis"* on Google search, you get close to one million search hits (968 000, to be exact). We are familiar with these crises, as they somehow touch each of us, the lives of ourselves and those close to us. With the welfare states' withering budgets, lengthening queues for services, and lack of health and social care professionals, we are forced to face – once again – the ultimate question of 'what is good enough' when it comes to care. On the other side of the coin, there is also the question of what is definitely not good enough, not adequate enough – what the lack of care looks from the perspective of those who need it and those who work in caring professions, and what happens when the elements that we are not used to being associated with care, such as neglect and even violence, appear in the sphere of care.

The dark side of care

These intertwining themes related to the core of care are connected to what we have called the 'dark side of care'. In our edited book, *Hoivan pimeä puoli* [Engl. Dark side of care], published in the spring of 2023 by Finnish academic publisher Gaudeamus, we defined the dark side of care as structures, practices, experiences, actions, thoughts, and feelings connected to care that are difficult to talk about, and often associated with a taboo or stigma. These darker aspects of care are recognized by many, and even taken for granted, as these aspects can sometimes be considered just as 'the way things are'. Sometimes it is about money and resources, but it is not just that. It is about so much more. The dark side of care can be found in any kind of relation that involves human interaction and care. In some cases, the dark side of care can be related to the darker side of human nature. However, in other cases, the emergence of the dark side of care can be due to unintended and unanticipated outcomes in complicated situations, such as those occurring in caring relationships or in the organisation of care services.

When we started our book project, we were overwhelmed by the number of issues brought to our attention. The published book, *Hoivan pimeä puoli*, consisted of twelve individual chapters focusing on four themes: the hidden aspects of care in close relationships, the strict norms of maternal care, the issues arising from caring as a professional, and the blind spots of the Finnish service system. This, as we were to find out, was only the tip of the iceberg. The work on the dark side of care has continued in various discussions in which we have twisted and turned the myriad practices and unspoken rules governing the provision of care.

The importance of words

In our concluding remarks in the book, we drew on the idea of wicked problems. This is a term used to describe particularly complicated, often circular and tricky societal problems that have no clear solution, such as climate crisis or the persistence of various forms of inequality. Care and the arrangements of care are also, from our viewpoint, issues that are so complex that the footing is too often lost. This, however, does not mean that nothing can be done, and the discussion ends. On the contrary, this point can be viewed as the beginning of new ways of thinking. Finding the words to talk about our experiences related to receiving and providing care is valuable: words are our first step towards change.

Thus, the work on the topic continues. If you are interested in the theme of the dark side of care, keep an eye out for our working groups in upcoming conferences. We are also currently working on a special issue on the dark side of care, to be published in *The International Journal of Care and Caring* in the spring of 2026. For the special issue, we are still looking for contributions that would engage with these discussions in the *Book reviews*, as well as *Debates and issues* sections. If you would be interested in contributing to these discussions, please don't hesitate to contact us.

References

Sihto T. & Vasara P. (2023) *Hoivan pimeä puoli*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.



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