

Vulnerability in a Mobile World

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Vulnerability in a Mobile World

EDITED BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

For the vulnerable

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About the Contributors

Helen Forbes-Mewett is Discipline Head of Sociology at Monash University and Deputy Director, Monash Migration and Inclusion Centre. Her work focusses on international students, migration, cultural diversity and social cohesion. Helen's books include *International Student Security* (2010), *International Students and Crime* (2015) and *The New Security: Individual, Community and Cultural Experiences* (2018).

Kien Nguyen-Trung is PhD candidate in Sociology, School of Social Science at Monash University, Australia. His work relates to risk, social capital, vulnerability and disaster resilience in Vietnam. His most recent publication is a book chapter *Being sacred, being honest: exploring 'flexible hierarchy' in Vietnamese everyday deference rituals* published by Springer Nature Singapore.

Harry Tan is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the National University of Singapore, Department of Sociology. His main research areas are homelessness, housing insecurity, marginal populations and addiction issues. As a volunteer, Harry has worked closely with people experiencing homelessness in Singapore since 2012 and in Melbourne from 2015 to 2017.

Allegra Clare Schermuly is Research Fellow in Sociology. Her work explores the challenge for public institutions, such as the police and healthcare, to remain fit for purpose in rapidly changing, multicultural societies and the social inequalities that persist in access to justice and healthcare despite advances in digital technologies.

Gianluigi Rotondo was awarded PhD in 2019 at Monash University, Australia. His work focusses on humanitarian organisations, professional intercultural mediators and communication strategies in the context of migrant and refugee settlement.

Anita McDonald-Doh is a Monash University Arts (Honours) Graduate with a background in Allied Health Assistance. Anita's Sociology Honours thesis (2016) focussed on young peoples' perceptions of intercultural relationships, which features as a shortened chapter in the current book. Anita has experience in qualitative research and social advocacy.

Bernice Loh is Postdoctoral Fellow at the Centre for Family and Population Research at the National University of Singapore. She currently researches on children growing up in transnational families in Singapore. Her broad research interests include youth and youth identities, social inequalities and cultural identities.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Helen Forbes-Mewett

Populations across the world are becoming increasingly mobile. This mobility is for many different reasons including a search for a better and/or safer life, economic or environmental purposes, education or identity formation, among others. While mobility may bring prosperity and better life chances, for some it means experiencing vulnerability. In this book the notion of vulnerability is discussed and applied in different contexts to provide understanding that it means many different things for different people. The notion of vulnerability is presented in both abstract and subjective forms. This book presents a conceptual framework of vulnerability to seven empirically led chapters contributed by different authors.

Due to the broad range of contexts provided by the contributors, *Vulnerability in a Mobile World* is likely to appeal to a diverse and international audience. The book contributes to the literature on “vulnerability” in a way that relates to disparate populations, some who seem much more vulnerable than others. The book also contributes to the literature on homelessness, urbanisation and police legitimacy, natural disasters, refugee and asylum seeker support agencies and intercultural communication, international student mental health, intercultural relationships and “tween” girls and the use of online media. As with my previous book on the New Security: Individual, Community and Cultural experiences (Helen Forbes-Mewett, 2015), *Vulnerability in a Mobile World* rests on five similar and adapted key principles:

- (1) Vulnerability is both objective and subjective.
- (2) Vulnerability relates to risk and opportunity.
- (3) Vulnerability involves interconnecting social influences including mobility, economic and environmental factors, cultural diversity, housing, education, relationships and online access.
- (4) Vulnerability extends well beyond group dynamics and links to people’s everyday lived experiences.
- (5) People have a right to seek protection from vulnerability.

These principles lay down the guidelines for examining vulnerability in Chapter 2 (Helen Forbes-Mewett and Kien Nguyen-Trung). Once vulnerability has been examined in relation to various concepts including modernity and the risk society, the term is then discussed in relation to risks, hazards and threats before considering apparent opposites in security and resilience. Viewing the notion of vulnerability within this overarching framework led to a definition that suited the purposes of this book. Our understanding of the notion of security is applied in various ways to the empirical studies that constitute Chapters 3–9. These chapters are authored by new and emerging scholars who have undertaken extensive research in their areas of expertise. The studies in the following chapters draw on their research experience to focus on a broad range of people in an equally broad range of contexts.

Chapter 3, authored by Harry Tan, applies the concept of vulnerability to a poignant ethnographic study of older homeless people in Singapore. Their stories are presented by Tan who captures rare insights into daily life as a homeless person to show that there is much more to consider than the assumed deficit model often applied to this group. The study reveals that both structural and individual factors impact on these individuals' ability to draw on traditional supports and homelessness often results.

In Chapter 4, by Allegra Clare Schermuly, vulnerability is discussed in relation to the rapid urbanisation of a Melbourne suburb in Australia. The context is an increasingly culturally diverse population with varying perceptions of police legitimacy. The study reveals that overall both long-term residents and newly settled migrants felt vulnerable in terms of the services and infrastructure provided by police. It was thought that police services had not increased in line with the demographic changes in the locality.

The vulnerability of farmers in Vietnam's Mekong Delta is the subject of Chapter 5 by Kien Nguyen-Trung. This chapter explores the circumstances of two natural hazards resulting in a large-scale environmental disaster and how this impacted the lives of farmers in the region. The vulnerability of the farmers becomes apparent as does their human agency. The vulnerability is attributed to the interaction between crop production choices and state policies.

Chapter 6, authored by Gianluigi Rotondo, is a study of refugee and asylum seeker support agencies in Italy and Australia. Refugees and asylum seekers are presented as the most vulnerable social categories in the Western societies. The chapter focuses on intercultural practices and communication in both non-government and community-based organisations and how these dimensions impact the vulnerability of those they seek to support.

Jiamin Gan and Helen Forbes-Mewett focus on international students and mental health in Chapter 7. The topic of mental health is currently gaining traction and this contribution relating to the perceptions of Singaporean students in Melbourne, Australia, will add to the growing body literature. They discuss how intercultural adjustment is often a stressful process for international students, thus contributing to a higher risk of vulnerable mental and emotional states. Importantly, they also discuss how international students cope with mental health issues and the role of education institutions.

In Chapter 8, Anita McDonald-Doh looks at vulnerability in the context of intercultural relationships in Australia. Despite playing an important role in strengthening relationships across different racial, ethnic and cultural groups, people in intercultural relationships who participated in her study revealed that they were vulnerable to experiencing discrimination on a regular basis.

Bernice Loh in Chapter 9 takes vulnerability in a new direction with her application of the concept to online Western influences on tween girls in the context of Singapore. Interviews with young girls aged 8–12 revealed changing mediascapes that have not previously been acknowledged. The chapter considers both vulnerability and empowerment and calls for a closer examination of YouTube in relation to girls' dressing.

Helen Forbes-Mewett (Editor) concludes the book with Chapter 10. This final chapter captures the contents of the book and discusses the significance of the authors' contribution to the literature pertaining to the concept of vulnerability.