This paper will present a theoretical exploration of the shifting sands of vulnerability utilising the humanising framework proposed by Todres et al (2009), in order to illuminate the complexities of the phenomenon of vulnerability.

It is presented as part of a PhD exploring, "The Lived Experience of Vulnerability". Understanding health vulnerability of a Gypsy/Travelling community: using a holistic health perspective.
The beginning...
Nurses have historically “ministered” to vulnerable populations (Drake 1998).

People can experience vulnerability whenever their health or usual function is compromised, thus vulnerability increases when they enter unfamiliar surroundings, situations or relationships (NMC 2002).

Within health care a host of situations can “herald” vulnerability for a person, including becoming a patient as this often incorporates a loss of identity (Barker 2005:5)

Spiers (2005) identifies that vulnerability is an essential concept which nurses use in the daily course of their professional work, due to its links with health and health problems.

Barker (2005) argues that addressing vulnerability is at the heart of nursing practice.
The Etic and Emic debate

Vulnerability (Noun)
Etic

- Susceptibility to & possibility of harm
- Externally evaluated/judged description by someone else, normative, dichotomous, homogeneous.
- Quantitative measures of health, biomedical, says nothing about what the person might be experiencing

Vulnerable (Adjective)
Emic

- State of being threatened & feeling or fear of harm
- Internally judged, description of the experience of being/feeling vulnerable.
- Qualitative & holistic
- Silent in health care literature

Spiers (2000: 716)
A review of the literature

**Database**
- Initial index term searches using keywords (in the title, abstract or keyword) ‘vulnerab*’, ‘Gyps*’, ‘Vulnerab* and Gyp*’, ‘Vulnerab* and qualitative’ and ‘Gypsy and qualitative’.
- Dates searched 1983 to 2010
- Databases British Nursing Index, Medline, CINAHL, Academic Search Premier, Global Health, International bibliography of social sciences, Social work abstracts, Int Bibliography of the Social Science, Psyche Articles and Applied Social Service Index and Abstracts (ASSIA).

**Search Terms**

**Grey Literature**
- Policy initiatives with regards to healthcare provision within the United Kingdom (UK) as well as statutory guidance in vulnerability.
Perspectives of Vulnerability

- Shifting experience
- Mechanism to identify populations at risk of ill health
- Vehicle for personal growth
- Mechanism to identify social groups in need of protection
- Consequence of social interaction, influenced by societal values
- Existential experience
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspectives of Vulnerability</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mechanism to identify populations at risk of ill health</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vulnerable populations as “social groups who have an increased relative risk or susceptibility to adverse health outcomes... as evidenced by morbidity and premature mortality.” – Flaskerud and Winslow 1998:69.</td>
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<td><strong>Mechanism to identify social groups in need of protection</strong></td>
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<td>“Anyone aged 18 years + who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness and who is or maybe unable to take care of him/herself”. DoH 2000:8-9.</td>
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<td><strong>Consequence of social interaction, influenced by societal values</strong></td>
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<td>Peternelj-Taylor (2005) defines vulnerable populations as those who are typically impoverished, disenfranchised, or who are subject to discrimination, intolerance, and stigma.</td>
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<td><strong>Shifting experience</strong></td>
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<td>Rather than a dichotomous experience, vulnerability needs to be expressed as a continuum, upon which individuals will move depending upon the experience at that time - Archer Copp (1986).</td>
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<td><strong>Existential experience</strong></td>
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<td>All human beings are vulnerable (Erlen 2006), as part of their humanity, for human beings are never totally free from the risk of harm (Sellman 2005).</td>
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## Dimensions of humanisation

| Conceptual framework of the dimensions of humanisation by Todres et al (2009) |
|---|---|
| Insiderness | Objectification |
| Agency | Passivity |
| Uniqueness | Homogenization |
| Togetherness | Isolation |
| Sense-Making | Loss of Meaning |
| Personal Journey | Loss of Personal Journey |
| Sense of Place | Dislocation |
| Embodiment | Reductionist body |
How does the Emic/Etic views align with the perspectives of vulnerability identified from my reading?

Are some etic and some emic?

Could you explore an etic /emic point of view under each perspective?

Agar (2010) argues there are no clear lines between the insider and outsider in today's world – indeed are they not two kinds of emic?
The Kaleidoscope of vulnerability

Perspectives of Vulnerability

- Mechanism to identify populations at risk of ill health
- Mechanism to identify social groups in need of protection
- Consequence of social interaction, influenced by societal values
- Existential experience
- Shifting experience
- Vehicle for personal growth
Spiers (2000) argues that reducing vulnerability to epidemiological terms reduces the vision of the world. It does little to understand why some groups may experience vulnerability.

Yet this perspective continues to present the dominance of a biomedical approach to health, and this is in contrast with contemporary humanistic nursing ideology which recognises the need to understand the client’s perspective and social discourses.
Whilst it is clear that vulnerability is a key issue in health, within the literature there appears to be little examination of what it is.

Using descriptive phenomenology I plan to build upon from the work of Spiers (2000, 2005) to explore the existential lived experience of health vulnerability of a Gypsy/Traveller community. By focusing upon the emic “lived experience” it will illuminate aspects of this phenomenon which have not yet been explored, developing our understanding of this concept further.
Comments......

Thoughts........

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References

- Agar, M. (magar@anth.umd.edu), 2 August 2010. Re Emic and Etic Perspectives of Vulnerability. E-mail to Heaslip, V. (vheaslip@bournemouth.ac.uk)