

Sociology of health and illness essay sample

[Health & Medicine](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

What is Medicalization and why is professional and public concern about medicalization on the increase? (Conrad 2005) During the 1970's medicalization first came into light in social scientific literature. “

Medicalization consists of defining a problem in medical terms, using medical language to describe a problem, adopting a medical framework to understand a problem, or using a medical intervention to “ treat” it.”

(Conrad, pp. 209-232, 1992) Sociologists believe medicalization to be a method of social control and view it in very much a negative way as it can often turn non-medical everyday natural elements of our existence into medical problems that need to be treated medically. While supposedly the aim of medicalization is to cure illness, relieve pain and eliminate suffering, it can often create an even bigger problem and prompt illnesses that were never there in the beginning. Professional and public concern about medicalization is on the increase as it is becoming more and more apparent in today's society and people are becoming more and more reliant on it to solve their problems.

With the existence of medicalization, people no longer have as high a pain threshold and can no longer deal with life's suffering and unhappiness without the aid of medicine. In today's world it seems that any problems a person may have can be ‘ cured’ or eliminated by medicalization. If we are unhappy we can take anti-depressants, if we cannot sleep we can take sleeping tablets etc. We as humans are no longer able to cope with the natural occurrences of life because of medicalization. For Ivan Illich, an Austrian philosopher, medicalization is a process of ‘ iatrogenesis’.

Iatrogenesis is the “ inadvertent and preventable induction of disease or

complications by the medical treatment or procedures of a physician or surgeon.” (Miriam-webster. com, 2014) Iatrogenesis is when illness is caused and created by medicine itself and according to Illich, it operates on three different levels, clinical, social and cultural. Clinical iatrogenesis is the damage or harm done to patients by unsafe, toxic or ineffective treatments.

Social iatrogenesis is when medicalization encourages society to invest in curative, preventive, industrial and commercial medicine, and leads people to believe they are un-well by inducing stress, lowering pain thresholds and by generating new painful needs. Finally, cultural iatrogenesis is the attempt to prevent and treat natural elements of life such as birth and death by interfering with them and fighting against the natural progression of life.

Medicalization is becoming more and more commercial and market driven, making patient's consumers in a competitive market. Medicalization cannot be healthy for society as it is becoming more and more powerful and weakening humankind which would most certainly cause professional and public concern about medicalization to be on the increase. Clinical iatrogenesis is the cause of ill-health and side-effects due to drug intake.

Medicalization can cause illness because of patients taking unnecessary medication, overdosing or becoming addicted to prescribed medication, taking several pills in dangerous combinations, or taking the wrong drug to cure pains and illnesses.

Medicalization is a common problem in today's society as it can often worsen a patient's condition and create problems for them that did not exist in the beginning. In June 2012, Political correspondent for the Irish Examiner, Mary Regan, reported that “ Figures released by the Department of Health show <https://assignbuster.com/sociology-of-health-and-illness-essay-sample/>

the number of drugs seized rose from just 1, 160 in 2006 to 1. 3 million last year — with sedatives including valium and xanax — used for the treatment of anxiety — making up the majority of pills taken out of circulation” (Regan, 2012). These figures show an alarming increase in the use of prescription drugs in Ireland in 6 years, which certainly highlights the negative impact and the rapid increase of medicalisation. She also reported that “ Sleeping and slimming pills, as well as erectile dysfunction medicines, are also widely available on the black market.”(Regan, 2012) Medicalization prompts the use of drugs to try and improve everyday bodily functions or ‘ dysfunctions’ as how we see them, such as weight gain, irregular sleeping patterns and sexual dysfunctions in the bedroom.

For problems such as these, before the introduction of medicalization, were dealt with without the use of drugs and medication. Prescription drug abuse is a problem that exists all over the world. According to the website ‘ Foundation for a Drug-Free World’, “ In the US alone, more than 15 million people abuse prescription drugs, more than the combined number who reported abusing cocaine, hallucinogens, inhalants and heroin.” (www. drug-freeworld. org, 2014) Prescription drugs are so readily available to patients by doctors and pharmaceutical companies as the medical profession nowadays is seen to more of a competitive than a health care system. Therefore, drugs are given to patients for even the slightest ache, pain or complaint, leading people to become reliant on prescription drugs to be able to cope with their everyday lives and thus, allowing them to become addicted. Antibiotics prescribed by medical professionals and doctors can

also have a detrimental effect on our bodies. “ Every time you swallow antibiotics, you kill the beneficial bacteria within your intestines.

When you do so, you upset the delicate balance of your intestinal terrain. Yeasts grow unchecked into large colonies and take over, in a condition called dysbiosis.” (Kauffman, 2003) Antibiotics can cause super-infection in our bodies by altering the normal bacterial flora, lowering our immune system and causing us to be very ill. Social iatrogenesis is when medicalization encourages the use of medication and strengthens and enables a pessimistic society by encouraging people to consume curative, preventive, industrial and commercial medication for ill health. Social iatrogenesis encourages and recommends the use of medication and drugs for symptoms of stress and unhappiness in everyday life. This most certainly lowers levels of tolerance for pain and discomfort and increases the need for quick and easy stress, anxiety and any of life’s unhappiness or discomforts through the use of medication.

“ Anxiety disorders cause a person to be constantly “ primed”, or “ tense” in expectation of an impending threat to their physical or psychological well-being. Symptoms of anxiety disorders are often chronic, and can include difficulty concentrating, irritability, tense muscles, sleep disturbances, and trouble overcoming worries.” (LifeExtension. com, 2014) Instead of relieving these symptoms of stress and anxiety by using coping mechanisms and mental training which would have been the methods used before the introduction of medicalization, medical professionals and pharmaceutical companies nowadays however, recommend the use of drugs and medication to alleviate these symptoms. However the article then goes on to explain <https://assignbuster.com/sociology-of-health-and-illness-essay-sample/>

that, “ The conventional health care model typically attempts to alleviate anxiety with an array of psychoactive drugs that either mimic or manipulate neurotransmitter signalling. For instance, medications for anxiety might either increase the recycling of existing neurotransmitters or bind directly to neurotransmitter receptors and block or activate them, artificially altering mood.

However, psychoactive drugs fall short of addressing the underlying causes of anxiety – hormonal and metabolic imbalances that emerge as our bodies attempt to adapt to chronic stress.” (LifeExtension, 2014) The author of this article outlines that medicalization is merely just a ‘ quick fix’ that covers up a problem temporarily instead of dealing with it and illuminating it permanently, which cannot be fixed by any medication or pills, but through mental training and therapy. Therefore, this clearly stands to show that medicalization, merely covers up the underlying mental issues of society which is of course an issue of concern that would cause professionals and the public to be worried about. “ Cultural iatrogenesis represents a third dimension of medical health-denial. It sets in when the medical enterprise saps the will of people to suffer their reality.” (Illich, 1976) Cultural iatrogenesis undermines the ability of humans to cope, and face the reality of their own lives. Illich says that “ To be in good health means not only to be successful in coping with reality but also to enjoy the success; it means to be able to feel alive in pleasure and in pain; it means to cherish but also to risk survival.” (Illich, 1976)

With the existence of medicalization, humans do not have good health as they are unable to cope with reality without the use of drugs or medication.

<https://assignbuster.com/sociology-of-health-and-illness-essay-sample/>

We do not understand and know the full meaning of being alive as with the indication of one ache or pain, we take medication to feel numb and empty. We also use medication in order to alter the experience of child birth and death, both natural experiences of life that medicalization alters and modifies for us. We often take medication to delay the natural occurrence of death. “ Our overzealous medical community has taken the blessed event of childbirth and turned it into a medical procedure with a whole different set of risks and side effects. This medicalization of childbirth turns our newborns into medical experiments and permanently hooks them into a life of medical dependency” (Stellpflug, 2012). The use of drugs during child birth affects the natural occurrence and alters and takes from the natural experience, turning it into a mere impersonal, medical experiment. Epidurals are used for over half of birthing experiences in hospitals. “ Epidurals interfere with normal bio-feedback between the pelvic muscles and the mother’s brain during labor.” (Stellpflug, 2012)

The use of this medication not only numbs the mother’s body, disabling her to experience the natural experience of child birth but also puts the baby at risk, as it can cause the mother’s blood pressure to drop resulting in a lack of oxygen being given to the baby. The use of medicalization can clearly have a detrimental effect during the natural experience. As a result of medicalization being so market-driven in today’s society, the medical industries withhold the power to affect and change social norms. For example, medicalization changes the norms about men’s and woman’s physical features such as women’s breasts. Medicalization sets a norm for breast implants and augmentation, when similarly the increasing use and

advertisement of Viagra has de-stigmatised male erectile dysfunction.

Worryingly enough, men's and in particular women's bodies are increasingly becoming the objects of medical control. According to the guardian, more than 50, 000 cosmetic surgery procedures were performed in the UK last year (2013), 45, 365 of whom were women which is an estimated rise of 17% since 2012. (The guardian, 2014).

In addition to this, according to ' Drugs. com', the number of Viagra U. S. retail sales was recorded at \$300, 463 worth of units sold in the fourth quarter of the year 2013, compared to \$290, 984 worth of units sold in the third quarter of the year. (Drugs. com, 2014) These figures and statistics portray the growth of medicalization as a market and a business, putting the health and well-being of the people on the back-burner. Of course this is cause for increasing concern of professionals and the public about medicalization. Medicalization is a process in which human problems and dysfunctions come to be defined and treated as medical issues. Certainly, it has positive aspects to it, however, it is of course clear as to why is of increasing concern to professionals and the public.

Medicalization alters and modifies many of the natural experiences in life such as birth and death, can be the cause of further illnesses and can also cause unnecessary problems in people's lives. Medicalization can often ignore and cover up the problems we face with medication and tablets in order to make everyday life bearable. However, medicalization, which is certainly on an increase, is becoming more market-driven rather than patient focused, and is altering the norms of our society. Medicalization is stealing our natural experiences of life from us and leading through life with a feeling

<https://assignbuster.com/sociology-of-health-and-illness-essay-sample/>

of numbness. There is certainly no wonder as to why professionals and the public have increasing concern for our health.

Bibliography

Conrad, P. 1992. Medicalization and social control. Annual review of Sociology, 18 (1), pp. 209–232.

Drugfreeworld. org. 2014. Statistics of Prescription Drug Abuse, Overdosing, Emergency Room Visits: Foundation for a Drug Free World. [online] Available at: <http://www.drugfreeworld.org/drugfacts/prescription/abuse-international-statistics.html> [Accessed: 15 Mar 2014].

Drugs. com. 2014. Viagra Statistics & Prescription Sales Data in Retail. [online] Available at: <http://www.drugs.com/stats/viagra> [Accessed: 17 Mar 2014]. Illich, I. 1976. Ivan Illich. Medical Nemesis. Introduction to Part III: Cultural Iatrogenesis. [online] Available at: <http://www.soilandhealth.org/03sov/0303critic/030313illich/Frame.Illich.intro.part3.html> [Accessed: 16 Mar 2014].

Kauffman, D. 2003. Antibiotics Kill Your Body's Good Bacteria, Too, Leading to Serious Health Risks 6/14/03. [online] Available at: <http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2003/06/18/antibiotics-bacteria.aspx> [Accessed: 16 Mar 2014].

LifeExtension. com. 2014. Anxiety – Stress, Depression, Homocysteine – Life Extension Health Concern. [online] Available at: http://www.lef.org/protocols/emotional_health/anxiety_01.htm [Accessed: 16 Mar 2014].

Merriam-webster. com. 2014. Iatrogenesis – Medical Definition and More from Merriam-Webster. [online] Available at: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/medical/iatrogenesis> [Accessed: 15 Mar 2014].

Regan, M. 2012. Big rise in prescription drugs for sale illegally. Irish Times, 11 June.

Stellpflug, C. 2012. The medicalization of childbirth. [online] Available at: http://www.naturalnews.com/036252_childbirth_medicalization_delivery_rooms.html# [Accessed: 17 Mar 2014].