

# The sense of community cohesion in Britain sociology essay



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Socio-anthropologists hold the opinion that people think, feel and act in certain ways based on the environment in which they have grown. The environment in this context could be inferred as the community that has influence their make-up or identity. In recent times, public debates in the media by politicians, journalists, experts and other stakeholders have focused on what is or constitute being British. These debates have sharply bordered on socio-religious identities, and raised questions such as: Does religious beliefs supersede community bonding? To what extent is ones' loyalty to the community in which one lives?. Other debates have been on “ profiling and condemnation of racially motivated violence and harassment, a hand wringing debate on institutional racism following the publication in 1999 of the Macpherson Report into the death of Stephen Lawrence” (Amin, 2002).

Government policies and legislatives on equal opportunity to highlight awareness of sense of community, presuppose that the very fabric of the concept of community is weakened and threatened in our contemporary Britain.

Community is “ A body of people having common rights, privileges, or interests, or living in the same place under the same laws and regulations” (<http://www.brainyquote.com/words/co/community146100.html>) The meaning of the word ‘ Community’ has changed over the years. Smith (2001)explores the theory of community in the article entitled Community and highlighted on why the attention on social capital and community may be important.

“ the use of the term community has remained to some extent associated with the hope and the wish of reviving once more the closer, warmer, more harmonious type of bonds between people vaguely attributed to past ages’ (Elias 1974, quoted by Hoggett 1997: 5).”

People lived in groups sharing faith, religion and other social norms during pre industrialization era. Community was redefined after this when people became workers in industries. There were many studies about community in the middle of the 20th century leading a deeper analysis of the term.

The free Dictionary however defines individualism as “ a belief in the importance of the individual and the virtue of self-reliance and personal independence”. This definition highlights on the word ‘ belief’ - anything held as true. Thus in this context the individuals opinion is held in high esteem and supplants that of any others. Hofstede (1991) in his cultural dimensions describes individualism as pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Hofstede scaled Britain on high individualism index of 89, and that people thinks in terms of ‘ I’ and not ‘ We’.

Researchers found that Britain was the most individualistic society in the world - one that valued the self over the group more than any other country. (Richard A, 2009) According to the Kwintessential website certain traits are common to countries that have high individualism.

“ personal goals and achievement are strived for, it is acceptable to pursue individual goals at the expense of others, ‘ individualism’ is encouraged  
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whether it be personality, clothes or music tastes and finally the right of the individual reign supreme; thus laws to protect choices and freedom of speech.” (<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/intercultural/individualism.html>)

A recent report for the Children’s Society highlights the above facts.

“ Leading experts today identify excessive individualism as the greatest threat to our children. In a landmark report on A Good Childhood, commissioned by The Children’s Society and published by Penguin, they show that children’s lives have become more difficult than in the past, and they trace this to excessive individualism.”

([http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/whats\\_happening/media\\_office/latest\\_news/14758\\_news.html](http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/whats_happening/media_office/latest_news/14758_news.html))

Other organisations like Joseph Rowntree Foundation have express the fear over the changes that are taking place in Britain. They have classified excessive individualism as a social evil.

“ The JRF’s recent public consultation revealed a strong sense of unease about some of the changes shaping British society. This Viewpoint continues the discussion about modern ‘ social evils’ on the theme of ‘ inequality’.

Chris Creegan argues that until we can reconcile the problems of excessive individualism, consumerism and greed at the heart of contemporary society, life opportunities will continue to be lost, limited and wasted.” (Creegan C, 2008)

To enable all different groups to get on well in all communities, community cohesion should take place. A cohesive community is one that affords the <https://assignbuster.com/the-sense-of-community-cohesion-in-britain-sociology-essay-essay-samples/>

people in the community knowledge of their rights and responsibilities.

People from different backgrounds in this community should have similar opportunities. They must also trust their local institutions like the police and the courts. They should believe that the local council will offer fair services to all in the community and not for instance place all new immigrants looking for accommodation from social landlords into areas that are deprived and unwanted by the rest of the community.

The community must recognize the contributions of both new arrivals and those already settled and not be intimidated by the change it brings. A typical example is the arrival of the Polish immigrants. Some people in Britain could not recognize the skills, experience and knowledge they brought to the nation but rather were fearful that they had taken jobs from the British. Also, that there are positive relationships between people of different backgrounds at school, work and home. According to Ted Cante “Community cohesion ... is...micro-communities...mesh into an integrated whole. These divided communities would need to develop common goals and a shared vision” (Home Office, 2001b: 70). In his recommendations, Cante draws on the importance and the need for Social networks and social capital, social order and social control, social solidarity and reductions in wealth disparities. Worley (2005) also demonstrates how the concept of ‘community’ is vital to the community cohesion, and suggests that whilst the concept of ‘community’ is highly ambiguous, it has continuing significance in New Labour policymaking.

Excessive Individualism is concerned with each one for him/herself and God for us all and therefore undermines the sense of community cohesion in <https://assignbuster.com/the-sense-of-community-cohesion-in-britain-sociology-essay-essay-samples/>

Britain. People have become increasingly self-reliant. Families are not so extended anymore but reliant on one, two or the most three people. People are not in contact so much with their relatives and tend to rely on their immediate family only. Family homes are acquired to accommodate the immediate family and not the extended family. People hire child minder, nannies and do not rely so much on their relative anymore. Everyone aspires to be rich or amass wealth that will meet his and her families needs. Some researchers have even blamed the recession on individualism.

” From the public consultation we did last year, there was a strong sense that the decline of community has corresponded with a rise in individualism. Participants suggested that people increasingly look after their own individual or family interests without considering the needs of society or the community.” (Urwin J, 2008)

People are no more interested in what the community achieves but what they the individuals can achieve. Even industries encourage people to be individualist by offering DIY packages which take attention from tradesmen to the individual. Thus a sense of togetherness is non existent.

If the advent of industrialization has promoted individualism, then what about information age. Computerization, in terms of games development such Wii, Playstation and Xbox 360 are all means and mediums that does not encourage people to go out and socialize in the community, rather it encourages people to engage with themselves. Online shopping has brought the benefit of purchasing items from the comfort of our homes; however, this goes a long way to kill social interaction. Most social activities are now

targeted at the individual in his home. People have become 'lazy' at forming relationships with others especially those who live in urban areas.

The East end of London was once a upon a time described as 'dark in the night and dark in day' dark in the day meaning it was not lit up by the middle class's Christianity. That has diminished in today's Britain leaving little bulbs of religion here and there making religion or faith very individualistic. And yet the old east end is often held up as the epitome of 'community'.

People's values vary and individual behaviour has become very personal and can't be corrected by community as before. You can't correct other people's children without being murdered or abused. Everyone keeps themselves to themselves and it's hard to get to know your neighbours. There are some very sweeping generalizations in these preceding statements – they referencing or at least phrased with greater nuance. This is what happened in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford when communities lived in different areas went to different schools and had little to do with each other.

“ Whilst the physical segregation of housing estates and inner city areas came as no surprise, the team was particularly struck by the depth of polarisation of our towns and cities. The extent to which these physical divisions were compounded by so many other aspects of our daily lives, was very evident. Separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks, means that many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives.” (Independent Review Team, 2001; 9)

People's inability to relate to others goes a long way to affect community cohesion. It creates fear, tensions and misunderstanding which is what was experienced in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham.

“ Fears about the overwhelming and negative effect of diversity on social cohesion and national identity have been expressed by journalists and policy makers alike. For example, David Goodhart, the editor of *The Prospect*, targeted his February 2004 article at the detrimental impact of ethnic diversity in modern Britain on the sense of community and solidarity among citizens, and on the viability of the British welfare state (Goodhart 2004), while Trevor Philips, Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, reiterated this argument by stressing the need for strengthening common values and “ core Britishness” (Baldwin and Rozenberg 2004).” ([http://www.nuff.ox.ac.uk/Politics/papers/2005/NLetki\\_social%20capital%20and%20diversity\\_final.pdf](http://www.nuff.ox.ac.uk/Politics/papers/2005/NLetki_social%20capital%20and%20diversity_final.pdf)) This paragraph is all a quote – authors citing other authors. It needs some link to your argument – pulling out those elements that directly bear on it.

Having said all of the above, community cohesion issues are multifaceted and function differently in specific areas. “ There are many parts to building community cohesion, from tackling inequalities to developing people's understanding and tolerance of others.”

(<http://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=2627>)

Excessive individualism is not the only factor that works against community cohesion. There are other factors like integration which needs to happen for new residents and existing residents to understand and accept one another. <https://assignbuster.com/the-sense-of-community-cohesion-in-britain-sociology-essay-essay-samples/>



In the Cattle report the issue of intergration came up and the comments were as follows:

“ The other problematic issue is that of levels of integration/segregation. Again there is a perception within the established white community that minority communities do not do enough to integrate into what they see as British culture or society, instead forming a separate community (a view which seems at odds with the observed “ white flight” when such integration is attempted). Yet to an extent segregation will always occur through choice- whether naturally gravitating towards people who share your views or seeking minority-specific facilities such as places of worship or particular shops and services that would not be financially viable in a more dispersed community- and this is not necessarily a cause for concern. The Cattle Independant Review team notes:”

(Wntrmute 2003)

A cohesive community must also have the ability to create opportunities to bring people together, confront myths and intolerance so that people in the community can realise their full potential. Every area is unique and will therefore face different challenges. Britain has a rich diversity in towns, cities, urban and picturesque villages. Community cohesion must be able to meet the differing needs of its residents before cohesion can be promoted.

For community cohesion to function well there needs to a sense of safety. People must feel safe and welcome. There should be jobs so that establish residents do not start to blame new residents of taking their jobs.

“ Social trends have also influenced the experience of poverty within England. For example, unemployment figures are roughly comparable with those of the 1970s, but changes in social structure (more single home owners or single parent families) mean that a greater number of homes lack a source of income. The UK is the only EU country in which households with children are more likely than households without children to include no one with a job. This is attributed to the high proportion of UK lone parents without a job. (from the Social Inclusion National Action Plan)” (Wntrmute 2003)

Lack of jobs in certain communities in Britain has created a gap of have and half not in communities. Priorities should be given to regenerating run down areas in the community to promote community cohesion. If run down areas are not regenerated residents will start to become bitter and it will create tensions in the community. This will also attract businesses to the area which will in turn impact on the community.

The provision of affordable housing will also help promote community cohesion. Housing is recognised as a major determinant of the shape of communities (Independent Review Team, 2001; Home Office, 2001) In communities like Slough where there has been a large in flux of immigrants, there are accusations that local residents are being passed over in social housing. Also, when there is housing, communities do not break up and move away looking for housing elsewhere. In recent times, we have seen young people move away from villages because properties there are too expensive. Residents in the community should also be provided with the

opportunities for training for jobs. This will boost confidence and enhance job seeking opportunities.

There should be good transport links in the community. This should put the community on the map. Make people get to places quickly and conveniently. Give access to shops and amenities. There should be good environmental improvement which will enhance communities. An insert of cultural and leisure facilities should aid the promotion of a cohesive community. Cultural and community centres which promote belonging.

Britain is now made up of people from different backgrounds and for them to get on well together community cohesion must happen. This will however, be difficult if excessive individualism is prevalent. Having said that, community cohesion cannot be undermined by excessive individualism alone other factors like housing, poverty, race etc are contributing factors.

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