

Sociology social policy notes assignment

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Assess the relationship between sociology and social policy (33 marks)

Sociology has been related to the making of social policy, sociologist's role of conducting research on both social problems and sociological problems are brought together for the creation of a social policy. A social problem is a way of social behavior that causes public and/or private conflict and calls for action to solve it. A sociological problem is 'any pattern of relationships that calls for an explanation' (Peter Wordlessly) this could be something that society seared as a social problem but can also be something that society regards as 'normality'.

For example, George Simmer was interested in revealing the universal characteristics of all social relationships whether in the family, an office or even in a bus stop queue. Many sociologists are interested in solving social problems through their research and many are employed by the Government departments. These sociologists often have direct input into the making of policies and evaluating their effectiveness. Sociology has had an influence on social policy in many factors.

Electoral popularity can have an impact on whether a sociologists research findings and recommendations point to a specific policy that maybe popular or unpopular with voters. Also, if a researcher's perspective is similar to that of the Government, the researcher may stand more chance in influencing the policies. Therefore, having the same ideology and policy preferences of the Government would put the researcher at an advantage. Interest groups and pressure groups seek to influence Government policies in favor of their own interests which creates competition for the sociologist putting forward their policy.

Globalization may influence social policy through international organizations influencing individual Governments. Also, sociologists that are critical of the state and powerful groups (e. G Marxist) may be regarded as too extreme and therefore unlikely to influence policy. Policy makers may not have the funding to put forward an appropriate policy based on them, or, they may have other spending priorities and commitments. Sociologists may tone down their policy recommendations and their findings to fit their pay-masters wishes.

Similarly policy makers may recruit sociologists who share the same assumptions and/or political value. Positivists take the view that sociology is a science and would find the cause of social problems then conclude the scientific solutions to them. Their approach was part of the Enlightenment Project to use science and reason to improve society. Functionalist take a similar view and see society as based on value consensus and free from fundamental conflicts.

They see the state as serving the interests of society as a whole, producing and implementing social policies for the good of all. These policies help society to run smoothly and efficiently. Functionalists favor social policies that are referred to as the ‘piecemeal social engineering’ this is a cautious approach that tackles one issue at a time. Marxist criticism this approach and argue that social problems such as under achievement are aspects of a wider structure of class inequality and therefore we need to change the basic structure of society in order to solve the problems.

Both positivists and functionalists see the sociologist's role as to provide the state with objective and scientific information. By the sociologist investigating social problems and discovering the cause, the state can then implement a base to the policies. The social democrats favor a major distribution of wealth and income from the rich to the poor. Peter Townsend, argues that they should be involved in researching social problems and making policy recommendations to end the social problems. For example, Townsend conducted extensive research on poverty.

From his findings he made recommendations for policies such as fairer, higher benefit levels and more public spending on health, education and welfare services. Marxist criticism this view. They argue the same social problems, however, in their view; capitalism is ultimately responsible for the inequalities therefore the problem cannot be solved unless capitalism is abolished. They also argue that in any even involving the capitalist state; they are unlikely to introduce costly public spending policies to benefit the working class.

Marxist see society as divided through conflict of interest in which the ruling capitalist class exploit the labor of the working class. They see the state as representing the ruling class and its social policies serve the interests of capitalism, not those of society as a whole. They argue that the state provides ideological legitimating to mask the capitalist exploitation, maintain the labor force for further exploitation and they are a means of preventing revolution when class conflict intensifies and threatens the stability of capitalism.

But, Marxists do recognize that social policies sometimes benefit the working class. However, these are threatened with the capitalist tendency to go into periodic crisis of profitability leading to cuts in state spending on welfare. Marxists believe that research revealing the truth about the social problems capitalism creates will not be used to create policies to solve the problems. The only solution to social problems is a revolution to overthrow capitalism and create a classless society.

Therefore they see the sociologists' role should be to criticize capitalist social policy, not to serve the capitalist state. Exploitation must be revealed by the sociologist and the way how the ruling class use social policies to mask this exploitation and buy off revolt with minor concessions. Critics argue that the Marxist view on social policy and the role of the sociologist are impractical and unrealistic. Social democrats criticize them for rejecting the idea that sociological research can help bring about progressive policies within the existing capitalist system.

Feminists see society as based on fundamental conflict between genders. They argue society is patriarchal and benefits men at women's expense and the state preserve women's subordination through its social policies. Feminist research has already had an impact in a number of policy areas. For example, in education it has influenced policies such as learning materials that promote positive images of women and teacher training to sensitive teachers to the need to avoid gender bias and promote inclusiveness for both sexes.

Radical feminists regard men as direct oppressors of women, especially through the family where women are kept subordinate through the use of threat of physical and sexual violence. They therefore favor separatism, the idea that women need to separate themselves from men to be free from patriarchy. One area of social policy that reflects this view is the establishment of women refuges for women escaping domestic violence. Feminist sociological research has had some impact on social policies areas that affect women.

The New Right believe that the state should have minimal involvement in society. They are opposed to using the state provision of welfare to deal with social problems. State intervention in areas such as family life, income support and education robs people of their freedom of own choice and undermines the sense of responsibility; leading to greater social problems. Charles Murray argues that generous welfare benefits and council housing for lone parents weakens the self-reliance that families have.

They encourage the growth of the dependency culture, an underclass of lone mothers, undisciplined children, and irresponsible father who abandon families in the knowledge that the welfare state will provide for them. Murray favors a reduction in the state spending on welfare. The New Right are highly critical of existing policies. They see the role of the sociologist as being to propose alternative policies to the present ones. These policies should aim to restore responsibility of individuals for their own and their families welfare rather than leaving their responsibility to the state.