

# Social problems: causes and solutions



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## Introduction

Sociology seeks to discover, describe and explain the order which characterises the social life of man (Inkeles, 1964 cited in McNeil and Townley, p. 21). Various attempts have been made to define social problems; however there is no adequate definition of social problems. Birenbaum and Sagarin defined social problems as, “ A social problems exists when the collective society is rent by, at the very least a public recognition that there is a sector of society, represented by its practices, which threatens or prevents others or themselves from establishing or maintaining their claims to membership” (Birenbaum and Sagarin, p. 16). Rubington and Weinberg, offers their own definition of social problem as, “an alleged situation that is incompatible with the values of a significant number of people who agree that action is needed to alter the situation” (Rubington and Weinberg, 1989 p. 4). The definition of any problem as a social problem, means that it is a problem that requires that affects society as a whole and needs society to come together to deal with the problem (May, et al eds 2001 p. 17) Social problems are approached from a constructive perspective and a realist perspective. Saragu develops a social constructive approach to the intersection of social divisions and policy, Bucchi on the other hand develops an introduction to the post structuralist critique of problem and policy centred approach (May, et al eds (2001 p. 13). Constructive perspective of social problems looks at social problems three main aspects; namely the society constructs as a problem, the contested character of social construction and the changing character of social construction (May, et al eds 2001 p. 8) A realist perspective looks at social problems as real

problems that exist and which everyone agrees to their existence and requires explanation. The constructive perspective on the other hand, looks at social problems as a construction of society. The question they ask is who says there is a social problem what sort of social problem, do they say it is (May, et al eds (2001). The main issue between the different perspectives of social problem is whether social problems are factual and objective for sociologists to investigate and explain.

This essay will look at social problems and the difficulty of solving them. I will start by looking at common factors relating to social problems.

### **Common factors relating to social problems**

All social problems are prone to a number of different definitions and interpretations. The journalist looks at a social problem from a perspective different from that of a sociologist or a philosopher. The journalist may report a problem in a certain manner, there by actually exaggerating the real problem and causing further alarm in the society. Sociologist will interpret a social problem from a different perspective.

Different explanations of social problems are another common factor relating to all social problems. People usually do have different explanation why social problems occur. Society is always looking for whom to blame for a social problem. They always attribute the cause of a problem to the individual, family or the government.

How a problem is presented, is another common factor relating to social problems. The press do play a role in this regard. Journalists are interested in sensational news which they feel will interest the public. Issues are termed

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social problems, when they are brought to the knowledge of the public and they become part of the public discourse

Professional intervention is another fact common to social policies.

Professionals in our society are quick to label people, that they believe do not conform to 'standard normal behaviour', they more often than not marginalise such people and segregate them, (e. g.) special schools, special needs.

The victims view point is another factor that is common in all social problems. There is a world of difference between the way a victim sees himself and the way society views him. Society stereotypes certain people. We all have our prejudices, knowingly or unknowingly. The way the society views homeless people is different from the way homeless people view themselves.

Finally, how to find the solution to social problems is an element that is common to all social problems. There is no generally accepted way, social problems can be solved. Some solutions can be very complex, while others appear straight forward. Anti Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) was introduced as a straight forward solution to deal with anti social behaviour. However, many young people now regard ASBO as a badge of honour (The Guardian, Monday November 6 2006). To tackle the issue of juvenile crimes and ethnic groups will require complex situations.

## **Causes of Social Problems**

Generally speaking a perspective means a way of looking at things. I will now briefly look at the causes of social problems from different perspectives. I will

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first look at the individual perspective. Some commentators argue that criminals were abnormally conditioned by biological and environmental factors (Rubington and Weinberg, 1989 p. 33). Others however argue that causes of social problems are due mainly to the society/ environment and not due to the physiological make up of individuals. However, certain actions of individuals or groups are so glaring that they causes of social problems are directly attributed to them.

Another reason why social problems occur is due to peer group or family pressure. Disagreement between individuals or groups in a society can also lead to social problems. This is called the interaction perspective.

Fall out between different cultures and religion in a society is a reason why social problems occur. People are usually influenced by their culture and religion. Some people are very fanatic in their views and believe and see some one of a different faith or race as different from them. This can to a lot of social problems.

Social structures are the very basic foundation of any society, and it is a major reason why social problems occur. Some individuals or group might feel excluded from the social, economic or political structures of society. The social structures of society might be designed in such a way that they shut off or marginalise certain segments of their society, usually minority groups. Added to this is that government interferences and policies, might cause social problems, as they may favour certain segments of the society while excluding others.

## **Examples of Social Problems**

### **Poverty**

Poverty has so many definitions. Poverty is powerlessness. It has so many faces and it is changing from place to place and across time (World Health Organization, 2001). Absolute poverty is disabling. It means that one cannot afford the basic human requirements. By this, I mean that it robs one of many things in life, including his dignity and pride. Relative deprivation means that one is not keeping up with the standards in a given city. Poverty is one of the major reasons why people are excluded from the political, social and economic structures of society (Maxwell and Kenway, 2001). Poverty is usually constructed by a distinction between normal people, and those that are poor. The constructive perspective of poverty does not deny the existence of poverty, but that only some people at some time and in some place will be labelled as being in poverty (May, et al eds 2001 p. 7). A realist perspective will look at poverty as objectively describable and will attempt to offer an explanation.

### **Juvenile delinquency**

Juvenile delinquency is a complex, serious problem. The cause of this problem includes peer pressure and the failure of our social structures, among others. However it is not a new phenomenon. In 1880, the penologist Enoch Wines, wrote, " Delinquent children, the criminals of the next generation, must be prevented from pursuing their criminal careers; they are born to it, brought up to it. They must be saved" (Wines, 1880, p. 132 cited in McNeil and Townley, p. 21-27). We cannot overstate the fact that juvenile delinquency is a huge social problem today. The government has tried to deal with it, with legislation, culminating in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, <https://assignbuster.com/social-problems-causes-and-solutions/>

Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBO) and parenting orders. However, the media seem to be giving a lot of attention to delinquent youths and portraying them as monsters and race and gender issues have not adequately been looked in to. There is also a difference of opinions on how the problem can be solved. The realist perspective will acknowledge the existence of the problem, while a constructive perspective, will view it as a construction of society.

### **Ethnicity and Social problems**

Ethnicity generally refers to a group's attachment to a particular area and sharing a peculiar way of life. Racism is when a group of people are treated differently because of their colour. There have been ethnic and racial problems in our society. The media have played a part in upping ethnic tension in the UK. Race riots have flared in some parts of the UK. There have also been reported increases in race attacks. Our institutions, particularly the police and the media have been branded institutionally racist. People from ethnic minority are more likely to be stopped and searched by the police and they are more likely to be socially, economically and politically excluded, more than white people. They are also more likely to be projected as social problems. The cause of ethnic tension is usually an unfounded fear that diversity is a threat to the dominant group in society. The realist perspective will acknowledge the existence of this problem and will seek an explanation for it. The constructive perspective will view the issue as a construction by society.

### **Single parents**

Single parents are a social phenomenon now regarded as a social problem because they are believed to have an impact on our values. They tend to impact directly on society, socially, economically, and ideologically. Single parents become a problem, when they cost the state a lot. A good number of single parents depend on state benefits. Fathers are usually absent, and do not contribute towards the upkeep of the children. The social cost of absent fathers can not be overlooked (Dennis and Erdos, 1993). The government have put in place legislation namely the 1989 Children's Act and the 1991 Child Support Act to deal with the problem.

### **Conclusion**

Social problems are hard to solve. They seem to be ingrained in the complex web of unwanted state intervention, reckless forms of individual behaviour and economic factors. Social problems have no commonly accepted forms of definition, but they all have common factors that relate to them. In the problems that I listed above, they are all seen from different perspectives and given different explanations. It depends on who is viewing the problem. The media and the government also contribute to making social problems hard to solve. Some social problems might be downplayed and others blown out of proportion. Some times the intervention of the government and experts may worsen a problem as they tend to look at the problem from their own point of view, without taking the point of view of individual or groups suffering the problems directly in to consideration.

Individuals can also make social problems difficult to solve. They may mislead the government by providing incorrect data. Economic factors do



play a part. The government might not see some social problems as a top priority for them to solve and thus will not earmark enough funds to tackle the problem. Sometimes, the government may not have the political will to solve certain social problems. Some social problems are interwoven in to our social, political and economic structure, that to solve them, we will need to dismantle our entire structure. Finally, there is no generally accepted way to solve social problems. Some solutions appear easy, while others appear complex, but you can not be certain, that the proffered solution will solve the problem.

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