

What is the social ecological model? essay sample

[Life](#), [Childhood](#)



How can this perspective be used in practice to deepen understanding of the lives of children, young people and families in poverty and promote wellbeing?

In social care services, models and theories are constructed in order to promote knowledge and understanding of particular areas. With a clear understanding established it enables practitioners to analyse, debate and practice in the most effective way. The particular model focus for this essay is the social ecological model established by Bronfenbrenner (cited by O'Dell and Leverett, 2011). Children, young people and families all across the United Kingdom (UK) experience and are affected by poverty, Bradbury and Janetti (cited by Rixon, 2011, p. 15) clarify this, " By the end of the twentieth century, the UK had the highest rate of children living in poverty in Europe". The wellbeing of children and young people is at the focus of all surrounding social care services.

With this importance in mind, this essay will ascertain that using the social ecological model in practice can deepen the understanding of the lives of children, young people and families experiencing poverty and how it can aid in promoting their wellbeing. The social ecological model is a framework used to highlight how the lives of children and young people are directly affected by the environment that they live in, their immediate surroundings and the society as a whole. Bronfenbrenner originally used a diagram displaying concentric circles to aid in the understanding of the social ecological model (Open University, Learning Guide 3, Section 3. 1). Since Bronfenbrenner established this framework in 1979, the model has continued to be used and adapted enabling more depth and understanding. Every child

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is recognised by the ecological perspective to be an individual. The model does therefore not automatically make any assumptions that every child experiences the same surrounding networks. However, Brofenbrenner's model does not acknowledge that in between each clearly defined level, of the child, family, community and society it can be far more complex.

With every child being unique, so is there surrounding environment. For one child the outer influences may be far more direct or have a greater impact. To be able to fully understand children and young people, it is essential that their family environment, their location of community and the way society is structured, is fully understood. Working to this understanding would enable the framework Brofenbrenner established. Importantly, this perspective brings to light the importance of how a parent's approach of care and support has a direct impact onto the child. This leads onto the next concentric ring of 'family'. As researched by Duncan and Brooks Gunn (cited by O'Dell and Leverett, 2001, p. 3) they acknowledged that children and young people can be negatively affected by family factors, including poverty. The negative influence may affect the child's life chances and different areas of development. The direct impact of factors such as poverty, leads onto the next concentric circle of community and society.

Following the ideas presented from Brofenbrenner's social ecological perspective, a child who experiences a positive environment within family and social networks will be less likely to be affected negatively from the outer concentric rings of community and society. Factors such as the neighborhood the child or young person is living in, need not directly affect

them if they have a positive family environment. Working in a way which supports the social ecological model can have a positive impact onto children, young people and their families. Families who experience poverty can feel that they are to blame and it is due to their own failings. If practitioners can address the family using Brofenbrenner's framework, the impact of society can be acknowledged therefore understanding that factors out of a families control can still directly affect them. It would appear that the benefits of the social ecological perspective is widely acknowledged across the United Kingdom and is underpinned by legal framework.

O'Dell and Leverett (2012, p. 2) writes about this and acknowledges that Getting it right for every child (Scottish Executive, 2008) and the Framework for the Assessment of children in need and their families (DH, 2000) take into consideration this perspective. With these policies in mind, it appears that the importance of the social ecological framework have been addressed yet not all practitioners and professionals actively embrace this perspective. In practice, the framework can be used as a constant reminder of a fact that in the social work system is not always practiced; the child is at the centre. The importance of the child or young person is paramount. A child or young person's wellbeing is not demeaned to suit the system, but the system is there to suit the individual, unconditional of their situation. Children can grow up imprinted with perspectives that have been pushed onto them, intentional or not. If perspectives have been negative, it is likely to affect the overall wellbeing of the child.

A practitioner can ensure that families are aware of how much a child is impacted by actively engaging in discussions about wider issues such as the community they live in and how society reflects onto them. On reflection parents may acknowledge the direct impact of their personal views and adapt the way they inflict them onto their children. The wellbeing of each child should be viewed individually. A strong affecting factor for one child may be a non existing factor for another. One child may live with extreme fortune but face the affects of social exclusion, on the other hand, a child and their family may be in the depths of poverty, but have a solid network built around them. For both children, their wellbeing is being affected. With the understanding that social exclusion can affect a child or young person as much as poverty, practitioners must embrace outreach onto the wider society.

As identified by Gill and Jack (2007), cited by Rixon (2011, p. 24), “Practitioners should also be prepared to engage with politicians, funders, agencies and the media about the issues such as child poverty”. Engaging in this way can aid in addressing aspects which affect society as a whole, and then onto local communities. Research carried out and examined by Feinstein (cited by The Open University, 2012) highlighted the inequalities that children face in an educational setting. The inequalities demonstrated in the research were divided between children from low and high social economic status. From the research carried out, it then led onto early interventions which were solely targeted at the poorer communities. However it could be more beneficial to not only target the communities as a whole but people as individuals. With the social ecology perspective in mind,

practice should be developed around peoples as individuals and not as a whole unit in their community.

From the outcome of Feinstein's research it is questionable whether educational settings are encouraging the divide amongst children and young people by providing schools in which fees are used, to gain recognition. In conclusion, the social ecological model has and will continue to be a beneficial framework to be embraced by practitioners. It may be perceived that the perspective is too simplistic when considering the enormity of the extent of what can affect the wellbeing of a child or young person.

However, whether the opinion is a simplistic one or not, the framework can aid in practitioners work, promoting their own understanding and that of the children, young people and families that they work in partnership with.

References

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