

Definition of underclass and youth offending criminology essay



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People who are at the bottom of a society having become victims of poverty trap. This class is largely composed of the young unemployed, long-unemployed, chronically-sick, disabled, old, or single-parent (usually the mother) families. It also includes those who are systematically excluded from participation in legitimate economic activities, such as cultural, ethnic, or religious minorities or illegal immigrants. Children of the underclass (especially those from single-parent families) often lack educational qualifications and social and other skills and are, therefore, unable to rise out of it.

Nevertheless, whether as a heuristic device to study society or as a target of ideological or academic attack, the underclass thesis has been used a focus of attention by a wide spectrum of researchers, politicians and journalists. In post-industrial societies the debate on the existence, nature and causes of the underclass has been raging on for decades. There is a plethora of ideological, policy, ontological and methodological disputes around it.

In the social sciences, not many theses have been as contentious as the underclass thesis. The evident growth of society has been plagued by radical changes that attempt to explain certain sectors of society and their behavioural tendencies in order to understand their influences and attempt to resolve social problems. To solve any social problems begins with a definitive role and naming it, thereby build social responses that are geared to address the defining issues. Within this discussion the description of what is defined as an underclass is vital to the argument, there appears to be little consent about whether or not the term should be used. It derived in the United States and first came to use in Britain in the 1960's and 1980's (Field, <https://assignbuster.com/definition-of-underclass-and-youth-offending-criminology-essay/>)

1989) and Murray adopted the term but recognised patterns to define what it constituted.

The evident growth of society has been plagued by social and economic changes that attempt to explain part of certain sectors of societal segregation and their behavioural tendencies in order to understand their influences and attempt to resolve problems that affect those segments. To solve any social problems begins with a definitive role to name and then define 'underclass', thereby build social policies and responses that are geared to address the underlying issues. According to Bullock and Young (2002) the full scale of a problem can only be defined after a universal definition. According to Jencks' version (1992), he refers to underclass 'as composed of people who lack the social and cultural skills required to deal with mainstream institutions'. Hereby begins the use of multitude of 'criteria to rank one another usually being based on their income, cultural skills and social behaviour'.

In order to bring some form of sense to the word 'underclass', Charles Murray explains that its formation is based on three issues. These are 'crime, dropping out of the labour market and illegitimacy' (IEA, 1999). These issues are also popularly associated with reason of adolescences with many youths resorting to criminal activities, unemployed and from broken down families. My report will refer to 'underclass' theory according to Charles Murray's *The Emerging British Underclass* (1989) and assesses whether there may be any correlation with group offending, in particular the youths. He refers to underclass not as a 'degree of poverty, but a type of poverty'

and thereby agrees with Jencks in that 'poverty may be a necessary condition' in establishing an individual as a member of the underclass.

Definition of underclass and youth offending

By beginning to understand 'underclass', is to begin to 'distinguish the mindset of the poor' and to explain the breakdown of law and order within their segment. The current literature has associated the definition of underclass and places 'emphasises either on the persistence of poverty or the number of people in neighbourhoods where the incidences of poverty or dysfunctional behaviour is high' (Mincy et al, 1990). Murray goes further to address that poverty is mostly concentrated in the lowest social class and is drastically reduced among the middle and upper class and therefore crime levels are used to define poverty especially in the underclass. Therefore it can be termed the underclass is a 'dependency culture of the estranged and idle (and criminal) sustained by state benefits (Morris, cited by Hall, 2006) His underlying cause however is that the root cause of underclass is the 'breakdown of the family'

Youth offending

From the 1940s youth delinquency became a common feature in social, academic and political discourses mainly due to the threat of the social order. By the 1960s it was becoming clear that welfare systems were failing to tackle crime and delinquency among the youth thereby creating many challenges (Davis, 1990 cited by Hall, 2006).

Sutherland (2011) states that youth offenders are from families that do not value social behaviour and display a lack of parenting skills. Most youth

offenders are from struggling families where the three factors mentioned by Murray (1999) were prevalent and he believes these reforms helped established underclass within UK. Muncie (2009) defines youth as those aged between ten to seventeen years of age, but the age range might not be reflective to encompass social issues that affect older youth offenders. The main influences of youth offending (group) that are common with the underclass include violence, family support, inequalities cultural differences, victims of circumstances and anti-social peer relationships. Social, family and personal conditions experienced by these groups drive youths to carry out criminality, and the policies to address poverty only refers to them as underclass (Farrington, 2007) This does not help to devise policies that address issues that can arrest the development of poverty. The relationship between the underclass and youth offending is the drive of crime. This is common with those who are not in employment, by choice and children of the underclass (especially those from single-parent families) often lack educational qualifications and social and other skills and are, therefore, unable to rise out of it. (businessdirectory) Murray states that the underclass growth is result of the lack of these skills an

The issue of defining a version of poverty as the ' underclass' fails to justify its correlation with why a large number of youth offend. The mere comparison alone is enough to bring those socially disadvantaged to be rebellious because of the stigma associated with being poor. Social policy dictates it as ' inhuman to criticise or blame an individual who has fallen on hardships due to misconduct' (IEA). Therefore any policies that categorise those less fortunate, whether deserving or undeserving will alter their

behaviour thereby influence the way they interact with society. The association of 'hoodies', for example, with youth offenders has already resulted in society treating them in a hostile way. The result is even those who do wear 'hoodies' are now tarnished with the same brush and with suspicion and contempt. Society views them as hostile delinquents and therefore their future is now being affected by the way they look rather than the content of their character. There are no situations where we can justify calling part of the same society we live in by under-rating them with such derogatory term. While we may continue to use the term 'underclass' in our social explanations, it will be to justify the explanation for our cause rather than to address the real underlying issues of a 'degree of poverty'. The behaviour of youth offenders is more to do with a lack of resources to improve their status, which in turn results in social poverty brought on by their exclusion to the very society they live in. We cannot continue to label part of our society to justify economic or political explanations anymore. Radical decisions have to be implemented to address those under-privileged by whatever circumstances, than to continue to give them a new name, which will not resolve their problems, but excaebarate it.

Conclusion

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