

Social policy essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Q.

1 (a) What is meant by social policy? (2)Ans. 1(a) Social policy refers to actions or objectives adopted by the government directed towards maintaining or improving a specified condition of living conducive to human welfare. They are also policies adopted to counter perceived social problems. For example, state pensions are arrangements to provide people with a certain amount of income once they have retired, become disabled or no longer earn income through employment(b).

Describe 2 social problems in your society. (4)Ans. 1(b) Social problems, as mentioned above, are problems, which directly or indirectly affect many members of the society. Child labor is very prevalent in Pakistan. Due to financial constrains many children are forced to earn a living for themselves and their families particularly in the carpet industry.

Child labor does not only limits horizons with an accompanying decline in literacy as children work at the expense of education. Another social problem faced by Pakistan is population growth. Many people consider large families as a blessing for social and cultural reasons. This in turn increases the burden on government resources, since this increase the dependency ratio and creates additional demands for health care and education.(c).

Explain how some groups may benefit from having the power to define what is considered a social problem. (8)Ans. (c) Sociologists have argued that ‘ experts’ or those in professional positions have access to knowledge and power, as a result of which certain groups may be in a strong position to establish what is considered a social problem. For example, politicians

determine the political agenda, and can therefore prioritize what they choose to perceive to be social problems, which might at present in the UK include terrorism, anti-social behavior, obesity and workless ness. The approach to health and illness offers an excellent example. Functionalist theorists see the role of medicine as central to the effective organization of society, with its key function being to keep people healthy and to treat the sick, thus enabling them to be healthy contributors to society as parents, workers, etc.

Hence doctors have a key role in determining a person's health status – deciding how 'well' or 'ill' the person is, declaring them fit or unfit for work, prescribing drugs to control behavior, ward off infection or prevent from disease, determining whether an illness is 'deviant; or 'imaginary.

Interactionists argue that illness is not simply the existence of biological disease, but a function of how a particular disease or the ill person is perceived by others and how that perception is acted upon. For example, perceptions of mental illness indicate how important the image or definition of the illness or ill person can be. Illness is what a particular society, at a specific point in time, for certain groups or individuals, views it to be, with the medical profession playing a critical role in the labeling of illness and ill people. Conflict theorists take issue with the functionalist approach, arguing that medicine is not merely a supportive social institution, but also serves itself as a profession.

Its role is thus to justify its expert status and to claim that its practitioners have the power to diagnose who is ill, why, and how the patient should be treated. Medicine operates within a capitalist system, and this enables doctors to assist in the social production of health and illness. Postmodernist

theorists see disease as a social construct, a concept based on assumptions in society about what is normal or abnormal. They also question the practice of medicine by so-called medical experts, and argue that acupuncture, faith healing and homeopathy (among others) might be just as valid as treatments. (d) Assess the view that sociological research should be used as a basis for solutions to social problems.

(11) The extent to which sociological research should be used as a basis for solving social problems depends in large part upon the perspective of the sociologist. A perspective is a way of focusing upon particular issues or types of question. The positivist approach believes that social phenomena are similar to natural phenomena, and so emulates the research methods used by natural scientists. So it looks at systems, structures and institutions, viewing behavior largely as the product of forces outside our control. It argues that sociologists should study only what they can objectively see, measure and count, and so uses methods that generate quantitative data, aiming to arrive at social ‘ laws’ that can explain the causes of events in the social world, and even to make predictions. The researcher should avoid personal involvement and aim to produce value-free evidence.

Positivists specialize in questionnaires, statistical analysis, standardized tests and structured interviews. On this basis, ‘ social problems’ are defined in terms of any phenomena that appear to reduce the effective functioning or stability of society. The focus is therefore likely to be on issues such as crime and disorder, reluctance to seek employment, ‘ undesirable’ sub-cultures, etc. The interpretivist or interactionist approach, by contrast, argues that social phenomena differ from natural phenomena.

Individuals are active, conscious beings who act with intention and purpose because of the way in which they make sense of their social situation. People are capable of shaping their social environment. So they act out various roles, selecting words, gestures, behavior and strategies that are appropriate for each social situation with which they are confronted. Hence this approach focuses upon the interpretation of the world by individuals, and argues that sociologists must be able to identify with this view in order to understand an individual's actions, and so the stress is upon the influence of interaction with others, and on how people manage social institutions. These methods generate qualitative data that expresses how people make sense of their social situations, and specializes in participant observation and open-ended interviews and discussions.

It follows that it is wrong to label people as 'deviants' or the cause of social 'problems', since this presupposes a value consensus – and 'deviant' behavior may be quite normal within certain groups, while the 'problem' may be simply a product of differing values in society, or labeling, or moral panics. The benefit of this approach to research is that it questions the assumption about the existence of objectivity in sociology. It has contributed a great deal of value to debates about the deprived, powerless, and poor in society, as well as about criminal behavior and the status of ethnic minorities. There is, however, the problem of unintended experimenter bias. Moreover, people act in terms of how they perceive others – age, gender, ethnicity, etc.

So their responses will tend to differ accordingly – and they also tend to act in terms of how they think the researcher expects them to act.