Faculty of Social Work

Contemporary Social Problems and Theories of Social Change

Level 5, WSD

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Designed for students only

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Chapter One: Understanding Social Problems

Introduction

Social problems are described most simply as perplexing questions about human societies proposed for solution. The distinctiveness of such questions as a separate object of sociological study rests upon their topicality, currency, and pragmatic derivation. Social problems are part of the climate of opinion in society which centers on expressed needs for public policies and anticipated requirements for social control. Social problems study or research consists of the ordering of perspectives and social facts in relation to the ends and means of collective action.

Proceeding beyond this general statement to a more precise definition of social problems poses a complicated task of sorting out the wide diversity of views held by sociologists as to the nature of the subject matter and the perspectives from which it should be studied (Merrill 1948). These conflicting viewpoints, as well as salient misgivings shared by many as to whether social problems is a"field"or can validly be included with sociology, are in part understandable in the context of the origins and history of sociology itself.

History of social problems approach

Concern with social problems has been singularly American or Anglo-Saxon. Antecedents can be found in the literature of socioeconomic criticism and reform which was directed at many of the consequences of commerce, industrialism, and urban growth in Western Europe, particularly eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century England. The more immediate forerunners of what came to be the social problems approach emerged from writings, reports, essays, and surveys by Protestant clergymen, philanthropists, and middle-class humanitarians, in the United States as well as England, who were dedicated to a variety of social reform activities. These included prison reform, settlement work, and child rescue, promotion of temperance, housing betterment, and improvement of conditions of employment of women and children; by the middle of the nineteenth century many of these had crystallized into organized actions or associations.

The roots of the intellectual orientation toward social problems as an academic subject are more precisely located in the broadly based American reform movement from which, in 1865, there issued the American Social Science Association. This represented a merger of a variety of local

and regional associations, whose constituted objectives were clearly ameliorative (Bernard & Bernard 1943). In large part it was responsible for the introduction of social science courses in American colleges and universities, beginning in 1865 and reaching a peak between 1885 and 1895. Many, if not most, of these courses, however titled, dealt with topics subsequently recognized as the substance of social problems courses in sociology with possibly somewhat greater attention paid to education and law.

The development of such courses reflected motivations of persons both within and outside the universities who were seeking to arouse and prepare students for careers of legislative reform. The courses attained quick popularity with students, many of whom were repelled by limitations of the classical or science curricula and who were fired by the social ferments of the post-Civil War period. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, when sociology began to receive formal departmental recognition in colleges and universities, many of those recruited to teach it came from backgrounds of the ministry and welfare work. The lineal ties of their versions of sociology to the older social science movement are attested by the substantial numbers of these early sociologists who were members of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections and of the American Prison Congress (Sutherland 1945).

The scientific rationale

Such facts strongly tempt one to the conclusion that American sociology was fathered by the study of social problems. However, this is opposed by another theme, reflecting continuity with the thought of August Comte and Herbert Spencer, holding to a scientific purpose in the study of society, which was present almost from the first in the social science movement. To the scientific emphasis in pioneer American sociology was added an antireform bias, stemming from the laissez-faire philosophy of Spencer and sounded in W. G. Sumner's strident disdain for social welfare activities. The conflict of purposes among early sociologists is epitomized by the lengths to which Sumner himself went in devising titles which would sharply distinguish his courses from the reformistic ones taught by his colleagues at Yale Divinity School.

It is generally accepted that Lester F. Ward's teleological philosophy outweighed the influences of Spencer and Sumner in the formative years of American sociology and that the notion of an "applied sociology" became or remained dominant. Yet the applied sociology of Ward (1906)

was little more than an idea which took its concrete meaning from classroom teaching, student field trips to charitable institutions, and the writing of textbooks, a number of which appeared in the first decade of the twentieth century. These, as well as the ones which followed, drew heavily on factual data from a variety of sciences construed to have a bearing on the problems under discussion, roughly ordered into "causes," "effects," and "solutions." This was consistent with Spencer's conception of sociology as a synthetic, "capstone" science, but this scientific rationale probably made a virtue of necessity. The amount of "pure" sociology available for application to social problems was severely limited; early sociologists, like Yankee inventors, made do with materials at hand.

Changing Perspectives

The passing of time saw the social problems approach in sociology lose ground as the socioeconomic characteristics of recruits to the field changed and as the need to validate sociology's status as a macrocosmic science was increasingly accepted. In the middle decades of the twentieth century sociologists turned more and more to self-conscious discussion of methodology, research design, and theory, with a growing attention to the European sociology of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. A kind of ideological commitment to social neutrality and non-evaluative research took hold of the discipline. The gulf between social theory and the study of concrete social problems grew wide, intellectually stranding many sociologists with continuing interest in the latter (Davis 1957). Their discontent culminated in the establishment in 1952 of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, which, while affiliated with the American Sociological Association, nevertheless carefully cherishes its separate identity.

Despite the shift in perspective regarding the fundamental tasks in sociology, the flow of textbooks on social problems has continued unabated, and courses so titled continue to be taught—albeit more restively by a younger generation of sociologists trained to demand theoretical meaning in materials with which they deal. The attenuated identification of sociologists with social problems courses is perpetuated by the relatively large number of students attracted to their offerings who nevertheless do not plan to follow sociology as a course of study. Instruction in social problems courses in otherwise scientifically oriented sociology departments is given various rationales—general education, a "service function," or a means of recruitment of students to the field.

Other pressures also have made it difficult for sociologists to disengage themselves from the old ties to social problems. Government recognition of military uses of sociology during World War II, plus research support from industry, government, and private foundations after the war, drew the interest of sociologists toward applied research on problems posed by persons or agencies outside the field. The massive surge of the American Negro after 1954 toward greater equality of opportunity multiplied the contingents of sociologists at work on applied research. The looming threat of thermonuclear war motivates others toward immediately useful, rather than abeyant, "scientistic" sociology. A number of highly articulate critics both within and outside sociology have inveighed against the sterility or inapplicability of much contemporary theory, directly challenging the claim that sociology can or should aspire to ethical neutrality.

Theoretical issues

The most sweeping indictment of social problems writings appeared in an article by C. Wright Mills (1943) entitled "The Professional Ideology of Social Pathologists." With slashing phrases he more or less condemned an entire generation of social pathologists for the low conceptual level of their textbooks, the discrete and unrelated nature of their treatments of various social problems, and insertions of rural-biased value judgments in the guise of objective terminology. These observations while undeniably cogent and pointed, were closer to stricture than to science, although they were organized around Mills's own brief for structural analysis of social problems data.

Closer study and more sanguine assessment of the field in the past make it less atheoretical than it would seem, especially if the textbooks are disregarded in favor of provocative articles by Frank (1925), Waller (1936), and Fuller (1937; 1938; compare Fuller & Myers 1941a). These writers, especially Fuller, both saw and sought to analyze social problems in a general setting of values and value conflict. Fuller's distinction between ameliorative problems and moral problems, implications of which he developed in a paper on morals and the criminal law (1942), bears insightfully on structural questions concerning the relationship of values to norms and the contingency of legal action on variations in this relationship.

Both Frank and Fuller stressed a holistic view frequently repeated by many contemporary sociologists, i.e., that situations or behavior considered to be problems, on finer analysis prove to

be expressions of cherished values or institutionalized norms crucial to the operation of society. From this came Fuller's conclusion—dismal to some that solutions to social problems may be or are impossible. This, when fitted with his later effort to demonstrate a natural history of social problems (Fuller & Myers 1941; Lemert 1951a), closely allies his thinking with the laissez-faire philosophy of Sumner, but it is also akin to the political conservatism many sociologists believe to inhere in modern "system" theories of society. In sum, these critics seem to say that putting social problems into a structural context destroys bothideological rationale and the individual motivation for reform, by showing the problems to be "necessary" consequences of a given type of value system or by making clear that values will have to be sacrificed and institutions disrupted if the problems are to be eliminated.

Definition as an issue

The first authors of books on social problems bothered little or not at all about definitions of social problems, uncritically drawing on fairly homogeneous convictions about the aspects of society that needed improvement or reform. Among the first attempts at definition were those of Ellwood (1915), Howerth (1913), Kelsey (1915), and Hart (1923). The prevailing definition, however, came from Case (1924), who was attracted to ideas of Thomas (1909) dealing with generic elements in the process of cultural origins. Predominant among these was an element of attention, defined as the subjective or reciprocal aspect of social control, which is activated by crises (Thomas [1917-1937] 1951, p. 218). These ideas led Case to propose that social problems are situations impressing a large number of competent observers as needing remedy by collective action. They became for him and many others after him socio-psychological phenomena; social problems, stated most simply, are whatever a goodly number of members of society say they are.

This definition more or less identifies sociologists with the lay populace and makes public opinion sociological opinion, with implied faith in a democratic process. Its difficulties accrue from recognition of the irrational or spurious qualities in public expressions or collective behavior, which counsels considerable discounting of public reactions or moral indignation as guides for sociological criticism of society or its institutions. Moreover, questions must be faced as to how many or what persons qualify as an acceptable panel for making judgments as to what are social problems. Many issues in modern society are articulated almost exclusively within coteries of specialists in health, medicine, welfare, correction, and education. They reflect

technical interests, often couched in esoteric language, which are projected into the arena of public opinion only ephemerally or adventitiously.

Superficially, Fuller's distinction between moral and ameliorative problems seems to reconcile the older conception of social problems with the facts of technical specialization. However, the division between moral and technical problems often becomes vague or disappears, for means may become ends or ends means, depending upon the vantage point of the beholder. The older idea that social problems could be defined by a consensus of professional and welfare experts made little headway with sociologists, largely because judgments of specialists outside their own or adjacent areas of interest can claim no greater validity than those of educated lay persons. Representative specialists often are spokesmen for organized groups, necessarily supporting vested agency values as well as conveying judgments derived from technical knowledge. Finally, it must be noted that the ordering of social problems with respect to priority or importance cannot be determined by consulting specialists who define them distributively.

Social pathology

The subjectivism inherent in the "popular" definition of social problems runs athwart the conception of sociology as a body of knowledge which rises above common sense and is accumulated through application of special methods by observers or researchers at least relatively detached from the social facts under scrutiny. If social problems are defined in terms of such a body of knowledge, they become objective rather than subjective facts, "discoverable" from laws or generalizations about necessary conditions of social life. Despite its well-documented shortcomings, the bare idea of social pathology is more congenial to such a formulation of sociology than is that of social problems.

Social pathology was an effort to apply a biological or medical model to the analysis of problematical phenomena of society. It rests on the idea that societies or their constituent parts may develop abnormally or anomalously and that they can be described or "diagnosed" in the light of some pristine or universal criterion of normality or health. The orientation of social pathology was, however, toward man rather than society, being heavily pervaded with the nineteenth-century concern about the relevance of institutions to the perfectibility of human nature. The notion of individual adjustment figured large in discussions of social pathology,

revolving about the consequences of physical illness, mental deficiency, mental disorders, alcoholism, lack of education, or incomplete socialization for the realization of life goals regarded as normal for most people. The fact that many of these conditions are indeed associated with organic pathologies or were assumed to have hereditary foundation lents strength to the idea that social problems were external, or objective, facts. Sociological residues of this idea persist today among those who believe alcoholism and mental disorder to be diseases. In the perspective of time it may be said that so long as American society was dominated by middle-class values, laissez-faire individualism, localism, and southern regionalism, the more absolutistic conception of social problems as social pathology remained tenable.

Social problems and social disorganization

The growth of cultural relativity in sociology, infiltrating from the critical-historical themes of American anthropology, together with the general questioning of paramount American values that was generated by the great depression of the 1930s and by foreign revolutions, put an end to social pathology as a viable perspective on social problems. The need for concepts to organize thought about societies in wholesale flux and crisis was conjoined with the need to place discussion of social problems in a more comprehensive intellectual scheme that would be in keeping with the methodological aspirations of sociologists. The needs in part seemed met by restatement of conceptions of social disorganization originally set down by Thomas and Znaniecki (1918-1920) and Charles H. Cooley (1918). Many of the phenomena that had long been the subject matter of social problems or social pathology now were postulated as symptoms or products of such processes as uneven cultural development, conflict, dissensus, and dialectical change. Taken together, these processes mean social disorganization. A pivotal distinction was set up between social disorganization and personal disorganization, with the latter assumed to be functionally associated with the former. On this point most textbook writers followed the organic analogy of Cooley rather than the ideas of Thomas and Znaniecki, who saw no necessary relationship between the two.

While some sociologists have decried texts on social disorganization as being little different from those on social problems, apart from their introductory chapters, this ignores the lively development of ecological studies by sociologists at the University of Chicago and elsewhere, whose findings appeared to give statistical support for the notion that social problems are

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expressions of a common, underlying social process. For a while, at least, the idea of "disorganized areas" in urban communities became established sociology and a welcome new way of ordering the data in textbooks. Vice, crime, poverty, divorce, and mental disorder all became part of a zonal or area parcel explainable in terms of generic ecological growth, change, and deterioration.

Social disorganization as a subject has the look of an impressive theoretical facade which on closer analysis is disillusioning. The concept of process on which it relies is vague at best, and the distinction between social and personal disorganization is difficult to maintain. Serious doubt has been cast on the method of ecological correlation, undermining the neat idea of disorganized areas. Careful ethnographic studies of the slum, such as W. F. Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1943), make it undeniably clear that such areas can be or are relatively well organized.

The idea of social disorganization still has its theoretical partisans and, defined simply as human activities or failures to act which impede or block other activities, is indeed demonstrable and of heuristic value. Thus, if artillerymen fire shells that, by reason of faulty communication or function, fall on their own troops, the result is fittingly enough described as social disorganization. But if questions are asked whether the attack was part of integral tactics, or whether the associated campaign advanced over-all strategy, or whether the war should have been fought in the first place, theoretical analysis quickly moves into speculation where fact and value blur. In any but a specifiable, closed social system or subsystem with consensual goals, the formulation of social disorganization reduces to value choices of its author.

Social problems as dysfunctions

The Forms of thought from the traditions of European sociology and English anthropology offer theoretical alternative of subsuming the data of social problems under the category of social dysfunctions. This descriptive and analytic device proceeds from assumptions that there are functional prerequisites of social life around which institutional structures operate, mutually supporting each other, meeting psychobiological needs of individuals, and contributing to an over-all integration of society. Practices or activities which run counter to functional prerequisites, which disrupt the institutional nexus, or frustrate individual needs are defined as social dysfunctions.

The difficulties of functional analysis are well known. Determining what is indispensable to maintain a specific complex of behavior and what is adventitious is made difficult by the fact that the range of cases or time series in human societies from which to generalize often is small and some kinds of events have only a few instances. Culture comes to each generation in unsorted bales or packets, and historical, comparative, or cross-cultural studies are limited in their potential for sorting out that which is functional or dysfunctional. When cultures change or undergo disruption; that which may have seemed to participants or observers to be a causal or functional association may turn out to be dispensable. The social problems of yesteryear often live only as the quaint reminiscences of today.

The persistence of ancient social problems or dysfunctional activities in such forms as crime, political corruption, gambling, or prostitution in the face of collective efforts to eradicate them is not readily explained by functional analysis. An explanation for such seeming paradoxes was proposed by Robert K. Merton (1949, chapter 1) in the form of a distinction between "manifest" and "latent" functions; R. M. Williams (1951) also dealt with this matter in his discussion of "patterned evasions of institutional norms." However, these explanations seem secondary or residual at best. They call attention to the fact that actions may have functions as well as dysfunctions. In another light, they are implicit concessions that determination of functions in a culturally diverse society depends in large degree on the particular needs, perspectives, or values adopted by the observer.

A more crucial but closely related issue in functional analysis is whether it can reveal those activities which can be established in objective terms as social problems, even though they are not necessarily subjects of popular awareness or collective action. In a general way Case (1924) heeded this question when, in defining social problems primarily as aspects of the collective mind, he nevertheless recognized that statisticians and others could describe adverse conditions of society; furthermore, the inclusion of a "situation" in definitions by a number of other sociologists was recognition that objective factors were a necessary part of social problems (Smith et al. 1955). Ogburn (1922), more clearly of functionalist persuasion and impressed by the discrepancies between dynamic technology and institutional adaptation, sought a totally objective definition of social problems as consequences or expressions of "cultural lag."

Subsequent critics showed that this conception was not, as hoped, free from value judgments and strongly argued against its underlying dichotomy of material and nonmaterial culture.

The causal relationships between technology, culture, and moral ideas and the sequence in which they change continue to be among the great moot questions of sociology. They have grown more prominent as ruling groups in some societies seek to assist others to industrialize or raise agricultural productivity. The discovery in many instances that introduced technology does not always lead to the expected consequences has compelled students of socioeconomic development to conclude that their judgment of what is functional and dysfunctional for others is not easily imposed for the purpose of directing change.

Social problems as deviation

Since 1940 a sizable portion of the traditional subject matter of social problems, such as crime, delinquency, prostitution, drug addiction, and physical handicaps, has been categorized as deviance, deviation, or deviant behavior. The amoral, statistical, or descriptive implications of the terms carry a strong appeal, although they tend to acquire morally invidious connotations. Generally, deviance is defined as violations of norms, or departures from social expectancies, but beyond this minimal agreement the ideas projected for its analysis differ considerably.

One group of sociologists, following Durkheim, Parsons, and Merton, has concentrated on sources of deviation in discontinuities, anomie, or strain within the structure of a society that is assumed to be more or less an integrated system. The analysis of deviation in this theoretical context is voluntaristic, in contrast with deterministic or strictly causal versions of functionalism. Deviation originates from permutations of choice by individuals motivated by culturally given ends and confronted with means of varying accessibility. The most cogent statement or theoretical design derived from these ideas appeared in Merton's widely influential article ''Social Structure and Anomie'' (1938).

Critical assessment of the structural or ''anomie'' interpretations of deviation was slow to crystallize but was finally made by a symposium of sociologists qualified by extensive research in areas of deviation. In this volume, edited by Marshall B. Clinard (1964), they raised serious doubts as to whether Merton's effort to design an embracing theory of deviation was sufficient for the complexities of the data. The ends-means distinction is not an easy one to maintain with

concrete data, and the individual motivational base of structural sociology is barren ground for the production of a theory of group-related deviation in any but reactional terms. The heavy accent on conditions of social order in works of Parsons (1951) reduces social control to a negative mechanism for repressing deviation; the recognition of deviation as a creative necessity for social change is absent from structural theories or appears only in revised afterthoughts.

Standing at considerable theoretical distance from the objectivism of current structural theories of deviation are the productions of a small nucleus of sociologists represented by Erving Goffman (1963; 1961), Howard S. Becker (1963), and Edwin Lemert (1948; 1951fc), whose perspectives are more microcosmic than macroscosmic. Characterized by the importance they assign to interactionally derived meanings in the genesis of deviation, they have dwelt upon factors present in interaction, such as labeling, stigma, self-presentation, identity conflict, and identity protection; they have also dwelt upon the more structural concepts of role, deviant career, societal reaction, and secondary deviation. These writers do not talk of social problems, but their interests in the self-definitional and constrictive impacts of social control align them with the notion that social problems are products of definition. They are little concerned with criteria for rational social control or solutions for problems of deviation, preferring to show how agencies of reform, rehabilitation, or "treatment" give form and meaning to deviation and stabilize it as secondary deviation by intervening interaction processes.

While these sociologists offer strong negative criticism of institutional controls and public policy relevant to deviance, thus far they have not produced explanations of how definitions of deviation and related policy appear as cultural phenomena, or of how and why they change. Neither have they done much theoretically to connect deviation with innovation and creativity in the processes of change. Broadly assessed, however, interactional studies of deviation show more sensitivity than systematic sociological theory to many salient features of modern society, among which must be numbered functionally derived morality, shifting ends-means relationships, pluralistic group action, segmentalized social relationships, information control, attenuated role commitment, and the operational consequences of these for norms and rules defining deviation.

Future of social problems approach

In some respects social problems is one of the most important branches of sociology, for it provides the testing ground for predictions and the ultimate usefulness of sociology. Yet it remains a theoretically embarrassing area for many sociologists who regard its crucial questions of definition as unanswered. Discussions and research in social problems, particularly those subsumed as deviancy, now can lay claim to a closer alliance with general sociological theory than was true in the past. However, the dilemma between subjective and objective viewpoints persists, reviving with nearly every attempt to formally delimit the field.

There are growing indications that this dilemma may be resolvable with theory and studies of values and valuation, concepts toward which sociologists and other social scientists have been pushed by the dissensus, group conflict, and resistance which seem to be the ubiquitous concomitants of swift change in modern society. Some sociologists, and more anthropologists, have sought to discover the basis of action in a general structural matrix of values delineated by age, sex, occupation, kinship, and other status attributes; others have looked for significant values in derivative, "second order" categories, such as "personality structure." However, these researches bypass the question of how values are aggregated for a pattern of action in any increasingly pluralistic society containing tangles of competing groups and associations.

One consequence of the heightened interest in values and valuation may be the evolution of a science of social action from the more amorphous area of social problems, implemented by studies of conflict resolution and short-term change and emphasizing content as well as forms of group interaction. This requires a different imagery of social problems, one less pointed to crisis and reform and more amenable to the facts of continuous change and policy revision in high-energy societies. The notion of a solution to social problems as a synoptical "best possible" choice from a number of alternatives will prove less useful than knowledge of how decisions are made and executed the "hard way." These decisions, it is to be hoped, will be seen less as "causes" of change in static situations than as strategies for intervention into ongoing processes. If value aggregation through group interaction is an important phase of such processes, it will be no less important to specify who has access to what means of social control and to locate the relevant values of power elites; for these, too, are among the "conditions" of change.

Successful linkage of "subjective" value phenomena with "objective" social structure and technology may come from theoretical extensions of human ecology, widely conceived to show how time, space, energy, and resistance to change intrude into the socio-psychological aspects of action. This necessitates acceptance of the idea that technology can change the order of choice among values, otherwise set by culture and social structure, by altering the costs of their fulfillment. This is not to say that human beings always perceive and respond economically to "costly" ways of acting. Both the definition of social problems and the organization of rational intervention are problematical phenomena to be explained. Insofar as social scientists assume responsibility for supplying critical knowledge for rational intervention, they help to organize it. Consequently, it is doubtful that social problems can be studied from an ethically neutral position.

Chapter Two: Contemporary Social Problems in Africa

1. Social Problems in Nigeria

Social problems are found in any type of community. They are solved easily where people understand their social responsibility and live up to the standard. The solution starts with acknowledging the problem and understanding it.

Some people believe that **social problems** have to be solved by the government or by someone else. They do not seem to understand their share of social responsibility in solving them. However, identifying a problem as a social one allows the society to use its communal resources for its elimination. Surely, the government has its social services, which use money, education, assistance and other tools to resolve the issue.

Still, individual members of community and various entities, such as churches, charities or companies, should not shun their share of responsibility and their load of work. In many cases, such problems as poor education are not viewed by people involved in them as their direct responsibility. They do not believe they can really do something to fix them, thus, they mostly remain unsolved and people keep on complaining. That is why understanding the idea of social problems is so important for all of us.

As you see, it is not enough to just identify problematic social conditions, we need to find an adequate solution for them, although, realizing them is an integral part of that solution.

What are social problems in Nigeria?

1. **National identity problem**

    Recently Nigeria has celebrated its 55th independence anniversary. This country is young and it was created artificially after its decolonization. The land is shared by a huge number of tribes and that plays the key part in shaping contemporary social problems for Nigeria.

    This country struggles to gain its national idea and identity that would unite all the ethnic

and religious groups within it. The conflicts related to Biafra, Boko Haram and other issues create significant tension in the community.

2. **Poverty**

Among the top social scourges of Nigeria is poverty. It becomes the cause of many other troubles in the society. A large portion of population lives below the poverty line.

Since 2004 the number of people, who have just $1.25 per day to spend has constantly grown. The same can be said about the number of people, who survive on just $2 per day. Presently over 70% of the country's population live under the poverty line and this percentage has rapidly increased from almost 35% in 1992 to over 70% in 2010 and on.

3. **Corruption**

Rapid population growth is not the only cause of poverty in Nigeria. Corruption is a great contributor to this social issue. Some of Nigerian politicians and people in ruling offices in just one year make as much, as other citizens would make in 65 years! Corrupted system and failure of justice leads to bribes, stealing, manipulation, etc. Poor people hardly have any civil rights, while the rich ones become only wealthier every year.

4. **Inequality**

Nigeria is the Giant of Africa. Its economy is the largest one on the continent and the GDP continue to grow. However, those goods and natural resources are not spread equally among the population. Nigeria is called a rich country with poor people. In fact, the richest man in Africa comes from Nigeria (Aliko Dangote).

And he is not the only one in the list of the richest persons of this continent. The problem is that the main part of population of the country is engaged in agriculture.

This sector is where the poverty rules. The main riches come from oil production, but only few people have access to this sector of economy. So, poor become even poorer and rich gain more wealth.

5. **Terrorism**

Boko Haram has made Nigeria famous throughout the world. This Islamic organization fights against western ways of life, education, medicine and other things. Hundreds of people have been killed during the attacks of terrorisms and millions got displaced from their home villages and towns that greatly. That contributes to social problems in Nigeria.

6. **High level of child mortality**

This is one of the saddest of them. In 2015 child mortality rate in Nigeria has reached an immense level. Every day over 2000 children under the age of 5 die of malnutrition, diseases and poor care. Nigeria takes the second place among all the countries in the world by the child mortality rate!

Poverty, lack of education among women and poor health care system keep it at such a high level. In most cases antibiotics that cost under $10 dollars could have saved a life of a child, but such luxury is unavailable to their parents, who make living on just 1.25 dollars per day!

7. **Unemployment**

Currently the unemployment rate in Nigeria is 8.2%. In parts it is caused by the displaced persons, who were forced to leave their homes and flee. This creates social psychological issues and evokes enmity between different tribes in the country. People leave their homes and go to overpopulated cities, such as Lagos, looking to make their living and get a better life.

8. **Poor education**

   Many acknowledge that educational system of Nigeria has crushed. They blame corruption and government for such an outcome. Only little over 50 percent of Nigerian women can read or write and that rate is a bit higher for men – 70%. In the early 2000 the situation started to improve, but now the number of illiterate people has grown again.

   That has become a real problem, as our world is technocratic. People with no special skills and knowledge have little chances of succeeding in it.

9. **Tribalism**

   Tribal conflicts are natural for Nigeria, as this country has never existed before. There are several major tribes, such as Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. All the tribes have their own religion, culture, languages. It is not surprising that they engage in conflicts and fight over the power in the newly shaped country. Even 50+ years is not enough to bring those tribes to unity and shape their national identity.

10. **Home violence**

    This might seem like a controversial issue for some people. In some cultures home violence against children and women is considered to be Ok. However, that is a real problem. Often times it is tightly related to alcohol or drug abuse. At times it leads to serious injuries or even murders. In most cases the victims of such crimes have nowhere to turn to for help.

Now you know the 10 top types of social problems in Nigeria. No doubt, these are serious issues and they demand government strategies and ruling to solve them. But what are the main causes of social problems in this state? Why does it seem like the authorities are unable to cope with them successfully?

The answer is that those problems are rooted in the hearts and minds of people. They cannot be uprooted by any social program that is not aimed at raising the level of social responsibility and

awareness. The only way to deal away with them is by "awakening" people and helping them realize that they are the part of the problem and they should become the part of the solution as well.

See https://ask.naij.com/culture/what-are-social-problems-in-nigeria-10-top-i23504.html

2. Socio-economic problems in South Africa

Unemployed painters, plumbers and tilers wait outside Builder's Warehouse in Johannesburg, South Africa, for job opportunities on June 6, 2012. Image: Gallo Images / City Press / Herman Verwey

1 Endangered Marriage Legacy: South Africans appear to have departed from the state of being a loving, caring and committed society. Society seems to no longer consider marriage as a long-term project. Personally, I find it enormously difficult to envisage a nation of single-parent citizens. Statistics show a dramatic decline in the number of people getting married, coupled with a rise in divorces, and South Africa is now rated among the top five countries with the highest divorce rates in the world.

2 Absent Fatherhood: Absent fatherhood constitutes fatherlessness. It is increasingly becoming more common for children to grow up in an unbalanced family order. I myself was partly brought up in such a similar, adverse family situation.

3 Teenage Parenthood: The number of teenagers falling pregnant has reached abnormal levels. Be it instinctively happening or state-social-grant motivated, the consequences are costly, including but not limited to school dropouts, immature parenthood, and a rise in child adoption.

4 Cultural Distortion: Any elements of culture (unintentionally) advocating the consumption of liquor enhance the possibility of addiction. Merely by endorsing liquor as the official substance that determines or governs any cultural initiation at any stage of human growth is tantamount to the approval of addiction. There seems to be a false idea that alcohol was part of our primitive society.

I want to correct the impression that this was the case across all South African tribal or social backgrounds. The unintended consequences of such cultural ignorance and commercialization of culture continue to negatively impact generations across all races.

5 Alcohol Abuse: Similarly to smoking tobacco or dagga, drinking alcohol is not a good habit, and alcohol intake precedes dependency on alcohol. Just like drinking and driving endangers lives, so alcohol abuse ruins a person's future.The inevitable would be a class of unproductive citizens and an expensive healthcare system owing to the effects of alcoholism and other related addictive substances.

6 Anarchy Culture: South Africans seem to have shifted from being a reasonable and peace-loving nation (where people obey rules and laws) to being a militant and brutal society. Evidently, SAPS statistics reveal that senseless crimes are committed on a daily basis along with unjustified violent acts against property (state and private). Constant murdering has become the new norm.

7 High Unemployment and Low Wages: An unemployment rate higher than 25% of the total population is considered very high. The gap between the haves and the have-nots is expanding at a rapid pace. Problems associated with that state of inequalities comprise a dissatisfied section of citizens who are getting angry and impatient, strikes, violence, etc.

8 Corruption: This act of injustice creates an unfair economic situation whereby only the rich are likely to be the beneficiaries of state resources. Ordinary citizens are automatically captured in a modern caste system, SA version (with no prospects for economic or social betterment). Government officials tend to reserve the state's lucrative contracts exclusively for politically aligned individuals or those who are already rich, and this alone has bred poor service delivery to the poor.

9 Lack of Leadership: Leadership is a learnt skill just like any other field of study, and everyone has the potential to grow and develop in this precious life skill along with time. Leadership classes should be taught at all levels of society – household, family, cultural social, religious and professional – and, if possible, prior to the political party level.

10 Heritage Illiteracy: There is a Lack of Knowledge Syndrome (LKS), where people tend to learn and adopt negative and uncultured social values and then begin to forge their own principles based on the same toxic social, philosophical and ideological backgrounds. And the outcome of this creates grave mistakes where an individual begins to think that right is wrong and that wrong is right; or good is bad and that bad is good. The byproduct of such ignorance is moral degeneration and character deterioration.

See Sakhekile Ngonyama, Lorraine; http://www.heraldlive.co.za/letters-the-herald/2016/10/19/top-10-socio-economic-problems-sa/ October 19, 2016

3. Social problems in India

Corruption:

Be it a government employee, a builder or even a peon – in India, anyone can "co-operate" with you if you have the money to give to them from under the table. Corruption is widespread in India, and as long as it will remain, justice and fair dealing won't exist.

Poverty:

The substantial poverty that India has been suffering from since decades is another major social issue that doesn't seem to recede any time soon. As the adage goes, "India is a rich country with poor people", wealth in India is concentrated in the hands of a fraction of the population. No wonder, the streets of the country are lined with shanties and people living on the footpath.

Caste system:

The present Indians are suffering a lot because of this caste system. The main motive, the caste system was introduced in India was to show a equality between the people that is, in the previous century, only certain group of people are allowed to study or take up a particular job (that is only doctor son will only MBBS, teacher's child will only take teaching proficiency, etc.) in order to make low caste students (less income families) to study in various department and can take any job. But in india, the people are getting rejected at the cause of low caste peoples.

Dowry system:

The practice of dowry is one of the worst social practices that has affected our culture. In independent India, one of the landmark legislations is the passing of the Dowry Prohibition Act in 1961 by the Government of India. Despite the fact that the practice of both giving as well as accepting dowry is banned by law and such acts are punishable offences, the system is so thoroughly imbedded in our culture that it continues unabated. Whether it is rural or urban India, the blatant violation of this law is rampant. Not only dowry deaths, even most of the acts of domestic violence against women including psychological as well as physical torture are related to matters of dowry. Some of the very basic human rights of women are violated almost every day. Sometimes it is heartening to see some girls stand firm to assert their rights against dowry. But there is an urgent need to strengthen such hands by taking some concrete as well as comprehensive social, economic, political and administrative measures in order to free Indian society of this disease.

https://www.quora.com/What-are-main-social-problems-that-India-is-facing-currently

4. Social problems in Japan

Everybody knows Japan is in crisis. The biggest problems it faces – sinking economy, aging society, sinking birthrate, radiation, unpopular and seemingly powerless government – present an overwhelming challenge and possibly an existential threat. Less fateful but closer to home is a tangle of smaller worries and anxieties, of which Shukan Josei (March 13) enumerates 10.

Some of them – one-third of single women living in poverty, rising number of children needing protection from child abuse – are in fact far from minor. Others – increase in bicycle accidents, increasing destruction caused by wildlife – do seem at first glance to merit the back burner, although at second glance…

Take destructive wildlife, for instance. Deer, wild boar, monkeys and other creatures who know not what they do cause each year an estimated 20 billion yen worth of damage to crops, national parks, and also to people in the form of personal injury – monkeys especially. Deer nibbling tree

bark have turned half of Japan's national parkland into wasteland, Shukan Josei says, while boar ravage rice paddies. If only the Japanese, like the Europeans, could acquire a taste for eating game! Then hunters would hunt the marauders in greater numbers, and a sustainable balance be restored. But though the Japanese became meat-eaters; their preference remains strictly for domestic livestock.

The trouble with bicycles – convenient, environment-friendly and excellent exercise – is that anyone can ride one; you don't need a license and there's no mandatory instruction on rules of the road, which many riders, apparently, don't know. Besides, few people think of bikes as dangerous, so they're not given the respect they deserve. Many accidents – Shukan Josei doesn't tell us how many – involve pedestrians and can be serious. Cyclists draw most of the blame, not altogether fairly. Japan, the magazine points out, is far behind other places, notably Holland and Scandinavia, in creating exclusive bicycle lanes.

There's actually a silver lining in rising child abuse statistics. At least some of the rise is attributed to neighbors reporting problems, which suggests spreading awareness and also maybe heightened neighborly concern. That's small comfort to victimized children, of course. Stress and isolation get much of the blame. Child-raising used to be a community responsibility, but communities hardly exist anymore; or the whole extended family got involved, but extended families, too, are almost extinct. Moreover, Shukan Josei adds, public children's homes tend to be understaffed and rundown, unlike senior citizens' homes, which benefit from more attention.

Why should one-third of single women be living in poverty? For one thing, most working women – 12 million – are part-time employees, receiving small salaries and few benefits. For another, inheritance laws are skewed in favor of men. Since many single women are single mothers, the impact on children is harsh. "Compared to other developed countries, Japan gives very weak protection to its young generation," the magazine hears from a lawyer.

Female poverty is a factor in the declining birth rate too. There are 340,000 abortions a year in Japan, many of them presumably on women for whom child-raising is an economic impossibility.

See https://japantoday.com/category/features/kuchikomi/japans-10-most-intractable-problems

5. Social Problem in Canada

The North American nation of **Canada** is one of the world's largest in terms of landmass, containing one of the world's most educated populations and (perhaps unsurprisingly) the world record for the most gold medals won in a Winter Olympics. To Americans, Canada is often seen as a land of snow, maple syrup, and few problems of any sort, but Canadian society is full of its own debates. Let's take a look at the hot topics of this cold, northern country.

Canadian Social Issues

Canadians today are facing many **social issues**, or those which impact their daily lives and culture. For the last few generations, the nation has developed a very progressive attitude, proudly claiming a spot as a global leader in human rights and similar issues. For many Canadians, this has become a definitive part of their national identity, something they believe distinguishes them from the other nations of North America (and in particular their southern neighbor).

Discrimination

One major social issue within Canadian society today is that of discrimination. Canada is proud of its culture of tolerance, supporting this policy with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Human Rights Acts, which prohibit discrimination on a broad scale.

Homosexual Discrimination

On the list of people that Canadians have extended fair treatment to is the nation's homosexual population. Canadian anti-homosexuality laws first began to be repealed back in 1969, culminating in the 2005 legalization of same-sex marriage. While this has created tension with Canada's conservative party, everybody seems to have accepted that the law is here to stay.

First Nations

Canada has a large First Nation population, and Canadians have long prided themselves in maintaining a stronger relationship with this group than Americans have with theirs. While

issues of tribal and cultural sovereignty are still debated, they are done so in the national spotlight, not in private conversations. Achieving a healthy and respectful relationship between First Nations peoples and other Canadians is a national priority.

Immigrants

While Canada may come across as a land of never-ending welcoming, recent global events have threatened to change that. Terrorist attacks around the world have made many Canadians more wary of outsiders, and the Islamophobia is making its way into Canada. While some worry that this could change Canada's national culture, others insist that national security is a greater concern. Current topics being debated in Canadian society and politics include the rights of Muslim women to wear traditional face coverings in Canada.

Government

Canada's government is run by a prime minister and a parliament, similar to that of England. While this government is generally trusted, Canada's constitution and political structure do not guarantee citizens all the rights and liberties expected in nations like the United States. There are two areas in particular where this is currently a major source of debate.

Freedom of Speech

Canadian citizens do have a constitutional freedom of speech, but it is not absolute. The government maintains a list of banned books, and has adopted several laws prohibiting hate speech. This is a very controversial topic. While Canadians generally want to keep hate out of their national vocabulary, legally prohibiting it does constitute a restriction on free speech. This is especially concerning since hate speech is hard to strictly define, theoretically giving the government power to limit any free speech by labeling it as hateful.

Gun Control

As in the United States, gun control is another issue of concern for Canadian people. Canada has a large culture of gun ownership, thanks to historic and cultural elevation of hunting as a national pastime. However, an increasingly urbanized number of Canadians are shying away from this tradition, and more people are advocating for greater gun control on the part of provincial

governments. This is a sharply divisive issue, one that particularly separates rural and urban Canadians.

See http://study.com/academy/lesson/contemporary-social-issues-in-canada.html

6. **Social problems in Russia**

As the new economic crisis threatens to engulf countries involved in world trade, Russia still has to confront several challenges such as youth emigration, demographic, public health and economic issues that hinder the country's development.

Growing economic difficulties and lack of job opportunities and professional development entice many young people to emigrate, particularly to Europe and to the United States. It is estimated that between 2000 and 2010 more than 1.25 million Russians emigrated, an even greater number than those who left after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

During the past two decades, an aging demographic turn and its effect on Russian society has been the focus of debate. Russia is experiencing a rapidly aging population with steadily declining birth rates. However, while people living in most industrialized countries have increased life expectancy Russian inhabitants have a relatively low health status.

These factors, in addition to restrictive immigration policies and low fertility rates (below two children per woman, which is considered the population replacement rate), have led Russia to a constant process of depopulation. Between 1993 and 2015 Russian population decreased from approximately 149 to 144 million people. If current trends continue, there will be between 100-107 million Russians in 2050.

Serious health problems among Russians derive from high rates of smoking and alcohol consumption. Mortality among Russian men rose by 60 percent since 1991, four or five times higher than the European average, mostly from preventable causes (alcohol poisoning, smoking, cardiovascular diseases, traffic accidents, violent crimes.)

According to the World Health Organization, heart disease, aggravated by alcohol and tobacco, is responsible for over 1.2 million deaths each year. Estimates of annual fatalities derived from

smoking-related diseases range from 350,000 to 400,000. In the U.S., with more than twice the population of Russia, cigarette smoking causes more than 480,000 deaths annually.

HIV/AIDS is still a serious problem, particularly because 80 percent of those infected with HIV are under 30, and the epidemic is closely associated with high levels of intravenous drug use. More than two million men are considered to be HIV positive, and the epidemic doesn't show any signs of abating.

Tuberculosis still affects many Russians. Even more seriously, the country is experiencing a high burden of multidrug- resistant tuberculosis (MDR), a variety of the disease impervious to isoniazid and rifampicin, the two most effective first-line anti-TB drugs. Treatment of MDR TB requires treatment with drugs that are less potent and more toxic that those used to treat drug-susceptible TB.

The prevalence of diabetes is rapidly increasing in Russia, where four million people have been diagnosed with the disease and almost six million people are unaware they have it. The annual cost of caring for diabetic patients in Russia is over $12.5 billion.

In addition, a still inadequate health care system, lacking in resources and with attention focused in the country's main cities, affects mental health care. In 2012, there were 277 outpatients clinics devoted to the primary care of people with mental disorders compared to 318 such clinics in 2005. At the same time, there is a reduction in the number and quality of medications for patients with psychiatric illnesses.

Trying to cope with such problems diverts resources from an economy under strain because of international sanctions and the low price of oil. The energy sector is a motor for the country's economic growth, and there is a close correlation between oil prices and the country's GDP. More than two-thirds of export earnings come from energy. However, the current global oversupply of oil and lower demand because of the economic crisis doesn't augur well for the country's economy.

The economic outlook is negatively affected by widespread corruption. Independent experts name law enforcement agencies as the most corrupt institutions, followed by health care, education, housing and communal services. While some experts maintain that corruption

consumes as much as 25 percent of Russia GDP, the World Bank puts this figure at 48 percent. Transparency International ranks Russia 136th in its Corruption Perception Index.

The economic downturn affects all sectors, from big corporations to small and medium enterprises, many of which have gone bankrupt. A considerable number of small businesses that do well in prosperous times such as boutiques, small restaurants and several kinds of service stores have closed down.

Some recent cuts in health care and education will not solve the problems affecting the Russian economy, and are at most palliative measures that will not cure a sick economy.

Although the problems highlighted are not the only ones affecting Russia, they need to be addressed more effectively if the country aims to develop at the rate its considerable resources allow.

See https://www.counterpunch.org/2015/10/29/challenges-facing-russia-today/

7. Social problems in Germany

The Migrant Crisis

The German government has taken in over 1,000,000 migrants claiming to be refugees since 2015. It was not well-prepared for this huge influx of new residents, and this has resulted in their welfare system being stretched to its limit. It's now become a complex political problem, not in the least, due to the inter-political debates about allocating tax money for this unpredicted event. It's being complicated by the perception of a portion of German citizens (voters) who believe that their government is doing more for the migrants than it is for their citizens. Also, it has become apparent that there are possible security risks concerning migrants who migrated without any kind of identification. At the moment it's one of the foremost social problems in Germany.

The Aging Population

At the moment the average age of Germans is 44 years. This number is much higher than other developed countries, because over one half of the population is older than 45 years. This is putting a tremendous strain on the retirement / pension system. The government still is using the retirement system of "youth wages financing aged retirement", which is beginning to dissolve like a pyramid scam. They are trying to compensate by moving the retirement age from 65 to 67, but according to the latest demographics, it may be that they will have to "bump" the retirement age up to 70, because of longer life expectancies. This is compounded by a social problem in which employees over the age of 50 are no longer attractive for German employers, despite experience and skills.

Diminishing Purchasing Power

Life is getting more expensive in Germany, but wages are failing to or just barely keeping up. The extras that Germans enjoyed in the 1980's and the 1990's (such as taking 2 vacations a year and deluxe consumer goods) have been drastically curtailed. Particularly annoying for many Germans is the fact that government fees, fines and taxes seem to have been increased/raised independently to the rate of inflation. In many cases they were raised in order to avoid or reduce government debt, and the German taxpayers cannot avoid them. Hence the only way they can compensate is by drastically reducing their demand for perceived "luxury goods".

Remaining Social Divide between East & West Germany

It's been over 25 years since the reunification, yet a social divide still remains between East & West Germany, in the form of lower wages and lower employment levels in East Germany. Due to the German government attention in demand to solve the Migrant Crisis, the social services seem to focus less on the socially disadvantaged East Germans, and more on the socially disadvantaged migrants, which has only fuelled the right-wing political groups. East German states (outside of Berlin) has the lowest levels of migrants, but the "migrant danger" is perceived in these states as being the greatest - if nothing more than because the German government is pouring lots of resources into migrant integration and less in "East German integration".

Parallel Cultures/Societies & Immigration

For decades the German government refused to officially acknowledge itself as an "immigration country", and refused to adopt an official policy regarding legal immigration. They neither officially encourage nor discourage immigration. The majority of the migrants living in Germany are "legal aliens" (as it is called in the U.S.), and have never been encouraged to apply for German citizenship, even though they have lived for decades in Germany. The children of legal migrants born in Germany do not automatically become Germans just because they were born in Germany. They receive the citizenship of their parents. They have to apply for citizenship; a process that is expensive and full of red-tape. Many immigrants chose only to go through naturalization if there is a significant advantage - such as dual citizenship, or the prospect that they would never want to live in the country their parents were born in. The so-called "A Generation" (original migrants) almost never applies for German citizenship; it's only the "B Generation" (their children) or often the "C Generation" (their grandchildren). This practice of "not being German even though you've lived your entire life in Germany" has only served to foster the creation of parallel societies - according to the motto: "If you're not a German then you're a(n) (nation stated on your passport)" - even if you have never been to that country in your life. It's estimated that 25% of the German population isn't German (e.g. they come from migrant families), and this "exclusion" policy has only served to create a form of "clannism" in Germany with migrants and migrant decedents flocking to separate cultures and separate identities - splitting society into parallel cultures.

See https://www.quora.com/What-are-some-social-problems-of-Germany

8. Social Problems in China

A rapidly aging population: China will be the first major economy to go gray before it gets rich, placing huge strains on working-age people who will have to effectively pay for pensions and healthcare for a disproportionate number of non-working elderly citizens. For a nominally socialist country, the weave of China's social safety net is woefully loose and badly frayed in parts--most notably the healthcare system. This is often cited as a major cause of the high savings rate--something that chokes off consumption and contributes to the imbalance in China's

economy.

Gender imbalance: Preference for male children, with deep cultural roots, has skewed the percentage of male to female children dangerously. Though the one-child policy has been substantially relaxed in rural areas, and though sex-selective abortion is outlawed and physicians are forbidden from disclosing the gender of a fetus to parents, the gender balance does not appear to have improved. It may well be that social ills like increased criminality will arise when large unmarried male populations.

Income inequality: Income disparity is continuing to grow, and while China does not have quite the Gini coefficient of some other major countries, it has increased very rapidly throughout three decades of reform and opening. This manifests itself perhaps most immediately in the housing crisis, where prices have risen so fast that they've put home ownership out of realistic reach of many working class Chinese.

Environmental degradation: Polluted air, desertification, toxic waterways, soil erosion--China suffers a long, long litany of man-made environmental problems, much of it related to its coal addiction. Anthropogenic global warming is contributing to this problem and to water shortages as glaciers melt at an alarming rate.

Dependence on fossil fuels: Coal is still far and away the source of electric power in China, and China's addiction to this is contributing to global warming, to pollution (and thus to health costs, to shrinking agricultural land because of acid rain, and to a generally lower quality of life). **An imbalanced economy,** too dependent still on export with a relatively low share of GDP from domestic consumption compared to most developed nations. This also leads to chronic overcapacity, which exacerbates China's trade imbalance with certain major trading partners and is a perennial cause for tension in bilateral relations with, most significantly, the U.S. **Water shortages:** Particularly in North China, water is in chronically short supply. Water tables beneath major metropolitan areas like Beijing have dropped precipitously. Enormous hydrological projects like the South North Water Transfer Project, which would convey water from the relatively well-watered South to the arid North in three systems of canals and pipelines, have hit snags and caused considerable controversy.

Ethnic tensions: Tibet, Xinjiang, and to a lesser extent Inner Mongolia all have active separatist movements, and ethnic tensions have boiled over in recent years in China's Tibetan Autonomous Region and other parts of western China where Tibetans live (in March 2008) and in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (in July 2009)**.**

Corruption: While China is by no means among the world's most corrupt countries, corruption certainly does remain a problem. The perception of corruption is a major factor in social unrest in China.

Lack of participatory channels: China's increasingly wealthy "middle class" wants, not surprisingly, a greater voice in policymaking. Informal channels like Internet public opinion may be stopgaps, but they are not a long-term substitute for more direct participatory mechanisms. **Eroding trust in government leadership:** While a full-blown legitimacy crisis doesn't seem to be looming at present (polls actually show a remarkably high level of support for the government), there are important segments of society that have become deeply distrustful and cynical about political authority in China. The Internet has created a de facto public sphere where civil society can coalesce around any of the many issues laid out above; around unaddressed grievances (mothers of people killed in June 89, parents of children killed in the Sichuan Earthquake of 2008 due to shoddy school construction, people calling for a full accounting of the horrors of the Great Famine, the list is long). Internet censorship is another issue around which activists have coalesced. This is a very significant challenge to the Chinese leadership.

https://www.quora.com/What-are-the-biggest-problems-e-g-economic-social-cultural-et-cetera-facing-China-as-it-redevelops-into-a-world-power

9. Social Problems in Latin America

It appears that in recent years, Latin America will no longer grow at the same pace as it did over the last decade. However, it will be the year when citizens will demand better services to boost their quality of life.

Clearly, one of the region's most pressing problems is public insecurity. With only 10% of the world's population, Latin America accounts for 30% of all homicides. This, together with other

crimes, has grave consequences for individuals, but also for the region's economies and development.

"Strategies for studying violence, to understand it and the methods for trying to evaluate it and explain what works and what doesn't, are very similar to those used to understand other epidemics," said epidemiologist Andrés Villaveces in this interview. Dr. Villaveces forms part of a team working to create a regional platform for exchanging knowledge and ideas on how to address the problem.

Some of these ideas are being put into practice, not only by governments and international organizations, but also by the perpetrators of violence. In Central America, one such example is the former gang members who are working to discourage other youth from following in their footsteps.

However, many experts believe that the emphasis should be on fighting inequality. This is a priority for Latin America, given that it is the region in the world with the greatest income disparities.

Inequality and informal employment

 "An increase in inequality because the rich keep getting richer (rather than due to an increase in the percentage of the poor), which has contributed to rising homicide rates," said economist Hernan Winkler, co-author of a World Bank study on inequality and violence in 2,000 Mexican municipalities, in this interview.

This is not an easy task given that around half of all jobs in the region are informal. Latin American countries face the daunting challenge of generating quality, formal employment.

The fight against poverty in the region has also enjoyed some successes, such as conditional cash transfer programs, in which the poorest families receive cash in exchange for sending their children to school and taking them for regular medical checkups.

One of the most successful of these initiatives, the Bolsa Familia Program in Brazil, managed to reduce extreme poverty by half. It serves as a model for the rest of the world.

Women, rights and equality

Women's efforts have been crucial for reducing extreme poverty in the region. In fact, many Latin American women are abandoning more traditional roles to engage in what was previously considered "men's work."

Several women have undertaken initiatives to form small businesses to address and overcome the effects of violence in their lives and that of their families. With respect to women's political participation, key efforts have been made to ensure that they have increasing access to decision-making entities.

Unfortunately, in Latin America, prejudices and stereotypes from the past remain and cases of harassment or street violence against women continue. Additionally, the rights of sexual monitories are often not respected, despite the enactment of several laws in their favor.

Innovation and education

Much remains to be done in the education field. Although there is widespread access to education in most of Latin America, the main challenge continues to be education quality, as demonstrated by the World Bank study, *Great Teachers: How to Raise Student Learning in Latin America and the Caribbean.*

Based on direct observation in schools, classrooms and of teachers in different countries of the region, the study concluded that Latin American students lose an average of one day of classes weekly due to teachers' inefficient use of time.

However, the region has made some notable progress in this area, such as in Jamaica, where basic education coverage is nearly 99%; and in initiatives such as a private school in Mexico which students attend for free; as well as a school with thatched roofs in Costa Rica that has surpassed all attendance records.

In terms of innovation and new technologies, some countries of the region are exploiting their comparative advantages. For example, several Caribbean nations have taken advantage of the English-language skills of their populations along with the proximity to the United States to

position themselves as allies in industries such as animation and software or videogame development.

The enormous penetration of smart phones in the region (almost all countries have more than one cellphone per inhabitant) is also an opportunity for young programmers to join forces with development experts to create technology tools to fight poverty.

Chikungunya and obesity

The increase in non-communicable diseases in the region is of growing concern for governments, who must add this burden to their already overwhelmed health systems. In Mexico alone, some six million people are obese or overweight, many of whom suffer from diabetes.

 "The average number of calories we ingest in the region is on the rise and, in several countries, foods providing little nutrition account for a large percentage of calorie consumption in our diet," said World Bank Health and Nutrition Expert María Eugenia Bonilla-Chacín in this conversation.

Another health concern is Chikunguña. In August, experts warned that the spread of this disease throughout Latin America would be difficult to control given that it is a relatively new illness, for which reason Latin Americans have yet to develop the necessary antibodies to fight it.

This means a major challenge for governments and their health systems, as along with uncertain economic effects.

Additionally, cancer, one of the leading causes of death in the region, disproportionately affects the poor, who have limited access to good doctors, lack the funds to pay for treatments, and do not have the possibility of taking time off to recover from the illness.

"Depending on the phase of the disease, patients may not be able to work and relatives may even have to quit their jobs to help care for them. In many cases, income declines, worsening the living conditions of these families," explains David Oliveira de Souza, a World Bank health expert.

Chapter Three: Social Work and Social Problems

Introduction

The academic discipline social work builds its identity on the study of social problems. The goal is to generate knowledge about causes, consequences and potential solutions for social problems. This knowledge is expected to be useful to practitioners working with clients affected by different adverse conditions. In empirical social work research on poverty, discrimination, social exclusion, homelessness, juvenile delinquency, domestic violence and human trafficking, it is usually taken for granted what the 'social problem' is. The social problem is treated as a deplorable circumstance about which something must be done (Holstein & Miller, **1993a**). It is therefore considered to be a deviation from a desirable condition (how society ought to be), how exposed groups suffer from these conditions (Gould & Baldwin, **2004**; Healy, **2001**; Korpi, Nelson, & Stenberg, **2007**; Payne, **2005b**; Trevithick, **2007**) and what social work practitioners need to take into consideration when dealing with those bearing the symptoms of such conditions.

What this kind of research has in common is that it addresses 'what' questions (What is a social problem?; What solutions are there for social problem Y?), which makes it basically *essentialist* in that it looks for the 'essence' of social problems or the objective conditions that cause, trigger or sustain them. Social problems appear to be natural incidents which seem to exist independently of social relations, context, time or observer (Fuchs, **2001**). In our view, the essentialist stance is an obstacle to theory development (see Spector & Kitsuse, **1987 [1977**]). We suggest that there is considerable potential for the development of a theory of social problems in social work once a re-orientation is made from 'what' questions to non-essentialist 'how' questions. 'How' questions do not ask about the nature of social problems but about how the very problems are shaped and applied differently by different observers. Hence, the move we suggest is from the level of essentialist observations to constructionist observations, that is, the observation of observations made by different observers (Fuchs, **2001**; Luhmann, **1990**).

We argue that social problems are what communication theorist Paul Watzlawick (**1984**) called *second-order realities*. The distinction between first- and second-order reality is helpful in clarifying a common mistake by separating essences and constructions.1 First-order reality refers

to physical characteristics and qualities of a thing, event or situation. First-order reality consists of uninterpreted facts that are accessible (i.e., in the world), measurable and empirically verifiable. This is the world of facts. Examples are temperatures, sounds, cities, buildings or the number of human beings in a social situation. <u>Second-order reality</u> includes any descriptions (and thus interpretations) *of* the first-order reality. This is the world of meaning. Second-order realities are created whenever we attribute meaning to a first-order reality. Meaning is not to be found 'in' the facts. Whether certain temperatures are considered just and reasonable, sounds noisy or musical, cities car-friendly or aesthetic, buildings used as schools, hospitals or barracks, or human beings in a social situation considered as agentive interlocutors or bodies is always a matter of interpretation, and thus a second-order reality on the basis of the first-order reality. These interpretations as they appear in descriptions include observers' opinions, judgments, assessments, evaluations and accounts. Different observers interpret the same first-order reality in various ways.

<u>When something – an adverse condition, a gap between expectations and how things are, and so forth – is described as a social problem, we must therefore look not only at the facts of the problem described, but also at the description itself, and that leads us to the observer behind the description: From what perspective is he/she observing, what positions and what interests are involved?</u>. As Fuchs noted, the 'important conflicts in modern societies … concern who is an observer, what this observer can and cannot see, and how significant or binding his observations are for other observers' (Fuchs, 2001, p. 20). Approaches to social problems that fail to account for the observers can be instrumentalised by welfare bureaucracies by defining people as deviant and as a target for interventions, thereby turning social work into an issue of power (Mik-Meyer & Villadsen, 2013).

Modern societies are characterised by high levels of pluralisation and differentiation of classes, milieus, subcultures and minority cultures, and other groups. For this reason, one cannot simply assume that all agents involved in a certain social problem have the same understanding of it in terms of definition, conditions, remedies and so forth. Even if they agree that, for instance, social inequality poses a social problem, there is no consensus on what exactly determines the problem and even less on its causes and solutions. Is it an unfair distribution of wealth and access to resources? Is it the result of a lack of incentives or individual initiative? Are those in powerful

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positions responsible, or is it the collective or the individual? Depending on who observes the problem, their moralities, interests and many other factors, the answers will look different. The plurality of observers implies a potential plurality of observations and accompanying descriptions. Hence, assessments of something as a 'social problem' do not necessarily reveal objective conditions. Problems are problems always and without exception from a *particular* point of view; they become part of society always as observations and descriptions from a particular observer.

The empirical question is to what extent and in what dimensions/parameters the definitions of problem constructions vary. The overarching research agenda we want to suggest in this article is: *How do different agents construct the (same) social problem differently?* Our article aims to present a theoretical synthesis of two approaches which, in their combination, offer a useful theoretical as well as methodological tool to study social problems in a non-essentialist manner, that is, as *second-order realities*. The combination allows us to focus on the very observers who construct something as a social problem and to pinpoint the societal locus from which these observers make their claims. The two approaches are *constructionism in social problems research* and *Luhmann's theory of functionally differentiated society*. The article is structured as follows. The second section presents the constructionist approach to social problems with regard to four parameters along which constructions of social problems may vary: moral values, causal explanations, victims and responsible actors, and solutions. The third section discusses the Luhmannian theory of social systems, in particular protest movements, the function systems of politics, science and medicine. In the fourth section, we argue for a theory combination of the approaches presented in the second and third sections. The fifth section offers an outline of the synthesised approach to studying social problems with the help of an illustrative empirical case: suicide among mentally ill people as a social problem. The final section (sixth) offers some implications for research in social work dealing with social problems.

Constructionist approaches to social problems

Constructionism is not an uncommon approach in social work research (see Payne, 1999). It plays a prominent role in studying the labelling and social categorisation of client groups with so-called problematic identities (criminals, substance abusers, refugees, immigrants, victims etc.). Other typical cases of constructionism in social work are the analysis of discursive power orders (between ethnic majorities and minorities, insiders and outsiders, social workers and clients) and gender norms. What this kind of research has in common is that the very portrayal of a group as problematic, afflicted or troublesome is deemed the root of the social problem, while the problem (e.g. inequality, drug abuse, domestic violence) itself is taken as a given. In this regard, the social problem is the blind spot of social work observers.

By contrast, constructionist approaches in social problems research focus on the construction of the social problem itself. Their points of departure are the questions of how and why some (but not other) conditions have received the status of social problem (Holstein & Miller, 1993b; Loseke, 2003; Loseke & Best, 2011; Spector & Kitsuse, 1987 [1977]). A follow-up question is why a particular condition is sometimes seen as a problem and sometimes as a solution. Constructionists argue that essentialist approaches cannot understand and explain why some (seemingly) harmful social conditions are given the status of social problems while others are not. Constructionists go even further and question the very basis of objectivist approaches, that is, the assumption that social problems can be studied as measurable deviances from desired normative standards. The theoretical and methodological problem is how to define those standards, whose standards they are, when and why are they desired, by how many and so forth. (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987 [1977]).

According to constructionism, a problem does not exist *socially* before it has been defined by some agent as a social problem. While social conditions unfavourable to some groups might exist, these do not pose a social problem before they have been defined as problematic and needing solutions (Loseke, 2003). Hence, social problems are considered the result of an activity undertaken by so-called 'claims-makers' (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987 [1977]), for example, social movements, politicians or concerned scientists. Claims-makers raise the claim that some, in their view, adverse condition receive the status of a social problem, thus as an undesirable but existent

social condition that violates ethical standards or other widely shared values, afflicts certain groups and requires countermeasures.

According to Donileen Loseke (2003), the constructions of a given condition as a social problem can vary in the following parameters:

Conditions and causal relations

Claims-makers construct the conditions of the projected problem, thus what is wrong (and needs to be corrected), what is part of the problem (and what is not), what is the cause of the problem and who is responsible. This parameter of social problems construction corresponds in part to what Snow and Benford (1988) meant by 'diagnostic framing' (see also Jönson, 2010).

Cultural themes

Constructions make use of an underlying morality; the problem is constructed as a condition that violates/breaks with generally accepted (culturally and historically specific) values and provokes indignation. Variation in cultural themes corresponds to what Snow and Benford (1988) meant by 'motivational framing'.

People

On the one hand, there are victims of the putative condition who deserve sympathy, who are not responsible and who are unfairly affected. On the other hand, there are villains who deserve condemnation; they can be, but do not need to be, individuals, groups, a system, an institution, social forces or social structures.

Solutions

General lines of action (what ought to be done) and responsibilities (who should do it) are constructed. These claim legitimate certain solutions (and exclude others) as well as construct indicators of success. Variation in solutions corresponds to what Snow and Benford (1988) meant by 'prognostic framing'.

Luhmann's theory of functionally differentiated society

The other theoretical pillar of this article is the theory of social systems by the sociologist Niklas Luhmann. The Luhmannian approach has already gained some prominence in social work, although mainly in a German (Baecker, 1994; Bommes & Scherr, 2000; Merten, 2000) and a Scandinavian context (La Cour, 2002; Moe, 2003; Nissen, 2010). Publications in international journals are still rather scarce (Nissen, 2014; Scherr, 1999; Schirmer & Michailakis, 2014; Villadsen, 2008; Wirth, 2009). Particular attention has been directed at the study of the function of organised social help and its relation to society. The Luhmannian theory is very complex and consists of several sub-theories (such as communication theory, theory of society, theory of organisation). For the purpose of the present article, we will concentrate on a central aspect of Luhmannian theory, that is, the theory of *functionally differentiated society*.

According to Luhmann, modern society consists of a number of differentiated social systems which each fulfil a function for society (Luhmann, 1982, 1997). Examples are the systems of politics, economy, science, medicine, religion and law. Each of these function systems provides a solution to a specific societal reference-problem; they observe society from their own, function-specific perspectives, and communicate whatever falls within their scope in a specific way. Function systems can see only what their unique perspective allows them to see. They are blind and indifferent to everything else. Because some systems will be discussed in more detail below, two brief examples should suffice for now. In the economic system, everything appears as a commodity with a specific price. In the system of law, everything is observed in terms of legality; is it consistent with the laws in effect or does it violate them?

The theory of functional differentiation is a powerful analytic tool for examining many issues in modern societies in terms of horizontal differentiation; however, it needs to be complemented with another line of social differentiation, namely the differentiation of levels of social systems. We need to distinguish society (the level of function systems), organisations (parties, churches, corporations, schools), face-to-face interactions, networks and protest movements (Fuchs, 2001; Luhmann, 1982, 1997).

Combining functional differentiation with the differentiation of system levels helps us to analyse different constructions of social problems. Because the empirical focus of this article is on the

topic of the *suicide of mentally ill people as a social problem*, the following paragraphs deal with one particular type of system, namely social movements (the disability movement of people with mental illness), as well as the three function systems of politics (the Swedish welfare state), science (social work) and medicine. The *political system* is of interest because it plays a key role in social problem construction: It is the receiver of claims made by the disability movement, it is the contracting body for social work and it is responsible for policy-making (Schirmer & Hadamek, 2007). The *system of science* is of interest because social work is among other things a scientific discipline. Finally, as suicide is often seen as a problem of illness, we also look at the perspective of the *medical system*.

Social movements

On the basis of Luhmannian differentiation theory, we can assume that the disability movement (and the faction representing disability due to mental illness) is a social system of its own type. Social movements mostly make use of the communication form of 'protest', that is, communication that criticises social conditions and tries to gain influence beyond institutions within the centre of the political system (Luhmann, 1997). Protest communication divides society into two groups: those who protest against and are affected by existing social conditions, on the one hand; and those the protest is directed against, that is, those who represent, profit from or refuse to change the social conditions, on the other hand. To mobilise support and loyalty, protest communication invokes ethical principles which, according to the self-image of a social movement, are morally superior to the ethics of its opponents. Therefore, protest communication is prone to point out injustices and violations of prevailing values. Another characteristic of protest movements is the frequent use of simplified causality both in terms of sources of the problematic condition and its solutions. The reference object of the protest is seen as a result of causes that are external to the movement, portrayed as objective, essential and impossible to reject. Therefore, a movement generates expectations of countermeasures by others (mostly the political system) and demands solutions to problems identified without having to worry about the very consequences the solutions demanded lead to (Luhmann, 1997, p. 855).2

For a social movement (such as the disability movement), the point of departure for the construction of social problems lies in highlighting the putative problem as a violation of

prevailing values, thereby generating collective support and forcing the addressee to undertake measures.

Politics

The system of politics and its organisations (such as parties, government, parliament) mostly makes use of power-based communication (Luhmann, 2000). The function of politics is to provide collectively binding decisions. This formula refers to decisions of governmental and administrative authorities which are binding for citizens (e.g. legislation). Even if the implementation of such decisions requires a power-based infrastructure (Willke, 1992), the political system in the capacity of a modern welfare state depends on legitimacy granted by the public and on collective support (Schirmer & Michailakis, 2012). Political communication is therefore always at least implicitly aimed at (and sensitive to) public opinion. As a welfare state, the political system bears general responsibility for collective goods such as security, infrastructure, healthcare and education. The state is accountable for policy-making and therefore is the main recipient of demands brought forward by protest movements. Therefore, political self-descriptions are typically aimed at conveying the welfare state's readiness and capability to take action in addressing and solving social problems. *The political system can therefore be expected to construct social problems in a way that it can demonstrate power of action and competence.*

Science (social work)

Social work is a discipline in the system of science. The societal function of science is to produce knowledge (Luhmann, 1990) that is reliable and can be used with surplus value in social contexts beyond science. In the case of social work, the primary 'consumers' of knowledge are social work practitioners, and the beneficiaries are the clients. To achieve reliability of the knowledge produced, certain quality criteria are required – precise concepts as well as methodological and theoretical rigour which can ensure that the research results accord with the truth. In other words, there are more or less clear rules for scrutinising the validity (or falsity) of any scientific claim. This is the crucial difference between the communication forms of the two systems described above (movements, politics) and scientific communication. Of course, scholars are aware that this is an ideal to strive for. In reality, it is an empirical question how politicised a certain

discipline is, that is, to what extent political or ideological ideas gain priority (even if hidden) over scientific truth. It is crucial to the identity of the discipline of social work that it can be seen as autonomous, that is, a constructor of social problems in its own right or not. The more it is oriented towards scientificity, and thus towards truthfulness (in contrast to appropriateness, advantageousness, desirability), the more *the constructions of social problems by social work (as an academic discipline) need to correspond to complex causality, value neutrality and an open-mindedness to unexpected results*.

Medicine

The medical system is centred on communication about health and illness (Luhmann, 2005). In the context of medical communication, human beings become relevant as *bodies* (Saake, 2003), and only if their condition can be related to symptoms for diagnoses of illness (Michailakis, 2008; Michailakis & Schirmer, 2010). Medical observations scan human beings for pathological deviations from defined normal (healthy) states on biological, physiological, psychological or behavioural levels. With the exception of epidemiology, the focus of medicine (examination and treatment) is normally on the individual. However, medical communication involves not only treatment of current illness, but also prevention of potential future illness on a collective level. That is where we can expect social problem constructions by the medical system; for instance, if a certain illness or other medically relevant pathological deviation occurs too often (measured by contingent standards) or if medicine is hampered by external (i.e., financial, political, legal) constraints in executing its function (Schirmer & Michailakis, 2011). This also suggests that *social problems constructed by the medical system can be expected to have a clear reference to illness, ways to treat the illness, and limits of the medical system's capacities due to (external) societal causes*.

Combining constructionist social problems research and functional differentiation

Mainstream research on social problems is under-theorized; researchers in social work have used the concept 'social problems' without relating it to a theory of the broader social context within which social problems emerge and are sustained. Without such a theory, there is an imminent risk that social problem researchers either adopt political or common sense definitions of the phenomena they investigate or lapse into subjectivism (Loseke & Best, 2011).

We suggest a combination of the constructionist approach to social problems based on Spector and Kitsuse's and Loseke's work, as well as Luhmann's theory of functional differentiation. The constructionist approach provides a useful method for the empirical study of social problems as claims-making activity. However, this approach is not complete, and thus has not been without criticism. With their seminal 1977 book, Spector and Kitsuse paved the way towards abandoning the search for objective conditions behind social problems and only look for claims-making activities – this was a reaction to the inconsistency problems any essentialist approach on social problems faced before them (especially Merton & Nisbet, 1971 and Fuller & Myers, 1941; see also Rubington & Weinberg, 2010). Some years later, Woolgar and Pawluch (1985) accused many constructionists working with the Spector/Kitsuse-approach of 'ontological gerrymandering'; thus, they claimed, that through the backdoor some objective conditions had sneaked into constructionism which indicated methodological inconsistencies in an approach that was understood as a remedy to those very inconsistencies.

As a compromise, Joel Best proposed a differentiation of strict and contextual constructivism (Best, 1989), the latter carefully taking into account objective conditions in the context of claims-making, while still studying social problems as an activity of meaning production – thus constructionist. Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993) replied in a programmatic article to the faced criticism. While offering smaller adjustments to the original Spector/Kitsuse-approach, they made a clear statement for the strict constructionist paradigm (see also Troyer's (1992) critique of contextual constructionism). During the last decades, there have been repeated claims to go 'beyond' constructivism (Hazelrigg, 1986), which means to re-focus on the 'realist' components of social problems, for example in line with critical realism based on Bhaskar's work (Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen, & Karlsson, 2002; Houston, 2001).

When interested only in the objective conditions behind social problems, this might be a useful strategy. However, the reason we see that social constructionism needs to be complemented is its lack of connection to a general framework of a theory of society that can account for societal reasons *why certain observers tend to use certain distinctions and constructions, while other observers construct the problems differently*.

Luhmann's theory, on the other hand, has no specialisation in the study of social problems (despite the work by Hellmann, 1994). Still, it offers a precise conceptual apparatus for

comprehending the highly specialised forms of system formation that characterise contemporary society. It is this functionally differentiated social structure that creates the special conditions for social problems in terms of definition, prevention, confrontation and solution. In the combination of both approaches we suggest here, we can explain how problems emerge in communication and what role social systems play, because this can link them with how the modern world has evolved and relate them to the function of the different systems. With Loseke, we can analyse claims-making activity, thus the construction of social problems, as a variation in the four parameters c*onditions and causal relations*, c*ultural themes, people* and *solutions*. Luhmann provided the theory of society which could pinpoint how different observers differ systematically with their accounts of the social problem in focus. Variations in Loseke's parameters can then be interpreted as outcomes of the observational incompatibilities of the involved social systems. In the next section, we illustrate how different social systems observe differently and how the constructions made by different observers vary in the parameters and along the lines of system-boundaries.

One note of caution: By suggesting the presented approach, we do not claim that social problems should not (or never) be studied in an essentialist way, that is, searching for and explaining objective conditions. What we do, however, is point out what can be missed if one fails to take note of the insights a constructionist approach can offer, namely accounting for the empirical fact that different observers construct the same problem differently. By this we do not claim that this 'same problem' is an objective condition either (thus, no ontological gerrymandering), because we remain on the level of second-order observation, simply taking seriously the observation of others. They seem to know that there 'is' something, and that is reason enough for us to study their accounts.

Illustrative example: suicide as a social problem

Suicide has been a source of inquiry by the social sciences, particularly since Durkheim's famous study (Durkheim, 1979). Durkheim's major contribution was the focus on suicide as a social fact, that is, to consider suicide as a social, not an individual matter. Thanks to Durkheim's work, suicide has begun to be seen as a *social problem*, which gives rise to preventive initiatives and efforts by many different agents and institutions, such as the welfare state, social workers and psychiatry. This is the background to why we use the phenomenon *suicide among mentally ill*

people to illustrate the variation in constructions of a (given) social problem in different social systems.

In this section, we present excerpts from different texts to illustrate the variation in constructions of suicide as a social problem along the lines of three function systems and one protest movement.5 The excerpts are from spokespeople of the different social systems discussed in the third section of this article. We begin with two excerpts from the member journal of the *Swedish National Association of Social and Mental Health* (*RSMH*), a protest organisation that is part of the Swedish disability movement. Then we proceed with two excerpts from documents of the political system – a Swedish Government Official Report and a Government Bill. The third pair of excerpts comes from scientific articles in social work. Lastly, we present a pair of excerpts from the journal of the *Swedish Medical Association*(*Läkartidningen*). Each pair of excerpts is followed by a short analysis according to the parameters presented in the second section (conditions and causal relations, cultural themes/moralities, people, solutions). At the end of this section, we briefly discuss commonalities and differences in the constructions of suicide as a social problem in all social systems.

Constructions of suicide as a social problem: Protest movement

Excerpt 1: 'Scary statistics' from the chairman of the RSMH

Over the past few years, suicide in healthcare has been continuously on the rise. … an increase of almost 30 per cent within the last four years. It is not news to us at the RSMH, and our youth organisation RUS, that many children, teens and young adults are feeling worse than ever. There are also many reasons for this. As for the youngest, we know that there are major problems at school; classes are getting bigger and bigger while the staffs are getting smaller and smaller. The school health services are cutting their activities and in many places there are neither school welfare officers nor school psychologists available in the first place. … Suicide is a problem that requires extremely powerful measures. We at the RSMH find that the government must begin to work immediately and pro-actively towards a vision zero of suicide which they in fact announced in 2008 … (Trevett, 2011)

Excerpt 2: 'How is it possible to take one's life in an in-patient care department?' from the business coordinator of the RUS (Youth Organisation of the RMSH)

Many suicide attempts are a cry for help – help that in many cases one does not get in today's psychiatry. I myself have been suicidal and not received the help I needed then, and I have many friends who told me about having the same problem. If one is hospitalised, the help mostly consists of masses of drugs or electroshock treatment. I do not believe that this can be called good care. As I see it, there is also a need for contact or some kind of therapy treatment. More money must be allocated for this! I knew someone who was forced to take lots of drugs and she said she felt even more depressed by the medication and its side-effects. She could not stay in the psychiatric ward because there were no places available. When she came home, she killed herself. A life was erased because there was no room for her at the psychiatric clinic. More money needs to be allocated! … We must together make demands on the government so that it also spends more money for research on suicide. We have no time to lose since there is a risk that even more people will commit suicide. Allocate money for this and do it now! (Andersson, 2010)

In both examples, suicide is constructed as a social problem, particularly when it concerns young people. The main condition for the problem in the first excerpt is the rise in suicide rates among young people over the past few years despite the government's promise to achieve the opposite. The second excerpt locates the problem in the quality and availability of mental care. As is typical of protest communication, in both excerpts there is an almost complete identification with the victims, either as members of the movement (Excerpt 2) or as people represented by the movement (Excerpt 1). The causes of the social problem are attributed to the environment of the movement (and its members), such as the school or medical care. Although an obvious reference to villains is absent, there is a straightforward appeal to the government as agent to be accountable in a double sense: Not only has it been unable to avoid the problem (in the first excerpt, it is portrayed as a failure, unable to keep its own promises); the government is also expected to solve the problem. The solutions suggested, which are connected to the designation of the government as problem solver, seem rather diffuse and simple (forceful measures, more money). However, it is not the function of protest communication to solve, but rather to highlight and complain about their social problems.

Constructions of suicide by politics

Excerpt 3: 'Swedish Government Official Report 2010:45: Event analyses of suicides in healthcare and social service'

The government notes that the vast number of suicides and attempted suicides as well as the enormous socio-economic costs and the mental suffering this cause implies that suicide ideation, attempted suicides and suicide in general constitute a major social problem. Suicide is seen as the final step in a long or short process in which biological, social, psychological and existential factors interact. Furthermore, the government notes that effective suicide prevention is based on the insight that suicide can be prevented. Suicide prevention requires broad cooperation and coordination that transcend sectors between local, regional and national agents. The need for systems thinking is emphasised and advised – as in other fields of injury prevention; the chain of events preceding a suicide should be examined through events analysis. Lessons can be learned from such analyses that can reduce the risk that a lack of availability or procedures, negligence or a lack of knowledge will be a contributing factor in suicide (SOU [Swedish Government Official Reports, 2010, p. 26).

Excerpt 4: 'Proposition for government bill 2012/13:So330 suicide prevention'

There are no simple solutions for how to avoid suicide, but it is important that this observation does not paralyse but instead motivates people to find solutions and leads to an understanding about the life situations of young people. … There is an overarching vision in Sweden that nobody should be in such a precarious position that the only way out is perceived to be taking one's life. The government has the vision that nobody should have to take his/her life. To ensure that this vision is translated into constructive work in practice, there is a need for a national strategy designed with an appeal to Sweden's municipalities to develop local action plans (Carlsson, 2012).

There is consensus between these two excerpts and the previous excerpts by the protest movement that the victims of the social problem are suicidal people themselves. In contrast to the protest communication, however, the focus in these examples of political communication is more on complex causal factors, both in terms of the causes of suicide as a social problem and the solutions (aimed at the design of social measures) to prevent the problem. Another striking

contrast between political and protest communication is the role of the own agency. Whereas protest communication describes itself as a non-agent, that is, an assembly of or representation for victims, political communication emphasises its own ability to act by taking various measures. This is true even if the cause of the problem lie somewhere outside political action frames, for example biological or psychological factors. Suicide can be prevented, it says, so the government takes preventive action. The mentioning of a strategy (Excerpt 4) again underscores the assumption that the government knows, despite the causal complexity, exactly what needs to be done. The solutions proposed are typically of a bureaucratic nature (more cooperation, more coordination, more action plans, more commissioned investigations, i.e., transferring the responsibility to act).

Constructions of suicide by social work

Excerpt 5: 'Young people, gender and suicide'

Almost all adolescents dying by suicide show evidence of suffering from some form of mood disorder. … [XX] argues that while suicide and depression are clearly linked, it is difficult to ascertain whether depression causes or is caused by suicidal thoughts and feeling. … it is not possible to determine whether they are a symptom or a cause of suicidal behaviour. … [YY] reported that a third of the under-25s who killed themselves were suffering from schizophrenia, whilst a fifth was given the primary diagnosis of personality disorder. In addition, they found that most people with schizophrenia were both unemployed and unmarried, with younger suicides also being more likely to have a history of substance or alcohol abuse and violence. … Although there is a clear link between mental health/illness and suicide risk, the relationship is a complex one (Smalley, Scourfield, & Greenland, 2005, pp. 130–140, emphases removed).

Excerpt 6: 'Preventing suicide: a neglected social work research agenda'

Suicide is a major social and public health problem. Our review of journal publications focused on the contribution of social work research from 1980 to 2006 to knowledge for guiding suicide risk assessment, intervention and prevention. Professional social work practice, at its core, should be based on relevant and valid knowledge to guide intervention; however, research supporting evidence-based practice has been traditionally underrepresented in social work. … There are several practice implications that we can draw from this survey of suicide research

literature produced by social workers. In their practice, social workers must understand the demographic patterns and the trends in suicide – namely that younger members of several Western countries are completing suicide at higher rates – and that, therefore, early preventive interventions with older adolescents and young adults, particularly males, must become an integral part of more coordinated suicide prevention efforts. … Most professionals rely on their own profession's literature as their primary source of practice knowledge. Although research from other disciplines is substantial, our results suggest that social work investigators need to incorporate social work's unique concepts, perspectives and techniques to help build a scientifically developed clinical knowledge base more applicable for use by social work practitioners working with suicidal clients. (Joe & Niedermeier, 2008, pp. 523–4)

These two excerpts are representative of what research articles in social work look like in discussing findings or implications related to suicide and suicide prevention. The most obvious contrast with protest communication and political communication is the matter-of-factness of scientific communication. The first excerpt, taken from an article reviewing research on the causes of suicidal behaviour, concentrates on the difficulty of establishing clear causal relationships. Not only can there be interaction effects between mental illness and suicidal feelings, but also reversed causality, that is, suicidal feelings as a cause of mental illness. Furthermore, there is the question of where to cut the causal chain: Is mental illness the cause of suicide, or is it an intermediate variable between social (such as unemployment) or bio-physical factors (substance addiction, violence)? The point we want to illustrate here is that scientific observers construct suicide as a social problem with a more complex causality than protest movements or political agents do. The scientific report constructs no unequivocal causes, clear villains or obvious solutions.

The second excerpt stresses that suicide is a social problem. However, for social work as a scientific discipline, this is primarily a matter of gathering scientific knowledge. Because of the self-understanding of academic social work, this knowledge needs to be applicable by practitioners. The proclaimed solution to the problem definition is hence the development of genuine social work knowledge to make suicide prevention more successful. Such a problem construction makes social work researchers at least partly responsible for preventing suicide. It is

their responsibility to increase (evidence-based) research on suicide to provide the knowledge that practitioners working with suicidal clients need.

Constructions of suicide by medicine

Excerpt 7: 'Suicide has become less common', by a chief physician at a psychiatric clinic

It is of utmost importance to emphasize that treatment with antidepressant drugs is likely to be a powerful intervention to prevent suicide. The treatment of mental illness with drugs has been regularly criticized without the enormous benefits with respect to human suffering and human life being taken into consideration. This is particularly the case with antidepressant drugs, which happen to be attacked from every possible vantage point. The most foolish arguments come, of course, from ideological organisations. Antidepressant drugs are also attacked from a narrow economic perspective even though the costs for medication constitute a very small percentage of the total healthcare budget. … One does not need any scientific training to understand that a decrease in suicide rates of almost one third along with a five-fold increase in the prescription of antidepressants since the 1990s indicates that medication reduces rather than increases the risk of suicide (Isacsson, 2006).

Excerpt 8: 'Suicide is not just the responsibility of psychiatry!' by a professor emeritus at a psychiatric clinic

Suicide tends to be a medical problem, especially a problem for psychiatry. Every suicide carried out is therefore perceived as a failure of psychiatry. … if one focuses only on the care system, there is a risk that the care system will be perceived as the main party responsible and that care personnel will still feel singled out and guilty or co-responsible for what happens. … Psychiatry has thus been given the role of helping to redress the problems that authorities, employers, unions, courts, the mass media and the 'zeitgeist' have created for individuals. Moral values in society and cultural trends constitute tremendously important background factors that affect how people feel mentally. … By contrast should people working in psychiatry always account for being unable to prevent adolescents from getting drunk, taking drugs and harming themselves?. … Psychiatry cannot 'cure' existential unhappiness … (Jacobsson, 2010, pp. 84–5).

These excerpts from the journal of the Swedish Medical Association suggest that doctors construct suicide primarily as a medical problem to be treated by medical means. As suicide is observed as the symptom of a diagnosed (mental) illness, the question is then how to treat suicidal patients and their mental illness. Not only does medicine claim to have the exclusive competence to judge whether a prescription of antidepressants is a viable method for preventing suicidal patients from killing themselves, it also claims to have clinical evidence on its side. In the first excerpt, this is used as a communicative device to fend off criticism from protest movements. Both excerpts differ in their punctuation of the causal chain, just like in Excerpt 5 of a social work research study. While Excerpt 7 only makes statements on the effects of antidepressants, Excerpt 8 highlights the broader scope of suicide as a social problem: mental illness as a proximate cause of suicide ideation. Seen in that way, suicide can be prevented by treating mental illness medically. However, this is only treatment of the symptom because the diagnosis is ultimately aimed at shortcomings in contemporary society as causes of mental illness. Extrapolating this logic, suicide prevention would require solving other social problems first. As for the actors involved, the observer in Excerpt 8 wants to free psychiatry from the responsibility for suicide among mentally ill people and re-establish the (functional) limits of the medical system: He argues that suicide as a social problem has been passed on by others (politics, authorities, employers etc.).

Implications for research in social work

As we have shown in the preceding analyses, suicide among people with mental illness has been constructed differently by different observers along systemic boundaries on the basis of the parameters suggested by Loseke. There seems to be consensus only in terms of the morality/cultural theme: All observers want to prevent suicide. It is thus taken for granted that suicide is a moral evil to be avoided.

In this concluding section, we want to identify some implications of the suggested combination of a constructionist approach to social problems using Luhmann's theory of functional differentiation for research in social work. Social problems are often treated as an unreflected mix of first- and second-order realities. Constructionists argue that social problems are claims-making activities, that is, communication (see also Loseke, 2003), and this means second-order realities. Therefore, an analysis of social problems is an analysis of communication (of a claims-

making activity). The specific contribution of Luhmann's differentiation theory is that it indicates and explains societal dividing lines between such observers. Political observers will likely select and interpret information differently than scientific or medical observers.

There are at least three implications of the synthesised approach suggested for the study of social problems and for the interventions undertaken by practitioners. First, when social work research or claims-makers in social movements interpret a situation as a social problem, they respond to the first-order reality, which is identified based on certain data (e.g. the number of young people who spent the night in stairwells), with a second-order reality interpretation (poverty, homelessness, drug abuse, family violence). The interpretation, in turn, calls for and justifies a specific course of action. It is important to see that these actions undertaken are not caused by properties of first-order reality, but are governed by meanings attributed to observer-independent facts, thus on the level of second-order realities. Second, controversies regularly occur in research and between different interpreters/constructors of social problems. This is partly due to a failure to distinguish between first- and second-order realities and to understand how both are interconnected. There is variability in definitions and descriptions (second-order reality) and an alleged constancy in the conditions to which they are related (first-order reality). Thus, variations in the descriptions of the condition must result from the *social parameters* – causal relations, cultural themes, people and solutions – *rather than from the condition itself*. Disagreements also occur as a result of the incommensurability of the perspectives of observers involved and communicative forms employed, as Luhmannian theory teaches us. Studying social problems as claims-making activities, hence as communication of different observers, helps then, for instance, to disentangle potential muddles by looking at and charting who says what, when, how and (possibly) why, when something is presented as a social problem. Third, there is a great risk to the integrity of academic social work when phenomena for which there is little or no direct knowledge are communicated – for instance by welfare state agencies or social movements – and acknowledged as being social problems. If levels of reality are not kept separate and the different perspectives of observers are not accounted for, judgments and definitions made by others could be accepted uncritically. A methodological recommendation for studying social problems is thus to account for the observer. Always ask by whom, how (with regard to Loseke's parameters) and, if possible, even why it is described as a social problem.

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Assignment:

1. **Identify and discuss the contemporary social problems in Rwandan context**
2. **Gender and social problems**

Chapter four: Theories of "Social Change"

Introduction

Social **Change** refers to the modifications which take place in life patterns of a people. It occurs because all societies are in a constant state of disequilibrium. Early sociologists viewed the cultures of primitive peoples as completely static.

But this view was abandoned with the appearance of scientific studies of pre-literate culture. Anthropologists now agree that primitive cultures always underwent changes, although at a very slow pace, which initially gave the impression of their being static and stationary.

All modern sociologists unanimously express their agreement on the naturalness and inevitability of Social change in each human society. However, at the same time they project and advocate various theories of Social Change. Each theory seeks to explain the nature and reasons and scope of Social Change in a particular way.

1. Theory of Deterioration:

Some thinkers identify social change with deterioration. According to them man originally lived in a perfect state of happiness i.e. golden bliss. Subsequently, however, deterioration began to take place with the result that man reached an age of comparative degeneration. This was the notion in the ancient times. It was expressed in the epic poems of India, Persia and Sumeria. According to Indian mythology man has passed through four ages. Satyug, Treta, Dwapar and Kaliyug.

The Satyug was the best age in which man was honest, truthful and perfectly happy. Thereafter degeneration began to take place. The modern age is the age of Kaliyug wherein man is deceitful, treacherous, false, dishonest, selfish and consequently unhappy.

This view of social change as deterioration dates ancient times. It stands rejected in contemporary times However, even today some thinkers project such a thinking when they lament and say that in our times there has taken place a deterioration in almost every walk of life.

2. Linear Evolutionary Theory or Stage Theory of Social Change:

Evolutionary theory is based on the assumption that societies change gradually from simple to complex forms. Early anthropologists and sociologist like L.H. Morgan gave three stages of social evolution-savagery, barbarism and civilization through which all societies pass. August Comte believed that human societies evolved in a unilinear fashion i.e. in one line of development.

He protected a relation between the development of human thought and social evolution. He identified three stages of social evolution/change-the age of theology, the age of metaphysics and the age of positivism (reason and facts).

Man has passed through the first two stages, even though in some aspects of life and thought these still prevail. Man on gradually reached the positivist and multilinear 1st stage, which still continues. In the first stage man believed that supernatural forces controlled and designed the World. He advanced gradually from a belief in fetishes and deities to monotheism.

This stage gave way to the Metaphysical stage, during which man tried to explain all phenomena by resorting to abstractions. In the Positivists stage, man considers the search for ultimate cause hopeless and seeks the explanatory facts that can be empirically observed. This implies progress, which according to Comte gets assured when man adopts a positive attitude in the understanding of natural and social phenomena.

Spencer believed that all societies followed the uniform natural law of evolution passing from simple to complex/compound societies.

Herbert Spencer, who described society as an organism, maintained that human society has been gradually progressing towards a better stage. In its primitive stage, the state of militarism, society was characterised by warring groups involved in a merciless struggle for existence.

From this stage of militarism, society moved towards a state of greater differentiation and integration of its parts. The establishment of an integrated social system made it possible for the different groups – social, economic and racial – to live in peace.

Darwin's 'Organic Evolution Theory' also gave the concept of social change from simple and primitive societies to complex and advanced societies. Durkheim identified the cause of societal evolution as a society's increasing 'moral density'. He held the view that societies are changing in the direction of greater differentiation, interdependence and formal control under impact of the presence of increasing moral density.

Some Russian sociologists also subscribe to the stage theory of social change. Nikolai K. Mikhailovsky opines that human society passes through three stages: (1) the objective anthropocentric stage, (2) the eccentric stage, and (3) the subjective anthropocentric stage.

In the first stage, man considers himself as the center of the universe and remains preoccupied with mystic beliefs in the supernatural. In the second stage, man gets subjected to abstractions; the abstract is more "real" to him than the actual.

In the third stage, man comes to rely upon empirical knowledge by means of which he exercises more and more control over nature for his own benefit. Soloviev conceived of three stages of social evolution as the tribal stage, the national governmental stage, and the stage of universal brotherhood.

The multilinear evolutionary theory holds that change can occur in several ways and that it does not inevitably lead in the same direction. Multilinear theorists recognise that human culture has evolved along a number of lines. For example, the theory of demographic transition graphically demonstrates that population change has occurred differently in more developed versus developing nations.

Medical and public health technology was introduced gradually in the developed nations which gave them time to adjust to falling death rates and resulting rise in populations. However developing nations got this technology in a short span of time and it led to o dramatic population growth and a severe pressure on social services and natural resources including food production.

3. Telic Theory of Social Change:

A number of sociologists have held that social change can be brought about by means of conscious and systematic efforts. Lester F. Ward has asserted that progress can be achieved by

means of purposive effort or conscious planning. Through education and knowledge intellect can assert itself over emotions and this can lead to the possibility of effective planning.

According to Ward, natural evolution is a very slow process, whereas intelligent planning can and in fact always accelerates the process of natural evolution. German sociologist, Ludwig Stein and English sociologist L.T. Hobhouse also expounded theories closely resembling Ward's telic theory of social change.

They expressed the view that progress can be achieved through the use and control of reason and, therefore, rational element in our nature must be developed so that it may be used as a factor in the evolutionary process.

4. Cyclical Theories of Social Change:

Cyclical theories of social change hold that civilizations rise and fall in an endless series of cycles. Oswald Spengler wrote a book 'The Decline of the West' in 1918, in which he wrote that the fate of civilisation was a matter of 'destiny'. He saw society moving in continual cycles of growth and decay.

He said that each civilisation is like biological organism, taking birth and then going to maturity, old age and ultimately to death. He studied eight major civilisations, including the western civilisation and said that western society is in its old stage and is entering the period of decay. This type of cyclical theory of social change has become obsolete. Spengler's idea of destiny stands rejected as inadequate and unacceptable.

Another Cyclical theory holds that human society goes through certain cyclic changes of days and nights and of eliminate. Some sociologists believe that society has a predetermined life cycle and has birth, growth, maturity and decline.

Modern society is in its last stage. It is in its old age. But since history repeats itself, society after passing through all its stages, returns to the original stage, whence the cycle begins all over again.

This concept it's found in Hindu mythology, according to which Satyug will again start after Kaliyug is over. J.B. Bury, in his 'The Idea of Progress', points out that this concept is also

found in the technings of stoic philosophers of Greece as well as in the teachings of some of the Roman philosophers, particularly Marcus Trelius.

Cyclical Theory of Recent Thinkers:

The assumption that change takes place in a cyclical way has been a quite long held one. This ancient concept of cyclic social change is still held even by some modern thinkers who however give different versions of it.

The French anthropologist and biologist Vacher de Lapouge holds that race is the most important determinant of culture. Lapouge maintains that civilization develops and progresses when a society is composed of individuals belonging to superior races and declines when racially inferior people are absorbed into it.

According to him, Western civilization is doomed to extinction because of the constant infiltration of foreign elements and their increasing control over it. The German anthropologist, Otto Ammon, the Englishman Mouston Stewart Chamberlain and Americans Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard also agree with the view of Lapouge which may be called the theory of biological cycle.

Spengler developed another version of cyclical theory of social change. He analyzed the history of various civilizations including the Egyptian, Greek and Roman and concluded that all civilizations pass through a similar cycle of birth, maturity and death. The western civilization is now on its decline which is unavoidable.

Relying upon data drawn from the history of various civilizations, Sorokin concluded that civilizations fall into three major types, namely, the ideational, the idealistic and the sensate. In the ideational type of civilization, reality and value are conceived of in terms of a "supersensory and super rational God", while the sensory world appear as illusionary.

In simple words, ideational civilisation is God-ridden. In the idealistic type of civilization (culture) reality and values are regarded sensory as well a supersensory. This is a synthesis of ideational and the sensate type. The thought and behaviour of man are partly anchored in the materialistic and partly concerned with the other world.

In the sensate type of civilisation (culture) the whole way of life is characterized by a positivists-materialistic outlook. Reality and value are merely what the senses perceive and beyond sense perception there is no reality. The western civilization, according to Sorokin, is now in an "overripe" sensate phase.

In recent times Arnold J. Toynbee, the noted English historian, has also propounded a cyclical theory of the history of world civilization. He maintains that civilizations pass through three stages, corresponding to youth, maturity and decline. The first is marked by a "response to challenge", the second is a "time of troubles" and the third is characterized by gradual degeneration.

He is also of the view that our civilization, although in the stage of final downfall, can still be saved by means of proper guidance by the "Creative minority", by which he means a select group of leaders who withdraw from the corrupting influences, commune with God, become spiritually regenerated and then return to inspire the masses.

Arnold Toynbee also proposed a cyclical theory of human history. He wrote the book 'A study of History' in 1946 which was a multi volume work and which drew material drawn from the studies of twenty four civilizations. The key concept in Toynbee's theory has been 'Challenge and Response'. Every society has to face challenges from outside environment and also from internal and external enemies.

The achievements of a civilisation consist of its successful responses to such challenges and in case it cannot mount any effective response to the challenges, it dies out. However Toynbee does not explain as to why some societies are in a position to make effective response to challenges while some others do not.

While critically examining Toynbee's work, Barness writes, "It is not objective or even interpretative history. It is theology, employing selected facts of history to illustrate the will of God as the medieval bestiaries utilized biological fantasies to achieve the same results Toynbee's vast material throw far more light upon the processes of Toynbee's mind than upon the actual processes of history. He writes as the thinks it should be to further the cause of salvation, rather than as it has really been".

The above theories of the cyclical nature of social change are, as a matter of fact, the result of philosophical rather than scientific studies. The authors of these theories begin with presumptions which they try to substantiate by marshalling a mass of data from history, as really has been".

Cyclical Theory is neither really helpful in anticipating the changes which may not occur nor is it useful in distinguishing positive changes from negative changes, except in retrospect.

5. Structural-Functional Theory of Social Change:

The Structural-Functional theory of social change has been a very popular theory of our times. It is strongly advocated by several sociologists, particularly by Tallcott Parsons and Morton. According to its advocates, every social system has two aspects, one structural and the other functional. A structure is an arrangement/unit for the performance of functions. Function is the consequent of the activities of structures.

All the structures are closely related to each other and all the functions are interrelated and interdependent. Change in one leads to changes in others. Each structure serves its own function and at same time helps others to function.

In this way the whole social system functions and undergoes social change. A change in the marriage system from an arranged marriage system towards a love marriage system leads to changes in caste system, family system, joint family system, rate of divorce and even religion.

Functional theorists are concerned with the role of cultural elements in preserving the social order as a whole. Functionalists see society as a system in equilibrium. If some external force disrupts the equilibrium of the society, there takes place a counter force for maintaining the social equilibrium.

For example, when terrorism disrupts the normal life, the authorities counter with laws like POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act), TADA (Terrorist and Disruptive activities Act) and the people launch anti-terror movements for educating the masses against terrorism and the forces of terrorism.

Parson's equilibrium model says that any change occurring in any part of the society is countered by adjustments in other parts. If this does not take place, the society's equilibrium gets threatened and several strains develop. Like evolutionary theorists, he believes that societies evolve from simple to compound societies.

Parsons maintains that three key concepts characterize the process of evolutionary change.

(a) Structural differentiation

(b) Functional specialisation

(c) Social integration.

The structured differentiation refers to the increasing complexity of social organisation. A change from 'medicine man' to 'physician, nurse and a pharmacist is an illustration of differentiation in the field of health system. As communities grow larger and larger, societal units get divided and subdivided.

The functions of the old structures are taken over by several differentiated structures. Structural differentiation leads to functional specialisation. Just as different structures and agencies specialise in different functions, individuals also tend to specialize in specific occupations.

Functionalists assume that social institutions cannot not persist unless they contribute to overall social integration. As social units multiply and specialised occupations tend to grow, it becomes necessary to coordinate all aspects of society.

6. Deterministic Theory of Social Change:

The Deterministic theory has been a widely popular theory of social change among several contemporary sociologists. According to this theory there are certain forces, social or natural or both which bring about social change and the circumstances which determines the course of social change.

Sumner and Keller insist that social change is automatically determined by economic factors. Keller maintains that conscious effort and rational planning have very little chance to affect change unless and until the folkways and mores are ready for it.

It was Karl Marx, who got deeply impressed by the German philosopher Hegel's metaphysical idealism and held that material conditions of life are the determining factors of social change.

He advocated his theory of Historical Materialism which offered a 'materialistic interpretation of history' and held economic factors were the factors of social change and evolution of all societies. Karl Marx held a total faith in the theory of Economic Determinism of history and social change.

Marx held that human society passes through various stages, each with its own well defined organisational system. Each successive stage comes into existence as a result of conflict with the one preceding it. Change from one stage to another is due to changes in the economic factors namely the methods of production and distribution of material means of life.

A change in the material conditions of life brings changes in all social institutions, properly system, state, religion and family. To put it in the words of Karl Marx: "Legal relations as well as forms of State could neither be understood by themselves, nor explained by the so-called general progress of the human mind, but they are rooted in the material conditions of life.

The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual process of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness."

Thus the economic factor is primary factor of all social relations and social change. All aspects and phases of social life are dependent upon the economic factors and are almost entirely determined by it.

According to Marx, the social order has passed through five phases called the oriental, the ancient, the feudal, the capitalistic and the communist. The prevailing capitalist system has been moving towards its doom because the conditions it produced and the forces it unloosed make its disintegration inevitable.

"The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself. Not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself, but also it has called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons—the modern

working class, the proletarian." The growth of capitalism also is its march towards its grave and this happens due the economic factors of the capitalist society.

Capitalism is destined to meet its end which will come through a proletarian revolution which will lead the society to the next stage – a new social order. The resulting social order will not reach its full development at once but will go through two stages. In the first, there will be dictatorship of the proletariat during which the proletariat will rule and crush out all the remnants of capitalism.

In the second stage, there will be real communism, in which there will be no state, no class, no conflict and no exploitation. Marx visualized a society in which the social order will have reached a stage of perfection. In that society the prevailing principle will be "from each according to his capacities, to each according to his needs.

Marx's theory of Economic Determinism contains a large element of truth but it cannot be said to contain the whole truth. No one can deny that economic factors always influence social conditions of life and the process of social change.

But no can also hold that economic factors are the only activating forces of human history. There is no scientific proof that human society is going through the stage visualized and explained by Marx. His claim that man is destined to attain an ideal stage of existence is little more than Utopia.

A number of social thinkers opposed to the theory of economic determinism do not consider material elements of culture as the basic factors of social change. Some of them reject the deterministic theory of social change while other simply reject the theory of Economic determinism but prefer to hold ideas as the moving force of history. They regard ideas as the prime movers in social life. Gustavo Le Bon, George Sorel, James G. Frazer and some others held hold that religion is the chief initiator of social change.

The theory of religious determinism has been criticised by Sorokin. He posed the question, "If all social institutions change under the influence of the changes in religion, how, when and why does religion change itself?" According to Sorokin change is caused by the interaction of the various parts of a culture, none of which may be considered primary.

It means that change is pluralistic rather than monistic in origin. He advocates the view t change is initiated in the material culture and then it spreads to other spheres. Change is caused not only by economic factors but several factors acting together. Social Change comes under the impact of several factors and not by any single deterministic factor. Hence the Deterministic Theory of Social Change is not fully valid.

See http://www.shareyouressays.com/112462/6-most-important-theories-of-social-change-2

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