

## Problems & Social Policy

Dr. Farah Naz

## Defining Social Problems

Any condition that is **harmful** for society

Most people and organizations define something as a social problem only if it harms (or seems to harm) their own interests.

Sociological Approach

Social problem exists when there is a sizable difference between the **ideals** of a society and its actual **achievements**.

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## Sociology of Social Problem

- A **social problem** is a condition or a type of behavior that many people believe is harmful
- The extent to which any conditions or behaviors becomes social problems is based not only on **the reality of their existence** (Objective Element) but on **the level of public concern** (Subjective Element)
- Hitting a Child?

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## Development of a Social Problem

- The process in the development of a social problem begins when someone makes an argument (a **claim**) that a **condition or behavior is harmful** and tries to convince others why something must be done about it and what specific actions are needed (Best 2013).
- The **claims maker** may be an expert in a related field, someone with personal experience, or a social activist who tries to assemble evidence supporting a claim that a condition or behavior is a social problem
- Media Attention
- Leveling Public Opinion: Public Mobilization
- Force Lawmakers to Take action

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## Social Movements: Feminist Movement in Pakistan



## Social Movements: Feminist Movement in Pakistan

- **What are your thoughts?**

What Do you think about women rights in Pakistan?

How could this be achieved in the Pakistan?

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### The Social Context of Social Problems

- To learn about social problems, how they develop, and how people work together to deal with them, it is important to understand their context
- The essential features of the societies
- ✓ **Social structure** is the expression for relatively stable patterns of social behavior and relationships among people. It means how a society is organized.
- ✓ A **social institution** is a continuing pattern of social relationships intended to fulfill people's basic needs and aspirations and carry out functions essential to the operation of society

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### The Social Context of Social Problems

- Conditions generated by institutions may become social problems. Such as inequality
- **social stratification**, which refers to inequality among people with regard to important social factors including access to education, income, property, power, and prestige.
- **culture** refers to the knowledge, ways of thinking, shared understandings of behavior, and physical objects that characterize a people's way of life. The elements of culture particularly important for understanding social problems are values, norms, beliefs, and symbols.<sup>12</sup>

### Climate Change

- Consider global climate change.
- Does this exist?
- Beliefs affect whether someone thinks it actually exists, whether it is a problem, and whether people or government can do anything about it.
- The elements of social structure and culture can have a powerful influence on which conditions or patterns of behavior are recognized as social problems and what people decide to do about them.

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### What Are Today's Greatest Social Problems?

- What do you think are the seven most important social problems in the Pakistan today? Rank them beginning with the most serious. Record your answers in the blanks and then compare your choices
- 1. ....

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### Revisiting Social Problem

- The definition of problems is different in different places.
- Definitions are not 'objective'
- A better way to describe them is that they are 'inter-subjective'
- The understanding of problems grows through a series of shared perceptions and beliefs.
- Problems are 'socially constructed'
- The pattern of relationships in society shapes the circumstances which lead to the problem, the way the problem is understood, and the extent to which it is perceived as a problem.

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### Problems Which are Not Social?

- Many problems are not social – for example, personal relationships, grief or pain.
- They become social at the point where they are constructed in social terms, or when a social response is called for.
- Is personal health condition of an individual is a social issue?

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## Social Problems & Social Policy

- Understanding problems is important for social policy
- ✓ it helps to understand what the problem is in order to respond to it.
- ✓ When social problems are recognised, they are interpreted or 'constructed' in a particular way; they might have to be reinterpreted, or 'deconstructed', to make an effective response possible.

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## Responding to Social Problems

- The way that a problem is responded to is shaped by the way the problem is defined and understood
- Some responses to problems are *direct*, in the sense that the response is intended to deal with the immediate problem as presented.
- The second kind of response is concerned with causes rather than effects.
- Addressing 'causes' is contentious, because it is difficult to find agreement about what the causes of social problems are
- But its important for policy

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## Response to a Problem

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-9y5TRXPQ0>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOcNEfuJBT4>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4gn5xTdulw>

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## Key Intervention

- The principle of key intervention depends on the argument that a focus on a small number of selected elements can have a critical effect on other elements.
- This is based on an analysis of the relationships between the elements.
- If the relationships between the parts are identified correctly, it may be possible within a complex set of issues to pick out the ones which will lead to change more generally.

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## What do You Think?

- Quarantine?  
OR
- Herd Immunization?
- Relate the response to problems to the patterns of social organisation

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## Policy Response

- Responses have to be translated into practical action.
- Policies are usually 'targeted', or aimed at somebody.
- The main objective of targeting is to deliver more resources to the poorest groups of the population.'
- Targeting means only that policies have to be directed at someone or something

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## Targeting: The Focus of Policy

- The 'focus' of policy refers to the people or social units who the policy directly affects.
- People who are helped are not necessarily the people who the policy is focused on
- Social policies have commonly focused on a range of different targets. They include policies aimed at individuals; families; households; communities; different kinds of social group; and the whole society.

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## Targeting: The Focus of Policy

- The question of which focus is most appropriate can be taken in two different ways:
  - ✓ To what extent these groups can be seen as the source of the problems,
  - ✓ To what extent it is appropriate to focus on such groups as a means of responding to the problem.

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## Pathological Theories

- Approaches to problems and policy which concentrate on dealing with people one at a time are usually described as 'individualised', although sometimes you will encounter the term 'pathological'.
- Pathological theories are those which see the cause of a problem in terms of the unit which has the problem
- so, if individuals are poor, ill-educated or homeless, a pathological explanation is one which tries to find the reasons for their condition in terms of the characteristics or behaviour of those individuals.

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## Individualism

- Concentrating resources on the people who are most in need should give the maximum benefit with the minimum waste.
- This is also more directly redistributive; if money is taken from the best off and given to the worst off, society will be more equal.
- For individualists, the individual is not only the basic unit in society, but also the unit which undertakes obligations, makes agreements, or tries to gain redress against injustice.

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## Individualism

- Individual rights have proved in practice to be a very effective strategy for the delivery of welfare.
- If individuals gain **entitlements**, and are able to claim benefits and services themselves, and to have some kind of direct redress against the providers of services or the government, it introduces an important set of **checks and balances**, as well as making services much more **responsive** to the circumstances of the individual.

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## Households and Families

- A household is defined in terms of a group of people who live together, sharing resources and responsibilities.
- There are certain social issues, which are primarily addressed socially in the context of the family. That being the case, it is difficult to avoid consideration of how policies work at the level of families when these issues are discussed.

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## Communities

- focusing on areas
- focusing on people with existing networks of responsibility, or 'solidarities'.
- The chief reason for concentrating on geographical areas, then, is that problems often present themselves on an area basis.

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## Blocs

- Groups of people who share common characteristics might be referred to as 'blocs' in society
- Bloc-regarding policies may be aimed at identifiable social groups, but they are not necessarily based in a politics of identity – that would depend on participants sharing understandings about group membership.
- The policies are just as likely to be aimed at broad categories of people – women, adolescents and so on.

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## The general public

- In a sense, such policies are 'unfocused', because the benefits are not necessarily attributable to any particular individual or group.
- A public park, for example, is a facility available to anyone who wants to use it.
- Economists refer to such provisions as 'public goods'

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## Society

- A policy for society – a 'societal' policy – is focused on the relationships of society as a whole.
- Policies that are intended to change relationships in society – policies concerned, for example, with the family in general, culture, or national identity – can be seen as focused on society.
- Defense, health. Economic policy

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## Individual and collective approaches

- One view of 'social welfare' is that it is nothing more than the sum of the welfare of the people who make it up; in the case of public goods like parks or roads, collective action can yield more benefit for each person than the cost to each individual user.
- If welfare is understood individualistically, it can be increased by making things better for more people, for example through growth, redistribution or insurance.
- If, on the other hand, it is interpreted collectively, there are different criteria by which the welfare of a society ought to be judged. Societies can be said to have 'needs', in the sense that there are things which are necessary for a society to survive.

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## Debate Question

If governments want to tackle the current COVID 19 health emergency, where should the focus of policy fall?

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