
UNIT 4 SOCIAL ISSUES AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS*

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Definition and Nature of Social Problems
- 4.3 Approaches to Social Problems
- 4.4 Social Issues and Problems
 - 4.4.1 Gender Discrimination
 - 4.4.2 Delinquency
 - 4.4.3 Poverty
 - 4.4.4 Unemployment
 - 4.4.5 Violence and Criminal Behaviour
 - 4.4.6 Child and Elder Abuse
 - 4.4.7 Other Social Issues and Problems
- 4.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.6 References
- 4.7 Key Words
- 4.8 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 4.9 Unit End Questions

4.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to,

- discuss the definition and nature of social problems;
- describe the approaches to social problem; and
- explain various social issues and problems.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Have you ever felt like changing some systems in our “society” because they didn’t feel right like gender discrimination or caste system?

Things around us that influence and impact us as a community, come under an umbrella term called social issues could be across all societies. Often, we

*Dr. Megha Pushkarna (M.Phil, Ph. D), Counselling Psychologist, Associate Professor, IILM University, Gurugram, Haryana

notice, that these invisible yet strong factors are beyond any person's control because, we as a society follow them as much as worry about them (for example, dowry). We hear and notice elderly and child abuse and wonder if we can ever eliminate such practices which significantly impairs well-being of people who are dependents and cannot raise concerns when ill-treated. Social issues can also stem from differences in economic power (for example, poverty induced violence communal violence, criminal behaviour due to unemployment that leads to delinquent behaviour and we notice these concerns adding burden to the social problems we already face in India. A social problem often begins with thoughts are seen in actions and affects a lot of people at the same time, which if not addressed takes the form of a chaos.

In the very first unit of this course, we discussed about applied social psychology. We mainly discussed that applied social psychology seeks to understand various social issues and problems in a systematic manner in order to develop suitable intervention strategies. The title of the block 2 of this course is Intervention and Evaluation. But in order to develop suitable interventions, it is imperative to focus on the social issues and problems. thus in the first unit of block 2 (unit 4), we will focus on social issues and problems and in the next unit (unit 5), we will discuss about intervention and evaluation.

In the present unit, we will mainly try to understand what social issues and problems are and will also focus on some of the prominent social issues and problems.

4.2 DEFINITIONS AND NATURE OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN INDIA

Any social happening which can disturb the smooth functioning of social order and create unrest can be identified as a social problem. In the beginning, it can be thought as “one-time event” which could be noticed but ignored to reduce any kind of confrontation. However, when it starts to affect normal social functioning, is when we term it as a problem.

Let us start with discussing various definition of social problem.

According to Leon-Guerrero (2016 page 7) “A social problem is a social condition or pattern of behaviour that has negative consequences for individuals, our social world, or our physical world”. For example, violence can have a negative impact on the individuals”.

Reinhardt in 1952 (page 14) defined social problem as “ a situation confronting a group or a section of society which inflicts injurious consequences that can be handled only collectively”.

According to Nisbet and Merton (1961) social problems are “problems in the sense that they represent interruptions in the desired scheme of things;

violation of rights as a society; dislocation in the social patterns and relationships that a society cherishes.”

E. Raab and G.J. Selznick (1964) defines social problem as “a problem in human relationship which seriously threatens society itself or impedes the important aspirations of many people”.

As can be seen from the above definitions, a social problem is described as a situation or a condition that is leading to disruption or is having negative consequences.

According to Bernard, any social problem irrespective of its consequences has three types of components; that is,

- 1) Tension factors which challenge some values of society,
- 2) Social values which are being challenged and
- 3) Intense reaction of individuals and groups to challenge.

At times it is noticed that social stratification (categorisation of people based on their economic status etc.) brings about imbalance in social class and leads to malpractices like unemployment, poverty and tensions. These can further lead to group problems like communalism (tension between people identified as different communities,), linguism (discrimination based on person's language) causing regionalism (focussing on a region than the whole country) and thus racism (extreme form of exploitation of people by others considered higher in the society).

Nature of social problems exhibit characteristics as listed below:

- 1) **Shameful:** Shameful means that social problems cause misery and suffering and affects value system of the society.
- 2) **Several causes:** Each social problem is noticed to be a complex mixture of many causes like poor economy, social unrest, anxiety or unemployment.
- 3) **Intertwined:** It has been noticed that interconnected causes could create a social problem. For example, addiction leads to abuse which further leads to increase in crime and delinquency.
- 4) **Multi-fold solutions:** Social problems need to be addressed at various levels thus various solutions.
- 5) **Utility value:** Social problems though troublesome in the beginning could lead to a better world tomorrow. What may seem like a problem today could be an answer to an age-old problem in the society.

According to Carr (1951) a social problem exists whenever we become conscious of a difficulty, a gap between our preferences and our reality. Ram Ahuja in his book titled Social problems mentions that “the custom of Sati in India was a ritual as long as most people thought of it as desired. Only when

Raja Ram Mohan Roy took constructive steps towards recognising it as a social problem, did people support his cause in the social movement.

There are three different theoretical standpoints to explain social problems as given in table 4.1. We will discuss the approaches to social problems in the next subsection.

Table 4.1: Theoretical standpoints explaining Social problems

Theoretical perspective	Major assumptions	Views of social problems
Functionalism	<p>Every society has institutions that perform functions that help maintain stability.</p> <p>Any social problem reduces a society's stability.</p>	<p>Functionalism suggests that social problems must be functional in some ways for society, otherwise these problems would not continue.</p> <p>Poverty is also a major social problem, but one function that poverty serves is that poor people do jobs that otherwise might not get done because others would not want to do them (Gans, H. J. (1972).</p>
Conflict theory	<p>Society exhibits inequality which is based on social class, gender, etc. We need far reaching results to eliminate social inequality and create equal opportunities for all.</p>	<p>Social problems exist due to problems in the structure of the society which favour some people over others on different dimensions.</p> <p>While functionalist theory emphasizes the benefits of the various parts of the society for ongoing social stability, conflict theory favours social change to reduce inequality.</p>
Symbolic interactionism	<p>People develop their roles as they interact. As this interaction occurs, individuals manage social life through symbols like words and gestures to reach a shared understanding of their interaction.</p>	<p>Social problems arise from the interaction of individuals.</p> <p>People who engage in socially problematic behaviours often learn these behaviours from others (like substance use, crime etc.)</p>

Let us understand the above with an everyday example; like drug addiction. A functionalist approach will suggest that addiction might bring positive functions in society, like creating jobs (drug pedlars, de-addiction centres, NGO's facilitating rehabilitation).

A conflict theory would explain addiction due to poverty, street criminals, delinquency and frustration; that can arise from desperation due to lack of opportunities and low self-esteem.

To reduce addiction, conflict theory would advocate far-reaching changes in the social/economic structure of the society.

Lastly, symbolic interactionism would explain how addicts become addicted due to their close interaction to drug dealers and other addicts. To connect to their environment, they would use addiction to be "accepted". Solution to it would be to advocate awareness and de-addiction programs for potential criminal offenders like in schools and slums.

We have discussed nature of social problems and what they are like in theory; now let's bring into perspective how they are dealt with in practicality. We operate in a social structure whereby we see things happening around us and explain their occurrence as a part of the social structure we live in. At times social deviancy is seen as a problem with "some people" and therefore we blame them.

Person-blame approach: Assumption to this approach is that there are laws which everyone has to follow and those who don't are considered as problematic. As society is a custodian for all customs and traditions, people who deviate from those ethics are seen as troublemakers in the society.

But the question here is, why do people become troublemakers? Social scientists like Herbert Spencer says that "the poor are poor because they are unfit." The poor are poor because they do not have the intellectual ability to be wealthy. He argues that they are greedy and that is why they are unable to uplift themselves off their misery.

- **Person-blame distracts attention away from institutions:** This mentality to blame one person shifts the focus from the larger concerns like the environment (government, economy and social milieu) which are to be blamed.
- **Person-blame makes it difficult to establish a systemic change:** As we blame one person, we make it difficult for any change that needs to be suggested in the system. Unjustified social norms are ignored when facing concerns like racism, homophobia, gender equality, etc and the protests are curbed all in the name of curtailing violence.
- **Person-blame allows the powerful to control rebels:** When we blame a person and call his/her behaviour deviant, we allow the government to control and punish such rebels. Rebels are treated unfairly and times sent

to institutionalised care like prisons and rehabilitation which mentally affects them more. The system nevertheless still stays unchanged because of which rebels were born.

- **Person-blame encourages judging group of people:** We convince ourselves with what we see and form opinions in the form of stereotypes (Men drive better than women). This leads to generations carrying forward same stereotypes without challenging them and judge people.

Check your progress I

- 1) What is a social problem?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

4.3 APPROACHES TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS

There are four main approaches as suggested by Etzioni (1982, as cited in Shetgovekar, 2018) that can be explained in the context of social problems. These are discussed as follows:

- 1) **The consensus and structural-functional approach:** The consensus and structural-functional approach mainly highlights how the social structure of a society meets the needs of the individuals in the society. Society, according to this approach is like an integrated system with different parts that are connected with each other and work in coordination in order to maintain balance in the society. Thus, various organisations, institutions both governmental and nongovernmental in a society are interrelated and function in tandem with each other. Thus, society functions as an integrated system in order to meet the needs of the individuals in the society. And in order to meet the needs of the individuals, the society undergoes constant adjustment to ensure that at least needs of the majority of the persons in the society are met. Practically speaking though, many a times needs of all the individuals and segments in the society are not met. And in many cases even the fundamental needs of individuals are not met. This kind of deviation (that can be termed as a deviation of the society from its own norm of meeting the needs of the individual) leads to creating of a social issue or a problem. Social problem are also seen as consequences of breaking down of socialisation that can be as a result of issues and difficulties related to individuals, families and subcultures. This approach does assume that disparity to some extent in meeting needs of all the

individuals will exist, though largely the society as a social system will function adequately. The approach as such does not provide any suggestions regarding intervention to deal with the social problems. Though it suggests re-socialisation and control as measures to deal with any deviants from the social norms. The approach does not propose rapid change in society as that could derail the social order. But it does support a change or reform that is slow and gradual.

- 1) **The conflict or alienation approach:** The main focus of this approach is on the tension and contradictions that may exist between the classes of individuals in the society who have power and the individuals who do not have power. According to this approach such tensions and contradictions are integral and basic to any society. And thus, inequalities on the basis of class, gender and so on, exist in any society. The approach suggests societal transformations or change at a larger level in order to deal with varied social issues and problems. And these transformations are directed towards decreasing or removing the inequality between the groups so as to encourage power sharing.
- 2) **Symbolic interactionism:** According to this approach, social problems originate from difficulties or issues in interactions amongst the individuals. Further, the approach also states that individuals displaying deviant behaviours learn the behaviour from others in the society and perception of social problems as well is learned from others. According to this approach, there is no permanent solution for social problems as issues and difficulties in communication, ambiguity in meanings and social norms will continue to exist in any society.
- 3) **The neo-conservative approach:** This approach focuses on the scarcity of resources that leads to a kind of division, where there are individuals who are less fortunate as they do not adequately receive resources and there are individuals who are fortunate and receive resources adequately. According to this approach, there is a social contract between these two groups and thus the elite may provide leadership and protection to the less fortunate and the less fortunate in turn will entrust the power to the elite. Social problems arise, when there is a breach in this social contract. Social change is not seen as necessary by this approach as social problems are assumed to arise as a result of deviant behaviour or issues related to authority.

Check Your Progress II

- 1) List the approaches to social problems.

.....

.....

.....

4.4 SOCIAL ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

We have understood the definition and nature of social issues and problems. Now let us briefly look at some of the social issues and problems.

In the present subsection of the unit, we will discuss about various social issues and problems especially in the Indian context.

4.4.1 Gender Discrimination

Men and women are born different and that makes them unique. At times these differences which emerge from our biological, psychological and cultural norms create inequality between men and women and affect our experiences in life (education, personality, careers and family life).

Gender discrimination can be explained as a social concern where the birth of a girl child is unwelcoming and the girl child is considered as a burden to the family. Girls are provided with fewer opportunities given to them which reduces their chances of personal growth and confidence. Male dominated society as noticed in most parts of India; mark women inferior to men and position them at home for child rearing responsibilities.

As per 2011 census data, effective literacy rates (age 7 and above) were 82.14% for boys and 65.46% for girls. The main reason why parents are not willing to spend on girl's education is the mindset that educating women is of no value as in the future they will only serve their husbands and in-laws. Even in open minded societies, women are still paid less for the same work done by men which shows obvious gender inequality. The absence of basic information about gender inequalities is a serious limitation because due to economic conditions, probably stronger family influences (Vindhya, 2007), greater female safety concerns (Vindhya, 2007) and differing cultural expectations (Chandrakar, 2014).

There are many socio-cultural reasons why gender inequality still exists in India as follows:

- i) **Poverty:** In a patriarchal society like ours, many still look up to the “man of the house” to earn for the family whereas if the woman earns as well, she is not given any respite from household chores. Further, women in India lack economic opportunities and autonomy, lack of access to economic resources including credit, land ownership and inheritance, lack of access to education, support services and their minimal participation in the decision-making process.
- ii) **Illiteracy:** Despite educational reforms, girls in our country are denied a chance in learning over helping at home. An educated, well-read woman ensures that other members especially the children of the house get quality education. That is why it is said, that when you teach a woman, you teach a whole family. According to Census of India, 2011 at the state

level female literacy rate varies from 35% in Bihar to 88% in Kerala. In states like Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir and Rajasthan, the female literacy rate is below 50%.

- iii) **Patriarchal setup in our Indian society:** Most households in India are dominated by a male figure who controls decision making for the whole family. In urban cities, we notice a change in mindsets, however we have a long way before we see equality at home as well as at work.
- iv) **Lack of employment facilities:** In India, many women spend most of their time devoted to home-based activities (cooking, washing, cleaning, looking after family members, etc). As there is no equal distribution of work at home, women are overburdened and subdued in their position at home. In urban cities, lack of proper day care facilities for their children restricts women to leave their children in safe hands to pursue their careers.
- v) **Social-cultural beliefs:** From our mythology to our films, men are seen as stronger gender who are protectors of the family and this impression is passed on to young children, wishing to grow up to take those social roles. Boys continue to be preferred gender by expecting parents in business communities and are seen as an asset whereas girls are seen as liabilities (expenses related to marriage and dowry).

Thus, gender discrimination can be termed one of the prominent social issues or problems that can have an impact on the overall development of the individuals and society and suitable intervention strategies that focus on attitude towards women and on creating awareness regarding issues like education for girls and equal opportunities etc. need to be developed.

4.4.2 Delinquency

Delinquency is defined as criminal behaviour, especially by a young person who is engaging into crime and misconduct finally resulting into violation of law. Acts like stealing and destroying public/private property may be thought as petty concerns but from a psychological point of view, they create criminal minds and law offenders.

Frequently researched and referred topic under this category is that of Juvenile delinquents who are defined as minors (less than 18 years of age) intently committing crime. It is very important to understand why a minor commits a crime to prevent it from occurring in future.

Delinquent behaviour includes running away from home/school without permission, poor academic record, use of vulgar language, committing sexual behaviours, engaged in gambling, drugs, drinking and constantly defying authority and rules. Understanding the causes of juvenile delinquency is an integral part of preventing a young person from involvement in inappropriate,

harmful and illegal conduct. In Indian context, there are different causal factors related to delinquency that are discussed below:

- i) **Personal Characteristics:** Those who have been observed to have low intelligence and have not received proper education become vulnerable to criminal behaviour. Acts like aggression, impulsive thrill-seeking behaviour is commonly noticed as factors contributing to delinquency.
- ii) **Family Influences:** Families where there has been poor to no parental supervision, tensed marital relationships, neglect and abuse have higher chances of delinquent cases. Also, when parents themselves disregard rules and norms, children are likely to follow in their footsteps. Lastly, children showing no attachment to their families display stronger delinquent characteristics.
- iii) **Substance Abuse Factors:** Most delinquents have been observed to be addicted to one or more substances (drugs, smoking, alcohol, etc). Research has shown school going children to be using stronger drugs than 10 years ago. This vicious circle of addiction makes them steal money and miss school.
- iv) **Peer Pressure:** If friends engage in delinquent acts, a child feels pressured to do the same to move in the same circle with them. This increases group's unity to defy authority together.
- v) **Socio-economic Factors:** Poorneighbourhoods are seen to be more responsible for delinquency as children growing in those neighbourhoods want to prosper hence steal and commit crimes. Most commonly committed crimes are done for necessity (fulfilling an urgent need) without giving it a second thought.

This is yet another relevant social issue and the focus needs to be not only on developing intervention strategies for parents and teachers at varied levels that could work as preventive measures, but the focus also needs to be on providing suitable counselling, guidance and support to the juvenile delinquents so that they are able to make correct choices for their future lives and move in a positive direction.

4.4. 3 Poverty

Poverty is an unfortunate situation where people lack basic necessity to meet their daily needs like food, shelter and safety. According to India's Planning Commission (2012) some 76.5 million people (21% of the total urban population) are considered poor. The National Building Organization reports that approximately 93 million people live in slums. This population is most impacted to the risks inherent in unplanned rapid urbanisation. India's poor regularly face losing their homes and livelihoods. Inequality in earnings are widening the social gap and making richer rich and poor miserable. Increasing rate in population and decline in agriculture are strong factors

contributing to poverty. Economical, Psychological as well social disadvantage pushes many into crimes to sustain themselves and areas where poverty is high, it is being noticed, crime rates to be higher as well.

People suffering in poverty are seen more involved in alcohol and drugs, the rate of violent crime has been increased from 29 percent from 2000 to 2010. The rate of murder also increased from 41 percent from last two decades. To evade desperate times due to poverty, people may indulge in activities like human trafficking (trade of humans for the purpose of forced labour, sexual slavery or commercial sexual exploitation), drug selling that results to home violence. Communal violence is also led by frustrations attached to illiteracy, lack of equal opportunity and poverty.

According to Henry Bernstein (1992 as cited in Shetgovekar, 2018, page 253) the dimensions of poverty include:

- Lack of ways to maintain livelihood on day to day basis.
- Inaccessibility to financial and other resources.
- Feelings of insecurity and frustration.
- Inability to develop effective social relationships due to lack of resources.

There are various causes of poverty and these can be categorised in to the following:

- **Individual causes:** In this, the poverty is mainly attributed to the individual and his/her success or failure. Thus, the individual is poor because of his/her personal reasons, that could range from being lazy, ineffective efforts, lack of efficiency an so on.
- **Culture of poverty:** Culture can be explained as way of life and when we talk about culture of poverty it denotes poverty as a way of life that ha been passed along the generations. Thus, certain behaviours are maintained, values and norms are followed and the individuals are used to a certain lifestyle that lead to poverty and also serves as a barrier in eradication of poverty.
- **Social structure:** Certain social conditions like lack of educational and employment opportunities and other economic aspects etc. lead to proliferation of poverty and can be categorised under social structure.

In India poverty can be attributed to various reasons like lack of educational and employment opportunities, lack of resources or inadequate use of resources, unemployment and so on (Ahuja, 2014). Poverty affects health and wellbeing of the individuals and the individuals may not be able to fulfil their basic needs of food and shelter and as a result they are not able to lead their lives to the fullest. Poverty also leads to inequalities in the society and thus can have an impact on overall development of the society.

Dealing with poverty is not an easy task and interventions at various levels are required. On one hand, education and awareness regarding need for education needs to be created and on the other hand employment opportunities are to be provided. Social and welfare schemes and policies directed towards reducing poverty also need to be developed.

4.4. 4 Unemployment

Unemployment can be explained as willingness to work but not employed and earning a salary. This affects people not only economically and socially but a lot more psychologically. Lack of productivity and self-worth pushes people into criminal mind and behaviour. Reasons behind unemployment can range from increased population, rapid technological change, lack of education or skills to rising costs of living thus resulting into financial, social and psychological problems. Ahuja (2014) described unemployment as absence of work that is remunerative, though willingness and potentiality to work is present. The three main elements of unemployment are, willingness to work, present of potentiality and willingness to make efforts to find work. But despite of these the individual is not able to get a remunerative work.

Some of the types (or causes) of unemployment (Shetgovekar, 2018) are as follows:

- **Seasonal unemployment:** The individuals remain unemployed for a certain period of time in a year. For example, in certain cities, individuals may remain unemployed due to seasonal changes like snowing.
- **Agricultural unemployment:** These result due to seasonal nature of farming or due to increase in industries that leads to decrease in agricultural related work.
- **Cyclic unemployment:** This is as a result of fluctuations that take place in trade and business.
- **Industrial unemployment:** These include factors like lack of growth in industries, increased migration and so on.
- **Technological unemployment:** Many a times when technological upgradations are carried out in an industry or organisation, a work activity that was carried out by many individuals can now be carried out by fewer or single individual(s). This can lead to technological unemployment.
- **Educational unemployment:** Lack of fit between education and the requirement in the job market can lead to educational unemployment.

Unemployment can also attributed to social factors like increase in population, lack of willingness to carry out certain jobs that are seen as below one's status, increased migration and so on.

Unemployment can be detrimental to the development of the society and can also have an impact on the individual as he/ she experiences stress, anxiety

and other issues as a result of being unemployed. Poverty and unemployment are also related and both can have a negative impact on the overall development of the society as a whole.

Intervention strategies to deal with this social problem need to focus on educational opportunities, bridging the gap between education and the demands of the job market, generation of employment opportunities and so on.

4.4.5 Violence and Criminal Behaviour

WHO (2021) defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation" (<https://www.who.int/violenceprevention/approach/definition/en/>). Violence can be categorised (WHO, 2021) as follows:

- **Self directed violence:** This is the violence where the perpetrator and the victim is same. Self abuse and suicide are examples of this violence.
- **Interpersonal violence:** As the name suggests, this the violence between persons. This can be further be categorised in to family and intimate partner violence and community violence. Family and intimate partner violence includes domestic violence, child abuse, intimate partner violence and so on. Community violence can be further categorised in to acquaintance and stranger violence. Violence at workplace, attack by strangers and so on can be categorised under this category.
- **Collective violence:** This is denoted as violent behaviour by large group of persons and can be categorised as social, political and economic violence.

Violence can have a negative impact on the wellbeing of the individual as a well as society. In this context we also need to focus on the vulnerable group that is even more prone to being victimised. Women, children, elderly and individuals belonging to low Socio Economic Status are more vulnerable to be victimised and the impact of violence on them can be grave.

Violence against women can range from domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape to female foeticide and infanticide. Dowry system that is still prevalent in Indian society can also lead to harassment and victimisation of the women and their maternal families.

Criminal behaviour like stealing, robbery and kidnapping seem to be an easier option when a person/gang is unemployed. This gives them a chance of making quick money without hurting anyone.

Unemployed individuals are driven into violent crimes by addiction (drugs, alcohol, etc) and casual approach towards laws. Farnsworth et al. (1994) have

explained that unemployment has strong relation with criminal behaviour. Increase in joblessness increases social stress leading to anti-social behaviour like violence. Sociological point of view explains that when a person is treated negatively from social institutions (religion, community, workplace) and is unable to achieve his/her goals in life (earning a living), s/he turns to crime as they do not feel the need to be controlled by any social order. Since unemployment increases daily excessive time it also increases the probability that the person gets into bad company and starts engaging in criminal activities (Patacchini and Yves, 2007).

To deal with these social problems as well, interventions need to be carried out at various levels. Awareness programmes need to be organised and certain programme at school and community levels also need to be organised. Stricter laws against violence also need to be created and implemented. Though, necessary measures also need to be taken in order to prevent violence and criminal behaviour in society.

4.4. 6 Child and Elder Abuse

Over and above wrong doings in the society, there are concerns at domestic front by family members on dependents such as children and elders that need to be discussed. Unfortunately, as dependents are unable to fight back, they are abused more frequently.

Abuse to a child can be explained any form of maltreatment by an adult that is violent and threatening. It can be from someone at home or caretakers' outsiders on whom a child depends on. Trust is violated and the child is left hurt for life.

It has been noticed that abused children have a hard time trusting other due to their traumatic past experiences and could also become abusers. Primarily there are four types of abuses commonly seen in children:

- 1) **Physical abuse:** All forms of physical violence
- 2) **Emotional abuse:** An adult regularly insults the child, acts in a hostile manner towards the child
- 3) **Neglect:** The child does not receive the care and nurturing that s/he needs (physically) and is ignored for their need for love, warmth and security.
- 4) **Sexual abuse:** Child is subjected to molestation or abused sexually.

Causes of Child Abuse and Neglect: Children can become victims to child abuse for various reasons, some of them have been explained.

- i) **Domestic Violence:** when home environment is violent, children become soft targets to frustrations and disappointments.

- ii) **Alcohol and Drug Abuse by parent(s):** When parent are addicted to substances, it has been noticed that children from those families witness rage, neglect and physical abuse from their addict parent.
- iii) **Parents having history of mental disorder:** Children who have parents suffering from personality disorders are physically and mentally not there for their children and thus suffer neglect.
- iv) **Poverty and Socio-economic conditions:** Financial distress takes parents away to work, leaving children unsupervised and thus prone to abuse. Abusers have been reported to be unemployed and disappointed with their lives and target children for their unhappy lives.

Elder Abuse: Elderly abuse has been described as intentional actions that cause harm or risk basic needs and safe living conditions of the elderly. It includes physical abuse, negligence, material exploitation and sexual abuse (Cohen et al. 2006).

HelpAge India (2011) has performed a study in 12 major cities of India and reported different kinds of elder abuse cases in its study. According to it, an elderly is abused verbally (60%), physically (48%), emotionally (37%) and economically (35%), and 20% of elderly feel neglected themselves by the family as well as society.

Furthermore, this study reported that major types of crimes faced by the elderly are burglary, molestation and criminal acts. With incidences of crime against the elderly going up, there is a perceptible increase in fear of crime among the elderly.

Elder abuse can be categorised as follows:

- **Physical Abuse:** Hitting, pushing, kicking, inappropriate use of drugs or restraints
- **Mental abuse:** Insults, threats, humiliation, controlling behaviour, confinement and isolation
- **Financial abuse:** Misusing or stealing a person's money or assets
- **Neglect:** Not providing food, housing, or medical care
- **Sexual abuse:** Sexual contact without consent

The above noted abuses could be for several reasons and it varies from poor physical to deteriorating mental health of victims; at times substance abuse can also be seen as a risk factor. At times, gender (women) is seen more at risk as well as shared living space accounting to their dependency on the abuser.

Elderly persons deteriorating health and increase in medical expenses could also be a pressing reason why family members see them as burden and treat them badly. Mostly being retired and now dependent, they are neglected and suffer loneliness.

Intervention programmes here not only need to focus on providing suitable counselling, therapy and support to the victims but also on creating awareness and taking up preventive measures. Stricter laws also need to be created and implemented.

4.4. 7 Other Social Issues and Problems

Besides the above, there are various other aspects that could lead to social problem. One such aspect is communalism. Communalism can be explained as a strong attachment towards one's own community and religion to the extent that it creates distinctions within community against each other. People follow communalism blindly as they are uneducated and are influenced under the name of god and religion. Rioters see 'others' not like them to be using resources and therefore treat them like threat. Thus, the very social fabric of the society can be disturbed as a result of communalism. Besides, the caste system that serves as a system of social hierarchy separating people into ranks can lead to discriminations and thus can have an impact on development and wellbeing of the society. There are also social issues that are related to language. India is a diverse country with people belonging to different culture and speaking different languages. And in certain cases the language could lead to development of certain social issues and problems.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was quoted as saying, "*One language can unite people. Two languages are sure to divide people*". What comes to mind when one thinks of language, is a close connection it has with that country's heritage and culture. Common language relates people to each other and at times different dialects can cause confusion and disharmony. Shortly after gaining independence, the Indian government created states based on linguistic (spoken language) boundaries.

For the most part, each state has a majority language which takes precedence over the many others which also exist in the region. The official language is not always the majority language of the state.

With over 900 million people and more than one thousand languages, India is certainly one of the multilingual nations in the world today. India has been proud of its secularism and multicultural societies which allows people to speak different dialects of which Hindi stays as the most commonly spoken language. English is still considered an elite and commonly accepted spoken language especially in urban cities, whereas in suburban and rural areas, people still prefer to use their regional language, something they are most comfortable with. This confusion separates people speaking different languages and also forms groups against one another.

These social issues and problems can also be dealt with the help of suitable intervention strategies that focus on awareness and also by nurturing and encouraging acceptance of diversity and respect towards others, even those who differ from oneself.

Check your progress III

- 1) List the categories of elder abuse.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

4.5 LET US SUM UP

When we live in a society, we live in harmony knowing our social limits in the name of social norms. A particular behaviour can become a social problem when it moves beyond social norms and starts to target certain groups in the same societal set up. If things are not resolved at one to one level, it tends to get escalated at a group/community level and that's when we see a social issue becoming a social problem. The trouble with social problems is that it digs deep roots and brings out at times regressed concerns; along with the present problems leading to resentment and unrest till a solution is shouldered to create social harmony. Any occurrence considered as a social pathology includes convicts being punished to set rules or lessons for others in society to follow. Law and police are involved in resolving social harmony and trust in the legal system of the country. In the present unit thus, we discussed about the definition and nature of social problem. We also discussed about various approaches to social problem. Lastly various social issues and problems like gender discrimination, delinquency, poverty, unemployment, violence and criminal behaviour, child and elder abuse and other social issues and problems were also discussed. In the next unit we will mainly focus on the intervention and evaluation. Based on varied social issues and problems and their nature suitable intervention strategies can be developed and these interventions can be evaluated on regular basis in order to improve them.

4.6 REFERENCES

Ahuja Ram (2008) Indian Social System, Rawat publication, Jaipur.

Amutha, D., The Roots of Gender Inequality in India (January 27, 2017). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2906950> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2906950>

Carson, David & Foster, Jennifer & Tripathi, Nishi. (2013). Child Sexual Abuse in India: Current Issues and Research. *Psychological Studies*. 58. 318-325. 10.1007/s12646-013-0198-6.

- Datta, A. (2018). Family violence: Reflections on elder abuse in India. In *Abuse and Neglect of the Elderly in India* (pp. 45-64). Springer, Singapore.
- Gans, H. J. (1972). The Positive Functions of Poverty. *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 78, No. 2. (Sep., 1972), pp. 275-289. Stable URL:<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0002-9602%28197209%2978%3A2%3C275%3ATPFOF%3E2.0.CO%3B2-W>.
- Leon-Guerrero, A. ((2016). *Social Problems*. New Delhi: Sage
- Mohanty R. P., D. N. Biswal (2007) *Culture gender and gender discrimination*, Mittal Publication, P. 125
- Nisbett, R. E., & Wilson, T. D. (1977). Telling more than we can know: Verbal reports on mental processes. *Psychological Review*, 84(3), 231–259. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.3.231>
- Ovcharchyn-Devitt, C., Calby, P., Carswell, L., Perkowitz, W., Scruggs, B., Turpin, R., & Bickman, L. (1981). Approaches towards social problems: A conceptual model. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 2(4), 275-287.
- Phogat, K. (2017). Juvenile Delinquency in India Causes and Prevention. *Journal of Advances and Scholarly Researches in Allied Education*, 5.
- Raab, E and Selznick, G. J.(1964). *Major Social Problems*. USA: Harper and Row.
- Shama G. L. (2015) *Social Issues*, Rawat Publication Jaipur, P. 419.
- Reinhardt, J., 1952. *Social problems and social policy*. New York: American Book Co.
- Shakuntala Devi (1999) *Women status and social change*, Pointer publishers, Jaipur P. 179 Shankar Rao C. N. (2015) *Indian Social problem*, S. Chand Company Pvt. Ltd Ram Nagar New Delhi. P. 208, 225.
- Shetgovekar, S. (2018). *An Introduction to Social Psychology*. Delhi: Sage.
- Vindhya, U. (2007). Quality of women's lives in India: Some findings from two decades of psychological research on gender. *Feminism & Psychology*, 17(3), 337-356.

Weblinks:

- https://www.google.com/search?q=approaches+to+social+problems&rlz=1C1CHBD_enIN901IN901&oq=approaches+to+social+prob&aqs=chrome.0.0j46j69i57j0l5.11083j1j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#
- <https://nptel.ac.in/content/storage2/courses/109103022/pdf/mod1/lec3.pdf>
- <http://ndpublisher.in/admin/issues/IJSSv7n4f.pdf>
- <http://www.lawjournals.org/download/371/4-4-43-597.pdf>
- https://www.who.int/ageing/projects/elder_abuse/alc_ea_ind.pdf?ua=1#:~:text=Whether%20elder%20abuse%20is%20common%20in%20the%20area%20

[and%20why&text=Economic%20dependence%20was%20considered%20a,they%20could%20not%20fight%20it.](http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data_files/india/Final_PPT_2011_chapter6.pdf)

http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data_files/india/Final_PPT_2011_chapter6.pdf

4.7 KEY WORDS

Delinquency: Delinquency is defined as criminal behaviour, especially by a young person who is engaging into crime and misconduct finally resulting into violation of law. Acts like stealing and destroying public/private property may be thought as petty concerns but from a psychological point of view create criminal minds and law offenders.

Person-Blame Approach: Assumption to this approach is that there are laws which everyone has to follow and those who don't are considered problematic. As society is a custodian for all customs and traditions, people who deviate from those ethics are seen as troublemakers in the society.

Social Problem: According to Leon-Guerrero (2016 pg 7) "A social problem is a social condition or pattern of behaviour that has negative consequences for individuals, our social world, or our physical world". For example, violence can have a negative impact on the individuals".

Unemployment: Unemployment can be explained as willingness to work but not employed and earning a salary. This affects people not only economically and socially but a lot more psychologically.

Violence: WHO (2021) defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation".

4.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check your progress I

1) What is a social problem?

According to Leon-Guerrero (2016 pg 7) "A social problem is a social condition or pattern of behaviour that has negative consequences for individuals, our social world, or our physical world". For example, violence can have a negative impact on the individuals.

Check Your Progress II

1) List the approaches to social problems.

The approaches to social problem are:

- The consensus and structural-functional approach

- The conflict or alienation approach
- Symbolic interactionism
- The Neo-conservative approach

Check your progress III

- 1) List the categories of elder abuse?

The categories of elder abuse are as follows:

- **Physical Abuse:** Hitting, pushing, kicking, inappropriate use of drugs or restraints.
- **Mental abuse:** Insults, threats, humiliation, controlling behaviour, confinement and isolation.
- **Financial abuse:** Misusing or stealing a person's money or assets.
- **Neglect:** Not providing food, housing, or medical care.
- **Sexual abuse:** Sexual contact without consent.

4.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Explain the definition and nature of social problem.
- 2) Describe the various approaches to social problem.
- 3) Discuss poverty and unemployment as social issues and problems.
- 4) Describe violence and criminal behaviours as social issues and problems.
- 5) Explain child and elderly abuse.