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UNIT I: Social Disorganization and Social Problems Concepts and Theories

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Social Problems:

"Social problem is a generic term applied to a range of conditions and aberrant behaviours which are manifestations of social disorganization. It is a condition which most people in a society consider undesirable and want to correct by changing through some means of social engineering or social planning" (Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, 1994).

A problem is a condition of discontentment resented by someone. But when it is resented by many people, it becomes a social problem. For a problem to be social, it must involve a large number of people, sometimes groups and institutions, who consider a particular condition as undesirable and intolerable and want to correct through collective action.

Thus, not all problems are social, unless the discontented persons come in contact, and vocalize their discontentment and associate to do something for its solution. A problem becomes social when it is communicated to others and the activity of one person leads to similar activity of other persons. Thus, a social problem is different from an individual problem.

Individual problem is one which is felt by only one person or a small group of people. It does not affect the public at large. Its resolutions lie within the power and immediate milieu of the individual or group. A public issue however requires a collective approach for its solutions. No one individual or a few individuals are responsible for the appearance of a socially problematic situation and the control of this situation is also beyond the ability of one person or a few persons.

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The concept of social problem was first developed by sociologists. Fuller and Myers in 1941. They defined it as 'those conditions or situations which members of the society regard as a threat to their values'. Elucidating their ideas, they said at other place that it is 'a condition which is defined by a considerable number of persons as a deviation from some social norms which they cherish'.

Reinhardt defined it as 'a situation confronting a group or a section of society which inflicts injurious consequences that can be handled only collectively.' Raab and Selznick (1959) hold that a social problem is 'a problem of human relationship which seriously threatens society or impedes the important aspirations of many people'.

Merton and Nisbet (1961) have defined it as 'a way of behaviour that is regarded by a substantial part of a social order as being in violation of one or more generally accepted or approved norms'. Walsh and Furfey

have defined a social problem as a 'deviation from the social ideal remediable by group effort'.

Horton and Leslie (1970) wrote that a social problem is 'a condition which many people consider undesirable and want to correct. It is a condition affecting a significant number of people in ways considered undesirable, about which it is felt that something can be done through collective measures'.

Social problems are the general factors that affect and damage society. Also known as social issues sometimes. A social problem is normally a term used to describe problems with a particular area or group of people in the world. Social problems often involve problems that affect the real world. It also affects how people react to certain situations. Examples can include:

- Anti social behavior
- Poverty
- Drug abuse
- Prostitution
- Racial discrimination
- Alcohol abuse
- Economic Deprivation
- Political Corruption
- Unemployment
- Sexual abuse
- stress
  - Rape
  - Early pregnancy
  - Female genital mutilation
- Animal abuse
- The shortage of schools
- The lack of infrastructure
- Bullying
- Obesity
- High crime rate

Thus, in social problems two things must be present:

 (1) An objective condition, like crime, poverty, communal tensions and so forth, the presence and magnitude of which can be observed, verified and measured by impartial social observers; and

(2) A subjective definition by some members of the society that the objective condition is a 'problem' and must be acted upon. Here is where values come into play. People start perceiving that some values are being threatened.