

# Social Change/Social Problems

By Dr. Frank W. Elwell

# What I know:

- Society is a system
- Various components fit together
- You can't do one thing

# Social Problems

Social problems are usually not the result of some malfunctioning part, but are the consequence of the sociocultural system as a whole.

# Social Problems

In order to understand social problems we must first understand the sociocultural system that creates these problems.

# Social Problems

There is a reciprocal relationship between social change and social problems:

- Social change often causes social problems.
- These problems, in turn, often cause further social change.

# Social Problems

If the connections between different elements of the social systems are not made clear, real solutions to social problems become impossible.

- For example, you cannot truly reform the educational system in isolation from the family.
- You cannot reform politics without looking at our economic system.

# Social Problems

Social change and social problems are present in every society. While this is true, many perceive a qualitative difference (or a difference in kind) in the social problems we face today.

# Social Problems

Our problems appear qualitatively different, they believe, because society has grown in both technology and in numbers of people. Because of the sheer size and power of our numbers and our technology we now pose a direct threat to human existence.

# Our most severe problem:

Our most severe problems, the evidence suggests, revolve around environmental degradation. This is of two types:

- Depletion of resources
- Pollution

# Other widespread problems:

Related to these environmental problems, there is a dehumanizing trend associated with rise of bureaucracy (*Secondary Organizations*) and the decline of family (*Primary Groups*). This trend devalues human initiative, freedom, autonomy, and human relationships.

# Problems Associated with the Powerless:

Then there are problems that are associated with the poor and powerless in our society. These include:

- Gross inequality in life chances
- Poverty
- Under employment
- Racism
- Classism
- Sexism

# Problems that Plague the Individual :

Finally, there are the problems that appear plague increasing numbers of individuals: Criminal deviance; Sexual deviance; Alcohol and drug abuse; Apathy; Hedonism; Barbarism; Rampant Consumerism; and Alienation

# Individual Problems

Many of these individual problems seem to be approaching epidemic levels in many *Hyperindustrial* nations. The theme of this class is that the social problems we see around us are interrelated.

# Main Theme:

Social change is rooted in the intensification (or growth) of production and population.

# Corollary 1:

This intensification of production processes causes changes in social structure, which change the value system and norms of the sociocultural system.

# Corollary 2, 3 & 4:

- These social changes cause environmental and social problems.
- Massive change causes massive problems.
- We are undergoing massive social change.

# Social Problems

Most social problems are not caused by evil men and women, but are the unintended consequence of technological and demographic changes.

# Social Problems

By understanding the causes of social problems, we can hope to adequately address them. This knowledge is essential if we hope to achieve a more just and humane society.

# Interrelated trends:

- Intensification (growth in population and production).
- Resulting in environmental depletion
- Resulting in further intensification
- Growth of secondary organizations
- Decline of primary groups
- Changing values and norms
- Changing character of man