

COURSE CODE:	GNS 103
COURSE TITLE:	Social Problems and Culture
NUMBER OF UNITS:	3 Units
COURSE DURATION:	Three hours per week

COURSE DETAILS:

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COURSE CONTENT:

The course will explain what social problems are; differentiate between social problems and personal problems; identify the different types of social problems in Nigeria; point out the causes of social problems and suggest possible solutions. The course will also address the sociological perspectives in the explanation of social problems. Furthermore, this course will expose students to the concept of culture, its types, characteristics, functions, elements and other related terms with particular attention on Nigeria.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Being a general study and a compulsory course, students are expected to be formally exposed to social problems and culture, where lessons learnt will shape their behavior and comportment during and after their study at the University of Agriculture Abeokuta (UNAAB). In view of this, students are expected to participate in all the course activities and have a minimum of 75% attendance to be able to sit for the final examination.

READING LIST:

Suggestions for further readings:

- Henry, K. (1978). *Social Problems: Institutional and Interpersonal Perspectives*. London: Scott, Foresman and Company.
- Imhonopi, D. and Urim, U. M. (2011). *Sociology, Culture and Social Problems: Essays and Insight*. Ibadan: ICED.
- Isiugo-Abanihe, U. C., Isamah, A. N. & Adesina, J. O. (2002). *Currents and Perspectives in Sociology*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited.
- Macionis, J. J. (2007). *Social Problems*. New York: Kenyon College.
- Odugbemi, O. O., Adebajo, A., Balogun, K. A. and Adedoyin, S. F. (1999). *Essentials of General Studies*. Ago-Iwoye: Centre for Sandwich Programmes (CESAP).
- Zastrow, Charles. 1996. *Social Problems. Issues and Solutions*. 4th Ed. Chicago: Nelson Hall Publishers.

LECTURE NOTES

1.1 Introduction

The question that needs to be addressed is: what is “social” about social problem? Why is it different from individual problems? In the 21st century Nigerian state, a list of current social problems in the country might include **poverty, prostitution, armed robbery, violence, terrorism, HIV-AIDs, unemployment, drug abuse, tribalism, teenage pregnancy, examination malpractices, corruption, divorce, single parenting and religious fundamentalism.** The reasons these problems have sneaked into the social realm and are considered as social problems is because they have captured public interest, anxiety or concern and have gained a hold on the attention of the Nigerian society at this point in time in our historical development. It is important to say that what is a social problem in one society may not necessarily be a social problem in another society. For instance, what commands public attention in Germany, the USA, UK or China is likely to be different in at least some respects to what is a current social problem in Nigeria. It is also true that if we look back at earlier historical periods in Nigeria, only some of the listed current social problems would be visible then. For example, HIV-AIDs, Terrorism, Cybercrime and Single Parenting, among others, are becoming social problems in Nigeria because they have captured social attention and concern.

1.2. What then is a social problem?

Social problem, like every social concept, has been defined in various ways and arising from different sociological perspectives. However, the following definitions will aid students’ understanding of what social problem is.

- Social problem simply is a problem that poses a threat to the well-being, survival, continuity, health and prosperity of a society.
- Social problems are widespread and intense worries that collectively demand leadership, social attention and intervention.
- A social problem is recognised as a condition that has been “incorporated into a community’s or organisation’s agenda for action.”
- A social problem is a phenomenon that disturbs society, prompts for social action and intervention and that requires government’s response.
- A social problem is a behavior or circumstance that is not regarded as desirable, acceptable and normal within a group or community. It is regarded as deviations from community or societal standards e.g. prostitution, corruption, terrorist acts, armed robbery activities, and others.
- Social problems are “social” because they have social causes and consequences and treating them requires changes in social behavior e.g. HIV-AIDs, prostitution, child abuse and trafficking, etc.
- A social problem is a social condition that a segment of society views as harmful to members of society and in need of remedy.

1.3. Sociological Perspectives on Social Problems

As we hinted earlier, there are sociological perspectives that try to explain what social problem is from their own particular viewpoint. Here we will treat the following:

- Functionalist Perspective
- Conflict Perspective
- Interactionist Perspective

- Feminist Perspective

The Functionalist Perspective

From the functionalist viewpoint, social problems are functional in the society. Simply put, functionalists see social problems as serving a function in society. For instance, crime, as a social problem, can engender solidarity in a group or society to fight it. Besides, crime is the reason we have the Police force, paramilitary and other security agencies who are employed to checkmate the threat crime poses in the society. Without crime and criminals, therefore, these people will lose their jobs.

Conflict Perspective

Conflict theorists view the problems in society as being the uneven outcome of competition among various interest groups for limited resources. This struggle takes many forms, often putting more powerful groups, with little concern for general social interests, against less powerful, but directly affected groups. For instance, political violence is instigated by powerful forces in the society to enforce their selfish and “particularistic” desire on the general interest of members of society. Additionally, in Nigeria, tribalism has become a vehicle for the expression of ethnic dominance in particular areas in society. Many political leaders will seek to promote the welfare and interests of the ethnic group they represent as against the general well-being of the country.

Interactionist Perspective

Focusing on how people “subjectively” define reality, interactionists examine how values, shared expectations, and perceptions apply to social problems in a society. This means that social problems can be interpreted to be so based on the values of a people, their individual perceptions and expectations. For instance, another man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter or martyr. Another good example is that some people in Africa and in some parts of the world still believe that HIV-AIDs does not exist and that it is a mere ploy by the West to deny African people the pleasures they can derive from sexual activities.

Feminist Perspective

Feminists view society as being structured along gender lines. Thus, according to this theory, women and girls are victims of the different social problems that exist in society. For instance, feminists believe that war is caused by men but that women, girls and children bear the negative consequences more than men. Furthermore, the feminist theory canvasses that even concerning the issue of poverty, the society is masculinised and gendered in such a way that women are the ones that suffer most, are jobless, lack education and training and suffer from family violence.

1.4. The Differences Between Social Problems and Personal Problems

S/N	Social Problems	Individual problems
1.	They are social in nature because they affect a group or a great number of people.	They are individual in nature.
2.	They are of social consequences and magnitude	They are of individual consequences and magnitude
3.	Most times, they demand government or community response.	They may not necessarily require government intervention.
4.	Could pose a threat to society’s survival, health and well-being.	May only pose a threat to an individual’s well-being.
5.	Requires change in the groups social behaviour.	Requires change in personal behaviour.

1.5. Types of Social Problems with Particular Attention on Nigeria

The list of social problems in Nigeria is as follows:

- Poverty
- Prostitution
- Armed robbery
- Violence
- Examination malpractices
- Terrorism,
- HIV-AIDs,
- Unemployment,
- Drug abuse,
- Crime,
- Tribalism,
- Teenage pregnancy,
- Examination malpractices,
- Corruption,
- Divorce,
- Single parenting
- Religious fundamentalism
- Rural-Urban Drift
- Illiteracy, and others.

A few of these have been explained in brevity for the understanding of students. They are as follows

- *Poverty* – is the deprivation from the basic necessities of life.

Causes

- Lack of education/illiteracy
- Political corruption
- Lack of national and individual planning
- Mismanagement of resources
- Lack of training and job/financially viable skills, etc.

Solutions

- National and Individual Planning
- Proper management of state and individual resources
- Principled leadership committed to citizens' welfare
- Education and literacy
- Acquisition of job and financially viable skills

- *Prostitution* – the act of engaging in sexual intercourse in exchange for money or offering another person for such purposes.

Causes

- Lack of education/illiteracy
- Child Trafficking
- Poverty
- Unemployment
- Social stigmatization e.g. social outcasts

Solutions

- Education and literacy

- Teaching victims job and economically viable skills
- Creation of employment for victims and women in the society
- Legal Prohibition and punishment of offenders, sponsors and pimps

- *Armed robbery* – this is a criminal act that involves the use of dangerous weapons to dispossess innocent citizens of their legitimately acquired possessions.

Causes

- Lack of education/illiteracy
- Frustration
- Unemployment
- Bad company
- Get-rich-quick syndrome, etc.

Solutions

- Education
- Moral suasion by religious leaders and institutions
- Adequate and uncompromising policing and security frameworks
- Parental responsibility
- Adequate punishment of offenders
- Job creation schemes

- *Violence* – the use of physical force to injure somebody or damage something.

Causes

- Criminal minded individuals
- Social inequality
- Political interests and motivation
- Ethnic considerations
- Resource squeeze

Solutions

- Adequate security of lives and property
- Social equality
- Popular participation and rule
- Welfare of citizens
- Equilibrium in the distribution or allocation of resources

- *Terrorism* – extreme violence or threat of violence that could harm innocent people involving such acts as kidnapping, bombing (suicide bombing inclusive), assassination and plane hijack, carried out for political or other purposes/reasons.

Causes

- Criminal minded individuals
- Political groups and interests
- Religious or political fundamentalism
- Injustice and social inequality
- Marginalisation and political and economic exclusion
- Porous border security

Solutions

- Effective border patrol and security
- Political inclusion and popular rule
- Responsive and responsible leadership

- Welfare of citizens
- Equilibrium in the distribution or allocation of resources
- *HIV-AIDs* – this stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus-Acquired immune deficiency. HIV is a virus disabling immune system which causes or leads to AIDS.

Causes

- Indiscriminate and unprotected sex with a victim or victims
- Use of infected needles, pins, razors or other sharp objects
- Contact with infected blood products
- Transfusion of infected blood

Solutions

- Health education
 - Sexual Abstinence/Use of condoms
 - Sexual faithfulness to one's partner
 - Sterilisation of needles, pins and razors used in the hospital
 - Screening of blood and blood products
- *Examination malpractices* – these are practices that fall below the required standards acceptable for passing examinations and involve the use of external materials, the use of “mercenaries” or impostors and other malpractices that help a student or students to pass their examinations.

Causes

- Laziness of students
- Lack of study
- Parental negative influence
- Fallen social morals and values
- Fallen standards of education
- Corrupt teachers and education officials

Solutions

- Promotion of morality and values in the society and educational institutions
- Meritocracy
- Parental guidance and example
- Hard work and personal responsibility
- Reforms in educational institutions

2.0 Culture

We have always known culture as the way of life of a people. Culture is a universal phenomenon as every society has its own cultural stock to which its members subscribe to, identify with and are identified by. In Nigeria with different tribes and ethnic groups, each of these groups has its own culture with regards to family life, marriage, belief system, religion and custom, among others.

2.1 What is Culture?

The main approaches to the culture definition are general. The essence of a sociological approach to the study of culture definition is, firstly, the disclosure of societal relationships and regularities of the functioning of and development of culture and, secondly, to identify its social functions. Culture in sociology is regarded primarily as a collective and ubiquitous

concept. Culture is a term that has many different meanings. However, the following are various ways culture has been defined.

- Culture is the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterises an institution, organization, group or society.
- Culture has also been defined as an integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behaviour that depends upon the capacity for symbolic thought and social learning.
- Culture is considered to be group-specific behaviour that is acquired, at least in part, from social influences. Here, group is considered to be the species-typical unit, whether it be a troop, lineage, subgroup, or so on.
- Culture is a community's customs, rituals and belief systems developed over time.
- Culture means the whole complex of traditional behavior which has been developed by the human race and is successively learned by each generation.
- Culture can also mean the forms of traditional behavior which are characteristic of a given society, or of a group of societies, or of a certain race, or of certain area, or of a certain period of time.
- Culture is the socially transmitted knowledge and behavior shared by some group of people.

2.2 Types of Culture?

There are two types of culture: material culture and non-material culture.

Material culture is that aspect of culture that we can see and handle e.g. chair, book, biro, table, clothes, bag, drums, etc.

Non-material culture is that aspect of culture that cannot be seen or touched e.g. values, customs, beliefs, folklore, etc.

2.3 Characteristics of Culture

1. Culture is universal.
2. Culture is not inborn; it is shared and learnt.
3. Culture is dynamic.
4. Culture is transferable from one generation to another.
5. Culture is overt and covert. It is divided into material and non-material aspects.
6. Culture is symbolic: It is based on the purposeful creation and usage of symbols; it is exclusive to humans.

2.4 Elements of Culture

1. Customs
2. Language
3. Symbols
4. Folkways
5. Mores
6. Norms
7. Values
8. Laws

2.5 Functions of Culture

1. Culture determines how people behave and live.

2. It differentiates one society from another.
3. It ensures and guarantees the continuity of society.
4. It aids uniformity among certain groups of people in the society.

2.6 Other Concepts in Culture

1. Ethnocentrism – this stands for the situation when a group or individual feels their material or non-material culture is better than others e.g. when a Yoruba man feels his dressing is better than those from other tribes.
2. Sub-culture – is a distinctive culture shared by a group within a larger society e.g. Igbo culture is a sub-culture to the general culture in the Nigerian society.
3. Cultural relativism – this is the uniqueness of the culture of a group which contains peculiar pattern of behaviour which may seem alien to people from other cultural background. For instance, the beating of grooms in the Fulani culture as a test of courage, fearlessness and masculinity falls into this group.
4. Culture shock - this is the psychological and social maladjustment at micro or macro level that is experienced for the first time when people encounter new cultural elements such as new things, new ideas, new concepts, seemingly strange beliefs and practices e.g. mini skirt, terrorism, suicide bombers, exposure of women's breasts in the public, etc. are examples of cultural shock to some people in Nigeria.

3.0 Conclusion

The study of social problems and culture is very important for tertiary students because not only will it inform and expose them to the world around them, it will also help to shape their behaviour and compartment within and outside the university environment. As future leaders, students will be exposed to the various social problems as listed in this course, their causes and probable solutions, and this approach prepares them to develop cognitive and creative skills at problem solving. Also with adequate knowledge of culture, students will be able to appreciate the theoretical aspects of the concept and how to apply these to the practical or material aspects of their particular cultural stock. Students are to read up and practice the following review questions below for further discussions in class.

4.0 Review Questions

1. Explain, what is “social” about social problem?
2. How would you distinguish between social and individual problems?
3. What social problems do you think is prominent in Nigeria? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Write an essay on corruption as a social problem in Nigeria. Identify its causes and possible solutions.
5. Do you agree that examination malpractice is a social problem? Give your reasons.
6. Which of the sociological perspectives do you think has the best interpretation of social problems in Nigeria?
7. Do you think that your culture is better than others? Explain.
8. Write extensively on the cultural life of your ethnic group.
9. Culture is not innate; it is learned. Discuss.
10. Is culture actually necessary? Support your position with practical examples.