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LEVEL: 200

**QUESTION**

* With reference to the functions of social work, in what ways can social workers help to solve social problems in your society?

**ANSWER**

A social problem is an issue within the society that makes it difficult for people to achieve their full potential. Poverty, unemployment, unequal opportunity, racism, and malnutrition are examples of social problems. So are substandard housing, employment discrimination, and child abuse and neglect. Crime and substance abuse are also examples of social problems. Not only do social problems affect many people directly, but they also affect all of us indirectly. The drug-abusing driver becomes the potential traffic accident that doesn’t choose its victims by race, color, or creed but does so randomly. The child of abusive parents all too often becomes the victim or perpetrator of family violence as an adult. Social problems tend to develop when we become neglectful and fail to see that serious problems are developing. Between 1988 and 1993, for example, the United States saw a phenomenal increase in youth violence. In my book about children who commit violent acts (Glicken, 2004b), I documented that children younger than age 12 cause one third of all fires resulting in death and that the average age of children who sexually abuse other children is younger than age 10. According to Osofsky and Osofsky (2001), “The homicide rate among males 15–24 years old in the United States is 10 times higher than in Canada, 15 times higher than in Australia, and 28 times higher than in France or Germany” (p. 287). These are troubling examples of social problems that affect all of us.

Social workers are responsible for helping individuals, families, and groups of people to cope with problems they're facing to improve their patients' lives. One aspect of this is teaching skills and developing mechanisms for patients to rely on to better their lives and experiences.

Social work is a profession oriented towards helping people in need. Social work practice External link includes helping people obtain tangible services, undertaking counseling and psychotherapy with individuals, families or groups, supporting communities to provide or improve social and health services, and participating in the formation or change of social policy.

Believing that social problems can be solved is really a myth, and the myth is sometimes harmful. The problem of crime will never go away, nor will poverty, nor will inequality, nor will Scapegoating, poor schools, racism, or destructive families. There are three reasons for this. First, whenever we try to solve a serious problem, our definition of the problem will change as we learn more about it and are successful in confronting it. For instance, as we have dealt with the problem of child abuse, we have expanded our definition of “child abuse” to include actions that were not previously seen as abusive, such as psychological abuse, or even spanking. Another example could be pollution. Recognizing how gas-powered vehicles polluted the air, we began building “cleaner” engines; yet, even as we were successful in doing that, we turned our attention to eliminating gasoline engines altogether. Over time, we simply come to understand more about the social problem at hand and redefine it. Second, problems are too complex to be solved. All the causes of any given problem are too complicated and interrelated to be changed successfully. Third, problems are embedded in the nature of society. Finally, solving one would mean that society would have to change dramatically. This is too much to expect and probably simpleminded to believe. Dealing with solving social problems is like dealing with the issue of freedom. It is not an either/or thing; it is a constant effort. We are never fully successful in our fight for freedom; there are always new controls that have to be dealt with, new threats to freedom, new understandings of what it means to be free. At any time, we might begin to lose whatever freedom we have, or we might take freedom for granted and think we will always have it—only to find ourselves suddenly without it. Trying to deal with social problems means that as a society we need to understand what is wrong and to work at making it less wrong. If we leave problems alone, they might get better on their own, but they will more likely get worse and might eventually cause even more serious problems or destroy whatever works well in society. Democracy is a commitment to dealing intelligently with social problems, because democracy above all else means that all people are important and to some extent we are responsible for one another. Society’s problems can be confronted and made less serious, and covering them up or running from them can bring about destructive conflict and disorder, one of the most serious social problems of all. If we demand to solve a problem, we will discourage efforts to deal rationally with it. The course is not about solutions; it might provide recommendations about doing something to correct most serious problems related to race and ethnicity, so that fewer people are hurt and a better society can be built. Such approach could be changing government policies or organizing concerned people to exert their collective power to influence corporations or schools.

**REFERENCES**

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