

MODULE 1. SOCIAL POLICY- CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

Module details	Name
Subject Name	Social Work Education
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Module	Module 1. Social policy- concepts and definitions
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Learning Objectives	<p>This module will help the student to learn about:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The key terms and concepts involved in the study of social policy such as: Social Policy, Social Administration, Social Welfare, The Welfare State and Social Expenditure.2. Difference between the various terms used and the range of objectives of social policies.3. The various methods used to meet social needs and the intentions and its outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

The study of social policy focuses on the support for well-being of citizens provided through social action, whereby it looks at the ways in which a society promotes the welfare of individuals and families. It is a multi-disciplinary subject that not only contributes for academic research but also for empirical studies. It draws from a variety of subjects that includes history, sociology, political science and geography.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this module is to facilitate the understanding of the main concepts and definitions used in the study of social policy, which shall help provide a base for further delving into its theoretical perspectives and frameworks. This module will help the reader understand the main concepts involved in social policy and will introduce the reader to the subject, while also introducing a lens that will provide space for critical evaluations at a later stage.

Learning outcomes

At the end of this module, the reader will be equipped to-

- Understand and describe the key terms and concepts involved in the study of social policy such as: Social Policy, Social Administration, Social Welfare, The Welfare State and Social Expenditure.
- Differentiate between the various terms used and develop awareness about the range of objectives that may be contained within social policies.
- Understand the various methods used to meet social needs and the intentions and outcomes it involves.

Historical Background

Earlier known as Social Administration (now changed to Social Policy), this subject has its roots in nineteenth century Britain. The change of name from social administration to the study of social policy was meant to signify a dramatic shift, as it was felt that administration focused too closely on the analysis of how welfare services operated, whereas the word policy would encompass a more broad understanding and holistic analysis of the political and ideological

bases of welfare provisions. The history of social policy draws closely from Fabian Politics, whereby a critical analysis of the existing socio-economic problems in Britain led to the ushering in of social protection through the state. As new research evidence began to be developed, the notion that economic markets could meet the welfare needs of all began to be challenged. It was then realized that state-led policy interventions were necessary to provide the forms of support and protection which markets were not equipped to handle. In its early days the subject of social policy was primarily concerned with what William Beveridge, the chief architect of the British welfare state, had termed the 'five giants'. In modern terms, these giants were **poverty, ill-health, poor housing, insufficient education and unemployment**. However, over the course of the post-war period, social policy analysts and academicians began to identify gaps in the Beveridgean welfare state. Some highlighted the persistence of poverty amidst plenty. Others pointed to 'hidden' giants of sexism and racism that the welfare state had failed to address. These criticisms reflected not only a concern with the weaknesses of government policy but a broadening of the focus of the academic subject of social policy which began to draw much more widely on ideas from sociology and political science and adopted a more critical perspective on the welfare state.

Key concepts and Definitions

Social Policy

The word 'policy' denotes the principles that govern action directed towards any given ends, and can therefore even imply change. Therefore, it can be said that policy is action-oriented.

Social policy, thereby can be seen as a positive instrument of change and is part of a political process. However, it is important to understand that social policies may not always be associated with altruism and may not always be positive, because a social policy that may benefit one group, may actually be detrimental to another group. Hence, a critical lens towards social policy is pertinent.

Some have defined social policy to be the action taken to ensure that every member of the society are given a certain minimum standard of living as well as opportunities to uplift themselves.

Social policy therefore can be said to have three main characteristics-

- a) It aims to be beneficent by directing welfare for its citizens.
- b) It includes economic as well as non-economic objectives.
- c) It involves some level of progressive redistribution in the command over resources from the rich to the poor.

Social Policy can be divided into three models-

The Residual Welfare Model of Social Policy: This is based on the premise that individual's needs can only be fulfilled via two channels; the private market and the family. It is only when both these systems break down, should social welfare be made available, that too temporarily. Some justify this by saying that the true objective of the Welfare State is to teach people how to live without it. The theoretical basis of this model can be traced back to the days of English Poor Law.

The Industrial Achievement-Performance Model of Social Policy: This model places social welfare in a significant position, whereby it acts as supplements to the economy. The basis of it remains that social needs must be met based on merit, work performance and productivity. Its theoretical base lies in theories that looked at incentives, effort and reward along with the formation of class loyalties. It is also known as the 'Handmaiden Model'.

The Institutional Redistributive Model of Social Policy: This model views social welfare as an important institution that is part of the society, providing Universalist services outside of the market on the principle of need. It is partly based on the principle of social equality and is meant to incorporate systems of redistribution in command over resources through time.

Social Expenditure

One of the ways in which the amount of social policy in any society can be measured is to sum up the money spent on it. This forms two different kinds of expenditure-

- *Public Social Expenditure:* Money and resources spent directly by governments. Eg: Cash benefits, pension schemes, unemployment benefits and other such social care services.
- *Private Social Expenditure:* Money spent by non-government organizations on benefits and services for citizens.

Such benefits made available to people to provide support and welfare to people is referred to as '*social protection*'. Examples of social protection schemes include the ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) that tackles malnutrition and health issues faced by children below the age of six years of age and their mothers in India. Similarly, maternity benefits, tax reductions among others also fall under this category.

Social Welfare

Arrangements that are made to tackle social issues, to meet the needs of individuals as well as groups in a society is known as social welfare. While it may refer to increased access to economic benefits in order to aid well-being, it also includes other parameters such as promoting happiness and absence of threat and measures taken to facilitate such forms of welfare. There are various sources that aid the welfare of an individual and have a direct effect on the quality of their lives. These sources include links to the market, to the government as well as the family and community that surrounds people. In the absence of any of these sources, the other steps in.

For instance, families provide for children from the time of their birth, however, for an orphaned child, the community or the state may have to step in by providing assistance or social services. Hence, it can be said that welfare is the product of all the three sources, which is often referred to as the *mixed economy of welfare*.

The State and the Mixed Economy of Welfare

It is a general perception that state is the dominant institution that is responsible for the provision of welfare services, however, today it no longer holds true. This is because welfare services are funded through and often provided by a variety of different means which involves multiple sectors such as the commercial sector, public, not-for-profit as well as informal sectors.

If one examines the role of the state in the provision of welfare services, various arguments can be made. Some say that the state plays a huge role through its various roles in functions and because of this increased role, it is now incapable of undertaking all of these roles and functions adequately. Therefore, making it pertinent to involve various other external organizations in order to facilitate service delivery and administration. However, while others argue that a large

state apparatus proves to be inefficient as it involves bureaucracy and red-tapism, which often reduces the freedom and choice of the people, some also believe that the role of the state in social policy needs to be further expanded so as to reduce inequalities.

While there may be various views, it is certain that the role of the state is definitely complex.

Social Need

This is primarily the reason why social welfare institutions are created, so that social needs may be addressed. However, it is important to break down and understand what is meant by need and delve into the various types of needs in order to understand what constitutes a social need and how it is different from an individual need.

There are various kinds of needs and they may be divided into categories-

Normative need: This kind of need is based on set norms. These norms/standards are often decided by experts. A 'desirable' standard is laid down and is compared with the standard that actually exists – if an individual or group falls short of the desirable standard then they are identified as being in need. A problem that arises with the normative definition of need is that there may be very different and possibly even conflicting standards laid down by different experts. Normative standards may change in time, both as a result of increasing knowledge and avenues as well as the changing values of society.

Comparative need: This form of need arises through comparison with others who are not in need. It is based on the principle that if there are people with similar characteristics not receiving a service, then they are in need. While it may be seen as an attempt to standardize provision, provision may not always correspond with need. The problem arises because the statement that 'X' is in need in comparison with 'Y' does not necessarily imply that 'Y' is still not in need.

Felt need: These needs are the ones that people feel and therefore become obvious. For example, need for care (in various forms) when we feel ill or an accident. Here need is equated with want. It is limited by the perceptions of the individual which would depend upon the awareness of the available services, as well as a reluctance in many situations to confess a loss of independence. On the other hand, it could also be inflated by those who ask for help without 'really needing it'.

Expressed need: This sort of need is one which people claim they have and is outwardly expressed or is revealed. It is basically a felt need turned into action. While one does not demand a service unless they feel a need, it is also common for a felt need not to be expressed through demand.

Once, we have understood the various kinds of needs, it is also important to distinguish it from social needs. A social need arises out of shared conditions of life amongst social groups and communities. These shared conditions refer to problems that maybe collectively faced as well as the system, social structures and processes that are required to rectify them.

Welfare State

The word welfare commonly refers to 'well-being' and it can also refer to services which are made available to people to protect them in various conditions. Here, it is important to note that though welfare is often associated with needs, in order to achieve well-being, people must have the power of choice so that they may choose their goals and ambitions.

Welfare states are those societies in which a large part of the welfare is paid for and provided by the government. It is based on the principles of equality of opportunity, equitable distribution of wealth, and public responsibility for those unable to avail themselves of the minimal provisions for a good life. It involves transfer of funds from the state towards services to benefit individuals and it may be in the form of healthcare, education related schemes, old age pension etc. The welfare state should also be distinguished from other forms of help notably the private sector, which provides welfare through insurance schemes to its subscribers, or occasionally through charitable institutions to others. It should also be distinguished from the voluntary sector, where it is provided by large organizations, often with the help of companies at a formal level, and at an informal and less organized level, help is given due to the charitable notions of individuals.

There are various ideologies that influence welfare policies in different countries. Gosta Esping-Anderson categorized welfare states into three kinds in his book titled '*The three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*'.

Liberal Welfare States: This refers to benefits that cater to low-income state dependents, which usually consists of the working class. In this case, the entitlement rules are very strict in order to

reduce the chances of people opting for welfare instead of work. However, the benefits are quite large. Examples of liberal welfare states include The United States of America, Canada and Australia.

Conservative Welfare States: There is a strong emphasis on upholding status differences and hence, social insurance funds were set up to reward work performance. Since it is rooted in traditions, it often excludes a group/section of people to uphold the traditional structures. For instance, social insurance excludes non-working wives, thereby, encouraging motherhood. Examples of such countries include Germany, France and other European countries.

Social Democratic Welfare states: It is based on the principle of universalism, whereby access to benefits and services are based on citizenship. It is meant to promote equality at the highest standard, whereby the poor are guaranteed the same quality of rights enjoyed by the wealthy. Hence, it incorporates people of all strata being offered similar benefits. Examples include Sweden and Scandinavian countries.

There also exists a large body of work that argues against the existence of welfare states as it is seen to hamper the prospects of economic growth. It is believed that redistribution has a limited ability to uplift the poor but it is the growth of the economy that has the potential to lift people out of poverty. Similarly, it is also argued that the existence of welfare states will drive people to choose welfare dependency over work, thus decreasing the active work force or have a negative impact on their motivation to work.

Social Protection

Social Protection concerns itself with making provisions for the disadvantaged in order to protect them. It may include women, children, old people, and people living with disabilities, historically marginalized groups and many more.

Social protection is commonly understood as “*all public and private initiatives that provide income or consumption transfers to the poor, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalized; with the overall objective of reducing the economic and social vulnerability of poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups*” (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004: i). Social protection is usually provided by the state and it is based on the ‘state-citizen’ contract, in which states and citizens are believed to have rights and

responsibilities towards each other. However, the objectives of social protection might vary whereby, it may be meant for empowering women and girls, improving livelihoods or even used as a response to a sudden event or a shock. While the short term goal of social protection is to act as a temporary safety net to mitigate the shock, to smoothen consumption patterns, the long term goal is to enable people to permanently alleviate themselves from poverty.

The functions of social protection may be divided into four types-

- Protective: which provides relief from deprivation (example: pensions, income benefits)
- Preventive: which averts deprivation (such as insurance schemes)
- Promotive: which is meant to enhance income as well as capabilities (for example, inputs)
- Transformative: meant to promote social equity and inclusion and rights (example: labour laws)

