

Social problems in Algerian society Reading from sociological perspectives

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Abstract:

Drug abuse, divorce, delinquency, crime, and kidnapping are just a few of the major social problems in Algerian society that this study attempts to thoroughly analyze. The study employs many sociological viewpoints to identify and analyze the frequency and consequences of these problems, explore their underlying causes, and assess their wider social, economic, and psychological impacts on people, families, and communities.

The study begins by defining the social problems and examining their impacts. It delves into the psychological effects on individuals, as well as the broader social repercussions, such as the breakdown of social cohesiveness and trust. Furthermore, the study investigates the underlying reasons of these problems considering factors such as poverty, unemployment. The research addresses some examples of social problems that have recently spread in Algerian society and the effects of their proliferation.

key words: Algerian Society; Social Problems; Drug Abuse; Divorce; Delinquency; Factors and causes; Social Cohesion.

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Introduction

Social problems are a ubiquitous and complex feature of human societies, manifesting in various forms that impact individuals and communities differently. These problems encompass a wide range of issues, including poverty, inequality, crime, environmental degradation, and discrimination. Understanding the nature, causes, and implications of social problems is critical for developing effective solutions and policies.

Sociology, as the systematic study of society and social interactions, provides invaluable insights into these pervasive issues. By employing diverse theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches, sociologists examine how social problems are constructed, perceived, and addressed within different cultural and

institutional contexts. The sociological lens allows for a deeper exploration of the underlying structures and processes that contribute to social problems, moving beyond individual-level explanations to consider broader social forces and power dynamics.

Key sociological perspectives, such as functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, and social constructionism, offer distinct yet complementary frameworks for analyzing social problems. Functionalism focuses on the role social problems play in maintaining or disrupting social order and stability. Conflict theory, on the other hand, emphasizes the power struggles and inequalities that underpin social problems, highlighting how they often arise from systemic injustices and exploitation. Symbolic interactionism delves into the micro-level interactions and meanings that shape individuals' experiences and perceptions of social problems. Social constructionism explores how social problems are defined, framed, and understood through collective social processes and discourse.

By integrating these perspectives, sociologists provide a comprehensive understanding of social problems, considering both their objective realities and subjective interpretations. This multidimensional approach not only aids in identifying the root causes and consequences of social problems but also informs the development of interventions and policies aimed at alleviating them. As such, the sociological study of social problems is indispensable for fostering a more equitable, just, and humane society.

1.Objectives and Significance of the Research

1.1Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

To Identify and analyze key social problems such as drug abuse, divorce, delinquency, homicide, theft, and kidnapping, and to analyze their prevalence and impact on Algerian society.

To understand the root causes and the underlying of these social problems, including economic factors, unemployment, cultural shifts, and inadequate social policies.

To assess the effects social, economic, and psychological impacts of these problems on individuals, families, and communities in Algeria.

1.2 Importance of the study:

The importance of this research on social problems in Algerian society lies in several critical areas:

- Understanding Root Causes by Identifies the underlying causes of social problems like unemployment, inequality, and corruption and others problems.

- By providing analysis of social problems such as drug abuse, divorce, delinquency, homicide. it can help to suggest and find of focused solutions, and helps address social tensions and conflicts.
- To publish Social Awareness by raises awareness of issues affecting communities. where reducing the prevalence of social problems improves the overall quality of life for individuals and communities.
- Conducting research on these social problems raises awareness among individuals about the severity and impact of these problems, the research helps to promote social cohesion and stronger familial and community ties, which are essential for a stable and supportive society.

2. Conceptual grounding

The research delineates various concepts and terms, necessitating clarification to ensure reader comprehension

2.1 Social problems:

A social problem is a condition which is defined by a considerable number of persons as a deviation from some social norm which they cherish." This definition offered by Richard C. Fuller and Richard R. Myers some 30 years ago characterizes with considerable economy the kinds of issues sociologists typically study under the rubric of "social problems." As will quickly become apparent below, the "field" of social problems has a very different character from most of the substantive areas of sociology, such as social stratification or interaction processes or the family.

In their efforts to define what social problems as traditionally studied have in common, Fuller and Myers noted that there is always a dual reference in the assertion that something is a social problem: (a) a reference to an objective condition, and (b) a reference to a subjective evaluation which defines that condition as in some way undesirable, destructive, or immoral. They note further that the objective condition is verifiable, in the sense that impartial or trained observers can describe its nature and extent. But in order for a particular objective condition to be reasonably characterized as a social problem, it is necessary that members of the society see it as an undesirable departure from the ordinary course of things. One could relax this latter condition somewhat and broaden the definition to include objective conditions that have or are believed to have consequences which, if understood, would be regarded as deviating from some social norm. These might be called "hidden social problems".(Rainwater, [1974](#))

Social problems are often deeply interconnected. Issues like crime, poverty, inadequate healthcare, violence, and drug abuse rarely occur in isolation. These challenges, along with many others, are frequently the subject of intense debate regarding their causes and who is responsible for addressing them. Some question whether we should be held accountable for the actions of others. However, there is a broad consensus that problems such as unemployment, terrorism, and crime must be tackled by society.

This holds true for all the issues previously mentioned, as most people agree that these conditions should be actively addressed and resolved.

When enough people in a society agree that a condition exists that threatens the quality of their lives and their most cherished values, and they also agree that something should be done to remedy that condition, sociologists say that the society has defined that condition as a social problem. In other words, society collectively agrees that an issue affecting some members is a concern for the entire community, not just those directly impacted. However, there are often debates about the nature, severity, and best solutions for addressing the problem-whether through laws, social programs, or other policies. For action to occur, there must be substantial agreement within society that a problem exists, but this consensus is not always universal. In reality, not all individuals have equal influence in defining social problems and determining solutions. (Kornblum, & Julian, [2012](#))

social problems A generic term applied to the range of conditions and aberrant behaviours which are held to be manifestations of social disorganization and to warrant changing via some means of social engineering. Typically, these problems include many forms of deviant behaviour (such as crime, juvenile delinquency, prostitution, mental illness, drug addiction, suicide), and of social conflict (ethnic tensions, domestic violence, industrial strife, and so forth) (Scott, [2014](#))

A social problem is a condition caused by factors built into the social structure of a particular society that systematically disadvantages or harms a specific segment or a significant number of the society's population.

Social problems are challenges that negatively impact the well-being of individuals or communities, preventing them from thriving within society. These issues are generally acknowledged as requiring attention through social policies, interventions, and reforms. Examples include crime, drug abuse, poverty, unemployment, domestic violence, and discrimination. Often stemming from deeper economic, cultural, political, and environmental factors, social problems demand comprehensive solutions that tackle these root causes while fostering social cohesion and stability. (Crone, [2011](#))

2.2Drugs:

A drug is any substance that induces psychophysiological changes when consumed. Under this definition, a wide array of substances qualifies as drugs, regardless of their legality, medicinal purpose, or societal value, including alcohol, over-the-counter cold remedies, and illicit drugs like cocaine. Early drugs, such as psychedelic mushrooms, were naturally occurring and could be used by humans with minimal effort for their mind-altering effects. As time progressed, humans began to modify these substances for psychoactive purposes-whether for spiritual, recreational, or medical use-leading to increasingly scientific approaches and the eventual development of the modern pharmaceutical industry. (Treviño, [2019](#))

3. *Perspectives on social problems*

Theory A set of assumptions and propositions used for explanation, prediction, and understanding, within the social sciences. It provides a structured framework that helps researchers and policymakers make sense of complex social phenomena by identifying patterns, relationships, and underlying mechanisms. using social theory to analyze social problems to determine how social life is organized, sociologists develop theories and conduct research. A theory is a set of logically related statements that attempt to describe, explain, or predict social events. Theories are useful for explaining relationships between social concepts or phenomena, such as age and unemployment.

They also help us interpret social reality in a distinct way by giving us a framework for organizing our observations. Three major theoretical perspectives have emerged in sociology: the functionalist perspective, which views society as a basically stable and orderly entity; the conflict perspective, which views society as an arena of competition and conflict; and the interactionist perspective, which focuses on the everyday, routine interactions among individuals. The functionalist and conflict perspectives are based on macro level analysis because they focus on social processes occurring at the societal level. The interactionist.

Analyzing social problems through the lens of social theory allows for a deeper understanding of the underlying causes, dynamics, and potential solutions to these issues. Social theories offer frameworks that help explain why social problems occur and how they affect different segments of society.

There are a number of sociological theories of social problems. These range from the 'social pathology' perspective that originated in the 19th century from theories formulated by Francis Galton, Cesare Lombroso and others, to 'conflict theory' and 'critical theory' derived from the sociological insights of Karl Marx, and formulated and elaborated upon by the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research. In between, there are other theories and perspectives, such as the 'disorganisation theory' originated in the Chicago School of Sociology in the 1920s; the 'anomie theory' of Robert Merton; and a range of social deviance theories developed by Howard Becker, John Kitsuse, Aaron Cicourel and others. One of the more recent sociological theories is the 'constructionist theory', which focuses not on social problems per se, but on the processes through which social problems are identified and on the social actors who identify them. A number of constructionist theories were formulated by American sociologists in the 1960s and early 1970s, at a time when issues of social order and social cohesion in the United States became a matter of grave concern. Most theories of social problems at that time were concerned with problems more appropriately defined as problems of social deviance, and for this reason analyses of these phenomena tended to focus on populations whose characteristics departed in various degrees from the 'norm', although what the desired 'norm' was supposed to be is not always clear. The constructionist theorists, however,

shifted the focus from the 'deviant population' and its 'problems' to the people who made claims about certain phenomena as 'problems', and to the activities these people engaged in to make their claims accepted by society.

Although more recent analyses of society from the perspective of the postmodern era, such as the studies by Zygmunt Bauman (1992, 1995), do not focus specifically on social problems as such, they identify sources of social problems in the structural and ideological fragmentation of society and in the resulting lack of a dominant social model or dominant social value to be followed. The great variety of postmodern perspectives on contemporary society presents a new problem in social analysis, as such a variety challenges the possibility of objective perceptions or even the existence of phenomena that may be appropriately referred to as social in nature.

With such a variety of theories and perspectives it is relevant to consider which aspects of society would constitute the field of study that might be legitimately called the sociology of social problems. Much sociological analysis is indeed concerned with aspects of society that are perceived to be in some degree 'problematic' and that are therefore the subject of concern and research interest. However, the problematic nature of certain social phenomena may simply mean either that the nature of a phenomenon is not clearly understood or that it is perceived and explained in such a variety of theories or perspectives that it creates confusion and uncertainty.

A "social problem" is defined as a social condition that is seen as undesirable or threatening by society or certain groups within it. It represents a deviation from societal expectations or norms. According to Merton and Nisbet (1976), the term "social problem" applies to any social condition that is perceived as different from what people believe it should be. The normative aspect—how a condition is judged based on societal values and expectations—is crucial for sociologists studying social problems. This contrasts with phenomena where there is no perceived threat. Because perceptions of social problems are influenced by normative subjectivity, the study of social problems does not constitute a separate, distinct category within sociology but is intertwined with broader sociological inquiry.

Social problems can only be fully understood within the context of the society in which they arise. While some issues, such as violence in public places, may affect the entire population, others, like youth unemployment, may impact only specific individuals or social groups with particular characteristics. Most social problems do not occur in, or are not experienced in, the same frequency or intensity throughout the entire social structure. In Western industrialised societies, such problems as poverty, unemployment, violence, child abuse and so on are social phenomena that occur with greater or lesser frequency among certain population strata identified by social characteristics such as income, education, occupation and other attributes of social class. The nature and frequency of certain social problems also differ among population groupings identified

by such attributes as age, ethnicity, religion, or geographic locality. Therefore, while the causes of social problems experienced by some population groupings rather than others can be explained by societal arrangements in the distribution of societal resources, the people who are experiencing social problems with greater frequency or intensity than others tend to be perceived as 'problem populations'. Such shifts of perceptions, from the social nature of the problem to the population experiencing the problem, distract attention from societal arrangements and effectively confirm and validate the legitimacy of these arrangements, thus validating a given social system and its structure of power.

Social problems are often most prevalent among the "lower" social classes, leading to their perception as issues tied to class. However, this perception tends to obscure the underlying class structure of society, as these problems are often attributed to the personal traits, whether real or assumed, of the affected individuals, rather than being seen as rooted in broader societal structures. This focus isn't unexpected, as much of the research on social problems takes a narrow view, concentrating on the groups where these issues are most intense and frequent—essentially a "captive audience" for social researchers—while overlooking the structural aspects of these problems. (Jamrozik, Nocella, [2000](#))

Everyone has their own views on the causes of social problems and what should be done to address them. Some might argue that a homeless single mother is responsible for her situation, perhaps due to moral failings, mental instability, lack of intelligence, or a lack of motivation to work and rise out of poverty. These are common explanations for individual misfortune. At worst, they place the blame squarely on the individual; at best, they attribute the person's troubles to characteristics beyond their control. While one or more of these explanations might be true for a specific individual, they fail to account for why the same challenges affect entire groups of people.

Why do women become single mothers, and why do single mothers often become homeless as well? Why are women who are born into poor and minority families more likely to become single mothers, and possibly heads of homeless families, than are women who are born into middle-class families of any racial or ethnic group? And does the experience of being homeless inflict hardships on women and children that make it more difficult for them to perform productive roles in society and attain the good life?

These are sociological questions that delve into why conditions like homelessness exist. They examine how such conditions are distributed within society and whether certain groups are more vulnerable than others. These questions focus on the social aspects of a problem rather than the individual ones. Understanding these social dimensions is crucial, not just from an academic or social-scientific perspective, but also because they are essential for developing effective strategies to eliminate social problems. It's important to note that research on these issues extends beyond sociology; other social-scientific approaches also contribute to the study of social problems.

Contemporary sociology is based on three foundational perspectives, or sets of ideas, that provide theories about how societies function and why they change. While these perspectives—functionalism, conflict theory, and interactionism—are not the only sociological approaches to understanding social problems, they offer powerful tools for analyzing them. Each perspective leads to various useful and unique approaches to studying social issues. In the following sections, we will explore several of these approaches, with a particular focus on how they attempt to explain one of society's most pressing issues: criminal deviance. (Kornblum, & Julian, [2012](#))

3.1 The Functionalist Perspective

The functionalist perspective, as its name suggests, examines the functions or consequences of the structure of society. Functionalists use a macro perspective, focusing on how society creates and maintains social order. Social problems are not analyzed in terms of how "bad" they are for society. Rather, a functionalist asks, how does the social problem emerge from society? Does the social problem serve a function? (Guerrero, [2016](#))

From the day we are born until the day we die, all of us hold a position—a status—in a variety of groups and organizations. In a hospital, for example, the patient, the nurse, the doctor, and the orderly are all members of a social group concerned with healthcare.

Each of these individuals has a status that requires the performance of a certain set of behaviors, known as a role. Taken together, the statuses and roles of the members of this medical team and other teams in hospitals throughout the country make up the social institution known as the healthcare system. An institution is a more or less stable structure of statuses and roles devoted to meeting the basic needs of people in a society. The healthcare system is an institution; hospitals, insurance companies, and private medical practices are examples of organizations within this institution.

The functionalist perspective looks at the way major social institutions like the family, the military, the healthcare system, and the police and courts actually operate.

According to this perspective, the role behavior associated with any given status has evolved as a means of allowing a particular social institution to fulfill its function in society. Thus, the nurse's role requires specific knowledge and behaviors that involve treatment of the patient's immediate needs and administration of care according to the doctor's orders. The patient, in turn, is expected to cooperate in the administration of the treatment. When all members of the group perform their roles correctly, the group is said to be functioning well.

In a well-functioning group, there is general agreement about how roles are to be performed by each member. These expectations are reinforced by the society's basic values, from which are derived rules about how people should and should not behave toward each other in different situations. The Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule, the

Bill of Rights, and the teachings of all of the world's religions are examples of sets of rules that specify how people should behave in different social roles.

If society consists of groups where individuals understand their roles and follow shared values, why do social problems like crime and warfare persist, and why is it often so challenging to make social organizations function smoothly? From the functionalist perspective, the primary reason social problems arise is that societies are constantly evolving and must adapt to new conditions. When societies fail to adapt effectively, social problems emerge as a result. (Kornblum, & Julian, [2012](#))

From the functionalist perspective, social problems emerge when social institutions fail to perform their intended functions or when dysfunctions occur. Dysfunctions are the negative consequences of an activity or social process that hinder a society's ability to adapt or adjust. Functionalists believe that dysfunctions within social institutions lead to social disorganization across society. Social disorganization refers to the conditions that weaken traditional social institutions' ability to regulate human behavior.

In the early twentieth century, sociologists Robert E. Park (1863–1944) and Ernest W. Burgess (1886–1966) developed social disorganization theory to explain why certain areas of Chicago exhibited higher rates of social deviance—defined as patterns of rule violation—compared to other areas. Social disorganization disrupts the traditional values and norms that usually serve as mechanisms of social control, which, under normal circumstances, prevent individuals from engaging in nonconforming behavior. In this context, values are understood as collective ideas about what is considered right or wrong, good or bad, and desirable or undesirable within a specific society. (Kendall, [2013](#))

Wars, colonial conquest, disease and famine, population growth, and advancements in production, communication, and healthcare—all these significant social forces have the power to transform societies and alter the roles expected of their members. As social groups attempt to adjust to these new circumstances, individuals may experience a sense of being unmoored, unsure of how to behave, or conflicted about their roles as parents, workers, or citizens. They might question the values they were taught as children and struggle with what to pass on to their own offspring. This state of social disequilibrium can lead to a rise in social problems, such as crime and mental illness, as people seek their own, often antisocial, solutions to the challenges they encounter.

3.2 *Conflict Perspective*

Like functionalism, conflict theories focus on the macro level of society, examining its structures and institutions. While functionalists believe that society is unified by shared norms, values, and a common morality, those who adopt a conflict perspective argue that society is held together by power and coercion, primarily benefiting those in positions of power. From this viewpoint, social problems arise from the ongoing conflicts between

various groups within society—whether based on social class, gender, race, or ethnicity—with the dominant groups typically emerging victorious.

There are multiple levels of domination; as Patricia Hill Collins (1990) describes, domination "operates not only by structuring power from the top down but by simultaneously annexing the power as energy of those on the bottom for its own ends".

As a result, this perspective offers no easy solutions to social problems. The system could be completely overhauled, but that is unlikely to happen. We could reform parts of the structure, but those in power would retain their control. The biggest social problem from this perspective is the system itself and the inequality it perpetuates.

Karl Marx was the first to propose that conflict arises from the economic foundation of capitalism, which he believed shaped all other social structures and relations. Marx concentrated on class conflict, particularly between the proletariat (workers) and the bourgeoisie (owners). Unlike Emile Durkheim, who saw society as creating a civilized individual, Marx argued that capitalism led to alienation—where individuals become estranged from their true selves. This alienation manifests on several levels: from their work, the products of their labor, other workers, and ultimately, their own human potential.

For instance, a salesperson immersed in repetitive transactions might neglect meaningful interactions with colleagues and customers, or fail to appreciate the products she sells. This mindless, monotonous work prevents her from reaching her full human potential. Marx believed that workers needed to develop class consciousness—an awareness of their social position and exploitation—to unite and overthrow capitalism. This would pave the way for a more egalitarian socialist system, eventually evolving into a communist society. (Guerrero, [2016](#))

Although sociology from its inception has been deeply involved in describing and analyzing social problems, the approach of sociologists to the subject has shifted markedly from time to time. Earl Rubington and Martin S. Weinberg have analyzed the development of five different sociological perspectives: (1) social pathology, (2) social disorganization, (3) value conflict, (4) deviant behavior, and (5) labelling.

Early sociologists, before World War I, often viewed social problems as deviations from a state of "normality" within society. They saw society as akin to an organism, where one could discuss its health and identify specific pathological conditions. This perspective was influenced by the prevailing belief in the significance of biological factors in social behavior, such as the impact of inheritance on mental capabilities or the influence of climate on the success or decline of nations. Social pathologists of that era tended to attribute social problems to individuals with perceived defects—those considered feeble-minded, possessing criminal tendencies, or succumbing to immoral

impulses. These individuals were seen as causing problems due to their inherent weaknesses or because they exploited the vulnerabilities of others.

In more recent times, sociologists who find the social pathology perspective meaningful have spoken of society and its institutions as "sick." The causes of that sickness are generally located in the predatory character of particular classes or institutions within society. In this form, the social pathology perspective shades imperceptively into the two approaches that succeeded it in the development of sociology-social disorganization and value conflict. The emphasis on social pathology is perhaps best thought of as a primitive first approximation of a social scientific view of widely recognized problems in society. As the theoretical tools available to sociologists for analyzing social life have improved, this naive approach has been supplanted.

The second sociological perspective After World War I, the concept of social disorganization gained prominence in the study of social problems. Sociologists, particularly from the University of Chicago, focused on the dynamics of social life in American cities. They observed that many urban social issues stemmed from rapid social changes, including urbanization—both from international migration and internal rural-to-urban movement—and technological advancements related to industrialization, such as the advent of the automobile.

The "Chicago School" sociologists, who investigated social pathologies like crime, truancy, suicide, and tuberculosis, found an intriguing pattern: despite changes in the immigrant populations over decades, certain neighborhoods consistently exhibited high rates of these problems. They concluded that these neighborhoods were inherently disorganized, disrupting the lives of their residents. This social disorganization led to a breakdown in social rules and eroded individuals' ability to rely on a stable set of expectations to guide their behavior.

Just as the social pathology perspective presupposes a state of social normalcy, the social disorganization perspective assumes the existence of social organization. This latter perspective gained prominence in sociology between the two world wars as sociologists became increasingly convinced that they were developing a scientific understanding of how societies function. Central to the theory of social organization is the role of rules—guidelines for societal functioning. According to this view, social disorganization is an ever-present risk. When rules fail, are unclear, or are contradictory, the group struggles to maintain its activities and cohesion, leading to social problems.

Much of the empirical research done during this period fit neatly into a framework emphasizing the central role of normlessness and cultural conflict. However, as time went on, more and more sociologists began to observe that many situations involving social problems did not fit under the rubric of social disorganization. In fact, much socially problematic behavior seemed highly organized and tightly integrated into the ongoing activity of society. Observations of this kind considerably strengthened a

growing skepticism about the proposition that "bad things" in society or in individuals were producing the bad effects we call social problems.

This skeptical impulse eventually produced a **third approach**, usually called the value conflict perspective. It is this perspective on which we have drawn for our own general definition of social problems, accepting the position originally enunciated by Fuller and Myers who first brought into sharp focus the view that central to all such problems are "conflicts in the value scheme of the culture." In this view, problems occur not because things fall apart socially but because different groups in society have different interests, these interests conflict, and these conflicts precipitate conditions that at least some people regard as undesirable. (Rainwater, [1974](#))

Fuller and Myers identify three categories of social problems. The first category includes physical problems, which are universally recognized as threats to welfare, such as natural disasters (earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, and droughts). While these issues are not caused by value conflicts, the process of responding to them often involves conflicting interests and leads to disagreements about the best ways to address them.

The second type of social problem identified by Fuller and Myers is the ameliorative problem. In these cases, there is broad agreement that a particular condition is undesirable, but there is no consensus on how to improve the situation. Examples of ameliorative problems include crime, physical and mental health issues, and accidents. Unlike physical problems, these issues are deeply social, as both the conditions themselves and the responses to them involve potential conflicts of interest and values.

A third kind of problem they call the moral problem. Here there is no agreement that the problematic condition itself is undesirable. Some groups in society believe it is a problem and others argue with equal vehemence that it is not, that it is in some way a "normal" social situation. Many of the conditions and processes we have included under the rubric of problems of inequality are of this type, in that there is not universal agreement that they are in fact problematic.

This perspective shares a kinship with the social disorganization approach, as both emphasize the lack of uniformity in social values as a central factor in social problems. While earlier views highlighted how urbanization and industrialization intensified social issues, this idea is less pronounced here but still relevant. Willard Waller's observation that "social problems in the modern sense did not exist when every primary group cared for its own helpless and unfortunate" reflects this connection. He noted that social problems, as we understand them today, are a consequence of secondary group societies, where primary groups are no longer willing or able to support their members." (Rainwater, [2009](#))

In summary, the perception of social problems in these five perspectives has differed dramatically. For the social pathologist, the problem is the defective character of

individuals in society. For the sociologist who focuses on social disorganization, the problem is the ineffectiveness of rules for organizing constructive social processes. For the value conflict theorist, the problem can be understood only as a result either of conflicts among groups in society or of conflicting interests held by a single individual. For the deviance theorist, the problem lies in the instigations to rule violation created by the unequal distribution of opportunities for self-realization in society. For the labelling theorist, the problem is very much in the eye of the beholder, and in the process by which society separates its members into the moral and the immoral, the conforming and the deviant.

The theorists who developed these different perspectives have tended to emphasize (and perhaps to exaggerate) their incompatibility. To some extent the differences are more a result of preferred subject matter than anything else. Many modern investigators have combined at least the last three perspectives those of anomie theory, labelling theory, and value conflict-in ways that yield a much more richly detailed and subtle picture of socially problematic situations and behavior than any investigator working only within one tradition is likely to be able to do.

3.3 *The Value Conflict Perspective*

Value conflict theorists view social problems as conditions that clash with the core values of a group. According to this perspective, value conflicts are a regular feature of family life, communities, and society at large, where individuals often hold a range of differing values. While people may have some shared core values, they do not uniformly share all values or a common culture. (Kendall, [2013](#))

For conflict theorists, social problems emerge when a group perceives its interests as unmet or feels it is not getting a fair share of resources, leading them to address what they see as an unfair disadvantage. Unlike functionalists, who might view divorce as a disruption to societal norms, conflict theorists might see it as a normal response to marital conflict under certain conditions. However, this perspective does not dismiss the negative effects of divorce or deny that it can be a social problem. Instead, divorce is considered a social problem when powerful groups perceive their interests as being jeopardized by its prevalence in society. (Sullivan, [2016](#))

3.4 *Symbolic Interactionist Perspective*

Both the structural-functionalist and the conflict perspectives are concerned with how broad aspects of society, such as institutions and large social groups, influence the social world. This level of sociological analysis is called macrosociology: It looks at the big picture of society and suggests how social problems are affected at the institutional level.

Microsociology focuses on the social-psychological dynamics of individuals interacting within small groups. Symbolic interactionism, a key perspective in microsociology, draws heavily from the work of early sociologists and philosophers like Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Charles Horton Cooley, G. H. Mead, W. I. Thomas, Erving

Goffman, and Howard Becker. This perspective highlights that human behavior is shaped by the definitions and meanings that are developed and sustained through interactions with others.

Sociologist W. I. Thomas (1931/1966) emphasized the importance of definitions and meanings in social behavior and its consequences. He suggested that humans respond to their definition of a situation rather than to the objective situation itself. Hence, Thomas noted that situations that we define as real become real in their consequences.

Symbolic interactionism also suggests that social interaction shapes our identity or sense of self. We develop our self-concept by observing how others interact with us and label us. By observing how others view us, we see a reflection of ourselves that Cooley calls the “looking-glass self”.

Symbolic Interactionist Theories of Social Problems

A basic premise of symbolic interactionist theories of social problems is that a condition must be defined or recognized as a social problem for it to be a social problem. Three symbolic interactionist theories of social problems are based on this general premise.

Herbert Blumer (1971) proposed that social problems evolve through several stages. Initially, a social problem enters the stage of societal recognition, where it is identified and defined, such as the issue of drunk driving. Next comes social legitimation, during which the problem gains broader acknowledgment from the community, including media, educational institutions, and religious organizations. As awareness of the dangers associated with drunk driving grew, so did its recognition as a serious social issue. The third stage is mobilization for action, where individuals and groups, like Mothers Against Drunk Driving, organize to address the problem. This mobilization leads to the creation and enforcement of strategies to combat the issue, such as implementing highway checkpoints, lowering legal blood-alcohol limits, and introducing stricter regulations for impaired driving.

Blumer's framework for understanding the development of social problems is useful for tracing how these issues evolve. For instance, although sexual harassment and date rape were present throughout the 20th century, they did not gain recognition as significant social problems until the 1970s. Social legitimation occurred when institutions such as high schools, colleges, churches, employers, and the media acknowledged these issues. As awareness grew, organized groups took action to address the problems. They successfully lobbied for laws against sexual harassment and for the enforcement of penalties for violators. Additionally, they initiated educational seminars on date rape for students and established support services for victims.

Some critics of the symbolic interactionist perspective argue that social problems exist independently of their recognition. For example, individuals who experienced date rape in the 1960s were victims of a serious issue even though date rape was not acknowledged as a social problem at that time. According to this critique, the existence of a social problem is not contingent on its recognition but is defined by the actual experiences and impacts on individuals. (Mooney, Knox,& Schacht, [2011](#))

Fig 1. An explanatory model for social problems according to social theories

Comparison of Theoretical Perspectives

	STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM	CONFLICT THEORY	SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM
Representative theorists	Emile Durkheim Talcott Parsons Robert Merton	Karl Marx Ralf Dahrendorf	George H. Mead Charles Cooley Erving Goffman
Society	Society is a set of interrelated parts; cultural consensus exists and leads to social order; natural state of society—balance and harmony.	Society is marked by power struggles over scarce resources; inequities result in conflict; social change is inevitable; natural state of society—imbalance.	Society is a network of interlocking roles; social order is constructed through interaction as individuals, through shared meaning, make sense out of their social world.
Individuals	Individuals are socialized by society's institutions; socialization is the process by which social control is exerted; people need society and its institutions.	People are inherently good but are corrupted by society and its economic structure; institutions are controlled by groups with power; "order" is part of the illusion.	Humans are interpretive and interactive; they are constantly changing as their "social beings" emerge and are molded by changing circumstances.
Cause of social problems?	Rapid social change; social disorganization that disrupts the harmony and balance; inadequate socialization and/or weak institutions.	Inequality; the dominance of groups of people over other groups of people; oppression and exploitation; competition between groups.	Different interpretations of roles; labeling of individuals, groups, or behaviors as deviant; definition of an objective condition as a social problem.
Social policy/solutions	Repair weak institutions; assure proper socialization; cultivate a strong collective sense of right and wrong.	Minimize competition; create an equitable system for the distribution of resources.	Reduce impact of labeling and associated stigmatization; alter definitions of what is defined as a social problem.

(Mooney, Knox,& Schacht, [2011](#),p16)

Theories in sociology provide us with different perspectives with which to view our social world. A perspective is simply a way of looking at the world. A theory is a set of interrelated propositions or principles designed to answer a question or explain a particular phenomenon; it provides us with a perspective. Sociological theories help us to explain and predict the social world in which we live. Sociology includes three major theoretical perspectives: the structural functionalist perspective, the conflict perspective, and the symbolic interactionist perspective. Each perspective offers a variety of explanations about the causes of and possible solutions to social problems.

4. Type of social problems

Fuller and Myers categorize social problems into three types. The first type is physical problems, which are universally recognized as threats to welfare, such as natural disasters like earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, and droughts. These issues are not caused

by value conflicts but involve conflicting interests in how to address them. Disagreements often emerge about the best strategies for coping with these challenges.

A second kind of social problem they call the ameliorative problem. Here there is general consensus that an objective condition is undesirable, but people "are unable to agree on programs for the amelioration of the condition." Examples include crime, physical and mental disease, accidents, etc. These problems, unlike physical problems, are fully social in that both the objective condition and our responses to it are full of potentials for interest or value conflict.

Sociologists examine the gap between social standards and reality for several reasons. Firstly, this approach highlights society's shortcomings by focusing on issues such as crime, mental illness, school dropout rates, and poverty. Sociologists provide insights into how individuals, based on their social position (e.g., social class, occupation, age, race, and role) and environment (e.g., region, community size, neighborhood type), face varying pressures that may lead to deviant behavior. A key assumption in this inquiry is that those who violate norms are often symptoms of underlying social problems rather than the problems themselves. In other words, individuals who engage in deviant behavior are frequently victims of systemic issues rather than solely responsible for their actions. Understanding the situations affecting these individuals, such as the obstacles faced by minority groups, helps explain why certain groups are more likely to engage in deviant behavior.

Another reason for focusing on norm violation is that deviance is culturally defined and socially labeled. Sociologists are deeply interested in the processes by which certain actions and individuals are labeled as deviant while others are considered normal. Social problems are inherently relative because they are defined by public perception. For instance, while people on welfare are often viewed as a social problem, slumlords may not be seen in the same light. Similarly, individuals who hear voices are labeled schizophrenic, while those who claim to speak to God might be considered sane. Murder is labeled a social problem, yet killing during wartime is often celebrated with medals. Prostitutes face legal consequences, while their clients do not. Illegal immigrants are viewed as a problem, but their employers are not.

The key insight is that "deviance is not an inherent property of certain behaviors; it is a label applied by those who witness the behavior." Society, particularly its most powerful members, decides what constitutes a social problem. Powerful individuals and groups play a significant role in assigning these negative labels. Since there is no absolute standard for deviance, our definitions are influenced by the laws, which are shaped by those in power. Therefore, understanding deviance involves examining not only societal norms and values but also the interests and influence of powerful groups.

Social Conditions

The second type of social problem addressed here involves conditions that inflict psychological and material suffering on specific groups within the United States. This perspective shifts the focus from individuals who violate norms to examining how societal structures operate and who benefits or suffers under the current system. It asks questions about the inherent biases in societal arrangements: How are societal rewards distributed? Do certain groups face disadvantages due to factors such as school organization, jury selection, seniority systems in industries, or healthcare delivery?

These inquiries highlight how societal institutions can create social problems by failing to meet basic human needs. For example, if we accept Abraham Maslow's framework, which posits that all individuals have fundamental needs such as shelter, security, group support, esteem, and self-actualization, then the frustration caused by unmet needs can lead individuals to act out in ways that are perceived as deviant. This might manifest as withdrawal, substance abuse, or involvement in crime and violence. Such behavior is often condemned as "bad," but it may be a consequence of living in a society that fails to address or meet these basic needs effectively. (Eitzen & Zinn, [2012](#))

In summary, social problems are seen as (1) conditions created by society that lead to psychological and material suffering for certain segments of the population and (2) actions and situations that violate societal norms and values. Understanding these issues hinges on examining the distribution of power within society. The powerless are often unable to meet their basic needs—such as sustenance, security, self-esteem, and productivity—due to the dominance of the powerful. Conversely, those in power benefit from controlling the mechanisms and institutions that shape public perceptions. Through influencing public policy, reinforcing customs, and shaping laws and their enforcement, powerful groups determine who is labeled as a problem (or deviant) and who needs to be controlled.

Thus, the focus should be on societal structures, particularly how power is distributed, rather than solely on individuals who are labeled as problematic. Deviant individuals are symptoms of a larger societal failure to address their needs. The roots of issues such as crime, poverty, drug addiction, and racism lie in the laws, customs, quality of life, distribution of wealth and power, and practices of institutions like schools, governments, and corporations. To resolve social problems, it is essential to restructure society itself, rather than merely addressing individual deviance.

5. Examples of social problems in Algerian society

Algerian society, with its vibrant culture and historical significance, confronts numerous social problems that hinder its growth and stability. Despite its wealth of natural resources and potential for economic prosperity, the country struggles with pervasive **unemployment**, particularly among its youth.

A major topic of social research during periods of mass unemployment in the twentieth century, unemployment arose with the growth of dependency on waged employment. It involves exclusion from paid employment but definitions and measurement remain contentious. The International Labour Organization definition, widely adopted for comparative studies of countries and over time, includes people currently available for work who actively looked for work during the previous month. This excludes the discouraged.

unemployed, those not currently seeking work but who might take a job if offered. However, it includes some excluded from official counts because of ineligibility for state benefits, as eligibility is usually more restricted (and shifts with policy changes). (Turner, [2006](#))

Also known as The state of being unable to sell one's labour-power in the labour market despite being willing to do so. (Scott, [2014](#))

In practice, unemployment is difficult to identify and measure, because willingness to be employed is partly affected by the extent and nature of demand for one's services. As a result, official definitions imposed by government employment agencies are affected by political theories about the causes of being unwilling or unable to be employed, on one hand; and, on the other, by the rules allowing registration as out of work and eligible for such welfare benefits as may be on offer. (Scott, & Marshall, [2009](#))

High unemployment rates, particularly among the youth, contribute to feelings of disenfranchisement and hopelessness, driving some towards criminal activities as a means of survival or rebellion against the system. The lack of job opportunities not only impacts their economic well-being but also undermines their sense of purpose and belonging in society. This sense of exclusion can lead to frustration and anger, which may manifest in anti-social behaviors and criminal activities. Without meaningful employment, young people may struggle to envision a positive future for themselves, making them more susceptible to engaging in theft, drug trafficking, or gang involvement as alternative ways to gain income and social standing. Addressing youth unemployment through targeted job creation programs, vocational training, and education initiatives is crucial in mitigating these risks and fostering a more inclusive and stable society.

Drugs as a Social Problem

Drugs themselves are not inherently good or bad; their effects are shaped by the social contexts in which they are used and the purposes for which they are employed. For example, opiate drugs can be crucial in alleviating severe pain and reducing suffering after medical procedures. However, when used recreationally, these substances can lead to dependence, which may result in a cycle of problematic behavior, additional health issues, and even death from overdose. The integration of drugs into our lives, therefore, plays a critical role in determining their impact on individuals and society..

The proliferation of drug use is another critical concern, with serious implications for public health and social stability. The increasing availability of drugs and the lack of effective preventive and rehabilitative programs have resulted in higher addiction rates, which in turn fuel other criminal behaviors and place additional strain on healthcare systems. This issue is often compounded by the absence of adequate support structures for affected individuals and their families, leading to cycles of addiction and crime.

Delinquency the term "misdeed," which literally means a violation of duty or wrongdoing, is sometimes used interchangeably with crime or deviance. However, it more accurately describes a type of rule-breaking that falls between minor offenses and serious crimes, involving violations of minor laws or significant social norms. Often referred to as juvenile delinquency, this type of misdeed is prevalent among teenagers and young men, many of whom abandon such behavior as they assume adult responsibilities. Early studies, particularly those from the Chicago School, linked juvenile delinquency to factors like urban gang structures, delinquent subcultures, and limited legitimate opportunities for working-class youth. Critical criminologists have occasionally romanticized delinquency, viewing it as a form of resistance against oppressive dominant values. (Bruce, & Yearley, [2006](#))

Children and adolescents below a certain age (usually eighteen) who commit illegal or antisocial acts usually are not charged with criminal conduct but are adjudicated as delinquent by a juvenile court judge. However, when older juveniles are charged with violent crimes, it is becoming increasingly common to certify or waive them to adult court. (Kendall, [2013](#))

Crime is defined as behavior that contravenes criminal law and is subject to penalties such as fines, imprisonment, or other punitive measures. Every crime comprises two essential elements: the *actus reus*, which is the actual conduct or action, and *mens rea*, which refers to the criminal intent or "guilty mind" behind the action. The intent can vary from deliberate and intentional conduct to negligent or reckless behavior. Criminal law is categorized into two primary classes: misdemeanors, which are less severe offenses typically punishable by less than a year in jail or fines, and felonies, which are more serious crimes carrying more severe penalties, including longer prison terms. (Kendall, [2013](#))

Crime and delinquency are intricate phenomena, often difficult to fully grasp. The fear and complexity surrounding these issues can lead to oversimplified explanations. Historically, some have sought biological explanations for criminal behavior, suggesting that certain individuals might be inherently less capable of conforming to societal norms due to their physical or genetic makeup. However, extensive research has shown that biology plays only a minor role in criminal behavior. Contemporary criminologists generally agree that psychological and social factors are far more significant in understanding and addressing crime and delinquency. (Sullivan, [2016](#))

Crime is typically defined as behavior deemed illegal by legislative bodies and governing agencies. However, this definition is not as clear-cut as it might seem. For instance, certain actions, like the recreational use of marijuana, are illegal in some states but legal in others. Additionally, some behaviors are considered illegal only under specific circumstances, such as killing someone in self-defense, and these circumstances can vary from one state to another. Moreover, the legal status of various behaviors can change significantly over time, reflecting shifts in societal attitudes and legal standards.. (Treviño, [2019](#))

Technically, crime is any violation of the criminal law. Nevertheless, we begin with a discussion of the kinds of acts embodied in the criminal law -acts that are defined as threatening to the state or to citizens whom the state is obligated to protect. (Lauer, & Lauer, [2014](#))

The term “crime” is a complex concept that has been the focus of criminological and juridical research for many centuries. Crime is a concept whose definition varies across time and place. The definition is dependent upon perspective, viewpoint, and perception. Within criminology, there exist several competing theoretical foundations, all of which construct different and distinctive definitions of crime.

The FBI defines them as follows (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2002): (1) Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter are willful killing of a person. Not included are deaths by negligence, suicide, accident, and justifiable homicide. (2) Aggravated assault, “an unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe bodily injury,” usually involves a weapon. (3) Forcible rape is defined as actual or attempted sexual intercourse “through the use of force or the threat of force.” (4) Robbery is the use of force or threat of force to take something of value from a person. (5) Burglary-by definition the “unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft”-does not necessarily mean force was used to gain entry (6) Larceny-theft is the “unlawful taking or stealing of property or articles without the use of force, violence, or fraud.” It includes shoplifting, picking pockets, purse snatching, and the like. (7) Motor vehicle theft includes both actual and attempted theft of any motor vehicle. (8) Finally, arson is any “willful or malicious burning or attempt to burn, with or without intent to defraud, a dwelling house, public building, motor vehicle or aircraft, personal property of another, etc (Lauer, & Lauer, [2014](#))

In examining why certain behaviors are deemed illegal, two primary perspectives provide insight: 1/Normative Consensus Perspective: This view posits that behaviors are classified as illegal because there is a widespread agreement among members of society that these behaviors are morally unacceptable. According to this perspective, crimes like murder, rape, and theft are universally condemned, and even in the absence of formal legal prohibitions, society would likely still regulate and penalize such actions through informal social norms. 2/Normative Conflict Perspective: This perspective suggests that

laws are created and enforced primarily to benefit those in power and to maintain their dominance in society. From this viewpoint, the establishment of laws reflects the interests of powerful groups rather than a collective moral consensus. For instance, consider the "War on Drugs"—this policy can be seen as a means for powerful entities to assert control, target marginalized communities, and perpetuate social hierarchies under the guise of addressing drug-related issues..

Another significant issue spreading in Algerian society is the rise of cybercrime. As internet accessibility and digital literacy expand, so too does the prevalence of online criminal activities. Cybercrime encompasses a wide range of offenses, including identity theft, financial fraud, hacking, and the dissemination of malicious software. These activities pose substantial threats to individuals, businesses, and national security.

Cybercrime involves using computers to commit illegal activities, impacting individuals, organizations, and even entire nations. Nations can face attacks from terrorist groups that breach government records or sabotage financial and military systems. Businesses and corporations are also targets, with hackers stealing valuable information to gain a competitive edge. For instance, one company experienced an almost instantaneous loss of years' worth of research and development, valued at \$1 billion. (Lauer, & Lauer, [2014](#))

The internet's anonymity and extensive reach make it a tempting platform for criminals. Individuals risk having their personal information stolen and exploited, resulting in financial loss and emotional turmoil. Businesses are increasingly vulnerable to cyber-attacks that can breach sensitive data, disrupt operations, and inflict substantial financial damage. Additionally, critical infrastructure systems are at risk of cyber-attacks, which can have significant consequences for national security and public safety.

A major challenge in fighting cybercrime is that technological advancements evolve so quickly that law enforcement and regulatory bodies struggle to keep pace. To tackle and reduce cyber threats effectively, there is an urgent need for strong cybersecurity protocols, well-defined legal frameworks, and international collaboration. Public awareness campaigns and education on online safety are crucial for enabling individuals to protect themselves from cybercrime. By focusing on these areas, Algeria can enhance the security of its digital environment and provide a safer space for its citizens and institutions.

Violence The World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as "the deliberate use of physical force or power, whether threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or a group or community. This can lead to, or have a high likelihood of leading to, injury, death, psychological harm, developmental issues, or deprivation."" (World Health Organization, [2002](#))

This broad definition encompasses a range of actions, including physical assault,

verbal abuse, emotional manipulation, and structural violence embedded in social and institutional practices. Violence can be direct, such as in acts of aggression, or indirect, manifesting through neglect or systemic inequalities that harm individuals or groups. Understanding the multifaceted nature of violence is crucial for developing effective strategies to prevent and address its various forms in society.

Critics often support the view of many family violence researchers that spanking constitutes a form of violence. They argue that spanking serves as a violent example for children, teaching them that violence is acceptable. Such critics contend that spanking not only humiliates and devalues children but also reinforces the notion that physical violence is an effective problem-solving method. They see spanking as a form of minor violence that can lead to more significant issues later in life, particularly for those who endure frequent or severe spankings as children. Increasingly, media articles draw connections between spanking and abuse, suggesting that the distinction between the two is subtle and easily crossed. (Loseke, & Best, [2017](#)) Violence is all around us, whether in the media, the streets or the home. It is pervasive in modern society, manifesting in various forms across different settings. On the streets, violence is frequently witnessed in the form of gang conflicts, protests, and random acts of brutality, which undermine public safety and social cohesion.

Divorce is defined as "the legal dissolution of a marriage by a court or other competent body" (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, [2011](#)). The rising divorce rates signal a shift in societal norms and pressures, reflecting changing attitudes towards marriage and family. Economic stress, gender inequality, and evolving cultural expectations contribute to marital breakdowns, which can have cascading effects on children and extended family networks. The disintegration of the family unit often leads to increased vulnerability among children, who may face emotional and financial hardships, potentially leading to further social issues in the future.

In recent years, Algeria has witnessed a troubling rise in various social problems, significantly impacting the fabric of its society. Crime rates have surged, with an increase in theft, assaults, and more organized criminal activities posing serious challenges to law enforcement and public safety. The proliferation of drug use, particularly among the youth, has exacerbated social instability, leading to higher rates of addiction and associated criminal behavior. Divorce rates have also escalated, reflecting growing strains on familial structures and societal pressures. Additionally, incidents of violence, both domestic and public, have become more frequent, highlighting underlying issues of economic disparity, unemployment, and social discontent. These problems collectively underscore the urgent need for comprehensive social reforms and targeted interventions to address the root causes and mitigate their impact on Algerian society.

6. Effects resulting from social problems in society

The Negative Consequences of Social Problems

A social problem is a social condition or pattern of behavior that has negative consequences for individuals, our social world, or our physical world. A social problem such as unemployment, alcoholism, or drug abuse may negatively affect a person's life and health, along with the well-being of that person's family and friends. Problems can threaten our social institutions, for example, the family (spousal abuse), education (the rising cost of college tuition), or the economy (unemployment). Our physical and social worlds can be threatened by problems related to urbanization (lack of affordable housing) and the environment (climate change). You will note from the examples that social problems are inherently social in their causes, consequences, and solutions. (Guerrero, [2016](#))

The spread of social problems such as drug abuse, delinquency, and crime significantly impacts society, creating a cycle of adverse effects that undermine social stability and cohesion. Drug abuse leads to numerous health crises, strains healthcare systems, and diminishes workforce productivity. Delinquency, often stemming from socio-economic disparities and inadequate social support, disrupts educational attainment and fosters environments of instability and insecurity. Crime, encompassing a range of offenses from theft to homicide, exacerbates fear and mistrust within communities, prompting increased spending on law enforcement and diverting resources from other vital social services. These issues are often interconnected, with economic hardships, unemployment, and social inequalities serving as common underlying factors. Addressing these social problems requires comprehensive strategies that not only tackle immediate manifestations but also focus on preventative measures, community support, and policy reforms to create a more resilient and harmonious society.

Social problems such as drug abuse, delinquency, and crime profoundly affect families, creating emotional, economic, and relational turmoil. Emotionally, these issues can cause significant stress, anxiety, and mental health challenges, straining relationships within the family and leading to conflicts and breakdowns in communication. Economically, the financial burden of medical expenses, legal fees, and lost income due to incarceration or inability to work can destabilize family finances, diverting resources from essential needs like education and housing. Socially, families may face stigma and isolation, losing crucial support networks from their community and extended family. Children are particularly vulnerable, often experiencing behavioral issues, poor academic performance, and emotional neglect, which can perpetuate a cycle of dysfunction. Additionally, the stress and frustration from dealing with these social problems can sometimes escalate into domestic violence, further compounding the trauma and instability within the family unit. Addressing these effects requires comprehensive support services and policies aimed at alleviating the root causes and providing holistic assistance to affected families.

Media and the Construction of Social Problems

Sociologists have long explored the complex relationship between media and social problems. Recently, however, changes in the media environment and developments in social problems scholarship have produced three distinct sets of questions about media and social problems.

One set focuses on media content and the role of media in defining issues as social problems. How, for example, do news and entertainment media portray emerging and long-standing social problems? How, if at all, do such portrayals change over time, and how do advocates shape media portrayals of specific social problems? Are new forms of digital media, including user-generated and social media, changing the way the media construct social problems?

A second set of questions looks at the potential role of media as a cause of, or contributor to, social problems. Does exposure to violent media imagery produce violent behavior? Do media contribute to health problems such as obesity or anorexia? And how do media influence our understanding of, and responses to, social problems?

The final set of questions about media and social problems focuses on the emergence of new social problems related to the development of new media technologies. For example, what are the consequences of the digital divide—that is, persistent inequality in people's access to and knowledge about new digital media? How can we understand media-related social problems such as cyberbullying and distracted driving? What new challenges do these pose for policy makers?

The media regularly portray social problems. Crime, for example, is a staple of local television news coverage, and print, broadcast, and online journalists routinely cover a range of issues associated with health, education, and the environment. A steady stream of films and prime-time television programs include implicit references to school violence, homelessness, and drug abuse. Both news and entertainment media also often offer in-depth and dramatic portrayals of the causes and consequences of social problems. But what counts as a social problem?

The conditions that become social problems have both objective and subjective dimensions that interact. The objective dimension includes evidence of the existence, prevalence, and severity of potentially troubling issues, such as illegal drug use, gun violence, or child abuse. The subjective dimension includes collective interpretations of and public attitudes about these issues. Media are a primary arena within which the two dimensions interact, offering a prominent space where we debate and interpret the meaning and significance of incidents and trends associated with potential social problems. For example, citizens seeking to raise awareness about gun violence may offer journalists evidence of the problem—from official statistics to details of dramatic gun incidents—hoping the media will report it. Such news reports typically generate commentary, in which media become an arena for interpreting the significance of the statistics and incidents and for discussion of the appropriate ways to respond, leading to additional reporting on the debate

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over gun violence. Thus media help define the context within which both public policy and public opinion develop. (Treviño, [2019](#))

Media Framing of Social Problems in Algeria

Following the liberalization of the audiovisual sector in Algeria, numerous television channels emerged, each aiming to capture the attention of Algerian viewers. These channels began addressing a range of issues previously overlooked by state television, including economic, political, religious, and especially social topics. Among these, social programs stood out for their bold approach in breaking societal taboos and successfully engaging audiences. The primary objective of such programs is to present and analyze social problems and phenomena with the aim of finding effective solutions. Additionally, they seek to raise public awareness, promote socially responsible behavior, and reinforce values aligned with authentic Algerian traditions. These programs also contribute to fostering social stability and security by encouraging dialogue and compassion within society. (Chabane, [2019](#), p 41)

Framing refers to the selection and emphasis of certain aspects of a perceived reality in media narratives. In Algeria, mainstream media outlets often sensationalize violent crimes (e.g., homicides, assaults), giving them prominent coverage, while underreporting persistent but less “dramatic” issues like domestic violence or youth unemployment. This disparity in coverage is not neutral -it shapes public perception of what constitutes a crisis and what does not.

For instance, gender-based violence is often framed as isolated incidents or family disputes rather than as systemic societal issues. Such framing minimizes their perceived urgency and reduces pressure on policymakers to act. Conversely, moral panics about drug use or criminal gangs are often blown out of proportion, reinforcing public fear and support for punitive state responses.

This imbalance in framing leads to skewed public understanding and policy action. The framing itself becomes a political act, privileging certain voices and silencing others.

Social media plays a complex and dual role in the landscape of social problems, acting both as a catalyst for harm and a powerful tool for positive change. On one hand, social media platforms can perpetuate and amplify social issues such as cyberbullying, misinformation, hate speech, and online harassment. These problems can contribute to mental health challenges, reinforce stereotypes, and deepen social divisions. The speed and reach of content on social media often allow harmful narratives or fake news to spread rapidly, influencing public opinion and sometimes inciting real-world consequences. On the other hand, social media also serves as a space for awareness-raising, activism, and community support. It enables marginalized voices to be heard, mobilizes people for social justice causes, and provides platforms for education and mental health advocacy. Have shown how social media can bring global attention to critical issues and push for policy

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changes. Thus, the role of social media is not inherently good or bad-it depends on how it is used, by whom, and in what context. (Tahar, 2018)

In summary, the main ideas can be captured in the following paragraph:

In Algeria, the framing of social problems by traditional and digital media plays a critical role in shaping collective perceptions, public discourse, and policy agendas. Algerian mainstream media often frame issues such as urban crime, drug addiction, or juvenile delinquency in a sensationalist manner, using dramatic language and visuals that evoke fear or moral panic. Meanwhile, structural problems such as domestic violence, unemployment, mental health, or the marginalization of rural communities are frequently underreported or framed in ways that minimize their systemic causes. This selective framing leads the public to prioritize certain issues over others and can result in superficial or reactionary policy responses rather than holistic solutions. At the same time, social media introduces a complex dynamic: it can both perpetuate social problems-through the spread of misinformation, online harassment, or digital tribalism-and also serve as a powerful tool for resistance and reform. Activists, NGOs, and everyday citizens use platforms like Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) to launch awareness campaigns, expose injustice, and pressure decision-makers.

Communication theories provide a lens to interpret this dual role. "Agenda-setting theory" suggests that media don't tell people what to think, but rather what to think about, influencing which issues receive attention. "Framing theory" explains how the way a problem is presented-whether as a crime issue or a social justice concern-shapes how audiences interpret its causes and consequences. "Cultivation theory" emphasizes the long-term impact of repeated media messages on public attitudes, which can normalize certain stereotypes or reinforce pessimistic worldviews. Finally, "spiral of silence theory" illustrates how dominant media narratives can silence dissenting opinions, especially in politically sensitive contexts. Together, these dynamics highlight how media in Algeria do not merely reflect reality but actively participate in constructing it-shaping not only what the public perceives as a social problem but also how the state chooses to respond.

Overall, Media are a central and increasingly influential venue for defining troubling issues as social problems. Claims makers often use the news and online media for circulating their interpretations of social problems to policy makers and the public, jockeying for position to do so. Thus media attention is not distributed equally across issues, nor is it a simple reflection of the prevalence or severity of a given issue. Looking at examples of news coverage of crime and drugs will help us see how media construct social problems.

CONCLUSION

The study of social problems in Algerian society reveals a complex interplay of factors and their far-reaching effects on individuals, families, and communities. Key social issues such as drug abuse, divorce, delinquency, homicide, theft, and kidnapping are deeply rooted in economic factors, unemployment, cultural shifts, and inadequate social policies. These problems are not isolated phenomena but are interconnected, often exacerbating each other and creating a cycle of social instability and dysfunction.

The effects of these social problems are profound and multifaceted. At the family level, they cause emotional and psychological stress, economic strain, social isolation, and disruption of family dynamics, which can lead to further issues such as mental health problems, domestic violence, and neglect of children. At the community and societal level, these problems weaken social cohesion, reduce workforce productivity, and increase public spending on healthcare, law enforcement, and social services, thereby hindering economic development and overall quality of life. Understanding these factors and their effects is crucial for developing effective interventions. By identifying the root causes and interconnections of social problems, policymakers can formulate comprehensive strategies that address the underlying issues rather than just the symptoms. This approach not only helps in mitigating the immediate impacts of social problems but also promotes long-term social stability, economic development, and improved quality of life.

Different sociological perspectives offer valuable insights into understanding and addressing social problems. Functionalism highlights how social problems disrupt the stability and equilibrium of society, emphasizing the need for institutions to adapt and restore balance. Conflict theory focuses on the power dynamics and inequalities that underlie social problems, advocating for structural changes to address economic and social disparities. Symbolic interactionism examines the meanings and labels attached to social problems, stressing the importance of addressing stigma and changing societal perceptions. Feminist theory sheds light on gendered dimensions of social problems, emphasizing the intersectionality of gender, race, and class in understanding issues like domestic violence and inequality. Critical race theory underscores the role of systemic racism in perpetuating social problems, advocating for policies that address racial injustices. By integrating these perspectives, policymakers and researchers can develop more comprehensive and effective solutions to social problems. Raising awareness and encouraging further research are essential for sustaining efforts to combat these issues and for contributing to a global understanding of social problem mitigation. Through informed policy making, strengthened social cohesion, and continuous academic exploration, Algerian society can work towards a more resilient and supportive social structure.

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