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An Inquiry Into The Nature Cause And Results Of Social Disorganization With Particular Emphasis On Its Relation To Social Problems

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AN INQUIRY INTO THE NATURE
CAUSE AND RESULTS OF SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION
WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS
ON
ITS RELATION TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS
by
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INTRODUCTION

The following pages are a discussion of one of sociology's questionable terms, social disorganization. The term is questionable because it has not been accepted by all sociologists, because its nature is not actually clear, and because it has been investigated only briefly.

First, definitions of social disorganization are discussed and any convergence, noted. A differentiation is made between personal and social disorganization.

The various causes of social disorganization are then discussed followed by evidence of social disorganization in each of society's major groups.

The result of social disorganization is social problems. The relationship between these two sociological terms is discussed. Several sources are cited which state that disorganization of society produces social problems.

The development of the term in three stages is noted. Each stage is distinguished by certain characteristics.

Social disorganization is related to organization and reorganization. It is this relationship which is the target of further research in the field of social disorganization.

All societies suffer some disorganization. What is this disorganization? Where does it come from? What is the result of social disorganization? It is these questions that this paper is designed to answer.
Social organization exists if adjustments are made and if the changing group and individual function with a reasonable degree of efficiency.

However, if this efficiency is lacking, the result is social disorganization.

Social disorganization is the process by which associations or organizations are thrown into disorder or cease to exist or function; a process which goes on at all times but which is accentuated by change or by natural or societal catastrophe, eg. increase in rate of divorce; business failure; closing of schools, recreation centers, churches; changes in government.¹

Social disorganization is the inability of society to adjust itself to the changing social conditions, resulting in nervousness, disease and insanity.²

Social disorganization is the process of disarranging or destroying the organic structure or regular system; also the state or condition of a system in a state of disorder.³

Social disorganization is the decrease of influence of existing social rules of behavior upon individual members of the group.⁴

⁴Ibid., p. 112.
By comparing these definitions one can note a convergence. Many sociologists classify social disorganization as a process.* They agree that it is relative to the organization in a society, and that it is always present at least in some minor degree. Social disorganization appears when men are unable to meet or adjust to the new roles and status forced upon them by changing societal conditions. Because man cannot adjust to the new social requirements, some needs are left unsatisfied. The consequent disorder centers around the unsatisfied need taking the form of a social problem.¹

Most authors agree on the term of social disorganization. However, a few authors such as Loran Osborn and Henry Neumeyer prefer the term social maladjustment.

You will note the subject of this paper is social disorganization as differentiated from personal disorganization. The preceding definitions make the nature of social disorganization obvious. For the sake of comparison and clarification personal disorganization need also be defined.

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*A process is want satisfying action.

Personal disorganization is the inability of an individual to fulfill roles and status demands due to changing social conditions. Both social and personal disorganization have their beginnings in "personality conditions and deviations, the disruption of the structure and functions of society, and sometimes certain physical environmental conditions."¹

The connection between personal and social disorganization is difficult to determine. Some cases of disorganization can be seen to start with a few people as personal disorganization and then develop into social disorganization. The exact opposite can also be observed. An example of the former is divorce. It begins as personal disorganization and then through the increasing rate and the widespread effects of marital failure becomes social disorganization.

According to Joyce O. Hertzler in *Society in Action* a disorganized society (a society in a state of social disorganization) results in a heterogeneous personality in most of the members while a stabilized society (an organized society) results in a

integrated personality.¹

For example, a disorganized society with a high divorce rate results in heterogeneous personalities. On the other hand, an organized society with little or no divorce would produce integrated personalities. "Personal and social aspects of disorganization occur concommitantly, and the influences are mutual and reciprocal."²

When discussing the cause of social disorganization, one must be cautious to guard against the particularistic fallacy³ which credits social disorganization to just one major cause. For instance, decline of religious influence is held to be the one cause of social disorganization by some sociologists. Others will blame economic insecurity as the major cause.

Osborn and Neumeyer blame social change. "Disorganization of persons and society occurs particularly whenever there is great and sudden change or if there is uneven change which upsets or at least disturbs the existing organization."⁴

However, these narrow or over-generalized theories of the


cause of social disorganization are not to be abandoned completely. Rather they should be verified as a cause and then combined into the multiple causation theory.¹

The multiple cause theory is self-explanatory. Rather than attribute social disorganization to one cause, social disorganization is seen to be the result of many concurrent and reciprocal causes.

Further research is needed into social disorganization before there is any convergence on the cause or causes of social disorganization. Many authors fail to discuss cause when working with the subject of disorganization in society. One of the most acceptable multiple cause theories is that of Ogburn and Nimkoff in _Sociology_. The causes are grouped into three categories:

1. maladjustments of man and culture to natural environment.

2. lack of adjustment of man's inherited nature to demands of group life and culture

3. change at unequal rates of speed in correlated parts of culture² (This is Ogburn's theory of cultural lag.)


One of the most obvious points of convergence among the sociologists studying social disorganization is that social disorganization is a process. "Social disorganization is fundamentally a process or a series of processes. The difficulty of stating exactly what social disorganization as a process means is obvious. The lines of demarcation between disorganization, organization and reorganization are not distinct and fixed."\(^1\) It is difficult to say where organization ends and disorganization begins. It is toward clarification of this point that present research is being conducted. Sociologists must learn to distinguish between reorganization, disorganization and organization.

Cuber offers a possible beginning of a solution. He states that processes are complementary. Disorganization prevails when co-operation is replaced by violence.\(^2\) As long as men are interacting with co-operation, there is organization. When conflict or violence becomes the dominant form of interaction, disorganization is the result. When men take action to return things to their normal state, reorganization is the term used to describe


Joyce O. Hertzler divides social disorganization into four separate processes:

1. Separative and isolative processes (This process divides and separates persons and groups.)
2. Opposition process
3. Social decadence processes (This occurs when there is a breakdown in structure.)
4. Societal ossification processes (The solidification of society at the point which disorganization changes to organization)

Hertzler states that social disorganization has four various and distinct forms. The basis of distinction is the object of the disorganization. For instance with the separative and isolative type of disorganization, it is people or groups that are disorganized, in opposition it is the means to gain an end while with social decadence the social structure is what suffers disorganization, and finally in ossification the entire society is disorganized in its structure and function.

Social disorganization is evident by many and varied symptoms

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technically referred to as indices. Social disorganization is noted by tensions, crimes of passion and local disorders. If there is any leadership it will be in the form of agitation. Tension can be found spreading from group to group. A present day example is the segregation-integration situation in the South. Tension is definitely evident. Decline of unity and harmony within social groups is another indication of disorganization. Other indices are formalism, decline of sacred elements, individualism, hedonic behavior, population heterogeneity and mutual distrust.

Raymond Murray groups indices into four classes:

1. If attitudes of members of a social group are toward each other such that they find it difficult to make adjustments in their ordinary social relationships (This classification is very difficult to apply because attitudes are so difficult to measure and determine.)

2. Family Statistics
"Divorce is a fairly reliable index to social disorganization in that family disorganization ultimately spells national social disorganization." (The reason for this generalization is the fact that the family is the basic unit of society. Illegitimacy and venereal disease are also accurate


measures or symptoms of disorganization. But due to
the delicacy of such matters, statistics are very
difficult to obtain.

3. Personal disorganization such as insanity,
drunkenness, crime, prostitution and suicide.
(Here the difficulty remains to determine if the
personal disorganization is a result or cause of
social disorganization.)

4. Community disorganization shown by poverty, unem­
ployment, irregular school attendance and political
corruption. 

It is important to note that the index depends on the point
of view of the observer. If a person were a communist, it may
not be possible to note unemployment as an index because of
complete government intervention in business.

Indices of social and personal disorganization are higher
in urban areas than in rural. However some of the statistics
could be called immigrant statistics. For example in the case
of illegitimacy, many of the infants may be conceived in rural
settings, but the mother usually goes to a city to be delivered.
Thus the statistic is registered as urban?

The obvious products of social disorganization are social
problems.

1Murray, Raymond W., C. S. C., Introductory Sociology

2Sellew, Gladys; Furfey, Rev. Paul Hanly; and Gaughan
Rev. William T., An Introduction to Sociology, New York:
Harpers and Brothers, 1958, p. 532.
disorganization are chief consequences of disruptive processes of society."¹

Social problems are evidence of disorganization.

According to Ogburn it is cultural lag which causes social disorganization. This is in agreement with the theory of Nimkoff. Both of these sociologists state that "our most important social problems can be traced to the unequal advance of different parts of our civilization." This inequality of advance is known as cultural lag.²

According to Cuber, "social problems are an integral part of the process of social disorganization. Hence the objective fact of disorganization is an element of each problem."³

Thus social problems are seen to result from social disorganization, which in turn results from cultural lag.

Disorganization is found on all levels of society. It can be found in primary and secondary groups. "Disorganization in the primary group may follow from disorganization in the family."⁴

"The modern family is said by some observers to be disorganized."⁵ It has been suggested that so called disorganization


⁴Sellew, Gladys; Furfey, Rev Paul Hanly; Gaughan, Rev. William T., An Introduction to Sociology, New York: Harpers and Brothers, 1958, p. 219.

⁵Cuber, p. 602.
in the family evidenced by divorce, delinquency and so forth is actually just a step in the evolution of the family. This is refuted by Sisters Leo Marie Preher and M. Eucharista Clavey. They hold that the human is made up of "an intellect and will with which they mold their own destinies. They do not pass through evolutionary stages."  

Agreeing with Sisters that there is disorganization in society's basic unit as opposed to the evolutionary theory, the cause of family disorganization must be discussed. The Sisters make this contribution. They blame over-emphasis on material success which leads to individualism, urbanization which attracts family members to outside interests, lowered religious ideals and lack of family recreation.

Symptoms or indices of family disorganization are divorce, illegitimacy, desertion, prostitution and possible suicides. The target of any remedial action is attitudes. If family disorganization is to be met, healthy attitudes toward family life must be inculcated.

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2Ibid. pp. 138-142.
Marriage as one of the major vocations must be adequately prepared for. Pre-marital education would result in more intelligent mating and as a result—better family organization. Stricter divorce legislation would cut the alarming, rising rate of broken marriage. Marriage guidance clinics would perhaps lessen the necessity for divorce by supplying the means of solution to various marriage problems. Family members must be urged to re-assume their individual roles and family functions. When the function is not performed, the needs of the members are not satisfied. The result is a social problem.

The other social groups are now forced to supplement the family's loss of function. When one group is disorganized and is consequently unable to satisfy the needs of its members, the other social groups are forced to accept an extra burden. They must function for themselves and for the disorganized group as well. An analogy can be drawn to an automobile engine. If one of the pistons is not functioning properly, the remaining

\[1\] Ibid., pp. 51-57.
pistons will have to work that much harder making up for the weak piston so that the car will run.

Disorganization can be seen in all of society's major groups. In economic life man does not know what kind of behavior is best to meet his needs. He cannot judge in which social group he can best find satisfaction of his needs. "This indeed seems to be disorganization."

Indices of social disorganization in the economic group are low wages, unemployment, strikes and poverty.

There is also social disorganization in the educational group. This is evidenced by the rising rate of school dropouts and juvenile delinquency. Since education is supposed to be a function of the family and church as well as the school, it is nearly impossible to determine the possible causes of disorganization in this social activity. There are too many possible causes.

The social disorganization in recreation is unique. Disorganization in recreational activity can be traced back to the

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defunctionalization of the family. In place of family gatherings, picnics and card or game playing, there are women's night and men's night at the bowling alleys, meetings of the younger members of the family at the local youth center, bridge club and hot rod clubs. The members of the family individually recreate. Disorganization in this group is not due to inactivity. If anything, there is an overabundance and definitely an overemphasis on recreation today. The difficulty arises from misdirection of the activity. Rather than individual recreation, there should be group recreation.

All the emphasis on material possessions and comfort is sufficient evidence that there is social disorganization in the religious sphere of the society. Again the difficulty can be traced to the family. Unless the family lays a firm spiritual foundation in the very first years of the child's life, the Church's influence will at best be minor. Churches should be the means to salvation. If a person is not taught how to use this means properly, how is he to reach salvation? The Church has assumed a great burden in attempting to teach the children of her own worth and value. This teaching should come from the
family and be directed by the Church. War, "the most descriptive form of social disorganization," unemployment, race conflict and poor housing stand out as indices of disorganization in politics. No longer do people live so strongly for the common good. Individual welfare is foremost in the minds of most people. Why? Once again, the responsibility rests with the family.

The basic social unit is to teach the common good through practice and good example. The welfare of individual members is to be sacrificed if the common good of the family is concerned. However, today's small family pattern is hardly the appropriate setting for learning about the common good. One or two children occupying the center spot of all attention and affection seldom learn anything but individualism. They learn to care about themselves. If politics is to become reorganized, people of society are going to have to learn again to live for the welfare of others.

Some sociologists deny the existence of social disorganization.

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"... In fact, the circumstances (of social disorganization) have become so basic and their implications so profound, that it appears at least doubtful that the concept social disorganization can be retained as a valid one to a person who desires to think realistically about human behavior and society."  

"The crux of the problem lies in the inability to distinguish between the so-called breakdown of a traditional role and the appearance of a new role."  

Cuber accuses sociologists of using the term social disorganization too loosely. This criticism is well deserved. Caution must be used lest social disorganization be attached to any situation in society which meets with disfavor. He suggests that these unfavored situations "only seem to be disorganized because we are familiar with the roles which have come out of the past, but we are unfamiliar with the roles which are shaping up for the society of tomorrow."  

Such a current situation is the integration-segregation situation in the United States. The role of the negro in the past was to be a slave. The future hopefully holds the role of equal rights for

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2Ibid. pp. 604-605.

3Ibid. p. 608.
the negro. However, the process of getting this role of the future accepted is a long and difficult one. Now according to Cuber one should not jump to the conclusion that the situation of the negro is one of disorganization. The United States is rather going through a trial and error process experimenting with the role of the negro for the future. However, in noting the similarity between the negro situation and the definition of social disorganization, it seems safe to apply this term to the segregation-integration problem.

In refuting Cuber's argument, Neumeyer says, "However, this is a matter of opinion. In so far as it is possible to measure objectively the relative rates of change and their social effects, the concept of social disorganization is a useful tool of scientific analysis."

Point of view greatly influences the study of social disorganization. Sociology is supposed to be value free, but the point of view of the sociologist and consequently his values inevitably influence his investigation of social disorganization. Consider for a moment the two possible reports that would be made if

a negro sociologist and a caucasian sociologist were to study
the social disorganization in the integration-segregation question.

"Social disorganization can usually be determined objectively.
However, judgement of whether it is desirable or not depends on
subjective point of view. Matters such as these are determined
by consensus of group opinion." ¹

Murray has this to say about the subject. "When studying
disorganization...the student of sociology...must be on guard
not only against the inertia of the slovenly, but also against
vested interests that seek to encourage cultural lag." Social
disorganization gives evidence of cultural lag. ² When someone
benefits from social disorganization that someone will resist
change. According to his point of view there would be no social
disorganization. This someone would want to preserve the cultural
lag.

The person concerned with social disorganization is the
social worker. It is his job "to reestablish personalities and
to readjust the social order." ³ He attacks disorganization on

¹Ogburn, William F., and Nimkoff, Meyer F., Sociology, Boston:

²Dawson, Carl A. and Getlys, Warner E., Introduction to

³Osborn, Loran David, Ph. D., and Neumeyer, Martin H., Ph. D.,
The Community and Society, New York: American Book Company, 1933,
p. 209.
the personal and social levels.

The study and research of social disorganization can be seen to take three stages. The first is termed social reform. "The existing framework of society was accepted while efforts centered almost entirely upon mitigating rather than eliminating the grosser social evils."¹ The sociologists were not interested in basic causes. They simply wanted to make the social disorganization more bearable. They dared not hope to eliminate the problems. Background of the problems was ignored.

Advancing to the second stage, known as social problems, there is noted the advance of the organicism theory. Sociologists were of the opinion that a study of social pathology would provide all the answers to social problems just as research in physical pathology solves medical problems.

The third and present stage has made the "initial contribution that social disorganization is the converse of social organization."² Through research sociologists have determined that there is a process of organization, disorganization and reorganization operating in society. The ability to determine and differentiate the three individual phases of disorganization in one social group

²Ibid.
or one instance of social action will come only with further research. When this has been accomplished, sociology will have one more efficient tool of scientific analysis.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


