

SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLANATION OF POVERTY

“THE EMERGING BRITISH UNDERCLASS” By Charles Murray

Introduction

Understanding poverty

- There is much agreement about the idea of poverty- numerous definitions are used by different researchers and policy makers.
- Approaches used to measure poverty include benefit receipt, income levels and indicators of deprivation.
- Explanations of poverty can be individual, familial, sub-cultural or structural. Currently I shall be dealing with the explanation of poverty by Charles Murray “The Underclass”.

Who are the underclass?

A sort of synonym for people who are not just poor, but especially poor. In short the “underclass” does not refer to degree of poverty but, to a type of poverty.

Main Ideas of Explanation

- The poor in society are not characterised by the fact that they have low incomes or no money but also by their way of life, i.e.; lazy, dirty housing, juvenile delinquents, etc.
- The poor are poor due to a class stratified society

- The “underclass” in society becomes obvious when certain trends in their way of life keeps repeating and increasing.
- These have been identified by Murray in Britain as:
 - Illegitimacy (the best predictor of an underclass in the making)
 - Crime
 - Work Inactivity

Illegitimacy: - described as when an individual legally lacks both parents.

- occurs among the lower class of society
- Clear cut difference in the advantages of a child with both parents than that with a single parent.
- The occurrence of this problem is also based on the immediate environment being assessed.

Crime: -Criminal occurrences in society are mostly carried out by young males from the underclass

-They have mainstream values but their culture prevents them from living up to their aims, so they resort to crime.

-Violent crime rates in Britain are fast catching up to that of the U.S. with rates of normal crime, i.e. muggings, burglary, etc already exceeding that of the U.S.

Work Inactivity (Unemployment)

-Young and active males choose not be in employment but rather depend on the welfare state for a living.

-Economic inactivity amongst the underclass is also dependant on the immediate environment being assessed.

-Attitude towards employment in the underclass is different between the older generation and the younger generation.

-In short Murray argues that the culture of the poor (in his case “the underclass”) keeps them in poverty.

Evaluation

Murray’s work is quite simply, factually wrong. I explain as follows:

-Majority of lone parents would like a stable relationship and there is no evidence of an automatic overlap between lone parent families and crime.

-Lots of families raise children with problems and not just lone-parent families.

-Crime rates could be seen to be rising only because people are now more conscious and report them regularly.

-There is no evidence from social surveys that a group exists that rejects the work ethic.

-People are unemployed, because society has set standards and thus make it difficult for them to gain employment and enjoy a good standard of living.

Conclusion

Poverty is not the moral, cultural or social problem of a permanently excluded underclass, but an economic risk that affects everyone.



poverty has not changed in the last year



Nearly 200,000 under 19-year-olds do not have a basic qualification

