**Chapter 1: Introduction to the 2nd Edition**

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It has been five years since the first edition of this text was written. Many of the issues discussed in that first introductory text persist such as poverty, homelessness, youth gangs and organized crime. You might think that it would be surprising if these social problems were ‘solved’ and you would be right. As we set out in the first edition of the book, we investigate social problems not so much to rid society of them (although this would be wonderful) but simply to understand them better. Rather than discover the hidden alchemy that might transform social ills, the aim of a textbook like this is to merely highlight some of societies key contemporary social issues so that we might not make uninformed statements about the problems themselves. Our current Prime Minister in the UK, Boris Johnson, is very fond of quoting Latin phrases. One such expression he has used on more than one occasion, to the slight bewilderment of the interviewer, is a well know maxim for classical scholars, *ignoratio elenchi,* meaning arguing to the wrong point. Now you might not think of Mr. Johnson as a great social scientist, and he may not think of himself as one either, but the fact is that this is a great phrase for understanding what we are doing, not only in understanding social problems, but also in general as social scientists. In exploring some of the most pressing social issues our society faces we should not be so arrogant as to think that we can completely solve them. What we are trying to do is to make sure that the basis of our understanding of the problem is as reasonable and based upon as much evidence as possible. That is, it is founded on solid social research, qualitative and quantitative methods, theory and reasoned argument.

The purpose of this second edition of *Social Problems in the UK: An Introduction* is then to continue to help students to think about the character of contemporary social problems in Britain but also most importantly to engage you in thinking about how you begin to approach their study as social scientists. Whether you are studying sociology, criminology, education studies, youth studies or whatever this book is designed to provoke you and make you reflect upon the appropriate methodological manner to explore a range of social phenomena. In addition, even though our aim might be one of tentative exploration and building the foundations of knowledge and method, it does not mean that we must do this without a framework of constructive critique. The approach that you will find in these textbook feeds into broader perspectives about social inequalities and social justice. The very choice of subjects and the emphasis of the subjects chosen insist on this. Many of the social issues here cannot be ring-fenced away from pressing political and ideological arguments. One of the features of a social problems approach to social inequalities and social injustice that students enjoy the most is that it engages them in passionate debates. Debates about things that matter, like the *Black Lives Matter* movement, that are happening now and that will affect your lives. This text is no dry academic book, we hope. It will fill you with the desire to follow up with further research and maybe even propel you into activism around social concerns that impact you or those around you.

*Social Problems in the UK: An Introduction, 2nd* *edition* maintains the style and pedagogic approach laid out in the first text. A key motivation for this book continues to be to bring teaching to the page. That is, to be an accessible study aid to students that introduces them to applying a methodological perspective to familiar issues. You will find within these pages a great deal of pedagogic content. Rather than relating reams of quantitative material in relation to each of the social problems, accessible narratives, coursework questions and further readings are used to direct the student to sources that will help them keep up to date. At the end of each chapter there are key points to help students understand the main issues and aid revision.

The book opens in chapter 2 with a general methodological and theoretical chapter on understanding and defining social problems. This chapter introduces students to the ‘common sense’ view, the social construction approach, and related sociological theories. Practical examples are given whenever possible. This is an on-going feature of the book, to tie theory and practice to guide students towards the applied character of this type of study. The overall purpose of this chapter on definitions and approaches is to try to convey to the student the importance of using methodological and theoretical tools, in an accessible manner.

Chapter 3 is highlights one of the most urgent social problems facing the UK today. The content focuses on the historical reasons that lie behind the *Black Lives Matter* (BLM) movement. Although the media and public conversation tends to focus on the immediate, it is the role of the social scientist to delve further in order to give context to contemporary issues. This is exactly what Prof. William Anthony Henry does in this chapter. Here the internationally renowned author situates the BLM moment in relation to colonialism and its long-lasting legacy. He illustrates why African chattel slavery is distinct to other forms of subjugation and why its affects are still with us today. The chapter provides a fascinating insight and intellectual rigor to many of the day-to-day arguments we hear in the media and all around us.

Chapter 4 concerns issues situated around the topic of health. With the international pandemic still upon us as I write this is, of course, a timely subject area. However, as the co-authors illustrate issues around health and the dividing lines that these social problems bring, are always with us. This chapter starts by asking the question what do we mean by health? The authors provide a range of definitions and measures of health that have been widely used. They then go on to think about health in a rather surprising manner, as a business, Recognising that health is an important business in the UK, is an important part of understanding the types of social problems associated with it. This is because it will affect the level of health service funding it attracts from government as well as the private sector. As might be expected in a textbook of this type these social aspects of health are further explored. Poverty, poor housing conditions and a range of social factors, including social class, gender and ethnicity can all impact upon our health. Arguably the broadest social issue of all is also given time for discussion in this chapter, climate change. How climate change should be dealt with in the context of health is an intriguing and difficult challenge that the authors discuss in some detail. All in all, this chapter throws up some surprising debates about how we think of health and public health in our society and everyday lives.

Chapter 5 follows up some of the issues previously raised related to issues of health. However, Prof Norman Ginsburg’s chapter on ageing also brings with it a number of other important discussions beyond social care and ill health. For example, there are many problematic aspects of the ideas of both retirement and a prescribed ‘retirement age’. It links to many issues about paid and unpaid work found later in this textbook (see below), as well as the deservingness or otherwise of being able to retire on a decent pension. Prof. Ginsburg argues that the current situation of retired people seems to solidify and strengthen inequalities of ‘race’, class and gender in the labour market and across society as a whole. In addition, another dimension of the discourse around ageing as a social problem looked at here is in terms of intergenerational injustice. It is sometime suggested that older people, having benefited from secure employment and the welfare state in the post-war decades, are now kicking the ladder behind them, leaving younger people to face a much more precarious job market and a meaner welfare state. Retired people enjoy ‘third age’ consumerism at the expense of the generations behind them. This argument implies that there should be a redistribution of resources from older people to those of ‘working age’. On this issue, Prof. Ginsburg maintains that in actuality this picture of old age and the conflict between the generations is not only over-simplified but can also be potentially harmful for us all.

At the other end of the age spectrum, in Chapter 6, Jessie Bustillos and Sandra Abegglen, undertake an inquiry into inequalities in education. They attempt to disentangle some of the many issues in the realm of gender, ‘race’ and social class in education. The chapter explores some of the growing patterns of inequality that have characterised schooling in the UK. This is broken down into three main sections, First, a section where gender equity issues in schools are outlined and interrogated. The authors look at feminist concerns and ask whether or not we are now in a post-feminist educational era. Second, issues of ‘race’ and education are discussed in relation to the work of’ critical race theorists’, Gillborn and Youdell. Finally, the work of recently retired, internationally renowned Prof. Stephen Ball will be drawn upon to illustrate a range of issues around social class and educational opportunity.

The qualitative and quantitative research that is evidenced in the previous chapter, is strengthened by this largely theoretical enterprise from Dr. David Blundell. In Chapter 7, on childhood and education, Blundell starts by stating that ‘No social group figures as consistently or frequently in the discussion of social problems as do children’. In this way the author points to one of the main ways in which the social construction approach helps us to take one step back from common sense arguments. Blundell insightfully pieces together how it is that ‘the child’ is constituted in various ways by us, as parents, teachers and members of civil society. As he points out, these constructions of childhood are part of a historical legacy that constitutes powerful ideological assumptions which underlie many current education policies. Blundell explores the impact this has upon young people themselves as well as the wider policy implications. He argues that children are overly burdened as a source of hope in the search for solutions to many social problems. It is in the system of education and the institutions of schooling where many issues of social concern are presumed to be ‘solvable’. This includes not only educational achievement but the future of the UK’s economic success, health problems, issues relating to social cohesion and crime. Fundamentally, then, this chapter explores where our ideas about children and childhood come from and why childhood and education have become so closely identified as means to solve society’s ‘ills’.

McDonough’s chapter, Chapter 8 on work, is probably the most revised chapter of all those that have remained from the first edition of this book. This says a great deal about the way that the character and experience of work has changed so much. Of course, part of this is due to the response to Covid-19, but by no means do all these changes relate only to the pandemic. Issues such as the widening of the ‘gig’ economy and a greater precariousness of job security are part of longer-term trends, as McDonough points out. So too are some of the solutions to the social problems associated with the lack of work and income relatively new. In particular, the concept of a universal basic income, where everyone from a certain age receives a payment from the state to live on, as discussed here. Although this is not a very new idea, its legitimacy is. Whereas once this notion was seen to be at the margins of ‘real politics’, increasingly there are pilot studies across the globe, and in the UK, experimenting with this seemingly radical notion. This issue and other contemporary ideas about how to solve unemployment and a lack of a regular income are explored in this fascinating chapter.

In keeping with the rest of the book, Chapter 9 examines the social construction of poverty. Isaacs argues that debates about poverty often demonizes the poor themselves, blaming them for their own circumstances, as well as sometimes wider economic and social welfare failings. The chapter moves on to analyse New Labour’s social exclusion policies and apply to the later coalition and Conservative governments. Following this a case study is undertaken around a discussion of homelessness and its relationship to issues of poverty. Isaacs maintains that, rather than being a social problem for the few, homelessness is a fundamental social issue that affects the whole of society.

The book ends appropriately, in Chapter 10, with Foley’s important review of how to research social problems. Foley has worked as an academic librarian in the social sciences for a number of years. She understand the difficulties students face in this respect, particularly first year students new to undergraduate study. Students often struggle simply because they are not aware of the resources available of how to use them. Here Foley carefully sets out how students can use their library’s tools to locate and then evaluate what materials they need. This is done, here, with examples that draw from the type of social sciences literature that students will need to engage with. Common problems addressed in this chapter include: the confusion that often arises about journals and journal articles; citing and referencing sources; plagiarism; and how to transfer the skills learned when researching one area to researching another. It is also hoped that teaching staff may also find this chapter useful as a readymade resource to guide their students when they are searching for material.