



UNCORRECTED SAMPLE CHAPTER

## Need, Risk and Protection in Social Work Practice

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**Please note this material is at draft stage and has not yet been edited or proofread**

**To be published by:**

Learning Matters  
33 Southernhay East  
Exeter  
EX1 1NX  
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[www.learningmatters.co.uk](http://www.learningmatters.co.uk)

## CHAPTER 1: NEED AND VULNERABILITY

### ACHIEVING A SOCIAL WORK DEGREE

(In this book, both the NOS and SiSWE will be referred to)

#### Introduction

This chapter will introduce you to the central concept of *need* in its many guises and help you to think about these in relation to social work and social care. We shall also consider how the notion of need is often treated as a somewhat relativistic concept and one that has a number of corollaries, including *vulnerability*, *risk* and *protection*. All of these issues are core to the art of social work and social care and as such will dominate much of your thinking and your doing.

The chapter will draw on a range of ideas from a number of different and sometimes disparate disciplines in order that we can begin to think about need more creatively and understand why, within the context of late modern societies, need is very much at the forefront of discussions around welfare, social work and social care practice and how, within human services, the derivations of *vulnerability*, *risk* and *protection* manifest as specific policy and practice related issues, and what relevance and influence these interrelated concepts have in terms of your day-to-day practice as a social/care worker.

In any discussion concerning need there are a number of things we have to consider. Firstly, when we talk about 'need(s)', what is it we are in fact referring to? What is a 'need'? What sorts of 'needs' do we have? Do we all have the same needs? Are some needs more important than others and if so, which ones and why these? Who should meet our needs, we ourselves, the state or someone else? If the state is seen as having a role in meeting need, which it clearly does in the UK and many other parts of the world, how should it do this? And does this mean that we have a *right* to such provision? Furthermore, any discussion about needs presupposes some awareness of what it is we mean when we talk about 'welfare', as need and welfare are inextricably connected and we also have to consider the issue of 'fairness' or social justice.

## **Definitions, theories and interpretations of need**

When beginning to think about any idea, concept or issue, it is often useful to go to the dictionary. This is not to suggest that the dictionary definitions will necessarily be *helpful*, but it is nonetheless a good starting point. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (SOED) (OUP, 2007) offers us the following in relation to 'need':

*Need:*

- 1 Necessity for a course of action arising from facts or circumstances.*
- 2 Necessity or demand for the presence, possession, etc., of something.*
- 3 A condition or time of difficulty, distress, or trouble; exigency, emergency, crisis.*
- 4 A condition of lacking or requiring some necessary thing, either physically or (now) psychologically; destitution, lack of the means of subsistence or of necessaries, poverty. Now also a condition of requiring or being motivated to do, a necessity to do.*
- 5 A matter requiring action; a piece of necessary business.*
- 6 A particular point or respect in which some necessity or want is present or is felt; a thing wanted; a requirement.*

Some of these definitions will be quite useful to us in understanding what we mean by the term 'need' in its various uses. So what is a need? In a broad sense it is generally taken to refer to the absence of something which is deemed to be necessary, usually for the continued and often basic functioning of the organism, and in this regard is something which if not adequately met is likely to compromise the capacity of the organism to meet other needs and therefore promote and maintain wellbeing. At the extreme, an unmet need may actually threaten our survival.

## **What types of need are there?**

We have to think about how we *define* and *describe* need and how and why we *categorise* and *prioritise* it as we do.

Below we look at a number of different interpretations and theories of need and try to establish how meaningful these are in relation to social work/care practice. Here though it is important for us to try and begin to think about need in a more ordered way and to begin to try and understand differing *types* of need. For example, one way of thinking broadly about this is to list these as *physical* needs, *psychological* needs, *emotional* needs and *social* needs. We could also add *spiritual* needs to this.

### **ACTIVITY 1.1**

*Using the categories above, draw up a list of needs.*

#### **Comment**

*What did you come up with?*

*Physical* = Water, food, shelter, warmth, reproduction.

*Psychological* = Stimulation, activity.

*Emotional* = Love, affection, trust, understanding.

*Social* = Contact with others, friends.

*Spiritual* = beliefs, communion with ....

Would you say that these then are our *basic* or *primary* needs? In order to claim that this is so we have to be sure that these are generalisable to *all of us* and that a failure to have these needs met would result in our capacity to function being seriously impaired to the extent that it might result in us being unable to meet other needs and therefore threaten our very existence. If this is indeed so, this appears to suggest some kind of essential criterion or *hierarchy* regarding our basic needs.

You might also have thought that there are *connections* between these different elements. For example, water and food are necessary for the growth, development and maintenance of nervous tissue that itself is necessary for the correct functioning of the nervous system, which then allows us to function *psychologically* by being able to respond to *stimulation*, etc.

We should also think about whether the distinction between physical, psychological, emotional, social and spiritual needs is 'real' or is it too artificial? Could all of the needs to which we have referred be seen as essentially *social*? We could use this sense of the term on the basis that all these needs affect our capacity to be *social beings* so they are essentially *social* needs. This brings in another dimension: to what extent are our (basic) needs able to be met without reference to society (i.e. other people and structures)? Can an individual meet his or needs alone or do we need the structure of a society around us to facilitate this? For example, how would we ensure a clean supply of water? Would you have the knowledge and skills necessary to find water (in the absence of taps and bottled water in the shops which are clearly *social* developments)? Would you have the ability to ensure that it was disease free? How would you guarantee the source? The same would apply to food sources and, particularly, to those needs seen as *psychological* and *emotional* which depend almost entirely for their satisfaction on the availability of others (i.e. they are socially oriented). Some writers would in fact argue that all our realities are socially constructed and socially mediated (Berger and Luckman, 1979; Searle, 1995) including our sense of who we are (Cooley, 1904; Mead, 1934) and how we develop psychologically (Vygotsky, 1978).

Doyal and Gough, citing Nevitt, make the following point:

*Social needs are demands which have been defined by society as sufficiently important to qualify for social recognition as goods or services which should be met by government intervention.*

(Nevitt, 1977, p115 in Doyal and Gough, 1991, p10).

We shall consider this point below when we look at the history of need where we shall see that society has generally, and for a long, long time deemed that some needs are so important and all encompassing that the most effective way to meet them is to do so *collectively* via the creation and implementation of *law* and *policy*.

## Theories and interpretations of need

### *A hierarchy of human need*

One theory of human need developed by the American psychologist Abraham Maslow, (1970) argues that there are essentially five categories of need, subdivided into two sub-sets ('deficiency' motives or needs and 'being' motives or needs), which he saw as being ranked *hierarchically*, as in the 'famous' triangle. Maslow's thinking was firmly located within the tradition of humanistic psychology that posits (somewhat optimistically, some would say) that the paramount internal drive is the motivation to achieve one's fullest potential. This ultimate goal was that of 'self actualisation' and refers to the satisfaction of the need to understand, to give and to 'grow' as a person. This however can only be achieved if all other lower-order needs have been met.

Maslow said that each level of need must be sufficiently satisfied before one can 'progress' upwards to meet the needs on the next level. So, our need for oxygen, food and water, sex (for reproductive purposes only in this scheme), sleep and the elimination of waste takes priority over other needs when these arise. We then concern ourselves with ensuring that our 'safety' needs are attended to: being safe, feeling safe. Thereafter, the other needs within each of the levels are attended to. However, we don't consciously think 'I need to meet all my physiological needs this morning then I can look at the others after lunch'. We simply 'get on with it' until a certain 'need' effectively tells us that it must be met. For example, when you feel tired, you reach a point where you have to *sleep* otherwise your body begins to shut down and the need for sleep cuts across anything else you might be doing at the time, which might be addressing other needs higher up the hierarchy. This level one need is so crucial to our well being that it just has to be met and when that point arises, *nothing else matters*. In relation to level two, the safety needs, these can even be compromised if level one needs are not met. If you are in need of food (and here we should acknowledge that we are talking about a *real* need for food which many of us will not be familiar with - near starvation), then you will do some fairly dangerous things to get it and thereby compromise your own safety needs because the need for food is paramount. You might however be in level five, reading Dostoyevsky's *Netochka Nezvanova* or enjoying the *Arietta* of Beethoven's piano sonata opus 111 when you suddenly feel the need to empty your bowels. This need overrides any other and you are most likely to stop your

reading or listening and go to the toilet. Similarly, while reading, etc., you may learn that the date you had tonight has called off; this kicks in needs around love and belongingness and your priority will be find out why it has been cancelled. Your capacity to concentrate on higher activities to the same extent will be compromised until you have more information. In such circumstances, you go straight from level five to these 'lower' levels almost instantaneously. However, reference to such 'lower-levels' should not be taken to imply that they are less important; in fact, it could be argued that the contrary is the case and the idea of 'higher-order' and 'lower-order' needs only represents their depiction within a hierarchical structure and as such, may be (diagrammatically) accurate whilst actually belying the higher-level *significance* in the broad scheme of things of those needs at levels one, etc.

In essence, Maslow's theory argues that each level of need must be met if we are to be able to function fully and enjoy a 'rounded' existence. In reality however, there are many people across the world who never get beyond meeting those needs at level one; think about some of the war-torn places we hear about on the news or some of the very poor countries in Africa, for example. In the UK, there are many who do not get much beyond level two; these may be people you work with who might be homeless and otherwise alone. There are also some people who cannot attend to their level one needs themselves without assistance. Think of someone with motor neurone disease; for example, Professor Stephen Hawking, the Cambridge cosmologist has suffered from this degenerative condition for many, many years and whilst he spends his days thinking about the origins of the universe (clearly a level five activity), he is more or less totally dependent upon others to meet all his other needs. If others did not attend to these, routinely and regularly, he would be unable to focus upon such lofty matters.

In the field of social work and social care, some individuals are dependent upon others to help them to meet a number of the lower-level needs. For example, someone may not have enough income to allow them to provide sufficient food, warmth, shelter etc for their family so need state assistance in the form of welfare benefits to achieve this. A young child may be being sexually abused by an adult and therefore needs someone to help them meet their safety needs and someone who has experienced the loss of a spouse in some way may need assistance in meeting their needs around love and belongingness. It may be that they have friends and/or families who can do this with and/or

for them or they may not. If they do not, the question then becomes one of *who* should do this and *how*? Is it the state? If so, what form should this take? Who pays for it? Is it a priority for the social work/social services department *relative to their other operational priorities*? The writings of Jonathan Bradshaw referred to below might help you to understand some of these issues a little more clearly.

### ***A theory of (universal?) human need***

Doyal and Gough (1984; 1991) offer two main arguments regarding the issue of need. First, that the concept of need is central to any discussion regarding the role of welfare in contemporary society and second, that the concept should be reformulated to ensure that it can be applied to a broad range of contemporary problems. They argue that these activities are essential to act as a counter to new right individualism and what they see as a shift away from a *collective* approach to the meeting of human need.

Their position is a broadly Marxist/Critical one that sees the state as having a major role in addressing the issue of the needs of its citizens. However, they believe that the whole concept of need is so mixed up and open to individual interpretation that until we are clear about what it is we are talking about when we refer to need, actually thinking about meeting it will be almost impossible. For them, there should be agreement on what constitutes *universal needs*, the things that we *all* require in order to be able to function adequately.

What Doyal and Gough argue is that there are certain needs that are common to *everyone* irrespective of who they are and where they live, for example water, adequate food, appropriate shelter, adequate clothing, adequate health. Note that they do not (cannot?) specify *how much* or the *form* such a requirement should take, as this would be culturally and historically *specific* and therefore *relative*. It is important to think about this because there is a danger of seeing this argument as one based around a certain degree of *absolutism* concerning need. For example, you may be familiar with the work of Townsend (1979) in relation to poverty and his notions of *absolute* and *relative* poverty. The former categorisation was an attempt to identify and fix a rock-bottom level of goods and services which all of us required in order to function; a drop below this would be incompatible with continued well-being and in the extreme, life. Current social security levels ('subsistence') are based on this thinking, as are eligibility criteria for access to services that we shall

consider later. At the broader universal level, it is important to distinguish between *what* is needed and *how much* of it is needed. We can come to some level of agreement regarding the former, but would need to be more relativistic with regards to the latter i.e. relative poverty.

Doyal and Gough suggest that basic individual needs relate to those goals that must be achieved if an individual is to achieve any other subsequent goal and are *survival/health* and *autonomy/learning*. However, these can only be met if four *social* pre-conditions are present: *production, reproduction, culture/communication* and *political authority*.

We seem therefore to be able to identify *what* needs we have; the issue then becomes how these are *satisfied* or met and by whom, in what form and for how long.

Needs change with time and Doyal and Gough use the notion of 'historical progress' to effectively denote the role of time, place and space in relation to discussions about need and therefore acknowledge the *relative nature* of the concept which they then try to give *absolute form* to, at least insofar as *basic needs* are concerned. This sense of historical progress is used in a broadly Marxist sense whereby they suggest, as Marx implied, that needs cannot be determinate; rather, they are subject to (broad) definition by reference to the particular socio-historical milieu (what is happening at that time and the shape and form of any particular society). Doyal and Gough however, in their search for *universal* needs do not support Marx's implication that needs are essentially 'open-ended' although at one level this suggestion can be reframed to accommodate the notion of *relativism* in relation to those factors referred to above.

### ***A taxonomy of social need***

Another theory around need and how it ought to be responded to was developed by Bradshaw (1972). In this seminal paper, Bradshaw proposed that human need manifests and is defined in certain ways depending upon a number of factors. He does not discuss whether there are universal needs or whether some needs are more important than others *per se*; rather, he suggests that the ways in which need as a *concept* is dealt with varies according to who is *experiencing* it and who is *defining* it. Implicit here of course are *subjective* determinations of what need *is*, *who* has a need and *how* it should be responded to.

In his opening to the paper, Bradshaw states that:

*The concept of social need is inherent in the idea of social service. The history of the social services is the story of the recognition of social needs and the organisation of society to meet them. (p640)*

He then goes on to quote from the Seebohm Report (Seebohm, 1968) which said that ... *the personal social services are large-scale experiments in ways of helping those in need.* This is echoed by TH Marshall (1976) who said that *Welfare ... is a compound of material means and immaterial ends* (In Timms and Watson, 1976, pp51-2). These comments help us to appreciate that need is ever-present and that as a society we are committed to deal with it *collectively* where we can, assuming that there is some level of agreement on what *is* a need, etc as we mentioned before. Bradshaw provides us with the following arrangement (taxonomy) in order to help us to think about this very thing and highlights four conceptions of need:

**Normative need** This is what the professional or other person with expertise in an area or subject defines as need in any given situation. This definition would usually be supported by reference to some generally agreed upon standard regarding the particular need. For example, you might be said to be depressed when you reach a particular score on the Beck Depression Inventory, or you might be said to be in need of nourishment when your weight and other indicators of nourishment fall below a set standard. Nowadays, most social work and social services departments have sets of 'eligibility criteria' that are used to determine whose needs are the greatest based on the outcomes of an assessment and a point-scoring system. For example, if you are 90 years old, live alone and have no family or other social supports and have limited mobility, you are likely to be deemed to be *more* needy than a 90 year old living alone with no mobility issues who has family living in the same street who pop in and see you twice or three times a day, seven days per week.

Such classifications of need are open to claims of paternalism and the standards to which people refer (and perhaps *defer*) in order to make a judgement may conflict with other normative measures and may change over time. Eligibility criteria are reviewed regularly and may appear to the recipient

to be either more or less generous or facilitative depending on whether the person gets what they think they need. Which leads us on to consider the next category, that of *felt need*.

***Felt need*** In this classification, need is equated with *want*. It is argued that this conception is usually inadequate as a 'true' measure of need because of the element of subjectivity inherent within the individual. Some may say 'Yes, I need it' whereas others may say they do not need it (even though they do) because this could signal for them a loss of independence, for example.

***Expressed need*** This is *felt need* turned into action. Here, unmet need is determined by reference to those who are requesting the service. This raises issues about those people who, by themselves are perhaps unable to express their felt need, so as a measure, it is perhaps unreliable. For example, an individual with a profound learning disability is unlikely to be able to recognise that they need support all day, every day so it would be up to professionals to make this claim on their behalf and action it appropriately. Clearly, this is an example of *paternalism* but arguably a justifiable one assuming the request is genuine and the need met appropriately.

***Comparative need*** Here, the measure of need is taken by reference to the characteristics of a particular group *who are in receipt of a service* (that is, they have an identified need) and applied to other groups with similar characteristics *who are not in receipt of a service*. This latter group are then said to be in need, based on this comparison. Such determinations are used to compare not only individuals but areas too. Need determined by reference to this measure is essentially the gap between what people receive in one place as opposed to similar people in another place.

### ***Concepts in action: Relativism, absolutism and subjectivism***

*We do however need to pause awhile to consider the issue of relativism and subjectivism at this point. Some writers like Doyal and Gough argue that there should be clarity on what are regarded as universal human needs and that agreement should be reached on what these are before we can begin to discuss how best to meet them.*

*One danger of all of this is that we get into tautological discussions.*

*It is however arguable in my view that there can be no absolute level of how much is required of anything, as this will vary from individual to individual (even at minute levels), although we can maintain that there are certain things we all need but that their particular form, structure, quality and quantity would of necessity be geographically, culturally (socially) and historically relative and therefore somewhat subjective in relation to these conditions. Thus, arguments around absolute and universal levels of need are difficult to sustain because there will always be a degree of subjectivism at play in the sense that this represents the requirements of geography, culture and historical time although these subjective elements should be differentiated from those subjective demands which present as wants, as these invariably exceed the basic requirements. One example of this would be the way in which the concept of relative poverty has now replaced that of absolute poverty (see for example Townsend, 1954; 1979). This occurred because as society changed, certain 'things' came to be seen as increasingly necessary for everyday life and a recent survey suggested that most people felt that a mobile phone was an essential item. Thus, if you don't have a mobile, are you in need, and if so, why? Is the possession of a mobile phone necessary to ensure that you can meet other needs? Is it therefore a basic need, and if so, is it a universal basic need?*

### **How do needs function?**

Doyal and Gough (1984; 1991) suggest needs can be seen in three ways; as *goals*, as *wants* and as *strategies*. In relation to the first category, needs as *goals*, this suggests that these types of needs are generalisable to everyone. These types of needs would be those that are *necessary pre-requisites* for the accomplishment of other things. For example, we all need water (in whatever form), as without it we would perish.

Needs as *wants* implies a different conception and brings in the issue of *preferences*. These are not necessarily generalisable to everyone as they imply a personally subjective determination of their importance *to that individual* (or group of individuals). For example, you might feel that you need a new plasma TV, but this type of need does not fall within the category of being a necessary pre-requisite for the meeting of other, essential needs.

Needs as *strategies* refer to the means we might adopt in order to meet other needs (goals or wants). You might for example say that 'I need to see a doctor' in order that you can then meet other needs like getting rid of your headache so that you can go back to work, etc.

Arguably, *primary needs* are those which if not met diminish our capacity to function at an optimum level by being able to meet other needs, as well as having the potential to threaten our survival. After all, our ultimate need is to *survive*.

In the current economic climate it will be interesting to see if our views of need alter and whether there is an *increase* in needs as goals. For example, with (global) unemployment rising, the need for paid work will figure more prominently in the *needs as goals* category.

## **ACTIVITY 1.2**

### ***Needs and wants***

*Think of different sorts of needs that you feel you have. Can you separate these out into needs and wants? What is their essential difference?*

### **A history of need**

The whole issue of need is actually wrapped up in notions of 'well-being' and welfare; in order to be well, in the broad sense, certain needs have to be met consistently. We have discussed this before; if some needs are not met we will fail to achieve that standard of well-being that allows us to function effectively as a human being within our particular milieu. As we have seen, there are some individuals and groups who for many reasons are unable to meet certain of their own needs without help from others. These 'others' might be family and friends (these may be the lucky ones), or for some it has to be 'the comfort of strangers' they rely upon, often in the form of the state and its various institutions and organisations specifically set up and designed (well or badly) to address these kinds of situations and whose *raison d'être* is to address the issue of unmet need.

However, Ancient Greece is generally regarded as the birth-place of modern democracy and the writings of the Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and others offer useful insights into the nature of social life which are as relevant today as they were over 2000 years ago. Their writings covered such subjects as how we learn and gather knowledge (epistemology), mathematics and

much concerning the nature of the human condition including how to live 'the good life' (ethics) and how to govern people and run society (politics). In these writings it is clear that the ancient Greeks believed that there were certain things which everyone needed, irrespective of 'class' (even though slavery was the norm then), status or ability in order that the collective (society) could function at a basic level so that other things could be achieved. The basic premise here was that everyone had a role to play in society because all the various jobs that had to be done were all inter-related and all ultimately contributed to the (collective) 'good life'. For example, if the streets were not kept clean, this could create disease that could affect the capacity of many people to do other jobs because they were sick. Similarly, inadequate nourishment led to hunger that minimised a persons' capacity to function in *any* meaningful way, so a steady supply of food for everyone was seen as an essential pre-requisite for the continuation of society in general. The basic understanding therefore was that there were certain *basic* things that were necessary for everyone to have and to do in order that society could function as effectively as possible.

Over the course of history it has been acknowledged that there are certain things that everyone requires access to and one of the most efficient and effective ways of doing this has been via a collective and *centralised* effort organised by those elected to govern; in essence, the *state*. As such, any discussion of how the state responds collectively to need involves us thinking about the role of *law* and (*social*) *policy* (see Hothersall and Bolger, (*forthcoming*)).

The Poor Laws implemented across the UK from *circa* sixteenth century can be seen as early attempts by the state to regulate social life as a response to the potential for social unrest. History tells us that state intervention, in whatever historical form, has often arisen as a response to the threat of social disorder often because of disquiet in the populace generated by unmet need of some sort or another. In this regard, state involvement manifested itself as the provision of *poor relief* for those who could not work as one means of meeting social need whilst simultaneously minimising the likelihood of social unrest.

From a Scottish perspective, the Act of 1579 remained the basis of Scots' Poor Law, with minor amendments in 1597 and 1672 until the passing of the Poor Law (Scotland) Act 1845. These early arrangements were essentially church-based, drawing funds from church (Kirk) donations (Cage,

1981). However, as secularisation increased and committed churchgoers decreased, this compromised the capacity of the Kirks to finance the system.

In England, the Poor Law Act of 1601 (referred to as 'The 43<sup>rd</sup> of Elizabeth') legitimised a distinction between three groups of poor. *The impotent poor* (the elderly, the sick, the disabled, etc.) were those to be housed in the poorhouses or almshouses and given 'relief' (or support) because it was acknowledged that they were *unable* (not *unwilling*) to meet their own needs, whilst *the able-bodied poor* were to be made to work, and later allowed to reside in the work-houses whilst the *idle poor*, who were seen as those who *could* work but refused to, were placed in 'corrective' sections of the workhouses and punished. This is perhaps one of the first publicly and officially articulated descriptions of different categories of people who, according to the state, had different needs and therefore had different types of *eligibility* for assistance or services.

'Modern' social policy is invariably aligned to the so-called industrial revolution (a phrase coined by one of the great nineteenth-century reformers, Arnold Toynbee) where vast numbers of people began living and working together in close proximity to each other. This generated a number of challenges for the government of the day who had to respond to the (new) needs of the population that were based upon the effects of mass migration to the developing towns and cities. This included increasing concerns over public health and sanitation, squalor, disease (especially cholera), public ignorance as to the state of the nation, air pollution, industrial injury and deaths and the increasing use of children for labour. Someone had to take control and set a series of rules within which social life could operate smoothly.

For many commentators, the 'New' Poor Law of 1834 is seen as the starting point for the modern history of social policy, although any discussion of such issues must acknowledge that similar centralised responses had been evident in earlier epochs because as we have seen, the effects of industrialisation were no different to those of earlier social phenomena in Elizabethan times for example, relative to the size of the populations. The effects of enclosures and other agrarian-based issues caused similar difficulties in their time and had themselves necessitated collectively centralised responses. *Any* discussion concerning social policy has to have some reference to history. This is an absolute necessity because where things are today in relation to social life are very clearly products of the past. Consider the following comment:

*History is not a recipe book; past events are never replicated in the present in quite the same way ... [However] .... We can learn from history how past generations thought and acted, how they responded to the demands of their time and how they solved their problems. We can learn by analogy, not by example, for our circumstances will always be different than theirs were. The main thing history can teach us is that human actions have consequences and that certain choices, once made, cannot be undone. They foreclose the possibility of making other choices and thus they determine future events.*

(Lerner, 1997, pp199-213 quoted in Hendrick ,2005, p11).

To the above we can also add that human *inaction* can have much the same effect.

By the turn of the twentieth century, a number of laws and other policy initiatives had emerged which sought to address many of the ills of late Victorian society and the expansion of capitalist labour. These included improvements in arrangements concerning child labour, the development of a hospital system that grew from the earlier introduction and subsequent expansion of poor-law hospitals and improvements to public health (legislated for from 1848). The Liberal reforms (1905-1914) were the beginnings of growing social awareness and a refinement of the social conscience after what might be seen to have been the barbarism of industrialisation. The tenure of the Liberal government brought major changes to the way in which social policy was conceived, implemented and subsequently developed.

The inter-war years saw further developments in relation to policy, particularly with regard to unemployment and national health insurance. The Second World War, as a *total war*, tended to reduce social distinctions and the poverty of many children, as well as the effects of poor nutrition on everyone, all served as a wake-up call for the nation.

The coalition government during the war years introduced a range of measures including the Determination of Needs Act 1941, which abolished the (dreaded) 'Household Means Test'. Other measures introduced from 1940 included free school meals and milk for all school children, free milk for mother's and babies and a wide-ranging programme of free immunisations (especially against diphtheria, which actually killed more children than the bombs did). The post-war reconstruction was

central to the thoughts of most people at the time and in some respects, the cessation of World War II provided a platform for a number of important social reforms.

The *Beveridge Report* was published in December 1942 and it was this which identified what were seen as the five giant ills of society (Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness) which were subsequently to be responded to by national schemes and systems of social insurance and social security (want), a national health service (disease), compulsory education for children (ignorance), a national programme of house building by local authorities with attention on public health matters (squalor) and a system of labour exchanges and allowances to deal with unemployment (idleness).

The period from 1951 to the advent of the reign of Margaret Thatcher as leader of the Conservative Party and Prime Minister in 1979 is seen as the last great period of welfare consensus. From an ideological perspective, all political parties during this time tended to agree, in general, that state intervention in certain areas of private life, along with the public regulation of large sectors of the economy (nationalisation) should be the norm. Such a position tended to eclipse the usual ideological positions adopted by the respective political parties. However, this tradition of liberal ideas came to a halt when Mrs Thatcher came to power and adopted a neo-Liberal approach to policymaking and welfare, which emphasised the role of the free market, the value of individualism and minimal role for state intervention.

The history of need is also the history of welfare, which is not a modern idea even if the term itself is. What the above illustrates is that for thousands of years there has always been a role for *collective action* in meeting human needs which, as society has become more complex, has itself become more sophisticated in terms of how this is done. Social work and social care practices are fundamentally designed to assist in the identification and meeting of need within a broad socio-political and organisational context.

### ***Perspectives on welfare***

*What should be the role and purpose of welfare? In the welfare literature, we can identify five interrelated perspectives that offer different understandings of human nature and the relationship between individuals and the state. Deacon (2002) summarises these as follows:*

**Welfare as an expression of altruism** This perspective sees one of the primary functions of welfare as being to redistribute resources and opportunities in order that this might create a sense of mutual obligation and help, thus providing a broad framework for the expression of altruism. This perspective is focused upon the issues around inequality and is more concerned than the other perspectives on the identification and measurement of social need.

Some of the key elements of this perspective on welfare include the view that state benefits should be seen as being no different from other forms of benefits e.g. occupational benefits or tax relief and that all benefits should be non-means tested, offered without prejudice and perceived as being but one route to utilising the resources of the state to assist individuals in fulfilling their own potential.

In essence, this approach to understanding the broad function of welfare and its associated systems is to appreciate that it effectively overlooked any attempt to explain poverty by reference to the behaviour of the poor themselves. In its rejection of an individualist account of poverty, where the question of whether people's own behaviour represented some meaningful choice in relation to explaining why they may be poor, it became focused upon broad structural factors at the expense of considering any role for human agency.

In some respects the avoidance of these issues left it open to criticism and to the subsequent influences of conservative and neo-liberal ideas concerning welfare where a strong individualist approach took hold, particularly as welfare spending continued to increase, which in its wake promoted the development of the notion of 'welfare dependency'.

The other perspectives below have all developed as a critique of this one.

**Welfare as a channel for the pursuit of self-interest** In this approach, the baseline assumption is that the majority of people will act rationally to further their own self-interest and that of their dependents, with the objective of any welfare system being to channel such behaviours in ways which promote the common good. In order for such an approach to be effective, entitlements to common resources (i.e. benefits) should reward those behaviours and attributes that promote the common good and penalise those which do not. A simple example might be a system where those actively seeking work are rewarded by a higher benefit payment than those who refuse to seek work. As Deacon comments, (W)elfare policies cannot attain their ends by coercion; nor can they rely on

appeals to altruism. All they can do is create a framework that channels the individual pursuit of self-interest (p48).

**Welfare as the exercise of authority** *In this approach, the baseline assumption is that the poor are poor because they do not/cannot respond to opportunities for improvement or advancement because of inherent flaws in their own characters. Therefore, the solutions are to be found in the exercise of authority, not in the development of progressive frameworks that encourage self-motivation. In order to do this, any entitlement to welfare should be conditional upon people behaving in certain, prescribed ways. The withdrawal of welfare is not necessarily seen as the best option because to do so would simply exacerbate the requirement on the state to provide some form of (minimal) assistance. This approach aims to effectively force the poor to discharge their obligations towards the common good (for example, getting paid work and thereby contributing to the economy which generates more resources for all) and their obligations as citizens. This perspective has little in the way of sympathy for the potentially stigmatising effects of welfare programmes; in fact, stigma would be seen as a form of (perverse) incentive.*

**Welfare as a transition to work** *Essentially, this approach sees the purpose of welfare as simply a 'bridge' between two phases of an individual's life. Welfare is seen as being a facilitative mechanism which will provide assistance in both monetary and other forms, including training and education relevant to the pursuit and performance of (usually paid) work.*

**Welfare as a mechanism for moral regeneration** *Broadly, this perspective views welfare as being a part of a broad-based strategy which aims to persuade individuals of the moral value inherent in work and a degree of self-sufficiency within a context which sees the receipt of welfare assistance as short-term. (pp1-2).*

## **Comment**

*All of the above perspectives have a different view regarding the role that welfare should have in relation to the meeting of particular needs. They also present views as to what should be rather than offering an analysis of what is.*

As we can see, individual need is often manifest as a product of collective circumstance. In these situations the government of the day offers a collective response that should benefit everyone. In this way, society is able to continue to function in such a way as to enable other tasks to be undertaken and other needs to be met. These laws and policies are intended to offer a coherent and consistent response to particular social phenomena that in the examples referred to constitute a threat to the general well-being of each individual and therefore society. As such, what we see in these responses are public (state) acknowledgement of what are deemed to be the most essential needs.

Here then is a history of need as determined by the state in its various guises over the years. As we can see, some aspects of social life have consequences for all of us (for example, inadequate sanitation would affect us all) and have to be addressed *centrally*, largely for the purposes of effective organisation and implementation as well as economies of scale. What though about *individual needs* which extend *beyond* the realms of public provision like the measures referred to above?

In response to this we should look at the *range* of public policies which exist in order to determine whether individual cases of need can be dealt with within any of these broad areas; for example, health policy (disease), social work and social services (want), housing policy (squalor), employment and economic policy (idleness) and education policy (ignorance). Arguably, there is the potential for a lot of individual need to be subsumed under these headings and the issue then becomes one of locating particular policies that have as their focus a particular aspect of need. For example, under 'health' one can see law and policy specifically designed to address different aspects of health-related need: mental health; physical health (medical and surgical services); mobility (physiotherapy services); incapacity, etc.

## Need and social work

As a social worker the issue of need is something you will be dealing with every day as well as related issues like vulnerability, risk and protection, which we cover elsewhere in this chapter and other parts of the book. So, what is the connection between need and social work? Essentially, social work (and other forms of social care) is about meeting people's needs on behalf of the state. This might be in the form of statutory social work services delivered to children and their families, including child protection services (Hothersall, 2006; 2008), services to those with mental health difficulties and those who may be vulnerable and in need because of some form of incapacity (Hothersall, Mass-Lowit and Golightley, 2008) as well as those people with other forms of disability or impairment. These services would be seen as being focused upon addressing individual need whereas other services have a focus on the needs of the wider community and the general populace, such as criminal justice services. Social workers who work for a local authority (a statutory agency) will also be involved in delivering non-statutory social work services as will those social workers employed by voluntary organisations. There is no difference in relation to the issues they are trying to address (i.e. meeting need), but some services are *statutory* in that these are mandated by statute (law) and are often those services which are given priority, usually because they have as their focus the most vulnerable people in society or because the consequences to individuals, groups, communities and society at large of not addressing certain needs via the delivery of these services could be severe.

### ACTIVITY 1.3

*Look at the list below and make a note of any needs you feel might arise because of that particular situation or condition. How might these impair or otherwise affect a person's well being and/or their functioning? Then consider who should be responsible for meeting the needs you identify.*

*Schizophrenia                      Type 1 Diabetes                      Racist abuse                      Poor housing*

*Severe learning disability                      Heroin addiction Alzheimer's disease*

*Child sexual abuse                      Stroke Unemployment Homelessness Poverty Alcoholism*

*Migration to the UK*

*You may have thought that some of these needs have different causes and where the cause is seen to perhaps lie with the individual concerned, this may have influenced how you responded to the questions above. Was that the case?*

Within social work and social services generally, the aim is to respond to unmet need as it arises and this (aspirational?) goal is enshrined in legislation. However, we have to consider firstly whether it is in fact possible to meet *all* unmet need and secondly whether it is the responsibility of the *state* to do this.

In response, we have to consider which needs have priority over others and whether these needs are primary to the goal of allowing people to meet other, less essential needs themselves, which is the issue around primary needs, secondary needs and wants discussed above. In terms of whether the state should be the prime agent of meeting need, consideration has to be given here to the role and influence of *ideology* and *economics*.

According to the SOED (OUP, 2007), ideology refers to *a system of ideas or way of thinking pertaining to a class or individual, especially as a basis of some economic or political theory or system, regarded as justifying actions and especially to be maintained irrespective of events.*

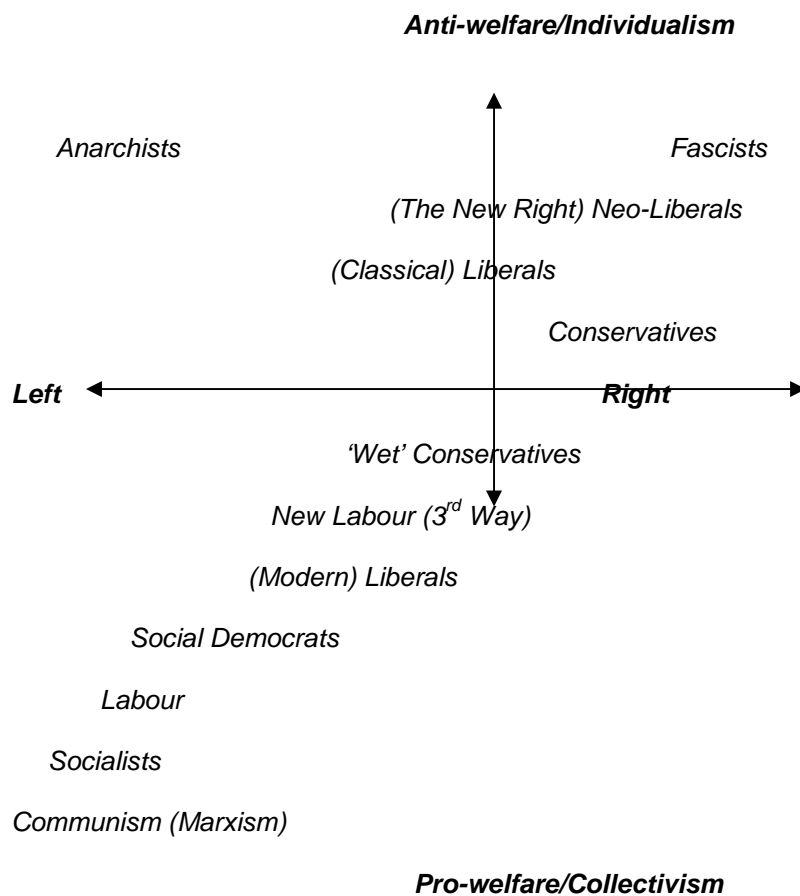
Ideology refers to a set of underpinning ideas and values that inform thought, language and subsequent action. In relation to social policy, these 'ideologies of welfare' are indicative of the role the state should play in relation to public and private life. They therefore represent the manifestations of political ideologies which, broadly speaking, run along a continuum from the *left* to the *right*.

According to Heywood,

*An ideology is a more or less coherent set of ideas that provides the basis for organised political action, whether this is intended to preserve, modify or overthrow the existing system of power. All ideologies therefore ... offer an account of the existing order, usually in the form of a 'world view' (and) advance a model of a desired future, a vision of the 'good society' ... and explain how political change can and should be brought about ...*

(2003, p12)





*These typologies work because of 'ideal types'. Within the extreme positions, we can see what appear to be inconsistencies. For example, fascism would see no place for outright dependence and the claims by Russia for the adoption of communism based upon Marx are clearly seen to be untrue. Perhaps there is a case to think of 'ideologies of welfare', which would connect ideology and welfare as noted above but to think also about 'welfare according to ideology'.*

Thus, whether the state should be the main player in the meeting of certain individual needs depends amongst other things upon the prevailing ideology; a more left-wing, socialist government would probably aim to have a broad-based system in place to respond to and meet need whereas a more right-wing, individualistic government may feel that the individual (and their families) should be responsible for these things. So whether it is the state, the individual or some combination of these which is seen as having primary responsibility for providing what Rawls (1972) refers to as 'primary

goods' (i.e. those basic opportunities and services which we all need and should be entitled to) is very much a product of its time and therefore historically relative.

In relation to the relevance of *economics*, from a social work and social services perspective, the so-called community care reforms of the 1980's, following hard on the heels of the neo-liberal policies of the Thatcher government led to the introduction of a mode of social work provision which had economics at its forefront; care management. In this mode of service delivery, social workers and other care professionals were responsible not for the *delivery* of social work and/or social care services, but for assessing and devising care plans which were economically viable and subsequently delivered by the provider who cost the less. This heralded the introduction of what many see as the 'social work business' (see Harris, 2002), with the emphasis upon business models as a means by which social work and social care services could be provided as effectively and economically as possible.

Whilst it would be folly to assume that money grows on trees and that the cost of services should not be a consideration, it could be argued that human need is (has been) sacrificed at the altar of economics and that service providers (state, voluntary and private) have as their focus 'best (economic) value', sometimes at the cost of 'best human value'. It is interesting to note that over the last fifteen years or so, there has been a growth in the number and *complexity* of eligibility criteria devised by service providers which effectively hierarchically rank need from 'essential' to 'low priority' and accord services to those at the top of the list. This you might argue makes plain (common, economic) sense and most people would probably agree with you, unless of course they were one of those affected by such policies. For example, which of these in relation to an older person living alone is the most important: having a walking frame so that you can get out and about, or having someone call at your house on a daily basis to make sure you are OK? Perhaps they are *both* equally important. Perhaps the person could manage with a walking stick rather than a frame in order that someone could visit the other person to prevent them from becoming lonely and depressed and perhaps contemplating suicide. Or perhaps the other person needs the frame because if they were not able to get out and about, they too would become depressed. How would you decide?

## **Legislative and policy responses to need**

The legislative basis that underpins many of the responses to need is nowadays conceived of as representing a particular formulation of the concept, that of *vulnerability*. This appears to be a rather loaded concept in that it carries with it a range of assumptions about the capabilities and capacities of a particular group of people and how likely they are to be able to meet their own needs or have them met on their behalf.

If you take a look at a range of statutes, for example the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (S) Act 2003, the Adult Support and Protection (S) Act 2007, the Adults with Incapacity (S) Act 2000, the Mental Health Act 2007 (E&W), the Mental Capacity Act 2005 (E&W) the Children (S) Act 1995 or the Children Act 2004 (E&W) you will see that they all make provisions to deal with particular broad categories of need which are seen to arise as a result of mental ill-health, incapacity (however caused and manifest) and immaturity (childhood). You have already completed an exercise where you have looked at the types of needs that might arise because of a particular situation or condition; these statutes take as their starting point the collective wisdom in relation to a range of generalised conditions and states of being and create a *generalised* framework within which specific needs can be located and the provisions of the law then applied proactively and more *individualistically* to afford care, treatment and/or protection.

### **ACTIVITY 1.4**

*Think of the types of needs that might arise because:*

- (a) you are a child;
- (b) you have a mental illness;
- (c) you have some form of incapacity (for example, you have dementia or are unable to use your limbs, or have difficulty communicating).

*Do these needs bring with them an increased likelihood or risk of harm? Think about why this might be.*

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