Sociology of Health and Illness A Study on Society and Health in Barddhaman Town

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Abstract

Health and illness is an important part of the field of Sociology as well as the major concern of society too. It is obvious that society and health both has relationship and connection. We all know birth and death rate of human beings are associated with a demographic structure of a society and health and illness are doing impact on birth and death rate. Though health and illness both are different parts of society and related with the biological structure of humans but each and every part are inter-connected and doing impact on society. Through this research, I am trying to find out health and illness is a totally different entity or associated with society? Is those are related to other social factors such as the family, communities, school, workplace, economy, and religion etc. How socioeconomic situations of individuals, particular places or circumstances, ethnic traditions or beliefs, food habits and other cultural factors taking important parts in health and illness? External factors are the causes of diseases though it is not the only causes. In my research, I annoyed to discover those socio-economic factors of society which made a tremendous impact on healthcare.

Key Words: Sociology, ill, demography, association, institution, community, disease etc.

Introduction: Sociology[1] of health and illness[2] it not just a topic it is a major part of society. It is focusing on broader perspectives to justifying society and health. Society and social institutions are not same it differs and varied from place to place, area to area and globally, so diseases and health problems also differ from different areas. Health problems

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[1] Sociology is the science of society, social institutions, and social relationships. It is the systematic study of the development, structure, interaction, and collective behavior of organized groups of human beings. It is a social science that uses various methods of empirical investigation and critical analysis to develop a body of knowledge about social order, disorder, and change.

[2] Illness is a condition of being unhealthy in your body or mind. It is a specific condition that prevents your body or mind from working normally.

are examined and compared based on the structure of the family, norms, and values of communities, traditional medicine, economics structure, morality, rites of religion, and culture that are specific to each region. For example, tuberculosis, thalassemia etc. are health issues in India, while it is problematic in certain areas but not in every area.

Before us discussing Sociology of health and illness we have to know why health and illness part of Sociology is and how society, health and illness influence to each other. Health is associated with people's biological or natural conditions. Every disease does impact on health and tried to destroy the immune power of the body. Sociologists tried to reveal and exhibit that the spread of diseases is heavily influenced by the nature and circumstances of individuals and also their socio-economic statuses, their ethnic traditions or beliefs, and other cultural factors. It differs from medical research because medical research might gather statistics on a disease. On the other hand, sociological perspective is focusing on socio-economic and cultural factors which are outside of the human body and does impact on health. Now we live in modern industrialist societies where one social structure differs from another where diseases and illness are their patterns are also dissimilar in various societies.

My study area is Barddhaman town which is under the state of West Bengal of India. After Kolkata, Barddhaman town is a place where health care and medical facilities are good. Par day thousands of people surroundings of Barddhaman town and other areas of Barddhaman district and West Bengal are coming into this town. They are suffering from many diseases, and behind those diseases many causes are associated. Through this research, I tried to find out those different socio-economic factors which manifest and latently responsible behind diseases.

Barddhaman is a Municipality based town in the district of Barddhaman, West Bengal where has 314,265 population among which 159,936 are males and 154,329 are females as per 2011 census. Last two decades in the field of medical sector has emerged very highly. Specialized doctors and many nursing homes we can find here easily. '*Khosbagan'* is Place of Barddhaman and it is famous for medical facilities. Moe than thousands of doctors and hundreds of nursing homes are present over there.

A. **Review of Literature:** A lot of work has been done in the field of Sociology of Health and Illness. Here I present a brief review of the literature. A literature review serves certain essential functions of research. Firstly, a literature review shows that the researcher is aware of the existing work already undertaken in the area. Secondly, it identifies what the researcher takes to be the key issues, the crucial questions and the obvious gaps in the available knowledge. Thirdly, it provides signposts to the researcher about 'where the research is coming from' and what theories and principles have shaped the present research. (Denscombe,1999, p.158). Many writers and thinkers made their tremendous contribution to health and illness. Among those who have contributed to the field, a few may be mentioned. Bernica A. Pescosolido, Jack K. martin, Jane D. McLeod, and Anne Rogers write down about some health and illness related issues in

their book "Handbook of the Sociology of Health, Illness and Healing". Here they discuss the importance of medicines, a connection to the people, connection of personal and cultural system etc. Robin Bunton, Sarah Nettleton and Roger Burrows discuss health promotion and sociology in their book "The Sociology of Health Promotion". Here they cover-up socio-political critique, sociological critique, feminist critique of health promotion. Apart from all those discussions it is essential that my study area is Barddhaman town of West Bengal which is a state of our country India. Here the socio-economic and cultural situation is essential to express this research.

B. **Objectives of the Research:** Health and illness are related to the biological structure of humans. Its impact and effects are associated with the organic structure. Eventually, it is correct but behind health issue and illness social structure and cultural environment are closely allied. In this research, I tried to find out how manifestly and latently socio-cultural atmosphere do impact on the health of human beings. How society creates and defines the health issues and how society, health and illness differ from place to place, area to area? Is remedy or solution of health issues totally related with medicines or social-cultural field plays importance role to solve health problems?

C. **Methods of Study:** To do this research I collected primary data as well as secondary data. I did a survey which was based on survey method. Interviews and questionnaires are the main methods adopted for doing the survey. My sample size was 100 and I collected all those samples randomly. After pilot survey, I prefer Barddhaman town of Burdwan district for my survey area because this town is very much sound in the field of medical industry. Here we can find hospitals, many nursing homes and health care centers. Around one lac people are coming into Barddhaman hospital per day. It the time of survey I visited different places of Barddhaman town to collect information. Among all places mainly Barddhaman Hospital, Khosbagan, and Gangpur area are was very much important. To execute this work I also meet with doctors, caregivers and very important – with common people. Their strong support helps me to accomplish this research.

D. **Health and Illness: Different Perspectives of Sociology:** Health, illness and their relationship with society are much important part of Sociology. Here have various perspectives through which we can justify all points very sharply. From the viewpoints of sociological imaginations each part of society has their own importance and values. It helps us to understand the society with relation to other social parts. If we are focusing on important perspectives on sociology it would be more understandable within us.

1. **The Functional Perspectives:** According to functionalist viewpoints society is a whole and it is maintained and functioned by constituent elements (such as family, institutions, culture, and economy etc.), which are interconnected to each other like organs of human body. Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Talcott Parsons, and Robert k. Merton, etc. were the famous functional theorist whose are associated with functionalism. Functionalism focusing on the complex part of society where every

part work together to promote solidarity and stability. Functionalists argued that individual who are basically sick they affect normal production process of society; therefore this deviance[3] needs to be polished. This is the role of the medical profession. Talcott Parsons was popular for the concept that is "**sick role**"[4]. In medical sociology, the term 'sick role' is related to the sickness and the rights and obligations of the affected. Parsons was a functionalist as well as a sociologist who argued that being sick means that the sufferer enters into a situation where they cannot move smoothly with socially approved behavior. In the functionalist model, Parsons argued that the best way to understand illness sociologically is to view it as a form of deviance that disturbs the social function of the society[5].

2. **The Conflict Perspectives:** Conflict theory argues that the economic and political structures of a society create social divisions, inequalities, and conflicts. Conflict theories are focusing on conflict and dynamic side of our society. Conflict theory is most commonly associated with Karl Marx; his theory was associated with capitalism and dialectical conflict within. Marx advocated that health is the part of the superstructure and it is regulated and maintained by an economy which is the base of a society.

3. **The Interactionist Perspective:** Interactionist theorists told that health and illness socially constructed. They argued that in our society people create the meaning of every facts and situation for interaction and communication. Health, sickness, care all are expressed and delivered by interaction process. Interactionists focus on the specific meanings and cause people attribute to health and illness. Sick role is a knowable tem in Sociology. Talcott Parsons was famous for this topic. According to Parsons, those people who are in sick they cannot maintain their duties smoothly that a person in good health can. As per Parsons sick role is a form of deviance. And this sick role does impact on society as well. Those sociological perspectives express their views on health, illness, and society in a different way.

E. **Sociology of Health and Illness:** Sociology is very much concerned with the social dimension of health and illness. Health and illness are associated with the biological condition of people but social situations are taking a much important role behind any health issues. At the time of the survey in Barddhaman town, I noticed that social situation was associated behind many health problems of people. As a researcher of

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[3] In sociology, deviance describes an action or behavior that violates social norms, including a formally enacted rule (e.g., crime), as well as informal violations of social norms (e.g., rejecting folkways and mores).

[4] Parsons saw the sick role as a form of deviance, or going against societal expectations, because an ill person has different patterns of behavior than the norm.

[5] https://www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/health-and-illness-19/sociological-perspectives-on-health-and-illness-133/the-functionalist-perspective-737-8949/

Sociology, I have revealed that the spread of diseases is heavily influenced by the socio-economic status of individuals, ethnic traditions or beliefs, and other cultural factors. Where medical research might gather statistics on a disease, a social research on an illness would provide insight on what external factors caused behind the diseases and what contrary it become ill.

I did this survey in different areas and places of Barddhaman town. I also visited in many nursing homes and hospitals and personally met with doctors and common peoples. Here I am using different parameters to representing how health and illness related to society.

1. **Residential Place and Health:** Place of residence has an enormous impact on health. Some diseases are associated with a particular place. People who are leaving in urban areas such as in slum areas among them some diseases are common. For example, skin diseases, dust allergies, sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS, mal nutation etc. The slum is the parts of the cities or towns, which are much congested and over populated. In the slum area all family members are living in a single room, here we find lack of proper sanitation, water problems, lack of drainage system and so on. So it is the fact that most of the diseases in slum areas are transmitted through air, water, soil and food or through insect or animal vectors. Apart from slum areas in village areas we can find some specific health related issues. Skin diseases, snake biting etc. we can find more in village areas.

2. **Customs and health:** People of India are emotional and most of the time they are regulated by customs and rituals. Those customs and rituals are doing impact on their health. Before I start my discussion we have to know what custom is. Custom is a practice or rule of conduct established in a particular community, locality, or trade, by long usage and obligatory on those within its scope[6], it is an action or way of behaving that is usual and traditional among the people in a particular group or place. Our tradition, folkways, and mores are reflected through customs. People's behaviors are regulated by it. Here people believe on 'rules of God, prejudices etc. They have faith in their lifestyles, eating habits; foods, fast etc. are controlled by customary rules.

   People told me for maintaining rituals and rites they do not eat a long time in a day. Behind this fasting, they have some desire goals. For prejudices and believing on superstitious many people do not even go to the doctors for a health checkup and using illogical tricks for primary care. Though it is a modern society but still people are also going to the shaman for solving health issues.

3. **Education and Health:** Education and health both has a close relationship. Educated people are taking initiatives to know basic information about health related issues. An uneducated person is very helpless to knowing primary information about the name of the medicine, expire date of medicine, components of medicine and

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[6] http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/custom.html

even to fill up the medical form in hospitals and nursing homes. For those reasons sometimes they are avoiding hospitals and health centers for health checkups. Education can impart a variety of benefits that improve the health trajectory of the recipient. Education contributes to human capital by developing a range of skills and traits, such as cognitive skills, problem-solving ability, learned effectiveness, and personal control.

Education not just related to books or schools it provides us prospects to learn more about health and risks, apart from books in school through hidden curriculum we learn so many things which help us to understand society and social problems. Health issues and prevention both we can learn from our society. Education is a key which develops our consciousness and common sense. People whose are educated they provide us proper knowledge and information about diseases, medicines and so on.

4. **Social Media and Health:** In modern times social media[7] and health are very much associated with each other. Through social media, we are getting various kind of information about health and related issues. Common people to physicians both are taking information from various Social Medias. People are getting information about diseases, their symptoms, about medicines, care, prevention and so many things. It helps us informative and conscious. Social media is a platform where Health Care Professionals getting useful information about health policies, about practical issues and practices. Social media provide us useful medium to communicate and interact with patients, caregivers, students, and colleagues. Health Care Professionals using various social media to improve their knowledge, information about diseases and preventive care. A survey is conducted by 100 peoples in Barddhaman town and among them 90 percent said that they are getting information about health care directly or indirectly from various social Medias.

F. **Economy and health:** Healthcare system is associated with the economy, and it has an impact on the nation because if the health of citizen is good than economic growth of nation will be enriched automatically. There is a bigger correlation between economy and health in our country. Social development, care, prevention and facilities all are adjoining to the economy. If people have sufficient economy then in many cases we can easily overcome from different critical diseases. On the other hand, money is also responsible for many diseases. For instance behind tobacco cancer cigarette is an essential cause and money is indirectly related in this cases. So directly or indirectly money and health are allied to each other from the positive or negative way. At the time of survey, I noticed that people who are economically strong they prefer to go for curing

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[7] Social Media generally refers to computer based and Internet-based tools and technologies that allow individuals and communities to gather and communicate; to share information, ideas, personal messages, images, and other content; and, in some cases, to collaborate with other users in real time.

diseases in private nursing homes, on the other hand, many people whose are coming from village areas and they are not economically stronger than other people they are choosing government hospitals for health care.

Conclusion: Sociology of health and illness describe that our society and social situations and circumstances do broader impact on health care and illness. People are aware of their health care and illness but it is obvious that socio-economic situations are very much important. People whose are living in an urban area they are getting much health facilities and care than village people, as well as urban people are more conscious about health care than village people. Place of residence and area is a necessary to cause for awareness development and facility providence. In the urban areas, we can find super spatiality hospitals, so many medicine stores, 24 hours health facilities, emergencies and other health care issues. So it is very much obvious that behind health care and illness social circumstances are very much indispensable. Through this study in Barddhaman town, I just want to express that health care facilities are better than any other surrounding areas. Health and illness are related to physics of people but our economy, culture, religion, tradition, place, nature, etc. always do broader impact on our health.

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