Social Problems in Finland
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Slides are available at my webpage:

http://www.jyu.fi/~mmantys/teaching.html
Contents:

- The social problems - research tradition
- Income inequality and poverty in Finland
- Deviance
- Child care
1 The research tradition of social problems

The social problems are social phenomena considered to be dysfunctional in the society, at least for some people. There is a group of people, who consider it as a good thing to get rid of the phenomena. The background for the unwanted phenomena can be either social, natural, or biological.
Research on social problems can be located in different fields of social studies.

- Sociology has dealt with social problems: many of the central theorists in sociology are important: Blumer, Merton, Kitsuse. Sociology of deviance
- social policy and social work
- economics?
Traditionally, the schools of thought in social problems can be divided in two main groups:²

- Objectivists take the objectionable or problematic condition identified with a social problem to be a given – that is, to be both objectively real and objectively harmful – and proceed to examine the causes, characteristics, and consequences of that condition as a condition. “Criminal behaviour as social problem”. (Funktionalistit, Robert Merton, marxistit.)

- Subjectivists on the other hand deny that objective conditions are either necessary or sufficient for a social problem to exist. They contend that social problems are the outcome of group activity. Problems, in other words, are accomplishments. “Claims-making about criminality is a social problem.” (Social constructivists, symbolic interactionism.)

According to C. Wright Mills, there is a difference between personal difficulties and social problems. If I would be the only person in Jyväskylä to be unemployed, it would be my personal difficulty, but if there are a group of people unemployed, it is a social problem.

It is possible to alleviate personal difficulties by helping the individual, but not social problems – they have to be dealt with socially.

Simple, but elegant.
A “Social problem” is not an objective state of affairs in a society. There have to be a group of people who consider this state a problem. Usually this group is in a power position or the definition of a problem is connected to their profession. Journalists, politicians, police, and social workers are that kind of professions. Defining something as a social problem is always power-play.
Herbert Blumer and John Kitsuse speak about a theory of the evolutionary change in social problems.

1. the birth of the problem
2. the legitimation of the problem
3. the mobilization of people to change the problem
4. official program is made
5. the program is enacted

There are other theories about the “life history” of the social problems, too.
Professor Jorma Sipilä (University of Tampere) defined social problems consisting of three types of phenomena:

- Poverty.
- Helplessness.
- Deviance.

(Sipilä 1979)
On the following, I will deal with issues of income inequality, poverty and unemployment, and deviant behaviour. I will not go on to the questions of helplessness.
2 Income inequality in Finland

On the following slide, the inequality of incomes in Finland are described by using Gini coefficient.

[The Gini coefficient was developed by the Italian statistician Corrado Gini. It is a measure of the income inequality in a society. The Gini coefficient is a number between 0 and 100, where 0 means perfect equality (everyone has the same income) and 100 means perfect inequality (one person has all the income, everyone else earns nothing). While the Gini coefficient is normally used to measure income inequality, it can be used to measure inequality of assets as well. (From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.)]

Inequality in incomes has risen from a very low 20.5 to 26.

Gini coefficient

year


Gini coefficient
Some other gini-coefficients:

- Australia, 1990, gini-coefficient 41.72
- Brazil, 1989, gini-coefficient 59.60
- Bulgaria, 1989 = 20.69 / 1993 = 34.42
- Chile, 1994 = 56.49
- China, 1992 = 37.80
- Sweden 1992 = 32.44
- USA 1991 = 37.90
Income inequality can even be measured by considering the amount of wealth which the poorest and the richest people in the society can use. The richest decile (richest 10% of the population) is getting more than before the recession. And the poorest decile is getting less than in the beginning of the 1990’s.
Poverty can be measured in a variety of ways. According to prof. Veli-Matti Ritakallio, poverty is measured

- using relative income method
- using relative consumption method
- political-administrative measurement
- counting income-support receivers

On the following slides the last of these is being used.
Income support receiving residents (in %), Finland and in Central Finland 1991–2000

% of population receiving income support over time in Finland and Central Finland.
One of the models of analyzing poverty is concentrating on visual poverty. Visual poverty can be seen in the streets, and in most of the large cities of the world, it can be easily recognized. In Finland, living in the streets is not easy, for the obvious reasons. However, there is a group of people who do not have permanent residence. Usually they dwell in various forms of shelters, but even under bridges, tents and corridors of houses.
3 Deviance

Substance abuse

Drinking alcohol, and the illegal use of drugs causes many kinds of trouble to individuals, families and the society. In the end of Sixties, the total consumption of alcohol was under 3 litres of pure alcohol per person. In 2001, the Finns drank 9.2 litres of pure alcohol per person. The estimated consumption in 2004 was 10.3 litres pure alcohol per person. 28 per cent of the alcohol consumption is strong liquires (vodka and so on). This proportion has been growing, especially since the taxation changed in Spring 2004. The growth of strong liquires during in 2004 has been 21 per cent, and the growth of alcohol consumption (all types) was 6.5 per cent (so called registered consumption – the total consumption is of course higher). 250 000 to 500 000 Finns are drinking too much. The number of
alcoholics can be between 6 to 12 per cent of adult population. According to drinking statistics, 10 per cent of men are drinking at least four times per week (2 per cent of the women are drinking as much). The number of risk-users is even higher: 5-6 per cent of women and 23-24 per cent of men fulfil the criteria of problem-drinker in so called Audit-test (they receive more than 11 points in Audit scale).

In 2001, there were 2454 alcohol-related deaths. Of these, 1490 were caused by alcohol-related illness, and 887 died violently or accidentally after drinking.
Comparison to other Nordic countries in 2002 (litres of pure alcohol per 15 years old resident):

- Greenland 12.3
- Denmark 11.34
- Finland 9.24
- Sweden 6.90
- Norway 5.89
Drug use is still a small problem compared to alcohol abuse. It is growing, though. Around 30 000 persons are problem-users of drugs. In 1999, around 20 per cent of the conscripts had tried narcotics. Cannabis is the typical drug. In 2001, Finland had 150 drug-related deaths. (Nuorvala 2002, 130)

In the survey conducted in 2002, 12 per cent of adult respondents reported having tried or used some narcotic substance during lifetime. Drug use during last year was reported by three per cent, while one per cent had used drugs during last 30 days. (STAKES - REPORT TO THE EMCDDA)
service–users in municipal rehab–clinics in Jyväskylä and Central Finland, (Finland = 100)
Crime

Finland is a society where violent crime is more frequent than in many other countries in Western industrialised world.

Table 1: Violent crimes in Finland 1980 - 1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>homicide</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gross assault</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>2358</td>
<td>2119</td>
<td>2145</td>
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<tr>
<td>battering</td>
<td>9271</td>
<td>15756</td>
<td>17405</td>
<td>18339</td>
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<tr>
<td>minor battering</td>
<td>3088</td>
<td>2534</td>
<td>7805</td>
<td>7538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>together</td>
<td>14037</td>
<td>20770</td>
<td>27435</td>
<td>28109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next slide shows the number of violent crimes announced to police.
In Finland, the crime-rate seems to decline a bit during the recession, but after the recovery there is a slight growth in crime-rate. In Central Finland this tendency is more clear than in the whole country.
Foreigners and crime.

In 2001, almost 98 577 foreigners had residence in Finland. In the same year, the police registered 14 800 cases where the suspected person was from abroad. The number of offences committed by foreigners has increased almost 40% since 1996. The scope is still quite limited: out of all persons suspected of offences known to the police, 2.5% were foreigners.

(CRIME TRENDS IN FINLAND, English Summary)
The foreigners living in Finland report of racist deeds. Especially Somalis are subjected to racist abuses quite often. In 2000, the Police got 289 announcements about racist crimes. 19 per cent of these were directed against Somalis.

(CRIME TRENDS IN FINLAND)
4 Child Welfare Services

The divorce rate has been growing since the family legislation changed in 1988. According to this law, divorce is given to spouses, if they apply for it. (No questions asked.)

- Till 1988, 10 000 divorces per year
- Since 1988, 13 000 - 14 000 divorces per year

(Taskinen 2002, 61)
The growth in child welfare services is eminent. The next graph is about the amount of open care services in child welfare. Even in the support interventions in community care has expanded.
In 1990, 20,000 children were using child-care services, in 2000 this number has grown to 50,000 children which means that 4.3% of children under 18 years of age were using child-care services.

The child-care statistics show that the number of children taken into custody (either foster care or institutional care) has risen during the 1990’s. The number of children in custody has grown 15% in ten years. In 2000, 1,467 children were taken in custody, and a total of 7,300 children were in custody. (Taskinen 2002, 69)

Again, here is a difference between Central Finland and the whole country.
Children taken into foster and residential care in the age of 0–17, Finland 1991–2000

- Foster care (solid line)
- Residential care (dashed line)
The foster care of children seems to grow all the time, but in institutional care there is a drop during the recession. Since 1996 the growth is more rapid.