

Sociology and Issues in the News

Sociological thinking, perspectives and evidence encourage a more sophisticated understanding of current events and issues: crime, poverty, health, education, gender, ethnicity, the family, the welfare state, social policy, work, and political debates, than the typical kind of coverage in most of the media. Sociology offers a broad perspective on the social world and a critical approach to events in the news:

- An awareness that public issues (the decisions of politicians, their policies, structural features of society such as inequality) often result in 'private troubles' for individuals and groups of people, as C. Wright Mills suggested.
- A questioning approach to so called 'common-sense' explanations of events in the news and alternative perspectives and explanations.
- The ability to question, analyse and evaluate different types of evidence, ideas and data.
- Scepticism about the utterances of opinion leaders in the media, of journalists, broadcasters and politicians, and an awareness that ideas are often ideological, reflecting the interests of those who expound them.
- Carefully collected research evidence which can be used to challenge opinions and conclusions based on flimsy evidence.
- Clear concepts which help to illuminate social processes.
- An awareness that the causes and explanations of social issues and events in the news are often more complex than the media and the short term solutions of politicians suggest.
- Scepticism about the construction of official statistics.
- An insight into the ways in which events can be structured by the media in ways which distort them.

ACTIVITY

- Your ability to interpret and apply sociological knowledge is important. It is a good idea to get into the habit of using events in the news as a way of developing these skills.
- Choose a story or issue currently in the news which is relevant to your sociology course.
- Show how the resources of sociology can be used to shed light on the way it is treated and the assumptions lying behind it.
- Use the checklist in the box above to help you show how journalists often skate over the surface of issues and explain why this is.
- Try to offer alternative sociological explanations and evidence but be quite specific which areas of sociology, which studies, which theories are useful.

