

SOCIOLOGICAL COMMENT ON THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION'S DEFINITION OF HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

Health is a part of social life. Since the time human being first appeared on the Earth, the perception of the meaning of the health has changed paralel with the perception of society. Health has been used in varying meanings such as being morally upright, phisical perfection, suffering phisically while obedience, having bath, being rich, having a smooth face, being healthy, not being the other/insane (as stated by Foucault) and interacting with other individuals. Following the enlightenment and industrialization, health was influenced as well by the fundamental changes affecting the world. Stating that health can no longer be defined with olden terms and concepts, World Health Organization (WHO) defined the term in a diferent perspective within the framework of these changes.

Keywords: Health, World Health Organization, Disease

INTRODUCTION

Health is a social phenomenon. World Health Organization's (WHO) definition of health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease makes it necessary to be considered under sociology of health as a branch of sociology. Glancing over the definitions of health in the framework of sociology of health will provide basis for this study.

Health was a concept devoid of disease or opposite of sin, deviance, immorality and pain in the antiquity. In the Ancient Greece, health found its meaning by the male bodies exhibited at the Arena and represented goodness in spiritual sense. In monotheistic religions, health is submission to the will of god, to be a slave to him and suffer if needed for the sake of him (Öngören, 2011; 1-9). In this sense, disease/pain is "kismet" for Muslims, "burden" from the previous reincarnations for the Chinese and Hindus and "the black whip of sin" for Christians (Turner, 1996; 203). The fact that religion accepts pain as a part of health as a concept, it narrows down the limits of medical intervention to the body. However, scientific developments forced religion towards small-scale reforms letting medical interventions which opened the door at least a little for intervention to the body. Although the religious structure blocks the way for medical arrangements on the body, it could initiate the public infrastructure arrangements. It is known that, public arrangements have been implemented since the ancient times enforced by the epidemics.

The enlightenment and industrialization penetrated the world, changed the meaning of all institutions and concepts and due to this change, health had also been redefined. The definition of WHO had been a milestone in this sense.

THE CHANGING UNDERSTANDING OF HEALTH WITH INDUSTRIALIZATION

Giddens stated that, while defining the modernity, The French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution took hold of the world starting from Europe which in turn lead to a great change

in social life. Before this change (pre-industrial times), individuals considered themselves with the nature, their life with availability of resources, quality of the yields and the ever changing state of nature. With the industrial Revolution, human beings began to live in artificial and created environments (Giddens, 1994; 9-59).

Industrial revolution changed the social structure and the political regimes in the West. Land bounded monarchies had to leave the power to the new classes which have had risen through the industrialization process. Changing production process necessitated an increased amount of raw materials. This need resulted in more pressure over the other parts of the world. Europe and North America enhanced their power and affluence via the colonial activities in various parts of the world. Similarly, Russia also engaged in colonial activities spanning from Europe to Alaska. Colonialism, the use of coal and steam and electricity in every aspect of life, industry being in the first place, let industrialization spread to the world (McNeil, 2008; 592).

With industrialization, the base of the society became the industrial/productive person. The main purpose of this person is (despite all negativities that may be experienced through life) to survive and produce under any circumstances (Meriç, 2000; 60-61). According to Pierre Leroux (1797-1871), the historical slave that made this production possible had first been the serfs and then the wageworkers (Hançerlioğlu, 2007; 304). Wageworkers, whom the modernity provided freedom, gained their freedom provided that they are dependent on the state. Due to this reason, it is required that every aspect of individuals' life including working conditions, production and consumption are provided by state.

With the emphasis on home-economics in the 18th century, Marx's idea that what happens at the superstructure is determined by the economic base solidified and reached to the peak during the beginning of 1900's. The modern productive individuals, who was free and dependent on the political power at the same time, body and health had been disciplined with the interventions (enshrining of the dead bodies, marriage and sexual life of couples and birth control) at the population scale beginning with Malthus. The will for nationalization and economic growth turned the disciplined and health bodies into soldiers of the production system. Population growth had been encouraged for more productive individuals; immigration into the countries had been supported while emigration had been made difficult. In this way, an army of workers were made out of the population that had immigrated or forced to immigrate from rural to urban areas. Adam Smith, who proposed that workers should be paid at subsistence level despite the fact that they produce all the value, states that the number of workers should be diminished through birth control as well as the payments, should be decreased to maximize profit. Malthus, on the other hand, stated that the conditions the workers had to put up with was not the fault of capitalism but it stemmed from the necessities of social laws and it was for the benefit of the society. Besides, despite the individuals' and society's interests are in a dialectical relationship, it is the benefit of the society that drives individuals (J.S. Mill (1806-1873)). This relationship structure can also be seen in the utility analysis of A. Marshall (1842-1924). According to Marshall, the payment of the individual can be deduced for the benefit of the society. To put it with his words; due to the importance of marginal utility, as the wage of the worker increases the marginal utility of that wage decreases. Therefore, for the sake of marginal utility/social benefit, the interests of the individual can be set back (Hançerlioğlu, 2007; 312-324). Veblen, defending the liberal economy, states that the prosperous class holding the money will protect its existence in any circumstances and it will monetize everything eventually. Individuals engaged in the name of social benefit, due to the fact that everything is measured by money and the ones who hold power also hold the money, pursue prestige and status and they become enslaved by bodily desires. Individuals exploiting everything including labor for status, power and money will

be able to reach a moral structure by reconstructing the society via the rationalization created by mechanization and the role that can be undertaken by the technicians in terms of production. Rationalized working individual, deify power on the axis of reproduction-freedom-happiness-life while pursuing the public interest and egalitarian order at the same time (Kızılkaya, 2003; 89-96). The individual, whose working instinct and even the physiological instincts are determined by the society, has to be healthy constantly. Because, the individual has to provide profit like a machine to ensure social necessities. From this point of view, it is enough to ensure bodies are healthy at a level to continue production. Ergo, the minimal and physical health being at a level to sustain the individual, provide necessary strength to keep up with monotonous and regular duties of industrial production, being enough to ensure nutrition, housing and security needs will guarantee the maximum benefit.

The problem of achieving marginal utility in economy and gaining the colonization resources brought the race for sharing them. The effect of marginal utility on individuals can be seen in A. Young's (1741-1820) statement that "the only way of keeping the workers productive is to keep them at minimum wage and it is known by everyone but the fools" (Dirican-Bilgel, 1993; 26). Moreover, at the end of 19th century, workers whose pay rate is very low began to utilize the services of health institutions whose expenses are covered from the taxes the sea workers pay (Belek, 2001; 129). The reason of investments to the health sector was that unhealthy environmental conditions and impairment of health causes degradation in production. Despite the fact that the degradation of production directly affects the employers economically, it was the laborers who financed protective and secondary health measurements.

As indicated before, the economy has a definitive role in its relations with the superstructure. Beginning from the 18th century, the developments about health has been more about economic growth rather than the medical aspect. The decrease in the frequency of epidemics was the result of regulations on the issues like nutrition, housing, water and food hygiene rather than the medical interventions. Statistics about tuberculosis, pertussis, diphtheria and measles can be given as examples for the results of such regulations (Belek, 2001; 33-36). The dialectical relation between the economic base and the superstructure also exists between the public health and economy. The changes in economic base reflect to the public health and changes in the public health affects economic base. Changes in the life-style, interventions affecting the development of individual and social health lead to change in relations of production (Belek, 2001; 39).

Carl Vogt's (1817-1895) statement that "just like salivary gland releases saliva or liver releases gall, brain releases thought" and another thinker's statement that "thought is the phosphorus released from the brain" (Haçerlioğlu, 2007; 307) shows both the superiority of the individual's physical/bodily aspect and the individual's dependence on the body in terms of producing action or thought. In the first quarter of the 20th century, the idea that nature can better be understood by starting from the individual began to take effect and first signs of the priority of individual over the society began revealing itself. Starting with Husserl, the efficiency and the strength of the body over decision making have been highlighted (Haçerlioğlu, 2007; 351).

The priority of the individual or the body began to evolve into a common understanding of health in the 19th century due to the technological and social developments besides the indicators revealed through meticulous medical record keeping. With the mechanical approach in the 18th century health and illness used to be defined as the balanced distribution of mysteriously effective liquids in the body (homeostasis) and their imbalance respectively

(Aydın, 2006; 126). During the following period, it is seen that disease is defined more clearly and in a detailed way as a physical condition caused by viruses and bacteria (Özsan, 2001; 78), and from this point on it became a concept that is studied actively in hospitals and laboratories instead of passive observation that had been carried out since Hippocrates' time (Aydın, 2006; 127) There had been a shift from the definition of health an definition on the bases of organic mass/fleshed body in an isolated area (like hospitals and laboratories) to a definition which takes socio-cultural aspects into account.

New inventions and developments in technology have changed the structure of production. The obligation that production tools should be together brought raw materials, labor, land and capital from rural provinces to the center. Movement of the labor force to the urban centers increased population and density. As a result of this process, big cities of workers with high population density had been formed. The workers composing the work force were open to communicable diseases due to the lack of proper infrastructure, housing and environmental conditions.

Proliferation of transportation and communication techniques (railroads, seaway, telegraph etc.) let the mass production be conveyed to other geographical locations. Circulation of commodities in the market changed the modes of production (McNeil, 2008; 593-595). The change in the mode of production; meaning the shift from handicraft-based, household production based on agriculture to massive scale machine production in factories, changed the social structure. Besides, the increasing population with urbanization lead to the problems of housing, hygiene and health causing the contagious diseases become pandemics.

Cities began to develop fastly and problems could not be solved with old institutions. Despite the head spinning increase in production, there was not any effect on the social. Due to the labor being transformed into a commodity; workers became dependent and poor. Besides capitalism had very little effect about the regulation of the market in the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries. Due to industrial accidents, injuries and deaths, physical fatigue and injuries, there has been an intensive change of labor. Industrial facilities cause serious environmental hazard in procurement, storage and waste disposal. Heavy working conditions, consumption of contaminated food, poor housing conditions and intensive environmental pollution cause many diseases (Turner, 2000; 110-111). Due to these reasons, in the 19th century, industry and health were tried to be connected.

In the 19th century, the mechanic understanding of machine-body was dominant. The calories burned and the products generated with the energy receive had been calculated and it had been decided that the machine-body needs maintenance. Maintenance here meant the suggestions of taking more baths, especially with hot water. In this period, the frequency of baths among the members of the palace and bourgeoisie increased (Vigarello, 1996; 229-233). In the middle of the century, it had been highlighted that the ones who are most vulnerable to diseases are those who respect the hygiene and cleaning rules the least. Settlement in the rural areas had been near water sources while in the urban areas the situation changed and access of clean water to the living areas became difficult. Despite the emphasis on sanitation, due to the problems of access to water, it is seen that the use of public baths was common. Since it was considerably expensive to have access to water in Europe, baths and general hygiene conditions involve serious social inequalities. Generally, the houses with water supply were occupied by the bourgeoisie while the neighborhoods with public baths were occupied by the wealthy city-dwellers. At end of the century used today was basic health information, and supply the (poor!). At the end of the century the basic hygiene knowledge had been widespread and it is understood that dirty and germ people (the poor!) were carrying the diseases and contaminate the environment. Although these

people had been routinely quarantined since the ancient Greece, this practice began to be carried out in certain spaces in an orderly fashion and in line with the rules in the 19th century (Vigarelo, 1996; 270-279).

In the Middle Age, a big plague hit vast geographical areas in the Middle-Asia and Europe and wiped out 25% of the population. In the 18th century, the population increased as well as the death rates near the cities. From 1898 to 1948, 13,000,000 people had been killed by the plague in India. Infectious diseases fastly spread and it became more difficulty to take precautions. The cholera which started in Great Britain in 1831 infected a considerable part of Parisian population and stormed through Europe until the midst of the century. Similarly, within the first half of the century, cholera killed 50 thousand people in the Ottoman Empire. However, with regulations in the public space beginning in the second half of the century, the population in Europe and in the world increased fastly (Dinç, 2009).

FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION AND ITS DEFINITION OF HEALTH

World economy continued growing after the midst of 19th century until the World War I with some fluctuations, collapses, sudden and short crises. With the Industrial Revolution; technological improvements gained speed, economy grew unevenly and growing process of globalization dominated the world. France and the United Kingdom received a bigger share of economic growth due to colonization activities and technological development. Germany's lag in the economic race and its will to gain more of the colonization activities caused World War I. Due to the war, 26 million soldiers and civilians died; while contagious diseases like typhus, cholera, plague, pyrexia and Spanish flu killed 7-8 million people throughout the world. The war prepared for the conditions of low hygiene and caused fast proliferation of contagious diseases since contact among many societies had been increased by it. The new political status quo after the World War I and massive unemployment in 1929 caused the collapse of general health policies. World War II started because of the unsolved accounts of the previous war and nationalist movements, resulting the deaths of even more people. Concurrently, contagious diseases had been seen widely due to the recession and destruction caused by war. Contagious diseases caused more losses in the World War II compared to the World War I due to the broadened effect of the World War II throughout the world, globalization and easier transportation (Bakırtaş-Tekinşen, 2004- Dinç, 2009).

Infectious and communicable diseases and pandemics occurred despite the individual that is ruled by reason and who is competent in everything since the age of Enlightenment and before. This paved the way to the foundation of health institutions and their intervention to the society. In this way, the society had been redesigned and the power of global actors had been consolidated.

Degradation of workers' health in the 18th century due to insufficient measures and the belief that communicable diseases can spread easily; left the sovereigns with no choice but take precautions to alleviate the negative perceptions. This view, which spread at the beginning of the 20th century, shows that health and disease has considerable effect on the social structure unlike the mechanical and physiological views. The output gained from the worker who is a part of the wheels of production decreases due to their insufficient health condition. Low wages for maximization of profit leads to poverty and poverty leads to degradation in health and produce disease (disease is defined as a social process here). Since the solution of socially generated disease should also be solved social; it will only be possible by ensuring sanitation, regulating the physical environment, respecting the rules of hygiene and regulating the social life according to these necessities. However, institutional regulations are necessary

to realize all these. R. V. Virchow (1821-1902) states that typhus epidemic, like the others, in the 19th century had been eradicated due to regulations on the environmental conditions and application of quarantines without any medical intervention (Dirican&Bilgel, 1993; 31). On the same subject, Illich states that during 17th to 19th centuries, the reasons of the diseases had been found but could not be treated - in fact some diseases that were discovered in the 20th century could not be cured until the midst of the century- and instead, epidemics either completed their natural cycle of development and vanished by themselves or they had been eradicated by regulations of social milieu or the environment (Illich, 1995; 26). Health and disease, therefore, are not only related to biological and physical factors but also related to the social, economic, and political factors (Akgün, 2008; 1-7).

Struggle against the diseases were not directly the success of medicine after the Enlightenment but it is more related to environmental regulations and prevention of contagious diseases. Besides, the need for productive and healthy labor for economic development necessitated a broader definition of health and disease. And this definition should insure the importance of the mental aspect as much as the body and even cover the social aspect. In this frame, as stated by Unat and Aydın, around the end of the 19th century the General Medical Council had been founded, The Council organized International Health Conferences, and around the beginning of the 20th century, Regional and International Health Organizations began to be founded. The aim of these organizations is to take necessary measures including quarantines against contagious diseases, standardize treatments of such diseases and keep statistical data to determine the limits of health (Unat, 1988. Aydın, 2006).

As Foucault stated, the domination of medicine over the mental aspect of individuals require the health individual to be normal/healthy in terms of the mental aspect. Therefore being healthy means being normal both in mental and physical terms. Because, it is required that individuals take part in the social and economic life as both producers and consumers.

19th century and the first half of 20th century had been the story of finding out the reasons of diseases and the methods of prevention against them (not treatment). After World War I, the basic cause of deaths being the contagious diseases, setbacks in production due to war and diseases and the same experiences being repeatedly seen during World War II had pushed nations to establish health platforms. As stated before, capitalist were continuously after expanding their boundaries during these periods. Global capitalism existing with its crises, aims that these crises are foreseeable and controllable via some institutions and structures.

Human beings, from the time of Descartes, have been considered in a mechanical way. In the beginning of the 20th century, the body redesigns itself through uniting itself with the system by labor force and serving it. And the soul atunes itself to the new design by the new of the church besides educational and political inducements of the system. However for the individual, that is being taken within the unity of the body and the soul, to be more into the production process and be able to engage in the consumption of goods, it is necessary that social space should be controllable. Therefore, it had become necessary that the definitions and assessments of individual and society are inclusive and controlling.

Due to the reasons mentioned above, the time that international and regional organizations in the areas of health transform in to a steady and single international organization came. The efforts starting in 1946 resulted with the establishment of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1948 (Dirican&Bilgel, 1993; Sağlık Bakanlığı, 1997). As a result, thoughts like medicine should be for the utility of the society rather than the thought in the 19th century that medicine being a social science, Virchow's statement defending that health services should be provided by state to ensure universal access, the thought that health and disease

could be affected and changed by socio-economic factors, living conditions and policies spread (Dirican, 1997; 14).

Thus, WHO draw an interfering framework by coming up with the definition that " health is not only the lack of disease or impairment but a complete state of wellbeing in terms of bodily, mental and social aspects".

Decisions taken in the first commission meetings of WHO can be seen evaluable as considerably positive in terms of public health. In these decisions, it had been demanded to have epidemiological information, categorization of diseases and biological standardization (Sağlık Bakanlığı, 1997). Important steps towards treatment of preventable diseases had been taken via regulation of environmental conditions throughout the world. The WHO, aiming to work for all people to reach top level health conditions, provides international coordination. Therefore, as seen in its definition of health, WHO claims coverage for all the humanity?

In the process of WHO's establishment, it should be considered that the U.S.A. had provided most of its funding and the decisions and standardization about health serve to the European and U.S.A's interests. WHO's lack of interest, especially st the beginnings of its foundation, in regulating the conditions of nutrition, housing, entertainment, and recreation, economic standards and health care is due to these countries' influence on it.

CONCLUSION

The definition of health like WHO's as "not only the lack of disease or impairment but a complete state of wellbeing in terms of bodily, mental and social aspects", transformed it to be recognized as a part of social life besides being a medical subject. Health could no more be explained by the old concepts. This definition of WHO takes the individual as a whole rather than the dichotomy of body-spirit accepted since Descartes. This definition recognizing the social aspect of the individual beyond the medical aspect stems from the fact that since the 19th century, the reasons of diseases had always been looked for in the environmental factors and measurements had always been seen as social issues.

Explanation of health in a broad sense which covers environmental factors made the environment that is surrounding and affecting the individual more important. Regulation of factors that can have negative impact on human health, also reconstructs or supports the society in a functional way.

In order for the individual to be at a complete state of wellbeing; mental and social aspects should be healthy the physical aspect. In order to meet this expectation, the individuals' access to health should be sufficient, the health technology should be high while factors like sports, education, nutrition, housing, fashion should be benefited/consumed at a high level. As a result, the definition of health is a turning point for the individual. Health became an object of consumption while, the spirit and the body had been wrapped in the image of health ornamented with symbols of consumption.

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