

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Medical sociology is a new field within sociology. It attempts to analyze social action and social factors in illness and illness related situation. The ultimate for this is that we would be able to appreciate the meaning and implication of any illness episode for the symptomatic person, as well as significant others, the health professionals and all other stakeholders in the wider society.

Sociology therefore focuses on social order and the analyses of social groups in particular and society in general. Sociology is interested in analyzing how human beings interact with one another and the forces that determine social order or harmony in human interactions. Sociology studies behavioural patterns, be they rational, non-rational or irrational. In its quest for understanding human behaviour, sociology employs scientific methodology.

Sociology is related to medicine in several ways. First, the incidence of illness is to a large extent determined by social and cultural factors. As a result of this, knowledge of these factors in the aetiology of illness cannot be overemphasized. Besides, success in therapeutic efforts may be limited, except physicians and other health workers can show some appreciation of forces that are not entirely “medical”. Sociology is also related to medicine because it helps us to understand and appreciate the various actors in the treatment settings, such as physicians, pharmacists, laboratory technologists, nurses etc. Sociology indeed equips us with the knowledge of understanding such attitudes that may constrain or facilitate the treatment process. Sociology provides a careful study of all those who are relevant in providing support during the post-treatment phase. The study of these issues and many more definitely brings into focus the relationship between sociology and medicine.

3.2 Definition of Medical Sociology

Medical Sociology is a branch of sociology, which addresses a wide range of key issues and especially the interplay between social factors and health.

The field of medical sociology is a sub-discipline of sociology, which attempts to analyze social action and social factors in illness and illness-related situations with a view to making it possible for all involved in the illness situation to appreciate the meaning and implication of any illness episode.

In the 1950s, medical sociological studies were limited in scope as they concerned the social aspects of mental disorders and their consequences. Today, the field of health sociology, as it is more appropriately called, is concerned with virtually all aspects of health and medical care. Areas of coverage in medical sociology include the aetiology of disease and illness, illness behaviour, health-seeking behaviour and the delivery of health services and access to them. Others are: patterns of disease and mortality, medicine as a profession, ethical, political and organizational issues in relation to health.

3.3 Major Approaches in Medical Sociology

Medical Sociology overlaps with Social Epidemiology, Health Services Research, Behavioural Medicine, Social Psychiatry and Medical Anthropology. There are two major approaches to the study of medical sociology. The first approach sees medicine as a social institution which one should study and test using sociological hypotheses. The other approach sees medicine as an applied enterprise seeking to reduce the suffering of humans and to improve the quality of life.

3.4 Major Concerns of Medical Sociology

Medical Sociology is concerned with the following perspectives:

- i Looking at how diseases in the population are located among social groupings.
- ii. Explaining how people respond to diseases with a view to defining them in predictable ways from the perspective of their culture and their social class within a particular culture.
- iii. Describing how society prescribes means of treating diseases.
- iv. Investigating how social institutions give their support to the medical organizations in their bid to treat the sick.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit has equipped us with the knowledge of what Sociology really is and its relationship to medicine. Medical Sociology as a branch of Sociology considers non-medical factors, which are crucial to illness and diseases. In this unit, it has been explained that the incidence of illness is largely determined by social and cultural factors. This explains the importance of Medical Sociology to therapeutic efforts.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit we have learnt that:

- sociology focuses on social order and the analyses of social groups in particular and society in general;
- sociology is related to medicine in several ways: the incidence of illness in particular is to a large extent determined by social and cultural factors;
- Medical Sociology is a sub-discipline of sociology, which attempts to analyze social action and social factors in illness and illness-related situations;
- The study, Medical Sociology, has two approaches:
 - a. It sees medicine as a social institution which one should study through sociological hypotheses; and
 - b. It sees medicine as an applied enterprise that seeks to reduce the health burdens of humans.

ANSWER TO SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Medical sociology is a sub-field of sociology. Its major concern is to investigate those social factors in illness and illness related situations with a view to making it possible for all involved in the illness situation to appreciate the meaning and implication of any illness episode.