iJRASET
International Journal For Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 14 **Issue:** I **Month of publication:** January 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2026.76958

www.ijraset.com

Call: 08813907089 | E-mail ID: ijraset@gmail.com

International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)
ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.538
Volume 14 Issue I Jan 2026- Available at www.ijraset.com

Social Realities and Human Agency and Social Suffering

Dr. Sanjay C. Girepunje
Associate Professor, HOD of Economics, Vidarbha Arts & Commerce College, Lakhani Dist Bhandara

Abstract: ***In this paper the author is primarily exploring the notion of social suffering within a psychosocial paradigm. A brief outline of Bourdieu's concept of social suffering, and similarly concise explication of the psychosocial subject as contemporarily theorized is given. The central section of the paper looks at some understandings of social suffering that are experienced internally as well as within structural inequalities and power relations. The concept of hurt is considered, offering the internal- laser injuries of class as an example. Loss is then examined in relation to the severing of, for example, communities and the losses of social recognition and internal esteem. The complex concept of double suffering, in which hurt accrues more hurt and is re-experienced, is then discussed. The welfare subject of contemporary policy and practice is, finally, briefly revisited.***
Keywords: Bourdieu, double suffering, hurt, loss, recognition

I. INTRODUCTION

Enlightenment liberalism bequeathed a particular view of a rational and autonomous human subject from which both traditional social policy and progressive alternatives drew. The aim of this paper is to challenge this model by placing emotional life at the heart of social policy and welfare practice whilst retaining a critical perspective on issues of power. In the UK this emerging approach is termed 'psy- chosocial' (Clarke, 2006; Frosh, 2003). We also propose to use here Bourdieu's (1999) concept of 'social suffering' to undertake a psychoso- cial analysis of the welfare subject.Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization of social suffering draws attend to social misery: not just the unequal distribution of material goods in society, as welfare policy has tended to emphasize, but also people's lived experience of domination and repression, including feelings – humiliation, anger, despair, resentment – that may accompany, for example poverty, class or race. In this paper the notion of 'suffering' denotes the intermeshed components of thinking, feeling, responding, and acting. We are also concerned with suffering as both a reflexive and non-reflexive phenomenon: as something which at times can be thought about, critically and creatively, and at times is embodied, enacted or projected precisely because it cannot be thought about.

First we will briefly outline the post-liberal subject of welfare – the psychosocial position from which we are working here. Then the paper considers the central theme of the relationship between psychosocial understandings of subjectivity, the non-unitary self and the implicit-tones for human agency. Next, through a discussion of hurt, we will consider how psychosocial models of suffering provide a framework for understanding the experience of welfare subjects and how their agency is expressed. We then consider the notion of loss, using examples of loss of recognition in ageing and gendered losses. Finally the notion of 'double suffering' and its manifestation as enactment, embodiment and projec- tion is discussed, with some thoughts also on loneliness and foreclosure.

A. Post-liberal Conception of the Human Subject

The notion of the 'liberal subject' as addressed by much welfare policy is well known and needs scant reiteration here. Very briefly we are using this term to mean a person with autonomy, a unified consistent coherent identity, rationality and agency. Against this version of humanity, the welfare subject is invariably construed within a deficit model, as lack- ing these enlightenment traits: as dependent, unpredictable, unable to act in their own best interests, lacking agency.

B. Social Suffering

Traditionally, social policy has understood the well-being of citizens in terms of the distribution of material goods and services rather than in terms of the lived experience of domination and exclusion and the feelings this produces. Bourdieu uses the concept of social sufferingto draw attention to this. As he says, 'using material poverty as the sole measure of all suffering keeps us from seeing and understanding a whole side of the suffering characteristic of the social order' (Bourdieu, 1999: 4). In other words, social suffering draws attention to the lived experience of inhabiting social structures of oppression: and the pain that arises from this

©IJRASET: All Rights are Reserved

C. The Stress and Coping Model

One source of evidence of the relation between social inequality and social suffering lies in the vast body of research literature which has been influenced by the 'stress and coping paradigm' originating in the work of Leonard Pearlin and his colleagues in the USA (Pearlin et al., 1981). This looks at the incidence of personal stress in relation to indi- cators such as social class, ethnicity, and so on, and individual capacity to 'cope' (to exercise some form of first order agency and/or control) in the face of such stresses. Most of this literature uses quantitative methodology and a positivist epistemology in which, for example, a dependent variable (e.g. the incidence of depression) is understood in terms of the presence/absence of independent variables (perhaps socio- economic status) a Rethinking the object of social policy

In Western-type democracies the welfare state and welfarism arose as a consequence of the existence of suffering, particularly social suffering. Much of this system concerns relationships with disadvantaged commu- nities (including racialized minorities) and excluded groups. Wel suggest that one of, what Claus Offe (1984) once termed, the 'contradictions of the welfare state' is that modern democracies are concerned as much with the management of social suffering as they are with its alleviation. Not just an issue of resources and demands, this more fundamentally gives expres- sion to both a cultural and a political problem. Politically, the existence of

D. Loss

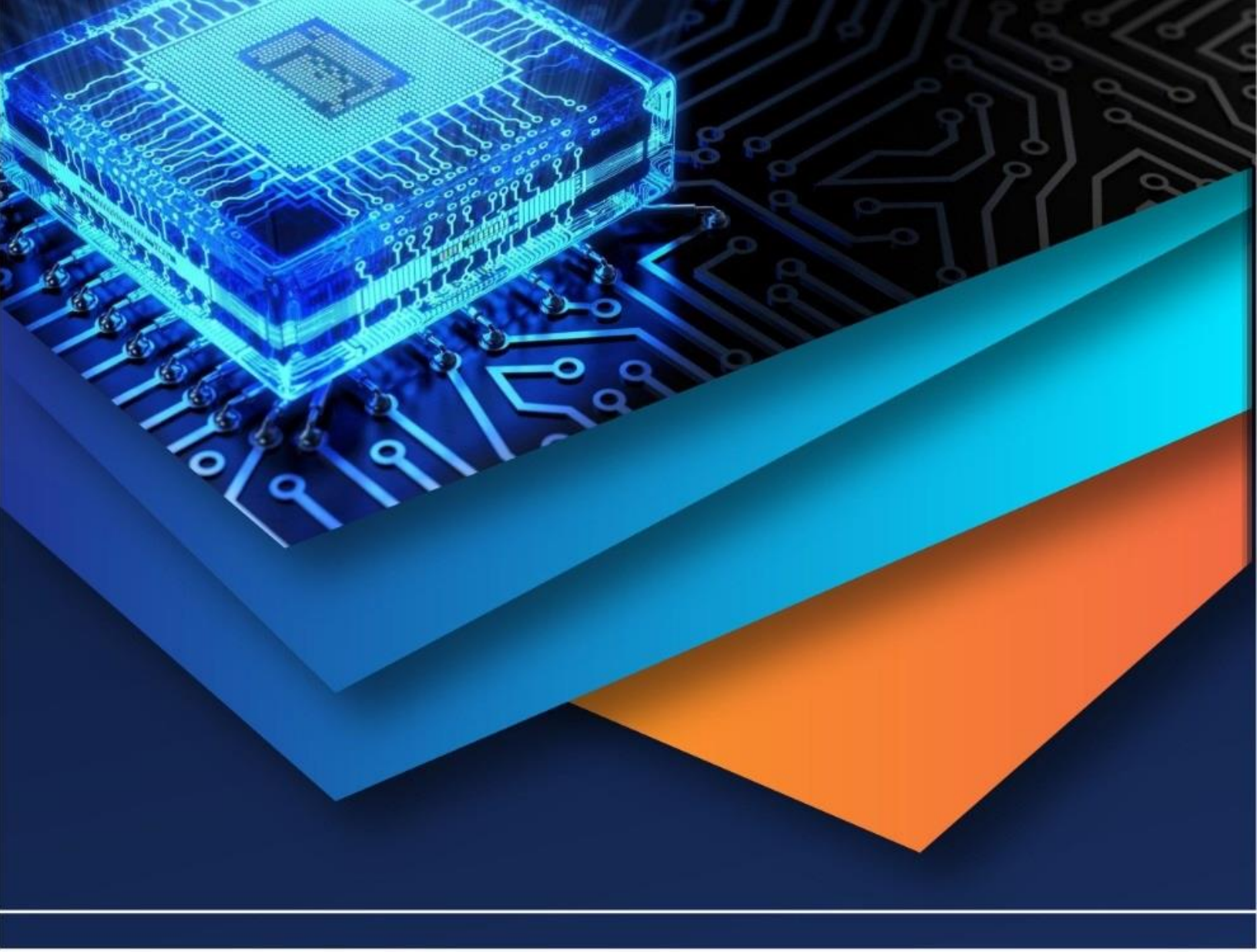
Particularly during rapid social change powerless people become the objects of change rather than its agents. Deindustrialization destroys whole communities and identities, particularly those linked to mas- culinity. Equally the personal costs of forced migration as a result of war, famine and ecological disaster can be enormous (loss of family, friends, job, status, identity, etc.) rendering the task of 'making a new life' extremely challenging.

There is now a history of using concepts of loss, grief and melan- cholia to understand the experiences of those whose communities are destroyed by processes of urban modernization (Marris, 1974) or, more generally, who are the powerless objects of economic and social restruc- turing (Sennett, 1998). The demise of traditional working class labour has taken with it sources of pride in physical strength, manual skills, hard graft and a job well done, and communities of labouring men shored up by and shoring up such esteem and recognition (Hollands, 1990).

Recently there has been an interest in understanding the role of loss in the formation of subaltern identities. Speaking of such loss Judith Butler lists 'the loss of "humanness" under slavery; the loss that is undergone with exile . . . the loss of culture that is performed by the mandatory production of the colonized subject . . . and perhaps most difficult, the loss of loss itself; somewhere, sometime, something was lost, but no story can be told about it

REFERENCES

[1] Ahmed, S. (2004) The Cultural Politics of Emotion. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
[2] Bion, W. (1962) Learning from Experience. London: Tavistock.
[3] Bourdieu, P. (1999) The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society. Cambridge: Polity.
[4] Busfield, J. (2000) Health and Health Care in Modern Britain. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[5] Butler, J. (1997) The Psychic Life of Power. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
[6] Butler, J. (2003) 'Afterword: After Loss, What Then?', in D. Eng and D. Kazanjian (eds) Loss: The Politics of Mourning. Berkeley, CA: Univer- sity of California Press.
[7] Clarke, S. (2003) Social Theory, Psychoanalysis and Racism. Basingstoke: Palgrave. Clarke, S. (2006) 'Theory and Practice: Psychoanalytic Sociology as Psycho-social Studies', Sociology 40: 1153–69.
[8] Clarke, S., Hoggett, P. and Thompson, S. (eds) (2006) Politics, Emotion and Society. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
[9] Cockerham, W. C. (2007) Social Causes of Health and Disease. Cambridge: Polity. Cope, R. (1989) 'The Compulsory Admission of Afro-Caribbeans under the Mental Health Act', New Community 15(3): 343–56.
[10] Dykstra, P. A., van Tilburg, T. G. and de Jong Gierveld, J. (2005) 'Changes in Older Adult Loneliness: Results from a Seven-year Longitudinal Study', Research on Ageing 27(6): 725–47.
[11] Emirbayer, M. and Goldberg, C. (2004) 'Pragmatism, Bourdieu and Col-lective Emotions in Contentious Politics', Theory and Society 34(5/6):



10.22214/IJRASET

45.98

IMPACT FACTOR: 7.129

IMPACT FACTOR: 7.429

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Call : 08813907089 (24*7 Support on Whatsapp)