

COVID and Inequalities (2)

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This follows the ‘Faith-Based Facilitation’ model. You may wish to consider the ‘Four Theological Voices’ when reading Scripture (NB all references are from the NIV, 2011). Please see OurHub for details.

Introduction - The issue

Wicked Issues

A Wicked Issue ‘is a social or cultural problem that is difficult or impossible to solve for as many as four reasons: incomplete or contradictory knowledge, the number of people and opinions involved, the large economic burden, and the interconnected nature of these problems with other problems. Poverty is linked with education, nutrition with poverty, the economy with nutrition, and so on.’ (https://wickedproblems.com/1_wicked_problems.php)

Responding to inequalities that have been worsened by COVID-19 is difficult as many ‘Wicked Issues’ are involved. These issues are complicated, interconnected, and have no easy solutions. For example, the Wicked Issue of COVID-19 is worsened by other Wicked Issues such as climate change, homelessness, domestic violence, unemployment, and other socio-economic factors, making it nearly impossible to resolve fully. Wicked Issues can be overwhelming, but do not let this stop you taking action. As we saw in the last chapter, Wicked Issues can also have wide-ranging Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, Environmental and Spiritual implications.

The ‘Submerged Tenth’ is the 10 per cent of the population that William Booth said was living permanently in poverty. He also used the analogy of a cliff fall to explain how, although saving the person who has fallen into the sea is appropriate, it is much better to tackle some of the issues at the top of the cliff which caused that person to fall. In this analogy, people from the Submerged Tenth are most likely to be the ones falling into the sea, as well as being those most impacted by Wicked Issues.



Questions for reflection

- Think of the ‘Submerged Tenth’ in your corps’ local neighbourhood; what are some of the Wicked Issues that you think might make their lives more challenging?

The First Step - What are the challenges?

The following are all inequalities that have been exacerbated by COVID-19:

Digital inclusion/exclusion

Digital inequalities were highlighted as a cause for concern very early on in the pandemic, as businesses and schools closed and many workers and students were forced to work from home with a heavy reliance on computers and internet access. Digital inclusion was essential during the pandemic for people to access services, attend virtual medical appointments, make essential purchases, access news and information, and stay socially connected. Those who are more likely to face digital exclusion include those who are unemployed, people on lower incomes, older people, and people with disabilities (Lloyds Bank, 2021).

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse can take the form of physical violence, but includes much more than this; emotional/psychological abuse, coercive control, sexual abuse, financial abuse, stalking and online abuse can all be forms of domestic abuse, and the psychological effects from abuse often last much longer than the physical ones. Domestic abuse can happen to anyone, regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, class, sexual orientation, or social standing.

Unemployment

Unemployment has impacted some groups and sectors more than others, such as people working in hospitality, manufacturing, retail, and the arts, entertainment and recreation industries (Powell & Francis-Devine, 2021) as well as workers under the age of 25 and older than 65 (Joyce and Xu, 2020). The long-term economic impacts of COVID-19 on employment are likely to reverberate down the years.

Poverty

Governments’ financial support measures have prevented this situation from being much worse, though it is too soon to know what the long-term effects of COVID-19 on poverty will be. The closure of the UK Government’s furlough scheme, ongoing impacts on businesses, and the second pandemic of Long Covid, which almost a million people in the UK are currently suffering from (ONS, 2021a), are some of the poverty-related challenges that are likely to echo long into the future.



Questions for reflection

- What can you do to support people who may be experiencing, or have experienced, domestic abuse?
- What is your corps doing to support people seeking employment? Could you offer mentoring to young people, or volunteering opportunities to people who have been out of work for a long time, to help them back into the workplace?
- How are corps members affected personally by digital exclusion? How can you help them to close this digital divide?

Going Deeper - How do we equip our responses?

Jesus is regularly shown praying, especially around significant events; and so it should be with equipping our responses. The first step in knowing how to respond to the many inequalities caused or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic is to approach the Lord in prayer, and to ask for his guidance and wisdom in planning your response. The issues and the inequalities are many, and so you may need to think prayerfully through the questions of what you can do, and who and which inequalities you will prioritise in responding.

Social injustices and Wicked Issues are often closely interrelated. For example, if you are a woman living in poverty or someone with a disability, then you are statistically more than twice as likely to experience domestic abuse (McManus et al, 2016; PHE, 2015). In turn, domestic abuse is often a factor in women's homelessness, substance abuse, and poor mental health, so planning support services for people who have experienced domestic abuse should also consider how to assist survivors with other common issues they may face. It is important to recognise the interrelation of many social injustices, and join the dots in the services that are needed to address these multiple and complex issues.



Questions for reflection

- What resources does the corps or centre have?
- What are the needs in your corps and local community?
- How can you 'join the dots' in your response?

Reflection - Being effective

As part of using resources wisely and joining the dots, you may wish to consider what other services or organisations are working in your local community, and if you can work in partnership with any of them. Partnership working can open you up to new insights, increased capacity and reaching new audiences, to name but a few advantages.

Impact measurement is another really useful tool to ascertain whether your corps is meeting its mission and vision. Impact measurement can help you to assess, understand, and develop the benefits and impact of how you are serving the local community.

Thank you for your sacrificial service in responding to the inequalities caused and exacerbated by COVID-19. Please make sure you are keeping both yourself and others safe by following the latest government guidance, and taking precautions such as social distancing, mask-wearing and regular handwashing where appropriate. If you are physically vulnerable to COVID-19 due to age, ethnicity, or an underlying health condition, please consider a less frontline and high-risk role, by responding in an equally valuable manner such as prayer support.

Moving Forward - Additional Resources

Contacts

The Salvation Army's Equality and Diversity Team is passionate about being inclusive and enabling people to experience a sense of belonging. If you would like additional support, information or guidance in relation to equality and inclusion, or if you would just like to share information about what you are doing, please contact the Equality and Diversity Team at equalityandinclusion@salvationarmy.org.uk or the Equality and Diversity Manager, Jennifer Laurent-Smart, at jennifer.laurent-smart@salvationarmy.org.uk



We hope you have found this helpful. A bibliography for this chapter and the full COVID-19 booklet that addresses key themes in greater detail is available on OurHub. If you have feedback or any ideas you'd like to share, email rdu@salvationarmy.org.uk.