



Note completion

1 Read this text and answer Questions 1–16 on page 67.

A A social problem can be defined as a condition that is considered undesirable by sufficient number of members of a specific community to constitute a group. There are, however, degrees of social problem, ranging from the relatively trivial to those that are so serious as to call into question the most important values of the society in question. On some there is likely to be consensus, while others may provoke extreme debate. Nobody could claim that social problems such as murder and traffic deaths resulting from drink driving are to be accepted as minor issues. However, it is not hard to find examples of other social problems that divide opinion. Teenagers playing loud music in a public park on finishing their school day obviously do not consider their behaviour unreasonable, but it may well be considered an extremely undesirable social condition by other groups who feel they have an equal right to enjoy the park and its facilities. Similarly, a number of non-smokers hold the view that smoking is an undesirable social condition that should be banned or restricted in all outdoor public areas.

B Nevertheless, research indicates there are factors that determine the degree to which a phenomenon comes to be perceived and accepted as a social problem. For example, the likelihood of a condition being considered a social problem is much greater if the group it affects are themselves powerful; that is, if they are figures of influence. For this reason, the problems that made life difficult for the poor tended to escape notice until they had some impact on the rich and middle-class citizens, for example when they became victims of crime. In the United States, the problem of drug abuse attracted substantially more attention once it spread from the lower-class, predominantly non-white population and began to affect the sons and daughters of the educated middle class.

C By much the same logic, if a condition has an impact on a small subsection of the population, it will more easily escape attention than when its adverse effects impact on a larger social group. Again, in the United States, the poverty of African Americans has featured much more prominently than the poverty of Native Americans. This can partly be explained by the fact that African Americans constitute a much larger group and are more visible.

D The third factor relates to the dynamics of the condition. If the number of people directly affected is seen to be increasing rapidly, public awareness will rise. For example, we become used to prevailing levels of crime, traffic congestion, atmospheric pollution and even political corruption. But should there be a sharp rise in intensity in one of these, public concern will also increase. One case of political corruption a year may be a source of concern for our institutions, but five such cases in one month will forcefully grab the public's attention.

E Also worth a mention is the role played by the mass media, which, according to many commentators, have largely and unfortunately failed in any attempt they might have made to address social problems. In fact, some would go further and state that if anything, television, radio and newspapers have actually contributed to the problems that exist and made them worse. This is to a great extent because they have reinforced the stereotypes that relate to race, class and gender rather than tackle them.

F Until the advent of the Internet, television was without doubt the primary vehicle through which society received its information and also the mirror of society in the way in which it reflected its values and expectations. Television has a vital role to play in the presentation of news and

information. Consequently, what a particular station chooses to present as newsworthy will inevitably influence the way viewers interpret both their society and the world around them.

G All too often, television news programmes tend to focus on stories that present negative images of minority groups. We are bombarded on an almost daily basis with stories of minorities engaging in crimes such as robbery, murder and rape. These crimes by implication become characteristic of minorities. The success stories that could counterbalance this negativity are remarkably absent. The single mother who, despite the odds, finishes college with a good degree; the young man from the inner city who works his way up from the factory floor to hold a position of responsibility in the company – these stories rarely feature.

Questions 1–12

Complete the notes below.

Choose no more than **TWO WORDS** from the text for each answer.

What's a social problem?

Definition: A condition that a group views as 1

Can be 2 or extremely serious

Consensus on drink driving and 3

Loud music in a park: debatable

Factors influencing acceptance of social problems

- If people affected have power and 4

Example: 5 not considered a problem when it was limited to lower class.

- Size of the population it affects

Example: poverty of 6 was overlooked.

Habit

We get used to problems like pollution, etc. However, 7 will attract attention.

8

Addressing social problems unsuccessful or not attempted.

May have made problems 9

Example: race, class, gender 10 not tackled, but 11

Few examples of stories of 12

Questions 13–16

The passage has seven paragraphs labelled **A–G**.

Which paragraph contains the following information?

Write the correct letter, **A–G**.

NB You may use any letter more than once.

13 The significance of the size of the group of those affected

14 Deciding to ignore the positive

15 Disappointments about lack of influence on the problems

16 Disagreements of interpretation of social problems

2 Make a collection of sentences with **–ing** forms and infinitives when you next read an article online or in a newspaper. Make a copy of the article and cut out all infinitive and **–ing** forms (and remember to keep a copy of the original so you can check). The next day, see how many of the gaps you can remember accurately.