**SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND SOCIA INTERACTION**

**The Concept of Social Organization**

The health science student should be introduced to the idea of how we as social beings organize ourselves and how individual persons, communities and societies are related to one another. Human beings are social animals by nature and whatever we do or say are related to social environment. Our lives as human beings have their meanings in organized relationships. Whether we eat, drink, work, play, worship, recreate or learn, we do it in social group context. No one enjoys alone outside organized network of social interaction and relationships. Although we have the capacity for privacy, no one can enjoy him / herself for a sustained period of time, without inflicting upon oneself adverse effects

By **social organization**, we refer to the pattern of individual and group relations. The term "organization" signifies technical arrangement of parts in a whole, and he term "social", indicates the fact that individual and group relations are the outcomes of social processes (Broom and Slezinky, 1973). Thus, one of sociology's main concerns is to study and analyze the behavior of human society as it appears in its structured and organized ways and relationships. Specifically, sociologists are here interested in discovering and analyzing:

• The personal and group relations that influence individual behavior and social institutions;

• How persons and groups relate to each other;

• How people organize themselves in various social situations, whether consciously or unconsciously;

• What kind of social relationships occur in their organized behaviors; and • How these social relationships are maintained; how they decline

or disintegrate.

**Social Groups**

In our day-to-day life and social activities, we interact with each other, belonging to a group of some kind. The study of group is central to any sociological investigation.

**Definition of a Social Group**

The term group has a special meaning in sociology because it represents a concept that is central to any sociological analysis. Quite several definitions have been given to the term group by different sociologists. Generally, a social group is defied as the collectivity or set of people who involve in more or less permanent or enduring social interactions and relationships. Members of a social group have common basis for interaction and shared characteristics, a feeling of identity or belongingness, shared psychology or consciousness and a definite set of norms to govern the behaviors of the individual participant in the group.

**Basic Features of a Social Group**

In their sociological analysis of the group behavior of human society, sociologists have identified some essential elements of a social group. For a set or collectivity of people to be a social group, it has to have the following essential traits or features (Calhoun et al, 1994)

1. Members of the group continue to interact with one another;

2. Membership requires living by norms that are special to the group;

3. Members view each other as part of the group; members feel some sense of identification with the group and with one another; and there is a social boundary between members and non-members;

4. Members are functionally integrated through role and status relationship in the group structure; and

5. Others see members as group.

Social interaction among the members is relatively permanent; it is not causal. Common interests should characterize as a basis for interaction. There are shared values, beliefs and lifestyles. The emotional, shared consciousness is also important. The feeling of belongingness is very important. Social norms and values govern behavior of group members.

All of the following are examples of social groups, from the smallest possible level to the largest possible. A dyad (made up of two persons like fiancés, husband and wife), a family, a group of students in a dormitory, peer group, a friendship, an ethnic group, a community, a nation, a continent, a university, an organization, etc.

**Classification of Groups**

Sociologists have classified groups into two basic classifications, namely, primary and secondary groups. The classification of groups into primary and secondary is mainly based on: (a) the quality of relationship between or among the members of the group, and (b) the degree of group identity. People, for example, generally feel more loyal to their family and close friends than to the companies for which they work.

**Primary Groups and Their Main Features**

 Charles H. Cooley was the first sociologist to use the term primary groups to describe such groups as family, neighborhood and children's play groups. Such groups were the ''nursery of human nature'' where the essential sentiment of human group loyalty and concern for others could be learned. Primary groups are distinguished by some of the following characteristics:

• There is face-to-face interaction among members.

• There is high sentiment or loyalty.

• Identification (group identity) and close cooperation among members • There is a high level of emotional, spiritual satisfaction to be derived from involvement in primary social groups.

• Concern for friendly relations as an end in themselves, not as a means to an end. • Primary groups are often small in size.

• Primary group gives its members (individuals) their ''first acquaintance with humanity''.

 **Secondary Groups and Their Main Features**

Secondary groups are the more formal types of groups to which peoples belong. To start with clearly definitive examples, the Federal Army, Lion’s Club, Ethiopian Commercial Bank, etc, are secondary groups. As organizations, secondary groups do not give people the feeling of close identity that primary groups give. Considerable effort must be devoted to making people proud of the corporation for which they work, and this type of pride, if it is achieved at all, is not primary group sentiment. One can still be lost in the great organization; there is not the same sense of psychological security.

Main features (traits) of secondary social groups include:

 • There is little or no emotional involvement.

• Members are more competitive than cooperative.

• Members are less intimate.

• Group identity is less relevant.

• Economic efficiency is given higher emphasis than psychological identity.

• The group is mainly a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

• Membership is unlimited.

Some critical observations must be made concerning the classification of groups. i) Primary and secondary groups are ideal types, i.e. types represented as opposite poles for the sake of analysis. In concrete life situations, most relations are not purely primary or secondary, but come some where between, examples: school, church, etc. ii) A second reservation about primarysecondary group classification is that primary groups may be formed with in secondary groups.

**Social Interaction and Social Relationship**

To understand social organizations in a society, sociologists study social structures and the function of social events and processes. This involves studying social interaction and relationships at broader (macro) and micro levels. Social interaction and relationship may be studied as they occur between the whole societies linked in the world system down to those between two individuals. Here our focus is on social interaction and relationship in the everyday life of individuals.

Individuals are the main components of society; they make up the building blocks; as, in a very important sense, society is the product of the actions of individuals. We may further state that society is a representation of the collective behavior of individual actors. It is the product of decisions people make concerning when, how, and with whom they are going to interact. However, individuals are social actors who act in a social environment; their social interactions are influenced by the social environment and existing social pattern. In other words, the actions of individuals are not haphazard ones; they take place in patterned relationships.

**Social relationship** refers to any routinized, enduring patterns of social interactions between individuals in society under the limits and influences of the social structure. The term "social relationship" elicits two important questions: between whom does social relationship take place? About what are social relationships? Answers to these questions lead us to the concepts of social status and role (Henslin and Nelson, 1995).

**Social Status and Social Roles**

The Concept and Types of Social Status In the social structure of a society or a group, there are various defined positions to be occupied by a group of individuals. This position in termed as **social status**. It is the position or rank a person or a group of persons occupy in the social system. Some of these positions are naturally given and they are called **ascribed social status.** They are acquired by birth. For example, being a male or female, boy or girl, black or white person, son or daughter, father or mother, etc. Some positions in society are to be attained by competitions, making efforts, commitments, choices, decisions, and other mechanisms. Such kinds of status are called achieved statuses. Examples include being a husband or wife, a student or teacher, a physician, a nurse, an athlete, etc. However, there are some of the statuses which may be both ascribed and achieved. For example, one can be an Ethiopian by birth or through other mechanisms.

Achieved social status may be regarded as the characteristics of modern, industrial societies. In a traditional society, most social statuses are naturally acquired. E.g. a potter family may produce potter son or daughter. But in modern society, this is not usually the case.

Every person has at least two social statuses. A person, for example, may be at the same time a student, a daughter, a mother, an employee, etc. Of these various statuses, one or two may be more dominant than others.

**The Concept of Social Roles**

Social roles are the expectations, duties, responsibilities, obligations, etc, which are associated with a given social status. Every person/ group of persons is/ are expected to behave, act and demonstrate skills, knowledge and attitude that are fitting to the given status or statuses. Every person is expected to play two or more roles.

Multiple statuses are associated with multiple roles. The different roles associated with a single status are called **role set**. Sometimes, there are role conflicts, meaning the clashing of one role with the other. These role conflicts may **be inter-role**, i.e. conflict between two or more roles. There are also **intra-role conflicts**, i.e. conflicts that occur when a person feels strains and inadequacies in accomplishing a certain role, or when there is a gap between what a person does and what a group expects of him or her. Intra-role conflict may also be called role strain. In other words, there is a clash between ideal role, that which a person is expected to perform theoretically, and actual role, that a person accomplishes according to his or her level of understanding, capacity and personality.

**Social Interaction in Everyday Life**

Micro-sociology focuses on understanding and analyzing the processes and dynamics of social interaction in every day life. Social interaction may simply mean what people do when they are in the presence of one another. Four symbolic interactionist micro-sociological perspectives are developed to understand social interaction in everyday life (Henslin and Nelson, 1995). These are:

1**. Symbolic Interaction**: Symbolic interactionism as indicated earlier focuses on social interaction as the most significant part of life in society. What interest scholars in this perspective are symbols people use to define their worlds. Here, three important concepts are used to explain the symbolic basis and nature of social interaction; these are: stereotypes in every day life, personal space, and touching.

• **Stereotypes** in Everyday Life: Stereotypes are the assumptions we have about people; they determine and shape our reactions and behaviors towards people. Our first impressions about people are shaped by the assumptions we make about such characteristics as the person's sex, age, skin color, physical appearance, social status, etc. The assumptions not only influence our ideas about the person, but the way we interact with that person.

• **Personal space:** Individuals have, and maintain, an important sense of personal space in social interaction; every person has thus personal space. Our personal spaces are open to only those whom we are intimate with such as children, parents, close friends and spouses. Otherwise, we keep others out of this personal space making sure that we do not touch.

**Dramaturgy:** Symbolic integrationists use the term “dramaturgy” to refer to the way individuals present themselves in everyday life. The term was coined by sociologist Erving Goffman (1922 – 1982) to refer to dramaturgical analysis of how people act and behave in social situations. Thus, social life is likened to a drama or stage. Individuals are born into the stage of everyday life. Our everyday social life consists of playing our assigned roles. Every person learns how to perform in the stage. Our everyday life is filled with stages where we perform; each person is expected to play his/ her drama taking many roles; e.g. a student, a wife, a mother, a daughter, a worker, etc. The actions and roles played on the stage are called role performances (Ibid.).

**Ethno-methodology:** literally means the study of people’s methods. Ethno-methodologists study how people make sense of life. Ethno-methodology involves uncovering people’s basic assumptions as they interpret their everyday world. Sociologists like Harold Garfinkel (who coined the term) have made extensive studies of how people use commonsense understandings to make sense out of their lives. What form the bases of social interaction in our everyday life are the assumptions individual actors have about the way life is and they way things ought to work (Ibid.)

4. **The Social Construction of Reality:** Symbolic interactionists argue that individuals define their own reality and try to live according that definition. Reality is not something that exists “out there”, independently. It is created socially. By “social construction of reality“, we mean the process by which we take the various elements available in our society and put them together to form a particular view of reality. Every individual’s definition of realities derives from his/ her society’s own definition.

**Social Institutions**

 **Definition and Main Features**

Social institutions may be defined as practices based on similar principles that display some degree of regularity. More specifically, a social institution is an interrelated system of social roles and social norms, organized around the satisfaction of an important social need or social function (Team of Experts, 2000).

In general, a social institution is an established pattern of behavior that is organized to perpetuate the welfare of society and to preserve its form. From the above definition, we can observe that social institutions have got some important functions. Three of such main functions are: (a) perpetuation of the welfare of society, (b) preservation and maintenance of the form of society, and (c) meeting the major needs of the members of society. A society is functionally integrated and held together by social institutions.

Social institutions are universal. They vary from time to time and across cultures, in terms of complexity, specialization, scope, formality and organization. But their basic nature and purpose are similar everywhere. These features are particularly true regarding the five major social institutions discussed below. Social institutions are resistant to change; they tend to persist. However, once a change occurs in particular social institution, it tends to affect the other institutions as well.

**Major Types and Functions of Social Institutions**

There are many principles around which institution are organized. The five social institutions of major significances are:

1. Economic institutions: those that deal with economic and property relations;

2. Polity and law: Those that are concerned with social control with politics and law government, the police, court, etc;

3. Religious institutions: Those concerned with the supernatural magic and religion;

4. Family: those based on principles of kinship, meaning, social relations created by descent and marriage; and 5. Educational institutions: those that deal with the need for training individuals in the roles, values, skills, knowledge, attitudes etc which are associated with being a citizen and a worker.

Each institution performs two types of social function. These are: (a) primary functions, which are also called manifest, explicit, or direct functions; and (b) secondary functions, which are also called indirect, hidden, or latent functions. Through these functions, social institutions fulfill important needs in the society. The primary functions of the five major social institutions are as follows.

**1. The Family**

The family is the most important social unit in any society. It is the building block of any society. The family fulfills two basic functions. These are reproduction and socialization. Society reproduces or recreates itself through the family. Children are born in the family to join the society. Parents play the roles of nurturing, caring for, teaching and training children; children are expected to play the roles of good and teachable trainees. The way parents nurture, train and care for their children vary according toe forms of family organization**. Nuclear family** is a dominant form of family organization in modern, industrialized and urban societies. It usually consists of husband wife and dependent children. In traditional, agrarian and rural societies, **Extruded family** form dominates. It consists of husband, wife/ wives, their children, and other relatives.

**2. Economic Institution**

Every society needs to make effective use of the scarce resources. Goods and services have to be produced to meet the basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, etc. Economic institutions are responsible for organizing the production, exchange, distribution and consumption of goods and services.

**3. Religious Institution**

This asocial institution is responsible for meeting (providing) spiritual needs of the members of the society. There are puzzling questions about the meaning of the human life, human destiny, the universe, and other questions.

Religion and related institutions like magic provide explanations for these puzzling paradoxes of life and provides meaning and purpose for life. It helps people to cope with purposelessness, meaninglessness and sense of alienation and frustration. These institutions also help members of society conform to social values and norms, and play their expected social roles

**4. Political Institution (Government and Law)**

 These social institutions are responsible for protecting the society from internal disorder, crime and chaos; as well as from external threats and invasion. They are responsible for maintaining peace and order at micro and macro levels; enforcing social control; and maintaining the welfare and well-being of society.

**5. Educational Institution**

This social institution is responsible for providing training for the members of society. It serves as center of knowledge production, exchange, and distribution. Generally, educational institutions are responsible for the vertical and horizontal transmission of material and non-material cultures. Vertical transmission means over time from one generation to another generation; where as horizontal transmission means over geographical space or from one society to another. Educational institutions also play the role of preparing members of society for the statuses and roles that re associate with being good citizens and workers, holding various occupations.

Before ending this section it is important to note that although the foregoing way of presenting the nature and function of social institutions is often common in some of standard text books in introductory sociology, we also need to view them in a critical and conflict theory approach. From such perspectives, social institutions may be functional for some and dysfunctional (meaning positively harmful and damaging) for other individuals and groups in a society. This is partly because they often exist and operate in the context of class division and social stratification, unequal access to power and resources. From this point of view, social institutions may not be functional to al members of society equally. They may exist to promote the interests and privileges of some sections of society (Personal communication: Dr Teketel Abebe, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Addis Ababa University).