



What is Sociology?

Sociology is the “**study of human society.**” For the examination, you need to know a number of concepts and terms used in the subject. There are **three** main areas you need to consider;

- Social structures (e.g. the family, education, social stratification, etc.)
- Social systems (e.g. culture and identity, agents of social control, etc.)
- Social issues (e.g. the causes of crime, the impact of unemployment, etc.)

As you might expect of a social science, there are several explanations as to how we can best understand human society. The main theoretical perspectives covered in GCSE Sociology are;

- Functionalism
- Marxism
- Feminism
- The New Right
- **Functionalism**

Functionalists believe that society can best be compared to a living organ, in which institutions and people all have a function to play with society. For example, the function of the family is to socialise children. Functionalist theorists include Talcott Parsons and Emile Durkheim.

- **Marxism**

Marxists believe that a capitalist society is characterized by a class conflict between the bourgeoisie (the owners of capital) and the proletariat (the working-class). In a capitalist economic system such as the UK, the bourgeoisie exploit the proletariat. Marxist theorists include Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx.

- **Feminism**

Feminists argue that society is dominated by men. In this patriarchal society men discriminate against women in order to prevent males and females gaining equal rights. There are various strands of belief within feminism; such as radical feminism, liberal feminism and Marxist feminism. Feminist theorists include Germaine Greer and Ann Oakley.

- **The New Right**

Sociologists who take a New Right perspective believe that traditional roles within society have been undermined by the permissive values of the 1960s and 1970s. They argue that the nuclear family is the bedrock of society, and that the welfare state creates a dependency culture. New Right theorists include Charles Murray and Sir Keith Joseph.

Sociology enables us to understand the structure and dynamics of society, and their intricate connections to patterns of human behavior and individual life changes. It examines the ways in which the forms of social structure -- groups, organizations, communities, social categories (such as class, sex, age, or race), and various social institutions (such as kinship, economic, political, or religious) affect human attitudes, actions, and opportunities.

The discipline also explores how both individuals and collectivities construct, maintain, and alter social organization in various ways. Sociology asks about the sources and consequences of change in social arrangements and institutions, and about the satisfactions and difficulties of planning, accomplishing, and adapting to such change. Areas studied in examining social dynamics include: culture, values, socialization, cooperation, conflict, power, exchange, inequality, deviance, social control, violence, order and social change.

Social organization is the study of the various institutions, social groups, social stratification, social mobility, bureaucracy, ethnic groups and relations, and other similar subjects like family, education, politics, religion, economy, and so on and so forth.

- Social psychology is the study of human nature as an outcome of group life, social attitudes, collective behavior, and personality formation. It deals with group life and the individual's traits, attitudes, beliefs as influenced by group life, and it views man with reference to group life.
- Social change and disorganization is the study of the change in culture and social relations and the disruption that may occur in society, and it deals with the study of such current problems in society such as juvenile delinquency, criminality, drug addiction, family conflicts, divorce, population problems, and other similar subjects.

- Human ecology deals with the nature and behavior of a given population and its relationships to the group's present social institutions. For instance, studies of this kind have shown the prevalence of mental illness, criminality, delinquencies, prostitution, and drug addiction in urban centers and other highly developed places.
- Population or demography is the study of population number, composition, change, and quality as they influence the economic, political, and social system.
- Sociological theory and method is concerned with the applicability and usefulness of the principles and theories of group life as bases for the regulation of man's environment, and includes theory building and testing as bases for the prediction and control of man's social environment.
- Applied sociology utilizes the findings of pure sociological research in various fields such as criminology, social work, community development, education, industrial relations, marriage, ethnic relations, family counseling, and other aspects and problems of daily life

Development of Sociology

Sociology is the youngest of the recognized social sciences. Auguste Comte in France coined the word 'sociology' in his Positive Philosophy published in 1838. He believed that a science of sociology should be based on systematic observation and classification not on authority and speculation. This was a relatively new idea at that time. Herbert Spencer in England published his Principles of Sociology in 1876. He applied the theory of organic evolution to human society and developed a grand theory of social evolution.

Lester F Ward an American published his Dynamic Sociology in 1883 calling for social progress through intelligent social action which sociologists should guide. All these founders of sociology were basically social philosophers. They proclaimed that sociologists should collect, organize and classify factual data and derive sound social theories from these facts. While they called for scientific investigation they did relatively little of it themselves.

Emile Durkheim gave the most notable early demonstration of scientific methodology in sociology. In his Rules of sociological Method published in 1895, he outlined the methodology which he pursued in his study 'Suicide' published in 1897. Instead of speculating upon the causes of suicide, he first planned his research design and then collected a large mass of data on the characteristics of people who commit suicide and then derived a theory of suicide from these data.

Courses in sociology appeared in many universities in the 1890s. The American Journal of Sociology began publication in 1895 and the American Sociological Society was organized in 1905. Whereas most of the early European sociologists came from the fields of history, political economy or philosophy many of the early American sociologists had been social workers, ministers and nearly all were from rural backgrounds.

Urbanization and industrialization were creating grave social problems and these early sociologists were looking for scientific solutions. They saw sociology as a scientific guide to social progress. The early volumes of the American Journal of Sociology contained relatively few articles devoted to scientific description or research but carried many sermons filled with advice etc.

By 1930s the several sociological journals were well filled with research articles and scientific descriptions. Sociology was becoming a body of scientific knowledge with its theories based upon scientific observation rather than upon impressionistic observation.

Socialization: Socialization is a process by which individual learn the culture of their society as it is the process of social learning and as such is a lifelong process. Without undergoing this process, an individual would bear little resemblance to any human being defined as normal by the standards of his or her society, e.g. so called "wolf children of midnapore" two females aged two and eight, were reportedly found in a wolf den in Bengali in 1920. They walked on all fours, preferred a diet of raw meat, they howled like wolves and lacked any form of speech. Such an example indicates that socialization involving prolonged interaction with adults is essential not only for fitting new members into society but also the process of actually becoming human.

Culture: Ralph Linton: "The culture of a society is the way of life of its members; the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation.

Since human beings have no instinct to direct their actions, their behaviour must be based on guidelines which are learned. But for a society to operate effectively, these guidelines must be shared by its members. Culture therefore has two essential qualities: firstly it is learned, secondly it is shared. Without it there would be no human society.

Culture defines accepted ways of behaving for members of a particular society. Such definitions vary from society to society. Every society has certain common problems to deal with for example the problem of dependent members such as the very young and the very old. However, solutions to such problems are culturally determined. It is to be noted that the solutions provided in one society may well be regarded as indefensible by members of other societies, e.g. under certain circumstances, "infanticide and geronticide" have been practiced by certain groups of Australian aborigines, Eskimos and Caribou Indians.

Norms: Norms are guidelines which direct conduct in particular situations. It is a specific guide to action which defines acceptable and appropriate behaviour in various particular situations, e.g. Norms governing dress which vary from society to society.

Norms are enforced by POSITIVE and NEGATIVE sanctions that is rewards and punishments. Sanctions can be informal such as an approving or disapproving glance, or formal, such as a reward or a fine given by an official body.

Usually, the threat of negative sanctions is sufficient to enforce normative behaviour. Conversely an admiring glance a word of praise or an encouraging smile provides rewards for conformity to social norms.

Values: Unlike norms which provide specific directives for conduct, values provide more general guidelines. A value is a belief that something is good and desirable. It defined what is important, worthwhile and worth striving for. In the west for example the value of materialism motivates individuals to invest time and energy producing and acquiring material possessions. In term of Sioux values which place a high value on generosity, the acquisitive individual of western society would at best be regarded as peculiar and more probably would be condemned as grasping self-seeking and antisocial. Shared norms and values are essential for the operation of human.

Primary socialization, probably the most important aspect of the socialization process, takes place during infancy, usually within the family. Through the family, the child learns the language and many of the basic behaviour patterns of its society.

Ultimately, the agents of socialization are the family, the educational system, the peer group, the occupational group and mass-media.