

Social Institutions

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Social institutions are a collection of different sources of knowledge, information, skills and values that affect an individual and define how an individual would behave in his or her society. In this sense, family, schools, religion and economy are considered as institutions to the sociologist. In other words, we tend to look up to our parents, teachers and care-givers in identifying what is right and what is wrong. Additionally, we as humans prefer to always be part of something bigger. We want to be part of our families, our society, our religion and we want to think of a supreme entity that judges us or at least takes care of us.



Definition

Social institutions are a group of people bound together for common purposes, though they are having individualistic goals, objectives, rights, privileges, and liabilities differing from each other.

Types of Social Institutions

Community

it is a group of people living in the same region or having common interests. Population in a community is concerned about the problems and well-being of individual members.

Minor issues at a social and personal level are solved within the community e.g. at working places minor issues are met with at community level.

Community service Organizations

These organizations are made to serve the community in terms of their basic needs, personal and family problems and to help the community in leading a healthy life. Examples of community service organizations are non-profitable social service organizations, NGO's, various clubs.

Education and Schools as a Social Institution

Before we get into family and religion, it is easier to study our education system as a social institution because we have always considered schools as an institution. In schools, we learn **scientific knowledge**, we develop **skills**, acquire **values**, have **attitudes** and sometimes schools help form our **beliefs** and **habits**.

Schools, in addition to the other social institutions we shall talk about later, help prepare us for two important tasks. **To be part of a bigger society** and **to be productive** and have a fruitful future.

In addition to our curriculum in school, we also learn how to govern our **behavior** and determine what is normal and what is not in terms of **social interaction** with our peers and teachers. We understand the hierarchy of our society.

Additionally, teachers usually realize individual differences among their students, thus start to have different **expectations** for each student. It is understandable to have different expectations but this should not affect how the teacher spends his or her time with students. This is because limiting their interaction with average students might limit their future full potential and can make them feel marginalized.

Additionally, schools and teaching systems differ from one neighborhood to another and as a result, what we learn from our school experience may be different. This can affect our potential as adults in integrating with our society professionally.

Family as a Social Institution

While it is easy to think of schools and our educational system as a social institution, it might be difficult for someone who is not a sociologist to think of family or religion as forms of institutions. In sociology, the family is also considered as an institution because it can help us define our **goals**, our **expectations**, have a huge impact on our **habits**, **beliefs**, and **values**, and finally can help us define what is **normal** and what is not.

A family can be defined as people who are related to an individual by **blood**, **marriage**, **adoption** or **other kinds of relationships**. These people teach us some values, affect our decisions and are part of our immediate support social group when we are under stress or need support, e.g. for grief over the loss.

Additionally, families can be **nuclear** or **extended**. A nuclear family consists of our **parents**, **siblings**, and **offspring**. An extended family consists of **grandparents**, **aunts**, and **uncles**. The nuclear family tends to have a larger impact on our social norms compared to the extended family.

While families and education affect our goals, expectations, and norms, it is important to note that **genetics** also play an essential role in defining behaviors(including criminal

behavior) and the ability to socially interact.

Additionally, the **environment** is known to affect our genetics through **epigenetics**. It can affect our ability to express certain genes. A common example is studying families who had huge stress in their lives and then to study their second or third generation to see if they still show signs of anxiety or depression. Surprisingly, anxiety disorders were found to be significantly more common up to the 3rd generation in these families even though their parents themselves did not experience any major stressful events in their lives.

The main five goals of the family as a social institution are:

- Protect the offspring
- Reproduce
- Teach the children how to socially interact
- Show affection and love
- Teach the offspring their position in the society



Reproduction



Protection



Socialization

Transfer of norms and values



Affection and companionship



Social status

Family background and reputation

“Five Functions of Family” Image created by Lecturio

Let us take reproduction as one of the important goals of the family as a social institution. Before the introduction of **antibiotics**, it was very common for children and adolescents to die before reaching adulthood due to infectious diseases. Therefore, families had to reproduce large numbers of offspring to ensure that their generation is going to survive and they will be able to be part of a productive society.

Families in this era tend to have a smaller number of children because their goals are different from those of earlier days. Nowadays, a larger family simply means more mouths to feed and your integration in the society would not be largely affected by the number of children because they are very unlikely to die at a young age because of infections.

Additionally, families nowadays can have a negative impact on their offspring because of issues such as divorce and domestic violence. Divorce has become more common in North America and has led to more remarriages and mixed family. It is more commonly reported now as compared to the past and is known to affect our social skills. Violence in the family unit can impact children, spouses and elders, many time anchored on neglect or mental abuse.

Another difference between earlier families and the ones we have now is that families are

more diverse. Diversity in family forms refers to all the various types of families that exist; traditional, mixed, gay/lesbian, grandparents.

Healthcare Institutions

It helps in monitoring public health, providing health facilities in the maintenance of health, treatment, and prevention of diseases, handling accidents and injuries.

Medicalization is the process by which human conditions and problems come to be defined and treated as medical conditions. This becomes the subject of medical study, diagnosis, prevention, and treatment.

The sick role means that the sufferer enters a role of **“sanctioned deviance”**. From a functionalist perspective, a sick individual is not a productive member of society. This deviance needs to be policed, which is the role of the medical professional.

The **delivery of healthcare** is varied in society, linked to access, socioeconomic status, and age. **Social epidemiology** examines disparity in health and medicine based on social factors and how they impact health. **Illness experience** refers to the process of being ill and how individuals cope and react, change in personal identity.

Religion as a Social Institution

Religion and organized religious rituals and practices can be traced back to the first day’s humanity started to emerge on earth. Religion and our need as humans to belong to supreme entities affect our behavior, our norms and can define our morals.

Unfortunately, strict adherence to religion is known to lead to conflict and can make one group of people socially isolated. Due to that, **secularization** started to emerge where people wanted to weaken the influence of religion and the church on politics and on the society. Nowadays, people try to seek information and answers from scientific sources rather than miraculous thinking or religious explanations.

Types of religious organizations

Ecclesia	Church	Sect	Cult
Dominant religious organization that includes most members of society	Well integrated into the larger society, entry through birth or may join	Distinct from that of the larger society, often break away organizations	For outside of society’s norms, may be short-lived, deemed “crazy”

Economy, the Government, Legal Institutes and Social Integrity as social institutions

Governments are an essential part of the social institution. They are responsible for setting rules and enforcing them to define how every one of us can integrate into the society. Legal institutes help us by regulating the society and preventing crime as they enforce the law and policy

While the government can affect people and their interactions with each other, people can also influence the government by applying **democracy**. In a democratic setting, people can be part of the government and can affect the government’s decisions, goals, and expectations.

On the other hand, a society that is run under **authoritarianism** would not allow people

to be part of the government. That society might be under military control because of an emergency or a disaster for instance.

The communism is a class-less, money-less system where all property is owned by the community and government has considerable power and authority.

In a monarchy is one family that has control and power over the government with a figurehead.

Comparative economic and political systems

Capitalism	Socialism
An economic system in which resources and productions are mainly privately owned	An economic system in which resources and productions are collectively owned
Goods and services are sold for a profit	Private property is limited

Conclusion

Social institutions play an important role in the formation of society, maintaining its integrity, functioning, and prosperity. Every category of the social institute has a unique role to play.

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