

Introduction to Sociology

Sociology is concerned with the study of human relations and the interaction between human beings, individuals and institutions, within societies. Sociology is a complex and broad science. Sociology studies multiple aspects of society, including the *family, the state, language, culture, social classes, racial, ethnic, and gender differences, religion, crime, economic growth, education, art, and communication*, among others. Also, sociology is closely related to other social sciences such as *politics, economics and psychology*, and it intersects with them in various fields.

1. Meaning of Sociology

Sociology is the scientific study of society, patterns of social relationships, social interactions, and culture of everyday life. It is a social science that uses various methods of empirical investigation and critical analysis to develop a body of knowledge about social order, acceptance, and change or social evolution.

- It is considered one of the social sciences *that study scientifically a society*, including patterns *of social relationships, social interaction, and culture*. The term sociology was first used by Frenchman **Auguste Comte** in the 1830s. (Calhoun,2002)
- Sociology is the study of *social life, social change, and the social causes and consequences of human behavior*. Sociologists investigate the structure of groups, organizations, and societies and how people interact within these contexts. (Conner,2014)

2. Etymology of Sociology

The word sociology derives from the French word, **sociologie**, a hybrid coined in 1830 by French philosopher **Isidor Auguste Comte** who lived from (1798) to (1857), from the Latin word: **socius**, meaning “**companion**”, and the suffix **-ology, meaning** “the **study of**” or “**knowledge**”

3. The Sociologist's Interest

Sociologists study all things human, and they seek to answer questions and conduct research that concerns *the human being and his relation to his surroundings*. The methods sociological researchers use to collect their information are similar to those of other sciences. Beginning with a question or a concept, *researchers collect data using social experiments, surveys or participant observation*. To give more substance their theory and how they plan to collect their information, researches revisit existing sources available through academic or government research sites. Some of these discussed issues are listed below:

- Studying the nature of the relationship between members of the same society or the external environment.
- Explaining the interaction between two people or more in a society.
- Looking at how the different societal aspects can be compatible or conflict with one another.
- Explaining the nature, complexity and contents of a human social behavior.
- Deciphering the structure and the function of society as a system
- Elucidating the indispensability of social interactions for human development.
- Analyzing how society affects individuals and how people can reshape the structures of their society ...etc.

4. Brief History of Sociology

Sociology emerged in the middle of the nineteenth (19) century in Europe. It is developed because of **three main** factors:

❖ *Industrial Revolution*

Europe at that time was transiting to new manufacturing processes: changing from agriculture to factory production and industry; therefore, a huge number of people left their countryside and moved to cities to search for work. In the cities, people faced many problems such as poverty, filth,

crowding and all sorts of crimes. This revolution opened the door for democratic changes to resolve many similar issues.

❖ *Colonial Empires*

European countries succeeded to obtain many colonies in the world. Its expansion exposed them to various cultures and different ways of life. It was a departure to understand cultures and look for the differences between them.

❖ *Natural Sciences Development (Scientific Revolution)*

A series of events and success in natural sciences marked this period. Developments in different fields like: mathematics, physics, astronomy, biology, chemistry and many others. These sciences helped to understand the causes of social phenomena and to find out a way to solve them.

5. Sociologists in Society

Contemporary sociologists are continuing the early sociologists' tradition of using sociology to make differences in diverse areas of society. Many sociologists are, of course, teachers and researchers. However, sociologists are actively using their skills throughout society in ways that extend well beyond academics and the classroom. Some sociologists, called applied or clinical sociologists, use their skills to find answers to practical problems. For example, they apply their unique perspectives on conflict and social life to finding new ways to assist in mediation and dispute resolution (Diaz 2001; Rebach 2001), improving community services (e.g., finding ways to extend phone service to the speech disabled [Segalman 1998]), improving help for victims of violence (Kilpatrick, Resick, and Williams 2001), or even in designing more effective social settings for human interactions from child-care centers to offices to night clubs (DuBois 2001). Some

sociologists are also starting to work in high-tech fields (Guice 1999). Sociologists are even working with scholars in a variety of disciplines on future studies (Bell 1997; Masini 2000; Shostak 2003).

People trained in sociology are found across society, even though they are not always famous for being sociologists. Peter Dreier (2001) has put together a “Sociology All-Star Team” to demonstrate the widely varied activities of a number of well-known people who majored in sociology. His list includes entertainment personalities Regis Philbin, Robin Williams, Dan Aykroyd, and Debra Winger, and sex therapist Dr. Ruth Westheimer. Well-known sociology majors in the world of sports include NBA all-star Alonzo Mourning, NFL Hall of Fame quarterback Joe Theismann, and sportscaster Ahmad Rashad. Olympic track and field gold medalist Gail Devers also holds a sociology degree (Gail Devers). Beyond their accomplishments in the entertainment and sports arenas, sociologists have made many world-changing contributions to society. Saul Bellow won the 1976 Nobel Prize in Literature, and Jane Addams and Emily Balch both won the Nobel Peace Prize. The civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. and the Reverend Jesse Jackson studied sociology. So did Frances Perkins, an industrial sociologist who fought to improve conditions in early-twentieth-century textile mills. Perkins became the first female member of a presidential cabinet, serving as secretary of labor under President Franklin Roosevelt. Ronald Reagan, 40th president of the United States, also had a sociology degree (Dreier 2001). A number of other notable politicians, including Shirley Chisolm and Maxine Waters, studied sociology.

References

1. Abercrombie, Nicholas, Stephen Hill, and Bryan S. Turner. 2000. *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*. 4th ed. London: Penguin Books. This dictionary is an excellent quick reference covering many of the important classical concepts and evolving, contemporary issues in sociology
2. *Electronic Journal of Sociology*. <http://www.sociology.org/>. This is a free international online refereed journal that publishes a broad range of sociological works