

Sociology Unit

WHAT IS SOCIOLOGY?

Means "the study of society".

Sociologists study social behavior in human groups and look for patterns.

Sociologists study a wide range of topics and may include:

- **Beliefs**
- **Values**
- **Rules**
- **Ways of organizing families**
- **Educational systems**
- **Religions**
- **Political systems**
- **Economic systems**
- **The roles people play**

Social Facts

Sociologists see patterns in people's behavior that relate to things outside of them, such as where they live, what religious and racial group they belong to and what their income is. They use social facts to explain the patterns.

A social fact is any social activity or situation that can be observed and measured. For example:

- **Attendance at sporting events**
- **Crime patterns**
- **Patterns of church attendance**
- **Marriage rates**
- **Unemployment and underemployment rates**
- **Patterns of educational level reached**

WHAT DO SOCIOLOGISTS DO?

- **Teach**
- **Advise**
- **Research**
- **Counsel**

People who do not become professional sociologists study sociology to help them in careers in journalism, politics, public relations, business or any other field that works with a diverse group of people.

SOCIETY

A large number of people who:

- **Live in the same area**
- **See themselves as separate and different from people outside their territory**
- **Participate in a common culture**

A society is made up of social interactions among people who think of themselves as similar. That doesn't mean that differences don't exist within a society.

CULTURE

The rules that guide our behavior. We begin learning them as soon as we are born and are shaped by them our entire lives.

It includes society's beliefs, history, knowledge, language, customs, moral principles and skills. It also consists of the objects people make and use that reflect their ways of life.

KEY ELEMENTS OF CULTURE (4)

1. VALUES

Personal values shape our behavior

Cultural values

Collection of what is good, desirable, and proper in a culture.

The types of values held by a society help determine almost everything else about a culture.

Broad, abstract, and basic ideas that reflect what is desirable, proper, good, preferred, important and right.

Cultures value such ideas as:

- **Freedom of expression**
- **Strong families**
- **Competition**
- **Loyalty to a leader**
- **Religious belief**

2. NORMS

**Guidelines people follow in their relations with one another.
They are shared standards of desirable behavior.**

Small - don't talk to strangers

Major - do not kill another human being

Two types of norms:

1. Folkways

group habits and conventions

everyday habits done without much thought such as:

- **saying thank you when someone gives you something**
- **greetings**
- **child-raising customs**

Not punishable, but society would think of you as rude or inconsiderate

2. Mores

moral standards

norms with powerful moral significance attached to them

Usually a consequence for violating mores such as:

- **Murder**
- **Stealing**
- **Dishonesty**

Norms are enforced by laws and sanctions:

Positive/Negative Reinforcement:

- **Marriage and divorce laws**
- **Student of the month**
- **Employee of the month**
- **Traffic fines**
- **Suspension**
- **“Grounding”**

Subculture – group of people that share some broad cultural values but also follow values and norms that are unique to their group

Counterculture – group that rejects the values and norms of the larger culture and replaces it with a new set

Ethnocentrism – the tendency to assume that one’s own culture and way of life are superior to all others

3. SYMBOLS

Commonly understood gestures, words, objects, sounds and designs that stand for something else.

Examples include:

- **Words**
- **Maps**
- **Diagrams**
- **Traffic signs**
- **Logos**
- **National Anthems**
- **Emergency vehicle sirens**

4. KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS

Culture's definition of reality.

Examples include:

- **History**
- **Science**
- **Medicine**
- **Skills needed to perform the work of the society**
- **Ways of doing things**
- **Ways of making things**