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**Investigation into Sociology: The Roles and Challenges in Development Studies**

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**BY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The study attempted to investigate sociology's roles and challenges in development studies. In the study, it was established that students who have been well trained in sociology know how to think critically about human social life and how to ask important research questions. They know how to design good social research projects, carefully collect and analyze empirical data, and formulate and present their research findings. Students trained in sociology also know how to help others understand the way the social world works and how it might be changed for the better. Most generally, they have learned how to think, evaluate, and communicate clearly, creatively, and effectively. These are all abilities of tremendous value in a wide variety of vocational callings and professions. The study concluded that sociology offers a distinctive and enlightening way of seeing and understanding the social world in which we live and which shapes our lives. Sociology looks beyond normal, taken-for-granted views of reality, to provide deeper, more illuminating and challenging understandings of social life. It was also recommended in the study that it is important to note that sociology should not be mistaken for other different common social studies courses, which have little relation to sociological theory or social science research methodology.*

**KEYWORDS: Sociology, Roles and Challenges**

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**Introduction**

Sociology is an exciting and illuminating field of study that analyzes and explains important matters in our personal lives, our communities, and the world. At the personal level, sociology investigates the social causes and consequences of such things as romantic love, racial and gender identity, family conflict, deviant behavior, aging, and religious faith. At the societal level, sociology examines and explains matters like crime and law, poverty and wealth, prejudice and discrimination, schools and education, business firms, urban communities, and social movements. At the global level, sociology studies such phenomena as population growth and migration, war and peace, and economic development. Social life overwhelmingly regulates the behaviour of humans, largely because humans lack the instincts that guide most animal behaviour. Humans therefore depend on social institutions and organizations to inform their decisions and actions. Given the important role organizations play in influencing human action, it is sociology's task to discover how organizations affect the behaviour of people, how they are established, how they interact with one another, how they decay, and, ultimately, how they disappear.

Among the most basic organizational structures are economic, religious, educational, and political institutions, as well as more specialized institutions such as the family, the community, the military, peer groups, clubs, and volunteer associations. According to Bloom (2006), the fortunes of sociology, as well as the other social sciences, are linked with the prevailing attitudes, values, and politics of the time. While the discipline developed an institutional base at the beginning of the century, substantial growth only occurred with the rapid expansion of higher education following World War II and postwar growth in government support for research. Socialization is the process by which the new generation learns the knowledge, attitudes and values that they will need as productive citizens. Education's primary role is to convey basic knowledge and skills to future generations.

### **Concept of Sociology**

Sociology is one of a number of social sciences (including economics, psychology and human geography) which endeavor to elucidate, give details and understand the actions of human beings in society. According to the American Heritage Science Dictionary, sociology is the scientific study of social behavior, its origins, development, organization, and institutions (AHSD, 2013). According to Ashley and Orenstein (2005), one thing we are certainly sure of is that sociology is a social science that utilizes different techniques of empirical investigation and critical analysis to expand and broaden our understanding of a body of knowledge that includes social order, social disorder, and social change (Ashley and Orenstein, 2005). For most sociologists, the principal concern for them is to carry out research which at least should be directly useful to social policy and welfare, whereas others concentrate principally on sanitizing and refurbishing the theoretical understanding of social development. Subject areas range from the micro stage of individual organization and communication to the macro stage of systems and social construction (Giddens, 2007). It is important to note that sociology should not be mistaken for other common social studies courses, which have little relation to sociological theory or social science research methodology. According to the US National Science Foundation, sociology is regarded as a STEM field. (A "STEM Field" is a short form referring to the scholastic disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) (National Science Foundation, 2012).

Sociologists study social events, interactions, and patterns, and they develop a theory in an attempt to explain why things work as they do. In sociology, a theory is a way to explain different aspects of social interactions and to create a testable proposition, called a hypothesis, about society (Allan 2006). Sociology, a social science that studies human societies, their interactions, and the processes that preserve and change them. It does this by examining the dynamics of constituent parts of societies such as institutions, communities, populations, and gender, racial, or age groups. Sociology also studies social status or stratification, social movements, and social change, as well as societal disorder in the form of crime, deviance, and revolution. Sociology, as a generalizing social science, is surpassed in its breadth only by anthropology—a discipline that encompasses archaeology, physical anthropology, and linguistics. The broad nature of sociological inquiry causes it to overlap with other social sciences such as economics, political science, psychology, geography, education, and law. Sociology's distinguishing feature is its practice of drawing on a larger societal context to explain social phenomena.

### **History of Sociology**

The term "sociology" was first coined in 1780 by the French essayist Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès in an unpublished manuscript. According to Harriss (2000), sociology as a scholarly discipline emerged, primarily out of Enlightenment thought, as a positivist science of society shortly after the French Revolution. Its genesis is owed to various key movements in the philosophy of science and the philosophy of knowledge, arising in reaction to such issues as modernity, capitalism, urbanization, rationalization, secularization, colonization, and imperialism. Sociological reasoning predates the foundation of the discipline itself. Social analysis has origins in the common stock of Western knowledge and philosophy, having been carried out from as far back as the time of Old Comic Poetry, which features social and political criticism, and the ancient Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, if not earlier, Nettleship (1894). For instance, the origin of the survey (i.e., the collection of information from a sample of individuals) can be traced back to at least the Domesday Book in 1086, while ancient philosophers such as Confucius wrote about the importance of social roles (341). Halsey (2004); Mitchell (1970). There is evidence of early sociology in medieval Arabic writings as well. Some sources consider Ibn Khaldun, a 14th-century Arab-Islamic scholar from Tunisia, to have been the father of sociology, although there is no reference to his work in the works of the major founders of modern sociology.

According to Scott et al (2015) and Macionis et al (2010), "Sociology" was later defined independently by French philosopher of science Auguste Comte in 1838 as a new way of looking at society. Comte had earlier used the term "social physics", but it had been subsequently appropriated by others, most notably the Belgian statistician Adolphe Quetelet. Comte endeavoured to unify history, psychology, and economics through the scientific understanding of social life. Writing shortly after the malaise of the French Revolution, he proposed that social ills could be remedied through sociological positivism, an epistemological approach outlined in the *Course in Positive Philosophy* (1830–1842), later included in *A General View of Positivism* (1848). Comte gave a powerful impetus to the development of sociology, an impetus which bore fruit in the later decades of the nineteenth century. To say this is certainly not to claim that French sociologists such as Durkheim were devoted disciples of the high priest of positivism. But by insisting on the irreducibility of each of his basic sciences to the particular science of sciences, which it presupposed in the hierarchy, and by emphasizing the nature of sociology as the scientific study of social phenomena, Comte put sociology on the map. Sociology quickly evolved as an academic response to the perceived challenges of modernity, such as industrialization, urbanization, secularization, and the process of "rationalization" (Habermas 1990). The field predominated in continental Europe, with British anthropology and statistics generally following on a separate trajectory. According to the British Journal of Sociology Website (2009), the first sociology department to be established in the United Kingdom was at the London School of Economics and Political Science (home of the British Journal of Sociology) in 1904. Leonard Trelawny Hobhouse and Edvard Westermarck became lecturers in the discipline at the University of London in 1907 (Pioneers of the Social Sciences 2013). Harriet Martineau, an English translator of Comte, has been cited as the first female sociologist.

### **Roles of Sociology**

There are several major manifest functions associated with sociology. The first is socialization. One of the roles of sociology is to teach students conformity to the law and respect for authority. Education is also an important tool used by students towards upward mobility. Higher learning institutions are viewed as vehicles for moving students closer to their careers that will help them

become successful. Education also fulfills latent functions. Much goes on in school that has little to do with formal education. The educational setting introduces students to social networks that might last for years and can help people find jobs after their schooling is completed. Students who have been well trained in sociology know how to think critically about human social life, and how to ask important research questions. They know how to design good social research projects, carefully collect and analyze empirical data, and formulate and present their research findings. Students trained in sociology also know how to help others understand the way the social world works and how it might be changed for the better. Most generally, they have learned how to think, evaluate, and communicate clearly, creatively, and effectively. These are all abilities of tremendous value in a wide variety of vocational callings and professions. Another latent function is the ability to work with others in small groups, a skill that is transferable to a workplace that might not be learned in a home school setting. According to Stouffer (2004), sociologists played a useful role in the World War II effort, exemplified by Samuel Stouffer's Research Branch of the Army's Information and Education Division and the publication of *The American Soldier*. Medical sociological endeavors tend to follow two streams: sociology in medicine and sociology of medicine (Straus, 2007).

Sociologists worked on health issues throughout the century, but medical sociology as an institutionalized specialty first developed a strong educational infrastructure in the 1950s and 1960s, largely with the support of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). Unlike the National Institutes of Health (NIH) at that time, NIMH saw the social and behavioral sciences as central to the development of its mission. In the former, sociologists work as applied investigators or technicians, seeking to answer questions of interest to their sponsors, whether government agencies, foundations, hospitals, or medical schools. Depending on the ingenuity of the researcher, such work can make broader contributions than the particular task may suggest, but the emphasis is on information and application. This role is familiar, encompassing those who design and execute health surveys and who study such varied topics as access to care, use of services, satisfaction, risk factors in disease, health status determinants, and many more. In contrast, sociology of medicine focuses on testing sociological hypotheses and using medicine as a laboratory to investigate fundamental issues in social stratification, power and influence, social organization, socialization, and the broad context of social values. within this tradition explores such themes as how physicians control the work of other health occupations; how lower social status and gender affect health interactions; and how political and economic interests influence the structure of care, reimbursement, and the use of technology in healthcare. At the organizational level, such studies commonly contrast rhetoric with reality, seeking to identify the motivations, incentives, and group interests that result in departures from public declarations and stated goals. Medical sociology has little theory of its own, depending on its parent discipline for its broader perspectives. Thus, the major points of emphasis that define sociology in general help focus the way generic questions about health and medicine are formulated.

## **Conclusion**

The study concludes that sociology offers a distinctive and enlightening way of seeing and understanding the social world in which we live and which shapes our lives. Sociology looks beyond normal, taken-for-granted views of reality, to provide deeper, more illuminating and challenging understandings of social life. Sociology's subject matter is diverse, ranging from crime to religion, from the family to the state, from the divisions of race and social class to the

shared beliefs of a common culture, and from social stability to radical change in whole societies. Unifying the study of these diverse subjects of study is sociology's purpose of understanding how human action and consciousness both shape and are shaped by surrounding cultural and social structures. Moreover, the broad nature of sociological inquiry causes it to overlap with other social sciences such as economics, political science, psychology, geography, education, and law. Sociology's distinguishing feature is its practice of drawing on a larger societal context to explain social phenomena.

### **Recommendations**

1. It is important to note that sociology should not be mistaken for other common social studies courses, which have little relation to sociological theory or social science research methodology.
2. For sociologists, the principal concern for them is to carry out research which at least should be directly useful to social policy and welfare. Also, concentrate principally on sanitizing and refurbishing the theoretical understanding of social development.

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