

Essay on Sociology: Top 6 Essays on Sociology

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Essay # 1. Definition of Sociology:

Sociology (from Latin: socius, 'companion; and the suffix -ology, 'the study of', from Greek logos, 'knowledge') is the scientific study of society, including patterns of social relationships, social interaction, and culture i.e. the scientific study of society and human behavior. Thus, society is used to interpret human behavior by using theories to understand human behavior by using scientific methods of research.

Sociology emerged as a discipline in the 19th century as an academic response to the challenge of modernization. Sociologists hoped not only to understand what held social groups together, but also to develop an 'antidote' to the social disintegration that was rapidly resulting from modernization.

Sociology is a social science that studies human societies, their interactions, and the processes that preserve and change them. 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.

As the organizations play an important role in influencing human action, it is sociology's task to discover how organizations affect the behavior of persons, how they are established, how organizations 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.

Sociologists depend on quantitative methods of social search to describe large patterns in social relationships, and to develop models that can help predict social change and how

¹ A creative commons of Indian origin, possibly of a student

people will respond to social change as well as qualitative methods—such as focused interviews, group discussions and ethnographic methods for a better understanding of social processes.

Sociology is a relatively new study among other social science disciplines including economics, political science, anthropology, psychology. The term ‘Sociology’ was coined by Auguste Comte, who hoped to unify all studies of humankind—including history, psychology and economics.

He believed all human life had passed through the same distinct historical stages and that, if one could grasp this progress, one could prescribe the remedies for social ills. Sociology did not replace the other social sciences, but aimed to be another of them, with its own particular emphases in terms of subject matter and methods.

Essay # 2. History of Sociology:

Industrial sociology’s origins lie in the ideas of Marx, Weber and Durkheim, and perhaps beyond. It was recognized as a discrete subject only between the world wars, developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and subsequently fragmented into myriad forms such as the sociology of work and organizational behavior, or has become merged along with some elements of industrial relations into Human Resource Management.

The history of industrial sociology can be read against the changing backdrop of the founding authorities. During the interwar period, when mass unemployment and economic crisis prevailed, Marx, with his theory of proletarian revolution generated by alienation and exploitation, was expected to prevail, but in fact Marx’s influence was minimal: the limited success of the communist revolutions shifted the focus of many Marxists from industry to culture.

In modern industrialized societies work tasks are increasingly carried out within bureaucratized corporations and formally structured enterprises that employ people to work under the instructions of organizational managers. Organizations are at ‘the center of gravity of contemporary society’.

Essay # 3. Sociology related to Other Social Sciences:

Sociology is related with other disciplines that also deal with the study of society. The fields of economics, psychology, and anthropology have influenced and have been influenced by sociology and these fields share a great amount of history and common research interests. Unlike sociology, psychology and anthropology have forensic components within these disciplines that deal with anatomy and other types of laboratory research.

Sociobiology is the study of how social behavior and organization has been influenced by evolution and other biological processes. The field blends sociology with a number of other sciences, such as anthropology, biology, zoology, and others. Sociology is also widely used in management science, especially in the field of organizational behavior.

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.

Sociologists also utilize some aspects of these other fields. Psychology and sociology, for instance, share an interest in the subfield of social psychology, although psychologists traditionally focus on individuals and their mental mechanisms. Sociology devotes most of its attention to the collective aspects of human behavior, because sociologists place greater emphasis on the ways external groups influence the behavior of individuals.

Psychology examines more of the workings of the human mind why persons think and behave as they do. Sociology tends to examine groups of persons (societies), communities, and nations. So psychology is more about the individual or small group, and sociology is more about communities and larger groups of persons.

Psychology helps the individual to function independently in personal relationships and within the community whereas Sociology intervenes and assists individuals and families through the hardships and crises they face through continuous support as needed. Simply, Psychology may be perceived as a goal toward independence, while Sociology might be perceived as the support necessary to sustain families and society.

The field of social anthropology has been historically quite close to sociology. Until about the first quarter of the 20th century, the two subjects were usually combined in one department. Anthropology and Sociology both deal with society but the only difference is that Social Anthropology mainly considers small states and their culture, but their area of studies is basically the same.

Two other social sciences, Political Science and Economics, developed largely from the practical interests of nations have also recognized the utility of sociological concepts and methods. Sociology and Political Science are related in the sense that they are both concerned with the welfare of people in a society. Political Science basically deals with the distribution of power and the exercise of power, democracy, dictatorship, and communism, how people vote etc.

Sociology and Economics are related in the sense that Economics deals with the production of goods and services and how they are distributed to people just like Sociology which also consider how the goods are distributed to members of the society.

History is another social science which is related to Sociology. History primarily deals with past events and how they affected society, e.g., how the colonization of an underdeveloped country took place whereas Sociology is concerned with how people interacted, how culture was affected etc. during the colonization and the present.

Geography can also be a social science which deals with society just like Sociology. Population studies, demography, health and environment are all geographical studies which deal with society which are also inter-related to sociology as a field of study. Fields like law, education, and religion and even such contrasting fields as engineering and architecture can benefit from the study of institutions and social interaction.

Sociologists have increasingly borrowed statistical methods from other disciplines such as Statistics and mathematical analysis. Statistician Karl Pearson's 'coefficient of correlation,' for example, introduced an important concept for measuring associations between continuous variables without necessarily defining the nature of the connection.

Later, statistical estimates of causal relations were probed by "**multiple regression analysis**," employing techniques that estimate the degree to which any particular variable influences a particular outcome. Patterns of responses to interview questions, once thought to be purely qualitative, have also been subject to mathematical scaling.

Many other statistical methods have been devised to suit the purposes of such specialties as demography, ecology, social stratification, organizational analysis, mass communication, and social movements.

Computers have accelerated the application of complex measures that were previously limited by the amount of time required for performing the mathematics. Further progress requires greater resources, larger research teams, and special research agencies comparable to the increased complexity of research organization that occurred in the older sciences. Large-scale sociological research is greatly enhanced by the availability of computers, by complex statistical techniques, and by the storage capacity of data banks.

Essay # 4. Methods of Sociological Research:

The basic goal of sociological research is to understand the social world in its many forms. Quantitative methods and qualitative methods are two main types of sociological research methods. Quantitative methods—such as social statistics or network analysis are used by Sociologists for investigating the structure of a social process or describe patterns in social relationships and Qualitative methods—such as focused interviews, group discussions and ethnographic methods for investigating social processes. Sociologists also use applied research methods such as evaluation research and assessment.

Various types of social research methods include:

i. Historical Method:

This involves a continuous and systematic search for the information and knowledge about past events related to the life of a person, a group, society, or the world.

ii. Archival Research:

Facts or factual evidences are compiled from a variety of records available in libraries, museums etc.

iii. Content Analysis:

The contents of books and mass media are analyzed to study how people communicate.

iv. Experimental Research:

A single social process or social phenomena is isolated by the researcher and the data is used to either confirm or construct social theory. Due to its extremely high internal validity the experiment is the best method for testing theory.

Participants, or subjects, are randomly assigned to various conditions or 'treatments', and then analyses are made between groups. Randomization ensures that the effect on group differences is because of the treatment and not some other extraneous factor.

v. Observation by Participation:

Information about social phenomenon or behavior is recorded by the researcher by using a highly disciplined Qualitative research by going into the field (usually a community), living with the people for some time, and participating in their activities in order to know and feel their culture.

vi. Survey:

Data is obtained from interviews, questionnaires, or similar feedback from a set of persons chosen randomly by the researcher to represent a particular population of interest. Survey items may be open- ended or closed-ended.

vii. Life History:

Personal life trajectories are studied through a series of interviews. The researcher probes into the decisive moments or the various influences on the participant's life.

viii. Longitudinal Study:

This is an extensive examination of a specific group over a long period of time. The choice of method depends on the researcher's epistemological approach to research. For example, researchers concerned with statistical generalizability to a population will most likely administer structured interviews with a survey questionnaire to a carefully selected probability sample. Whereas, ethnographers, who are more interested in having a full contextual understanding of group members lives will choose participant observation, observation, and open-ended interviews.

Sometimes researchers need to combine several of these methodologies since different methods produce different types of findings that correspond to different aspects of societies. For example, the quantitative methods may help describe social patterns, while qualitative approaches could help to understand how individuals understand those patterns.

An example of using multiple types of research methods is in the study of the Internet.

The Internet is used by sociologists in various ways:

- (i) As a tool for research, for example, in using online questionnaires instead of paper ones,
- (ii) As a discussion platform, and
- (iii) As a research topic i.e. analysis of online communities (e.g. as found in newsgroups), virtual communities and virtual worlds, organizational change catalyzed through new media like the Internet, and social change at-large in the transformation from industrial to informational society (or to information society).

Online communities can be studied statistically through network analysis and at the same time interpreted qualitatively, such as though virtual ethnography. Social change can be

studied through statistical demographics or through the interpretation of changing messages and symbols in online media studies.

Essay # 5. Development of Sociology:

The original emergence of sociology and the later development of the sociology of work and industry have been inextricably linked to the changing social and industrializing world of which it is a part. The Greek philosophers and their European successors discussed much of the subject matter of sociology without thinking of it as a distinct discipline. In the early 19th century, the subject matter of the social sciences was discussed under the heading of moral philosophy. Even after Comte introduced the word sociology in 1838, sociological studies were combined with other subjects for some 60 years.

By the late 1890s nearly all higher-educational institutions in the United States either had departments of sociology or offered courses in the subject. In 1895 the American Journal of Sociology began publication at the University of Chicago; in time a large number of journals followed in many other countries.

Ten years later the American Sociological Society was organized, also to be followed by a large number of national, regional, international, and specialized sociological organizations. These groups institutionalized the subject and continued to guide its directions and define its boundaries. Eventually in 1949 the International Sociological Association was established under the sponsorship of UNESCO, and Louis Wirth of the University of Chicago was elected its first president.

By 1970 there were more than a dozen important sociological journals and an indefinite number of minor journals worldwide. Along with this growth came a flourishing of research institutions—some affiliated with university departments and some independent—which allowed a small but increasing number of sociologists to pursue full-time research free from teaching responsibilities.

Increase in public appreciation of the subject, the continuing growth of funds for teaching and research, the steady reduction of sectarian opposition to study of social institutions, the refinement of methodologies that permit statistical analysis, and the growth of acceptance from scientists in other fields is contributing towards the gradual growth of Sociology.

It is likely that public interest in the development of sociological knowledge will increase as more people become aware of what sociology can contribute to human safety and welfare as the advances in science and technology are accompanied by unforeseen and unintended consequences.

Progress can indeed diminish the effects of natural catastrophes such as famine and disease, but progress can also bring about a wide range of new problems. Wars have shown a tendency to become more destructive, and the causes lie in the complexities of social organization and the interaction of great corporate national bodies. Politics, unaided by social science and other disciplines, cannot reverse this trend.

Problems within nations are seen as increasing sources of human troubles. Ethnic hostilities and internal conflicts between generations, political factions, and other divisions of the populations have increased.

Human welfare is also threatened by widespread poverty, crime, vice, political corruption, and breakdowns in the family and in other institutions. Though sociology does not provide the solutions at present, its practitioners believe that the prospects for human betterment depend largely on the increasing application of social science knowledge to these problems.

Essay # 6. Scope and Applications of Sociology:

Sociology can help us understand the role of work in people's lives and in modern societies. The goals of sociology are to understand human behavior, to generalize about the causes of human behavior, to predict future human behavior, to understand how society influences people, how and why people are organized in society, either as individuals or as members of associations, groups, and institutions.

1. Sociologists are employed by national and international bodies to recommend programs, evaluate their progress and effects, gather data for planning, and propose methods for initiating change
2. Sociologists aid industry by obtaining data on clients and workers, i.e. social surveys, offering advice on personnel or public relations problems, providing labor unions with advice, helping communities undertake reform, counseling families, and donating or selling advice to consumer groups.
3. The principal employment of sociologists is in academic institutions.
4. Other employment possibilities that have opened in recent decades are Social welfare agencies and government organizations of all types— from bureaus dealing with population, budgets, and education to departments concentrating on crime, agriculture, and health matters— have tapped sociologists for help in research, planning, and administration.
5. Other directions of sociological activity include the roles of consultant, social critic, social activist etc.

It appears likely that sociologists will continue to spread their activities over an ever-widening region of national or global concern.

Sociology studies organizations and social institutions, largely by a comparative method. It has concentrated particularly on the organization of complex industrial societies.