

SOCI 221

Basic Concepts in Sociology

Session 10 –Social Stratification and Inequality in
Society

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Session Overview

- **Overview**
- I am sure you have observed that there is no equality in society in which we live. Some people are tall and others are short, some people are rich and others are poor and some are black and others are short. Sociologists therefore argue that inequality is universal, inevitable and present in all societies. This session introduces students to the concept of social stratification and inequality and why sociologists think that every society needs a system of stratification.
- **Objective of Session:** At the end of the session, the student will be able to
- Define social stratification and its basis
- Identify the various dimensions, patterns and systems of stratification
- Examine the concept of social mobility and its various manifestations
- Define the concept of Social Class and its significance

Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- Topic One : The Concept of Social Stratification and its Basis
- Topic Two: Systems of Social Stratification
- Topic Three: Social Mobility and its Manifestation

Topic 1: The Concept of Social Stratification and Its Basis

- **The Concept of Social Stratification and Its Basis**
- The concept of Social Stratification is based on the notion that inequalities and differences are inevitable and universal as they exist in all known societies.
- The inequalities are related to, or derived from, among others social behavior and therefore, forms as essential subject matter of Sociology.
- Social Stratification refers to the hierarchical ranking of people in society differentiated according to their **power, prestige, privilege and wealth.**
- This ranking comes about because people have to compete for scarce resources and in the process there is inequality.

The Concept of Social Stratification and Its Basic Cont.

- In every society, the basis for Social Stratification is **Wealth, Power, Prestige and Privilege.**
- **Wealth** is measured in capital, assets and income which puts one in a position to acquire services;
- **Power** gives a person the ability to command and influence the actions in the face of difficulties;
- **Prestige** represents a persons standing in society and involves respect, esteem and recognition;
- **Privilege** refers to the advantages, immunities or rights a person enjoys in society;
- In all societies, Wealth, Power, Prestige and Privilege are not equally distributed hence Social Stratification.

Topic 2: Systems of Social Stratification

- The systems of Social Stratification differs in societies, as people can move with ease but not the case in others.
- In societies where people can change their social status with relative ease, it is known as the **Open System of Stratification;**
- In contrast where people have difficulty in changing their status, then we have **Closed System of Stratification;**

Systems of Stratification Cont.

- In Open Systems of Stratification, people have achieved status and can move from a lower status to a higher one and vice versa.
- But in a Closed System of Stratification people are confined to ascribed status meaning it is totally impossible for them to change status.
- A typical example of a Close System is the Caste System where society is stratified into occupational religious or ethnic groups between whom marriages are forbidden as among the Tutsi and Hutu in Rwanda.
- No society is entirely Open or Closed as there is a combination of both in every society.

Topic 3: Social Mobility

- **Social Mobility** refers to the upwards and downward movement of people or groups from one social stratum to another;
- Where the movement is upwards it is called **Upward Mobility** and where it is downwards it is called **Downward Mobility**;
- Social Mobility may also take other forms such as:
- **Vertical Mobility** which refers to the movement from one social status to another; it can be a higher and a lower one;
- **Horizontal Mobility** which refers to the movement from one status to another approximately similar position.

Social Mobility Cont.

- **Intergenerational Mobility** is the comparison people make about parents' social class and that of their children;
- **Intra-generational Mobility** refers to comparison of the social status of a person over an extended time period or generation;
- **Geographical Mobility** is the movement of individuals or groups from one place to another

Sample Questions

- With practical illustrations which of the systems of Social Stratification can be found in the Ghanaian Society?

Reading List/References

- Refer to students to relevant text/chapter or reading materials you will make available on Sakai
- Henslin, J.M. (2007). *Essentials of Sociology: A Down-to-Earth Approach*. Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing. (168-187).
- Hughes, M., Kroehler, C.J. (2005). *Sociology: The Core (7th Edition)*. Boston: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. (Pages 177-200).
- Schaefer, Richard T. (2004). *Sociology: A Brief Introduction*. (5TH Edition) Boston: McGraw Hill Companies, Inc.