



Review

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Social stratification is a phenomenon that still exists in the 21st century. Historically and sociologically, there is no classless society. All societies have forms of ranking in which their members are categorized into positions as the driving force is competition for a better life. As a result, there is social mobility with a constant movement of units between individual layers, as well as a desire to preserve the higher positions. A profession is not only a way of earning money but also a display of style and prestige, as in advanced societies professions are associated with social status and remain the most widely used measure of the class system of stratification. Wealth is the total worth of an individual or family, including income and investments, and prestige includes the social respect, admiration and recognition with a certain social status that gives rise to feelings and power by which others are compelled to do what they would not normally want to do, they do. High positions are less pleasant or desirable to occupy, but more important to the survival of society and require more special abilities and talents. Therefore, society must create a certain reward system that it can use to induce members to take certain positions.

Key words: Social categorization and differentiation; Social class; Quality of life; Social inequality; Social mobility;

INTRODUCTION

No society is classless or stratified. Stratification is an integral part of social life. There are certain means of categorizing a person in a social group. Most societies are organized in such a way that their institutions systematically distribute the benefits and burdens of stratification among different categories of people (1). Social arrangements are not neutral, but serve and promote the goals and interests of some people more than those of others. Historically and sociologically, there is no classless society. All societies have forms of ranking in which their members are categorized into positions that are higher or lower, prestigious or insignificant, relative to one another (2, 3). This form of categorization, which operates within a structured system of inequality in which members are ranked, based

on selected criteria, thereby limiting members' access to wealth, power, and opportunity, is called social stratification. That is, social stratification is a sociological term that applies to the ranking or gradation of individuals and groups into hierarchical strata, with inequality in the distribution of rewards, privileges, and resources. Some individuals, by virtue of their roles or group, are at an advantage, while others are at a disadvantage. **AIM:** The scope of the text is to discuss the phenomenon of social stratification, including its historical and sociological background, the existence of ranking systems in societies, social mobility, professions, wealth, prestige, and the importance of high positions in society. The objective is to provide an overview of the topic and conduct a literature survey on the current state of social stratification.

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Social mobility and social stratification. One of the characteristics of people is competition. Apart from the race for survival, every human being is competing for a better life. In the

process of this never-ending quest, they sometimes encounter opposition as resources are limited in supply. Despite possible antagonism (or support) from others, people never stop striving to change their status, and those at the top always strive to maintain their positions. Often, the movement of an individual from a lower position to the top can demote another to the bottom of the stratification ladder. This upward and downward movement of people from one status to another is called social mobility. Simply put, social mobility refers to the movement of individuals and groups from one social status to another (1, 3). Social mobility can be vertical or horizontal. Vertical social mobility refers to the movement of individuals or groups from one social status to another of higher or lower rank—a change in class, occupational prestige, or power. And horizontal mobility is the movement of individuals from one social status to another of roughly equivalent rank. It is a change in social position without a change in social position (1). Social mobility can also be between generations or within generations (3). It can be assessed by comparing the social status of a person at a certain age with that of her/his parents when they were that age.

Social differentiation. The distinctive differences and individual characteristics between individuals and groups in terms of age, gender, occupation, religion, and income is what is called social differentiation (3). Age differentiation is present in all societies as we find an age grade such as e.g. childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age around the world. Age allocates privileges, rights, duties, and responsibilities. Age statuses are ascribed, not achieved. Thus, a person must reach a certain age to fight for a certain position, to be admitted to school, to vote, to marry.

Occupations also create conditions for variations in responsibilities and statuses. The profession is not only a way to earn money, but also a demonstration of style and prestige. In advanced societies, occupations are associated with social status and remain the most widely used measure of the class system of stratification. In these societies, the functional importance of a given profession is also assessed by the relative scarcity of personnel, which determines prestige in the field. Social differentiation is a concept that describes a

process by which a society becomes highly specialized over time.

Stratification functions. Observation of the social world reveals that all societies are stratified. The universality of this stratification becomes possible as a result of its functional necessity (2):

1. Social stratification determines individual placement in the social structure. Each position is functionally necessary for the survival of society (2). Since it is impossible for everyone to occupy the same position, competition, and hard work are encouraged. High positions have been found to be less pleasant, more important, and less staffed (2). Those who "sacrifice" themselves to achieve these high positions are rewarded with money, prestige, power, comfort, etc.

2. Social stratification regulates human relationships. Human behavior in the upper class is different from that in the lower class. Role expectations, norms, and standards of behavior are involved in relationships with each layer. Inequality of opportunity gives advantages to those from higher strata and deprives those belonging to lower strata.

3. Social stratification gives rise to different socialization: With the existence of social stratification, individuals are born into different social classes, which in turn leads to different education and upbringing of the members of the society. With different socialization comes different values, norms and standards of behavior. Different perspectives on life ultimately lead individual members of society to seek different occupations.

4. Social stratification serves integrative functions: Members of one class tend to limit their intimate relationship to those with whom they share the class and rarely establish relationships with members of different classes. It is not pride or humility, but shared values and norms.

Dimensions of Stratification Historically. The upper class according to Karl Max is those he calls the bourgeoisie or capitalists. At the bottom of the stratification system are those who are ready to sell their labor - proletariat or working class. Weber identified three dimensions of stratification: class (economic

wealth), status (prestige), and party (power). Wealth is the total worth of an individual or family, including income and investments; prestige includes social respect, admiration and recognition with a certain social status, which gives rise to feelings with which others admire us, and power is the ability to force others to do what they would not normally want to do. Although it is possible to stratify society based on the amount of wealth, such stratification today will not provide an objective view of the world.

Systems of social stratification. Stratification systems can also be of different types or forms. The variability of these systems is determined by the degree of verticality, mobility and speed with which people are allowed to enter and exit a given stratum (2). A system of stratification, to a large extent, any given society is defined by whether it operates in a closed or open system. In a closed system, individual members of society find it very difficult, if not impossible, to change their social status and seem to have no chance of vertical movement up the stratification ladder. An open system allows vertical mobility and individual members of society can change their social status without much difficulty (2). Although, there are no completely closed or open systems, there are elements of having characteristics that are closer to one end:

1. Slave system: The oldest and most closed stratification system refers to the ownership of people (5). It involves a situation in which one group or individuals (masters) claim ownership over another group or individuals (slaves) so that the privileged group or individuals have the right to use, command, abuse, and own the fruits of labor of a group or individual in unequal position (6). In this system, vertical social mobility is extremely closed and social statuses are determined absolutely by attribution. Children born to slave parents automatically became slaves by virtue of their parents' status. In ancient times, most people acquired slave status either through conquest or through inability to pay debts. The need for more people on farmland encouraged slavery to flourish during the Middle Ages. The global dimension of slavery erodes cultural authenticity; increased inequality; as well as led to the backwardness of the Third World countries at the expense of the development of the First World countries; among other disadvantages (7).

2. Property systems: Property systems, also known as feudal systems, are characteristics of pre-modern, pre-industrial, agrarian (farming) societies that were widespread in Europe and Asia during the Middle Ages. This system was based on land ownership, as agriculture was the predominant occupation at the time in the absence of machinery for processing and producing goods. In the upper echelon are the landowners or nobles, and in the lower - the serfs (8). To own land is to control power. The earth is the property of God, entrusted to a monarch; a very strong social structure rooted in belief systems that recognize the supremacy of God. It was believed that God had already established a social order and no mortal could question such an order until the French Revolution, which fought for freedom and equality. The complete abolition of feudalism could not be achieved decades of socio-political and economic conflicts (9).

3. Caste systems: The Hindu caste system is an example. A caste consists of a family of members who share a common name and share a common ancestry (10, 11). The caste system is described as a closed system of stratification, as no individual is allowed to move up or down in class, with the rare exception of marrying out of caste, which can result in loss of caste position, demotion in the caste hierarchy. The caste system in India is further supported by religious beliefs: reincarnation and caste mobility. Reincarnation is the belief that everyone who dies is reborn, and caste mobility is the belief that an individual is reborn into a different caste hierarchy (lower or higher) depending on how that person performed his religious duties in the previous life. After 1949, the new constitution of India granted equal rights to all in the caste hierarchy.

4. Class systems: The class system is a common feature of industrial society because industrialization itself is the product of individual efforts in the free market, leading to differential accumulation of individual wealth. By definition, a class system is a system of stratification in which people are classified according to their economic holdings. In general, sociologists use income, wealth, type of occupation, level of education, lifestyle, and material possessions to categorize people into social classes. The class system is more flexible and open than other systems of stratification because it allows for social mobility. This is because the class system is based more on achievement than attribution. Although, an

individual is born into a given social ranking in the class system of stratification, he/she has a relatively equal opportunity to move up or down based on her/his personal efforts, knowledge and skills.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Since its inception, sociology has been concerned with social order and social dynamics. The functional theory supports the existing social order by emphasizing the distribution of rewards as a necessary tool for continuity. In contrast, Conflict Theory is highly critical of existing social arrangements, arguing that social stratification is not a necessary condition for society's survival, but rather an exploitative one resulting from a continuous struggle between the "haves" and the "have-nots" (1). Every society must deal with human motivation. This is important because the duties associated with different positions are not equally pleasing to individual members of society (some positions are more desirable to occupy than others), not all are equally important to the survival of society, and not all are equally in need of the same abilities and talents. High positions are less pleasant or desirable to occupy but more important to the survival of society and require more special abilities and talents. Therefore, society must create a certain reward system that it can use to induce members to take certain positions. There are researches which describe the challenges associated with school integration of Roma children in Bulgaria (East Europe), one of them is conducted in 2014-2015 (12). The study highlights issues such as Roma children's preschool education, early dropout of school, school segregation/desegregation, access to quality education, and vocational education and training. The focus of the study is on the inequalities in access to quality education for Roma children, which is a problem typical for the whole educational system in Bulgaria and leads to the reproduction and reinforcement of social inequality and stratification. The study

concludes with a SWOT analysis of the municipal educational system to support the efforts of local authorities in finding better solutions to enhance the municipality's human capital. Therefore, the study highlights the importance of addressing educational inequalities to promote social inclusion and reduce social stratification.

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