



Family: Definition, Characteristics and Function

DR. PRIYANKA KUMARI

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

DEPARTMENT OF HOME SCIENCE

G. B. M. COLLEGE, GAYA, MAGADH UNIVERSITY

Definition

- ▶ The family is the most important primary group in a society.
- ▶ It is the simplest and the most elementary form of society.
- ▶ The family as an institution is universal.
- ▶ It is the most permanent and the most pervasive of all social institutions.

Definition by sociologists....

- ▶ Maclver : Family is a group defined by sexual relationship, sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the procreation and upbringing of children.'
- ▶ Robert Bierstedt :The family, almost without question, is the most important of any groups that human experience offers ... the family ... is with us always, or more precisely, we are with it.'
- ▶ M. F. Nimkoff: 'Family is a more or less durable association of husband and wife, with or without child, or of a man or woman alone, with children.'
- ▶ Eliot and Merrill: 'Family is the biological social unit composed of husband, wife and children.'

Characteristics of Family

- ▶ Family is a Universal group. It is found in some form or the other, in all types of societies whether primitive or modern.
- ▶ A family is based on marriage, which results in a mating relationship between two adults of opposite sex.
- ▶ Every family provides an individual with a name, and hence, it is a source of nomenclature.
- ▶ Family is the group through which descent or ancestry can be traced.
- ▶ Family is the most important group in any individual's life.
- ▶ Family is the most basic and important group in primary socialization of an individual.

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- ▶ A family is generally limited in size, even large, joint and extended families.
- ▶ The family is the most important group in society; it is the nucleus of all institutions, organizations and groups.
- ▶ Family is based on emotions and sentiments. Mating, procreation, maternal and fraternal devotion, love and affection are the basis of family ties.
- ▶ The family is a unit of emotional and economic cooperation.
- ▶ Each member of family shares duties and responsibilities.
- ▶ Every family is made up of husband and wife, and/or one or more children, both natural and adopted.
- ▶ Each family is made up of different social roles, like those of husband, wife, mother, father, children, brothers or sisters.

Functions of Family

- ▶ **As a social group and as an important social institution, family performs various functions that are as follows:**
 - ▶ Family is a unit through which procreation takes place. Marriage sanctions sexual relationships, and it also establishes a family, which is further reinforced with the birth of children.
 - ▶ The process of reproduction is institutionalized, regulated and controlled in a family. The family legitimizes the act of reproduction.
 - ▶ Family helps in propagation of human species and perpetuation of human race.

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- ▶ Family provides an individual with an identity.
- ▶ It is through the family that every family name is carried on from one generation to another.
- ▶ Family is responsible for the production and upbringing of children.
- ▶ Family is an important agent of socialization. The primary socialization of any individual takes place within the family. The immediate family members teach all the basic rules and norms of social life to a child.

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- ▶ Family is also an important agent of cultural transmission. Culture is transmitted from one generation to another through family. All the aspects of culture are learnt within the family structure.
- ▶ Family is a great source of strength, emotional and psychological, for its members. All the members are aware that they can depend upon their family in the times of need.
- ▶ Family provides an individual with a home, and establishes enduring social relationships.
- ▶ The family is the basis of division of labour, where all members have their duties and obligations towards each other.

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- ▶ A family fulfills the economic needs of its members. This function has undergone transformation, with families moving from being production and consumption units in earlier times, to becoming more of consuming units rather than a producing one.
- ▶ Family is traditionally responsible for the education of the children.
- ▶ Family also has a recreational function. Earlier, most recreation was family- based. Family gatherings during festivals, functions, family reunions, marriages, brought entire families together. Now-a-days, taking family members out on holidays or for movies, plays, dinners, or parties, etc., perform the same function.

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Thanks