
UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO GROUPS: DEFINITION, CHARACTERISTICS AND TYPES OF GROUPS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Social group is, “A group of two or more people who interact with one another and who recognise themselves as a distinct social unit”. Further, social groups play an important role in daily life. These groups are needed for our very survival, as they fulfill one of the basic psychological needs for survival, belonging etc. A social group is not always made up of friends, though friendships may develop within a group. Families are a form of social group in which we relate with parents, brothers and sisters and relatives. Social groups act as great support system when needed. In this unit we are going to learn about what are groups, describe their characteristics and learn the various types of groups and their functions. All groups have certain roles to play and this will be taken up in this unit.

We will also concern ourselves with the individual’s behaviour when alone and when in group. Sometimes situation becomes complicated and interaction among the members of the group depends on communication. The behaviour of the person and the messages that the person sends by speaking are received by the other person and he/she responds to that message by another message and so on. Thus interaction and communication play a vital role among the group members..

1.1 OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Define group;
- Explain the meaning of group;
- Describe the characteristics of the group;
- Elucidate the types of group; and
- Explain individual's behaviour in groups.

1.2 GROUPS, DEFINITION, MEANING AND CONCEPTS

From the very beginning of our life, humans are part of one group or the other. From the moment a person is born he or she is a member of a family, which is a group. Starting from mother-child relationship, we enter into the family group. After that, we enter into the peer group, neighbourhood group, social class group, religious group and so many. We always identify ourselves with a group and other group members.

The same individual may be a member of different groups, as for example, two brothers or sisters are not only members of the same family but they may also be members of the same play group and of the same school group. Their behaviour as individuals will vary according to the differences in the groups.

Each person's behaviour is the product of a complex combination of personal interests, attitudes, motives, beliefs and aptitudes with many formal and informal group memberships, identifications and loyalties. Thus, the word group has many meanings. Broadly speaking we can say that a group is the aggregation of human beings. For instance, people who are sitting together in a railway platform to catch the train is a group. The pilgrims who are walking towards a town or a city to participate in a religious festival will also be called a group.

On the other hand, the members of a caste, the members of a club, and the members of a state are also called groups. Since we use the same word "group" to refer to various kinds of groups, so there exists misunderstanding. Not only this, we also use the term group when we deal with mere classification.

When we do something in connection with a sample survey, we consider a number of people with varying age, gender, education, socio-economic status, etc., so that we can easily understand the overall picture of the sample and also classify them in different groups. Actually these people have no relationship with each other. They may never come together but the social scientists when take them up for research they call them groups. Humans cannot think of themselves without a group, in fact they have no existence apart from a group.

Humans, that is people live in a family, and so is a member of the family group. They go to college and have some friends there, then they become one of the members of college friend group. It also happens that sometimes they go to club or parties and thus become a member of that group. Each and every group has different types of activities and as people belong to different types of group in

different situations and time, their behaviour and activities become different considering the nature of the group.

A group may have a strong influence upon the individual in that the individual gladly accepts the activities of the group. Each and every human being has own personal interest, attitudes, values etc. As the group consists of a number of individuals with different background etc. there are differences in the characteristic features of the various groups. Researchers try to find out the causes for these differences in groups as well as try to find out the relationship of individual's characteristics to the characteristics of the group. The behaviour of the individuals generally varies according to the differences and the diverse characteristics of the groups. There are also many reasons for the differences obtained in the group characteristics and also the differences in the responses of the individuals in different groups. The behaviour of the individual is of a certain type when the person is a member of a particular group and the behaviour varies the moment the person moves to another group. For instance the individual in the family will be uninhibited and behave in a relaxed way and express whatever he or she wants to. On the other hand when the individual is in the school, the behaviour changes to one of cautious expression of thoughts and behaves in a way that the teacher wants. The same individual when with the peer group behaves quite differently.

Sometimes the situation becomes so complicated that the interaction among the members of the group depends on a type of communication. The behaviour of the person and the messages that an individual sends by speaking are received by the other person and the latter responds to that message by another message which the first person receives and so on. Thus interaction and communication play a vital role among the group members. Considering these two, that is interaction and communication, acceptance and rejection also come about depending on what is communicated and how.

1.2.1 Group Psychology

The study of groups, organisations and behaviours of the groups is the concern of group psychology. It is a realm of psychology that explores the release of individual control within a group setting. Social, organisational and group psychology are all powerful areas of study that look at the many factors that drive group behaviour and the decisions that a group makes. Depending on the group's influence, the personal wishes and desires of the individual are completely given up for the greater good of the group. It is the role of group psychology to uncover why this release occurs and what effects it has on society.

Many groups are formed based on strong religious or cultural tenets. Group psychology studied these groups and have found that the beliefs these groups hold have a finality about them that becomes inextricably linked in the minds of the group members.. The concepts become both truth and reason. Individuals in the group no longer question anything related to these beliefs. They merely accept them without question. Group members will sometimes reach a point where they will do anything to defend the ideas held to be unquestionable by the group. However when this goes beyond a point, and becomes an obsession it can be destructive.

Terrorist groups typically start out as nothing more than a welcoming collection of individuals who have similar beliefs concerning the world and a higher power. Group psychology concerning terrorists has uncovered an unbreakable bond to ideas and beliefs. Individual members of terrorist groups give up their individuality for the purposes of the group. A collective identity is assumed rather than individual personas, which becomes unhealthy.

1.2.2 Concept of Social Group

A social group consists of two or more people who interact with one another and who recognise themselves as a distinct social unit. The definition is simple enough, but it has significant implications. Frequent interaction leads people to share values and beliefs. This similarity and the interaction cause them to identify with one another. Identification and attachment, in turn, stimulate more frequent and intense interaction. Each group maintains solidarity with in and keeps its identity vis a vis all other groups and social systems.

Groups are among the most stable and enduring of social units. They are important both to their members and to the society at large. Through encouraging regular and predictable behaviour, groups form the foundation upon which the society rests. Thus, a family, a village, a political party, a trade union etc., is all social groups. These are different from social classes, status groups or crowds, which not only lack structure but whose members are less aware or even unaware of the existence of the group. These have been called quasi-groups or groupings.

1.2.3 Definition and Meaning of Groups

Now let us take up some of the formal definitions and meanings of group as given by sociologists and social psychologists. Group may be defined in various ways and each definition emphasises one or the other important features of the group. Some of the important definitions are as follows:

R.M. Williams (1989)

The sociologist R.M. Williams (1989) defined group as a given aggregate of people playing inter-related roles and recognised by themselves or others as a unit of interaction. Here it can be stated that a group is an aggregate of some people. The roles of the group members are inter related. The group is considered as a unit.

R.M. MacIver (1954)

A renowned sociologist Mac Iver stated that “ By group we mean any collection of social beings who enter into distinctive social relationships with one another.” According to this definition, it is clear that there must be social relationships between the individual members of a group.

David, E (1968)

A social psychologist, David defined group as follows: “ A social psychological group is an organised system of two or more individuals who are interrelated so that the system performs some functions, has a standard set of the role relationship among its members and has a set of norms that regulate the function of the group and each of its members.” In this definition group is structured and organised, the people in the group inter relate and interact with each other, it has certain

rules and regulations and norms that must be followed by all the members of the group.

Kretch, D., Crutchfield, R.S., and Ballachy, E.L. (1962)

Famous for their social psychological contribution, the three social psychologists defined psychological group “ as two or more persons who meet the following conditions , viz., (i) the relations among the members are independent (ii) each member’s behaviour influences the behaviour of each of the others, (iii) the members ‘share an ideology’ – a set of beliefs, values and norms which regulate their mutual conduct.” This definition too focuses on not only interaction and rules and norms but also mentions a shared ideology amongst the group members.

Paulus , Paul, B.(1989)

A sociologist, Paulus Paul defined group in the following words, “ A group consists of two or more interacting persons who share common goals, have a stable relationship, are somehow interdependent and perceive that they are in fact part of a group.” According to this definition, we can say that individuals interact with each other, either directly or indirectly. Besides this, the group members are interdependent in some manner, i.e., what happens to one must affect what happens to the others. Not only this, their relationship must be relatively stable. The members of the group involve to attain the goals and their interaction will be in a structured form so that, each group member performs the same or more or less similar functions each time they meet. Finally, it can be said that the individuals involved in a group must recognise that they are part of a group.

To know the meaning of the group more clearly one should think about all the groups to which one belongs, viz., local friends, college friends, music and dance group and so many. Generally people join in groups due to various needs, and these needs are:

Need 1: Group members help to satisfy important psychological and social needs, viz., receiving affection and attention, for attaining belongingness.

Need 2: Group members help to achieve the goal in a smooth and easy way. By working with others, you can perform the task well than alone.

Need 3: Group members can provide each other knowledge and information which is not available to collect independently.

Need 4: Group members help the individual to experience safety and security.

1.3 CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF GROUP

Suppose you belong to a group where you may observe some special features which you can accept or not. It may be good or bad, it may be healthy or unhealthy, it may be favourable or unfavourable, but some significant features exist there which you can say are the characteristic features of the group. These include the following:

A sense of we feeling: There is a feeling of belongingness among the members of the group. The members of the group help each other in performing their

duties. They work collectively against the harmful powers. They treat others as outsiders. They always try to make the group self-sufficient.

Common interest: Each and every member of the group has a common interest. There is a similarity among the members which promotes unity. The group includes those persons who are related to each other in such a way that they should be treated as one.

A feeling of unity: This is essential for every group. Each and every member of the group treats each other as their own and there develops a sense of sympathy among the family members.

Relatedness to each other: It is true that members of the group are inter-related and this social relation is called group. There is a reciprocal communication among the group members. Social relations are the fundamentals of the group life.

Affected by group characteristics: Each and every group has some social characteristics which separate it from similar and dissimilar groups. These characteristics affect the members of the group. The nature may be different for different persons, but still all the members are affected by the group.

Common values: The social values of the members of a family are common and are traditionally respected and communicated to the succeeding generation. They are expressed by the mutual behaviour of the members. Members of the social group are bound together by common values.

Control of group: In each group there are some customs, norms and procedures which are acceptable to everyone. In fact, without some norms, the existence of group life is practically impossible. It can be said that the reasons behind the similarity of behaviour in group life is that the actions of the members are controlled by the group.

Obligation: In family situation, all the members have complementary obligations to each other. Also, the relationships between the members of a group are strengthened through their mutual obligation and their common social values.

Expectations: Not only mutual obligation, the members of the group expect love, sympathy, co-operation etc. from other members of the group. If mutual expectation is fulfilled, the group members are maintained in tact. A group can maintain its existence only if the constituent members fulfill their responsibility by satisfying the desires among themselves.

Social organisation

Social organisation is the organisation of groups. The social groups are the units of the social organisation. Therefore, the integration and disintegration of social organisation are dependent upon the integration or disintegration of the groups. In group, social relationship is a very important factor. The first and foremost social relationship indicates the relationship among the family members. Thus, it can further be said that family is a very important social group.

Every individual is one of the family members in his or her family. They interact with other family members in the family. There is a reciprocal relationship between

the individual and others. Certainly the individual will have the sense of 'we feeling' as he or she belongs to that family. Among the family members of the family there are relationships such as husband-wife, father-son, brother-sister etc. and they all work together for the interests of the family in a mood of mutual co-operation. Each and every member of the family treats the other members as his or her own and in spite of differences of opinion they have some common ideals and values. It is mainly due to the common interest of the family which works as a well-knit unit.

For example one can state that "school is a social group" whose significant characteristics are :

- All children have common goal.
- The students and the teacher are motivated for the achievement of a common goal.
- School has an organised structure.
- School offers excellent opportunities for group.

1.3.1 Salient Features of Group

In addition to the above, there are a few salient features regarding group which are presented below:

- In group, one or more individuals come together and influence each other.
- There must be social relationships between the individual members of a group.
- It sometimes happens that there exists some common motives, drives, interests, emotions etc.
- There is also need for communication among the group members. It may be verbal or non-verbal.
- Group has some common object of attention and group members stimulate each other.
- Group members have common loyalty and participate in similar activities.
- A feeling of unity is essential for group. Group members treat each other as their own and a sense of sympathy develops among them.
- Similarity of behaviour in group life indicates that the action of the members are controlled by the group.
- There are some customs, norms and procedures which are acceptable to everyone but if exception happens, then they will be criticized by the public.

1.3.2 The Role of Groups

As mentioned earlier, it is well known that every individual acts and behaves differently in different groups. When a person is alone, the behaviour is different and when the person is in a group, the behaviour is still different. This happens because every individual is highly concerned with the social image that he or she presents to people. Individuals are generally concerned about how and what other people think about them and wants to put before them their best self. Hence the difference in their behaviours.

When alone, we tend to be more relaxed, less concerned with the outward expression of our behaviour, and are basically ‘ourselves.’ Add just one other person, even if we do not know that person, our behaviour tends to change. This change can be in either direction that is positive or negative. Research has found that when others are present, our level of arousal is increased. In other words, we are suddenly more aware of what is going on around us. Because of this, we tend to perform better at tasks that are well learned or simple. When completing a difficult or new task, however, our performance level decreases and we tend to do more poorly. This type of behavioural change and betterment at task when we are with people etc., is called social facilitation. This happens because of group’s influence. In a group, when other members are watching, we tend to be relatively more self conscious, and thus tend to make more mistakes. On the other hand professional players perform far better and at their best when being watched by large number of persons, because they have learned the game to their best ability.

Also in a group, people tend to think alike like other members even though away from the group, their thinking will be highly different. Also in a group with which a person is able to identify self, and be happy in it, the tendency to think like the group members emerges. This phenomenon is called group think. If this identification with the group goes beyond a point, it may end up in destruction, as is obtained in Klu Klux Klan etc.

We are all aware of people being mugged on the road, beaten up, raped etc. in broad day light and large number of persons watch it without doing anything about it. This kind of incidents happen more in big cities. The larger the group, the less responsible one is towards the group. The internal push to help a person decreases as the group gets larger.

1.4 TYPES OF GROUP

Groups can be classified in different ways and based on certain criteria. These criteria are given below:

- 1) The level of intimacy
- 2) Basis of relationships
- 3) Basis of norms and rules
- 4) Organised vs disorganised
- 5) Basis of tasks to be accomplished
- 6) On the basis of functions
- 7) Interest based
- 8) Friendship based.

Let us deal with the above a little more in detail.

1.4.1 The Level of Intimacy

Based on this we can classify groups into primary and secondary group.

Primary group: There is an intimate face-to-face relationship among the members and the members experience the ‘we feeling’ to the maximum. Family, play groups

and village community come under this category. If all groups are important to their members and to society, some groups are more important than others. Early in the twentieth century, Charles H. Cooley gave the name, primary groups, to those groups that he said are characterised by intimate face-to-face association and those are fundamental in the development and continued adjustment of their members.

He identified three basic primary groups, (i) the family, (ii) the child's play group, and (iii) the neighborhoods or community among adults. These groups, he said, are almost universal in all societies. They give to people their earliest and most complete experiences of social unity. They are instrumental in the development of the social life. They promote the integration of their members in the larger society.

Secondary groups: These are characterised by anonymous, impersonal, and instrumental relationships. People move frequently from one section of the country to another and they change from established relationships to widespread loneliness. Young people, particularly, turn to drugs, seek communal living groups and adopt deviant lifestyles in attempts to find meaningful primary group relationships. The social context has changed so much that the primary group relationship today is not as simple as they were in the past.

In secondary groups, the relationships are more or less casual and marked by common interest. Clubs, trade unions etc. are under this category.

The social groups other than those of primary groups may be termed as secondary groups. They are a residual category. They are often called special interest groups. Maclver and Page refer to them as great associations. Primary groups are found predominantly in societies where life is relatively simple. With the expansion in population and territory of a society people's interests become diversified and differentiated.

The new range of the interests demands a complex organisation. Especially selected persons act on behalf of all and hence arises a hierarchy of officials called bureaucracy. These features characterise the rise of the modern state, the great corporation, the factory, the labour union, a university or a nationwide political party and so on. These are secondary groups. Ogburn and Nimkoff define secondary groups as groups which provide experience lacking in intimacy.

Characteristics of the secondary group are the following:

- i) *Dominance of secondary relations:* Secondary groups are characterised by indirect, impersonal, contractual and non-inclusive relations. Relations are indirect because secondary groups are bigger in size and members may not stay together. Relations are contractual in the sense they are oriented towards certain interests
- ii) *Largeness of the size:* Secondary groups are relatively larger in size. City, nation, political parties, trade unions and corporations, international associations are bigger in size. They may have thousands and lakhs of members. There may not be any limit to the membership in the case of some secondary groups.

- iii) *Membership*: Membership in the case of secondary groups is mainly voluntary. Individuals are at liberty to join or to go away from the groups. However there are some secondary groups like the state whose membership is almost involuntary.
- iv) *No Physical basis*: Secondary groups are not characterised by physical proximity. Many secondary groups are not limited to any definite area. There are some secondary groups like the Rotary Club and Lions Club which are international in character. The members of such groups are scattered over a vast area.
- v) *Specific ends or interest*: Secondary groups are formed for the realisation of some specific interests or ends. They are called special interest groups. Members are interested in the groups because they have specific ends to aim at.
- vi) *Indirect communication*: Contacts and communications in the case of secondary groups are mostly indirect. Mass media of communication such as radio, telephone, television, newspaper, movies, magazines and post and telegraph are resorted to by the members to have communication.
- vii) *Nature of group control*: Informal means of social control are less effective in regulating the relations of members. Moral control is only secondary. Formal means of social control such as law, legislation, police, court etc. are made to control the behaviour of members. The behaviour of the people is largely influenced and controlled by public opinion, propaganda, rule of law and political ideologies.
- viii) *Group structure*: The secondary group has a formal structure. A formal authority is set up with designated powers and a clear-cut division of labour in which the function of each is specified in relation to the function of all.
- ix) *Organised*: Secondary groups are mostly organised groups. Different statuses and roles that the members assume are specified. Distinctions based on caste, colour, religion, class, language etc. are less rigid and there is greater tolerance towards other people or groups.
- x) *Limited influence on personality*: Secondary groups are specialised in character. People involvement in them is also of limited significance. Members's attachment to them is also very much limited. Further people spend most of their time in primary groups than in secondary groups. Hence secondary groups have very limited influence on the personality of the members.

American sociologist Talcott Parsons distinguished five factors that differentiate primary groups from secondary groups:

That is, relations between members of primary groups, as contrasted with secondary groups, tend to be

- 1) diffuse, rather than specific or delimited,
- 2) particularistic, rather than universalistic,
- 3) ascription-based (i.e., based on who or what you are), rather than achievement-based (i.e., based on what you do or have done),
- 4) other-oriented or group-oriented, rather than self-oriented,
- 5) affective or emotion-laden, rather than emotionally neutral.

Secondary groups are those in which relations between members tend to fit the opposite poles of the five factors.

1.4.2 On the Basis of Relationship

i) *In-group/ we group* vs Out group

In In-group or we group, we identify ourselves within that group wherein the members have common object and common interest. They have a sense of we feeling. The members of the in groups treat others as outsiders. These groups can be formed on the basis of relationship, country, political interests, economic interests etc.

Out-group is one in which the members are considered as outsiders by the in group people. Groups other than ingroup are generally called out groups.

The opposite of in-group bias is *out-group bias* where, by inference, out-group people are viewed more negatively and given worse treatment. This is the basis of racial inequality.

In-group linguistic bias is where out-group people are described in abstract terms (which depersonifies them) when they conform to the out-group stereotype. Out-group people will be referred to in more specific, concrete terms when they act in unexpected ways.

When people identify themselves with a group, they perceive themselves and the group members as different from other groups. This can be explained in terms of the social identity theory. According to this theory, a person has not one, “personal self”, but rather several selves that correspond to widening circles of group membership. Different social contexts may trigger an individual to think, feel and act on the basis of his personal, family or national “level of self” (Turner et al, 1987).

Also an individual has multiple “social identities”. Social identity is the individual’s self-concept derived from perceived membership of social groups (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002)..

Social Identity Theory asserts that group membership creates ingroup/ self-categorization and enhancement in ways that favour the in-group at the expense of the out-group.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) identify three variables whose contribution to the emergence of ingroup favoritism is particularly important. A) the extent to which individuals identify with an ingroup to internalise that group membership as an aspect of their self-concept. B) the extent to which the prevailing context provides ground for comparison between groups. C) the perceived relevance of the comparison group, which itself will be shaped by the relative and absolute status of the ingroup. Individuals are likely to display favoritism when an ingroup is central to their self-definition and a given comparison is meaningful or the outcome is contestable.

Social Identity Theory has a considerable impact on social psychology. It is tested in a wide range of fields and settings and includes prejudice, stereotyping, negotiation and language use. The theory has also implications on the way people deal with social and organisational change. For example in a minimal group studies, schoolboys were assigned to groups, which were intended to be as

meaningless as possible. They were assigned randomly, excluding roles of interpersonal discrimination such as history of conflict, personal animosity or interdependence. The schoolboys assigned points to anonymous members of both their own group and the other group. Conclusions were that even the most minimal conditions were sufficient to encourage favouring the in group responses. Participants picked a reward pair that awarded more points to people who were identified as ingroup members. In other words, they displayed *ingroup favoritism*.

1.4.3 Organised vs Disorganised

Groups can be categorized into formal, informal group etc. Let us see what these are:

- i) *Formal group*: It is generally formed on the basis of specific norms, rules and values. The group of students in a classroom comes under the category of formal group. So, school is one of the formal group setting.
- ii) *Informal group*: The nature of the group is not formal at all. The rules are usually flexible. Play groups, peer group and social clubs etc. are examples of informal groups.

In addition groups can also classified into various categories as *organised and spontaneous groups* etc. Let us consider these below.

- iii) *Organised groups*: The groups which are formed for specific purpose and are carefully planned is called organised groups. The family, the school etc. are called organised groups.
- iv) *Spontaneous groups*: The groups are formed without any careful planning. An example is the audience in a theater. Audience may be considered as spontaneous group when they come to listen to a speech or watch a play.
- v) *Command groups*: Command groups are specified by the organisational chart. It consists of a supervisor and the subordinates who report to the supervisor.

1.4.4 On the Basis of Tasks

- i) *Task groups*: This consists of a group of people who have come together to achieve a common task. In many situations there is a specified time period. This can be referred to as task forces.
- ii) *Functional groups*: Functional group is generally created by the organisation to accomplish specific goals within an unspecified time frame. Functional group generally exists after achievement of current goals and objects.

1.4.5 Interest Groups

These groups usually continue over a period of time and may last longer than general informal groups. It is seen that members' interest may not be part of the same organisational department but they are bound by some common interest.

1.4.6 Friendship Groups

These may be of different types. These groups are formed by the members who enjoy similar social activities, political beliefs, religious values and other common bonds.

1.4.7 Reference Groups

This is the group against which other groups and group members as well as others evaluate themselves. Reference groups have a strong influence on members' behaviour. According to Merton, sociologist, reference groups are those groups which are the referring points of the individuals, towards which the person is oriented and which influences the person's opinion, tendency and behaviour. The individual is surrounded by countless reference groups. Both the memberships and inner groups and non memberships and outer groups may be reference groups.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

Group is a collection of individuals. Group refers to two or more persons who interact with one another. They share common goals and recognise themselves that they belong to a group. Group members interact with each other, either directly or indirectly. Their relationship is relatively stable. Their interaction should be structured in some manner so that they perform the same and similar function when they meet.

Generally group members help to satisfy both psychological and social needs, such as giving attention and receiving attention. Groups help persons to fulfill their need for security. In contrast, one can think about a mere collection of individuals, who are not part of a group, as for example, members of a crowd, as in the case of disorganised group.

In a nutshell it can be said that the group has some kind of structure to hold it together and attain the goals effectively. The structure is hierarchical where the functions and powers are distributed. Group may be of different types, viz., primary and secondary group, formal and informal group, organised and spontaneous group, command group, task group, functional group, interest group, friendship group, reference group etc. Group structure is a pattern of relationships among members that hold the group together. It can be interpreted in various ways depending on group size, group roles, group norms and group cohesiveness.

1.6 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) What do you mean by the term 'group'? Briefly discuss.
- 2) Define group. Write in brief about the characteristics of group.
- 3) Elucidate briefly about the different types of group.
- 4) Differentiate between formal and informal group with examples.

1.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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