**SOCIAL GROUPS**

**Different meanings of group:**

1. Any physical collection of people. Group shares nothing but physical closeness. It is just an aggregation, a collectivity.

2. Number of people who share some common characteristic ­ which is often called as category.

3. Number of people who share some organized pattern of recurrent interaction. It can be an educational institution where people come and work, study, play.

4. Number of people who share consciousness of membership together and of interaction.

**Two essentials of social group**

Social interaction and consciousness of membership.

A social group is *two or more people who identify and interact with each other.* Human beings come together in couples, families, circles of friends, neighborhoods, and in work organizations. Whatever it form, a group is made up of people with shared experiences (through social interaction), loyalties, and interests. Not every collection of individuals can be called a social group. Let us look at some other concepts that are often mixed up with social group. For example: Category: People with a status in common, such as women, Muslims, Pakistanis, students, teachers, and workers. They may know others who hold the same status; the vast majority may be strangers to each other. So there is no interaction on the whole. Nevertheless, there are always pockets of small groups within any broad category who interact with each other and are conscious of membership.

Crowd: A temporary cluster of individuals who may or may not interact at all. They are too transitory, and are too impersonal. It might be students sitting together in a class, or people waiting for a train on the railway platform. Change in circumstances may turn the crowd into a social group.

**TYPES OF SOCIAL GROUPS**

**Primary and Secondary Groups**

**Primary group** is *a small social group whose members share personal and enduring relationships.* They are bound together by primary relationships. The relationships are informal, intimate, personal and total. These groups are among the first we experience. The examples can be: Family, play group, friends. They provide sense of security to the members. People usually have an emotional attachment, they are loyal, and the relationships are end in itself.

**Secondary group** is *a large and impersonal social group whose members pursue a specific interest or activity.* Just the opposite of primary groups their *relationships are secondary*. Such relationships involve weak emotional ties and

Little personal knowledge of one another. Most secondary groups are formal, impersonal, segmental, and utilitarian. These groups are goal oriented. The interaction may be impersonal though pleasant. Example can be students taking sociology course in the present semester. They might be together only for the

semester and may never see each other. Co-workers at a place of work, members of a political party could be other examples.

**In-Groups and Out-Groups**

**In-group** is social group commanding a member's esteem and loyalty. My pronouns: I feel I belong to them. Others: I am outside them. In-group exists in relation to an out-group.

**Out-group** is a social group toward which one feels in competition or opposition.

In modern societies the membership may overlap. In the National Assembly members are elected on the tickets of different political parties. They have competed against each other (out-group to each other) but after the election they are members of the one group i.e. National Assembly. Exclusion from in-group may be brutal in simple society--Social boycott.  In-group expects loyalty, recognition, and helpful to its members. *These groups are important because they affect our behavior.*

**Group Size**

Size of the group plays an important role in how group members interact. In small size groups the members can have highly intense relationships but such groups are less stable. Look at the group of two persons having a highly emotional interaction, but if one of them leaves, the group comes to an end.

The Dyad is social group with two members.

The Triad is a social group with three members. It is more stable than the dyad.

As groups grow beyond three people, they become more stable and capable of withstanding the loss of even several members. At the same time, increase in-group size reduces the intense personal interaction, which is possible only in the smaller groups.

Reference Group

How do we assess our own attitudes and behavior? Frequently, we use a reference group, *a social group that* *serves as a point of reference in making evaluations and decisions.* A young person might assess the rewards for his work by comparing the rewards given to other coworkers for similar work.

Reference groups can be *models,* which could be ideals for individuals. Parents can be reference groups for their children. Individuals can also be models and we can call them as reference individuals. A teacher can be a reference individual for students. Reference groups and reference individuals can be living or non-living persons; they can also be from the fiction. Quaid ­I-Azam can be a reference individual for Pakistanis. Children pick up many of their reference individuals from the cartoons they watch on television.

Reference groups or individuals can also be negative models whereby some individuals don't want to adopt the behavior patterns of such individuals.

Stereotypes

It is a group-shared image of another group or category of people. It is an exaggerated description applied to every person in some category. Such images could be about a minority group, about youth, about Muslims, about Christians, about Pakistanis, about laborers.  Stereotypes could become the basis of prejudice, which is a rigid and unfair generalization about an entire category of people.

Social Distance

One measure of prejudice is *social distance,* that is, how closely people are willing to interact with members of some category. It is the degree of closeness or acceptance we feel about other groups.