

The Science Of Family Studies In The Service Of Man

13

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Family studies are the science concerned with the study of family in both time and space. The various features of this field, revolving around family include-

- Type of family
- Structure of family
- Relationships in family
- Disorganization in family
- Diseases in family/ family health
- Laws and regulations concerning family and marriage
- Marriage
- Mate- selection
- Ritualism
- Habitat and lineage of family
- Types of marriage
- Marital adjustment and satisfaction
- Roles and functions of family etc

The various objectives of family studies are-

- To provide a forum for the development of the theories that advances the study of families, including their attendant structures, relationships or processes
- To reflect emerging trends in the field of family
- To foster the development of new paradigms for studying families in their diversity, including families of different

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socio-economic status, religion, caste, language, families of complex forms and gender compositions with a great sense of inclusiveness.

- To facilitate opportunities to shape the professional and public discourse about families, women, men, children and their relationships.

To fulfil its objectives, it performs various activities such as-

- Knowledge building - through construction & testing of theories and through conducting researches on family with problems.

- Evaluation & monitoring of intervention programmes & schemes.

- Providing consultation service to the Government and voluntary agencies in the welfare areas.

- Policy analysis and implementations- This is an important role which involves carrying out family policy research in order to advice on major policy decisions, influencing policy development and recommending policy changes or new policies in the area of family welfare.

Family field involves clinicians, policy makers & scholars from different disciplines such as – anthropology, sociology, psychology, home-science, education etc.

The field of family studies which evolved during the 1950's was founded by those with an applied motivation to improve family life. Infact, the original interests on which family studies was based (e.g. sociology, social work, education & marriage counselling) and the emerging trends that contribute to its vitality [i.e. contextualism, feminism & multiculturalism], share a concern with understanding social problems like juvenile delinquency, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy etc, increasing family tensions & contributing to social change.

The field has witnessed several developments in recent decades. The family which was considered the most basic unit of society, an anchor in human lives, fulfilling important socioeconomic functions seems to have come a full circle with the United Nations Declaration of 1994 as the International Year of the Family with its slogan “ Building the smallest democracy at the heart of society”. The intervening periods have been full of doubts & uncertainties, questioning the relevance, utility & the future of the family as a basic social institution. It started with the seminal works of Parsons & Bales & later Goode, who predicted nuclearisation & industrialisation. The family was described as undergoing vast changes & the question posed was:

Will the family be able to meet the challenges offered by an increasingly automated, technological, advanced society?

Rising divorce & separation rates, domestic violence, intergenerational conflict, social problems of drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, teenage pregnancy to name of a few, were cited as some evidences of the family’s failure to cope with the pressures of modern life. Also experimentations with family living styles like open-marriages, non-marital cohabitation, group living, voluntary offered as proofs that the family was an obsolete, dying social institution without a future. But the family seems to have survived, albeit in different forms, demonstrating its capacity to modify, adjust & adapt to changing social norms, values & structures. The theme of the 1994 International Year of this strength of the family was an expression of the recognition of this strength of the family to cope with societal changes.

Further the main proposition regarding the role of the family in modern societies seems questionable from one point of view or another here. This proposition is very commonly stated

in elementary texts on family & kinship; that is primitive/ tribal/ pre-modern societies, most social functions- economic, political, religious, educational & recreational- were encompassed within the family or wider kinship unit (known as Biradari in India), which served the agencies form of as an social control to avoid social disorganization. However the role of the family & kin group has contracted in modern societies & many of their earlier functions have been taken over by other institutions- the school, religious institutions, crèche, old- age home, factories, medical system & others, with the state playing a major role in the organisation of these facilities.

While the debate, whether or not the family is the most basic unit of society has lost its significance, certain long held assumptions have certainly been challenged. The earlier held privatised view of the family as having an impermeable boundary with minimum influences from the outside has given way to conceptualising family as a system that is fully integrated into the wider social, economic and political systems. What goes on within the family is no longer treated as entirely private, family problems are sought to be exposed for public security & redressed. To a large extent this view has been instrumental in generating academic concern with several hitherto neglected topics such as family violence- incest, child & elderly abused & neglect. The perception of the family as a unitary whole with implicit value on cohesion & completeness has also been challenged to recognise the diverging & at times, conflicting interests of its constituent members. The simplistic & idealistic notion of the family as consisting of two parents & children is also questioned. This view has helped to focus attention on alternate family forms that are either not 'complete' such as single- parent families or are formed with legal intervention like adoptive families.

Besides these challenges to some of the mainstream assumptions in family studies at the global level, certain developments are noticeable in the field of family in India.... In the 60's & 70's, the approaches to understanding the family were purely socioanthropological in content & theoretical in intent. The current approaches are distinct in at least two ways. One, there is a visible trend towards deriving an interdisciplinary understanding of the family which aims to capture the multi-dimensionality & the complexity of family living. Two, there is a greater concern with studies of applied nature- those that seek to understand problems and issues confronting families and draw implications for practice and policy.

A knowledge of family life cycle is not just useful for researchers but for all. We all recognize & come to count on the sequence of family events that constitutes family careers or family life styles. It provides a life script that serves three functions for us..... It gives us a comfortable sense of predictability in our sense of what makes up life. It also gives us standards of comparison & the importance of the support & predictability that orderly family careers give to life, appears when sequences are thrown into array. By knowing what stage a family is in, we have well-grounded expectations concerning such characteristics as the relative income, the level of marital satisfaction and the degree of parent-child conflict, to mention only a few aspects of family living. Knowing them, families have developed "anticipatory norms", norms that encourage them to anticipate change inside & outside the family. With expectancies of change & sufficient lead time to cope with coming variation, families can & have done a better job of developing new ways or new goals. Such families are also better prepared to explore structure modification goals. In this area

family studies have also helped to make decisions & choices in the light of values that are important for personal & family living based on understanding of what life can become if the resources now available are used effectively. Beginning with the personal and social values to be achieved by growing into maturity with understanding of self & others, it helps us consider courtship, engagement, marriage and parenthood & the social significance of families in each of the cycles in their development. In this discussion, it gives various proposals for strengthening family life & it also for substance & meaning to the excellence & quality of life of each of its members in each of the stages.

Family- life education that is a part of this discipline through its family planning education programme has promoted the freedom to choose parenthood. Further it has also promoted the enrichment of human life. In addition, it has enabled children & youth to deal with problems of coexistence in home & family life & to develop behaviour and interaction patterns conducive to interdependent living in families & society, thus promoting social harmony. Not only has it been used in crisis intervention & for prevention of disorders in children, but it also has been utilised for developing the skills of all members of a family in fulfilling their obligations and for facilitating the development of the potential of each member. Through it, adults have been able to explore alternatives to various problems like over populations and dealing with chronically illness in family.

Family scholars are frequently called upon to submit testimony in behalf of one or another course of public action. Indeed, scholarly expertise and technical know-how have been placed in the service of an amazing diversity of family concerns- i.e. from children's health to genetic planning, to family poverty, to mother's need, to children's requirements and other family problems & issues. In addition, researches

on couples with marital problems have provided useful implications for marriage counselling and therapy. Likewise, the forms and techniques of marriage counselling and therapy that are best suited to particular types of marital problems or groups of individuals have been used to influence theoretical considerations. Further researches on divorce, juvenile delinquency, teenage pregnancy, family violence, drug-abuse have been utilised by family therapists to develop their integrative models and expand their therapeutic repertoire. Marriage and family therapy, which is an applied aspect of this science has also helped deal with child psychopathology, effective parent-child relations, improvement of school performance of children, sexual problems, chronically/terminal illness in family etc. Infact, the field is increasingly focussing on all stages of relationship ranging from those beginning their relationship (Premarital counselling) to those terminating their relationship (divorce counselling) and to those forming new family structures (custody resolution counselling). Due to the success of these approaches, increasingly the public has become aware of these services and they are requesting, even demanding relationship oriented treatment.

A development brought to attention particularly by the feminist perspective is the penetration of human rights discourse into the family, demanding that relationships within the family be just & equitable & that oppression of & violence against women, elderly & children within the family be subject to public scrutiny. Outcry on matters such as Female infanticide & in foeticide & dowry deaths is the result of such attention only. Apart from making us acknowledge the various forms of family violence & oppression, it has also suggested and made us aware of the various strategies to deal with them by making us aware of the various laws and regulations in this area.

An analysis of prevailing structures of family has also help to understand the status of woman in the family- the main agent for child's early socialisation. This has further been utilised to analyse the process of socialisation which perpetuates the subordinate status of a girl child. This knowledge is in turn being utilized for policy recommendations restructuring the family.

Some studies which implicitly define the family as a cultural unit that transmits a set of prescriptive & proscriptive strategies for dealing with the outside world, expose the value-laden nature of educational experiences within the family. Thus, they suggest that schools as educative agencies can not be considered value free but must be viewed in term of their implicit & explicit values & how these values are interfaced with the values of families in different cultures served by schools within the context of the values of the social & political order. A large group of researchers also suggest that individual differences in academic performances might reflect cultural differences as well thus advocating individual specific & cultural specific education modules so as to help children in their academics.

Family studies have also tried to paved the way for better future generations by suggesting to parents what is best for their children & how to deal with them at different stages of their life. In additions, these studies have helped them know how to make parenting effective & easy by suggesting that to have better relationships with their children, parents need to recognise their own needs along with that of children & to avoid feeling unnecessary guilt; to accept help from others and finally to try to build and maintain flexible & intimate relationships.

This discipline has helped us realise that people in the old- age should not be treated as liabilities but should be considered as assets, since they are important in many ways not only for us but also our children. This sense of responsibility

has fostered the awareness of the need for support services for them, both by the family as well as by the Government.

This science has also helped many dual- earner couples in maintaining a balance between their work & family by suggesting an adequate provisions for child & elder care, family leave & more flexible employment scheduling. Further, the studies on maternal employment have also helped to erase the myths regarding it. This knowledge has paved the way for more women workers who can pursue their career along with home-life without a family of guilt.

This field has helped us make the functioning of family more efficient by suggesting that the family's care giving capacity may be better if there are alternate social support networks & for institutional supports. Thus friends, neighbours, colleagues, formal/informal group members act as sources of strength during illness/ death. Apart from these, institutional supports like hospitals, day-care-centres for children & the elderly infirm members help relieve the burden especially of care to a great extent.

Families in the process of transition during the stages of widow(er)hood, retirement or empty nest stage etc face special type of stresses such as lack of resources and problems of adjustment. In this regard, family scholars have suggested that a positive outlook, spiritual values & support groups, high self-esteem, open-supportive communication, adaptability, informal support groups, community resources all help in the adjustment or crisis management of a family.

This discipline has also suggested ways of increasing our marital quality by successful management of conflict by positive communication and expression of feelings. In the process, it has also warned the people from taking divorce by pointing to the various negative implications it has not only on

the couples but also upon the children & ultimately the national economy.

The knowledge of the needs of families & individuals in varied social contexts & prevalent and changing norms and values of family life that are likely to influence the family's response to interventions and change have been utilised for designing effective and functional interventions with meagre resources. In addition, information about the family problem solving process and the problem-solving patterns of individual families have been utilised in order to design approximate therapeutic and educational intervention programmes for different family groups.

The problem of intergroup relations has been the focus of recent socio-psychological studies, primarily because varying group interests and resultant intergroup conflicts have been the main barriers to harmonious social growth and human-development. Further, the recurring communal riots and caste tensions in India and racial rights in other countries have also focussed the alteration on understanding the family since according to researchers, prejudice strikes root through the very process of the socialisation during the childhood when the child absorbs the value system of the adult world. Hence, it has been realised that if we want to foster social harmony and avoid religion- communal tensions and other conflicts, we must devise effective measures to intervene before the innocent mind of child is infested with prejudice and for this a thorough understanding of an individual's family is imperative.

In addition to these prominent or broader areas, it has helped an individual in many ways. It has made us a better analyst of families in general and how they change. By learning about them, we have prepared ourselves to reach beyond our own family boundaries and deal with persons from other families. Further, when

one knows something about families, one is better able to understand the behaviour of people with whom one has daily contact. In addition, some of the people have also devoted their occupational careers to studying families. The family careers approach has enabled them to do a better job of working with families, whether as a member of the helping professions, by looking at families as a researcher or by talking about families as a teacher.

This discipline has helped us to be more objective about our own family as well. Further it has provided us a comparison with what went on and is going on in the family one is closest to so as to enable us to make a better sense of it. By pointing up both the common elements one's family shares with others and the differences, it has given us a better perspective on the pleasures and the pains inherent in family living and these specific to one's own experiences. It has also given us some ideas about how to increase the pleasures and decrease the pains. Greater insight into one's own family and the lives of other families is what one has gained from one's study of the discipline of family studies. It has helped in getting along in our existing family or the one we are thinking of beginning. Further, by examining expectable transitions and the changes they entail, we are better prepared to deal with them. Last but not the least, if one passes on to intimates the insights one has gained on family studies, together one is able to ease the disruptions in family life that transitions bring and avoid some of the associated pitfalls.

Thus we conclude that the interdisciplinary science of Family Science which was founded with an applied motivation to serve mankind through the family was and is constantly pursuing its endeavour as is evident from development in the field over the years and its activities which are constantly changing to cater to the changing needs of the individuals with change in the time.

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