

# Social Control

Lesson No.	Title	Activity
20	Social Control	Make a note how family as an agency of social control has changed its influence in modern times asking elder members in five families in your locality.

## Summary

In every society, children were taught to respect elders and teachers, to be punctual, to walk on the left side of the road and obey the laws of the land. As children grow up, they are made aware about their responsibilities towards aging parents and certain professional responsibilities that come with one's job. All of this points to the fact that behaviours are somehow regulated and controlled by family, prevalent customs and traditions, the state and the society at large. In sociology, all this refers to social control- a device through which society controls the activities of its individual members.

## Meaning and Need of Social Control

- Every society has a system of regulating the behaviours of the individual and group. This system is called social control.
- Mac Iver and Page are of the view that the organization of the whole social system and the method of its obedience are called social control. According to them, by social control we can understand the mutual relations between the whole society and its unit, the individual. Thus, social control channelizes the behaviours of individuals in society so that they conform to the accepted social norms and code of conduct.
- Social control helps to develop a sense of co-existence amongst individuals by seeing to it that individuals are not allowed unrestricted freedom which may lead to a kind of anarchy and disorder in the society.

## Means of Social Control: Formal and Informal

In Sociology, the mechanisms of social control are divided into two types:

1. Informal means of social control, and 2. Formal means of social control

**Informal Means of Social Control:** These are mostly found in primary groups where the relationships are direct, close and intimate. Here, social control is often regulated by informal mechanisms such as customs, traditions, religion, folkways and mores and religion. Informal means of social control include established and accepted institutions relating to socialization, education, family, marriage, religion, etc.

### Folkways

- **Folkways** are norms to which the individuals conform. These are manifested in matters of dress, food, habits, observance of rituals, forms of worship and method of greeting, etc.

### Mores

- **Mores** refer to moral conduct which impacts the value system of a society. These are social regulations which aim to maintain social order. Since mores are consciously designed, violations of these amount to penalties.

### Customs

- **Customs** are long established practices of people which influence a community to remain together. No doubt, with the large scale influence of modernism, diversity and the forces of individualism, they are slowly weakening, but in primitive societies they were powerful means of social control.

### Religion

- Religion influences in the process of social control by exposing individuals to notions of the good and bad. Religious conventions and practices also govern marriage, mutual relations among family members, rules of succession, property relations and inheritance, etc.

## Formal Means of Social Control

The formal means of social control largely derived from institutions like the state, law, education and those that have more legitimate power. These institutions apply the legal power to control the behaviours and action of the individual and the group.

### Law

- **Law** regulates individual behaviour by formulating a set of common laws which are backed by legal, administrative and political machinery of the State. In modern times, laws and enforcement agencies are replaced by customs and mores as the regulators of behaviour and ensure social order and control. Individuals obey laws due to two prime reasons that include the fear of punishment and a belief that adherence to laws is necessary for their own well-being and prosperity.

### Education

- **Education** prepares the child for social living and teaches him the values of discipline, co-operation, tolerance and integration. Educational institutions at all levels (school, college and university) imparts knowledge as well as ethics through formal structured courses and behavioural inputs. The role of education as an agent of formal social control comes through its inculcation of good moral behaviour, social mannerisms and discipline.

### State

- **State** has a vital role in exercising social control by means of the law and the government. The maintenance of law and order, defence, foreign relations, currency requires the state to intervene in a formal manner to enforce rules and laws. Hence, in modern societies, the state functions as an important agent of formal social control. It does so, both by moral persuasion and coercion.

## Agencies of Social Control

Agencies of social control include those agents which have a crucial role to play in the care, nourishment and growth of a particular individual in a group, community and the society at large. They establish order and control on individuals so that they are able to function within specific boundaries which otherwise would have led to anarchy and disorder. The agencies of social control include the family, neighborhood and public opinion which socializes the child into the norms, values, traditions and customs of the group to which the individual belongs.

### Family

- Shapes individual personality by socialising the child into the norms, values, traditions and customs of the group.
- Etiquettes, habits and attitudes are learnt within the family.
- Parents, siblings, kin groups, etc. act as immediate role models in the family.
- Consent and approval from parents and elders sought in decision making and personal achievements.
- Dominant role of elders functions as an informal social control for individuals.

### Neighbourhood

- Neighbourhood ensures uniformity and conformity and corrects deviant behaviour.
- By being an enthusiastic participant of many everyday activities, neighbourhood fulfils its role as a medium of social control.

### Public Opinion

- Implies aggregate views that individuals hold regarding matters that affect the interests of community.
- Newspapers, radio, television, motion pictures, legislations pamphlets and even word of mouth mould public opinion.
- In modern cities, the print and electronic media play a dominant role in shaping public opinion.
- All of these plays a dominant role in regulating the behaviour of individuals and thereby acts as a major agency of social control.

### **Evaluate Yourself**

1. Discuss the meaning of social control.
2. Explain the importance of social control in modern times.
3. Describe different informal means of social control.
- 4.** Justify the importance of education as an agency of social control.