Family Dynamics –
Lesson 1: Introduction

Objective:

➢ To understand the basic concepts related to Family

➢ To be familiar with some the origin & evolution of Family & Family system

Module 1: Concept and terminology

Family dynamics:

Family dynamics are the patterns of relating, or interactions, between **family** members. Each **family** system and its **dynamics** are unique, although there are some common patterns. **Family dynamics are the interaction** between family members as well as the varying relationships that can exist within a family. Every family has its own dynamic, which manifests in its own way. Uncovering these relationships can help you better understand your family as well as others', including how families function.

Family dynamics is the way in which members of a family interact with each other in relation to their individual goals and preferences. Although the family is a unit, people are individuals. In order for a family unit to be cohesive, all of the members must find some sort of balance between personal interests and the best interests of the unit. This is where family dynamics come into play.

Core theory

Family dynamics are one part of a larger system, defined by the individual members' relationships with each other. Families exist as their own structure made of people who share bonds and a sense of history and endeavor to meet each other's needs. These core qualities set the stage for family dynamics - without a structure, these dynamics cannot play out. Dynamics are affected by many factors, including the number of children or a family's culture. For example, a family with many children may have rules pertaining to which child does certain chores.

Family - Meaning and Definition

Family is the vital primary group of all forms of human groups. The word 'family' has been derived from Roman term 'famulus' which means 'servant'. According to maciver, 'family is a group defined by a sex relationship sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the procreation and upbringing of children.

Parker and Anderson define family as a 'Socially organized unit of people related to each other by kinship, marital and legal ties. American Bureau of Census defined 'family as a group of two or more persons related by blood, marriage or adoptions and residing together.' Such persons are considered as members of one family.

Family being a primary social group came into existence in order to satisfy the need for protection, sexual urge and economic desires. It is not of a sudden origin but evolved from times and passed through certain stages. Mating relationship, form of marriage, system of nomenclature, common habitation, economic provision to satisfy needs, emotional basis, universality, limited in size, influential group and as an instrument of social regulation are considered as salient features of family.

The family may be defined as a basic fundamental, and the smallest social grouping, the members of which are united by bonds of kinship. In its simplest form, the primary or elementary family, it consists of two matured adults of opposite sex who live together in a union (marriage) recognized by the society, along with their children.

Families may or may not be biologically related, and family, in this context, refers to all persons that live within a household, as well as biological family members who may live outside the household. There are a multitude of factors which are related to family dynamics, including the structure of the family itself, the income level of the family, the attitude towards education and spirituality that permeates the family, the number of siblings and their interactions with each other, and so on.

Model 2: The definition of family

The definition of family often varies, depending on who is defining it. The government has a specific legal definition to define family, used for income taxes and insurance, for example. Within the confines of your own home with your family members, however, you might choose to define family in a different way that fits your loved ones. A **family** consists of people who consider themselves related by blood, marriage, or adoption. A **household,** in contrast, consists of people who occupy the same housing unit a house, apartment, or other living quarters.

A **family** is an intimate group of two or more people who
(1) Live together in a committed relationship,
(2) Care for one another and any children, and
(3) share activities and close emotional ties. Some people may disagree with this definition because it doesn't explicitly include marriage, procreation, or child rearing, but it is more inclusive than traditional views of a wide variety of family forms.

Family may be broadly defined as a unit of two or more persons united by marriage, blood, adoption, or consensual union, in general consulting a single household, interacting and communicating with each other (Desai, 1994). Right from ancient times, family, caste, and community have dominated the entire texture of Indian society. Family has been the dominating institution both in the life of the individual and in the life of the community.

We can classify families as **nuclear** (husband, wife, and children) and **extended** (including people such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins in addition to the nuclear unit).

Nuclear Family

The standard definition of a nuclear family includes a married father and mother and kids -- either biological or adopted. A nuclear family could also include a household with one parent and children, after death, divorce or if a parent chooses single parenthood. With industrialization and opportunities for geographic mobility, families tend to fragment. Adult children eventually move away from their parents to start their own nuclear families with the next generation of children.

Blended Family

A blended family often has factors that make it different from a nuclear family. This type of family structure could occur after parents' divorce. The children from the marriage will continue to need family structure, but the relationships between family members can become more complicated. Blended families can also result if two parents have never been married. The parents might consist of a mother and stepfather or a father and stepmother. Children in this family could be his, hers or theirs, resulting in step-siblings and half-siblings in the family. Children sometimes reside in homes full time, and, other times, the kids split their time between two parents' households.

Extended Family

Grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins fit under the umbrella of extended family, states Social Worker Allan Schwartz, writing for Grace point, a mental health care facility. Typically, extended family members do not live together, but some situations exist when an extended family will choose to cohabitate. Economic struggles may necessitate extended families living together. Retirement and health issues also make living together beneficial for an extended family. Children often benefit from extended family because of the increased interaction with additional adults who love them. Sometimes extended family members help with child care responsibilities.

Non-traditional Family

Love and commitment can serve as the connecting factor for families - those that fall under the traditional description and those that do not. A family could also include parents of the same gender. Numbers of unmarried parents are increasing, and the

number of children living with two married parents is decreasing, states the Pew Research Center. Children often feel loyalty to a nontraditional family, states the Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance. This type of family can also pose challenges for youngsters. A child might feel self-conscious about his "different" family, especially with peers. You can help your child by engaging in open communication about your nontraditional family and by fostering strong bonds between family members.

Module 3: A Reflection of Societal changes

The family in India is often understood as an ideal homogenous unit with strong coping mechanisms. It is a basic, cohesive, and integral unit of the larger social systems. Moreover, families in a large and culturally diverse country such as India have plurality of forms that vary with class, ethnicity, and individual choices. Its members are bound by interpersonal relationships in a wider network of role and social relations.

It is considered a link between community and change (Tata Institute of Social Sciences – TISS, 1993). The family is the basic and important unit of society because of the role it plays in generation of human capital resources and the power that is vested in it to influence individual, household, and community behavior (Sriram, 1993). It is, therefore, a basic unit of study in most social sciences disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, economics, anthropology, social psychiatry, social work or human development.

The family is the first line of defence especially for children and a major factor in their survival, health, education, development, and protection. It is also a major source of nurturance, emotional bonding and socialization, and a link between continuity and change. It has the major potential to provide stability and support when there are problems. Human development can, thus, be enhanced by enriching family life (Desai, 1995a).

Families in India are undergoing vast changes like increasing divorce and separation rates, domestic violence, inter-generational conflicts, social problems of drug abuse,

juvenile delinquency etc. These changes indicate the inability to cope with the pressures of the modern life. Yet, the majority seem to have survived and are able to modify, adjust and adapt to changing social norms, values and structures, and have demonstrated a unique strength in keeping together despite the growing stress and strain. India has distinct personal laws for families belonging to different religions and, therefore, do not have agreed upon goals about this important aspect of civic life.

Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jews, and Parsis, each community has its own personal law which covers matters of personal relations and family practices such as marriage and divorce, adoption, maintenance, guardianship and custody of children, and inheritance and succession. As these laws draw from the respective religious norms, they often perpetuate traditional patriarchal norms, and slow down the process of reforms.

Module 4: Origin and evolution of family

Family is one of the main socialising institutions of the society. Since ancient times, the family has been the most important child care institute in India as children are expected to grow under the glory of family where a satisfactory rearing of child is ensured. The universal declaration of human rights prescribes the family as the natural and fundamental unit of society. Family is virtually a social organisation or a unit of men and women out of relationship. In India the family is the most important institution that has survived through the ages. India, like most other less industrialised, traditional, eastern societies is a collectivist society that emphasizes family integrity, family loyalty, and family unity. A major factor that keeps all members, big and small, united in love and peace in a joint family system in India is the importance attached to protocol.

This feature is very unique to Indian families and very special. Manners like respecting elders, touching their feet as a sign of respect, speaking in a dignified manner, taking elders' advice prior taking important decisions, etc. Is something that Indian parents take care to inculcate in their kids from very beginning? The head of the family responds by caring and treating each member of the family the same.

Family is one of the main socializing institutions of the society. Since ancient times, the family has been the most important child care institute in India as children are expected to grow under the glory of family where a satisfactory rearing of child is ensured. According to Pope – "the family is more sacred than the State." It was pointed out by Will and Ariel Durant that the family is nucleus of civilization. The universal declaration of human rights prescribes the family as the natural and fundamental unit of society. Family is virtually a social organization or a unit of men and women out of relationship.

Module 5: Family system in Indian society

In India the family is the most important institution that has survived through the ages. India, like most other less industrialized, traditional, eastern societies is a collectivist society that emphasizes family integrity, family loyalty, and family unity. The Indian family has been a dominant institution in the life of the individual and in the life of the community. For the Hindu family, extended family and kinship ties are of utmost importance. In India, families adhere to a patriarchal ideology, follow the patrilineal rule of descent, are patri-local, have familialistic value orientations, and endorse traditional gender role preferences. The Indian family is considered strong, stable, close, resilient, and enduring.

Historically, the traditional, ideal and desired family in India is the joint family. A joint family includes kinsmen, and generally includes three to four living generations, including uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews, and grandparents living together in the same household. It is a group composed of a number of family units living in separate rooms of the same house. These members eat the food cooked at one hearth, share a common income, common property, are related to one another through kinship ties, and worship the same idols. The family supports the old; takes care of widows, never-married adults, and the disabled; assists during periods of unemployment; and provides security and a sense of support and togetherness. The joint family has always been the preferred family type in the Indian culture, and most Indians at some point in their lives have participated in joint family living.

The beauty about the Indian culture lies in its age-long prevailing tradition of the joint family system. It's a system under which even extended members of a family like one's parents, children, the children's spouses and their offspring, etc. Live together. The elder-most, usually the male member is the head in the joint Indian family system who makes all important decisions and rules, whereas other family members abide by it dutifully with full respect. A major factor that keeps all members, big and small, united in love and peace in a joint family system in India is the importance attached to protocol.

The reason why Indians are proving to emerge as a prosperous lot globally, many researches claim, is because of the significance they attach to the joint family system. All working cohesively to solve a problem faced by any one or more members of the joint family, is what works magic in keeping one tension-free, happy and contended even in today's highly competitive environment. An Indian may be a top corporate honcho or a great sportsperson or a movie actor and so on in a particular professional field, but all these accomplishments relegate to the backseat when at home.

Module 6: Changing trends

With the advent of urbanization and modernization, younger generations are turning away from the joint family form. Some scholars specify that the modified extended family has replaced the traditional joint family, in that it does not demand geographical proximity or occupational involvement and does not have a hierarchal authority structure. This new family form encourages frequent visits; financial assistance; aid and support in childcare and household chores; and involvement and participation in life-cycle events such as births, marriages, deaths, and festival celebrations.

The familial and kinship bonds are thus maintained and sustained. Even in the more modern and nuclear families in contemporary India, many functional extensions of the traditional joint family have been retained, and the nuclear family is strongly embedded

in the extended kinship matrix. In spite of the numerous changes and adaptations to a pseudo-Western culture and a move toward the nuclear family among the middle and upper classes, the modified extended family is preferred and continues to prevail in modern India.

India is an extremely pronatalistic society, and the desire to have a male child is greatly stressed and is considered by some to be a man's highest duty, a religious necessity, and a source of emotional and familial gratification. Because male children are desired more than female children, they are treated with more respect and given special privileges.

Male children are raised to be assertive, less tolerant, independent, self-reliant, demanding, and domineering. Females, in contrast, are socialized from an early age to be self-sacrificing, docile, accommodating, nurturing, altruistic, adaptive, tolerant, and religious and to value family above all.

In rural areas, low-income women have always worked outside the home. In urban areas, there has been a substantial increase in the number of middle- and upper-class women working to supplement their husbands' incomes. In a traditional Indian family, the wife is typically dependent, submissive, compliant, demure, nonassertive, and goes out of her way to please her husband. Women are entrusted with the responsibility of looking after the home and caring for the children and the elderly parents and relatives.

Child rearing practices in India tend to be permissive, and children are not encouraged to be independent and self-sufficient. The family is expected to provide an environment to maximize the development of a child's personality and, within the context of the Hindu beliefs and philosophy, positively influence the child's attitudes and behaviors. Adolescence and young adulthood are particularly stressful and traumatic stages in the lives of Indian youths.

In one way, they desire emancipation and liberation from family but residing in the matrix of the extended family makes it difficult for them to assert themselves and exhibit any independence in thought, action, or behavior. Social changes are gradually occurring but arranged marriages are still the norm, and dating generally is not allowed.

Furthermore, sex and sexuality issues are not openly discussed, sex education is not readily available, interrelationships with the opposite sex are discouraged, and premarital sex is frowned upon. In the traditional Indian family, communication between parents and children tends to be one-sided. Children are expected to listen, respect, and obey their parents. Generally, adolescents do not share their personal concerns with their parents because they believe their parents will not listen and will not understand their problems.

SUMMARY

Family is a vital component of our everyday lives, but it is not something that can be easily defined. The debate over what constitutes a family who is to be included, how private or public it is, and how individuals balance personal needs with family responsibilities reflects the values we hold as a society. Additionally, while people often think of family solely in personal terms, these relationships are also shaped by social structure. Our attitudes, behaviours, and experiences are not completely random but are formed by the social forces operating in the society in which we live. In other words, the family is both a public institution and a private relationship.

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GLOSSARY

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Family dynamics: is the way in which members of a family interact with each other in relation to their individual goals and preferences.

Nuclear Family

The standard definition of a nuclear family includes a married father and mother and kids -- either biological or adopted

Blended Family

A blended family often has factors that make it different from a nuclear family. This type of family structure could occur after parents' divorce

Extended Family

Grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins fit under the umbrella of extended family

QUIZ

1. --------- are the patterns of relating, or interactions, between **family** members
A. Family pattern
B. Family dynamics
C. Family relations
D. Family issues

Ans B

2. ------ is the vital primary group of all forms of human groups
   A. Family
   B. School
   C. Neighborhood
   D. None

Ans A

3. ---------- family includes kinsmen, and generally includes three to four living generations, including uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews, and grandparents living together in the same household.
   A. Nuclear
   B. Extended
   C. Joint
   D. Blended

Ans B

4. --------- consists of people who occupy the same housing unit—a house, apartment, or other living quarters.
   A. Home
   B. Family
   C. Household
   D. None

Ans c

Assignment

- Explain the family stem in contemporary Indian society

Faq's

N/a

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