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Minority group

In sociology, a **minority group** refers to a category of people who experience relative disadvantage as compared to members of a dominant social group.^[1] Minority group membership is typically based on differences in observable characteristics or practices, such as: ethnicity (**ethnic minority**), race (**racial minority**), religion (religious minority), sexual orientation (sexual minority), or disability.^[2] Utilizing the framework of intersectionality, it is important to recognize that an individual may simultaneously hold membership in multiple minority groups (e.g. both a racial and religious minority).^[3] Likewise, individuals may also be part of a minority group in regard to some characteristics, but part of a dominant group in regard to others.^[3]

□ The term "minority group" often occurs within the discourse of civil rights and collective rights, as members of minority groups are prone to differential treatment in the countries and societies in which they live.^[4] Minority group members often face discrimination in multiple areas of social life, including housing, employment, healthcare, and education, among others.^{[5][6]} While discrimination may be committed by individuals, it may also occur through structural inequalities, in which rights and opportunities are not equally accessible to all.^[7] The language of minority rights is often used to discuss laws designed to protect minority groups from discrimination and afford them equal social status to the dominant group.^[8]

Definitions

Sociological

Louis Wirth defined a minority group as "a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination".^[9] The definition includes both objective and subjective criteria: membership of a minority group is objectively ascribed by society, based on an individual's physical or behavioral characteristics; it is also subjectively applied by its members, who may use their status as the basis of group identity or solidarity.^[10] Thus, minority group status is categorical in nature: an individual who exhibits the physical or behavioral characteristics of a given minority group is accorded the status of that group and is subject to the same treatment as other members of that group.^[9]

Joe Feagin, states that a minority group has five characteristics: (1) suffering discrimination and subordination, (2) physical and/or cultural traits that set them apart, and which are disapproved by the dominant group, (3) a shared sense of collective identity and common burdens, (4) socially shared rules about who belongs and who does not determine minority status, and (5) tendency to marry within the group.^[11]

Criticisms

There is a controversy with the use of the word minority, as it has a generic and an academic usage.^[12] Common usage of the term indicates a statistical minority; however, academics refer to power differences among groups rather than differences in population size among groups.^[13]

The above criticism is based on the idea that a group can be considered minority even if it includes such a large number of people that it is numerically not a minority in society.

Some sociologists have criticized the concept of "minority/majority", arguing this language excludes or neglects changing or unstable cultural identities, as well as cultural affiliations across national boundaries.^[14] As such, the term historically excluded groups (HEGs) is often similarly used to

highlight the role of historical oppression and domination, and how this results in the under-representation of particular groups in various areas of social life.^[15]

Political

The term national minority is often used to discuss minority groups in international and national politics.^[16] All countries contain some degree of racial, ethnic, or linguistic diversity.^[17] In addition, minorities may also be immigrant, indigenous or landless nomadic communities.^[18] This often results in variations in language, culture, beliefs, practices, that set some groups apart from the dominant group. As these differences are usually perceived negatively by, this results in loss of social and political power for members of minority groups.^[19]

There is no legal definition of national minorities in international law, though protection of minority groups is outlined by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. International criminal law can protect the rights of racial or ethnic minorities in a number of ways.^[20] The right to self-determination is a key issue. The Council of Europe regulates minority rights in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

In some places, subordinate ethnic groups may constitute a numerical majority, such as Blacks in South Africa under apartheid.^[21] In the United States, for example, non-Hispanic Whites constitute the majority (63.4%) and all other racial and ethnic groups (Hispanic or Latino, African Americans, Asian Americans, American Indian, and Native Hawaiians) are classified as "minorities".^[22] If the non-Hispanic White population falls below 50% the group will only be the *plurality*, not the majority.

Examples of minority groups

Involuntary minorities

Also known as "castelike minorities," involuntary minorities are a term for people who were originally brought into any society against their will. In the United States, for instance, it includes but is not limited to Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, African Americans,^[23] and native-born Mexican Americans.^[24] For reasons of cultural differences, involuntary minorities may experience difficulties in school more than members of other (voluntary) minority groups. Social capital helps children engage with different age groups that share a common goal.^[25]

Voluntary minorities

Immigrants take on minority status in their new country, usually in hopes of a better future economically, educationally, and politically than in their homeland. Because of their focus on success, voluntary minorities are more likely to do better in school than other migrating minorities.^[23] Adapting to a very different culture and language make difficulties in the early stages of life in the new country. Voluntary immigrants do not experience a sense of divided identity as much as involuntary minorities, and are often rich in social capital because of their educational ambitions.^[25] Major immigrant groups in the United States include Mexicans, Central and South Americans, Cubans, Africans, and Indians.^[24]

Gender and sexuality minorities

The term sexual minority is frequently used by public health researchers to recognize a wide variety of individuals who engage in same-sex sexual behavior, including those who do not identify under the LGBTQ umbrella. For example, men who have sex with men (MSM), but do not identify as gay. In addition, the term gender minorities can include many types of gender variant people, such

as intersex people, transgender people, or gender non-conforming individuals. However, the terms sexual and gender minority are often not preferred by LGBTQ people, as they represent clinical categories rather than individual identity.^[26]

Though lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people have existed throughout human history, LGBT rights movements across many western countries led to the recognition of LGBTQ people as members of a minority group.^[26] LGBTQ people represent a numerical and social minority. They experience numerous social inequalities stemming from their group membership as LGBTQ people. These inequalities include social discrimination and isolation, unequal access to healthcare, employment, and housing, and experience negative mental and physical health outcomes due to these experiences.^[26]

The disability rights movement has contributed to an understanding of people with disabilities as a minority or a coalition of minorities who are disadvantaged by society, not just as people who are disadvantaged by their impairments. Advocates of disability rights emphasize difference in physical or psychological functioning, rather than inferiority. For example, some people with autism argue for acceptance of neurodiversity, much as opponents of racism argue for acceptance of ethnic diversity. The deaf community is often regarded as a linguistic and cultural minority rather than a group with disabilities, and some deaf people do not see themselves as having a disability at all. Rather, they are disadvantaged by technologies and social institutions that are designed to cater for the dominant group. (See the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.)

Religious minorities[

People belonging to religious minorities have a faith which is different from that held by the majority. Most countries of the world have religious minorities. It is now widely accepted in the west that people should have the freedom to choose their own religion, including not having any religion (atheism and/or agnosticism), and including the right to convert from one religion to another. However, in many countries this freedom is constricted. In Egypt, a new system of identity cards^[27] requires all citizens to state their religion—and the only choices are Islam, Christianity, or Judaism (See Egyptian identification card controversy). Another example is the case of decreasing population of minorities in Pakistan, where they are being forcefully converted or killed.^{[28][29]}

Women as minorities

In most societies, numbers of men and women are not equal. Though women are not categorically a minority^[30], the status of women as a subordinate group has led to many social scientists to study them as a minority group.^[31] Though women's legal rights and status vary widely across countries, women experience social inequalities relative to men in most societies.^[32] Women are often denied access to education, subject to violence, and lack access to the same economic opportunities as men.^[33]

Law and government

In the politics of some countries, a "minority" is an ethnic group recognized by law, and having specified rights. Speakers of a legally recognized minority language, for instance, might have the right to education or communication with the government in their mother tongue. Countries with special provisions^[which?] for minorities include Canada, China, Ethiopia, Germany, India, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russia, Croatia, and the United Kingdom.^[citation needed]

The various minority groups in a country are often not given equal treatment. Some groups are too small or indistinct to obtain minority protections. For example, a member of a particularly small ethnic group might be forced to check "Other" on a checklist of different backgrounds and so might receive fewer privileges than a member of a more defined group.

Many contemporary governments prefer to assume the people they rule all belong to the same nationality rather than separate ones based on ethnicity. The United States asks for race and ethnicity on its official census forms, which thus breaks up and organizes its population into sub-groups, primarily racial rather than national. Spain does not divide its nationals by ethnic group, although it does maintain an official notion of minority languages.

Some especially significant or powerful minorities receive comprehensive protection and political representation. For example, the former Yugoslav republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina recognizes the three constitutive nations, none of which constitutes a numerical majority (see nations of Bosnia and Herzegovina). However, other minorities such as Romani^[34] and Jews, are officially labelled "foreign" and are excluded from many of these protections. For example, they may be excluded from political positions, including the presidency.^[35]

There is debate over recognizing minority groups and their privileges. One view^[36] is that the application of special rights to minority groups may harm some countries, such as new states in Africa or Latin America not founded on the European nation-state model, since minority recognition may interfere with establishing a national identity. It may hamper the integration of the minority into mainstream society, perhaps leading to separatism or supremacism. In Canada, some^[who?] feel that the failure of the dominant English-speaking majority to integrate French Canadians has provoked Quebec separatism.

Others assert that minorities require specific protections to ensure that they are not marginalised: for example, bilingual education may be needed to allow linguistic minorities to fully integrate into the school system and compete equally in society. In this view, rights for minorities strengthen the nation-building project, as members of minorities see their interests