

LECTURE NOTES

Teaching Anthropology

For Health Extension Workers



**Ethiopia Public Health
Training Initiative**

Zerihun Doda

Debub University

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Introduction

Anthropology is a social science which studies mankind in its entirety. The term in its literal sense means, “study of mankind”, as it is a combination of two Greek words, namely, *anthropos* and *logos*. Anthropology has gained popularity rapidly within the social/ behavioral sciences circle. Through its various fields of specializations, it offers us great insights into the ways of lives of human societies across time and space. Health science students learning this discipline have a great advantage of gaining fresh insights and practical benefits in their personal lives and professional practices. Anthropology along with other sisterly disciplines such as sociology and psychology has now become an essential part of the curriculum in universities and other training institutions abroad. Following this example, similar institutions in Ethiopia have also included it in their curricula.

This lecture note in introductory anthropology is prepared for the health extension workers (HEWs). Its purpose is to provide the prospective trainees with elementary ideas and knowledge in anthropology. It aims at helping the prospective health extension workers gain some insight

into the social, cultural, and behavioral dimensions of health and disease. The material is prepared as part of the curriculum for health extension package designed by the Ministry of Health. By learning the materials presented in this lecture note, it is believed that students will be able to understand and appreciate the elementary issues, principles and approaches of anthropology.

The writer makes no claim of originality for this material. The issues and concepts discussed in the material are adapted from text books and other reference materials on anthropology. Attempt is made to incorporate examples from the Ethiopian society and culture context. The materials used as resources books are acknowledged in the reference section (see *appendix 1*). The course is organized into six major units. To help the students internalize the issues learned and make effective use of the teaching material, each unit begins with list of objectives and ends with unit summary and review questions.

This teaching material may be used in conjunction with other references. The prospective teacher may use his/ her own discretion in the choices of various issues in the material. It would be desirable if the teacher raises various

issues as points of discussion from the Ethiopian contexts. Group discussion, if time allows, would be very important in helping the students grasp the concepts and issues. Individual and team based mini-projects may also be helpful. This will enable the students internalize the issues they learn in class rooms.



UNIT ONE
Definition, Subject Matter, History,
Sub-Fields, Uses And Methods Of
Anthropology

1.0. Objectives

After completing this unit, the students are expected to:

- Define anthropology and its basic concerns and subject matter;
- Describe the different fields of anthropology;
- Explain how and why anthropology as a science emerged;
- Appreciate the uses and applications of anthropology in personal and professional lives;
- Compare and contrast anthropology with other related behavioral or social sciences and;
- Describe the methods of anthropology.

1.1. What is Anthropology?

The term 'anthropology' is a combination of two words derived from Greek language: *anthropos* and *logos*. The term *anthropos* is equivalent to the word *mankind* or *human being*; while *logos* means *study* or *science*. So putting the two words together, anthropology is the study or science of mankind or humanity. The following are two important, simple, definitions of anthropology:

- Anthropology is the study of humanity.
- Anthropology is a broad scientific discipline dedicated to the comparative study of mankind as a group, from its first appearance on earth to its present stage of development.

In a more specific term, anthropology is a social/behavioral science which, among other things,

- investigates the strategies for living that are learned and shared by people as members of human social groups;
- examines the characteristics that human beings share as members of one species (*homo sapiens*) and the diverse ways that people live in different environment; and

- Analyzes the products of social groups-such as material objects and non-material creations such as beliefs and values.

1.2. Subject-matter, Questions, Concerns and Unique Characteristics of Anthropology

The subject matter of anthropology is very vast. The subject covers all aspects of human ways of life and culture, as man lives in a social group relationship. Anthropology is interested in some of the following questions and issues about humankind:

- Where did human species come from (i.e. what are the origins of mankind)?
- Was man created in the image and likeness of God, or was he just the product of millions of years of the natural evolutionary process?
- In what ways does man differ from other animal species?
- How did mankind arrive at the present stage of biological, intellectual, and cultural development? Is there a common human nature, and if so, what is it like?

- In what ways do humans who live in various times and places differ?
- How can we explain why cultures vary?
- Such and many other related questions are the concerns of anthropology.

Anthropologists want to know about the technological, economic, political and intellectual development of humanity. They want to know the extent to which different human populations vary in their biological and social characteristics and to understand why these differences exist.

Anthropologists are, for example, interested in why Americans eat beef, but devout Hindus do not, and in why some New Guinea people periodically eat excess pork meat but some Middle Easterners regard pig flesh as unclean. They want to know why Balines are fascinated by cockfights, Spaniards by bullfights, Thais by fish fights and North Americans by people fight.

Or to give example from the Ethiopia context, anthropologists are interested to know and explain, for example, why a pregnant woman in Gumuz goes to a bush

to give birth during labor, how the Nuer practice birth control methods and why they put horizontal line marks on their forehead, or why the Wolayta put a circular body mark on their cheek while the Tigreans put a cross mark on their foreheads, etc.

The main distinguishing characteristic of anthropology, the thing that makes it different from the many other fields that also include people as their subject matter is its broad scope. A good way to emphasize this *broad scope* is to say that anthropologists are interested in all human beings, whether living or dead, "primitive" or "civilized" and that they are interested in many different aspects of humans, including their skin color, family lives, marriages, political systems, tools, personality types, and languages. No place or time is too remote to escape the anthropologist's notice. No dimension of human kind, from genes to art styles, is outside the anthropologist's attention.

The three distinguishing marks of anthropology are:

1. Its broad scope

2. Its unique approaches

- *Anthropology is Holistic*: Studying one aspect of the ways of life of a group of people by relating it to other complex related aspects of life.

- *Anthropology is Relativistic:* Anthropology tries to study and explain a certain belief, practice or institution of a group of people in its own context. It does not make value judgment, i.e., declaring that 'this belief or practice is good' or 'that is bad.'
 - *Anthropology is Comparative:* Anthropology studies certain aspects of the culture of a group of people by comparing it across societies and different times; i.e., the present with the past, the modern with the traditional, etc.
3. **Emphasis on insiders' view:** Anthropologists focus on how the people themselves understand about their world, how a particular group of people explains about the world, etc.

1.3 Brief Historical Overview of Anthropology

Anthropology has its roots in the works and ideas of the great ancient and Medieval Greek, Roman, and Hebrew philosophers and social thinkers. These people were interested in the nature, origin and destiny of man, and the morality and ethics of human relationships. But anthropology as an academic discipline was born during

the 19th century. In other words, the study of human culture began in ancient times, but anthropology did not become a separate area of study until the mid-1800's (i.e. middle of 19th century).

Early anthropologists concentrated on applying *the theory of evolution* to their studies. The theory of evolution states that mankind is not the product of special creation, but is part of the natural, evolutionary process. Evolutionists argue that man was originated from lower animals, particularly the close ancestor or blood relative of man are the mammals which are manlike in their physiology and anatomy and other social behavior. Such mammals include apes, gorillas, chimpanzees, etc. On the other hand, creationists believe that mankind is the product of special creation and accept it as a given fact that man is created in the image and likeness of God.

But, about the end of the 19th century, many anthropologists emphasized the discovery of and recording of human differences rather than formulations of patterns of evolutionary development. They believed that the culture of the various indigenous peoples in America, Africa, Australia and Asia and Europe should be systematically studied

before their cultures were corrupted and transformed by contact with the modern, western world.

In 1920's, anthropology focused on the way that different cultural traits functioned to satisfy basic human needs, both biological and psychological. This approach was called Functionalism.

Early anthropologists mainly studied small communities in technologically simple societies. Such societies are often called by various names, such as, *traditional, illiterate, non-western, non-industrial, tribal, or simple societies*. Anthropologists of the early 1900's emphasized the study of social and cultural differences among human groups. The study of the cultural and social differences between the various groups of people is called *ethnography*. Here, many of the indigenous peoples of the non-western world and their social and cultural features were studied in detail. By the mid-1900, however, anthropologists attempted to discover universal human patterns and the common bio-psychological traits that bind all human beings. This approach is called *ethnology*.

1.4. The Sub-fields of Anthropology

Anthropologists usually divide the discipline into four branches. These are:

1.4.1. Physical Anthropology

This sub-field studies the biological dimensions of human beings, including biological evolution, the physical variations between contemporary (present day) populations, and the biology and behavior of non-human primates (mammals which feed their young with breast). Physical anthropology itself is further divided into three special fields of study: paleo-anthropology, primatology and anthropometry.

Paleo-anthropology is a subspecialty in physical anthropology which is interested in the search for fossil remains from prehistoric times to trace the development of outstanding human physical, social and cultural characteristics.

Primatology: studies the animals that most closely resemble human beings in terms of physiological and

anatomical structure. These include gorillas, chimpanzees, and other apes.

Anthropometry: studies physical differences among human groups. These physical differences may be in terms of blood types, skin colors, skull shape, facial shape, hair type, and the like.

1.4.2. Cultural Anthropology

This can also be called social anthropology or socio-cultural anthropology. It is concerned with the social and cultural dimensions of the living peoples. Cultural anthropologists conduct studies of living peoples, most often by visiting and living among a particular people for an extended period of time, usually a year or longer. They conduct fieldwork among the people they study and describe the results of their investigations in the form of books and articles called **ethnographies**. Cultural anthropology is also concerned with making generalizations about, and seeking explanations for, similarities and differences among the world's people. Those who conduct comparative studies to achieve these theoretical goals are called **ethnologists**. Thus, two

important aspects of social/ cultural anthropology are ethnography and ethnology. The former is more of empirical study or description of the culture and ways of lives of a particular group of people, while the latter is more of a theoretical study of the similarities and differences among the human groups of the world, past or present.

There are many other specialized fields of study in social or cultural anthropology. Some of these include: anthropology of art, medical anthropology, urban/rural/economic anthropology, political anthropology, development anthropology, anthropology of religion, population studies, legal anthropology, etc.

1.4.3. Archeology

Archaeology studies the ways of lives of past peoples by excavating and analyzing the physical remains they left behind. Tools, ornaments, pottery, animal bones, human skeletal material, and evidence of how people lived in the distant past are collected, and systematically analyzed. Archeology is divided into two major branches: **historic** and **prehistoric** archeology. Historic archaeology uses the evidence provided by excavated remains to enhance our

understanding of historic peoples; that is, peoples who had writing and about whom written records are available. **Classical archeology**, an aspect of historic archeology, deals primarily with the ancient civilizations and empires of Europe and the Middle East, including Egypt, Greece, Roman and Persia, Axum, etc.

In contrast, prehistoric archeology investigates human prehistory; that is the periods of time in a region before the art of writing developed.

1.4.4. Linguistic Anthropology

Linguistics is the scientific study of language. Linguists describe and analyze the sound patterns, combinations of sounds, meanings and structure of sentence in human languages. They also attempt to determine how two or more languages are related. Historically, modern linguists are especially interested in whether all human languages share any universal common feature. Some recent work suggests that human infants are born with knowledge of a set of generalized rules that allow them to discover the specific rules of language around them and to formulate new sentences by applying these rules.

Linguistic anthropology usually focuses on *unwritten languages* (i.e., those languages which have no form of writing, languages used by indigenous peoples of the non-western societies). It is especially concerned with relations between language and other aspects of human behavior and thought. Linguistic anthropologists might describe and analyze a language so far unknown to linguistic science. They are likely also to be interested in how the language is used in various social contexts. For example, what speech style must one use with people of higher social standing? How does a local political leader use language to earn people's allegiance? What can the naming of various parts of the natural and social environment tell us about people's perception of their environments?

1.5. Uses and Contributions of Anthropology

1.5.1. Uses of Anthropology

The uses of anthropology may be categorized into the following four types:

1. Anthropology gives us an insight into different ways and modes of life of a given society, to understand the logic behind and justification for human activities and behavior.

2. Anthropology also helps us to understand our own ways of lives. Many aspects of our lives seem to us normal, so we don't know the logic behind. Eating *injera*, for example, is assumed to be normal to those whose staple (main) food item is *injera*. By studying anthropology, we look into ourselves through the others' ways of lives. As we study anthropology, we encounter a different way of lives from ourselves, and hence we get opportunity to appreciate and understand ourselves.
3. Anthropology helps us to fight against prejudices and discriminations. It helps fight against ethnocentrism, the attitude that one's own culture and one's own way of life is the center of the world and the best of all. This arises from ignorance about other ethnic groups and their ways of lives.
4. Anthropology is also used as a tool for development. Applied anthropology, here, is the application of anthropological knowledge and research results in the solution of some social problems or in the implementation of project plans

1.5.2. Some of the Contributions of Anthropology

The following are some of the contributions of anthropology:

1. Because of its broad scope, anthropology allows us to understand the biological, technological and cultural development of humanity over long period of time in human evolution.
2. Because of its *comparative approach* to humanity, anthropology allows us to separate what is unique to our way of life from what is general to all people.
3. Because of its *relativistic approach*, anthropology helps us to be more sensitive and appreciative of cultural diversity and variability. It helps us to avoid some of the misunderstanding that commonly arises when individuals of different cultural traditions come into contact. Anthropology reduces ethnocentrism by instilling an appreciation of cultural diversity. Anthropology can help make us aware that when we interact with people from other cultural traditions, their actions are not always intended to mean what we take them to mean, and therefore much miscommunication

can be avoided. Health workers involved in health care giving in various cultural settings will find it very helpful if they develop this mentality.

4. Anthropologists use their expertise (special, expert knowledge) in particular subjects to formulate practical ways of coping with immediate social problems. Medical anthropologists, for example, investigate the interrelationship between human health, nutrition, and cultural beliefs and practices.

In general, anthropology more than any other science, can reveal the alternative ways of living developed by diverse segments of humanity.

1.6. Anthropology and Related Disciplines

1.6.1. Misconceptions about Anthropology

There are a number of misconceptions associated with anthropology due lack of appropriate awareness of its nature. The following are some of the misconceptions:

- ❖ One misconception about anthropology is related to the area of its study. It is said that anthropology is limited to the study of primitive societies. Indeed, most of the

works done by anthropologists during early periods focused on isolated, primitive, small-scale societies. But anthropologists now also study the advanced, complex societies.

- ❖ Another misconception is that anthropologists only study the rural people and rural areas. True, most of the works conducted focused on rural areas. But now, anthropologists are also interested in the study of urban people and urban areas. There is a distinct sub-discipline devoted to the study of urban societies -urban anthropology-which focuses on small scale society in a complex city.
- ❖ It is claimed that anthropologists are only interested in the study of far-away, remote exotic communities living isolated from the influences of modernization. True, most anthropologists go to field work to an isolated people in a distant corner. But now anthropologists are interested in home anthropology, studying anthropology at home, i.e., at one's own society.
- ❖ It is also said that the purpose of anthropology is to study in order to keep and preserve primitive, defunct

cultural practices in museums and anthropologists are advocates of defunct, obsolete culture. True, when anthropologists study primitive society, they study the culture of the people, to reconstruct it, to give meaning to the peculiar behaviors of people. But anthropologists not merely defend primitiveness; they play a great role to bring a change and development by studying and respecting the indigenous ways and knowledge of the community they study.

1.6.2. The Similarity And Interdependence Between Anthropology And Other Disciplines

Anthropology is similar with other social sciences as to its subject matter. All the social sciences such as sociology, psychology, political sciences, economics, history, etc study, in one way or another, the human society and its ways of lives.

Anthropology greatly overlaps with other disciplines that study human society. For example, anthropological field workers are likely to collect information on a society's agriculture, leadership patterns, and beliefs about the universe (physical world), music and art forms. They might

find it useful to be acquainted with the works of economists, geographers, political scientists, philosophers, mythologists, and artists or art historians. They may read the works of historians, sociologists, novelists, economists, psychologists, and political scientists who also write about the region. Anthropology thus cuts across many disciplines, encompassing many of the subjects that other scholars consider their special province: law, religion, politics, literature, art, and so on.

1.6.3. Differences Between Anthropology And Other Disciplines

Anthropology differs from other social sciences and the humanities by its broad scope, approach, unit of analysis and methods used. It studies mankind in its entirety. In its approach, anthropology studies and analyzes human ways of life holistically, comparatively and relativistically. Its unit of analysis is small scale society. That is, it is interested in a group of people with more or less simple, homogenous life ways. In its method of research, it is unique in that extended fieldwork among the studied community and developing intimate knowledge of the life worlds of the community with participant observation.

1.7. Anthropological Research Method

The most vital anthropological method of data collection is fieldwork, in which the researchers live among the societies study and observe their way of life intimately. A typical anthropological research method is participant observation, in which the researcher learns about a society living among them and participating in their daily lives. Anthropologists also use several other methods.

A typical anthropological research project has **four phases:**

1. Anthropologists go to the community with two major goals: (a) To establish a role for themselves and (b) gain a basic understanding of life in the community.
2. *Developing hypothesis:* The anthropologist decides to gather what kind of information about the community. He/She formulates research questions and forms hypothesis to answer them. Many new questions will arise from what the researcher has already learned about the society. During this phase, the anthropologists participates in fewer of the peoples activities, chiefly those related to the study.

3. *Collecting evidence*- after developing specific hypothesis, anthropologists gather information to test them, may continue to participate in the life of the community, but may decide to use other methods. (E .g survey, inventories, life histories, interviews, recording special events, making motion pictures, photographs, etc)
4. *Drawing conclusions*: This involutes organizing all the data collected so that it can be used easily and efficiently. They summarize the bulky data notes into similar themes; they count and summarize census data; they may, like all other social scientist use a computer to analyze large amount of data. Finally, they evaluate the hypotheses made initially, and writes up the conclusions and then the findings of the studies are disseminated through scientific journals and books and other means.

Anthropological research is comparative and cross-cultural but social scientists in other fields work mainly in urban, industrial societies and make cross-cultural comparisons less often. Anthropology emphasizes an insider's view of a society. This is what anthropologists call the **emic** view; here, the anthropologist gives value to what the people

he/she is studying know, think, believe, and view; how they explain and understand the world around them, and the logic and rationale of their beliefs, actions, practices, behaviors and institutions. However, the anthropologist also, as a scientist, gives equally much value to the *etic* view; this is what the scientist or the researcher as an outsider thinks about the thing being studied.

1. 8. Unit Summary and Review Questions

1.8.1. Summary

Anthropology is one of the social or human/ behavioral sciences, which was born lately in the 19th century, with the major aim of scientific study and documentation of the physical, socio- cultural and other diversities among people, past and present. It specially studies simple, small scale societies in the non-western world. Its holistic, comparative and relativistic approaches, its unit of analysis and its method of study along with its broad scope, make it unique. However, it shares many things with the other sciences. The science of anthropology has many theoretical and practical uses and contributions. The four main branches of anthropology are physical, social,

linguistic and archeological anthropology. Applied anthropology is sometimes regarded as a fifth sub-field. Each of the major branches of anthropology has several specialized areas of study within it. Anthropology as a science has as its major goal the making, accumulation and dissemination of scientific knowledge on society and culture.

1.8.2. Review Questions

1. What are the personal and professional uses of anthropology to you?
2. How do anthropologists study the life ways of a group of people?
3. What distinguishes anthropology from other human sciences?
4. What common characteristics does anthropology share with the other sciences?
5. Why do anthropologists use *emic* approach in their research?
6. Suppose you were in your role as a health extension worker asked to make nutrition survey and assessment of a certain village. In what ways would you apply the anthropological knowledge and principles? In what

way, for example, would you find anthropometry helpful?



UNIT TWO

The Concept Of Culture

2.0. Objectives

At the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- Define the concept of culture;
- Describe some major characteristics or features of culture;
- Understand the relationship that exists between culture, individual behaviors, health and disease.

2.1. The Concept and Definition of Culture

The concept of culture is central to anthropology. The capacity for making culture differentiates mankind from nonhumans. The term *culture* is not used with consistent meanings. It is used with various meanings in commonsense usages. It makes the backbone of sociology and cultural anthropology and other related disciplines such as cultural geography and social psychology. As a scientific term, culture refers to all the features of a society's way of life: e.g. productivity, modes of dress, routine living habits, food preferences; the architecture of houses and public

building, the layout of fields and farms; and systems of education, government, law, etc.

Edward B. Tyler defined culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

The phrase “acquired by man as a member of society” in this definition is very important. It is not any habit of capability of man as a biological being, but man as a member of a social group. The definition focuses on beliefs and behavior that people acquire not through biological heredity but by growing up in a particular society and social group where they are exposed to a specific cultural tradition. It is through a special socialization process that a person acquires a cultural knowledge. This process is called is *enculturation*.

The concept is an all-encompassing term that identifies not only the whole tangible lifestyle of people, but also the prevailing values and beliefs. In short, among the many definitions of culture, anthropologists have emphasized the learning, or acquisition of social habits, capabilities, beliefs,

techniques, lifestyles, etc that exist in a particular society or group.

2.2. Main Features of Culture

1. *Culture is encompassing:*

Culture encompasses all aspects, which affect people in their day lines.

2. *Culture is general and specific:*

Generally, all human societies of the world have a culture. It distinguishes them from other nonhuman beings. Specifically, there are as specific cultures as there are diverse peoples in the world. Humanity shares a capacity for culture (general), but people live in particular cultures where they are encultured.

3. *Culture is socially learned*

There are different ways of learning something. These are:

- Individual situation learning; this means an individual animal or person learns something by himself/herself through as specific situations lead him/her.

- Social situational learning; this involves learning from other member of a group, though imitation. Even animals can learn this way.
- Cultural learning; this is uniquely human. It is possible only through the utilization of intelligence and the ability to communicate through attaching meanings to words, objects or things. This is called **symbolic communication**. People learn culture directly and through observation and social interaction.

4. Culture is symbolic

Symbolic thought is unique and crucial to humans and to culture. Symbolic thought is the human ability to give a thing or event an arbitrary meaning and grasp and appreciate that meaning. A symbol is verbal or nonverbal within a particular language or culture that comes to stand for something else. There is no obvious natural or necessary connection between a symbol and what it symbolizes. Language is one of the distinctive capacity and possession of humans. Culture encompasses language, and through language, culture is communicated and transmitted.

5. Culture seizes nature

Culture imposes itself on nature. It suppresses the natural, and biological instinct in us and express it in particular ways. For example, we as biological beings feel the desire for food; but what type of food to eat, how many times per day to eat, with whom to eat, how much to eat, how fast or slow to eat, etc are all determined by the cultural values and norms of a particular group of people. Or, we feel the desire to urinate, but one can not do that any time and anywhere, unless one is an animal, an immature child or a mental patient.

6. Culture is shared

It is a possession of individuals as members of a social group; it is learned by observing, listening, talking and interacting with other people. Culture shared give people common experiences.

7. Culture is patterned

Cultures are not haphazard collection of customs and beliefs, but are integrated, patterned systems. The parts are interrelated. If one changes the other changes. For instance, if women joint work outside homes are disrupted

its effect will be felt in marriage, family size, the way children are reared, division of labor in the family, etc.

8. People use culture creatively

There is difference between ideal culture and real culture. What culture-rules say and what people do may be different; cultural rules tell us what to do and how to do it, but we don't always do what the rules dictate. We use culture creatively.

2.3. Components of Culture

The components of culture are the following:

- *Culture region:* is the geographical territory in which a particular culture prevails. It is marked by all the characteristics of a culture, including modes of dress, building styles, farms and field and other material manifestation.
- *Culture trait:* a single element of normal practice in a culture. For example, the wearing of a turban is a culture trait of Muslim society; eating of a raw meat as the culture trait of most Ethiopian people; or eating with

certain utensils (knife, fork or chopstick) is a culture trait for Europeans.

Culture complex: a combination of different culture traits in a meaningful way

Culture systems: Culture complexes having traits in common make up culture systems.

The concepts of culture trait, complex and system need further elaboration. Culture traits are not necessarily confined to a single culture. More than one culture system may exhibit a particular culture trait, but each will consist of a discrete combination of traits. Such a combination is referred to as a culture complex. For example, in many cultures, the herding of cattle is a trait. However, cattle are regarded and used in different ways by different cultures. The Massai of East Africa could be good examples for this. Although the Maasai culture complex is only one of many cattle keeping complexes, no other culture complex exhibits exactly the same combination of traits as that of Massai.

Culture complexes have traits in common, and so it is possible to group within complexes together as culture

systems. Ethnicity, language, religion, health beliefs and practices, marriage and family system, political organization and economic activity, etc all make up the culture system of a given society or country.

2.4. Some Important Related Concepts

2.4.1. Culture and its different levels

- *National culture*: refers to experience, ideologies and beliefs learned and values shared by citizens of the same nation.
- *International culture*: refers to cultural traditions that extend beyond national boundaries through borrowing or diffusion.
- *Subcultures*: refers to associated subgroups in the same society. All cultures contain diversity based on such factors as religion, ethnicity, income, residence, etc.

2.4.2. Universality, Particularity and Generality

- ***Cultural Universality***

Anthropology assumes that all human beings are fundamentally alike and they share the same basic interests. All people all over the world have certain common obligations one to another. All people are members of a single community; they all have the same root and destiny. This belief is either explicit or implicit in most of the great world religions. However, it is by no means acceptable to many people in many advanced societies. However, this fundamental anthropological doctrine was accepted as a truth.

Certain biological, psychological, social and cultural features of human beings are universal; others are merely generalities, common to several but not to all human groups. Still other cultural features are particularities unique to certain cultural traditions.

- *Biological universals*: long period of infant dependency; year round sexuality; a complex brain that enables to use symbols, languages,

tools, etc. whether “modern” or “primitive” all people share these universal biological features.

- *Psychological universals*: arise from human biology and from experiences common to human development in all cases: growth in the womb, birth, interaction with parents, etc
- *Social universals*: life in groups, family, food sharing, exogamy, incest taboo, etc. For example, all people prohibit sexual contact or marriage between individuals with blood relations. Such kind of sexual contact is known as incest. It is regarded as a taboo, that is something unmentionable or forbidden to touch or talk about.

Cultural Generalities

Cultural generality refers to regularities that occur in different times and places but not in all cultures. Cultural generalities may be explained by diffusion of cultures from one place to another. It could be through contacts, trades, wars, etc; or by independent invention; this means two or more societies may invent or create similar cultural belief or

practice independently, not by copying or imitation. Examples for this include: nuclear family, monogamy, strict control over women's virginity, etc.

Cultural particularities:

These are cultural traditions which are unique to only few societies. They occur rarely. For example, Homosexuality or lesbianism as a way of life, polyandrous marriage practice, eating of raw meat, etc

2.4.3. The Concept of Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism

Ethnocentrism is the tendency to apply one's own cultural values in judging the behavior and beliefs of people raised in other cultures. It is a cultural universal. People everywhere think that familiar explanations, opinion, and customs as true, right, proper and moral. They regard different behavior as strange or savage.

Cultural relativism is the opposite of ethnocentrism, the argument that behavior in a particular culture should not be judged by the standards of another: The problem with this position is that in its extremeness it argues that there is no

superior, international or universal morality, that the moral and ethical rules of all cultures deserve equal respect. The anthropologists' main aim is to present accurate accounts of cultural phenomena. They do not have to approve customs such as infanticide, cannibalism or torture. Anthropologists respect human diversity. Although they are sensitive to objectivity, sensitivity and a cross-cultural perspective, they respect international standards of justice and morality.

2.4.4. Language as the Component of Culture

Language is one of the corner-stones of national identity, of cultural unity, and of community cohesion. Old languages with historic roots and languages spoken by threatened minorities are nurtured and fostered by their speakers. But language can also be a weapon in cultural conflict and in political strife.

Language is the essence of culture and no culture exists without it; when a people's language is perceived to be threatened, the defensive response is often passionate and protective. People tend to feel passionately about their language, especially when they sense that it is threatened.

Language is the essence of culture, and culture is the life of society; without language, culture could not be transmitted. Passion for language is not felt only by small groups whose languages are threatened by extinction. It is also exhibited by cultures whose languages are spoken by tens, even hundreds of millions

2.5. Culture and Its Influence on People's Behavior

Culture is both public and individual, both in the world and in people's minds. Anthropologists are interested in not only in public and collective behavior but also in how individuals think, feel and act. The individual and culture are linked because human social life is a process in which individuals internalize the meanings of public (i.e. cultural) message. Individuals influence culture (either alone or in groups) by converting their private understandings into public expressions.

The issue of culture and the individual is studied in psychological anthropology. This field is interested in the ethnographic and cross-cultural study of differences and similarities in human psychology. Individual personality, lifestyles, basic attitudes and character are all reflections of

the cultural background of the individuals. The processes of enculturation and socialization work a powerful influence in the behavioral pattern and character development of individuals. Health behavior is just an aspect of the overall social behavior of individuals and the individuals behaviors are reflections of their societal and cultural backgrounds.

In short, the cultural values, norms, beliefs and practices of a group of people or any social group are related to the specific behavioral and character aspects of the individual person who is part of that culture. The person's living styles, life philosophy and attitude are all very important in determining his or her health behavior and condition. That is, certain disease types are observed to be prevalent among a certain group of people or sections of society. This shows the social and cultural origins of some important health problems, and if these origins are addressed many of the health problems may be solved.

2.6. Unit Summary and Review Questions

2.6.1. Unit Summary

The commonsense meaning of culture, as we use it in our ordinary conversations, is often too much limited in scope.

It does not capture the complex aspects of culture. However, culture is defined as being equivalent to all the group learned and shared behaviors, beliefs, practices, institutions, of a society or a group of people; all the material and non-material objects created and used by the group is culture. Anything apart from the naturally, biologically occurring thing is cultural.

The concept of culture has been defined in quite several ways; there are as many definitions as there are writers in the fields of anthropology or sociology. One of the most often cited definitions of culture was that which was attempted by a British anthropologist by the name of Tyler. His definition basically equates culture with all the habits and capabilities that a person acquires as a member of a group.

All human beings are cultured; there is no cultural superiority or inferiority among societies. Cultures vary according to the ecological, economic and historical backgrounds of people. Some cultural beliefs and practices are universal, meaning they are found among all human groups; others are generalized, meaning they are practiced by most peoples in the world; while others are particular, meaning they are limited to few human groups. Culture has components within it; culture traits represent the simple strands or elements in a people's culture, like the use of knife or fork when eating food; culture traits combined together are culture complexes, and culture complexes combined together give us the culture pattern of a people.

Culture and the behaviors of individual persons in group or society are intimately tied together. Individuals usually behave, act, think, and view things according to the general cultural values, norms, beliefs of the group to which they belong. Peoples' character and personality types are mainly the reflections of their culture.

2.6.2. Review Questions

1. What is culture according to your commonsense understanding? How does this differ from the anthropological definition of culture?
2. Identify at least five cultural beliefs and practices which you think are universally practiced among all Ethiopian peoples.
3. Identify at least three cultural beliefs and practices which you think are generally found in most parts of Ethiopia
4. Give examples of cultural particularities in Ethiopia.
5. Mention at least three diseases which you think are associated with the social behavior, life styles and cultural practices of people. Explain why you think so.

UNIT THREE

Kinship, Marriage, The Family And Health Issues

3.0. Objectives

At the end of this unit, the students will be able to:

- Define the concepts of kinship, marriage, the family;
- Describe the relationship that exists between marriage, the family and health;
- Appreciate the diversities in marriage and family practices in Ethiopia;
- Understand the changes in and current problems of marriage and family systems in Ethiopia;
- Understand and appreciate the psycho-social functions of marriage and the family and the fact that a healthy person is, to a greater extent, the result of a healthy marriage and family.

3.1. The Concept and Definition of Kinship

Kinship is considered as the life blood or the social building blocks of the people anthropologists study. In non-industrialized, non-literate cultures, kinship, marriage and the family form the basis of social life, economic activity and political organization. The behavior and activities of people in such societies are usually kinship –oriented.

Thus, one of the main concerns of anthropologist in studying the ways of life of small-scale, non-industrial societies is to understand the principles of kinship, marriage and the family. In contemporary, modern societies, most people's contacts outside the home are with non-relatives. However, people in non-industrial cultures spend their lives almost exclusively with relatives. Everyone is related to, and spends most of his/her time with, everyone else, and rules of behavior attached to particular kin relationship are basic to every day life.

Kinship is defined as the network in which people are related to one another through blood, marriage and other ties. Kinship is a kind of social relationship that ties people. Kinship can be created through three ways:

1) *Through blood*: this is the principle of consanguinity. A consanguine is a person who is related to another person through blood. Consanguine includes kin, not friends. E.g., a parent's (father/mother/grand-parent) relation to a child; relation between siblings (brothers and sisters); an individual's relation to his/ her uncle, aunt, niece or nephew; etc

(2) *Through marriage*: this is the principle of affinity. E.g. kinship ties between husband and wife; husband and his wife's group; wife and her husband's group, etc

(3) *Through adoption, fostering, god-parenthoods, etc*: This is called the principle of fictitious kinship. Fictitious kinship is, in other words, a kind of relationship in which two individuals create a kind of parent-child relationship without any blood or marriage ties.

3.2. Defining Marriage

Marriage is defined as basically a sexual union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are considered as the legitimate off- spring of both parents.

The main purpose of marriage is to create new social relationships, rights and obligations between the spouses and their kin, and to establish the rights and status of children when they are born. In traditional, simple societies, marriage is often more of relationship between groups than one between individuals. In industrial societies, it is more of individual matter. The idea of romantic love is less common in tribal (non-industrial) societies. Marriage thus is a group concern in such societies. Marriage in industrial societies joins individuals and relationship between individuals can be severed (broken) more easily than those between groups.

3.3. Types of Marriage

Generally marriage is classified into monogamy and polygamy. Monogamy is marriage which involves a man and a woman. Monogamous marriage is very common in most societies of the world. Polygamy (also called plural marriage) is permitted in many cultures. The two kinds of polygamy are polygyny and polyandry. The former involves multiple wives (a man marrying more than one woman) and the latter involves multiple husbands (i.e. one woman married to more than one man). Polygyny and polyandry

are found in various social and cultural contexts and occur for many reasons; polygyny is much more common than polyandry. There are demographic, economic, ecologic and other reasons for plural marriages. In Ethiopia, plural marriages, particularly a man marrying more than one woman is common in most south and south west parts and Muslim societies.

3.4. Rules of Marriage

There are two types of rules of marriage: These are endogamy and exogamy. Endogamy is a marriage rule which requires that people marry within their own social group (e.g. their own tribe, nationality, religion, race, community, social class, etc). On the other hand, exogamy requires that people marry outside a group to which they belong. It bars marriage within smaller inner circle, i.e. one's own close relatives. One of the main concerns of exogamous marriage rule is prohibition of incest, i.e. marrying or sexual contact between blood relatives.

3.5. Marriage Payments

Marriage is regarded as a contractual agreement between different parties (groups). There are two types of marriage payment. These are bride-wealth and dowry. The former is marriage payment made to the bride and/or her group, in terms of money, material gifts and labor service. Dowry refers to marriage gifts made to the woman usually by her family.

3.6. Definition and Types of The family

A typical, model family in today's modern society consists of a husband, wife and their dependent children. This is called **nuclear** family. But a more general definition of family considers the family as any social group of people who are united together by ties of marriage, ancestry or adoption, having the responsibility for rearing children. A family in many small- scales, tribal societies may constitute a husband, his wife/wives, his wife's/ wives' children and/or the wives and children of his sons. This form of family is called **extended** family.

3.7. The Social Functions of the Family

The family the most basic unit of all social institutions and the building block of any society. It is so important to individuals and society because it responds to some of the fundamental human needs, both individual and collective. These needs include the needs for love and emotional security, the need to regulate sexual behavior, the need to produce new generations, the need to protect the young and the disabled (the sick), and the need to place people in a social order.

The most important psycho-social function of the family is **socialization**. It is the process by which new born children are trained in the society's values, norms, standards of behaviors and action, etc. Socialization is essential to the personality, emotional, social and intellectual development of children. Without proper socialization children would end up being mere biological beings, or they would develop anti-societal and social attitudes and behaviors.

The other important psycho-social functions of the family in Ethiopia and many other traditional societies is providing social support, psychological comfort and physical care and protection for the young, the sick, the disabled and the

aged. Such families exert powerful authority on the behaviors of children; this is particularly true regarding children's sexual behavior. One of the reasons for the widespread nature of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS could be the weakening of the traditional authority systems of the family.

3.8. Trends in, and Problems of, Contemporary Marriage and the Family

Due to various factors such as the powerful influence of modernization, changes are taking place in the marriage and family systems. The types and volume of problems being faced by our contemporary society are enormous. However, not all of the changes are negative; some may be beneficial.

A simple comparison of the traditional (past) and modern (contemporary) marriage and family systems will show that many things have changed. One of the changing aspects is the issue of divorce. Divorce is the breakdown of marriage. Official statistics show that even in Ethiopia, the divorce rate is increasing at an alarming rate. Today it is easier for a couple to get divorced than it was in the past. Even

minor reasons may be regarded as a cause for divorce today. Divorce has many social, psychological and related consequences.

Some of other important aspects of marriage and the family in Ethiopia include the following:

- Early marriage and marriage by abduction are now decreasing in most parts of the country. It may be due to the influence of education and governmental and NGO interventions.
- Wife inheritance or what anthropologists call *levirate* marriage is also decreasing. This form of marriage, in which a brother of a deceased (dead) husband has cultural/ social right and duty to take the wife as his own, is common in most traditional societies. Its opposite is called *sororate* marriage. This is marriage practice in which a man has the right to take the sister of his wife when his wife dies.
- Fewer people are getting married today, especially in modern societies. Many people now choose to remain single for a long period of time or all of their lives. It may be due to various reasons. Some

choose to live in simple cohabitation, that is, sexual attachment between two persons without any legal formalities. Some may live in multiple sexual partnerships, in which case a person has sexual ties to more than one sex at the same time.

- Most people are getting married later in life. People are delaying marriage for various reasons nowadays.
- Many people are living alone (remaining single), cohabiting with some one to whom they are not married, bearing children outside of marriage, or marrying more than once.
- Many families are becoming single-headed families. In many cases, it is common to see one-parent families where women are the heads. In fewer cases, men or husbands may be the family heads. This condition happens when one of the parents is absent from the family due death, divorce, desertion or other temporary separation. Husbands may be away from homes for long period of time, working in far away areas as migrants or government employees.

- Arranged marriage is becoming less and less common. Young people are now freer to decide whom to marry, when to marry, where to live after marriage, etc. Parent's or familial intervention was very high in the past. Women particularly had no power to decide about their marriage rights.
- Premarital sex is becoming more and more common today. In the past, it was highly probable that the couple starts sex within marriage and children are born within marriage; but now, people exercise sex before marriage, and the woman may get pregnant before marriage.
- Society's value on women's virginity is also somewhat declining. In the past, a woman is required to maintain her virginity until marriage and wedding day. If she is found deflowered (i.e., found that she lost her virginity) it would bring much shame and disgrace upon her and her family, and she would be stigmatized.

3.9. Unit Summary and Review Questions

3.9.1. Unit Summary

Kinship relationship is basic to a traditional society. Understanding the principles of kinship, marriage, and the family; the diverse forms of family and marriage practices; the values and norms that are associated with them; etc is very important. Marriage and the family form the foundation of all societies; without sound and proper family and marriage systems, society will collapse. Many of the contemporary social and health problems in our society may be due to the ills of family and marriage system. Although some of the changing trends in family and marriage systems are positive and beneficial especially to women, many are negative and dangerous. One example is divorce, the breaking down of marriage; divorce results in family disorganization and many other psycho-social problems. The street children problem and the ever increasing number of older and disabled persons taking to the streets (i.e., going to streets for begging) may be due to the breakdown of traditional marriage and family systems.

3.9.2. Review Questions

1. How is kinship different from other forms of social relationships?
2. What forms of marriage are practiced in your area? What is the problem with levirate and sororate forms of marriage?
3. Describe the advantages and disadvantages of nuclear and extended family forms.
4. If men marry in your areas more than one woman, explain the reasons behind. Is such a practice declining or increasing? Why?
5. Discuss the psycho-social and health effects of early marriage and marriage by abduction.
6. Why do you think that many people these days are delaying their marriages?
7. Discuss advantages and disadvantages of marriage based on romance (i.e., love relationship where individuals make free decisions)? What are the advantages and disadvantages of arranged marriage? What are the effects of arranged marriage on women's health?

8. Discuss aspects of family and marriage systems that have changed in your area. Which ones are positive and which ones are negative?



UNIT FOUR

Gender, Ethnicity, Race And Health Issues

4.0. Objectives

At the end of this unit students will be able to, among other things,

- Define the concepts of gender, ethnicity and race;
- Understand and appreciate gender, racial and ethnic influences on health;
- Differentiate between biological and socio-cultural aspects of gender; and
- Identify and be aware of the gender -, ethnic- and racial-based prejudices, stereotypes and discriminations in a given country.

4.1. Defining the Concept of Gender

There is difference between sex and gender. Sex differences between men and women are biological or natural. Men and women differ both in primary sexual characteristics, such as genitalia and reproductive organs, and in secondary sexual characteristics, such as breasts,

voice, hair distribution over the body, etc. They also differ in average weight, height and physical strength.

The term *gender* includes all the traits or characteristics that a culture assigns to males and females. It refers to the social and cultural construction of male and female characteristics.

4.2. Gender Role Socialization:

Many of the behavioral differences between males and females are the results of gender role socialization. Every society has its own beliefs, values and norms regarding what a female or a male should look like or how they should behave or act. Gender roles are the tasks and activities that a culture assigns to the male and female sexes. Gender roles vary with environment, type of economic activity, peoples' adaptive strategy, and level of social complexity.

4.3. Gender Stereotypes and Stratification:

4.3.1. Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are over-simplified but strongly held ideas about the characteristics of males and females. A

stereotype is a very strong preconceived idea or attitude in the minds of people about something. It is often very difficult to delete this stereotype. Stereotypes of gender may be negative in most cases and sometimes positive. For example, there are more negative gender stereotypes against females or women than there are against males. Most societies usually hold an undermining stereotype about women. This is especially very common in traditional, rural societies.

4.3.2. Gender Stratification

Gender stratification describes an unequal distribution of rewards (socially valued resources, power, prestige and personal freedom) between men and women, reflecting their different positions in a social hierarchy. Gender stereotypes open the way for gender stratification. This means that men and women or males and females do not have equal access to society's resources. Beginning from childhood, boys and girls are socialized or trained in what the society regards as acceptable and normal way of behavior or life for the sexes. Girls are taught to be submissive to boys; boys are trained to be aggressive, more outgoing, strong, talkative, etc. The male sexes are

provided with more power prestige, privilege and respect than the female sexes.

Gender stratification has led to more men in positions of influential economic, social and political importance. There are few female sexes in high-ranking social, economic and political positions. Males have more decision making power than females. This is the case in most societies. This is not due to the low intelligence and performance level of females, although it is often thought as such. It is the result of the gender role socialization process, gender ideologies and stratification.

4.4. Implications of Gender role Socialization for Health

Gender role socialization among other things creates unfair burden on women. Starting from childhood, girls are often, especially in rural areas, burdened with higher work load than boys in the household division of labor. This may have an adverse effect on the health of women. On the other hand, boys are often taught to be tough, involve in aggressive behaviors, adventures and risk takings. This may partly explain why there are often cases of morbidity among females than males. On average, females tend to

be more morbid than males, and males tend to enjoy better health than females. However, mortality rates tend to be higher for males than for females. This may be explained partly by social and cultural reasons and partly by biological reasons.

Some research findings show that, on average, women live longer than men for both biological and socio-cultural factors. Risky social and health behaviors such as smoking, *chat* chewing, drug addiction, fighting, involvement in criminal activities, alcoholism, adventures, etc are mainly the causes for shorter life expectancy for males than for females.

Some gender based traditional obstetric and gynecologic practices also put women in a more disadvantaged position than men. Food avoidance practices during pregnancy for example may affect women adversely.

4.5. Defining Ethnicity and Race

Ethnicity refers to identification with, and feeling part of an ethnic group, and exclusion from certain other groups because of this affiliation. It is based on cultural similarities

and difference in a society or nation. The similarities are with members of the same group; the differences are between that group and others.

Members of an ethnic group share certain beliefs, values, habits customs and norms. They define themselves as different and special because of cultural features. This distinction may arise from language, religion, common historical experience, geographic isolation, kinship or race. Markers of ethnic groups may include a collective name, belief in common descent, a sense of solidarity, and an association with a specific territory which the group may or may not hold.

Members of an ethnic group may define themselves-and /or be defined by others as different and special because of their language, religion, geography, history, ancestry, or physical traits. When an ethnic group is assumed to have a biological base (absolute "blood" or genetic material) it is called a *race*. However, race is both a cultural construct and a discredited biological term. When anthropologists say that race is a cultural or social construct, they mean it is created socially by people, not naturally or biologically existing. Race, like ethnicity in general is a cultural

category (construction, or product) rather than a biological reality. The different ethnic and racial groups are usually results of peoples' perceptions of how different they are from others.

Thus, it is difficult to define races biologically, even though the average citizen conceptualizes (or understands) it in biological terms. The belief that races exist and are important is much more common among the public than it is among scientists. That is, it is the ordinary people who talk about races in biological terms, not the scientists. As far as anthropology is concerned, all people are fundamentally alike in basic bio-psychic make-up, despite the outward physical variations.

This being the real fact, people since the old times have believed that there are superior and inferior races, and this belief is still rampant even in so-called modern societies. It is the source of exploitation and domination of the minority groups by the majority.

In general, clearly, races are culturally constructed categories that may have little to do with actual biological differences. Furthermore, the validity of race as a biological

term has been discredited. That is it is no longer accepted as a scientific fact.

4.6. Ethnic and Racial Discriminations and Inequalities in Access to Health and Quality of Life

Ethnicity and race relations can be expressed in peaceful multiculturalism or in discrimination or violent inter-ethnic confrontation. Ethnic and racial conflicts often arise in reaction to prejudice (attitudes and judgments) or discrimination (action). Prejudice means devaluing (looking down on) a group because of its assumed behavior, values, capabilities or attributes. Discrimination refers to policies and practices that harm a group and its members. Discrimination may be *de facto* (that is, practiced, but not legally sanctioned) or *de jure* (that is, part of law). The most extreme form of ethnic and racial discrimination is called *genocide*. Genocide is the deliberate elimination of a group of people through mass murder. Institutional discrimination refers to programs, policies, and arrangements that deny equal rights and opportunities to particular groups of people.

Dominant groups may try to destroy the cultures of ethnic groups; this is called *ethnocide*. Ethnocide in other words is the purposeful destruction of the cultural beliefs, practices and institutions of a minority people by the dominant group. This may be done through forced assimilation of the minority group into the way of life of the dominant group.

Ethnic and racial stereotypes are the sources for the ethnic and racial discrimination in a given society. They are the strongly held (often negative) assumptions, beliefs and attitudes people have towards a member or members of a certain ethnic group. Such wrong ideologies lead to ethnic and racial stratification and discrimination.

Access to different opportunities like quality of life, better health care, educational opportunities, etc vary among the various ethnic and racial groups. People belonging to a dominant group may enjoy better quality of life, better health care, higher life expectancy, low morbidity and mortality, better educational opportunities, etc. On the other hand, people belonging to the so-called minority ethnic and racial groups may suffer from poor living conditions, poor health care services, low quality of life measured by high rate of infant and maternal morbidity and mortality, low

life expectancy, limited or no access to better educational opportunities, etc. The best example of such kind of ethnic and racial discrimination may be that of the former Republic of South Africa, during its Apartheid, racial government. The system legally promoted ethnic and racial discrimination, (*de jure*). The few European white settlers enjoyed all of the good indicators of life, while the black majority of African population suffered from all of the mentioned problems.

Although in the current world system there may be no *de jure* ethnic and racial discrimination, discrimination still exist in many parts of the world in different subtle (that is easily unrecognizable) ways. Minority groups may still be suffering from such discriminations. They may be denied equal access to various opportunities. Our world is now facing huge problems of refugees. Refugees are those people who are made to leave their living areas and countries due to various reasons, including discrimination. Among other things, they face the problems of poor health care, high rates of morbidity and mortality, limited access to social and economic opportunities, although the concerned agencies make efforts to address their problems.

4.7. Unit Summary and Review Questions

4.7.1. Unit Summary

The concepts of gender, ethnicity and race are very important in anthropology. Studies of gender, ethnic and race focus on the social and cultural dimensions of these issues. Anthropology assumes that there is no inferiority or superiority between males and females, as well as between the different groups of people in the world. All people, male or female, white or black, Amhara or Oromo, are fundamentally alike, and share the same basic bio-psycho-social characteristics, despite outward natural or physical differences. However, people from the very beginning have used the sex and physical differences as the justification for the inferiority of one group or superiority of another group. Due to various historical incidents some groups become dominant and others become minority. The dominant group have exploited and oppressed the minority group.

Gender, ethnic and racial stereotypes and ideologies that exist in a given society are the sources for the stratifications and discriminations. These lead to the unequal distribution of economic, social and political power

and resources between males and females as well as between one ethnic group and the other. Throughout the history of human beings, such discriminations have been openly and explicitly practiced. This is called *de jure* discrimination. But now days, due to the advancement in social sciences and wide acceptance of the universal equality of all human beings, such kinds of discriminations have been legally abandoned. However, they still exist in subtle manners.

Wide gaps still exist in the quality of life, educational and economic opportunities, health conditions, etc, between males and females as well as between the various groups of people. Minority groups in different parts of the world are still enduring many social, economic, health problems. People are still being forcefully expelled from their homes and countries and are exposed to many problems.

4.7.2. Review Questions

1. What is the difference between sex and gender?
2. Why are females found in lower social, political and economic positions than males in most cases in Ethiopia?
3. Mention at least ten gender stereotypes that may be negative or positive which undermine women and favor men.
4. What are the trends in the status of women in your community? Are there positive changes? If yes, what are the reasons?
5. What health problems do women face in your community due to gender stratifications and discriminations?
6. What is the difference between ethnicity and race?
7. Are there cases of ethnic and racial prejudices, stereotypes and discriminations in Ethiopia, and in your community? Mention and discuss some of them.
8. Are there cases of inequalities in access to opportunities such as better health care services among the different ethnic groups in Ethiopia and in your area? If yes, give examples.

UNIT FIVE

The Anthropology Of Religion

5.0. Objectives

After learning this topic, students will be able to

- Define religion;
- Describe the religious diversities that exist in the world;
- Appreciate the role and function of religion in society;
- Appreciate the relation between religion and health.

5.1. What is the Anthropology of Religion?

The anthropology of religion is a specialized field of study, which is concerned with the relation between the sacred and society. The term *sacred* means “that which is set apart or regarded with great respect, fear and reverent (or worshipful) attitude”. The main focus of the anthropology of religion is understanding, analyzing and explaining the relation between man and the supernatural and the

associated beliefs, practices and institutions. The anthropologists of religion investigate, among others,

- The social origins of religion,
- The role of religion in the development of mankind and the society,
- The function of religion in the every-day lives of individuals and communities,
- The relation between religion and other aspects of culture and social life,
- The contents of religious beliefs and practices, and
- Inter-religious (inter-faith) issues.

5.2. Definition of Religion

It is difficult to precisely define what religion is as it manifests itself in so many different ways. However, scholars including anthropologists and sociologists have attempted to define religion in various ways. Generally, religion is defined as *that aspect of culture which relates man with the sacral and the supernatural*. More specifically, religion may be defined as *a system of beliefs, practices and philosophical values concerned with the definition of the sacred, the comprehension of life and salvation from the problem of human existence*.

Religion, like language, lies at the heart of culture. The two are virtual strands (the most easily recognizable, building blocks) in the fabric of society. In many societies less dominated by modern technology, religion is the real binding force, the dominant rule of daily life; from eating habits to dress codes, religion sets the standard for life in such societies. Religion in non-Western societies is so vital a part of culture that it practically constitutes culture. Religion and culture become difficult to distinguish one from the other. In short, it is a vital element of human culture.

5.3. Types and Functions of Religion

Anthropologists generally classify religion into two categories. These are the "world" or global religions and the religions of pre-literate or tribal societies. World religions are those concerned with the interpretation of sacred texts and the spreading of faith to others. These include Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Confucianism, and Shintoism, among others. The religions of non-literate or tribal societies are mainly concerned with the pragmatic (practical) benefits to be gained from the correct performance of rituals or observance of the correct

taboos. They are less concerned with the finer points of theology or personal salvation.

Religion plays a great role in the every day lives of individuals and communities. It is related to other aspects of culture and social life. Some of the main functions of religion include the following:

- *Religion serves as a form of explanation:* Religious beliefs help to explain some puzzling questions and events in human life and the natural world.
- *Religion serves as an expression of collective life:* Religious beliefs and practices unite people into a single moral community.
- *Religion serves as a means of validating society and its norms:* Religious beliefs and practices can help to produce commitment to society's values and norms among its members.
- *Religion serves as a force for protest and socio-cultural change:* Religion can be a force for mobilizing people in the search for change or protest against the prevailing exploitive and oppressive social-political and economic order.

5.4. Religion and Health/ Medicine

The psycho-social functions of religion are having important health curative effects. Religious commitment and adherence to the religious rules and teachings is associated with health status of individuals, families and communities. Some research findings indicate that those persons who have strong religious affiliation and commitment are found to be relatively in better mental and physical health than those with low or no religious commitment. The degree of suicide rates are also considered to be higher among individuals with less religious commitment.

Religious beliefs, practices and institutions have been important parts of the health care sector through out the centuries. As part of traditional, alternative medicine, religion continues to play a very important role in health care provision. Faith based curing and healings of some important health diseases such as mental illness and various other visible bodily and psycho-somatic diseases are witnessed among many organized religious denominations. In fact, in areas and for people where access to modern, scientific medication is limited, religion

and traditional health beliefs and practices and centers are the best alternatives.

In short, in almost all societies, religious beliefs and practices are important parts of health and health care. In traditional societies, religion and traditional medicine are highly interconnected. In such societies, traditional religious medical beliefs and practices play significant roles in the explanation of causes of illnesses, in the care for patients, in the treatment of diseases-both physical and psychological-and other misfortunes (bad happenings). Religious rituals and prayers accompany all the preparation of traditional drugs and their administration on patients.

5.5. Unit Summary and Review Questions

5.5.1. Unit Summary

The anthropology of religion is one of the specialized fields of study within social/ cultural anthropology. It studies the interaction between mankind, the sacred and the supernatural. Anthropologists of religion investigate the social roots of religious beliefs and practices, how and why religion originated, the religious diversities in the world in

terms of time and space. They also study psycho-social functions of religion in the lives of individuals, families, groups and communities and role organized religion in the socio-political and economic lives of countries.

Generally religion may be defined as that part of a people's culture which connects man to his supernatural beings. More specifically, religion is defined as a system of beliefs, practices, institutions and philosophical values which deal with the definition of the sacred and the secular, the explanation of the origins and meanings of life, the place of man in the cosmos, the ways of salvaging man from the problems of life. The two categories of religion are the world or global religions and the traditional religions. The world religions are mainly concerned with the interpretation of sacred texts and propagation of faiths, whereas the traditional religions are mainly concerned with the pragmatic benefits to be gained from the correct performance of rituals.

Religion has important psycho-social functions in the lives of individuals, families, groups and communities. Its functions can be generally categorized into four: the explanatory function, validating social norms and status

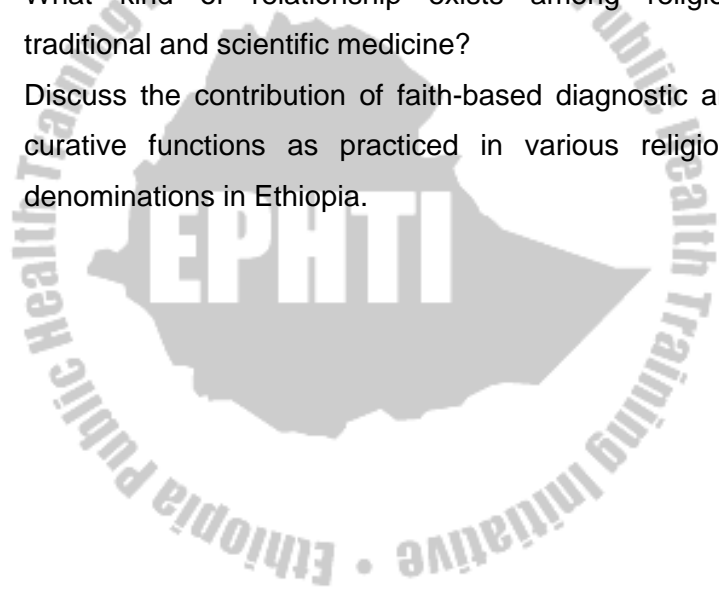
quo, unifying people, and catalyzing social and cultural change.

Religious beliefs and practices make up important component of traditional medicine. Faith based curative and diagnostic practices have been vital parts in the healthcare sector of societies from the very beginning. People still in many parts of the world have religion as their major source of support for health care needs. Integrating religion, traditional medicine and the modern, scientific medicine is thus very important to address the huge health problems of people in specially developing countries



5.5.2. Review Questions

1. What does the anthropology of religion study?
2. Why do anthropologists study religion?
3. How does being strong in religious commitment may help one to be mentally and physically health?
4. Describe the four general social functions of religion.
5. What kind of relationship exists among religion, traditional and scientific medicine?
6. Discuss the contribution of faith-based diagnostic and curative functions as practiced in various religious denominations in Ethiopia.



UNIT SIX

Anthropology And Medicine/ Health

6.0. Objectives

After learning this unit, students will be able to:

- Define medical anthropology;
- Distinguish between the anthropology *of* health and the anthropology *in* health;
- Appreciate the roles, applications and contributions of medical anthropology;
- Describe the merits and demerits of traditional and modern medical systems;
- Appreciate the social and cultural bases of health and disease.

6.1. Medical Anthropology: Definition, History and Concerns

Medical anthropology is a specialized branch of anthropology whose main concern is with the relationship between cultural factors, perceptions, and beliefs on the one hand and health and health disorders on the other.

Some of the concerns interests of medical anthropologists are the following:

- Investigation of the interrelationship between human health, nutrition and cultural beliefs and practices;
- Cross-cultural aspects of nursing cares;
- How people's eating behavior and sexual habits affect the spread of pathogenic organisms;
- The social and cultural contexts of an illness;
- Health-related behavior of people, the social and cultural correlates of that behavior;
- The social, behavioral, demographic and biological characteristics of persons who develop a disease; and
- The relationship of diseases to geographic, ecological and social locale (environment);

Medical anthropology, in general, is growing very rapidly as a specialty (specialized field of study) in anthropology, particularly since the 1950's and 1960's. The growth of this field is mainly due to (1) the increasing interest of social scientists in general and anthropologists in particular in health and illness, and (2) the increasing awareness of medical professionals and health policy makers to social sciences' role in health issue.

6.2 Roles of Anthropologists and Contributions of Anthropology to Health

Generally, medical anthropologists play the following two important roles:

- 1) They work in collaboration with health professionals and researchers, as consultants, advisers and researchers; and
- 2) They work in the field of health and illness by involving in independent research of their own, for the advancement of anthropological knowledge.

Some of the specific applications or contributions of medical anthropology in the field of health and illness include:

- They help hospitals and health agencies to deliver health care more effectively to the people.
- They help the national and international health organizations by providing anthropological data on the cultures of peoples of the world.

- They work with epidemiologists in identifying-the effects of cultural practices and beliefs on the transmission of disease.
- They help health professionals in the area of disease prevention and control.
- They involve in the areas of international health and mental health promotion among various cultures.
- They help in the fields of general health education efforts relating to family planning maternal and child health, improving community sanitation and nutritional counseling.
- They help in enhancing community participation in disease prevention.
- They help people to understand psychological and social factors affecting prevention, participation in case finding and treatment.
- They help health workers in overcoming the constraints in mass drug administration or vaccination, and in overcoming and dealing with cultural constraints on programs of health education.

- Anthropologists work with epidemiologists and psychiatrists in the problem areas of cardiovascular diseases and psychiatric disorders.

6.3 Disease and Health and Their Relation to Socio-economic Organization

Different societies have various conceptions of health, disease and illness. The standards people set for health vary from culture to culture. Behaviors and life styles which are considered as healthy vary from society to society, and from time to time. People's understanding of health and the perceptions of the nature of diseases also vary from culture to culture. Anthropologists argue that, on the basis of cross-cultural research (i.e., research done comparatively in various cultures) perceptions of good and ill- health, along with health threats and problems are culturally constructed. Different ethnic groups and cultures recognize different illnesses, symptoms, and causes and have developed different health care systems and treatment strategies.

Anthropologists also argue that disease vary among cultures and types of economic activity. For example,

certain infectious diseases such as malaria, typhoid, cholera, etc are more common in sedentary societies (peasants and urban communities). Diseases such as schistosomiasis are results of economic developments, which are highly prevalent among societies who practice irrigation systems. For cultural/ religious reasons, they are more common among Muslims than among Christians. Other infectious diseases, particularly sexually transmitted ones, including the HIV/AIDS pandemic, are more common in urban than rural cultures, and along highways. Towns being the main centers of such diseases in most societies of the world, rural people also get infected via various means of contact with towns.

6.4. Theories of Disease Causation: Traditional Beliefs vs. Scientific Explanations

The bio-medical theory of illness causation is just one from among the various theories of illness people hold. Peoples of different cultures have developed for themselves various ways of explanations of how illnesses and misfortunes (bad lucks or disasters) are caused. Such theories for centuries appeared to have worked for them quite efficiently. In fact, peoples of the world have depended on such kinds of

explanations (and not few societies still continue to do so) until the modern, scientific theory of medicine emerged few centuries ago.

Anthropologists have classified the various illness causation theories found among the different cultures of the world into:

- 1) Personalistic disease theories,
- 2) Naturalistic disease theories, and
- 3) Emotionalistic disease theories.

Theory number (1) blames illness on causative agents who are considered to be intelligent beings. This theory is particularly common among most non-western societies. Even if a person may know that mosquito bite causes malaria, he or she often thinks and believes the cause of the illness is due to the power and evil work of such agents as evil spirits, sorcerers, witches, ancestor ghosts, curses made by elders, wrath of supernatural beings, etc.

Theory number (2) is what is commonly referred to as the western or scientific medicine. This attributes diseases to such impersonal, scientifically proved agents like viruses, bacteria, fungi, parasites, etc., and toxic substances. This theory explains the causes of diseases on naturalistic

terms; i.e., diseases are natural occurrences, not supernatural things. Non-western cultures also use naturalistic disease theories. Some people for example believe that eating or drinking hot or cold substances may create a health problem. For example, a menstruating woman in some cultures is not supposed to eat a pineapple; because they believe that the pineapple is a “cold” thing and menstruating is a “hot” thing, the two will clash and cause disease.

Theory number (3) states that illnesses occur due to some intense negative emotional experiences. In some cultures, emotional experiences such as anxiety and fright may cause an illness called *susto*, or what is also called 'soul loss' in anthropological literature. A person who is believed to be caught with this psychological illness may develop symptoms such as lethargy (tiredness or weariness), inactivity, vagueness, distraction (or thought disturbance), etc.

In Ethiopia which is a predominantly a traditional society, traditional, non-scientific explanations of diseases are very important in diagnosis, treatment and management of diseases. Belief in the power of various intelligent agents such as *ginnies*, *mitch*, *seitan*, *ganel*, *budda*, etc to cause

different psychological and physical ailments is very common in most cultures in the country. People in some culture do not go to a modern health care center to seek help for certain types of diseases. They believe that since the diseases is caused by a supernatural power; it should be diagnosed and treated by supernatural ways.

6.5. Health Care Systems

Systems of health vary across time and space. People since time immemorial have developed different health-care systems. Modern systems of health care and its provision as it is practiced in contemporary modern world is a recent phenomenon. People have treated patients and developed means of caring for the sick and the disabled in various traditional ways, and such means of care giving still prevail in almost all non-western societies.

In short, all societies have some form of health care system. Health care system can be defined as "beliefs, customs, specialists, and techniques aimed at [promoting] health and preventing, diagnosing and curing illness." Traditional societies have their own medical practices and specialists who often depend on what specific illness

causation theory is believed. Traditional healers or curers play important roles in treating patients complaining of various health and related problems. They often use magical rituals and prayers in producing medicines and administer them on patients. They are highly respected in the society. Patients believe in their knowledge and skills (often much more than they believe in the expertise of modern medical doctors) and consult them.

6.5.1. A Comparison and Contrast of Scientific and Traditional Medicine

Comparison and contrast of the two systems of medicine might yield some important truths. Scientific medicine commonly called western or modern medicine, is considered to have nothing in common with traditional medicine. Traditional or alternative medical systems have been dismissed as useless by the modern medicine until recently. But now this attitude is being changed. Anthropologists argue that the two systems can complement each other. In many African societies, traditional medical practitioners are being recognized by the modern health professionals and collaborative efforts are being made in research and practice into such fields as

HIV/AIDS, and identification of various plants of medicinal value.

Traditional medical practitioners may be more effective in treating illnesses having psychological grounds, such as mental problems. People most often consult them and they get cured that might not be possible by modern psychiatrists. Patients often get more psychological/emotional comfort and social support when treated by traditional healers.

But in modern medicine, the context of treatment is often one of isolation and alienation (separation), being separated from the group. Western medicine may learn much from the traditional medicine in which "curer-patient-community relationship" is important. In such cases the patient is not alienated and he/she has the needed emotional and social support. Unlike western medicine, traditional medicine sees the patient as not merely a biological person, and pays attention to the social, biological, spiritual and mental aspects. Traditional medical practitioners treat patients effectively as whole beings, using any combination of methods that prove beneficial. This is usually not the case in modern medicine.

Western medicine, no doubt is better than traditional medicine in many respects, as many of its achievements are based on scientific facts. As such, traditional medicine has much to learn from it. True, traditional medicine may not be as effective against bacteria as antibiotics are. And advances in scientific medicine have made it possible to fight against many of the perennial (persistent, recurrent) health problems. Innumerable drugs have been made and are effective in treating various diseases.

However, anthropologists still draw our attention to some of the problems in western medicine. They argue that growth in the medical sciences and techniques of diagnosis and treatment have occurred at an alarming rate. But many of the procedures and practices of the modern medicine lack convincing justification and logic. They mention cases of inequalities in patient-physician relationship and physician-nurse interactions.

6.6. Unit Summary and Review Questions

6.6.1. Unit Summary

Anthropology and health or medicine have developed a strong collaboration and interdependence over the years.

Medical anthropology studies, among other things, the interaction between human social behavior, culture social and economic organization, ecology climate etc on the one hand and health and the occurrence, distributions and prevalence of diseases on the other.

The anthropology in medicine is the application of anthropological knowledge, techniques and approaches to the addressing of health problems. On the other hand, the anthropology of medicine is the anthropological study of the world of medicine, disease and health. Anthropology has many roles and applications in the areas of health and disease.

The standards of healthy behaviors and life styles and the perceptions of the causes, transmission and treatment of diseases vary from society to society. The types and distribution of diseases also vary according to the type of social and economic organizations of societies. Human societies since the very beginning have held different ways of explaining the causes of diseases and other misfortunes. The mechanisms of addressing health problems also have depended on the type of disease causation theories people hold. There are generally two types of health care systems: traditional, non-scientific and modern, scientific medical/

health care systems. Each medical/ health care system has its own advantages and disadvantages. In the past the attitude of the modern medicine towards the traditional medicine has been very negative, but this condition has now improved very much. There is now a promising level of collaboration between the two medical systems.



6.6.2. Review Questions

1. Define the term medical anthropology.
2. What is the difference between the anthropology *in* medicine and the anthropology *of* medicine?
3. Mention the application of medical anthropology in health and medicine.
4. What types of theories of disease causation are held in your area? Mention and explain them.
5. Are there categories or types of diseases in your area that are not taken as a problem to a modern medical system? List at least 10 such diseases and explain why the people prefer to see a traditional health.
6. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of traditional medicine.
7. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of modern medicine.
8. Identify the different types of traditional medical practitioners in your area and discuss the trend in the influence and role of these doctors in the health care sector in your area. What particular roles do women play in this regard? Comparing the past with

the present, what change do you observe in the role and influence of these practitioners?



APPENDIX 1

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