

## MCAT Study Guide: Social Institutions – A Comprehensive Review

### I. Education as a Social Institution

- Definition: Education is more than formal schooling. It is a social institution for transmitting knowledge, skills, values, and norms.
- Hidden Curriculum: Implicit lessons like conformity, obedience, and competition learned through school culture—not part of official curriculum.
- Teacher Expectancy Effect: Teachers' beliefs about students can affect performance (positively or negatively). Linked to self-fulfilling prophecy.
- Educational Stratification: Unequal access to quality education based on race, income, geography. Leads to long-term social inequality.

### II. Family and Kinship

- Definition of Family: A social unit formed by kinship ties—blood (consanguineal), marriage (affinal), or adoption.
- Family Structures: Nuclear Family (parents and children), Extended Family (includes relatives), Marital Structures (monogamy, polygamy, chosen families).
- Social Issues within Family: Marriage, divorce, family violence (child, spousal, elder abuse) with implications for public health.

### III. Religion as a Social Institution

- Types of Religious Organizations: Church (large, integrated), Sect (breakaway), Cult (new, unconventional).
- Religiosity: Includes belief, devotion, practice, and importance of religion in a person's life.
- Religion and Social Change: Acts as both a conservative force and a catalyst for reform.
- Modernization and Secularization: Modernization advances society, while secularization reduces religion's influence.
- Fundamentalism: Strict adherence to traditional doctrines as resistance to secularism.

### IV. Government, Economy, and Power

- Power vs. Authority: Power is the ability to enforce will; authority is legitimate and accepted power.
- Economic Systems: Capitalism (private ownership, profit), Socialism (collective ownership, welfare), Mixed Systems (blend of both).
- Political Systems: Democracy (rule by people), Monarchy (hereditary rule), Authoritarianism (centralized power).
- Division of Labor: Specialization in work increases efficiency but may reinforce hierarchy and inequality.

## V. Health and Medicine as Social Institutions

- Medicalization: Defining non-medical behaviors as medical issues (e.g., ADHD, addiction).
- Sick Role: Talcott Parsons' idea of temporary exemptions and responsibilities when ill.
- Illness Experience: The subjective experience of being sick shaped by culture, stigma, and support systems.
- Social Epidemiology: Study of how race, class, and geography influence disease patterns and health outcomes.