

Social Structure, Social Stratification, and Social Conflict in Society: A Literature Review and Implication for Guidance and Counseling

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Abstract

Social structure, social stratification, and social conflict are fundamental elements in understanding the dynamics of community life and their impact on individual welfare. This article aims to comprehensively examine the concepts of social structure, social stratification, and social conflict, as well as analyze their implications for guidance and counseling practices. The method used is a literature review by examining various relevant scientific sources, both books and reputable journal articles, to obtain a deep conceptual and empirical understanding. The results of the study show that social structure is formed through the interrelationship of status, roles, groups, institutions, norms, and values that regulate patterns of interaction in society. Social stratification creates hierarchical layers that have implications for unequal access to resources, opportunities, and social services. These conditions have the potential to trigger social conflicts arising from individual, cultural, political and economic differences, as well as social changes accelerated by globalization and digital technology. In the context of guidance and counseling, understanding the reality of social structure and stratification is crucial for counselors to be able to provide fair, inclusive, and non-discriminatory services. Therefore, counselors are required to have multicultural competence and conflict management skills to support the optimal development of clients in a diverse and dynamic society.

Keywords: social structure, social stratification, social conflict, guidance and counseling, multicultural counseling



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Introduction

Social structure, social stratification, and social conflict are three key interrelated dimensions in understanding the dynamics of contemporary society. Social structure refers to relatively stable patterns of relationships, including institutions, roles, and networks that both constrain and facilitate the actions of individuals and groups (Ross, 2023). Within this framework, social stratification is understood as the hierarchical differentiation of individuals or groups based on criteria such as wealth, power, occupation, education, gender, and ethnicity, which results in the unequal

distribution of resources and life opportunities (Ali & Faraj, 2025; Orhan, 2023). Class stratification, status, and occupational hierarchy are not merely descriptive phenomena, but are the main mechanisms that reproduce structural inequality and social distance in various industrial and post-industrial contexts (Lu, 2020).

In modern society, hierarchy and stratification do not only appear at the macro level (major classes), but are also manifested in social networks and everyday status negotiated through peer interaction and assessment in various arenas of school life, places of work, community, and digital spaces (Redhead & Power, 2021). This hierarchy has implications for different access to social support, authority, and influence, which in turn affect psychological well-being and vulnerability to conflict (Jan et al., 2024; Vallone & Zurlo, 2024). When inequalities and power relations within social structures and stratifications are not managed fairly, they often trigger various forms of conflict, ranging from interpersonal conflicts, family conflicts, to broader group and communal conflicts (Garfield, 2021).

Social conflicts, whether within the family, organization, or community, have been shown to have a significant impact on an individual's mental health, emotional regulation, and social relationships. Cross-context studies show that prolonged conflict within families and work environments correlates with increased anxiety, depression, somatization, and interpersonal sensitivity, while also exacerbating cycles of hostility and violence (Nangia, 2023; Vallone & Zurlo, 2024). In conflict and post-conflict areas, social and political pressures are intertwined with trauma, but the presence of social support and resilience can act as a buffer against negative psychological impacts (Jan et al., 2024).

In this context, guidance and counseling become strategic arenas for responding to the psychosocial implications of social structures and stratification, as well as the conflicts they generate. Contemporary counseling approaches emphasize the importance of multicultural sensitivity, understanding of the client's social position (class, gender, ethnicity, status), and power dynamics in social relationships as an integral part of assessment and intervention (Ghelani, 2021; Widaningtyas & Sutanti, 2022). Post-conflict research recommends the use of narrative counseling and community-based psychosocial interventions to aid trauma recovery, rebuild social trust, and reduce cycles of hatred (Melnyk et al., 2025; Widaningtyas & Sutanti, 2022). At the micro level, family counseling and conflict mediation highlight the importance of identifying patterns of hostility, training in constructive communication, and developing adaptive coping strategies to prevent the long-term impact of conflict on child development and family well-being (Moxina, 2025; Nangia, 2023).

Method

The method used in this study is a literature review. A literature review is a research method that draws conclusions from various types of reading sources (Snyder, 2019). Data collection was carried out by reviewing scientific articles from various published sources related to Social Structure, Social Stratification, and Social Conflict in Society.

Results and Discussion

The Concept of Social Structure

Social structure is a pattern of permanent relationships between individuals and groups in society. This structure includes social status, social roles, institutions, and social organizations (Mashuri et al., 2025). The term social structure is generally used to describe units or groups that have social relationships with one another, which are relatively permanent and form patterns of behavior and social relationships within a social system. Social structure is also expressed as social institutions and norms that form the framework of the social system, which serves as a guideline for the behavior of actors within the entire system.

The definition of social structure as social relations between different groups, or as the relative permanence of social relationship patterns, points to the idea that society is grouped into structured relationships between groups or a set of rules, with differences in functions, meanings, and goals. Social treatment of individuals with varying social structures can be understood as the interconnection of their positions in varying social strata. Thus, social structure can be identified as (Susilo, 2010): 1) the reciprocal relationship between a unit or group and another unit or group, 2) as enduring patterns of behavior of participants in a social system in relation to others, 3) as institutionalized norms or structured frameworks of knowledge that underlie the actions of actors in a social system.

The definition of structure as institutions or constructed norms that are used as guidelines for the behavior of social actors is important, as the structured causes that occur as signs of a process variation are part of the guidelines that underlie the structure in a social system. This approach is very important in academic literature and the development of various forms of structuralism, and is important in the context of contemporary organizations as organized structures that constitute organizational flexibility, capacity for change and various other factors and are an important issue for management. Social structure may refer to the basis of social systems including economic systems, legal systems, political systems, cultural systems and others. Family, religion, law, economy, and class are all social structures. A social system is the parent of a system consisting of various systems that form a social system (Susilo, 2010).

Social structure is the intertwining of fundamental social elements in society. According to Soekanto (2012), fundamental social elements include social culture, culture, social institutions or social organizations, social stratification, and power and authority. These social elements can change form. The process of change in social elements usually proceeds slowly, but can change suddenly and rapidly if events such as war or revolution occur (Lesmana, 2020). According to Nasrudin & Nursari (2025), social structure in sociological studies consists of various elements and components that form a complex network of social relationships in society. These elements reflect organized patterns of relationships, which enable society to function in an orderly and functional manner. Each element plays an important role in maintaining the continuity of the social system and defining the position of individuals in society.

These elements include (Nasrudin & Nursari, 2025):

1. Social status
Status is a person's position in a social system that reflects their place in the social hierarchy. Status can be ascribed, meaning it is acquired at birth, such as gender or ancestry, or achieved, meaning it is acquired through personal effort, such as education or position.
2. Social role
A role indicates the behavior expected of a person based on their position. Social roles are normative because they are determined by the values and norms that apply in society.
3. Social groups
Social groups can be primary, such as families, where interactions are intimate and personal, or secondary, such as formal and impersonal work organizations. Social groups are the main vehicles for the formation of identity and the learning of social norms from an early age.
4. Social institutions
Social institutions such as family, religion, education, law, and economics are more complex structures that regulate the behavior patterns of society in a broad and sustainable manner. According to Giddens (Nasrudin & Nursari, 2025), social institutions are not static but can be changed by human social actions, albeit within an existing framework.
5. Social norms and values
Norms serve as concrete guidelines for action, while values are general principles that underlie society's worldview. Violations of norms result in formal or informal sanctions, which serve to maintain social order.

Social Stratification in Society

According to Max Weber (Lesmana, 2020), social stratification is the classification of people who belong to a particular social system into hierarchical layers according to dimensions of power, privilege, and prestige. Max Weber sees social stratification as depending not only on economic factors (class), but also on social status (prestige or honor attached to lifestyle) and political power (the ability to influence the will of others even in the face of resistance) (Mashuri et al., 2025). Thus, social stratification refers to the grouping of people into layers based on certain criteria such as wealth, education, power, and prestige.

Social stratification refers to a hierarchical system of social layers within society that creates inequality in access to resources such as power, wealth, and prestige. According to Soekanto (2012), social stratification is a social system that places individuals and groups in different levels, and these positions are maintained institutionally. Stratification can be closed, as in the caste system in India, or open, as in modern societies that allow social mobility. In a closed system, vertical mobility is very limited because status is determined at birth and cannot be changed. Meanwhile, in an open system, a person can move up or down the social ladder depending on their achievements or personal efforts (Nasrudin & Nursari, 2025).

This stratification has real social consequences, such as differences in education, employment, and health services. Social stratification in Indonesia is not only based on economic class, but can also stem from education, political power, and socio-cultural status. In the context of globalization and digital transformation, stratification has also begun to emerge in new forms such as the digital divide or virtual classes (Nasrudin & Nursari, 2025).

Social Conflict

Sociologically, humans are social beings who cannot be separated from social relations, whether in the form of socialization, interaction, or even social conflict. Etymologically, the word conflict comes from the Latin *con*, meaning together, and *fligere*, meaning collision or clash, so it is interpreted as involving two or more parties that clash with each other due to differences. The word *social* is often associated with society. Etymologically, social conflict can be defined as a clash or collision involving two or more parties due to differing elements within society. According to Liliewer (Hodriani, 2023), conflict can be described as a natural opposition in society between individuals or groups of different ethnicities (nationalities, races, religions, classes) due to differences in attitudes, beliefs, values, or needs. Thus, conflict can be defined as an opposition involving two or more parties due to differences.

Conflicts generally arise due to these differences themselves and also due to social changes in society. The following are the types of conflicts according to Hodriani (2023): 1) gender conflict, 2) racial and inter-ethnic conflict, 3) inter-religious conflict, 4) conflict of interest, 5) intergroup conflict, 6) interpersonal conflict, 7) social class conflict, 8) conflict between countries. Conflict arises because of social, economic, and political relationships that seek to legitimize data sources or ownership, social status, and power. Factors that cause conflict include (Soekanto, 2012):

1. Individual differences
Differences in opinions or principles between individuals can lead to conflict.
2. Cultural differences
The existence of ethnocentrism developed by a group can lead to a high possibility of conflict. Ethnocentrism occurs because a group favors its own group and looks down on other groups.
3. Differences in interests
Political interests are usually used by officials to gain positions of power in the political elite. Economic interests are usually related to market (arena) and consumer control.
4. Social change
Conflict arises due to the influence of new ideas that change the social order in a place, such as globalization offering modernization, but on the negative side, offering a culture of Westernization in Asian countries.

Implications for Guidance and Counseling Services

Social science examines how a person's position in the social structure affects their life opportunities, how social inequality is formed, and how social mobility can occur. According to Koentjaraningrat (Mashuri et al., 2025), understanding social structure and stratification is very important in relation to poverty, discrimination, and injustice. The prominent form of variation in human life is the phenomenon of social stratification (levels). These differences do not simply exist, but are the result of a process; a form of life which can be always exists, social activities, or objects. The phenomenon of social stratification will always exist in human life, no matter how simple their lives may be, but its form may differ from one person to another, depending on how they perceive it.

Social stratification is the division of the population or society into hierarchical classes. As long as there is something that is valued in society, and every society certainly has something that is valued, then that thing will become the seed that can grow a layered system in that society (Soekanto, 2012). The thing that is valued may be money or objects of economic value, land, power, knowledge, or perhaps descent from respected individuals. Therefore, this will certainly influence individual behavior patterns not only from the individual's own point of view, but also from the point of view of their social environment.

In relation to the counseling profession, this also presents challenges and opportunities for counselors to provide effective and dignified services to clients/counselees with different social structures and strata. The target of guidance and counseling services are individuals, both individually and in group, who generally target individuals and life (Prayitno & Amti, 2012), but more concretely and directly, it is their attitudes and behaviors that are influenced by aspects of their personality and personal circumstances, as well as their environmental conditions (Winkel, 2021). These attitudes and behaviors in their development and life have led to the formulation of guidance and counseling principles.

Referring to the principles of guidance and counseling services, a counselor must serve all clients/counselees without discrimination based on socioeconomic status, age, ethnicity/race, gender, and so on (Prayitno & Amti, 2012). Professional counselors must not discriminate against their clients (Alawiyah et al., 2020). Meanwhile, conflicts can be resolved through conflict management, which is divided into three parts, namely peace keeping, peace making, and peace building. Conflict resolution is divided into three parts, namely prevention efforts, conflict analysis, and conflict resolution efforts (Hodriani, 2023).

Differences arise due to social structures and social stratification, which can lead to conflict, requiring counselors to be equipped with the skills to provide multicultural counseling. Multicultural counseling is a counseling approach that consciously incorporates culture, race, ethnicity, social class, gender, religion, and other forms of identity as an integral part of assessment, relationships, intervention, and service evaluation. The goal is not only to adapt techniques to the client's cultural background, but also to address power imbalances, discrimination, and social injustice that shape the client's psychological experience (Singh et al., 2020). In the context of social structures and stratification that give rise to conflict (e.g., ethnic, religious, racial, class conflicts), multicultural counseling is seen as a relevant model of psychological and social education services for diverse and post-conflict societies (Widaningtyas & Sutanti, 2022).

Conclusion

Society is a complex social system with structures, stratification, and conflict dynamics that affect the lives of individuals and groups. Differences in status, roles, and social strata give rise to inequality, while social conflict arises as a consequence of diversity in values, cultures, and interests. In the context of guidance and counseling, counselors are required to understand these social realities in order to provide professional, non-discriminatory services that are relevant to the needs of clients from various backgrounds. A multicultural-based counseling approach is necessary so that counselors can play a role in building peace, managing conflict, and supporting individual development amid the diversity of society.

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