

Good essay about social inequalities

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Examples of Inequality and Stratification

Social inequality describes the extent of the differences between various groups in the society (Sernau, 2010). In many societies worldwide, differences among people not only create diverse communities but also establish variations in their access to various opportunities and income sources (Western, et al., 2012). Consequently, the social differences create strata or layers in the society. In the UK, for example, social stratification is observed in the class system where individuals with similar characteristics belong to a particular social class (Savage, et al., 2013).

A typical example of social inequality in the UK is the social difference involving wealth and income. Usually, income covers a person's total earnings from sources such as pension payments, employment, and dividends. Wealth, however, includes income and the aggregate value of assets such as vehicles and land. Frequently, Gini coefficients are used to determine the income inequality in a given society and make inequality comparisons between different countries (BBC, n. d.). For instance, a country with a Gini coefficient close to zero percentage is considered as having a relatively lower inequality level. In the UK, Gini coefficient statistics demonstrates that income disparity has grown in some decades and fallen in others over time. Before 1979, for example, income disparity was systematically below thirty percent but began to increase in the 1980s until 2008 (BBC, n. d.).

Presently, the primary forms of social stratification include caste, slavery, and class systems (Giddens and Sutton, 2012). Sex slavery prevails in many parts of Asia whereas debt slavery is evident in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and

Nepal (International Labour Organization, 2005). The caste system, founded on ascribed statuses such as gender, race, and nationality, originated from Hinduism. Although the Indian government outlawed the system in 1949, vestiges of the caste system persist in India (Desai and Dubey, 2012). Another example of caste systems is the South African apartheid system. The effort of Nelson Mandela in fighting for nonwhite equality helped to outlaw the system in South Africa. Nevertheless, discrimination and prejudice recurs frequently in the country (le Roux, 2014). The typical stratification arrangement globally is the class system, which utilizes achieved statuses to determine an individual's position in the society.

Explanation of Life Chances

Life chances describe the opportunities that individuals can access to improve the quality of their lives (Aldridge, 2004). As such, Max Weber viewed the life chances' concept as the degree to which different individuals access significant societal resources, particularly shelter, healthcare, clothing, education, and food (Kendall, 2015). The differences among life qualities are apparent in a variety of indicators such as physical health, levels of wealth and income, and the accessibility of employment opportunities (Aldridge, 2004). Thus, the absence of poverty and availability of various social support services are some of the determinants of life chances. According to Jones (2012), the place of birth in the UK has a significant influence on the young people's opportunities for accessing university education and employment. Recent studies have demonstrated that the youth in Erdington, Birmingham have three times higher chances of encountering unemployment than the young people in South Kensington,

London (Jones, 2012). The studies, therefore, indicate extensive inequalities in young people's life chances and the urgent need for effective intervention. Policymakers, government organizations, and youth workers should note the ineffectiveness of current systems in addressing inequality issues. Suitable approaches to improving life chances may include the development and implementation of government programs aimed at encouraging self-employment (Jones, 2012).

Explanation of Class, Gender and Ethnicity

Developing countries report higher levels of social inequality, particularly gender disparity, than developed countries (Jayachandran, 2014). Among the developed nations, however, broad inequality gaps have been reported in the UK (The Equality Trust, n. d.). In the country, social stratification is primarily associated with gender, class, and ethnicity (Aldridge, 2004). Social class refers to the socioeconomic status influenced by the economic inequality among groups. Primarily, it is affected by aspects such as material possessions and employment opportunities. Social classes have a significant impact on life chances because they control people's access to essential services, particularly healthcare and education (Aldridge, 2004).

Gender stratification, on the other hand, results from the existence of differences in masculine and feminine social aspects (Little, 2014). In the UK, for instance, particular behaviors, occupations, and emotions are considered masculine whereas others are regarded as feminine (Aldridge, 2004).

In ethnic stratification, the term ethnicity refers to the cultural characteristics of different groups (Sernau, 2010). Typically, ethnic stratification affects life chances by creating differences in people's access to healthcare, education

opportunities, and other indispensable services. The UK has numerous ethnic groups, but the majority group is White. Hence, the ethnic minority groups often suffer more disadvantages than the Whites in the population. For example, current studies show that the unemployment rate for nonwhites in the UK is several times higher than the frequency among whites (Chalabi, 2014).

Explanation for Social Distribution of Inequality by Class and Gender

Different social scientists have employed various theoretical perspectives to explain and analyze social stratification (Crompton, 2008; American Sociological Association, n. d.). Karl Marx, for instance, founded his conflict hypothesis on the view that the modern society comprises only two categories of people: the proletariat and bourgeoisie classes (Livesey, n. d.-a). The bourgeoisie possesses tools of production such as businesses, factories, and equipment, which are crucial to the generation of affluence. The proletariat, however, are the laborers involved in wealth creation. Marx argued that the bourgeoisie exploited the workers in capitalist societies. Hence, he predicted a laborers' revolution in which the employees would gain awareness founded on their experiences of exploitation (Livesey, n. d. -a). As a result, the proletariat would unite in a worldwide revolution and eventually own the production means. Nevertheless, Marx's prediction failed to come true because the growth and modernization of societies allowed the working social classes to acquire education and suitable job skills. As such, they achieved the financial stability that Marx believed was impossible. Additionally, the workers received protection from labor laws and unions,

instead of experiencing augmented exploitation. Eventually, tradespeople and skilled workers began earning wages that were equivalent to their middle-class colleagues (Livesey, n. d. -a).

Max Weber, however, opposed Marx's apparently simplistic perspective of stratification. He pointed out that wealth, prestige, and power were the primary determinants of social class (Livesey, n. d. -b). For example, people can run companies without owning them and still gain benefits such as increased profits. However, the ownership of property can also bring prestige because people often hold wealthy individuals in high esteem. Other sources of prestige, especially intellectual and athletic abilities, can allow individuals to acquire property. Thus, Weber argued that prestige and wealth were intertwined (Livesey, n. d. -b). Power, which refers to an individual's ability to act despite opposition, also influences the social class significantly. Typically, wealthy people appear more influential than poor persons. Nevertheless, an individual's prestige may also help in developing power.

Issues of gender can be understood through three key sociological viewpoints: conflict hypothesis, functionalism, and symbolic interactionism. Functionalists perceive inequality in gender roles as beneficent for societies (Little, 2014). Conflict theorists, however, assert that division of labor based on gender is not necessarily useful to the society because it is maintained by the individuals in power. Thus, the hypothesis views gender inequalities as processes of finding power and dominance (Little, 2014). Symbolic interactionists associate current gender views and social interactions with the development of gender inequalities. For example, men are perceived as being relatively more apt to interrupt women during conversations (Little,

2014).

In conclusion, inequality is a serious issue affecting societies worldwide. Various sociological theories, therefore, have been developed to explicate the phenomena. For example, Weberian and Marxist approaches have been employed to explain the existence of social classes. Although social inequality levels are relatively higher in developing countries, developed nations also face challenges in addressing gender, class, and ethnic disparities. This study has demonstrated that among the developed countries, the UK has reported extremely high levels of social inequalities and stratification. The high disparity levels have had a significant impact on the young people's life chances. Hence, policy makers and youth workers should implement appropriate programs aimed at increasing self-employment opportunities and minimizing the inequalities in life chances.

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