

# Study on poverty and social inequality sociology essay



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Some argue that Britain is the most unequal society in Western Europe, Research conducted by Sutton Trust from 2010 suggests that poverty affects children's ability to do well in schools, the study indicates that just 45 per cent of children from poorest fifth of families were ready to read daily by the age of three compared to 78 per cent of children from richest fifth of families. This proves that British society is unequal; there are social groups that have access to better standards of living than others.

In order for Inequality to take place, some people need to have more than others, creating boundaries in society that stop some people from getting equal status despite their work and effort.

There are several ways of measuring social class, subjective method simply is based on people's perception of what social class they should be in.

However it is quite vague as some people may be middle class and have a lot of money whereas other might have education, lifestyle and manners of the middle class but are poor. Where objective method takes things into account like occupation, unemployment, income, education and so on therefore it is more reliable way of measuring social class. In order to measure social class effectively, stratification is needed to enable evaluation of inequalities; best way to do it is consider morbidity and mortality factors as unemployment or income are not always accurate way of measuring it. Taking someone's occupation into an account is might have problems too, as someone could have good profession and be unemployed and therefore struggling financially. The Registrar General is used by the government to objectively measure social class. It concentrates mainly on occupation.

Education is an important factor when social class is concerned; it is believed that children's social class is important when it comes to their exam success. Education is the best way to predict if the child would get high earning middle-class job. The link between education and earnings has been found using analyses of the Labour Force Survey, They have found that, men who have attained 1-4 GCSEs at grade A-C have higher earnings by 17%, 5 or more GCSEs at grade A-C increases earnings by 41%. A levels increase earnings by 67% and degree increases earnings by 111% compared to someone with no formal qualifications at all.

Researchers from Joseph Row tree Foundation put forward an argument that ' Children growing up in poorer families emerge from school with substantially lower levels of educational attainment' they believe that this is major factor affecting social mobility and poverty. They have found that children from poor backgrounds are brought up in less caring environment than those from richer families; the study suggests that mother's attitude is different depending on their social class. 81% of mothers from rich families hope their 9 year old will go to university compared to just 37% from poor families. Such attitude to education of mothers from poor families is closely associated with lower educational attainment at the age of 11. That factor is contributed to the %6 gap between children from rich and poor families attainment at the age of 11.

The difference in attainment at school grows quickly during the primary school education and is noticeable by the age of 11, when only around three quarters of children from the poorest fifth of family manage to reach the government's expected level at key stage 2, compared to 97% of children

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from the richest fifth. At secondary school the gap between poorest and richest children is not as significant as at the primary school however GCSE's results show that only 21% of poorest fifth manage to get five good GCSE's at grades A-C compared with 75% of richest fifth; it is a staggering 54%.

There are two main social statuses in society; ascribed and achieved, they both indicate how people fit into the society. Ascribed status is given at birth; it does not take any attributes or abilities into an account, like being male or born into the slavery, whilst achieved status is determined by an effort and performance like becoming a doctor or a lawyer

There are many things that are assigned to humans at birth, like gender, race, or position in a family. Those things could be crucial in development and chances of success one might have.

Good example of an ascribed status is gender. It is widely considered that men have it easier in life. In many countries around the world girls and boys education is approached differently, they concentrate on educating boys more than girls as it is believed they will be bread winners and girls will be housewives. Inequalities between men and women have been tackled for decades and there are still differences in earnings, conditions of work or positions in most of those cases men are on top.

Women have gone to work in larger numbers since the 1960s, although their occupations have been determined depending on how masculine or feminine the job is. For example postmen, bus drivers are usually jobs done by men where teachers, nurses, secretaries, have more become female dominated.

Most jobs in service sector are done by women however most jobs at <https://assignbuster.com/study-on-poverty-and-social-inequality-sociology-essay/>

manager level are done by men. That represents traditional approach and therefore reinforces gender inequalities in society.

Every year hundreds of women get discriminated against because they are pregnant. The gap in pay for the same job for men and women is thought of to be at about 13% below there are some statistics that would explore it a bit further.

The research by Labour Force survey conducted in 2005 outlines how average salaries are different between men and women taking into consideration education.

They divided participants of this particular survey into age groups and compared the differences in salaries between men in women taking into account their educational background. This survey reveals that in each category men earn more than women. That accounts for all jobs. Average weekly male salaries per week from all group ages and all education backgrounds were £42 higher than women.

## **Average gross weekly earnings: by sex, highest qualification attained and age, 2005<sup>1</sup>**

### **United Kingdom**

£ per week

16-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-59/64

All working age

## **Men**

Degree or equivalent

356

619

810

862

732

726

Higher education below degree level

366

501

588

619

583

554

GCE A level or equivalent

290

446

545

536

436

470

GCSE grades A\* to C or equivalent

253

410

469

463

503

410

Other (including GCSE below grade C)

253

389

453

435

417

407

No qualifications

250

325

359

366

335

342

All men2

283

483

574

575



487

506

## **Women**

Degree or equivalent

319

528

627

679

651

561

Higher education below degree level

267

384

464

491

488

440

GCE A level or equivalent

250

353

421

364

390

347

GCSE grades A\* to C or equivalent

227

330

331

329

309

308

Other (including GCSE below grade C)

187

378

299

315

302

313

No qualifications

182

300

235

262

259

251

All women2

253

425

433

424

381

397

## **All working age<sup>2</sup>**

270

459

524

515

457

464

1 At spring. Data are not seasonally adjusted and have been adjusted in line with population estimates published in spring 2003. See Appendix, Part 4: LFS reweighting. Males aged 16 to 64, females aged 16 to 59.

2 Includes people who did not state their highest qualification.

## **Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics**

Social mobility is the movement of people within the society over time. It refers to individuals and their change in income. Intergenerational Social mobility measures to which extend people's social status has changed between generations and intragenerational measures how peoples social class changes within their lifetime.

The beginning a rapid increase of UK income inequality is thought of to started in late 1970's. It was described as meritocratic society where poor

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could become rich if they worked hard. However Jo Blanden, Paul Gregg and Stephen Machin conducted a study in 2005 and they believe that social mobility in the UK is not only declining but is also lower than in many other developed countries. They argue that there has been a decline in social mobility in the UK in the last decades and children to poor families are less likely to succeed as they were in the past. Their research shows that UK has lower social mobility levels than many other countries including Canada, Germany and Scandinavian countries. ' Children from poorer families in Australia and Canada have a much greater chance of doing well at school, getting into university and earning more in later in life than children in the United States and the United Kingdom' was the purpose of 2012 two-day summit on social mobility organized by the Sutton Trust and Carnegie Corporation of New York. They compared levels of social mobility in 4 major English speaking countries. The research states that Australia and Canada are around twice as mobile as the UK and the US, the findings were analysed by professor Miles Corak who is world's leading expert on mobility. The evidence suggests that children in the UK and US are at least twice as likely to be born to teenage mothers as children in Australia and Canada. It also shows that in the UK students from higher social class are three times more likely to go to the universities than those from the lowest classes. There is a %46 gap in England between the %65 of students from richer families going to university and the %19 from poorer families. In America the gap is %36 while in Australia it is %32.

Karl Marx is famous for his analysis of Capitalism; his research has led to development of sociology and social sciences. Many of his ideas are

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attributed to political movements in 20th century including communism in Former Soviet Union or China.

Marx's theory concentrates on two main social classes in society, the property owners (Bourgeoisie) and the workers (Proletariat). The Capitalist society required long working hours and new discipline from the workers so they Capitalists could gain more profits out of the labour. The Productivity and profits of the business were really high however it came at the cost of the workers who were being exploited.

Marx believed that Capitalism would be responsible for creation of Communism that was initiated by dissatisfaction of the workers who would develop class-consciousness (an awareness of them being exploited). In Communistic society private properties are taken over by the Government. Communism would have all the benefits of Capitalist system where the government dictates how things should be and where there is only one social class which is working class(Proletariat) and Government who rules them(Bourgeoisie).

Marx's theory of Capitalism has been important for the sociology. He defined social structures that were in favour of few but was disadvantageous for the majority of people. Marx believed that Revolution was going to happen in the Capitalist societies like Great Britain or Germany, however first country where revolution took place was Russia which was relatively undeveloped when it comes to Capitalism. Russia wasn't egalitarian society that Marx hoped for but it was fully controlled by the Russian Communist Party.

Karl Marx encountered some criticism in his theory of Capitalism; his main critic was another German sociologist Max Weber who argued that Capitalist societies could be divided into 4 main social classes (the propertied upper class, the property-less white collar workers, the petty Bourgeoisie and the manual working class) as opposed to two that Marx has described in his research. Weber believed that those divisions within these social classes were greater than Marx had expected therefore suggesting that such divisions could mean that working class wouldn't unite and anti-capitalist revolution would not take place. Weber believed that within social classes there are divisions itself, Marx thought of working class as an economic concept where Weber had argued that within these social classes there are statuses, it could of meant that black people had less status than white or women has less status than men and these differences would mean that it would be difficult to unite working classes.

Davis and Moore, their theory is an explanation of social stratification (hierarchical arrangement of social classes) . It outlines that different positions in the society require different skills and abilities to achieve high performance therefore society needs to select best people to fill those positions. Right people need to be encouraged and trained to achieve highest efficiency. They believed best way to encourage people to obtain required positions would be by motivating them by offering bonuses or commission. They believed that in order to measure how much particular person would get is based on how unique their job is.

This theory has met some criticism, one sociologist who argued with it was

Tumin who suggested that their measurement of functional importance of <https://assignbuster.com/study-on-poverty-and-social-inequality-sociology-essay/>

position was inadequate, he disagreed with their statement that highly rewarded positions are most important; he believed that unskilled workers in the factory are as important as the engineers who also work there. Tumin questioned Davis and Moore's belief that only limited number of individuals have talent to obtain skills for important positions, he assumed that their method of measuring talent has not been thought of properly as there is no evidence suggesting that exceptional talents are needed for high positions and that there might be more talent out there than Davis and Moore have assumed.

Tumin also suggested that social stratification that Davis and More had developed might not be adequate to the functions they had assigned to it. He argued that those born into lower hierarchy of the scale don't have the same opportunities in succeeding as those born to the higher hierarchy of the scale. He concluded that members of the lower social class might feel excluded from being part of the larger society.

Poverty doesn't have fixed definition; therefore it is difficult to measure it. However it is based on measurement of the absolute minimum a person needs to survive, things like food, water, shelter, clothing. It varies from country to country and even in the UK in different regions what is considered poor is different.

Poverty can be defined as absolute and relative, Rowntree used definitions of absolute poverty in his research made in York in 1899, the study had found that over 20. 000 people in York were living in poverty. It is roughly 28 per cent of population that had not enough necessities to get by. It raised an



issue of huge poverty in Britain. Rowntree's report contributed to reforms in the government between 1906 to 1912, these included free school meals, sickness and unemployment insurance and first state pensions. Further research was conducted by Rowntree in 1936 and 1950 that revealed steady decline in poverty in York. What has helped it was the introduction of Welfare State in 1943 that brought range of benefits to help those in need.

In the UK absolute poverty is really low or virtually non-existent therefore it is not usually used to measure poverty, relative poverty is more commonly used as it gives more accurate indication of the poverty in the UK. There has been many studies conducted on relative poverty, one pioneer in this field was Professor Peter Townsend who defined relative poverty as when someone's 'resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities' Relative poverty is usually measured by the family's income, each household's income adjusted for family size and then compared to median income( it is middle income, half people have less and half have more) Those people who have less than 60 per cent of median income are considered poor, that poverty line is agreed internationally throughout the European Union.

In 2009 Joseph Rowntree Foundation had published their report based on public's perception of what is needed to achieve acceptable standard of living. The research had found that a single person in the UK needs to earn at least £13. 900 before tax is deducted in order to obtain acceptable standard of living. The minimum household budget (not including mortgage of running a car) has risen by about 5 per cent with general inflation rate.  
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Working-age people who are on benefits still remain below minimum income standard. People asked in this survey had expressed that minimum standard of living should allow people not just to survive but fully enjoy part in society.

There are few theories supporting why poverty exists. The concept of culture of poverty was initiated by Oscar Lewis who speculated that people living within poor communities have certain traits that are passed on from generation to generation that prevent them from gaining success. Individuals feel marginalised and develop attitude that it is fate to be poor.

The culture of dependency is when an individual depends on the government welfare for their existence. Murray in his research had described people who rely on state welfare as underclass. People who do not participate in social activities where they live, they have little or not all incentive to work and fail to take responsibility for their families; they usually are also involved in crime activities.

In some way this could be related to functionalism where people need to be connected to and responsible for the others, therefore an underclass is excluded from the main stream society as it is not integrated through work or other social activities. However their social attitude and behaviour (child neglect, criminal behaviour and high levels of illegitimacy) have influence on main stream society.

To conclude the evidence given in this paper suggests that inequalities within British society still exist and leaves open door for further investigation.

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