In what ways does social policy reinforce forms of oppression and inequality

Here you will need to demonstrate your ability to handle the theoretical and conceptual ideas around critical social policy and how forms of oppression and inequality are reinforced in society. The effects of policy should be considered within the ethnic minority cultures, within class groups and social divisions and with in gender.

You will need to define the terms of oppression and centre your arguments around specific examples of equality. While you can illustrate your discussion to social policy you will need to critically deal with specific areas of policy to support your argument/s. In answering this question, remember to bring together a personal evaluation to this question, consider also the concepts of each group and remember the socially constructed opinions and policies supported by government/s throughout history. IntroductionThis essay will explore how social policy reinforces oppression and inequality.

Though social policies are implemented to establish parity amongst all citizens, social policies are sometimes inadequate in establishing equality amongst different types of people. In this essay, the impact of social policy driven oppression, would be discussed within the context of race, class and gender. The essay would start by defining key terms i. e. Oppression and inequalities, then move on to give an overview of the Mental Health policy that would be critically examined by analysing how the policy oppresses on the basis of race, class and gender. Moreover, the essay will reflect the personal reflections of the author to the topic as well as socially constructed views and opinions and policies historically supported by the Government in the United Kingdom.

Oppression can be defined as a situation where an individual, group, society, culture or state, have power, be it economic, military or political; and exercise that power to disadvantage, and or subjugate those who do not. Oppression means control. It focuses directly on the power relationship that gives an entity the power to discriminate against another. Ethnic minorities are a group who are oppressed, both on an individual and societal level. With the legislation currently in place, this oppression is often very subtle and invasive. In relation to mental health, we may tell a client that what is being done is in their best interests, when in fact it may well benefit the worker, the service provider or the policy administrator.

' British society is saturated in oppression. They are based upon race, class, gender, age, and disability sexuality. Research and theory has indicated a wide range of influential factors, and in an attempt to encapsulate some of these elements, Thompson (2001) suggests that society is characterised by a range of social divisions, which are underpinned by ideologies that influence our actions and attitudes. These ideologies have the effect of creating and perpetuating inequality, discrimination and oppression. By looking at the acts carried out throughout history, it becomes apparent that those with power seek to isolate vulnerable groups and collude in order to maintain power in the continuous process of oppression.

Mental health legislation is, and always has been an extremely controversial issue. Maintaining the necessary balance between care and control has always been problematic, more so since the inclusion of the European Convention of Human Rights Act 1998 into the law of the United Kingdom (Bartlett ; Sandland, 1999). Compulsory treatment in the context now being

proposed by the Government undermines civil liberties; this is an opinion, which is shared by both the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2002), and the Law Society (2002), both of whom feel that the Governments proposals are unworkable and unethical. Thomas Szasz has argued since the 1950's that compulsory psychiatry is incompatible with a free society (Roberts, A. 1996). Studies show that people with severe mental illness commit only a small proportion of serious violent acts within society (Swanson, et al 1990).

Statistics show that whilst recorded violent crime amongst the general public has increased four fold in the last 30 years, there has been no increase in violence by people with mental health problems (Taylor, 1999). We are also aware that there are more individuals diagnosed as having a mental illness now, than there were thirty years ago. Different rates of mental illness have been reported in ethnic minority groups in UK. Afro Caribbean's and south Asians have higher reported rates of mental illness here than in their country of origin.

Social class plays a part, although service users identify racism as a social risk factor. Black men in particular are more likely to be labelled as mentally ill, more likely to be given drugs rather than a " talking cure", more likely to be in secure accommodation; and more likely to suffer a violent death in custody, as we seen in the Bennett enquiry. Cause of death was restraint, Social policy can and should be a creative way to address inequality, but it can only address social factors, such as poor housing, unemployment, poor environment etc. What is much harder to address is ' societal attitudes.

' How do you change the views of a racist, or a homophobe? Not easy, but it is integral to the success of social inclusion. Social policy is the government's strategy for dealing with social problems highlighted by research in the welfare arena. Lawson and Goddard (1999 p18) state that, ' Social policy is usually associated with the legislative action of the state, in the area of the welfare state.' We use legislative action, or laws, to administer policies.

These laws are laid down in ' Acts' of Parliament. Various Acts have influenced how welfare and social needs have been catered for down the centuries, from the Poor Law Act 1572 to the Local Government Act 1929, and present day New Deal Initiatives. Audrey Lorde (1984) defines racism as " the inherent belief of one races superiority over all others and thereby the right to dominance" Racism is a range of ideologies and social processes by which ascribed membership of assumed racial groups is taken to justify discrimination against other groups (Solomos 1993) It implies acceptance that one supposed races, superiority over others justifies it greater power over physical and economic resources, and cultural values. (Dominelli L, 1988) Racism is perpetuated through structures and belief systems that characterise black people as problematic, which then apply negative characteristics to all black people.

(Stereotyping) This in turn leads to oppression, discrimination, victimisation and the pigeonholing of black people Chand, A (2000)). Marshall's Perspective on social justice involved all individuals enjoying the rights of citizenship, but as detailed in the earlier sections this is at times restricted through prejudice. Race relations have clearly deteriorated since the McPherson report pulled the veil away from the public's eyes on the British

establishments best kept secret, institutional racism. ConclusionTo cover this topic within the constraints of the criteria has been difficult.

I have defined and discussed oppression and the effects of social policy on society. To conclude, it is evident that inequality and discrimination is inherent in contemporary society, and despite a raised awareness of this fact, little progress seems to be being made in reducing their occurrence. Anti-discriminatory practice is only effective if we actively strive to eliminate discrimination, rather than simply acknowledge its existence, and sit in agreement that such views are unacceptable (Thompson, 2001). To reverse the principles of Thompson's theory, health care professionals within a large social structure such as the NHS, are in a good position to provide a basis for tackling the wider issue of discrimination. Taking an active role in anti-discriminatory practice will hopefully filter through thus influencing cultural ideologies, for to quote the political maxim cited by Thompson (2001p25), ' if you are not part of the solution, you must be part of the problem'.