

Does social inequality exist in jamaica

Society



Introduction “ Social Inequality allows for the exclusion of individuals and the formation of prejudices and discrimination. Carefully analyze and discuss the validity of this statement based on current events in the Jamaican society. ”

Social Inequality is the existence of socially created inequalities; it occurs when ideology and power combine to make one group of people feel inferior to another.

From a sociological perspective people are able to assess both opportunities and constraints that characterize their lives as it relates to age, sex, gender, race and class and based on this, many ills that the world faces today are derived from some person’s blatant disregard for differences. A prejudice is a preconceived belief toward a particular group while discrimination is a behavior (an action), with reference to unequal treatment of people because they are members of a particular group. Some theories suggest that racism is a characteristic of an abnormal minority of the population and that this abnormality is psychological.

This prejudice may lead to racial discrimination. We may be familiar with this form of discrimination being more prevalent in recent times (Apartheid, Hitler vs. Jews) than now. In answering the question this report will outline the causes of social inequality and show that Social Inequality is prevalent in all societies including Jamaica. Race & Ethnicity Within sociology, the term ethnic, race, minority, and dominant group have very specific meanings, different from the meanings the terms have in common, their usage.

These concepts are important in the development of a sociological perspective on race and ethnicity. Race A race is a group of people treated

as separate in society on the basis of certain characteristics, some of which may be biological, that have been assigned social importance. Because of presumed biologically or culturally inferior characteristics, a race is typically singled out for its uniqueness and unfortunately succumbs to unfair treatment. Therefore it is not biological characteristics per se that defines racial groups, but how groups have been treated historically and socially over the years. Societies assign people racial categories such as Black, White, and so on. Not by science, logic or fact, but by opinion and social experiences. In other words, how racial groups are defined is a social process. This is what is meant when we acknowledge that race is “socially constructed”. The use of biological differences to judge an individual seems somewhat arbitrary. For example we differentiate people based on skin color and not other characteristics such as personality traits or culture.

Jamaica is made up of several races, but the majority is dark skinned. Most people interact with their own kind and do not get the opportunity to interface with others of a different race. However, for the ones who do, they may say that we are not a racist society but would more likely discriminate based on a person's socio-economic status. This may be true but there remains the irony that individuals with high socio-economic statuses are usually the light skinned (Caucasian, Indian, Chinese). Ethnicity

This refers to a social category of people who share a common culture, for example a common language or dialect; a common religion; and common norms, practices, customs and history. Ethnic groups have a consciousness of their common cultural bond. Jamaicans, Americans, Trinidadians, Japanese, Mexican Americans and so forth, are examples of ethnic groups.

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However ethnic groups are also found in other societies, such as Pashtuns in Afghanistan or Shiites and Sunnie in Iraq whose ethnicity is based on religious differences. An ethnic group does not exist simply because of the common national or cultural origins of the group.

These groups develop because of their unique historical, cultural origins or social experiences. These experiences become the basis of the group's ethnic identity. PREJUDICE A prejudice is a preconceived belief, opinion, or judgment toward a group of people or a single person because of race, social class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability, political beliefs , religion, line of work or other personal characteristics. It also means a priori beliefs (without knowledge of the facts) and includes " any unreasonable attitude that is unusually resistant to rational influence. Although positive and negative prejudice both exist, when used negatively, " prejudice" implies fear and antipathy toward such a group or person. •Cognitive Prejudice refers to what people believe to be true: for example, in adherence to a particular metaphysical or methodological philosophy at the expense of other philosophies which may offer a more complete theoretical explanation. •Affective Prejudice refers to what people like and dislike: for example, in attitudes toward members of particular classes such as race, ethnicity, national origin, or creed. Conative Prejudice refers to how people are inclined to behave. It is regarded as an attitude because people do not act on their feelings. An example of conative prejudice may be found in expressions of what should be done if the opportunity presents itself. These three types of prejudice are correlated, but all need not be present in a particular individual. Someone may believe that a particular group possesses low levels

of intelligence, but harbor no ill feeling towards that group. A group may be disliked because of intense competition for jobs, but still recognize no differences between groups.

DISCRIMINATION Discrimination is a sociological term referring to the treatment taken toward or against a person of a certain group that is taken in consideration based on class or category. The United Nations explains: "Discriminatory behaviors take many forms, but they all involve some form of exclusion or rejection. Discriminatory laws such as redlining have existed in many countries. In some countries, controversial attempts such as racial quotas have been used to redress negative effects of discrimination Farley also put discrimination into three categories: Personal / Individual

Discrimination is directed toward a specific individual and refers to any act that leads to unequal treatment because of the individual's real or perceived group membership. •Legal Discrimination refers to " unequal treatment, on the grounds of group membership, that is upheld by law. Apartheid is an example of legal discrimination, as are also various post-Civil war laws in the southern United States that legally disadvantaged Negroes with respect to property rights, employment rights and the exercise of constitutional rights.

•Institutional Discrimination refers to unequal treatment that is entrenched in basic social institutions resulting in advantaging one group over another.

The Indian caste system and European feudal system are historical examples of institutional discrimination. As with prejudice generally, these three types of discrimination are correlated and may be found to varying degrees in individuals and society at large. Many forms of discrimination based upon prejudice are outwardly acceptable in most societies.

What is Gender? Gender is a social classification that divides individuals into one of three categories (masculine, feminine, androgyny) as defined by behaviour, cultural and/or physiological traits learnt and expressed. The Difference between Gender and Sex Sex is a biological classification the divides individuals into categories (Male, Female, Hermaphrodite) as defined by their Chromosome make-up, reproductive organs, external genitals, hormonal states, internal genitals and secondary sex characteristics.

Therefore sex is fundamentally different from gender on the basis that sex is determined by sex from birth and gender is determined by socialization after birth. Gender: Functional History The gender roles in society today are as a result of thousands of years of social evolution going back to the beginnings of society. Lets us take a look at how gender evolved into what it is today. The first type of society that existed, hunter/gatherer societies, men and women shared equal roles as the food gatherers in society.

Women secured the more stable sources of food such as ground provisions grains and fruits while men secured the less stable sources of food from hunting game. This is due to the fact that hunting is a physically intensive activity and thus more naturally suited for the men in society however both sources of food were important to the welfare of the society and therefore both men and women had comparable roles. However while comparable, these roles would go on to influence society through the ages as the gathering of food tended to be relatively close to the settlement and the hunting of food would be further away.

We see therefore that women were socialized to stay close to home and men were socialized to journey away from the home. This comparable role relationship remained similar in pastoral and horticultural societies however a huge shift came when people began to form agrarian societies. Men took the role of primary food gatherers in society freeing women from the task of food gathering. Thus women adopted alternative roles in the home to occupy their time. This however elevated the role of men in society while at the same time decreasing the roles of women.

Men became more educated and took on more complex jobs within society. Women became the nurturers and home-makers of society. Thus the sexual division on labour became institutionalized (Lengerman and Wallace, 1985) In industrial society women were reintegrated in the workplace however they were typically low paying unskilled jobs and their male counterparts were typically paid more for the same work. The role of women in society was slowly increasing at this point. Gender: Functional Analysis of Jamaican Society Traditionally in Jamaican society women are seen to be the home-makers and men the bread winners.

This is due to the fact that the two genders play a complimentary role to each other (Talcott Parsons 141, 1964; orig 1951). In other words a complex Co-dependency between each gender that fulfils the economic social companionship, and social placement needs of a family unit thus holding and shaping society and. Each gender is socialized from birth to fulfil their respective roles. Boys are socialized to be competitive and aggressive through sports and aggressive role-models and yard work thereby allowing

them to compete and survive in the working world as part of the labour force when they become Men.

Girls are socialized to be sensitive and caring through dolls and house chores so that once they become Women they are better able to run the household and rear children. In a family unit these roles compliment each other and act as a stabilizing force for the unit and by extension for society. These stabilizing forces are perpetuated through various schemes of social control. Individuals who fail to show appropriate levels of masculinity or femininity are ridiculed and ostracised by society, this produces guilt and fear of rejection in the individual and serves to reinforce gender classes.

Gender: Functional Analysis - Critical Comments The functionalistic view of gender is unable to proper explain many occurrences of modern society. With the post-industrial society we see that women are increasingly taking on more complex roles in society due to the reduction in the amount of physical labour needed to perform complex tasks through industrialization, the ability to control contraception, the feminist movement andpovertylevel (women in poorer household work out of necessity). Indeed most households now rely on a two person income.

This however has left women with the dual roles of home-maker and breadwinners. This is a very daunting task as such many women remain single to avoid such a scenario. Alternatively since women have become a large part of the labour force we see that in couples, men have now either partly or in rare cases fully taken over the tasks of nurturing and caring for a child so as to fill the void created by the absence of the mother Traditionally

androgyny was a socially ostracised gender however lately there has been a blurring of the roles separating the genders.

We see this in 'the sensitive new age guy', 'the metro sexual', in women with short hair (short hair was traditionally a masculine feature), in male bleaching and male earrings (both of which were initially feminine traits).

Gender Discrimination Though gender discrimination and sexism refers to beliefs and attitudes in relation to the gender of a person, such beliefs and attitudes are of a social nature and do not, normally, carry any legal consequences. Sex discrimination, on the other hand, may have legal consequences.

Though what constitutes sex discrimination varies between countries, the essence is that it is an adverse action taken by one person against another person that would not have occurred had the person been of another sex. Discrimination of that nature in certain enumerated circumstances is illegal in many countries. Currently, discrimination based on sex is defined as adverse action against another person, that would not have occurred had the person been of another sex. This is considered a form of prejudice and is illegal in certain enumerated circumstances in most countries. Sexual discrimination can arise in different contexts.

For instance an employee may be discriminated against by being asked discriminatory questions during a job interview, or because an employer did not hire, promote or wrongfully terminated an employee based on his or her gender, or employers pay unequally based on gender. In an educational setting there could be claims that a student was excluded from an

educational institution, program, opportunity, loan, student group, or scholarship due to his or her gender. In the housing setting there could be claims that a person was refused negotiations on seeking a house, contracting/leasing a house or getting a loan based on his or her gender.

Another setting where there have been claims of gender discrimination is banking; for example if one is refused credit or is offered unequal loan terms based on one's gender. In today's Jamaican society, it is debatable as to whether one's sex influences their position or status in life. A feminist Shulamith Firestone believed that women were disadvantaged by their biology, due to the fact that they bear children and as a result they become dependent on the male species for survival. This dependence on men produced unequal power relationships.

Local journalist Peter Espeute, believes that boys face challenges due to inequality from as early as Primary school level. He disputes that girls are usually seated at the front of the class, while the boys sit at the back where they idle and play instead of learning. He also states that the entrance test given to children to decide what High school they go to is given at the wrong stage in their life cycle. It is a fact that at age eleven (11), girls are mentally more developed than boys, therefore the girls would outperform the boys, get the scholarships and be placed at the "best" schools.

A study done by Kevin Harper of Howard University shows that gender biases occur even in doctor offices. Doctors are deemed upper class statuses in Jamaica, and see themselves as "the almighty healers" (Payne-Jackson 1997). The study revealed that doctors were more apologetic to male

patients who were kept waiting. More so males of high statuses. Female patients tended to be treated more like children needing instructions.

Another example of gender bias may be seen in the workplace. In Corporate Jamaica, males in high positions (CEO, GM, etc.) are paid higher wages than their female counterparts.

As you go down the scale you will find that the salaries are usually level. However in some institutions such as factories and industrial complexes, because of the nature of the job, men are favoured. Even if females are among them, night shifts and overtime are usually approved for the men. The United Nations had concluded that women often experience a " glass ceiling" and that there are no societies in which women enjoy the same opportunities as men. The term " glass ceiling" is used to describe a perceived barrier to advancement in employment based on discrimination, especially sex discrimination. Social Class

The term social class refers to a system of social stratification which is based on individual achievements, resulting from the unequal distribution of wealth, power and prestige. A hierarchical distinction is made between individuals or groups of people within the society. Social stratification is regarded as structured inequality based on the characteristics of the society and usually persists over a long period of time. It is usually universal and often occurs on the basis of access to the scarce factors of production: it also occurs on the basis of other factors, such as race, gender, age, religion and caste.

Social stratification is usually prevalent in most societies. Usually a person's status is either ascribed or achieved. An ascribed status is usually fixed at birth and depicted by one's sex or race. An achieved status is depicted by one's achievements throughout their lifetime, usually occupational. An open society usually fosters social mobility between the different social classes. Social mobility is the movement of individuals between, or up or down the different class structures over time owing to improvements in their fortunes. Social mobility is usually achieved through the following avenues: 1.

Education, the attainment of higher tertiary education leads to more expertise and usually higher income paying jobs. 2. Hard work 3. Marriage, an individual marries into a rich family 4. Family status, the name of a rich family member usually opens doors for that individual 5. Talents and skills 6. Physical attributes, e. g. Miss World, usually marries into a powerful or rich family 7. Luck A closed system does not foster social mobility. Social positions are ascribed at birth and the system is very rigid with clearly defined structures.

The caste system in India is a very good example of a closed system of stratification. In this system an individual is born in caste and this determines their occupation, education, social interaction and power. No amount of hard work and achievement can change their status or caste over time. The best example of the open system is the class system. This is found in most modern industrial societies around the world. One's class in this system is largely determined by one's occupation, education, income, wealth and power. There are four classes in this system.

They are the upper-class, the middle class, the service class and the underclass. The upper class is usually made up of the top ten percent (10%) of the wealthy people in the society. This class is also broken down into two classes: the upper and the lower class. ? The upper- upper class is made up of people who normally have “ oldmoney” and are set apart by their wealth and power. These persons have been born and raised with wealth; mostly consists of old “ noble” or prestigious families. The Royal Family of England would be a prime example of the upper - upper class. The lower- upper class is made up of people who have extraordinary large income, which is achieved through occupational means. These people are usually referred to as having “ new money”. These individuals have become rich within their own lifetimes. This class consists of people who own large companies or are CEO’s of large companies. It also consists of entrepreneurs, movie stars, top athletes, as well as some prominent professionals). The middle class is divided into three different groups. They are the upper -middle class, the service- class and the lower- middle class. The upper middle class is usually made up of people who have prestigious occupations, such as doctors, lawyers, politicians and entertainers. These people usually earn very high incomes and live in prominent neighborhoods and are able to send their off springs to colleges and universities abroad. These people usually accumulate lots of wealth overtime. ? The service- class is made up of highly trained people who are usually managers at their place of work. These people usually have secured careers and earn very good incomes on the job.

Business consultants, teachers, and small business operators are good examples of persons who fall within this class. ? The lower- middle class is

reserved for people who earn an average income and enjoy a decent standard of living. These people work in mainly less prestigious white collar jobs and include Sales Representatives, Supervisors, Bank clerks and Office clerks. Most of these people have not acquired a tertiary level education. The working class is usually those people who live from paycheck to paycheck and are called blue collar workers.

These people usually earn what is known as “ minimum wage” and are normally the first set of workers to be affected in times of recession. The underclass is those people who fall below the poverty line. They are usually temporarily employed or unemployed and are usually dependent on the state for survival. Conclusion As our motto rightly states “ Out of Many One People”, we are diverse in race, ethnicity, and socialization. Based on our research which included a questionnaire (Appendices), we can clearly state that Social Inequality exists worldwide and Jamaica is no exception.

The questionnaire was issued to twenty persons which included two Rastafarians, Two Chinese, three Mixed race individuals, one Caucasian and the rest were Negros. Half were male and the other half females. The results were as follows:- Age discrimination was felt by one young man (22 years old) who was a bus driver by profession. He expressed that persons were not willing to take his bus when they saw that he was the driver. The Rastafarians who were ironically from the lower class said they faced discrimination from every aspect (class, beliefs). Most of the females stated that men are preferred for jobs in the corporate world.

One lady in particular related an experience of being in an interview and was told that she did well but they want to hire a male, as too many women were in the office. The only white man that did the questionnaire expressed that he felt discriminated just because of his colour; he was not comfortable going out alone because some people thought that he had something to offer them and were constantly begging. Therefore the question is answered Social Inequality does lead to people forming prejudices which may influence their actions toward person of a particular group or groups.