

Assess the reasons why some social groups are more likely than others to experience poverty.

PLAN:

Intro-

- Poverty definition
- Absolute and relative
- Examples of social groups – ones I will discuss in essay; ethnic groups, the working class, gender
- Factors- unemployment, poor housing, poor health, crime rates, family problems
- Social exclusion

Absolute Poverty-

- Definition
- Where it is found
- More serious form of poverty

Relative Poverty-

- Definition
- TV, computer, holiday etc.
- Varies from person to person – difficult to define
- Growing gap between rich and poor, easier to become relatively poor/social excluded

Social exclusion-

- Definition
- Labour 1997 – welfare state
- What causes social exclusion

Ethnic groups-

- Literacy/language problems
- Discrimination
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation statistic
- Success in education statistics
- Child poverty – harder to get out of
- Employment problems – degrees and wages
- Discrimination and racism at heart of poverty problem and social exclusion

Working Class-

- Definition
- Why it is a problem – how it came about – Thatcher (mining, unions)
- Labour Government
- This has not been resolved – rich poor divide

#### Conclusion-

- Some social groups are - ethnic minorities, working class
- Due to life chances, racism, social exclusion
- Will not change until rich poor divide is resolved

#### Introduction-

Poverty is defined by the EU as, 'a household income below 60 per cent of the median disposable income level in that year. It is common to distinguish between absolute and relative poverty.' The problem of poverty can strike any form of social group, but there are those that are more likely than others to experience poverty, be it relative or absolute. These social groups include; locality, age, disability and also ethnicity, and social class, which I will be focusing upon in this essay. The reasons for these social groups being more susceptible to poverty involves a number of factors, for example; unemployment rates, poor housing or health, high crime rates, or even family problems. Another issue surrounding the growing problem of poverty is that of social exclusion, which I will also be exploring in this essay, however first I will distinguish between absolute and relative poverty.

#### Absolute Poverty-

There are two main types of poverty, one of them is absolute, which is not very common in the UK, and which you are more likely to find in third world countries, for example some parts of South Africa. It is defined as; 'the lack of sufficient necessities and resources with which to keep body and soul together.' In other words it involves lacking the necessities in life such as food, water, shelter, clothing etc. An example of this type of poverty in the UK would possibly be someone living on the streets, perhaps living without adequate funds to feed and clothe themselves. This is the more serious form of poverty because it can lead to serious illness, and potentially death if left without food and water for a long period of time.

#### Relative Poverty-

Relative poverty is the lesser of the two evils, as it refers to a form of poverty where someone is unable to afford things which would allow them to fully participate in society. They would have the basic necessities required to live, but they may not own items such as a television or computer, which many people view to be vital in society, or they may not be able to afford go on holiday. Of course the idea of what is required to fully participate in society may vary from individual to individual; for example, some people may not see a television as something they need to be a part of society. This is where the problem of defining relative poverty comes into play. However items such as televisions are becoming

more and more likely to be viewed as essentials and so it is becoming more expensive to become part of society. This leads me onto the problem of the growing gap between the rich and the poor and how this is affecting the levels of social exclusion. As if more items and luxuries are perceived as being essential to participate in society, it becomes easier for people to slip into relative poverty.

### Social Exclusion-

The term social exclusion refers to the alienation felt by people within society who cannot afford to participate fully in social activities, political activities, or economic activities putting them at a severe disadvantage. It is a term which has always been considered to be closely linked with the problem of poverty. It was also a term which initially came into existence after the introduction of Labour government in 1997, who also brought about the welfare state in an attempt to reduce the levels of social exclusion in the country. The issue of social exclusion and the reasons behind them are a hard cycle to break and usually requires redistributing income through taxation and benefit systems, and in turn also ensuring that all basic rights and requirements of society are maintained. It was worried that without this the UK would slip slowly further into the poverty trap, where the level of social inequality would rise. There are a number of things which can contribute to social exclusion including; inadequate income, poor health either mental or physical, high crime rates, poor transport, unacceptable access to technology etc. I will now look at particular social groups which are more vulnerable and likely to experience poverty and in turn social exclusion.

### Ethnic Groups-

The affect of ethnicity in terms of poverty and social inclusion is a very important factor as it can affect a person's ability to become involved in society, for example due to language and literacy barriers and also because of prejudice within society. A statistic issued by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation states that whilst 40% of ethnic minorities are living in poverty, only 20% of the white British population are.<sup>1</sup> Within education the effect of ethnic background on performance is clear to see as according to National Statistics Afro-Caribbean's and Pakistani children fare less well in examinations such as GCSE's, in comparison to say Indian children.<sup>2</sup> Naturally success or failure in education is carried on to employment opportunities, which with in turn effect income and poverty levels of those select ethnic backgrounds within the UK. The current statistics have 70% of Bangladeshi children in the UK living in poverty, which is an unsettling figure. Child poverty is also a much more worrying term, because breaking out of poverty when generations before you have not is very difficult, and usually involves a substantial amount of education in order to break the chain. As I mentioned before, prejudice is also an issue, as even with a degree, it has been found that Bangladeshi and Pakistani men are still less likely to be employed in comparison to white British men with the same or equal qualifications. The problem also goes beyond employment opportunities, but also affects wages, as it is found that Bangladeshi and Pakistani men are paid worse on average than all other ethnicities. This shows that

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.jrf.org.uk/media-centre/poverty-twice-likely-minority-ethnic-groups-education-fails-close-gap>

<sup>2</sup> AQA Citizenship AS by Duncan Watts P53

discrimination and racism against ethnic minorities is one of the key reasons that they are more likely to experience poverty, even if they have made every effort to break out of the poverty cycle, simply because they will be disadvantaged when trying to access many opportunities. Obviously the reasons for poverty in any social group are complex and difficult to solve, but I believe that the unfortunate truth in the case of ethnic minorities, is that racism and discrimination are at the heart of this problem.

### The Working Class-

Social class is one of the main determinants of life chances and wealth possibilities currently within the UK. The 'working class' is defined as; 'of, relating to, deriving from, or suitable to the class of wage earners.'<sup>3</sup> In other words, it is the class level, where its population are given a wage; they are 'workers'. Problems within this class mainly began to arise during the Thatcher ruling in the 1980's. The worker's or the working class then, were employed within a number of different trades, such as mining, steel industries and factory work, however there were a significant number of job cuts during this time after closure of much of this industry, which led to this social group experiencing a high level of relative poverty. When the Labour Government came into power in the 90's they attempted to solve this problem by redistributing the wealth in society via taxation, benefits and minimum wages. However this does not appear to have improved the situation, with figures such as lower paid jobs wage increases at 2.8% and higher earning jobs at 10% wage increases. The most important factors which are viewed to affect working class poverty include; addiction, poor health and unemployment, which has become more predominant since the effects of the recession have hit society.

### Conclusion-

It is easy to conclude that some social groups are more likely to be effected and experience poverty, for a number of reasons, which mainly revolve around life chances, which may be restricted by for example ethnicity, or exclusion from certain parts of society, for example unemployment. The issue of poverty however can never be effectively tackled because of the growing affect of the divide between the rich and poor, even if issues such as racism and the class divide are resolved.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/working-class>

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