

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

**Plan**

**Introduction****Poverty****- Relative Poverty –**

- the absence of the material needs in order to participate fully in accepted daily life
- lack of resources to fund basic needs such as travelling, inability to purchase books or newspapers

**- Absolute Poverty -**

- lack of sufficient resources which are needed to keep the body and soul together
- Beveridge Report
- sleeping on the streets are exposing themselves to the cold and a number of illnesses such as pneumonia

**Social Exclusion**

- relatively new term used by the Government
- Social Exclusion Unit (SEU)
- differs from 'social inclusion'

**Discrimination**

- Race Relations Act,
- the Sex Discrimination Act 1975,
- the Disability Discrimination Act 1995,
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003.
- Joseph Rowntree Foundations

**Ethnic Groups**

- Housing
- Education
- Employment

**Working Class**

- Closure of the labour forces
- Females having to take over
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**Theoretical Approaches to the causes of Poverty****-The New Right-**

- Charles Murray
- 'low income'
- Against the idea of provision of welfare by the state to citizens

**-Social-Democratic Approach-**

- Unfair distribution of power and wealth in society
- Low wages
- Can lead to the concept of social exclusion

**Conclusion**

**Main Argument**

**Introduction**

Poverty is experienced by a range of social groups, from ethnic minorities to the working class. However, the term poverty has a very large meaning, often ambiguous. One person may relate to poverty as being relative, others by absolute. The Social Exclusion Unit has been developed to research situations, like this. The Joseph Rowntree Foundations has also researched that social groups such as women, children and pensioners are more likely to experience poverty. I will assess

this argument by looking at the different types of poverty, social exclusion, discrimination in a range of different areas, and a couple of approaches as to why poverty actually exists.

## **Poverty**

There is no single definition of poverty; everyone has their own views and opinions about the term. It could be relative to the standards of living in a society at a specific time. For example when someone is denied an income sufficient for their material needs in which these circumstances exclude them from taking part in activities which are an accepted part of daily life in that society. Familiar themes in poverty include lack of household insurance, participation in civic activities such as going to libraries and using public services, activities such as holidays and having a bank account, and inadequate housing.

A person is considered poor if his or her income level falls below some minimum level necessary to meet basic needs. This minimum level is usually called the "poverty line". What is necessary to satisfy basic needs varies across time and societies. Therefore, poverty lines vary in time and place, and each country uses lines which are appropriate to its level of development, societal norms and values. There is a big link between the terms, poverty and a citizen's life chances. A citizen's life chances in terms of their health, education, and employment are all related to poverty. Life chances are shaped by cultural expectations.

When assessing the term "poverty", there are two key terms that come into mind. These are 'relative poverty' and 'absolute poverty', identified by social commentators. Both are identified to be different levels of poverty although there can be general problems in the relation to the defining of the measurement of poverty. These will be identified below.

### **- Relative Poverty -**

The first definition of poverty revolves around the term 'relative poverty'. It classifies income or resources in relation to the average. It is concerned with the absence of the material needs in order to participate fully in accepted daily life. It is therefore acknowledging that poverty is a socially constructed category<sup>1</sup>. This particular type of poverty decreases the full means to take part in society. Examples of this could include the lack of resources to fund basic needs such as travelling. It could also stretch to the inability to purchase books or newspapers, or resources for school or college.

Despite this proposal, everyone will have a different list of 'essentials' needed to participate in everyday life. In defining what resources are actually needed to 'participate fully in society', certain items will vary greatly. Some people may feel that having a lack of particular technology advances such as a television, a computer, or even a mobile phone will be a big disadvantage. Although others may identify themselves in this category if indeed they do not have enough money for basic hygiene matters, or being unable to afford basic utility bills. Circumstances and experiences vary considerably from citizen to citizen. It is also hard to identify what actually is a 'norm' and what is a 'luxury' in life. All these points ultimately outline the complications that must be considered by the state when assessing a citizen's needs.

### **- Absolute Poverty -**

On the other hand, absolute poverty is defined as the lack of sufficient resources which are needed to keep the body and soul together. Therefore, the individual lacks the basic resources in order to maintain an adequate level of diet, living accommodation and clothing. A major absolute approach that is largely adopted was the Beveridge Report, which was published in 1942. This outlined the 'five giants' (Want, Idleness, Squalor, Ignorance and Disease). These policies were adopted to deal with poverty based on the 'poverty line', which was defined in monetary terms<sup>2</sup>. An example given by *Holden-Rowley and Blewitt* is individuals who are sleeping on the streets are exposing themselves to the cold and a number of illnesses such as pneumonia, as would individuals without adequate clothing. Another form that could be associated with this particular level of poverty would be an individual who suffers from weight loss or malnutrition caused by having fewer than the daily recommendation of calories. 'Third World' countries, such as Africa, and parts of Asia, are more likely to suffer from this kind of poverty, more so than some individuals of First or Second World countries such as the UK, USA or even Mexico.

## **Social Exclusion**

'Social exclusion' is a relatively new term used by the Government. This term played almost no part in Labour's pre-election of 1997; however within months it was a central concept. The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) was set up in December of that year, based in the Cabinet Office. It was a research body and its main role was reporting to the Prime Minister. Blair described social exclusion as:

"...a shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown".

This term differs from 'social inclusion', which is the position from where someone can access and benefit from the full range of opportunities available to members of society. It aims to remove barriers for people or for areas that experience a combination of linked problems outlined in the quote above.

There are many factors that must be considered when exploring the term 'social exclusion'. Aspects include health, poverty, education, employment trends, geographical location, age, gender, social class, ethnic group and societal discrimination in these particular social groups.

### **Discrimination**

Discrimination seems to be a popular example of social exclusion in recent years. Discrimination is a great problem in the workplace especially. Discrimination can be in the forms of age, sexual orientations, or even certain types of disability. A familiar view in the UK is that 'disabled' people will be less able to get a higher income job due to lack of access. Another view is that somebody would be unable to get a higher paid job due to discrimination by their potential employer on grounds of their ethnicity. These examples could all lead to social exclusion and poverty, even if the discrimination is unintentional. Despite this though, there have been attempts to prevent this particular type of discrimination. Examples include the [Race Relations Act 1976](#), the [Sex Discrimination Act 1975](#), the [Disability Discrimination Act 1995](#), and the [Employment Equality \(Sexual Orientation\) Regulations 2003](#). The first of which was initiated to make it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against someone on racial grounds. The second of which makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against someone because of their gender, because they are married, or if they have had, are having or intend to have, gender reassignment. The third gives disabled people rights in the areas of employment; education; access to goods, facilities and services, including larger private clubs and land-based transport services; buying or renting land or property, including making it easier for disabled people to rent property and for tenants to make disability-related adaptations; and functions of public bodies, for example issuing of licenses. The latter example gives protection in the areas of recruitment; terms and conditions of employment, including benefits such as pensions; pay; employment status, for example if someone is a worker or an employee; training; promotion and transfer opportunities; redundancy; and dismissal when it comes to sexual orientation.

Moreover, it was discovered by the *Joseph Rowntree Foundations*, a social policy research and development charity, that levels of poverty were highest among such social groups as women, children, pensioners, lone parents, large families and households with no wage earners. It has also been suggested that the UK alone faces the highest inequality levels today for more than 40 years. Suggestions for this include that the UK is becoming an increasingly divided nation, and particular richer areas in the South-east of England has become disproportionately wealthier over recent decades.

### **Ethnic Groups**

This particular social group seems to draw most attention for a number of reasons. For some ethnic minority groups, aspects such as unemployment, living standards and welfare are major problems. These minority groups tend to rely on social inclusion to be involved in, for example, education and employment. For some people, this is hard if they only speak their native language or very little of any other. This ultimately makes it a lot harder to actually become involved and accepted entirely in society.

### **-Employment-**

In 1999, a study was made by Dean, H and Melrose. The research showed that there was a major employment difference between the White employees and employees from various ethnic minorities. It was found that the White employees had average earnings of £7.73. However, £7.12 was received by Indians. Afro Caribbean's earned £6.88, whilst Pakistanis and Bangladeshis earned £6.43. Moreover, a big argument that arises amongst the ethnic minorities is that they are more likely to be in jobs with low pay such as cleaning, catering and the service industry. The Pakistani and Bangladeshi population were found to be more than three times more likely to be unemployed than the White population. Another factor is that young Afro-Caribbean males aged 16 to 24 were also found to be three times more likely to be unemployed than those who were White in the same age categories. Also, fewer than 50% of women from ethnic minorities are actually employed compared to over 65% of the white women. Reasons why this could be the case will be discussed below.

### **-Housing-**

This factor also provides astonishing results amongst ethnic minorities. It has been found in the 1991 Consensus that whilst only 2% of the White population are living in overcrowded housing, a high figure of 30% of Pakistanis and 47% of Bangladeshis have been found to be. These families are more likely to experience poverty than those are not. In a more recent study of households in Bradford, a shocking 65% of Bangladeshis and 45% of Pakistanis lived in overcrowded housing. Overcrowding not only has an impact in the individuals' personal space, but also on health and education. A quote from *England.Shelter.org* states, 'My daughter suffers severe asthma attacks due to the overcrowding. Every month she misses one, two, or three weeks from school.' Again, approaches as to why poverty may exist will be assessed below.

## **-Education-**

Although there have been an increasing need for schools to build built, and schools specifically being designed solely for ethnic minorities, such as the *Khalsa Primary School in Wexham, Slough*, the education system is still showing a predominantly white, middle class, male bias amongst the teachers and the pupils.

With education being a very important factor in influencing anyone's future, those from low income families need to do well in order to break the chain. It has been suggested in the past that Indians, in particular girls, do the best at school, coming top in nearly all subjects and 55% of girls and 52% of boys getting 5 A\*-Cs at GCSE. Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils on the other hand, tend to do just about second to worst, with only 32% of girls and 29% of boys achieving the 5 grades. Black or Afro-Caribbean pupils were a very close last place with only 35% of girls and 23% of boys gaining 5 A\*-Cs. This division is carried on at A-Level standard in a survey in 1998, with 36% of Indian pupils gaining 2 or more A-Levels, compared to 29% of white pupils.

## **Working Class**

During the Thatcher era, in the 1980's, the working class suffered greatly. They experienced severe job cuts. Labour work included that of mining, factory work, ship building and steel works being closed down. As a result, this caused devastation and an ultimate increase in poverty within the class boundary. Men were especially affected due to sudden uncertainty in work. Before the closure, men left school at an early age with no or little qualifications, and assumed that they would enter the manual workforce at some point of their life. However, this massive cut in jobs for the working class meant that such places as Sheffield were replaced with the service and retail sector. But these men had no skills to be able to participate in this industry and men found it hard to deal with. In some cases they were being replaced by women as the main breadwinners. This led to a large increase in unemployment and poverty amongst this particular social group. Men were reluctant to learn new skills in order to participate in society and therefore turned to addictions such as drink and drugs.

## **Theoretical Approaches to the causes of Poverty**

There are three main theoretical approaches that explain the reasons associated as to why and how poverty is caused. The concepts include that of individual and cultural explanations, explained around the theory of the New Right. The second aspect is defined through the concept of the social democratic approach, structural explanations. The last theory revolves around the theory of the 'underclass'. Below, I will discuss the initial two.

## **-The New Right-**

This is the main theory that suggests one approach to the causes of poverty. According to *Holden-Rowley and Blewitt* they prefer the term 'low income' rather than the term 'poverty'. This euphemism sounds a lot more appealing, in the terms that people would more likely prefer to be associated with 'low income', than being in the lows of 'poverty'. Furthermore, poverty can relate to many different scenarios discussed above, whereas this newer reference relates only to one particular point. The New Right believe that the causes of poverty link to lifestyle causes, and more so that of behavioural aspects. An example give in the book would be a person on low income is not forced to smoke.

Charles Murray is a right wing sociologist who is against the idea of provision of welfare by the state to citizens. This view is particularly towards those who have been in long term unemployment and furthermore are 'unwilling to take jobs that are unavailable'. Murray suggests that the primary cause of this is due to illegitimacy rates which is suggested is to be greater within the lower classes.

The New Right also proposes that the concept of Beveridge's welfare state is partly to blame for the existence of poverty. It is argued that individuals become too comfortable on the benefits that are provided by the state, which caused them to lose motivation to go out and thus became more dependent on the state provision. The existence of the welfare state has meant that when in need citizens immediately uses this state provision to help rather than turning to other friends and family members in the first instance. The New Right also argue that the provision of welfare by the state should be means tested and take into account all other viable methods of help that could be provided by sources other than the state, this is also more likely to ensure that the individual will go out and get a job rather than to depend on their family for support.

A loss of morality within society is another reason that the New Right suggests to have been the cause of an increase in levels of poverty. As Murray outlined, illegitimacy was cited as one of the main problems that cause poverty in society, the idea of single parent families and divorce goes hand in hand with such a view. It has been argued that today's society promotes divorce and separation within families which has lead to a 'dependency culture' on the state as opposed to the family unit. The New Right perceives the solution to be centred around the promotion of moral practices and family values in this increasingly liberal society, this is supported by the fact that single parent families are often those that are among those on low incomes.

### **-Social-Democratic Approach-**

In contrast to Charles Murray's and the New Right's views on the causes of poverty, the socio-democratic approach points to an unfair distribution of power and wealth in society as the cause of poverty in society under the broader problem of economic stability,

The model suggests that low wages are to blame for poverty, if an individual on a low income was out of work for a period of time they would as a result be less able to deal with the financial and social effects of unemployment. This is something would therefore effect life chances and in the long term lead to the concept of social exclusion and a loss of participation in society.

Poverty has been proven to be a very difficult cycle to break due to the low income that comes with it. The individual has less money and becomes less able to afford to participate in society which limits how they live their lives, who they can afford to associate with and even where they live. In the long run, it causes a build up of pressure which can even be linked to stress related illness which is detrimental to their health. All the time, the individual is remaining on a low income and it is becoming increasingly difficult to get out of poverty.

### **Conclusion**

Poverty is an increasing issue amongst many social groups, whether it is seen as caused by one factor or another. It is ultimately possible to concluded that some social groups are more likely to experience poverty than others due to a number of reasons primarily focuses around life choices that the individual makes despite contrasting views that suggest that inequality in society is to blame for poverty and indeed social exclusion in the UK. It is also important to remember when considering the idea of poverty about the effects that education, health and gender can have on the likelihood of the individual experiencing poverty later on in life and the measures in place that are there to protect them.

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<sup>1</sup> Citizenship in Modern Britain (Second Edition) – Trevor Desmoyers-Davis – Cavendish Publishing – page 373

<sup>2</sup> Citizenship in Modern Britain (Second Edition) – Trevor Desmoyers-Davis – Cavendish Publishing – page 372