

# SOCIOLOGY – CORE UNIT 2

## Inequality



Let's get revising. Read the notes and answer the questions on each page in the 'Test your knowledge' box before having a go at section A of paper 2 of one the past papers.

# Core unit 2 - Inequality

**What is inequality?**  
 Inequality is about the differences between rich and poor. These differences include differences in wealth, pay, status, health, jobs, houses, opportunities and quality of life. Sociologists call these differences **'life chances.'**

**Inequality of opportunity** refers to the lack of an equal chance of being successful. Equality of opportunity is important in British and American culture.

**What causes inequality?**  
 Discrimination has been one of the main causes of inequality between social groups in history.

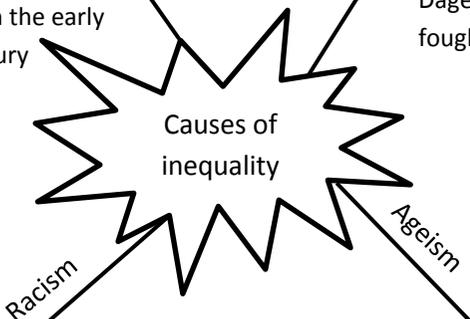


Suffragettes fought for the vote for women in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

**Sexism** – the idea that one gender is better and more suited to some activities than the other



Female workers at the Ford factory in Dagenham in 1968 fought for equal pay



**Racism** is the belief that some races are better than others. Martin Luther King fought against this in America in the 1960s.

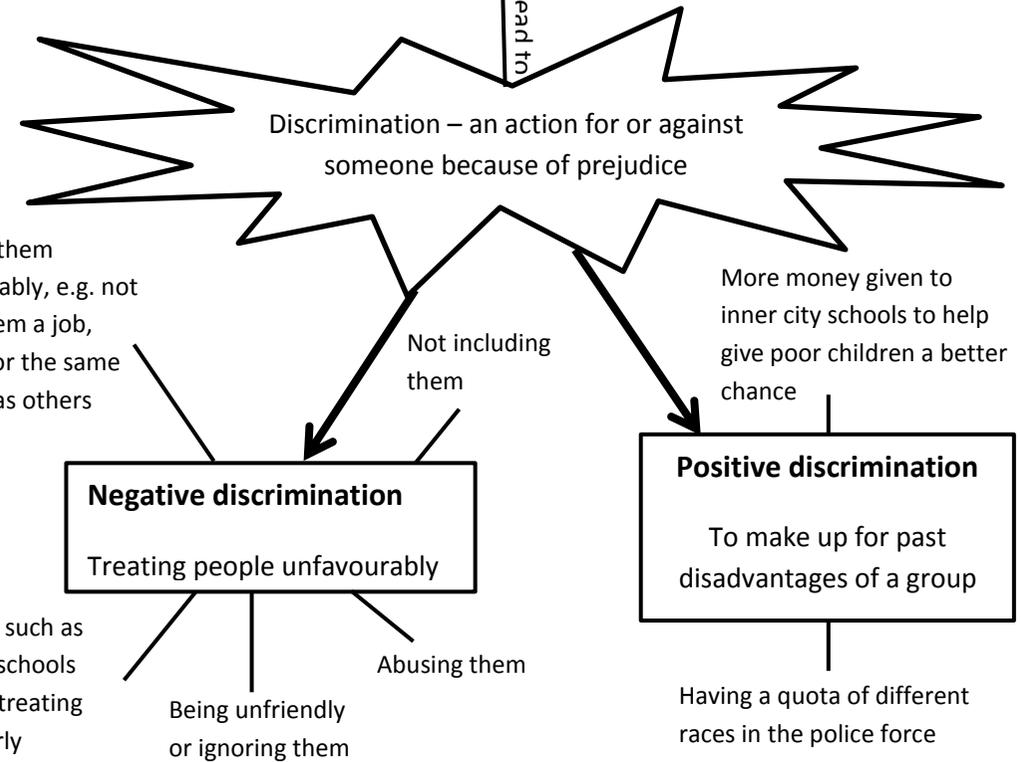


**Ageism** is the idea that some age groups, e.g. the elderly are not capable or that others act in a certain way, e.g. young people are troublemakers.



Prejudice – an idea about what someone is like based on pre-judgement about them.

Can lead to



**Test your knowledge**

1. What is inequality?
2. What are inequalities in opportunity?
3. What has been one of the main causes of inequality in history?
4. What are the three main causes of inequality?
5. What is sexism?
6. What is racism?
7. What is ageism?
8. What is prejudice?
9. What is discrimination?
10. What is negative discrimination?
11. Give five examples of negative discrimination
12. What is positive discrimination?
13. Give two examples of positive discrimination

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### What are the reasons for prejudice and discrimination?



**Cultural misunderstandings** cause people to see others in a negative way, e.g. in European culture making eye contact is polite and a sign of honesty. In Asian culture looking into someone's eyes is seen as disrespectful.

**Socialisation** - We are socialised into prejudiced ideas, e.g. in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when Britain was involved in the slave trade, prejudice and racism towards black people was the norm.

**Stereotypes** are fixed exaggerated ideas about a group of people and cause prejudice, e.g. old people have bad memories and can't cope with new technology. Jewish people in Germany in the 1930s were stereotyped as evil and greedy and blamed all of Germany's problems. This is known as scapegoating and is often used when a country has economic problems.

### What are status and prestige?

**Status** refers to how important your position in society is.

**Ascribed status** is a position that you are born into, e.g. the queen has an ascribed status and so does Mrs Wright. Mrs Wright's ascribed status is from her female gender.



**Achieved status** is a position that you have earned, e.g. Sir Alan Sugar earned his by running successful businesses.



**Marxists and feminists** believe that some groups, higher social classes and men, stand a better chance of gaining high status positions.

**Prestige** is similar to status and refer to the respect and admiration and is given to someone on the basis of their achievements, e.g. a doctor is seen as a position that carries a great deal of prestige and parents would be proud to say that their child was a doctor. However, a labourer is a position that carries low prestige because it is not seen as special.

### What is wealth?

**Wealth** includes property, savings, shares and valuable items, e.g. a house, car or work of art.



**Income** is money that is received weekly or monthly as wages, benefits or pension. Someone might have high income but low wealth because they spend all of their income and so do not accumulate much wealth. Some people have an income from their wealth, e.g. if they own and rent out properties people will pay them rent every month which will be income.

### Changing patterns of wealth

American sociologist Robert K. Merton introduced 'The Matthew Effect' which means that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

**In the 1950s** working people became much better off. Harold Macmillan, the Prime Minister of the time is famous for saying you've 'never had it so good' to working people who now had cars, televisions and better housing.

**In the 1980s onwards** most reports suggest that the rich are getting richer and the poor are becoming poorer. In 2007 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported that inequality of wealth was the highest that it had been for 40 years.

### Test your knowledge

1. What are the three main reasons for prejudice and discrimination?
2. Explain how cultural misunderstandings cause prejudice and discrimination.
3. Give an example to show how we can be socialised into prejudiced ideas.
4. Explain how stereotypes can lead to prejudice and discrimination.
5. What is status?
6. Explain why the queen has an ascribed status.
7. Explain why Alan Sugar has an achieved status.
8. Which groups do Marxists and feminists believe have a better chance of gaining a high status positions?
9. What is wealth?
10. What is income?
11. Why might someone have high income but low wealth?
12. What is the 'Matthew Effect' according to American sociologist K Merton?
13. Why did Prime Minister Harold Macmillan tell the public that they had never had it so good in the 1950s?
14. What do most reports suggest about inequality in wealth from the 1980s onwards?
15. What did the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report about inequality of wealth in 2007?

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### The Elites in the UK

**An elite** is a small group who are rich and powerful and control society.

**Power** is the ability to get what you want. For example Rupert Murdoch who owns Sky TV, The Times, the Sun and other media interests is very powerful. Some sociologists say that he has been able to influence the results of the last few general elections.

**Privilege** is having advantages over other groups. For example in the 2010 elections 504 MPs were male and 146 were female; this shows male privilege. Groups that enjoy privilege are not treated as harshly by the police, courts or other groups and usually have the best jobs and health care. They also have high status.

**The elite in the UK** are the ruling classes (the rich and powerful in society) according to **Marxists** and include the very rich such as Alan Sugar and Richard Branson who own the most important companies, the aristocracy including the royal family and the 'Old Boys' Network' of the ruling classes who went to schools such as Eaton and Harrow. They are mainly white and male.



**Life chances** refer to opportunities that individuals have of having good things happen to them and avoiding bad things. This includes the likelihood of being healthy, living in a nice house, being rich, reaching old age, having a good education, getting a good job and being a victim of crime.

**Quality of life** is to do with being happy and healthy and feeling good about your life.

**Lifestyle** is about a person's attitudes, possessions, interests and how they like to live.

Life chances, life style and quality of life are all linked to a person's social class, gender and ethnicity. A baby is born to a poor family and so lives in poor housing. This results in poor health so as a young person they become behind at school and gain poor GCSE results, leave school and get a poorly paid job. They leave home and rent a property. Poor housing results in poor health and time off work. They fail to gain much promotion, struggle financially and therefore buy cheap food and have a poor diet. Their health worsens; they have children and work long hours to support them. The prospects for their own children are poor.

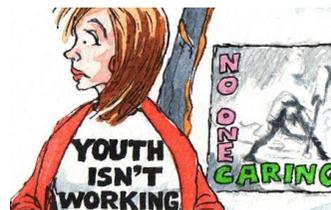


### What is social exclusion?

**Social exclusion** is being left out of society in important ways, e.g. by being homeless, unemployed, disabled, elderly or mentally ill.

**Homeless people** are excluded from society because they are not part of a town or village community. They do not have access to things others have, e.g. they are not a doctor's list and are isolated because they do not have access to modern means of communication, e.g. phones and the Internet. If they wish to become part of society people treat them differently if they realise they are homeless and also they may be unfamiliar with current norms and values of society.

**Unemployed people** are those who do not have a paid job. They feel left out as they do not have a daily routine involving work and



cannot afford things such as holidays, and entertainment that others take for granted.

**Inclusion** is the idea that all groups and people would be encouraged to be part of society. The government, health service and schools try to ensure that everyone is included and has the chance of a good life.

### What is poverty?

**Absolute poverty** is when a person does not have the basics needed to survive, e.g. food, shelter, clothes and warmth. The benefit system in the UK is supposed to make sure that no-one lives in absolute poverty.

**Relative poverty** is to be poor compared to other people in society, e.g. some people may not go out, go on holiday or be able to afford expensive presents at Christmas time and would see themselves as deprived. Being **deprived** is not having things that are seen as important for a decent life.

### Test your knowledge

1. What is an elite?
2. What is power?
3. Explain why Rupert Murdoch is a powerful person.
4. What is privilege?
5. Who are the elite in the UK according to Marxists?
6. What are life chances?
7. What is quality of life?
8. What is lifestyle?
9. Explain why life chances, life style and quality of life are all linked to a person's social class, gender and ethnicity.
10. What is social exclusion?
11. Why are homeless people excluded from society?
12. Explain what an unemployed person is.
13. What is inclusion?
14. What is poverty?
15. What is absolute poverty?
16. What is relative poverty?
17. What is being deprived?

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**Subjective poverty** is when you think that you are living in poverty compared to others.

**Poverty and social exclusion are linked** because the poor cannot take a full part in society, e.g. a child playing in a local football team costs the parent money for subs, football kit and transportation to matches. Families who cannot afford this are seen as living in relative poverty and are socially excluded.

### What is social class?

**Class** is a way of grouping people based on their job and status. In the UK there are thought to be three social classes:

The upper class includes the aristocracy, owners of big companies and the very rich. They have the highest social status.

The middle class who are better off and do not work with their hands, e.g. teachers, nurses and office workers.

The working class are people who work in manual jobs (using their hands), e.g. miners, factory workers and shipbuilders.

### Occupational scales

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the government developed the Registrar General Scale with well-paid jobs at the top and lower paid jobs at the bottom. This is no longer used by the government or sociologists because many traditional working class jobs such as those in factories and mines were disappearing and the unemployed did not appear on the scale.



A new scale the NS-SEC was introduced in 2001. It has eight points and is similar to the old scale but includes new jobs and the unemployed. However, it still causes problems, e.g. do you base social class on the man's or the woman's job? What about wealthy people who do not work? What about people with no job?

### Other factors to consider when deciding a person's social class

Are they wealthy?

Accent

Education – private school?

Social circle

What social class they think they are.

Lifestyle

Area they live in

Social class can mean different things to different people.

### What is ageism?

**The social construction of age** is the idea that the norms of what we do and how we behave at certain age is made by society, for example the modern idea that we should have a childhood did not appear until Victorian times. Before this there was no special time set aside for play and education. In Britain elderly people are not seen as the most important members of society. In other societies such as Native American tribes like the Sioux or Apache the elderly had greater status and prestige.

**Ageism** is the idea that some age groups are not capable or act in a certain way, for example the elderly are bad tempered and incapable of learning how to use new technology or the young are lazy, argumentative and irrational.



### How does gender affect women's life chances?

**Social construction of gender** is the idea that the norms of gender vary from society to society and over time, e.g. in the 20<sup>th</sup> century women were not allowed to vote and were not expected to have a career. They lived in the shadow of their husbands and had traditional feminine roles of housewife, mother and carer. Even though some women had gained the vote in 1918 by the 1950s a woman's place was still considered to be in the home.

**The rise of feminism** has seen a constant push to gain sexual equality. Greater numbers of women went out to work from the 1970s and the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 meant that women had equal rights to every job. The Equal Pay Act 1970 meant that women could no longer be paid less for doing the same job.



### Test your knowledge

1. What is subjective poverty?
2. Why are poverty and social exclusion linked?
3. What is class?
4. Who is in the upper class?
5. Who is in the middle class?
6. Who is in the working class?
7. What is the NS-SEC occupational scale?
8. Why was it introduced?
9. List all the factors that need to be taken into consideration when deciding someone's social class.
10. What is the social construction of age?
11. What is ageism?
12. What is the social construction of gender?
13. How has the role of women changed since the 1970s?
14. Which two acts have helped to increase sexual equality in the workplace?

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**Feminists argue that women have not gained equality** because:

1. There is a glass ceiling which is an invisible barrier caused by sexism and discrimination preventing them from getting the top jobs.
2. Women are still the main person responsible for housework and childcare. Feminists call this the double burden.
3. Some feminists go further and call this a triple burden; paid work, housework and emotional work as the wife has to keep everyone happy when upset and so the woman is still overburdened.

**How have changes in traditional roles affected men?**

**Man's traditional roles** were those of breadwinner (main wage earner), decision maker, strong leader and protector.

From the 1960s woman's roles have changed and men have had to try to adapt their role as these changes have happened.



**New man** – this idea appeared in the 1990s. New men were more caring and in touch with their emotions. They helped in the home with housework and childcare, e.g. David Beckham was seen as a 'hands on' dad. Men and women were more equal.



**House husband.** This is where men and women swap roles. The woman goes out to work and the man stays at home and looks after the house and children.

**Crisis of masculinity** – As men's roles in the home changed men's roles at work also changed as men's jobs in mines, shipyards and factories disappeared some sociologists argued that men no longer knew how to act. Sociologists called this a crisis in masculinity because men became confused about what the norms were for being a man.

**How have norms about homosexuality changed in the last 50 years**

**Homosexuality and the law**

In 1967 homosexuality was legalised if it was in private and the people involved were over 21 years. In 2001 the age of consent for gay couples was changed to 16 making it in line with heterosexual couples.

**Social norms and sexual orientation**

Despite changes in the law social norms have been slow to change and homophobic behaviour is still found. This is fear of or hostility towards homosexual

people. Young people tend to be more open minded gay pop stars such as Elton John and Boy George have helped by being role models. Films like Brokeback Mountain have also increased tolerance.



In 2005 civil partnerships were legalised giving gay couples the same rights as married couples.

In July 2013 the Marriages (Same sex couples) Act was passed in parliament allowing same sex couples to marry.

In 2010 the Equality Act was passed to protect gays and lesbians and people changing sex (transgender) from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

**What is racism?**

**Race** is an outdated way of dividing people often according to their skin colour.

**Ethnicity** is about a cultural group a person belongs to and may include religion, nationality and way of life.

**Racism** is when people are prejudiced and discriminate against different ethnic groups. Racism can result from socialisation by parents or peers. The government have passed laws to stop racism and schools have tried to introduce an anti-racist curriculum.

**Test your knowledge**

1. Give three reasons why women have not gained sexual equality according to feminists?
2. What was man's traditional role?
3. When did the roles of women start to change?
4. The idea of a new man appeared in the 1990s. What is a 'new man'?
5. What is a house husband?
6. Describe the crisis of masculinity.
7. Name two ways in which the law has changed towards homosexuals since the 1950s.
8. How have social norms changed towards homosexuals?
9. How have homosexuals been affected by changes in the law since the year 2000?
10. What is ethnicity?
11. What is racism?
12. How does racism sometimes come about?
13. What is the attitude of the government and schools towards racism?

**Scapegoating** often happens when there are economic problems and ethnic minority groups are blamed for social problems which are not their fault.



The Macpherson Report showed that institutional racism existed in the police force when police assumed that Stephen Lawrence and his friends were involved in gangs. This means that the culture of the organisation was racist.

### How does disability affect life chances?

**Equality Act 2010 defines disability** as when a person is not able to do everyday tasks due to physical or mental difficulties. This includes people who are wheelchair bound, blind, mentally ill or have learning disabilities.

**Able bodied people** are people who do not have a disability.

**British Social Attitudes Survey** found that people were uncomfortable with people who have disabilities particularly if people have mental health conditions or learning disabilities and were in positions of authority. This shows prejudice may lead to discrimination.

### Social versus medical model.

These are two ways of looking at the situation of people with disabilities.

**Medical model** – This model sees disability as bad and sees people with disabilities as needing help from society. People who are disabled have worse life chances because of a problem that they have.

**Social model** – Sees disability as just another form of difference like being male or female and therefore

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society needs to change to make things more accessible for them, e.g. by providing ramps or lifts. People with disabilities have worse life chances because of society.

### Why is there an underclass?

**Underclass** – a group of people who are below working class and left out by society, e.g. the long term unemployed, homeless and some disabled people.

### The culture of the underclass – the underclass are to blame!

The underclass has low status and do not take a full part in social life. This could be due to lack of money and / or the development of different norms, e.g. no job and different ways of making a living and having fun. This may begin with truancy from school and later include alcohol, drugs and crime



**The New Right** blame the underclass for their poverty and the government for giving them benefits which they believe produces a dependency culture in which they do not want to get jobs because they get benefits. The New Right are concerned about the effect that the underclass have on the rest of society linking high rates of teenage pregnancy, crime and bad parenting to them.

**Cycle of deprivation.** This is the idea that people who are poor are unable to escape their poverty because the way of life of the underclass becomes a culture of poverty. They socialise their children in ways that makes it impossible to escape their poverty.

**The Marxist view** is that society is so competitive and greedy that someone has to end up on the bottom of

society. There are always some people who are poor because some are well off.

### How do class, age, gender, ethnicity and disability affect people in the world of work?

**Class.** A 2011 BBC news report called 'Who gets the best jobs' found Britain had not been so unequal since World War I. People needed money and contacts to stand a chance of getting into jobs like law, medicine and media.

**Age.** Young people are often exploited, taken advantage of, by being paid low wages. Prejudice can be against older people but is hard to prove.

**Gender.** Feminists argue that a glass ceiling still blocks women from the top jobs. The Daily Telegraph 2012 argued that men are still paid more for doing the same job as women.

### Test your knowledge

1. What is scapegoating?
2. The Macpherson Report showed that the police force were institutionally racist following the murder of Stephen Lawrence. What is institutional racism?
3. How is disability defined in the Equality Act 2010?
4. What did the British Social Attitudes Survey show about attitudes to disabled people?
5. What can these feelings lead to?
6. What is the medical model of looking at the situation of disabled people?
7. What is the social model of looking at the situation of disabled people?
8. What is an underclass?
9. Why doesn't the underclass take part in social life?
10. What is the New Right's attitude towards the underclass?
11. What is a cycle of deprivation?
12. Why do Marxists think there is inequality in society?
13. What did the 2011 BBC News report find out about inequality in society?
14. How are younger and older people treated unequally?
15. How are women discriminated against at work?

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**Disability.** Disabled women earn 22% less but disabled men only earn 11% less. This is known as a dual disadvantage for women.



**How do class, age, gender, ethnicity and disability affect health life chances?**

**Class and health.** When the NHS was set up in 1948 it was expected that it would eliminate inequalities in health. In 1980 the Black Report showed that working class people were more likely to become seriously ill or die younger. This pattern continues. In 2012 the King's Fund found that working class people often drank too much, smoked and did less exercise. Health inequalities are getting worse. This report blames people's lifestyle and culture for health inequalities. Other sociologists state that poverty and poor living conditions cause poor health.

**Age and health.** Many young people are affected by health issues. One in ten young people in Britain suffer from a mental disorder, e.g. depression and anxiety. Between one in twelve and one in fifteen self-harm and each year and 25,000 of these are admitted to hospital because their injuries are so severe.

Some older people complain that they are given second class health care. They may not be given treatment because of their age.

**Gender and health.** Women report more health problems than men but live longer; 82.5 year compared to 78.5 years for men. The gap is closing but may be because men take part in more risky behaviour including dangerous jobs.



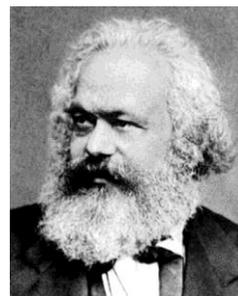
**Ethnicity and health.** Ethnic minorities have worse health than the rest of the population. This may be due to the fact that more are found in the working classes.

**What do the major sociological theories say about inequality?**

**Functionalists** say that everything in society has a job and that inequality is important in motivating people to work hard and be winners. Therefore inequality is needed by society and helps it to run well because if we were all equal nobody would try to do anything.

The New Right is a functionalist group who go further and blame the poor for inequality.

**Marxists** think that inequality exists between two main classes the working and ruling classes. The ruling class own big businesses, factories and the media. They control how the working classes think and so they don't realise that they are being used. Marxists believe that one day they will rise up and overthrow the ruling classes.



**Feminists** believe that we live in a patriarchal society; a society ruled by men and that inequality between men and women is the most damaging inequality because women have been trapped in the traditional roles of mother and housewife. Some feminists believe that progress has been made with changes in the law like the Sex Discrimination Act (1975). Radical feminists want to see bigger changes.

**Is Britain an equal society?**

**Meritocracy** is the idea that ability and hard work should bring success in a fair society. Therefore the top jobs will go to the cleverest people. Racism, ageism, sexism and treating people differently because of disabilities or social class suggest that Britain is not a meritocracy. People have different life chances of getting and keeping a good job,

being healthy and living a long life or staying out of jail. Individuals can overcome difficult circumstances but the odds are stacked against them.

There are sociologists that do not agree about this.

### Test your knowledge

1. How much less do ethnic minorities earn per hour than whites?
2. How much less do disabled women earn per hour than able bodied people?
3. How much less do disabled men earn per hour than able bodied people?
4. What did the King's Fund think caused the poor health of many working class people?
5. What do other sociologists blame for poor health among the working classes?
6. How are young people affected by health problems?
7. What do many older people state about the health care system?
8. Do men or women report the most healthcare problems?
9. Why do women live longer than men according to some sociologists?
10. What reason has been given for the worse health of ethnic minorities compared to the rest of the population?
11. Why do functionalists think that inequality is needed?
12. Who do the New Right blame for the fact that the poor are poor?
13. Marxists blame the ruling classes for the fact that the poor are poor and state that they are exploiting the poor. Who are the ruling classes?
14. What explanation do feminists give for inequality between men and women?
15. What is a meritocracy?
16. Why isn't Britain a meritocracy according to many sociologists?
17. Do all sociologists agree that Britain is not a meritocracy?