Social Class and Inequality

**Education**

<https://www.teachfirst.org.uk/why-we-exist/what-educational-inequality>

In the UK, the link between low socio-economic background and poor educational attainment is greater than in almost any other developed country.

Educational inequality starts early, before a child even starts school. Figures show a one year gap in 'school readiness' between 3-year-olds, and a 15 month gap in vocabulary development between 5-year-olds, in the richest and poorest families.

<http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2014/jan/27/education-inequality-in-england-where-is-the-gap-widening-demos>

Education inequality in England: where is the gap widening?

For the fourth year running, the South East of England has the largest gap between the grades of its poorer pupils and the average in each local authority. We present the data

The percentage point difference in GCSE success is worst in Wokingham - an area where the local food bank has seen requests for help double in the space of two months.

In Wokingham, of the pupils not eligible for free school meals, 73.5% attained an A\* to C grade - but only 31% of poorer pupils managed to do the same. At 39.6, the percentage point difference in Buckinghamshire was only marginally better than the gap in Wokingham. The 20 largest educational gaps are listed below.

Demos sought to build on the standard Department for Education release by compiling GCSE results since 2009/10 and seeing whether poorer students were catching up with their classmates. In some areas, such as Bracknell Forest, there had been a huge improvement - where once there was a 44.3 percentage point difference between pupils it had closed to 27.3 in 2012/13.

But in places like Rutland, the gap had more than doubled. Nationwide, the think tank claims that London, where poor students perform the closest to their peers, skews the results. Demos claims that once the capital is excluded, the data shows that educational inequality is rising

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-30352382>

Failure to address educational inequalities in England means taxpayers have to "pay twice", says an alliance of 25 education organisations.

Unless every child gets a fair chance, the cost of schooling is followed by more expense later, it says.

The Fair Education Alliance sets out five national targets to break what it calls "the class ceiling".

Education Secretary Nicky Morgan said the government wished to ensure all pupils achieved their full potential.

The report, Will We Ever Have A Fair Education?, says educational unfairness starts before children even start school, with poorer five-year-olds less ready for learning than their more affluent peers.

<http://centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/UserStorage/pdf/Pdf%20reports/Closing-the-Divide.pdf>

The Centre for Social Justice shone a light on the shocking levels of deprivation that blight communities across the UK in 2007 in our report Breakthrough Britain. The project transformed the British political landscape, reinvigorated a tired debate on how to tackle poverty and was hailed as a definitive research paper on social problems in modern Britain. This unprecedented diagnosis of deprivation led us to identify five interlinked ‘pathways to poverty’. These were: 

Family breakdown;

Economic dependency and worklessness;

Educational failure;

Drug and alcohol addiction; and

Serious personal debt.

Alongside this, we made recommendations about unlocking the potential of the voluntary sector to reverse social breakdown. These reports revealed how, despite the longest period of continuous economic growth in modern history – more than 60 quarters – and unparalleled levels of government spending, a large proportion of British society remained cut off from the mainstream. We argued that what was trapping people was not necessarily the economy but their exposure to long-term worklessness, family breakdown, poor education, addiction and serious debt, and that too often government intervention was focussed on trying to alleviate the symptoms of poverty, rather than these causes.

<http://www.ces.ed.ac.uk/PDF%20Files/Brief040.pdf>

Key findings 

Studying inequality over a period of expansion raises a question of values: is the value of education intrinsic, such that everyone may benefit from its expansion, or is it a positional good whose value declines if others possess more of it? 

 Inequalities in attainment at age 16 were similar in England and Scotland, and narrowed slightly in Scotland relative to England during the late 1980s and 1990s.

Inequalities in attainment at age 18 narrowed slightly between the 1980s and the 1990s in England but not in Scotland.

Within each Scottish cohort the class gap was wider at 18 than at 16 years. By the late 1990s inequalities at age 18 were substantially wider in Scotland than in England.

 Inequalities in participation in higher education (HE) initially rose as HE expanded in the early 1990s but then fell to a level lower than in the 1980s. They were consistently higher in Scotland than in England. 

The ‘overall’ level of inequality, across different levels of attainment, fell slightly in England and remained stable in Scotland.

In both countries social-class differences in entry to HE could largely be attributed to class differences in achieving the qualifications for entry to HE. Inequalities in entry to degree courses were wider than for HE as a whole. 

General levels of attainment and participation were higher in Scotland. Despite greater inequalities working class Scots outperformed their English peers.

**Health**

Males in the most deprived areas had a life expectancy 9.0 years shorter than males in the least deprived areas. They also spent a smaller proportion of their shorter lives in 'good' health (70.5% compared to 84.9%).

Females in the most deprived areas had a life expectancy 6.9 years shorter (when measured by the range) than females in the least deprived areas. They could also expect to spend 16.7 percentage points less of their lives in 'good' health (66.2% compared to 82.9%).

<http://patient.info/doctor/health-and-social-class>

Illustrating the social gradient of health - health status worsens as you go down the socioeconomic scale - between 1982 and 1986, life expectancy for men in Class 1 was 2.3 and 4.9 years greater than those in Classes 3 and 7 respectively. By 2002-2006, although the gap between Classes 1 and 3 had declined to 1.9 years, that between Classes 1 and 7 had increased to 5.8 years (Office for National Statistics, 2011).

Another important factor influencing health inequality is the provision - or lack - of public services (Bartley, 2004). The unequal distribution of income determines the relationship between individuals and these factors: those on the lowest income are likely to be most adversely affected by lack of public services.

<http://www.nursingtimes.net/clinical-subjects/public-health/social-class-and-its-influence-on-health/5091017.fullarticle>

Individuals of lower socioeconomic status in the United States experience a wide array of health problems as a result of their economic status. They are unable to use health care as often, and when they do it is of lower quality, even though they generally tend to experience a much higher rate of health issues.

<https://www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/health-and-illness-19/the-experience-of-illness-132/social-class-and-health-734-8214/>

Poverty e.g. not enough money to buy proper food, being forced to live in poor quality housing in unhealthy or high crime areas

Lower class people are less well-educated and have less knowledge of healthy lifestyles

Class differences in health-related behaviour

More dangerous jobs of lower class people

More stressful lives of lower class people

(PowerPoint presentation)

Social class (including income, wealth and education)

Research on socio-economic inequalities in health in the UK has a long history. In the early part of the 20th century the British government introduced questions on occupation in the decennial census. This allowed researchers to examine health outcomes by social class. The five class scheme Registrar Generals Social Class (RGSC) was created in 1911 and a variation of this scheme was still used until recently. In 2001, the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) replaced the RGSC. For a description of the new scheme see http: /www.statistics.gov.uk

The 1970-1972 Decennial Supplement of occupational Mortality (OCPS) showed that men in social class V (unskilled) were 2.5 times as likely to die before the age of 65 as those in social class I (professional). Children in social class V families were twice as likely to die as those in social class I.

<http://www.healthknowledge.org.uk/public-health-textbook/medical-sociology-policy-economics/4c-equality-equity-policy/inequalities-distribution>

**Work**

**The size of the social classes that have changed. The nature of the work which each class takes on has been greatly affected by the move towards a more flexible economy. For example manual workers find that the new service sector jobs have a different character: `The old working class was employed in coal mines, shipyards, steel plants and engineering workshops the new**

**working class is employed in supermarkets, security firms, contract cleaners, fast food and other catering establishments, and suchlike'. (Roberts 2001)**

**Denny (2003) reports that not all of the lower class have managed to find alternative jobs. In the worst hit areas, such as the old coalfields, many manual workers took early retirement or went benefit, with painful consequences for families and communities. Other found jobs that were not as well paid as the ones they had lost.**

**In general it is difficult to deny that middle class workers enjoy marked advantages. For example**

**Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers are four times more likely than professional and managerial groups to become unemployed (Brown et al 2002). If working, they are more likely to be on casual, temporary or part time contracts.**

**At present there are over 57000 millionaires in Britain. To get in the top 200 requires a fortune of at least £103m, and £250m to qualify for the top 100.**

**Many of these rich people were born into the upper class, since Britain’s generous inheritance laws allow upper class families to retain much of their wealth. It is not true that inheritance tax has destroyed the land estates of aristocracy. Robinson (1996) argues that the decline in aristocracy is entirely imaginary. If anything they have rallied in the 20th century some historic estates have increased substantially in size; and members of the aristocracy have not only held on to their great wealth and traditional ‘leadership’ roles but have also developed new roles in the City and in the arts.**

**Roberts (2001) describes the growing sense of insecurity and anxiety among the middle classes. Many of them feel their perks and privileges are under threat. Also they are increasingly desperate to ensure their children do well at school, so they avoid falling down the social class ladder.**

**There are similarities between Braverman’s views and the non-Marxist ideas of George Ritzer (1996). Ritzer argues that the so-called rational principles of the fast food industry are coming to dominate wider sectors of society (e.g. health, education, business). These principles are efficiency (speed), calculability (measurable quantities), and predictability and control (the substitution of humans with technology). Human discretion is minimised as far as possible by the use of technology. Ritzer is broadly critical of the process of deskilling which McDonaldization introduces into society at large. He says it is inefficient and dehumanising, and it strips people of their creativity and initiative. Moreover, he is not convinced by those who argue that society is actually moving away from McDonaldization towards ‘Post-Fordism’ or ‘Post-Modernism’.**

**Savage (2000) argues that the collective confidence of the working class is being undermined in contemporary society. At one time they saw themselves collectively strong and independent, in contrast to the dependent people who worked in an office. But savage argues that there has been a cultural shift. Nowadays the working class are no longer in powerful trade unions, and they jobs they have somehow seem less ‘heroic’ when compared with the collective craft pride of the old shipbuilders, steelworkers and miners. Manual labour has suffered a loss in status and it is often regarded as more suitable for young men than for mature adults.**

**Media and political representations in relation to inequalities in social class**

**There is also an enormous amount of print and broadcast media dedicated to daily business and stock market quotations, despite the fact that few people in Britain own stocks and shares.**

[**http://www.slideshare.net/craigosborne560/representation-of-social-class-20236313**](http://www.slideshare.net/craigosborne560/representation-of-social-class-20236313)

**Neo-Marxists argue that mass media representations of social class tend to celebrate hierarchy and wealth. Those who benefit from these processes, i.e. the monarchy, the upper class and the very wealthy, generally receive a positive press as celebrities who are somehow deserving of their position. The British mass media hardly ever portray the upper classes in a critical light, nor do they often draw any serious attention to inequalities in wealth and pay or the overrepresentation of public-school products in positions of power.**

**Newman argues that when news organisations focus on the working class, it is generally to label them as a problem, e.g. as welfare cheats, drug addicts or criminals. Working class groups, e.g. youth sub-cultures such as mods or skinheads, are often the subject of moral panics, whilst reporting of issues such as poverty, unemployment or single-parent families often suggests that personal inadequacy is the main cause of these social problems, rather than government policies or poor business practices. Studies of industrial relations reporting by the Glasgow University Media Group suggest that the media portray ‘unreasonable’ workers as making trouble for ‘reasonable’ employers.**

[**http://revisionworld.com/a2-level-level-revision/sociology/mass-media-0/age-social-class-ethnicity-gender-sexuality-disability**](http://revisionworld.com/a2-level-level-revision/sociology/mass-media-0/age-social-class-ethnicity-gender-sexuality-disability)

**MPs from privileged backgrounds may be ‘less in touch with the mass electorate’ and less in touch with working class voters. Working class MPs may also be more likely than upper class MPs to put forward or support left-wing policies and it may therefore be harder for the leadership of a left wing party to change party policy and move to the right when there are many working class MPs within the party who would potentially be resistant to such a move.**

[**https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/portal/files/23836228/class\_and\_representation.pdf**](https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/portal/files/23836228/class_and_representation.pdf)

**Where some groups (such as the working classes) feature in the media they’re fairly restricted to a fairly narrow range of appearances or situations. A positive area is sport (especially male professional sport). A negative side, there is the association with crime and industry unrest. Middle class representations are broader, involving a wider range of representations across professional employment, taking in work, sport and cultural associations (music, fashion and so forth)**

[**http://www.sociology.org.uk/revgmm4.pdf**](http://www.sociology.org.uk/revgmm4.pdf)

**The media has also been to the forefront of using terms like ‘chav’ to imply their poverty is undignified.**

**Hayward & Yar argue the label ‘chav’ is now used by papers & websites as a term for young poor people.**

**Lawler says the term is a sign of disgust & contempt for a certain group of people & their situation.**

**www.cpanel.stpaulsscience.org/.../Media\_representations\_of\_social\_class..**