Your notes

GCSE Sociology: revision notes

Social class and life chances

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Social class

- Social class is usually measured by occupation. The **upper class** holds great wealth, often inherited; the middle class works in professional and managerial jobs; the working class works in manual and routine jobs.
- **Life chances** are a person's chances of having good things in life, such as good health, education, housing and a long life.
- **Life chances** are strongly linked to class: on average, people in higher classes live longer and healthier lives and do better at school.

Social mobility

- **Social mobility** is movement between classes. **Intergenerational mobility** compares a person's class with their parents'; **intragenerational mobility** is movement within a person's own lifetime.
- Upward mobility can come from education and new opportunities; research suggests Britain still has limited mobility, with class background strongly affecting where people end up.

The underclass

- Murray argued an **underclass** had formed, living on welfare benefits, with high rates of crime and lone parenthood, and a culture of dependency.
- Critics argue this blames the poor, and that poverty is caused by structural factors such as a lack of jobs, not by culture.

Devine: the affluent worker (Eduqas)

- In the 1960s, Goldthorpe and Lockwood studied well-paid 'affluent workers' at car factories in Luton. In the late 1980s, Fiona Devine studied workers there again.

- She found they had not become middle class: they still had working-class values, kept close ties with family and workmates, and supported trade unions and collective action.

Key terms

Life chances	A person's chances of having good things in life, such as health and education.
Social mobility	Movement between social classes.
Intergenerational mobility	Mobility between generations of a family.
Intragenerational mobility	Mobility within a person's own lifetime.
Underclass	A group said to be below the working class, dependent on welfare.
Upper class	A small group holding great wealth, often inherited.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What are life chances?
2. What is intergenerational mobility?
3. What is intragenerational mobility?
4. Who argued an underclass had formed?
5. What is a criticism of Murray's underclass theory?
6. How is social class usually measured?
7. How are life chances linked to class?
8. What is upward mobility?

Answers

1. A person's chances of having good things in life
2. Mobility between generations of a family
3. Movement within a person's own lifetime
4. Murray
5. It blames the poor rather than structural causes
6. By occupation
7. Higher classes tend to have better health and education
8. Moving into a higher social class

What to do next

Practise 11 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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