8.1 Work, Poverty and Welfare: Explanations and Measurement of Poverty

AQA 7192 · about 55 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Use full sentences for questions worth 4 marks or more. Spend about 55 minutes on the whole paper.

1 Define what Weberian sociologists mean by 'life chances' and explain briefly how this concept helps to explain poverty in a contemporary society like the UK.

(Total for Question 1 is 3 marks)

2 Identify and explain one piece of evidence a sociologist might seek to test Murray's underclass thesis about areas of persistent poverty.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

3 State one strength of using a multidimensional poverty measure like Townsend's index rather than only an income threshold, in sociological research about poverty in the UK.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

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4 Using your sociological knowledge, explain two policy limitations when trying to reduce the feminisation of poverty in contemporary Britain.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 Discuss how far sociologists would agree that poverty in contemporary industrial societies is best explained by structural factors rather than by culture or individual behaviour. In your answer evaluate competing perspectives and reach a supported conclusion.

(Total for Question 5 is 12 marks)

6 Define what sociologists mean by 'relative poverty' when measuring poverty within a nation such as the UK.

(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)

7 Identify and explain one weakness of using a subjective survey question asking people whether they feel poor to measure poverty in a national British sample.

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

8 Outline two ways Townsend's relative deprivation index differs from a simple government income-threshold measure when assessing poverty in Britain.

(Total for Question 8 is 4 marks)

9 Identify and explain two criticisms of using a simple income threshold such as 60% of median income to decide who is in poverty in the UK.

(Total for Question 9 is 4 marks)

10 Item A: A local council area survey reports that 25% of households have incomes below 60% of the national median, but the same survey also finds 18% of households lack at least two goods or activities considered typical in that area, such as replacing worn-out clothes or inviting friends to the house. Using Item A and your sociological knowledge, explain two ways these two measures might give different perspectives on poverty in this council area.

(Total for Question 10 is 4 marks)

11 Identify and explain two ways Marxist explanations account for poverty in modern industrial societies.

(Total for Question 11 is 4 marks)

Mark scheme · 8.1 Work, Poverty and Welfare: Explanations and Measurement of Poverty

Question 1

definition: identifies life chances as opportunities individuals have to improve their quality of life and access resources **B1**

applies the concept to poverty, e.g. limited life chances due to low status, poor education or weak marketable skills reduce access to well-paid jobs **B1**

development, e.g. this explains poverty as a result of unequal distribution of economic and social resources rather than individual moral failure **B1**

Answer: Life chances are the opportunities individuals have to improve their quality of life and access resources; limited life chances, through low status, poor education or weak marketable skills, reduce access to well-paid jobs and so help explain poverty as a result of unequal distribution of economic and social resources.

Question 2

identifies suitable evidence, e.g. longitudinal data showing intergenerational unemployment and welfare dependence in certain areas **B1**

explains why it is relevant, e.g. such evidence would support or challenge the claim that poverty and family breakdown persist across generations **B1**

Answer: A sociologist could use longitudinal data tracking families to see if unemployment and welfare dependence persist across generations in certain areas; this would test Murray's claim that an underclass culture perpetuates poverty across generations.

Question 3

identifies a genuine strength, e.g. captures different aspects of living standards and social participation **B1**

brief development, e.g. this provides a fuller picture of exclusion than income alone **B1**

Answer: A strength is that a multidimensional measure captures different aspects of living standards and social participation, providing a fuller picture of exclusion than income alone.

Question 4

identifies first limitation, e.g. childcare provision and costs limit womens ability to increase paid work **B1**

develops first limitation, e.g. even if childcare funding increases, part-time low paid jobs and employer practices may persist **B1**

identifies second limitation, e.g. pension rules and fragmented employment histories make reducing old-age female poverty difficult **B1**

develops second limitation, e.g. policy changes to pensions require long lead times and face political resistance **B1**

Answer: Two limitations are that insufficient affordable childcare and persistent low pay in part-time work limit womens ability to increase paid work, and that fragmented employment histories and pension rules make reducing old-age female poverty difficult, since pension reform is complex and slow.

Question 5

Level 1 Basic statements about causes of poverty with little development or use of sociological perspectives. Limited or no evaluation and a weak or no conclusion. **1-3**

Level 2 Clear description of one or two explanations, for example structural factors and cultural explanations, with some use of sociological ideas. Limited evaluation of strengths and weaknesses and a simple conclusion. **4-6**

Level 3 Good analysis of competing views: clear explanation of structural accounts such as Marxist and Weberian arguments and cultural or individualist accounts such as New Right explanations. Relevant evidence or examples used. Balanced evaluation showing understanding of limitations on both sides. **7-9**

Level 4 Excellent analysis and evaluation, comparing Marxist, Weberian and structural accounts with New Right and cultural explanations, and feminist perspectives on gendered poverty. Discussion of empirical evidence and methodological issues, recognition of complexity and interaction between structure and agency, and a supported, well-reasoned conclusion. **10-12**

Indicative content:

- Structural explanations: Marxist view of capitalism producing low pay, insecure employment and spatial concentration of poverty; Weberian life chances showing how class, status and party affect access to resources.
- New Right and cultural explanations: Murray's underclass and culture of dependency, claim that attitudes, family breakdown and welfare dependency reduce employment incentives and perpetuate poverty.
- Feminist perspective: feminisation of poverty shows structural factors intersect with gendered roles and labour market inequalities to produce gendered patterns of poverty.
- Evidence and evaluation: use of longitudinal studies, regional unemployment data and measures of material deprivation to assess structural causes; criticisms of cultural explanations for blaming the poor and insufficiently accounting for economic restructuring.
- Interactionist or nuanced approaches: some sociologists argue for a combination of factors, where structural economic change produces conditions in which certain cultural patterns emerge, so structure and agency interact.
- Methodological issues: difficulties in proving causation, limits of income-thresholds versus multidimensional measures, and the role of ideology in shaping policy responses.
- Conclusion should weigh the relative explanatory power of structural factors against cultural and individual explanations and argue a justified position, for example that structure provides the primary cause but culture and agency shape outcomes and policy effects.

Question 6

identifies that relative poverty compares someone's resources to the standard of living in their society, not a fixed minimum **B1**

development, e.g. often operationalised as having income below a percentage of median income, for example below 60% of median household income **B1**

Answer: Relative poverty compares a person or household's resources to the standard of living in their society; it is often measured as having income below a set percentage of median household income, for example below 60% of the median.

Question 7

identifies a weakness, e.g. responses are influenced by personal expectations and cultural norms **B1**

explains the weakness, e.g. two people with similar incomes might answer differently so the measure lacks objectivity and comparability **B1**

Answer: A weakness is that responses are influenced by personal expectations and cultural norms; two people with similar incomes might answer differently, so the measure lacks objectivity and comparability.

Question 8

identifies first difference, e.g. Townsend uses multiple indicators of resources and living standards rather than income alone **B1**

develops first point, e.g. Townsend included lack of common goods, overcrowding and inability to afford social activities **B1**

identifies second difference, e.g. Townsend emphasises socially perceived necessities and exclusion rather than a single income cutoff **B1**

develops second point, e.g. his approach captures exclusion from ordinary living standards as judged against society's norms **B1**

Answer: Townsend uses multiple indicators of living standards rather than income alone, for example lack of common goods and overcrowding, and he emphasises socially perceived necessities and exclusion rather than a single income cutoff, capturing inability to participate in ordinary social life.

Question 9

identifies a criticism, e.g. a single national income threshold does not reflect regional differences in living costs **B1**

develops that point, e.g. the same income may buy less in an area with higher prices, so households on similar incomes can have different living standards **B1**

identifies a second criticism, e.g. income alone does not show non-income resources or debts **B1**

develops second criticism, e.g. households on similar incomes may have different savings or debt repayments, leaving them with different resources to meet their needs **B1**

Answer: A single national income threshold does not reflect regional differences in living costs: the same income may buy less in an area with higher prices, so households on similar incomes can have different living standards. Income alone also does not show non-income resources or debts: savings may help a household meet its needs, while debt repayments may leave another household on the same income with fewer resources.

Question 10

first point: identifies that the 25% figure measures income below a numerical threshold whereas the 18% figure records absence of at least two typical goods or activities **B1**

development of first point, e.g. savings or debt repayments could affect access to goods at a given income; the percentages alone do not show which households fall into both groups **B1**

second point: identifies that absence of typical goods or activities does not by itself demonstrate financial deprivation or inability to participate in ordinary social life **B1**

development of second point, e.g. absence may reflect preference or other reasons rather than inability to afford the goods or activities; the 18% figure alone does not establish the cause or severity of deprivation **B1**

Answer: First, the 25% figure identifies households below an income threshold, while the 18% figure records households lacking at least two typical goods or activities. Savings or debt repayments could affect access to goods at a given income, but these percentages do not show which households fall into both groups. Second, absence of typical goods or activities does not by itself demonstrate financial deprivation or inability to participate in ordinary social life. It may reflect preference or other reasons rather than inability to afford them, so the 18% figure alone does not establish the cause or severity of deprivation.

Question 11

identifies first Marxist point, e.g. poverty results from capitalist exploitation where surplus value is taken from workers **B1**

develops first point, e.g. low wages and insecure employment are structural outcomes of profit maximisation **B1**

identifies second Marxist point, e.g. poverty is maintained by ruling class ideology and institutions that legitimise inequality **B1**

develops second point, e.g. education, media and the state reproduce ideas that blame the poor and justify low pay **B1**

Answer: Marxists say poverty arises from capitalist exploitation, where profit motives produce low wages and insecure jobs, and is reproduced by ruling class ideology and institutions such as education and media that legitimise inequality and blame the poor.