

# Sociology: Summer Independent Learning (SIL)



**Instructions:** Read the following material and complete the questions/tasks.

*Answers may be completed on a computer and printed out or handwritten on paper.*

Bring this work with you to your first Sociology lesson. There is a glossary of key terms at the end of this booklet to help you.

## Part 1: What is Sociology?

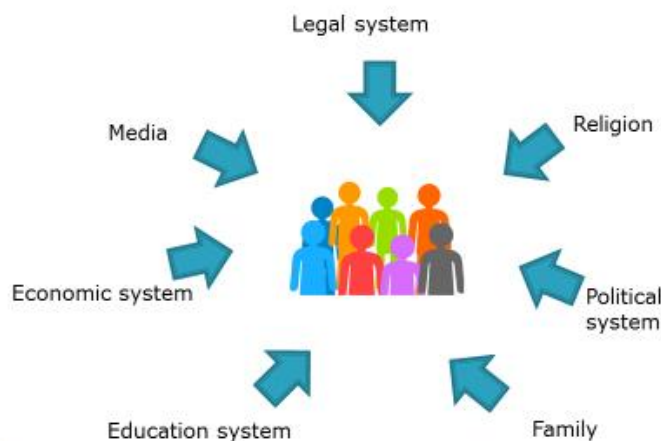
Many people coming to the subject of sociology for the first time have a vague idea that the subject is the study of people and society. This is a good start, as sociology looks at how influences from society shape and affect people and their behaviour, their experiences and how they interpret the world around them.

### Sociology is the study of social institutions.....

Sociology is the study of human groups and social life in modern societies. Sociologists are interested in the various social institutions found in society and how they operate. For example, **the family** is an institution that exists in many forms and a version of the family is found in the majority of human societies. Many developed societies have **education systems**, which perform a number of functions such as providing children with skills for work. **Work and the economic system** are the way in which goods and services are produced and distributed. **The law** ensures social control and regulation of people's behaviour and **politics** enables people's views to be represented democratically. Many societies also follow a set of beliefs, which may include **religion**.

Therefore, society is made up of many parts (or institutions) and they all contribute something to the operation of society.

The parts of society....



## Sociology is the study of social differences and inequalities.....

Sociologists are also interested in how society may be divided into social groups – or how they are **stratified**. For example, some sociologists would argue that **social class** is a significant form of stratification or inequality found in our society – wealth and incomes are distributed unevenly, which may result in some members of society having privileges and wealth, while others have low incomes and may live in poverty. For example, in the UK, the richest 10% of people own 44% of the nation’s total wealth. The poorest half of the population share only 9% of the total wealth.

A person’s income, occupation and ownership of wealth are related to other aspects of their lives such as how much power and influence they have, their level of education and their social status.

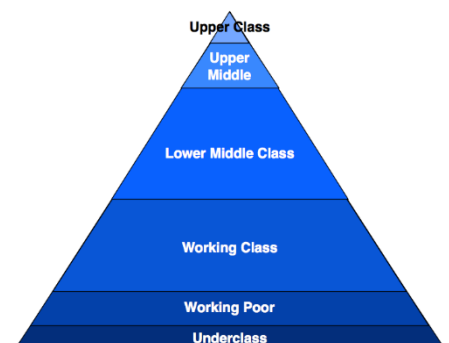
There is a lot of disagreement about how we should define different social classes, however we can usually separate them into these distinct groups:

Upper class	A small class that refers to the main owners of society’s wealth. This may include business owners, landowners and the aristocracy.
Middle class	A large class, and often refers to those in non-manual work. This includes people who don’t carry out physical labour in their work, and may involve working in offices. At the top of the middle classes, highly paid and highly skilled occupations may feature, such as doctors and lawyers. At the bottom, there may be people carrying out routine office work who are paid much less. Some may argue that those in the low paid jobs should be included in the working class as their pay may be very similar.
Working class	A large class, including those who work in manual jobs which involve physical labour. This may include skilled work such as electricians or plumbers, or unskilled work such as working in packing in a factory.
Underclass	Some sociologists have identified this small class at the bottom, whose poverty may exclude them from full participation in society. This class may be characterised as having long term welfare benefit dependency and unemployment.

Some people have suggested there are now more than the 4 main categories of social class shown in the table above, such as the ‘working poor’ and the ‘lower middle class’.

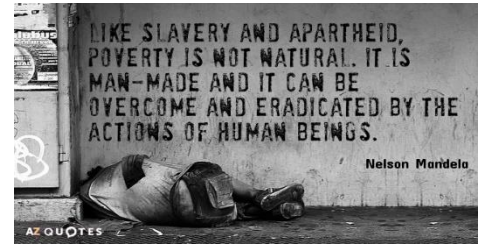
Sociologists study the relationship between social class and other factors, such as educational achievement and crime.

Other forms of divide sociologists are interested in are **gender** and **ethnicity**. An individual’s social class, gender and/or ethnicity can affect their life chances – whether or not they do well at school, whether they can get a good job or their chances of committing crime or being imprisoned. For example on average, women earn about 15% less than men. Unemployment is almost twice as high for ethnic minorities as for whites.



## Sociology is the study of social problems and issues.....

As well as studying how society works, sociologists are interested in why societies sometimes don't work well, or why certain features of social life may be harmful. For example, **poverty** may be found in many societies, and this can lead to other forms of disadvantage. **Family breakdown** and divorce may also occur which may lead to other social problems. Sociologists often research these issues to uncover useful information which could be used by governments and policy makers to try to improve society.



## Sociology is the study of social change.....

Sociologists are interested in social changes – society does not remain static, it constantly changes across decades and centuries and across countries. Sociologists want to know how and why societies change. For example, the role of women has changed in many contemporary societies. This may be because of...

- Changes in social norms and attitudes regarding what role women perform in society, for example many decades ago, women were seen as primarily performing the domestic role and were focused on home and raising children, whereas now women are actively involved in employment, the economy, education and politics.
- Changes in the law. These could include laws regarding equal pay and sex discrimination, access to divorce or abortion.

### **TASK A**

1. Identify two social institutions found in society.
2. Outline one function that education systems may perform in society.
3. Identify one characteristic of the upper class.
4. Identify two jobs that may be regarded as middle class.
5. Identify one key characteristic of the working class.
6. Welfare benefit dependency is regarded as a feature of the underclass. Briefly explain what this means. (You may need research this phrase online).
7. Identify one social problem that sociologists might be interested in studying, other than the problems identified in the text.
8. The text discusses how sociologists study social change and gives the example of the role of women. Identify two other ways in which society has changed over the last 100 years.

## Part 2: Is human behaviour a consequence of nature or nurture?

People disagree about whether our behaviour is something natural that we are born with (nature) or whether it is the result of our upbringing in society and our environment (nurture).



Biologists would examine how our behaviour is shaped by natural instincts. However sociologists question this and argue that much of our behaviour is learned. Instead of looking at biological reasons for our behaviour, sociologists look towards **culture and socialisation** instead.

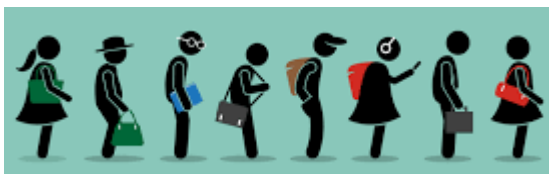
**Culture:** Without human contact we are reduced to basic and instinctive behaviour. But when humans work together they create cultures that are complex and different. We become human through this interaction with others, creating our culture.

If human behaviour were really directed by just our genes or instincts, we would expect to find people behaving in much the same way all over the world. But what is regarded as normal behaviour varies from one culture to another. If we lived in Victorian Britain or in modern China, we would follow different customs and have different lifestyles. So human behaviour is flexible and diverse. It varies according to the culture we live in.

**Sociologists usually define culture as the shared values and norms of a society or group.**

There may be some cultural variation within one society. For example, in Britain there are many different groups that may have their own subcultures that vary from the mainstream. Cultures may also change over time. Attitudes to different behaviours may change, such as attitudes to smoking or sex before marriage.

**Values:** are things we regard as important, the most significant standards or principles in our lives. The value of human life is an obvious example. Other examples are religious convictions and political loyalties. In everyday life, most people subscribe to the values of honesty, consideration towards others, justice and fairness.



**Norms:** are social expectations or rules about how people should or should not behave- for example, you should hold the door open for others, you should join the back of a queue. There are different rules for different situations and contexts – you can let your hair down at an end-of-term party, but the same behaviour would be frowned upon during normal class time. Norms also vary in their degree of seriousness. Committing murder will result in severe legal punishment but bad table manners might only provide irritation in others.

**Socialisation:** The process of learning our culture is called socialisation. When living in a human society, we learn our social norms and values from being children. Many of the social institutions described earlier in this resource – family, education – are involved in the process of socialisation. One of the key functions of the family, according to some sociologists, is to socialise children into the norms and values of society. Sociologists make the distinction between:

- Primary socialisation: this takes place in the family, where we are taught by our parents. These are often the norms that are expected of us within our family.
- Secondary socialisation: this takes place later, in education, the workplace or by the media. These are norms which are from the wider society and the adult world.

**Social Control:** The methods society uses to ensure people comply with the rules and regulations are known as social control. Social control may involve punishments or rewards to help reinforce what



acceptable norms of behaviour are within society. Social control may be formal such as the police or the courts. Social control can also take place in an informal way,

such as through peers, neighbours and our families.



### **TASK B**

1. Briefly explain how sociologists define culture.
2. Give one example of how culture can vary within a society.
3. Give one example of how social norms may vary across the world.
4. Briefly explain the difference between primary and secondary socialisation.
5. Give one example of formal social control.

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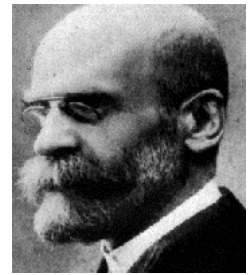
## Part 3: An Introduction to Sociological Theory/Perspectives

The subject of sociology is based on **theory** and **research**. Students of sociology study the different theories of human behaviour and society that have developed in the subject over many years. This means you will look at a range of views and perspectives about society, some of which disagree with each other. Many sociologists also carry out real research into society. When you study topics such as why men commit more crime than women, or why children from deprived backgrounds do less well in school, you will examine some of the research that has been published in these areas.

**Sociological Theories/Perspectives:** A perspective is a way of looking at something, or an opinion about something. A **sociological** perspective is a way of looking at society. There are many different perspectives in sociology. Below are three examples of sociological theories you will learn and evaluate on the A Level Sociology course. They are Functionalism, Marxism and Feminism.

### Functionalism

The theory of functionalism is associated with the French sociologist, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) and the American sociologist Talcott Parsons (1902-79). Both of these sociologists were interested in studying what makes societies work or function well. This theory is sometimes known as a “consensus theory” as it believes that society is based on agreement (consensus) amongst its members about basic norms and values (culture). The theory tries to explain what makes societies ordered and stable.



Emile Durkheim

The functionalist sociologists believed that societies are made up of inter-related parts that are essential for the smooth running of society. They say that society is similar to a biological organism such as the human body. As the human body is made up of parts – cells, organs etc - that fit together and depend on each other, society is also a system of interdependent parts. This idea is known as the “organic analogy”. For example, the family is a part of society that reproduces the next generation and socialises them into the norms and values of society. The education system is a part of society that socialises children and teaches them skills and knowledge they will need for the workplace.



So functionalists are interested in how the “parts” of society, or the “social institutions” contribute to the overall well-being and stability of society. They also look in detail at the different institutions such as the family, the education or legal system, and what functions they perform in society.

### **Evaluation:**

- Functionalists have been accused of being too positive about the role and function of the institutions in society. For example, the family plays an important role in the socialisation of children, but there are negative aspects to family life such as child neglect or child poverty.
- Functionalists assume that everyone in society shares the same values – this may not be the case as people’s culture and identity are more diverse today than in the past.



## Marxism

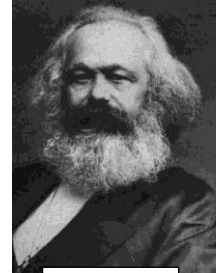
Another key sociological theory, Marxism, comes from the writings of Karl Marx (1818-1883). Marx was an economist and philosopher who was critical of the economic system of capitalism which had developed in Western societies around that time. He felt that this system benefited the few at the expense of the many.

### Definition of Capitalism:

An economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit.

He argued that society was made up of two main social groups:

- A ruling (capitalist) class – this small wealthy group own the means of production. This means they own the things that are needed to produce goods to be sold e.g. land, raw materials, factories, businesses.
- A subject class – workers who sell their labour to the ruling class in exchange for wages. A much larger group who Marx saw as being exploited by the ruling class.



Karl Marx

There is a basic conflict of interests between the ruling class and the subject class, according to Marx. Workers produce wealth in the form of goods yet a large part of that wealth is taken in the form of profits by the ruling class. Thus one group gains at the expense of another.

Marx believed therefore that modern capitalist societies were based on **conflict**, rather than **consensus** like the functionalists. Marx thought that the workers would eventually realise the extent of the inequality and exploitation, and would rise up and overthrow the capitalist system, resulting in a fairer and more equal society.

Like the functionalists, Marxism also explores the role of the “parts” of society – like the family, the education system and the legal system. Unlike functionalists, Marxists do not see these “parts” as helping society remain stable and ordered. Instead, institutions like the education system serve the interests of the ruling class and capitalism, for example the education system ensures the ruling class get a new, educated generation of workers to exploit. Marxists say that the family socialises children into capitalist norms and values, for example your parents teach you to do as you are told, to prepare you for the obedience to authority that is expected in the capitalist workplace.

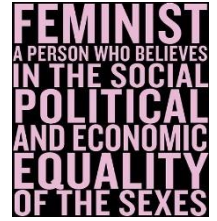
### Evaluation:

- Marx views all those who receive a wage as members of the subject class who are exploited – however in today's society many middle class professions may enjoy high wages and a good standard of living (a growing middle class).
- Marxists assume that all the parts of society socialise people to accept capitalist norms and values such as hard work and obedience to authority – this is a deterministic way of seeing human behaviour as some people may reject these norms and values.

## Feminism

Feminism is also known as a conflict theory. Like Marxism, they look at inequality and conflict in society but with a focus on gender, rather than social class.

Feminists argue that society is divided along gender lines, and that men have more dominance and power than women in all aspects of society – the family, the workplace and politics. Some sociologists argue that improvements have been made and that women now have more opportunities than they did in the past. However, feminists argue there is still some way to go to achieve full equality. For example, in the family, women still take on more than their share of domestic labour and childcare. In the workplace, women on average still earn less than men and are under-represented in senior positions.



**Patriarchy** is a term used by some feminists to describe **male dominance** in society. **Radical feminists** believe society is patriarchal. They argue that male dominance is present in people’s working and family lives, and is reflected in social norms and values, roles and institutions. Other types of feminism include **liberal feminism** who believe gender inequality is a result of society’s norms and values regarding gender, and that change is possible through the challenging of stereotypes and implementing laws that promote equality.

### **Evaluation:**

- Although Feminism has raised awareness about gender issues, the theory tends to ignore other forms of inequality for example social class.

### **TASK C**

1. Why is functionalism known as a “consensus theory”?
2. Identify three functions that the family may perform for society, from a functionalist perspective.
3. Briefly describe the two social groups that Marx said society was made up of.
4. What did Marx expect to happen once the workers realised they were being exploited?
5. The text explains how the family and education serve the needs of capitalism and the ruling class. Pick one of the following institutions and explain how it might benefit capitalism and the ruling class:
  - a) Media.
  - b) The law.
  - c) Police.
  - d) Religion.
6. Feminism is regarded as a conflict theory, like Marxism. What is the main difference between Feminism and Marxism?



## Part 4: An Introduction to Sociological Research

Although many of the sociologists and theorists we have looked at so far are from a long time ago, sociologists continue to study society in the present day. They are often based in universities all over the world, carrying out research into a range of social problems and social change and publishing their findings in articles and books.

Sociologists use a variety of methods to find things out about people and society. Some methods involve asking questions, like questionnaires and interviews, or observing groups and their behaviour.

### Examples of Sociological Research

**TASK D:** Choose two of the studies outlined below and research them in more depth. Write a short summary of your two choices. (150-250 words)

Think about:

- What was the study about?
- What methods did the researcher use?
- What were the findings of the study?
- Some other interesting facts about the study.

#### 1. Sudhir Venkatesh "Gang Leader for a Day" 2008

Venkatesh spent six years studying a criminal gang in Chicago. He used the method of participant observation, spending time with the gang members and observing their activities. He spent time with the gang's families and wrote about their lives, publishing a book about gang life.

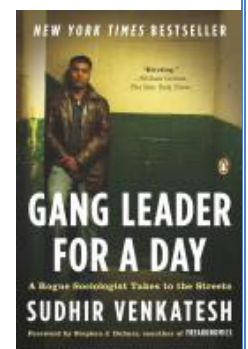
*More information can be found here....*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRq1AhFAN-4> short youtube clip outlining the study.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/gang-leader-for-a-day-by-sudhir-venkatesh-790843.html> bit more of an in depth view of it.

[http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1491906.Gang\\_Leader\\_for\\_a\\_Day](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1491906.Gang_Leader_for_a_Day) synopsis of the book (easiest way to grasp what it's about).

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sudhir\\_Venkatesh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sudhir_Venkatesh) his wiki page.



## 2. Eileen Barker “Making of a Moonie” 1984



A study of the religious cult “The Moonies”. Barker was interested in how people came to join this cult and what their lives were like. She carried out participant observation, but also used unstructured interviews and questionnaires. She was given permission to interview and spend time with the members of the religious organisation, and so did not have to take an undercover role. She joined in with prayer meetings and spent social time with the individual Moonies.

*More information can be found here....*

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Making\\_of\\_a\\_Moonie](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Making_of_a_Moonie) brief overview of the study

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/sep/04/moonies-brainwash-dispel-myth> an article in the Guardian newspaper about the Moonies, written by Eileen Barker

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cm0lqSg6gvo> a video clip about Moonie mass weddings.

## 3. Crime Survey for England and Wales



The first Crime Survey for England and Wales was carried out in 1982, collecting information about people’s experiences of crime in 1981. It is a victimisation survey and measures the amount of crime in England and Wales by asking people about crimes they have experienced in the previous year. It is also an important source of information about other topics, such as attitudes towards the criminal justice system and perceptions of anti-social behaviour. The Survey is carried out by the government every year.

*More information can be found here....*

<https://www.crimesurvey.co.uk/en/AboutTheSurvey.html> an overview of the Crime Survey.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice> some detail on the findings of the most recent survey.

#### 4. Paul Willis “Learning to Labour – How working class kids get working class jobs” 1977

Paul Willis was a sociologist who studied working class boys and their experience of education. He used the method of participant observation, alongside interviewing the boys about how they felt about and experienced school and what they expected from their futures. Willis found that these boys prioritised “having a laff” at school rather than their schoolwork and were negatively viewed by their teachers as a consequence. Willis also argued that the school system is set up so that some pupils fail, as the economy needs workers to do low paid and low skilled work.



*More information can be found here....*

<https://revisesociology.com/2016/01/25/learning-to-labour-paul-willis-summary-evaluation-research-methods/> overview of the study

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul\\_Willis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Willis) Willis’s Wikipedia page.

#### 5. Rosenthal and Jacobson “Pygmalion in the Classroom” 1968

In this research project, Rosenthal and Jacobson visited a San Francisco primary school; they claimed to have developed a new IQ test which could predict which children were likely to become “high attainers” in the very near future.

Teachers were told by the researchers that about 20% of a particular age group would come into this category of “very able children” In fact, the names of the high achievers had been selected at random.

Over a period of 18 months, the researchers visited the school regularly and found that the “named” children had, in fact, improved significantly in their school work – more than could be explained purely by chance. Rosenthal and Jacobson explained this dramatic improvement in performance in terms of increase or raised teacher expectations of the children in question.

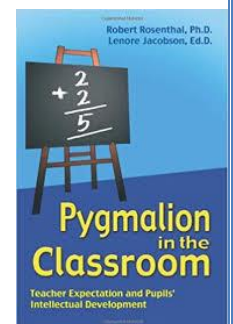
So this experiment identified a central cause of pupil achievement is teacher expectations of them. The method used in this study is an experiment. This involves the researchers manipulating the environment in some way and then measuring the effect. In this case, the manipulation was the inaccurate information given to teachers about pupil ability.

This study features in the subject of psychology, as well as sociology.

*More information can be found here....*

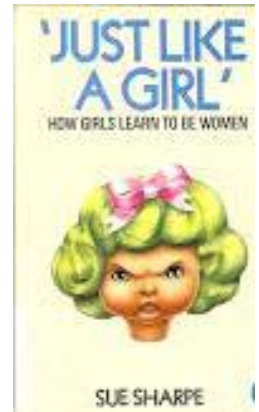
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pygmalion\\_effect](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pygmalion_effect)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJymYT\\_AkIc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJymYT_AkIc)



#### 6. **Sue Sharpe – “Just like a girl” 1976/1994**

Sue Sharpe compared the attitudes of working-class girls in London schools in the early 1970's and 1990's, using unstructured interviews. She found that the 1990's girls were more confident, more assertive, more ambitious and more committed to gender equality. Sharpe found that the main priorities of the 1970's girls were 'love, marriage, husbands and children'. By the 1990's this had changed to 'job, career and being able to support themselves' with education being the main route to a good job. In 1994, Sue Sharpe found that girls were increasingly wary of marriage. They had seen adult relationships break up around them, and had seen women coping alone, in a 'man's world'. Girls were more concerned with standing on their own two feet and were more likely to see education as a means to financial independence.



*More information can be found here....*

<https://getrevising.co.uk/grids/sue-sharpe-just-like-a-girl>

<https://sociologytwynham.com/2015/01/03/sue-sharpe/>

## **Key concepts glossary**

**Capitalism:** An economic system where the production and consumption of goods and services are done for profit.

**Culture:** the things that are learnt and shared by a society or group of people, passed on through generations. It includes shared norms, values, knowledge, beliefs and skills.

**Conflict:** disagreement

**Consensus:** agreement

**Ethnicity:** a person's heritage, culture and identity, often including the same language, religion and geographical region.

**Feminism:** a sociological perspective and political movement that focuses on women's oppression and the struggle to end it and gain equality.

**Function:** the contribution that a part of society makes to the stability of society as a whole. For example, the education system produces a skilled and intelligent workforce and socialises people into the norms and values of society.

**Functionalism:** a consensus perspective in sociology that see society as based on shared norms and values acquired through socialisation. Functionalists see society as like an organism, with each individual part of society performing functions to benefit society as a whole.

**Gender:** the social and cultural characteristics of men and women. These differ from sex differences, which are biological. Gender differences in behaviour differ between cultures and are learned through gender role socialisation.

**Identity:** a person's sense of self, influenced by the socialisation process and interactions with others.

**Ideology:** a set of beliefs.

**Marxism:** a conflict theory based on the ideas of Karl Marx. It sees society as divided into two classes, the bourgeoisie (ruling class) and the proletariat (working class). Marx argued the bourgeoisie exploit the proletariat and one day the proletariat would rise up in the form of a revolution.

**Norms:** Social rules, expectations or standards that govern the behaviour expected in particular situations. (For example, joining the back of a queue rather than pushing to the front).

**Patriarchy:** Feminists use this term to describe a male dominated society.

**Role:** How someone who occupies a particular status is expected to act.

**Social control:** forms control over behaviour in society e.g. the police.

**Socialisation:** the process by which an individual learns the culture of society. The process begins within the family and is built on by education and other agencies such as religion and the media.

**Sociological perspective/theory:** an explanation of human society, based on a set of ideas or beliefs.

**Stratification:** the division of society into a hierarchy of unequal groups. The stratification may be based on differences such as age, gender, social class etc.

**Subculture:** a group of people in society who share the same norms, values and attitudes and beliefs which in some way differ from the norms, values and attitudes of the majority.

**Underclass:** those at the lowest level of the class structure. Including high rates of lone parents, unemployed people and criminals.

**Values:** ideas or beliefs about general principles or goals. Things which we deem to be important e.g. the value of 'honesty', 'fairness', 'equality' etc.