

“To what extent does a persons gender explain inequalities in health?”

It is clear that gender plays a significant role in an individuals health, as certain lifestyle choices are made more often by specific genders than others, as well as other genetic factors. For example males are more likely to smoke than females which will have an effect on their health. However evidence shows that there are a complex combination of various other factors, such as social class and age, which also play a huge role on an individuals health and well being. With social class arguably being the the underlying factor of a persons health.

Gender can clearly be seen to have an impact on an individual's through the lifestyle choices a person makes as males are more likely to smoke than females. Smoking damages the health of both the smoker and those around them via the poisonous chemicals contained in cigarettes which produces cancerous smoke. It is therefore damaging to both those who make the lifestyle choice and those living around the person. Smoking is the cause of 96% of lung cancer cases and significantly increases an individual's risk of heart disease. Evidence shows that this lifestyle choice is most likely to be adopted by males from deprived areas, as 46% of them are likely to smoke compared to 11% of men of a higher social class. Women are less likely to smoke than men with only 43% smoking from deprived areas. This clearly shows the link between gender, social class, the lifestyle choice of smoking and poor health.

It can also be said that gender plays a role in the health and wellbeing of children as it is a mothers choice whether or not to breastfeed her newborn child. Breastfeeding has various nutritional benefits for a newborn and 40% of moths in Scotlands wealthiest areas breastfeed their newborn babies. Single fathers are incapable of giving this care to their children. However it can also be said that the underlying factor behind this is in fact social class as only 15% of mothers breastfeed in Scotland's most deprived areas clearly creating a health inequality between babies in each respective area. There are multiple reasons this could be the case such as the health of the mother, which statistically is poorer if they are from a low income area. Therefore it is clear that there is once again a link between gender and social class as well as geographical location in determining a persons health.

Although it must not be assumed that it is only lifestyle choices that contribute to gender inequalities in health as the job market also plays a significant role. On average women live longer than men in both the higher and lower social classes. The female life expectancy in Scotland is 80.9 years while males are only expected to live 76. 8 years clearly showing an inequality in terms of life expectancy between males and females. However it can be argued that women of lower social classes may suffer poorer health from working poverty. Even though women live longer they tend to live poorer and at the lower end of social classes women tend to work in the 5 C's (Cooking, Cleaning, Catering, Caring and Cashiering) which all tend to be

lower income jobs. On top of this women tend to bear the cost of raising children and are more likely to receive benefits from the state. This has a devastating impact on health as those of lower income tend to eat poorer quality meals and make poorer lifestyle choices which can lead to various diseases such as heart disease and cancer.

There is a clear correlation between poverty and health as documented in various high profile reports. The Black Report while outdated was the first of its kind to highlight this link, stating that the rich are becoming healthier although the poor are not. The Marmot Review of 2010 again highlighted the link between social class and health, highlighting that the lower a person's social class the lower their health will be. This inequality can clearly be seen in practice as those living in the upper class area of Jordanhill are expected to live to 80 yet those in the deprived area of Parkhead, only a few miles away, are only expected to live to 59. This can further be seen as in Scotland's poorest areas 46% of children suffer from tooth decay. It can therefore be argued that social class and geographical location have a large impact on an individual's health.

In conclusion it can clearly be seen that gender has an impact on one's health. Males smoke more females live longer and live poorer and the life expectancy of females is shorter on and therefore it is clear that it is a highly important factor. However social class is a major, if not more important, influence on health as those in lower social classes are more likely to suffer from poorer health. Sadly those in lower social classes tend to make poorer lifestyle choices in terms of excessive drinking, etc and this has a more detrimental impact on them in comparison with the middle classes. Finally there are other factors such as age and geographical location which all play a role in an individual's health.