

## **“To what extent does a persons lifestyle choices explain inequalities in health?”**

It is clear that lifestyle choices have a significant impact on an individuals health, as smoking and excessive alcohol clearly increase your risk at many diseases. For example those who smoke have a much higher risk of Cancer than those who do not. However evidence shows that there are a complex combination of various other factors, such as social class and gender, 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.

A lifestyle choice that can clearly be seen to have a damaging impact on an individual's health is smoking. 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. Another clear link between the poor lifestyle choice of smoking and poor health can be seen with life expectancy as it is estimated that 10 years of smoking can cut your lifespan by 5 years. However 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 and social class with the lifestyle choice of smoking.

Another poor lifestyle choice which negatively impacts an individual's health is excessive alcohol consumption. Excessive drinking can lead to fatal liver diseases and kidney failure due to the body being unable to process excess toxins in the blood. A 2009 study found that 9000 people are dying from alcohol related deaths every year. It is therefore clear than alcohol impacts an individual's health to a large extent. However in 2011, 1621 hospital admissions were alcohol related in Scotland's most deprived areas compared to 214 in Scotlands most affluent areas. This once again clearly shows a link between the geographical location and health as well as social class as poorer areas have higher rates of alcohol related deaths.

However it must not be assumed that it is only those of a lower social class, that are living in poverty, that make poor lifestyle choices as this can be seen in those of a higher social class also. Statistics show that 18% of children from affluent backgrounds are overweight and that 11% of affluent adults smoke. Showing that those of a higher social class also make poor lifestyle choices, albeit it a minority. However it can be argued that despite this it seems to be those from the poorest backgrounds that suffer the most from poor lifestyle choices as explained in Harry Burns “Biology of Poverty”, in which his studies found that those from poorer backgrounds are more likely to have a weakened immune system. This clearly suggests that poor lifestyle choices

have a more harmful effect on those from lower social classes and once again shows a clear link between social class and health.

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 persons 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 lifestyle choices have a huge impact on ones health. Smoking, excessive drinking and poor diet impacts on all aspects of health and therefore it is clear that it is one of the most important factors. 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, gender and geographical location which all play a role in an individuals health.