Age Groups and Poverty

The Young
- DWP Report 2008 - 3.9m children in poverty
- Poor have bigger families so a bigger % of children in poverty rather than adults
- Families with children means there is less chance of both working full time
- Young and old in weak position due to position in labour market (Townsend)
- Rowntree’s ‘life cycle’ - income linked to stage in life cycle for example families with children and the retired are likely to have lower incomes

Evaluation
- Linked to class + ethnicity

The Old
- Townsend dependency theory - the dependency of old is built into rules of society
- Rowntree’s idea of The Life Cycle
- Failures of government e.g. linking pensions to prices in 1980 (over long time wages go up faster than prices)
- Lack of paid work
- Ageism in labour market
- Ageing population make issues more prominent

Evaluation
- Johnson 1989 argued we must not exaggerate the influence of retirement as for many its a period of affluence
- The government in recent years has tried to help elderly e.g. fuel allowance which has helped to fight ‘fuel poverty’ (household spends more than 4% of income of fuel (electricity etc.))
- Old age worse for disabled, women + working class
- The percentage of old people in poverty has been falling (pensions haven't been cut back like other benefits)

Single Parents and Poverty
- End Child Poverty Campaign report 2006 - 48% of single-parent families below poverty line

Why are single parents in poverty?
- In 2001, 55% of single parents got income support (4% for 2-parent)
- Only one potential earner and likely to be part-time
- Difficulty of arranging and paying for childcare
- The poverty trap that results from the way the benefit system operates
- Impact of gender - most are women

Evaluation
- Demonstrate link to gender
- Link to class e.g. women from poorer backgrounds more likely to become single parents
- Recent government help through tax credit system (including help with child care costs)
  - also more schools run breakfast / homework clubs
Disability and Poverty

- About 1/3 disabled people live in poverty
- Low income and possible benefit dependency
- Extra costs of being disabled
- Only 12% in professional / manual jobs
- Some are excluded from opportunities in the labour market
- **Alcock 1993** - risk of poverty for the cared for extends to carer

Working Class and Poverty

(In this case meaning various forms of manual workers + children)
- Earn less on average than non-manual workers
- Have fewer savings
- Are more at risk of unemployment (as jobs more insecure and they obtain fewer qualifications - find harder to get new jobs)
- Have lower pensions due to lower lifetime earnings
- Have greater risk of incapacity due to nature of work

Wealth and Income

**Wealth and Income**

- Wealth - stock of assets e.g. property, shares, pension rights
- Income - flow of money e.g. wages and salaries, interest on savings, rent, dividends
- Interlink as recent rent from house as income into a pension as wealth

**Distribution of wealth in the UK**

- Very unequally distributed - top 10% have 44% of wealth - bottom 50% have 10%
- Wealth became more evenly distributed between 1945 (welfare state, industries nationalised e.g. rail) to 1980 (industries privatised e.g. coal/rail/gas etc.) which maintained this distribution for 20 years
- However, since 2000 wealth inequality has increased again

**Distribution on income in the UK**

- Unequally distributed - but not as unequally as wealth e.g. top 20% have 44% income, bottom 20% have 6% income
- Income inequality has increased since late 1970’s e.g. 1977 The Gini coefficient was 0.34 (bigger this number, greater level of income inequality)
- Smallest = 0 (complete equality)
- Largest = 1 (complete inequality)
- Figures prove that income some more unequal since 1990s
**Weberian**
- e.g. Townsend
- Weberians agree with most of what Social Democrats say but they also stress the issue of a lack of power
- They believe the poor are poor because they lack power e.g. elderly lack power in the labour market because they can't work / discriminated against and young lack power because they don't work and are dependent on others
- Hidden poverty - individuals in a household that are poor as parents may not spend enough money on them etc. but there are problems with the measure

**Feminist**
- Link poverty to patriarchy
- Argue women are paid less than men for the same work which throws them into poverty
- Lister - women suffer from ‘hidden poverty’ in the family
- Say poverty figures not accurate because of hidden poverty

**Criticisms of Feminists**
- **Marxists** would accept that women are exploited more than men but argue the cause of this is capitalism so address capitalism and patriarchy will go away
- Official figures on poverty suggest women only slightly more likely to be in poverty

**Individualistic theory of Spencer**
- 19th century industrial revolution - terrible working conditions and absolute poverty
- Spencer - 19th century sociologist - believed that the poor had bad characters and were deficient in some way which is why they were poor
- He accepted that some of the poor could 'help' their poverty and they were seen as the 'deserving poor' for example the sick (deserved help). However, able-bodied poor were poor because they were lazy
- Spencer believed like many of the higher classes at the time that the lazy should be punished - there was a workhouse where the able bodied were sent but many of the deriving poor ended up there - was introduced to create an incentive to work

**New Right - cultural explanation for poverty**
- Oscar Lewis writing in 1960s did not take an individual view but blamed poor
- Blamed poor and found that no matter where they were in the world, their characteristics were always the same;
  - **Fatalistic** - can't control destiny e.g. wont encourage children to work hard
  - **Immediate Gratification** - wanted immediate pleasure
  - **Present Orientation** - don't look beyond today
- Culture was passed on from generation to generation
- Lewis argues that these values kept people in poverty for example they were unwilling to save anything and parents didn't encourage children to work hard at school which locked them into poverty - they weren't bad people but their culture was bad

**Problem's with Lewis’ study**
- Lewis assumed the poor were the same across the world
- Many studies since Lewis have shown that the poor don't always have these features
- Even if the poor are fatalistic, this might be a symptom of their poverty and not a cause e.g. if people are poor they are likely to think just of today (no prospects)
- **Contes and Kilburn (1970)** - found in St Ann's, poor fatalistic but caused by poverty
The Social Democrat / Weberian View
• Structural / Conflict
• e.g. Townsend, Holman, Jordan
• Poverty is a result of inequalities of power and situational constraints
• Poverty traps of various kinds trap people into poverty
Solution
• More generous benefits and better state services
• More universal benefits

The Marxist View
• Structural / Conflict
• e.g. Kincaid, Miliband
• Poverty is an inevitable feature of capitalism
• Poverty results from the class inequality present in capitalism
Solution
• The end of capitalism (the Welfare State is merely an illusion)

The Feminist View
• Structural / Conflict
• e.g. Lister
• Women face greater poverty because of patriarchy
Solution
• Radical feminists would argue that attitudes towards gender need to be completely changed - the welfare state has failed women because it is based on patriarchal lines

The Functionalist View
• e.g. Davis, Moore
• Poverty is an inevitable feature of a meritocratic society
• Poverty performs useful functions
Solution
• Target help on the poorest (like New Right)