not having enough income to afford the necessities, whereas secondary poverty consists of those who had sufficient earnings but were spending that money on more ‘wasteful’ things. Rowntree’s study provided an extraordinary wealth of statistical data on wages, hours of work, nutritional needs, food consumed, health and housing. However, it also posed some problems in that the typical cost of living depended on type of household and size of family; something that was drastically changing and becoming more diverse with modern times.

This led to Townsend (1979) to argue that poverty can only be defined relatively and falling below the norms of one’s own society. He refers to it as ‘excluded from ordinary living patterns’. This means deprived of things customary to their society, for example, things that people taking for granted like holidays or a second car. People who live in poverty lack the material resources, which mean restricted opportunities in life. According to recent statistics, in 2008/09, 13½ million people in the UK were living in households below the low-income threshold (60% less than average). This is around a fifth (22%) of the population. (Palmer, G: 2011) Also, 20% of the UK population live in poverty: 3.8 million children; 2.2 million pensioners; and 7.2 million working age adults. (Oxfam:2011) Statistics such as these demonstrate that poverty is very much still alive and well in today’s society, even in one of the richest countries in the world.

There are other theoretical explanations for poverty in society and what purpose it serves from their perspective. Functionalism, established by Emile Durkheim, is the belief that each part of society, institutions and citizens, have a role and function in society. They look at society on a large scale and generalise their ideas for the masses. Therefore, if people are living in poverty, it must mean the poor are in some way less able or talented than everyone else and their ‘function’ in society is unknown. Poverty plays an important role in society itself, according to functionalists. However, this inequality caused by poverty is an incentive for people to better themselves and work harder. Suffering through the trials of poverty means people will aspire to work harder to ensure they stay out of it. Another approach to poverty and its effects on society was Marxism, created by sociologist Karl Marx. Marxists would claim poverty is caused by capitalism, and that the wealth in society is concentrated in the hands of the small group at the top, whilst those at the bottom are left to struggle and suffer. They see the current economic arrangements means poverty performs a valuable function for capitalists in that they can hire a highly-motivated but low wage demanding workforce. However, unlike functionalists, they do not blame the poor for their position and circumstances in society, but see the much wider contributors. (Griffiths.J, 2011)

Structured inequality is a complex term, to which one must first understand what equality is. Equality means to treat everybody the same, having the same privileges, rights, status, and opportunities as others. It is similar to universalism, which encourages equality for all people without consideration for their particular characteristics. However, structured inequality is when there is an unequal status attributed amongst people in society, in relation to others. There are various dimensions to this inequality and could be down to a number of reasons such as class, age, gender or race. (Fulcher & Scott, 2011:699) Having such a discriminating characteristic can seriously affect opportunities, rights, roles and life-chances in society. An example of this in modern society is gender inequality in the workplace. For decades, women have fought to remove any occupational segregation, but as it still stands, there is a large earnings gap across genders. Women tend to leave the workforce due to marriage or the time devoted to raising children. Consequently, men are typically viewed as the “breadwinners” of the family. Furthermore, occupational mobility is difficult, and women often find it hard to ‘move up’ in a company, due to this gender discrimination.