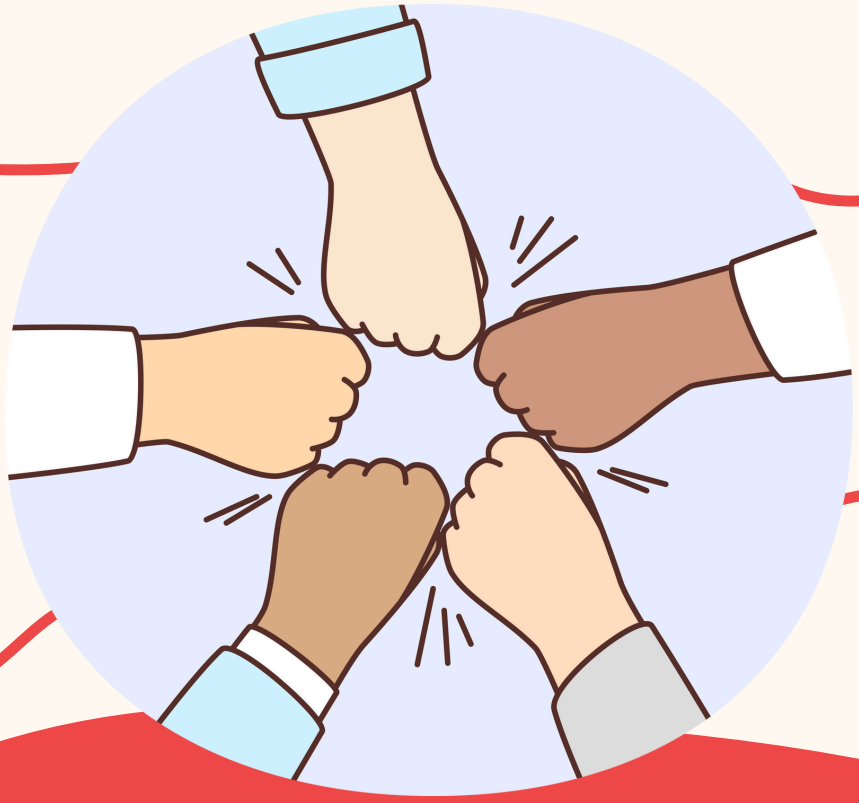
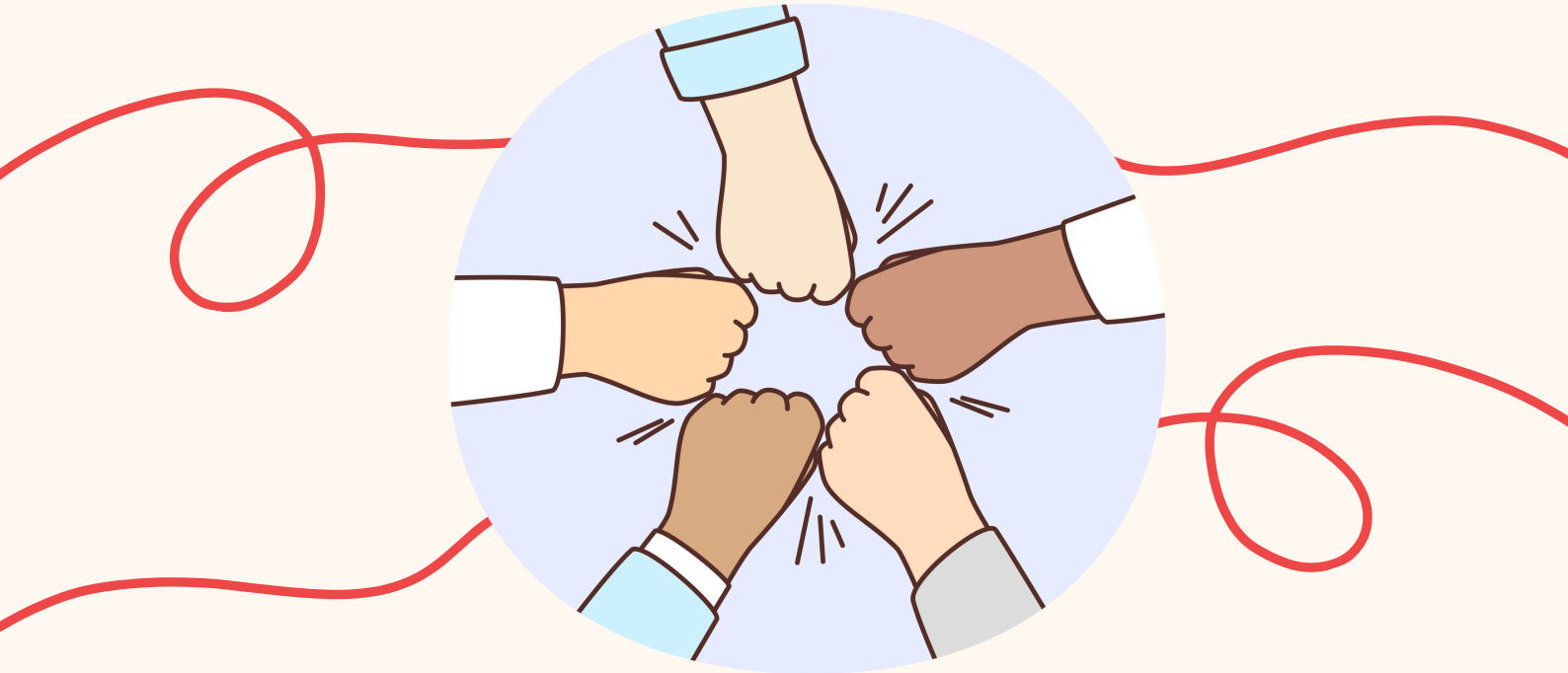
AQA GCSE

sociology



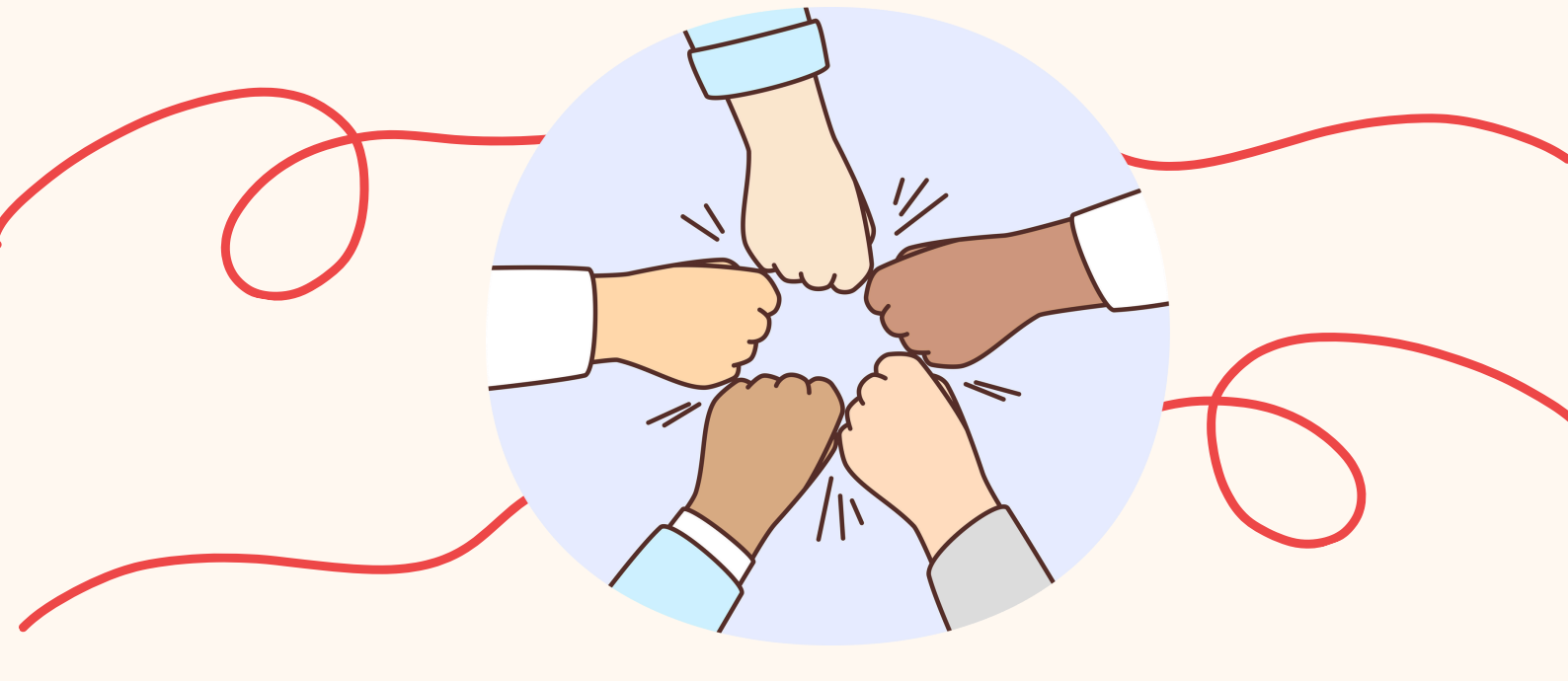
Revision notes for AQA Sociology GCSE.
Social stratification

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION



WHAT'S ON THE UNIT?

- LIFE CHANCES
- POVERTY
- POWER
- FUNCTIONALIST VIEW
- MARXIST VIEW
- FEMINIST VIEW
- INTERACTIONIST VIEW



INTRODUCTION

Social stratification in sociology refers to the way society is organized into different layers or classes based on factors like wealth, power, education, and social status. It’s a system that determines individuals' access to resources and opportunities, often leading to unequal treatment and life chances. Social stratification leads to unequal distribution of resources in society.

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Our society is broken up into 3 classes...

- Upper Class: The wealthiest people, often with inherited money, high education, and significant power. They enjoy expensive hobbies and luxury.
- Middle Class: People with a good education and professional jobs, like office work. They live comfortably but don’t have the extreme wealth of the upper class.
- Working Class: People with manual or blue-collar jobs. They often rent their homes and have a lower standard of living compared to the middle class.

These classes are created and influenced by...

- Politics and Laws: Government policies and laws can affect wealth distribution and access to resources, influencing social class positions.
- Industrial Revolution: This period led to the rise of factories and new industries, creating job opportunities and contributing to the development of distinct social classes.
- Decline in Manufacturing: As manufacturing jobs decreased, many people in the working class lost stable employment, impacting their economic status.
- Rising Service Sector: Growth in service jobs (like retail or healthcare) created new job opportunities, but these often offer lower pay compared to manufacturing jobs, affecting class structures.
- Lack of Affordable Housing: Limited access to affordable housing can make it harder for lower-income people to improve their living standards, reinforcing class divisions.
- Capitalism: This economic system creates wealth disparities by emphasizing profit and private ownership, leading to unequal distribution of resources and reinforcing social class differences.

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POVERTY

Types of poverty...

Absolute poverty is when someone cannot meet the basic needs necessary for survival, such as food, shelter, and healthcare. In the UK, this can still be seen in issues like homelessness, malnutrition, and lack of access to essential health services.

Relative poverty is when a person lacks the resources to participate in activities or access necessities that are considered standard in their society or country. It means they are significantly worse off compared to others. In the UK, it's often defined as earning less than 60% of the median income. This can lead to social exclusion, where individuals feel left out of common societal activities and opportunities.

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The **culture of poverty** theory suggests that people living in poverty develop their own set of values and behaviours that differ from the mainstream society. This includes things like a lack of ambition or motivation and limited opportunities for improving their social and economic situation. As a result, poverty can persist across generations, trapping people in a cycle of poverty.

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Material deprivation means lacking essential goods and resources needed to meet basic needs. This makes it difficult for people to escape poverty through regular means. While the government has attempted to help with welfare programs, tax credits, and benefits, these measures often fall short of fully addressing the issue.

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RELATIVE DEPRIVATION

Peter Townsend proposed that poverty should be understood as relative deprivation, meaning it's not just about having less wealth but about how your wealth and living standards compare to others in society. He argued that poverty is relative, multidimensional, socially constructed, and based on comparisons with others. He believed...

- poverty is relative
- deprivation is multidimensional
- deprivation is socially constructed
- deprivation is comparative

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THE UNDERCLASS

Charles Murray, an American politician and researcher, developed the concept of the underclass. According to Murray, the underclass is even lower than the working class and consists of individuals who are excluded from mainstream society and rely heavily on government support.

He blames the welfare state for creating and perpetuating this underclass. Key traits of the underclass, as characterized by Murray, include high rates of children born out of wedlock, elevated crime rates, drug abuse, and a lack of work ethic.

He argues that the underclass poses a threat to society and suggests that reducing the welfare state and encouraging traditional values are ways to address the issue.

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INSTRUMENTALISM

Privatized instrumentalism is when people focus more on their own families and personal survival rather than thinking about larger social or class issues. As a result, they become less aware of how they might be exploited or mistreated at work and are less likely to fight for changes or improvements.

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AFFLUENT WORKER

- Goldthorpe's theory suggests that certain skilled manual workers began to adopt middle-class values and lifestyles. These workers had relatively secure jobs with good wages. They were able to afford consumer goods and enjoyed a higher standard of living compared to unskilled workers.
- According to Goldthorpe, these affluent workers were influenced by factors such as education, job security, and upward mobility within their professions. They tended to prioritize things like homeownership, education for their children, and leisure activities. As a result, they identified more with middle-class values than with traditional working-class values.
- This theory challenges the traditional view that all manual workers hold similar attitudes and behaviours. Instead, Goldthorpe argues that within the working class, there are distinct groups with different aspirations and lifestyles.
- These affluent workers are less likely to push back at the ruling classes because they have comfortable lives
- Fiona Devine a British sociologist studied this theory afterwards, she argued the working classes still hold resentment towards the capitalist system, there is still shared experience between them due to this common struggle

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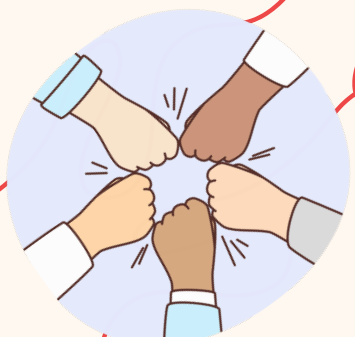

LIFE CHANCES

Life chances refer to the opportunities and resources a person has to achieve their goals and improve their life. These chances can be influenced by factors like social class, gender, ethnicity, LGBTQ+ identity, age, disability, and religion.

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POWER

- Power is the ability to influence or control others.
- Authority is the power to make decisions and enforce rules or laws.

Traditional power and authority come from longstanding customs, traditions, or institutions like monarchies or established governments.
Charismatic power and authority stem from an individual's personal charm and charisma, inspiring others to follow them, as seen with figures like Nelson Mandela.

Rational-legal power and authority are based on established rules and laws, such as in democratic systems.

Formal power and authority arise from specific roles within organizations, like a CEO.

Informal power and authority emerge from social roles and networks, such as those in families or peer groups.

Power relationships are influenced by various factors, including social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, disability, and religion.

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FUNCTIONALIST

Functionalists believe that social stratification serves an important function and is necessary for society. It helps allocate people into various roles and motivates them to perform well in these roles by promising rewards, such as social mobility. In this view, society is composed of different social classes, each with varying levels of education, income, and occupations. Each class performs distinct roles that contribute to the overall functioning of society.

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Davis and Moore argue that social stratification is universally necessary because it ensures that functionally important roles, such as doctors and engineers, are filled by individuals who are highly motivated and qualified. They believe that desirable rewards and incentives are essential for encouraging people to take on these critical jobs. If everyone had the same opportunities and rewards, people would lack the motivation to strive for and perform in these vital roles.

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Class tasks are distributed based on social class, with each class handling different types of work. The upper class performs the most complex and significant tasks, while the middle class takes on important roles such as teaching and professional jobs. The working class is responsible for manual, physical labour. This distribution is seen as "efficient" and beneficial for maintaining societal stability.

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Functionalists believe that social stratification is necessary because it maintains social order and stability. They argue that society rewards people with skills and qualifications with better opportunities. According to this view, your life chances reflect your hard work and talent. However, it tends to overlook the barriers faced by minority groups.

Functionalists see poverty as a necessary aspect of society. They believe it provides low-cost labor and is a "necessary evil" to keep society functioning smoothly. According to this view, poverty results from a lack of effort on the part of individuals.

Functionalists believe that power and authority are essential for maintaining social order. They see power as necessary for creating and upholding a hierarchical structure in society.

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Critiques of functionalist social stratification include:

- Marxists argue that social stratification is not natural or necessary but rather manipulative and designed to benefit the wealthy while exploiting others.
- Feminists criticize functionalism for ignoring the role of patriarchy, which they believe contributes to and reinforces gender-based inequalities within the stratification system.

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MARXISTS

Marxist views on social stratification suggest that it sustains the power and privilege of the ruling class. They argue that stratification is not natural or neutral but a result of ongoing class struggle. According to Karl Marx, class is determined by one's access to the means of production, such as resources and technology.

Marxists believe that the ruling class exploits the working class by controlling the means of production, such as resources and technology, which the working class lacks access to. They argue that capitalism leads to private ownership of these means, which exacerbates poverty and increases inequality.

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Karl Marx believed that the oppressive nature of the capitalist system would ultimately lead to a revolution. He thought that the working classes would rise up, overthrow the ruling classes, and establish a socialist or communist society.

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Marxists argue that the ruling class enjoys greater life chances and deliberately oppresses the working class to limit their opportunities. This oppression helps the ruling class maintain their power and control over society.

Marxists view poverty as a result of actions by the ruling classes and the capitalist system. They argue that capitalism creates and perpetuates poverty by exploiting workers and concentrating wealth. To address this, they believe a revolutionary change is needed to overthrow the capitalist system and redistribute resources more equitably.

Marxists view power and authority as closely linked to the ruling class. They argue that these power structures perpetuate inequality by maintaining the dominance of the ruling class and exacerbating class conflict.

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INTERACTIONIST

Interactionists view class as encompassing various factors, including life chances, income, wealth, and access to goods and services. They also consider status, social prestige, and honour, which are influenced by religion, occupation, lifestyle, culture, and education. According to interactionists, these aspects are not fixed and can change over time.

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Max Weber identified three types of authority: traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal. He defined power as the ability to get others to do what you want, even if they resist. Weber believed that authority must be perceived as legitimate to be effective. He studied bureaucracy and found it characterized by three key features: hierarchy, a system of rules, and specialization of tasks. Bureaucracy refers to an administrative system with a hierarchical organization, complex procedures, and often numerous rules and regulations, commonly found in large organizations, governments, or institutions.

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FEMINISTS

Feminists believe...
Social stratification is gendered, meaning it enforces gender roles and reinforces the patriarchy. The gender pay gap is perpetuated by these roles and expectations placed on women, particularly within the family. Additionally, there are intersections of racism and classism, which compound the barriers faced by women of colour and working-class women, making it even more challenging for them to achieve social mobility.

Men generally hold more power and privilege, which results in greater life chances for them compared to women. Women, on the other hand, face discrimination, which contributes to the persistent gender pay gap.

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Patriarchy oppresses women, contributing to their higher likelihood of experiencing poverty. Women are often paid less than men and are sometimes forced to stay at home instead of working. This situation leads to the "feminization of poverty," where women are left without adequate financial support.

Power and authority are gendered, meaning they are often inaccessible to women. As a result, women are marginalized and oppressed within power structures. These power relationships perpetuate inequality, reinforcing the marginalization of women and emphasizing the impact of patriarchy.

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Sylvia Walby developed a theory of patriarchy that identifies six different structures contributing to gender inequality. These structures include paid work, where women often face discrimination; the state, which enforces laws and policies that can reinforce gender disparities; the household, where traditional roles often limit women's opportunities; sexuality, which is regulated by societal norms in ways that disadvantage women; violence, which is used to control and oppress women; and culture, which perpetuates gender norms and values that maintain inequality.

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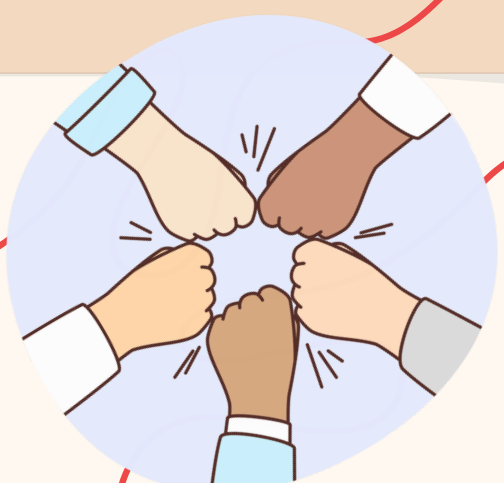

REVISION IDEAS

Create some revision cards explaining each sociological perspectives views on social stratification.

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Create some revision cards on the different theories.

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Complete the exam questions on the following page!

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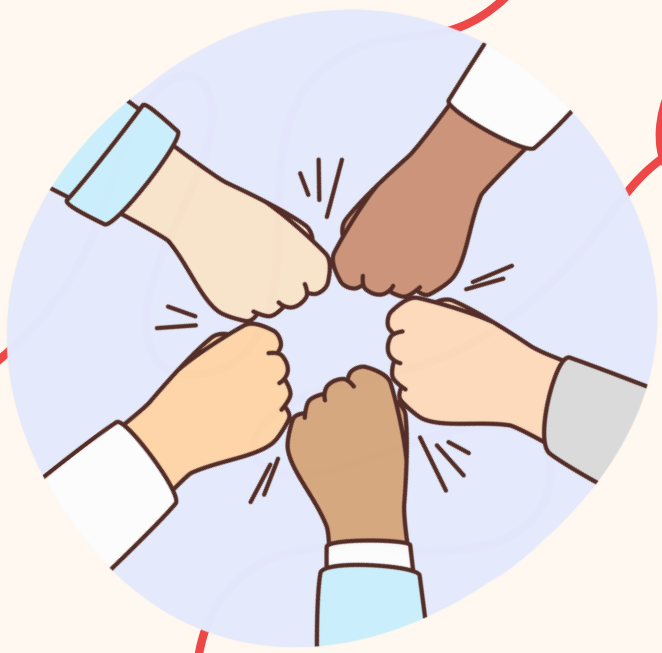


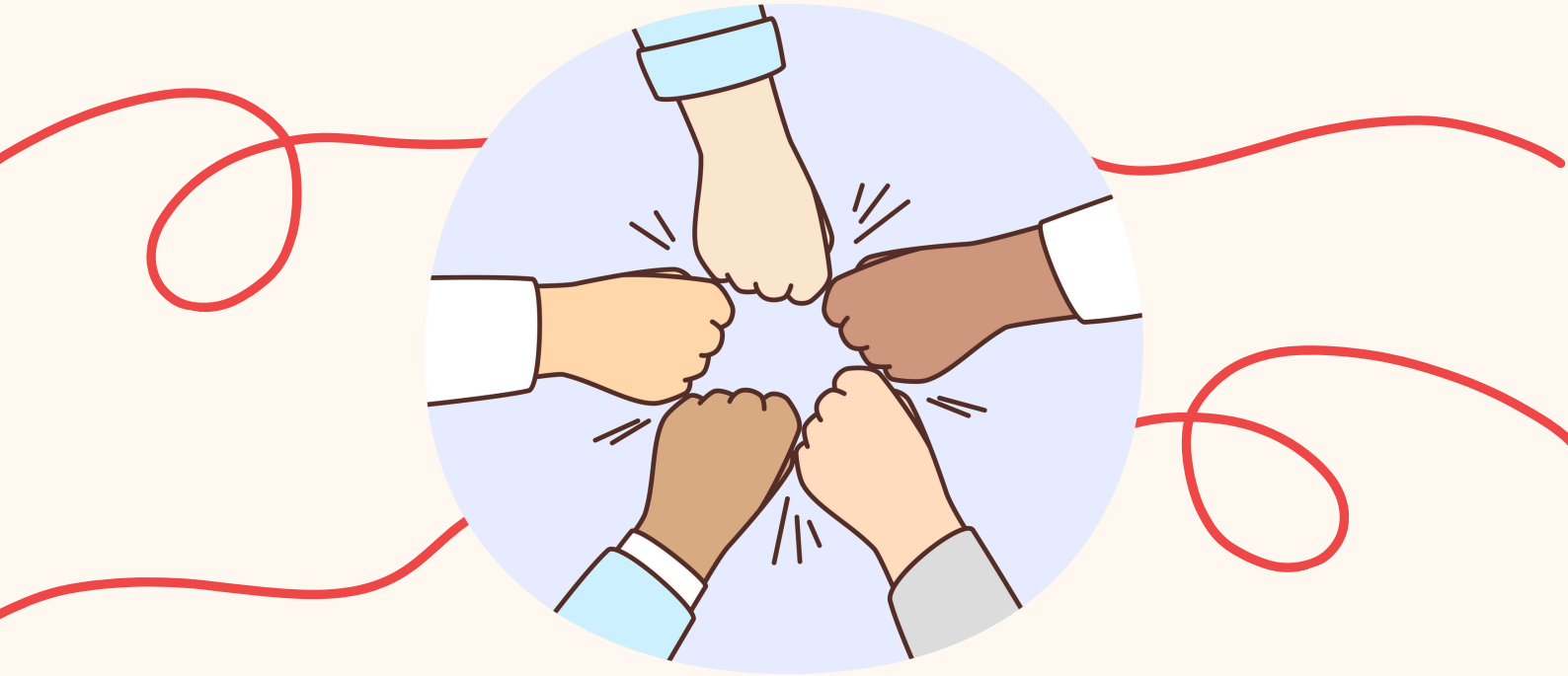
EXAM QUESTIONS

Describe one example of social stratification (3)

Describe one type of poverty (3)

Identify and describe one example of a social group who are more likely to experience poverty (3)

Identify and explain one way in which social class at birth can influence an individual's future life chances (4)

Discuss how far sociologists would agree that the welfare state has been successful in reducing poverty (12)

Discuss how far sociologists would agree box that social class is the most important factor affecting an individual's life chances (12)