SOCIOLOGY

Paper 2251/12
Paper 12

Key messages

- Candidates need to closely follow the command words as clues to the question and they need to show that they have a clear understanding of sociological terms and concepts

- Candidates should be made aware of the need to allocate sufficient time to answer specific questions worth more marks. Candidates might benefit from additional guidance on how to use their time effectively in the examination.

- Low-scoring answers often lacked any sociological evidence.

General comments

Overall many candidates responded well to the demands of the questions, demonstrating relevant knowledge and understanding of sociological concepts, along with appropriate application of the knowledge and understanding of the questions.

Candidates need to have a better awareness of the difference between ethical problems and methodological problems. It would benefit many candidates to do some planning before they begin their answers to avoid lengthy introductions which gained them little credit. Many candidates continue to confuse validity and reliability which caused them great difficulties in answering questions in Section A. Conversely many candidates had an excellent grasp of the strengths and limitations of various research methods, although they did on occasion, confuse qualitative and quantitative methods. Candidates need to practise the technique of producing an evaluative conclusion.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

(a)   Most candidates identified having an equal chance of being selected as the principle reason for using a random sample. Many candidates were unable to identify two reasons why researchers might use a random sample.

(b)   Most of the answers to this question demonstrated good kowledge of research methods. Some candidates confused sampling with research methods. A few candidates described the methods although they were only required to identify them.

(c)   There were some excellent answers to this question where candidates effectively applied their knowledge to explain why the research in Source A was unethical. Most candidates were able to identify issues of consent and deception. Lower scoring candidates discussed the weaknesses in this type of research with little or no reference to the content of Source A.

(d)   Better responses identified two benefits such as attracting research funding and the guide to research. Most had some understanding that it was to direct the research. Many candidates were unable to identify two reasons for using a hypothesis.

(e)   Good responses were able to identify advantages suck as reliability, generalisation and identification of trends and disadvantages such as lack of depth and understanding as well as validity. Lower scoring answers didn't discuss research in their response. Some candidates confused structuralism with interpretivism and gained no marks.

(f)   Many candidates understood that research using one method would not be accurate, although not all candidates were able to link this to methodological pluralism or triangulation. There was awareness that all methods had strengths and weaknesses. The most successful answers compared these weaknesses in the context of qualitative vs quantitative, or reliability vs validity.

(g)   Many answers lacked a clear understanding of field experiments and therefore included a lot of information about methodology very unlikely to be used in field experiment. Lower scoring candidates often characterised a field experiment as an experiment carried out in the open air.

Section B

Question 2

(a)   Many candidates were able to give a clear textbook definition of canalisation. Lower scoring candidates confused canalisation with manipulation.

(b)   Many candidates were able to give clear examples of manipulation. Lower scoring candidates confused manipulation with parental sanctions for any inappropriate behaviour without it being applied specifically in the context of gender roles.

(c)   There were many excellent answers to this question, candidates were frequently able to discuss how schools, mass media and the peer group reinforced gender identity. Good answers talked about the role of the hidden curriculum including images in textbooks, role models in the media and peer pressure, and the threat of rejection for those who did not conform to gender stereotypes.

(d)   There were some strong answers to this question, that identified the families role in primary socialisation and frequent mention was made of passing on norms and values.Some candidates discussed the families role as an agent of social control highlighting use of rewards and sanctions and other candidates illustrated the important role of the family by looking at the example of feral children.

(e)   This question was generally well answered, most candidates were aware of the difference between ascribed and achieved status. Good responses argued against the question that looked at evidence of meritocracy and social mobility and lower scoring responses argued for the question. Some quality answers compared functionalism and Marxist approaches to the question and high quality answers discussed open and closed societies, many making reference to caste in India.

Section C

Question 3

(a)   Many candidates were able to use details from the stem to give a partial response. A common misconception was to equate the underclass to the working class. Many simply equated the underclass with the poor. The better answers used terms such as beneath, separate from, marginalised or cut off.

(b)   This question was generally answered well. Some candidates described elements of inequality that resulted from stratification rather than systems of stratification. Many candidates referred to gender and ethnicity, other popular responses were caste and slavery.

(c)   Many candidates recognised that social class impacted on an individual's chance of gaining a good education and their opportunities to get a good job. Better responses looked at a wider range of factors and examples including health and life expectancy.

(d)   This question was answered quite well. The best responses showed an awareness of the arguments put forward by the new right. Lower scoring candidates answered in the context of 'the poor' in general. Many candidates used a range of relevant key terms, including fatalism, dependency culture and cycle of deprivation showing good sociological knowledge. Some candiates answered why the underclass were not to blame for their situation as opposed to why they were to blame.

(e)   Many candidates understood that wealth was not the only cause of inequality citing gender and ethnic inequality as evidence of this. Candidates were relatively less successful in explaining why wealth linked to inequality. Better responses explained this in the context of Marxist theory and saw the links between wealth, power and inequality or that wealth might overcome gender or ethnic inequality.

SOCIOLOGY

Key messages

- Candidates need to closely follow the command words as clues to the question and they need to show that they have a clear understanding of sociological terms and concepts.

- Candidates frequently confused reliability and validity

- Candidates should be made aware of the need to allocate sufficient time to answer specific questions worth more marks. Candidates might benefit from additional guidance on how to use their time effectively in the examination.

- Candidates should be encouraged not to write really long answers for questions with few marks

General comments

Centres need to ensure that candidates have a sound grasp and understanding of key sociological terms and concepts so that candidates are able to fully access the question.

Candidates need to be aware that whilst **Section B** and **C** have a stimulus that they may use to help them if they wish, in **Section A** there is a requirement that they must use Source A in answer to **Question 1c.**

Many candidates were able to engage with sociological ideas without engaging with the technical vocabulary of the syllabus to enhance their answers, which restricted their marks.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

(a) Most candidates scored well on this question. Good responses included: they do not like being observed, or they do not like strangers and you might be in danger.

(b) Most candidates gained both marks for this question. Only a minority talked about sampling methods instead of a research method. Good responses identified questionnaires and interviews as appropriate methods. A minority identified content analysis and case study.

(c) Better responses used Source A and linked researcher effect to the 'now when I do something I have to think what Bill Whyte would want to know' comment.

(d) Although most candidates knew the difference between participant and non-participant observation there was some confusion about reliable and valid when trying to explain the strengths of this method.

(e) As with 1d above there was confusion over reliability and validity, candidates found it difficult to link the identification and description. Where candidates knew this research method they were often able to achieve full marks here.

(f)   Candidates found it difficult to focus on reliability. Weaker responses focused on validity rather than reliability. Many candidates began their answer with an accurate definition of reliability but were unable to apply sm understanding of the definition. Many candidates wrote about the observer or Hawthorne effect. Some candidates were aware that participant observation was a qualitative research technique that was designed for validity not reliability but few were able to explain why this was.

(g)   Many candidates correctly identified the Hawthorne effect in response to the question. Better responses considered interviewer effect and researcher characteristics. Some candidates were able to identify positive affects as well as negative. Weaker responses repeated much of their answer to **Question 1f**.

Question 2

(a)   This was generally well answered. Some did confuse norms with 'laws'.

(b)   Some candidates found it hard to give clear examples of values even though they knew the definition. Occasional candidates confused this with wealth.

(c)   Candidates were frequently able to give examples of norms and values that had changed over time or differed from society to society but were often unable to explain why that was the case. Many answers were descriptive rather than evaluative in nature.

(d)   Many candidates seemed unfamiliar with this term. Some candidates confused role conflict with conflict and talked about wars and power struggles.

(e)   Although there were some good responses to this question, candidates generally had more success arguing that values were not universal than arguing that they were. There were some good responses which approached the question by considering the impact of globalisation on values.

Question 3

(a)   This question was generally well answered, some weaker responses copied from the stimulus without applying any knowledge.

(b)   Most candidates did well in this question, many gaining full marks, weaker reponses missed the part of the instructions that stated 'apart from the Caste system'.

(c)   Better responses recognised that factors like high levels of expertise, education and religious positions could bring status without necessarily bringing wealth. Weaker responses struggled to identify ways in which an individual could have status without wealth. Some candidates took their cue from the stimulus image and talked about the Brahman.

(d)   Many candidates were able to identify physical factors like lack of food and housing and their impact on health. Lack of educational opportunity was also frequently mentioned although few recognised that, given most states now offer free education, it is really material and cultural deprivation that are the major impact on life chances. Few consider concepts like social exclusion.

(e)   Some candidates produced excellent response to this question which offered both depth and range. Most candidates focused on open society as the question required. Candidates mainly focused on upwards mobility, few considered downwards.

SOCIOLOGY

Key messages

A lot of excellent responses were seen during this marking session which showed clear engagement with sociological issues and contemporary debates. Topical and local examples were used alongside more traditional 'textbook' examples in order to justify points made. Theories and concepts were also well used by many candidates. No rubric errors were seen in the examination session which is excellent.

- Ensure what is being written specifically addresses the issues raised in the question, candidates would not get marks for writing 'all that they know'

- Refer to sociological terminology, theory and concepts, using sociological specific vocabulary, as this will raise the overall quality of the answer

- Candidates should spend time thinking about what questions are asking for and planning answers to those specific questions in their reading time

- Use the marks per question as guidance as to how much is to be written for a particular question. Some candidates were writing half a page for a part **(a)** question worth 2 marks and the same for a part **(e)** question worth 15 marks

- On part **(e)** questions, ensure that candidates have a balanced argument that considers both sides of the debate. The response needs to include a range of points for each side that are well developed and evidence based, with a justified conclusion

General comments

In general there appeared to be the full range of quality of answers on the paper.

In terms of the 15 mark part **(e)** question, candidates should be encouraged to organise their answers into paragraphs and to develop each idea fully. Each point should aim to be directly focused upon what the question is asking and to engage sociologically and conceptually wherever possible.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 – The Family Question Comment

(a) Most candidates found the definition of domestic violence accessible. A common error was to repeat the word 'violence' in the definition and the odd candidate omitted reference to the family.

(b) Candidates were fairly successful in answering this question. A significant majority of candidates were able to correctly describe two functions that families may no longer perform in modern industrial societies. Popular functions included socialisation and social control or care of children and the elderly. A few candidates misunderstood the 'no longer perform' aspect of the question.

(c) Most candidates were able to explain two or three reasons why the family could be said to be patriarchal in modern industrial societies. A few candidates cited studies such as Dobash and Dobash, Edgell, Oakley, etc., though some did not fully understand the concepts. Common responses were references to the breadwinner role of the man in the family, decision-making, domestic violence and also the persistence of segregated conjugal roles. Some used culturally specific examples such as arranged/forced marriages to effectively answer the question.

(d)   Most candidates showed some good sociological knowledge and understanding of the essential nature of the family. A common response was the socialisation and reproductive functions of the family. Some excellent responses made references to the 'organic analogy' in their explanation of the essential functions of the family. Top responses integrated relevant theoretical views from functionalism, Marxism and the New Right into their answers. Weaker responses tended to be list-like and undeveloped.

(e)   Most candidates understood some pros and cons of single parent families. A number only offered a one sided view of how families are effected by lone parenthood. Some outlined the causes of single parent families instead of explaining how such families affect individuals and family life. Common evidence against single-parent families was poverty, inadequate socialisation and the absence of a male role-model. Whilst on the other side of the debate, candidates discussed the growing economic independence of women, the influence of the government on finance, the extended family as a support network and the opportunity to escape from domestic violence. A few candidates noted the debate between functionalist, new right and feminism. Some very good responses didn't to write a conclusion or make a judgement which meant that they lost out on the highest marks available.

Question 2 – Education

(a)   Most candidates were successful in defining socialisation, referring to the teaching/learning of norms and values. A minority misunderstood the question and wrote instead about 'socialising'.

(b)   This question was successfully answered. A good number of candidates were able to correctly describe two aspects of the hidden curriculum such as teaching punctuality, a sense of hierarchy and social control. A few responses repeated the term socialisation from the question and therefore lost marks.

(c)   Most responses explained how schools use sanctions to encourage conformity and made points about negative and positive sanctions.

(d)   Most candidates showed some good sociological knowledge and understanding of relevant school factors. Peer pressure, setting/streaming, labeling, self-fulfilling prophecy, and anti-school subculture were common concepts identified by candidates. Some weaker responses tended to spend perhaps too much time developing very similar points around 'teacher attitudes' which meant they were not able to access full marks.

(e)   Most candidates understood the idea of functions of education, although some answers did not involve a two-sided argument. Common responses across all mark bands included the idea of equal opportunities, provision of skills and qualifications that aid upward social mobility and the social control role from functionalist, feminist and Marxist perspectives.

Question 3 – Crime

(a)   Candidates typically understood the idea of social control but found 'agencies' harder to explain.

(b)   This question was generally misunderstood, due in part to the understanding of the concept of 'time'. Candidates wrote about crimes by different age groups or crimes that are relative to situation, instead of writing about crimes that changed over time. Correct answers included rape in marriage, homosexuality and same sex marriage, cybercrimes such as 'hacking' and even human sacrifice.

(c)   Most candidates understood the differences between the two types of social control, referring to agencies, sanctions and so on. Some struggled to make a wide enough range of points. Good responses referred to both types of control.

(d)   Most candidates showed some sociological knowledge and understanding of why criminal youth sub-cultures exist in modern industrial societies. Status frustration, deprivation and peer pressure were common issues raised by candidates across all mark bands. Good responses debated reasons for committing youth crime and often cited studies such as Merton and Cohen.

(e)   This question proved difficult for many who could not grasp the 'to what extent' element of the task. Arguments for tended to centre on the severity of the media causing crime, moral panics and TV news giving a false, biased picture of crime. Good responses discussed factors such as labeling, deviancy amplification, moral panic and police targeting.

Question 4 – Media

(a)   Imitation was understood as copying, but answers frequently only gained one mark.

(b)   This question was successfully answered by most candidates. Good responses made references to positive media representations of the elderly as being the font of knowledge and wisdom. Negative representations took the shape of the elderly being seen in the media as weak, grumpy and dependent.

(c)   Some candidates did not understand the term folk devils. It is vital that all areas of the specification are covered by Centres in preparing candidates for assessment. Good answers were often helped by the 'mods and rockers' example. Common responses included reference to exaggeration, stereotypes, scapegoats, and moral panics.

(d)   Those candidates who knew the Marxist/conflict sociologist views showed knowledge of relevant sociological terminology. Weaker responses included very general comments on negative roles of the media rather than showing specific understanding of Marxism. Good responses often made reference to false consciousness and false needs, distraction, ideology etc.

(e)   A significant number of responses demonstrated a general understanding of the effects of television violence. Some appeared to interpret television as 'media' and hence didn't include reference to video games and the Internet. Some very good responses referenced the media effects theories. Excellent answers outlined the differing responses to violence on television and weaker responses recited long lists of models of media effects without applying them to the question. Some candidates limited themselves by only giving a one-sided response or by omitting a judgement/conclusion.

SOCIOLOGY

Key messages

A lot of excellent responses were seen during this marking session which showed clear engagement with sociological issues and contemporary debates. Topical and local examples were used alongside more traditional 'textbook' examples in order to justify points made. Theories and concepts were also well used by many candidates. No rubric errors were seen in the examination session which is excellent.

- Ensure what is being written specifically addresses the issues raised in the question candidates would not get marks for writing 'all that they know'

- Refer to sociological terminology, theory and concepts, using sociological specific vocabulary, as this will raise the overall quality of the answer

- Candidates should spend time thinking about what questions are asking for and planning answers to those specific questions in their reading time

- Use the marks per question as guidance as to how much is to be written for a particular question. Some candidates were writing half a page for a part **(a)** question worth 2 marks and the same for a part **(e)** question worth 15 marks

- On part **(e)** questions, ensure that candidates have a balanced argument that considers both sides of the debate. The response needs to include a range of points for each side that are well developed and evidence based, with a justified conclusion

General comments

In general there appeared to be the full range of quality of answers on the paper.

In terms of the 15 mark part (e) question, candidates should be encouraged to organise their answers into paragraphs and to develop each idea fully. Each point should aim to be directly focused upon what the question is asking and to engage sociologically and conceptually wherever possible.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 – The Family Question Comment

(a)   Most candidates found the definition of polygamy accessible and were able to describe it successfully.

(b)   Candidates were fairly successful in answering this question. Those that answered it well described different types of marriages such as same sex, monogamy, serial monogamy etc. Weaker responses didn't focus on the word 'marriage' in the question and talked about different types of family instead, which could not be credited.

(c)   Most candidates were able to explain a range of points as to how divorce has been made easier. These varied from cultural and attitudinal shifts, to legal changes and secularisation. A minority of candidates misinterpreted the question and wrote about divorce in general, which was not relevant to the question.

(d)   Most candidates showed some good sociological knowledge and understanding of cohabitation and a variety of different reasons as to why this has increased in popularity. The good responses linked the Feminist theory to globalisation.

(e) This question produced a range of very varied answers. The best answers discussed different types of households such as single person, commune, candidate accommodation and living with friends in relation to there still being a need for a family unit. Often the functions of the family were discussed. Weaker responses did not focus on the term 'household' in the question and instead just debated the pros and cons of different types of family in their response. Some very good responses neglected to write a conclusion or make a judgement which meant that they lost out on the highest marks available.

Question 2 – Education

(a) This question was either answered very well by those who knew the term, or very poorly by those that did not.

(b) This question was successfully answered by a lot of candidates who typically focused on class, gender or ethnicity in their response. A number of candidates did not understand what was meant by a 'pattern in educational achievement' and lost marks.

(c) The majority of responses were very general and did not score at the top of the mark band. The best answers had specific examples of positive discrimination to discuss, such as girls into STEM, financial assistance programs for the poor etc.

(d) Most candidates showed some good sociological knowledge and understanding of the links between ethnicity and educational performance. Candidates were able to identify ideas such as setting and streaming, labeling, self-fulfilling prophecy, racism, anti-School subcultures etc. Only a minority of candidates focused on different patterns of achievement amongst different ethnic minority groups.

(e) This was a well answered question which allowed candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of how material factors can influence education. Good arguments for focused on such ideas as private vs state Schools, part time work, teacher labeling and home life. The against ideas covered such points as free will, parental values, self-negating prophecy and positive discrimination/compensatory education programs.

Question 3 – Crime

(a) Candidates typically understood the idea of crime rates but found 'rates' harder to explain. Some also simply repeated the word 'crime' in the question thus showing only a partial understanding.

(b) This question was typically very well answered with most candidates describing official statistics, self-report studies or victim surveys. Weaker responses simply described generic sociological methods instead.

(c) Most candidates understood the concept of 'deterrence'. The best answers incorporated ideas about retribution, rehabilitation, social order, shared values etc. into their responses. Lots of relevant examples of punishments that deterred people from crime were used.

(d) This question produced some really interesting responses that tapped into a selection of international, national and local examples to justify the points made. Candidates focused on the crimes themselves, the victims, the criminals and the law enforcement agencies in their responses and thus produced quality answers.

(e) Stronger answers compared strengths and weaknesses of self-report studies. Common strengths included uncovering the dark figure of crime and confidentiality, and common weaknesses included sampling issues and the limited range of crimes covered. Better responses were able to discuss validity as both a strength and a weakness of the method. Some candidates then went on to suggest better methods for producing an accurate picture of crime such as victim surveys or the crime statistics.

Question 4 – Media

(a) This was a well answered question with most candidates being able to successfully relate their description of 'role models' to the media.

(b) This question was successfully answered. Typical answers looked at the housewife role, the child carer, the passive role, the sex object or the victim.

(c)   The quality of answers seen here was very mixed. Some candidates did not really focus on media usage and so produced answers that were only partially relevant. Better responses looked at ideas such as newspaper consumption patterns, TV choices (i.e. popular vs high culture) and the digital divide. Some went so far as to use Marxist theory to inform their responses through ideas such as the ideological state apparatus and the bourgeoisie using the media as a tool to maintain their elite and privileged position.

(d)   Responses to this question varied in quality. Key concepts used to make points included bias, spin doctors, media effects theories, propaganda and the work of the GUMG.

(e)   Most candidates were able to access this question and produce some relevant and interesting responses. Discussing stereotypical representations was done by most, typically focusing on ethnicity, gender, age and social class. Linking this to negative effects on the audience, proved more challenging for some candidates. The better responses used Marxism and/or feminism to strengthen their arguments alongside other media effects theories. In terms of counter arguments ideas about the active audience, new media interactivity, legislation and the challenging of negative stereotypes were all discussed.