
AS

SOCIOLOGY

Paper 2 (7191/2) – Research Methods and Topics in Sociology
Report on the Examination

Specification 7191
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General

This was the first sitting of the examinations for the new specification, with its revised pattern of assessment. Most students managed their time appropriately and had enough time to write answers of an appropriate length. There were some occasional rubric infringements, and on rare occasions some students attempted all 22 questions. A small number of students appeared to have started the 'wrong' section B, and subsequently crossed this material out before starting on the 'right' section.

In general students coped well with the demands of the new examination. However, there are some aspects that could be improved. Centres are reminded that questions asking for a definition of a concept that contains more than one word within quotation marks are best answered by ensuring that all the words are defined. In the 6 mark question some students are writing far too much, thereby losing focus on the precise wording of the question. The 10 mark 'Outline and explain' question requires students to link two aspects of the specification. The best answers took note of both aspects of the question, clearly identified two separate points and developed them together them in relation to the question as a whole. Weaker answers either ignored one aspect of the question, or attempted to cover a number of ideas rather than focusing on the two required.

Section A – Research Methods

Question 1

Most students could identify two ethical issues, but some were unable to develop their answer sufficiently for the second mark. Informed consent was the issue most cited, often with reference to covert observation. Harm, illegality, deceit and anonymity also often appeared. The most frequent mistakes were to discuss practical issues rather than ethical ones, such as danger for the researcher; getting permission (particularly for children); and to offer vulnerable groups as an issue, without explaining an ethical problem.

Question 2

Many students followed a practical, ethical and theoretical factors framework, but there was often confusion over the theoretical concepts, especially reliability and validity. Many simply listed advantages and then disadvantages, showing little awareness of evaluation. Students often used phrases such as 'positivists like quantitative data because it's reliable' without any real development or sense that they understood what that meant. Better answers showed good knowledge and understanding of official statistics, and developed the response through examples and analysis. Strong responses were also able to evaluate those advantages explicitly rather than just juxtaposing a disadvantage, for example: 'official statistics had the ethical advantage of informed consent for the original data, but the participants were not aware of its use for further sociological research', or: 'although official statistics generated large amounts of data, this might mean problems of complex and lengthy analysis'.

Section B – Topics in Sociology

Topic B1 – Culture and Identity

Question 3

Most students were able to define ‘agency of socialisation’ satisfactorily, usually by reference to an institution that teaches people society’s norms and values. Examples of agencies with no development were awarded one mark.

Question 4

The key to this question was to link the idea of labelling to the individual as opposed to linking it to the general impact of labelling on society. Most successful answers tended to discuss the self-fulfilling prophecy and the idea that an individual may internalise their label.

Question 5

This question proved quite difficult. A number of students seemed unfamiliar with the term and instead discussed changing aspects of popular culture, with limited reference to the question. Successful answers identified the passive, commercial, trivial and mass produced aspects of mass culture.

Question 6

The most successful answers tended to focus on firstly, experiences around access to work, leisure and education, and, secondly, experiences based on stereotyping and labelling. Better answers were able to expand on the issue they were discussing and then develop a number of links from that issue to the social experiences of a disabled person. Weaker answers tended to describe some aspect of an individual’s social experiences, for example limited wheelchair access, without fully explaining the impact it may have on those individuals.

Question 7

The usual approach to this question was to discuss the role of globalisation in shaping a sense of national identity. This proved to be a fairly productive source of material as students were often able to make reference to changes in (usually) British identity in the face of migration from around the world, and go on to discuss the emergence of hybrid cultures. These points were often contrasted with a more traditional view of national culture and traditions. Better answers explored these ideas in more detail and were able to evaluate the competing arguments. Relatively few students moved beyond this discussion to consider issues such as cultural imperialism, global media and the sense of individuals being global citizens. Those that did were able to open up their discussion in a very productive manner and discuss other aspects of identity besides national identity.

Topic B2 – Families and Households

The majority of students chose this Topic.

Question 8

Many students gained full marks for this question. Lack of knowledge of the term was very centre-based, and even then very few students had no understanding of the concept. Students were, on the whole, better at explaining the 'serial' aspect rather than 'monogamy'. There were a few whose definition was actually for polygamy.

Question 9

This question was generally answered well and a high proportion of students gained full marks. The majority referred to the dual burden or the triple shift as the form that exploitation takes, and were then able to explain what the term meant. Others answered successfully by citing and explaining unpaid domestic labour, emotion work or domestic violence.

Question 10

On the whole this was answered well. Most students could identify reasons that potentially led to delayed childbirth, though some did not receive the second mark as they developed their response in relation to not having children at all, rather than just a delay. Typical responses identified the growth of the female labour force, increased numbers staying in education, more opportunities, and more independence as reasons. Other reasons used effectively were the need for financial stability, later marriage and longer life expectancy, the expense of parenthood, and the decline in stigma towards older mothers.

Question 11

Most students were able to give two examples of government policies, even if these were not very specific or accurate. Some particularly vague answers described policy areas rather than identifying a specific policy. There was some difficulty in linking policies to a specific impact on the experience of childhood today. Many candidates just said it was 'better', whilst others linked the policy to benefits in the future, eg better jobs. Some gave quite lengthy descriptions on the changes in childhood or various sociologists' views on the position of childhood today. Whilst sociological knowledge was often good, they failed to apply this explicitly to the question, resulting in limited marks. Others identified two policies, but then described just one way that it affected childhood. Some identified two policies and two ways, but very briefly with no development. Overall, relatively few students explained the effects on childhood experiences sufficiently effectively for top band marks. The policies most frequently cited were the extension of the school leaving-age, child protection policies, and various benefits. Weaker students then wrote only briefly about the extension of childhood, it being 'better' or more dependence on parents. Some wrote at a tangent, for example, about New Right views of benefits. Only a small proportion managed to identify a policy and link its effects well to several points about changed childhood experiences (eg through the effects of divorce law changes, or the arrival of legal gay marriage).

Question 12

There were some very good answers to this question. Some students gave very detailed and thorough accounts of the Marxist perspective on the family, with explicit analysis and evaluation. These were often accompanied by the inclusion of a range of sources. References were made to

inheritance, socialisation, ideology, consumption, 'safe haven', reserve army, reproduction of labour, patriarchy, etc, often incorporating Marxist-feminism. Other responses were more juxtaposed, providing detailed accounts of different perspectives on the family one after the other. Weaker candidates touched on just one or two issues and did not explain them well. These type of responses tended to rely on restating/rewording phrases in the item. Some better answers were able to use functionalist, feminist and post-modernist views as evaluation as they worked their way through these. Many more inserted paragraphs on these other perspectives, but did not use them as evaluation, showing no linkage whatsoever to Marxist views. A significant number of students seemed to know a lot more about these other perspectives (especially functionalism) as opposed to Marxist views on the family.

Topic B3 – Health

Few centres chose this Topic.

Question 13

This proved to be quite a difficult question for students. The word ‘chances’ was often used tautologically to define itself. Also quite a number of answers drifted into discussing differences in access to care, and subsequently struggled to explain the term.

Question 14

Successful answers were able to identify the consequences of travel and the spread of communicable diseases as affecting the patterns of health and illness in the United Kingdom. Some students were able to identify different susceptibilities to different diseases among different ethnic groups, but failed to link it back to movement of people between countries. Answers that discussed health tourism often struggled to explain how this might affect patterns of health and illness in the United Kingdom.

Question 15

Many students took this question as an opportunity to discuss the social class/ethnic/gender biases of medical treatment without being able to relate these comments back to how these aspects of provision benefited the medical profession. Similarly, many students discussed iatrogenesis, the various practices of drug companies or the inverse care law, but failed to explain how these benefited the medical profession. More successful responses identified ways such as: recommending treatment that benefited the medical profession financially; the ability of the medical profession to restrict access to the profession, so again benefiting financially; the medicalisation of social problems that has led to increased power and status in society for the medical profession.

Question 16

Most students were able to identify two reasons why members of some ethnic groups may be more likely to be diagnosed with mental illness than members of other ethnic groups. The most common reasons given were racism, labelling/stereotyping, poverty and cultural differences. Successful answers were able to explain clearly how the reason identified was a feature of some ethnic groups, and also how this led to a higher incidence of mental illness. For example, how poverty might lead to stress, lower status, feelings of inadequacy, loss of independence, frustration and so on. Less successful answers spent too long describing the differences in diagnosis rather than the reasons, or discussed differences between ethnic groups without relating them to differential diagnoses of mental illness.

Question 17

Some answers conflated the social construction of disability with the social construction of illness, especially mental illness, and subsequently struggled to focus on the specifics of the question. Good answers were able to explain clearly how disability might be socially constructed, with reference to cultural and historical differences as well as to aspects of labelling and stereotyping led by the media, and also to various access issues. Many answers identified modifications (or lack of) to the built environment as a focus for their discussion on the social construction of disability. Weaker answers often limited themselves to this, and tended to drift into descriptive accounts of the various challenges disabled people may face in society. The best answers were able to explain

a range of ways in which disability is socially constructed, and then contrast this with a biomedical view of disability, including a discussion of the relative merits of different approaches.

Topic B4 – Work, Poverty and Welfare

Few centres chose this Topic..

Question 18

The most popular and successful approach made reference to government providing a minimum standard of living. However, many students struggled to define the term satisfactorily, and tended to give examples of an aspect of the welfare state for which they received one mark as a partial definition.

Question 19

Most answers were able to explain how technological change may lead to reskilling, usually with reference to the introduction of computer technology.

Question 20

Most students were able to identify some reasons why families with young children may be likely to experience poverty. These usually cited the expense of bringing up children, the inability to do paid work full time, the expense of child care, and/or the necessity for some mothers to have a career break. Failure to get maximum marks was usually due to the point being too general, or not spelling out explicitly the significance of, or reason for, the point raised, for example stating that 'children are expensive' without explaining why young children incur particular expenses. or referring to a 'career break' without explaining the consequences of this for family income.

Question 21

Good answers were able to identify two government policies (often tax and benefit policies) and explain clearly how these have impacted on the gap between rich and poor during the last 40 years. Weaker answers were either less than clear about the policy, and/or failed to explain its impact on the gap between rich and poor. The most common successful approach was a discussion of minimum wage legislation, with a clear description of what this is coupled with some analysis of its potential impact on the poorest sections of society.

Question 22

The majority of answers took quite a narrow view of the question. Most students responded by discussing the impact of unemployment on individuals. These answers often identified the physical and mental consequences of long term unemployment on life chances and on identity. Some students tried to broaden the discussion onto ideas about people on benefits making a positive lifestyle choice, but these answers often failed to get beyond various simplistic assertions. There were relatively few students who really explored the idea of worklessness beyond unemployment. Those that did tended to discuss sociological aspects of retirement and were rewarded appropriately.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

[UMS conversion calculator](#)