



AS

SOCIOLOGY

7191/2 Research Methods and Topics in Sociology
Report on the Examination

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General

This was the second series of exams under the new specification and assessment pattern. Most students seemed able to manage their time appropriately and have enough time to write answers of an appropriate length. There were however, some occasional rubric infringements with some students attempting all 22 questions. The numbers of students doing this appears to have increased compared to last year.

In general, students coped well with the demands of the exam. However, some aspects could be improved. 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 in relation to the second part of the question. Weaker answers either ignored one aspect of the question or attempted to cover a number of ideas rather than focusing on two.

Additionally, some students are writing far too much on the 6 mark questions. This time could be better spent on the longer essay questions.

Section A – Research Methods

Question 1

The most common successful responses made references to problems such as the artificial environment not reflecting real life. Reference to the Hawthorne effect was also quite common. The most common reason not to get full marks was stating a problem without any explanation (for example 'lacks validity') or making references to general problems with research methods that are not specific to laboratory experiments, such as time and money.

Question 2

This question attracted a wide range of responses. Better answers explored issues of validity, reliability, representativeness and generalisability. However, a significant number appeared uncertain about what some of these key concepts meant. There were also some students who had little understanding of what theoretical factors were, and cited practical and ethical issues in their place. Some students gave long accounts of examples of research and their methods without really getting to grips with the question. The best answers were able to explain the link between positivist and interpretivist approaches and choice of method. Key theoretical terms were explained and analysed. The very best answers were able to come to a conclusion about the relative importance of theoretical factors when choosing sociological research methods.

Section B – Topics in Sociology

Topic B1 – Culture and Identity

Question 3

The majority of answers were able to explain 'global' with reference to people in different countries. More often the cultural aspect was more difficult to define. Successful students were able to discuss the idea of shared norms and values.

Question 4

The most common successful answers were able to relate age or gender or social class and leisure choices, and then explain how they shaped identity. Weaker answers described a leisure activity and then often struggled to make some connection with identity.

Question 5

Some answers gave numerous examples of age-related stereotyping and consequently were only credited once. More successful answers made reference to aspects of society, such as age-related legislation, work opportunities and involvement in education, as well as status and independence.

Question 6

This question was answered well with some good knowledge and understanding shown. Some students scored well by developing Oakley's ideas on gender socialisation. Others approached the question in terms of two different agencies of socialisation and their contribution to socialising children into gender roles. The best answers were able to clearly explain how agencies may socialise children into gender roles (usually family and education). These answers were detailed in their account of the process and they were also able to discuss the way in which these processes applied to girls and boys. They also discussed the way these processes were changing.

Question 7

The best answers made reference to different ethnic minorities as well as the ethnic majority. Some of these answers made good use of material from the education topic to discuss the relevance of experiences of education on ethnicity and identity. Good answers retained the focus on identity and were able to discuss ideas of cultural navigation and cultural defence in relation to ethnicity and identity. These answers often referred to studies by Modood, Johal and Ballard. Weaker responses tended to drift into life chances rather than identity or simply described some experiences of different ethnic minorities, often in a fairly stereotyped way.

Topic B2 – Families and Households

The majority of students chose this topic.

Question 8

Successful answers referred to the idea of stages and gave examples of significant life events. Answers who just gave examples of key life stages were awarded one mark. Some students seemed unfamiliar with the term but were able to work it out and suggest a suitable definition. The term 'life course' is mentioned specifically in the specification and should be more familiar to students than it appeared to be.

Question 9

The most common answer was 'the warm bath', closely followed by 'satisfaction of sexual drive', while a few referred to the economic benefits. Stabilisation of the adult personality was often developed well as was 'meeting emotional needs'. The most frequent error made was to confuse functions with roles, or to talk about the functions the family fulfils for society (eg reproduction, primary socialisation).

Question 10

This question generated a wide range of responses. Many students successfully identified three effects on society of an ageing population. Common responses were focused around increase in dependency ratio, strain on public/health services, the impact on housing or other issues, such as the increase in extended/beanpole families. Weaker responses suggested a vague idea of the issues but some students seemed to have problems articulating the precise nature of the problem as they saw it. Other weaker answers repeated dependency ratio, but in another form, or referred to public services/health twice. Some students were very confused about the effects and argued that the birth rate would increase because more old people were dying. Some answers were far too long given the amount of marks (and therefore time) available for the question.

Question 11

Top band answers were able to identify and develop two ways, such as changes in the position of women in society sometimes linked to other changes, such as divorce law with application to delaying childbirth and smaller family size. Changes to childhood, such as child-centred or economic liability, also successfully developed and applied to smaller family size were also rewarded well, as well as a number of responses that discussed the impact of industrialisation on family size. Occasionally more successful answers discussed how changes could increase or decrease family size, such as the re-emergence of the divorced extended family or one person households following divorce. Good answers analysed the underlying reasons for these changes, for example by referring to the growth of feminism. Weaker answers often lost focus on family size and instead discussed general changes to society or family. Alternatively they covered a number of possible changes in society that affected family size without developing any one of them sufficiently.

Question 12

The majority of students had clearly learned some relevant material and were able to write at length about different contributions to a sociological understanding of childhood. Most used the item to structure their responses into a debate between the 'march of progress' view and more critical views. There were many responses that listed material from the general topic area rather than applying the material to the question set. For example the requirement to focus on the last 50 years or so was often not recognised and Aries was the starting point for many. This meant that they often got bogged down in Aries and/or cross-cultural studies, and failed to address significant aspects of the question. The better answers were able to use Pilcher, Palmer and Postman among others to develop a critical discussion. These answers were broader and deeper with a focus on different arguments about contemporary changes to childhood. There was occasional brief evaluation, such as cross-cultural examples of childhood or class or gender differences. Top band answers had explicit evaluation of the debates and a more conceptual sense of the theories.

Topic B3 – Health

This option was done by a minority of schools and colleges.

Question 13

Most students had some idea about this. The successful ones were able to explain the idea of the rights and obligations involved, and the role of doctors as the gatekeepers of this process. Partial answers tended to express the idea in terms of 'being allowed time off work' or similar.

Question 14

This question proved to be quite difficult for many students. Partial answers tended to ignore the aspect of declining confidence in the question and just tended to assert that doctors did not operate in the best interests of their patients. More successful students cited the increased use of the internet undermining the traditional authority of the medical profession. Other good answers made direct reference to recent scandals involving the medical profession and related these to a decline in confidence in the medical profession.

Question 15

The most common reasons suggested by students involved the effect of women's roles, an aspect of gender role socialisation, and more contact with medical staff. Most students were able to gain the full two marks for each of these points by explaining how they led to women being more likely than men to be treated for mental illness. A common mistake was to make points that were the reverse of each other. For example, saying that women are more likely to be socialised to discuss emotions and seek help with mental health problems, then as a separate point say that men are socialised not to open up about mental health. In these cases, this was credited as one reason rather than two separate reasons.

Question 16

Cultural factors around older people's expectations of health and attitudes to consulting the doctor were the most common reasons offered by successful students. Differential work opportunities and differences in immune systems were also popular responses. Successful answers were able to explain how these factors affected different age groups and explained explicitly how they led to differences between age groups regarding consultation rates. Less successful students tended to drift away from age into considerations of gender or ethnicity, or tended just to assert the reason without any appropriate discussion or analysis.

Question 17

Some answers were unable to distinguish between cultural and material explanations for social class inequalities in health and just wrote very descriptively about smoking, diet or access to healthcare. A number of students were more comfortable with discussing cultural explanations as opposed to material explanations, and these answers were often unbalanced. The best answers referred to a number of material factors, such as poverty, stress, insecurity, unemployment, housing, the nature of work, social cohesion, and access to health care. These answers tended to weave cultural factors into the discussion rather than have two identifiable sections. For example by discussing to what extent poor diet was about material deprivation, poor health education or a cultural choice. These answers were often able to frame their answers with reference to sociological perspectives and arrive at a reasoned conclusion.

Topic B4 – Work, Poverty and Welfare

This option was done by a minority of schools and colleges.

Question 18

Most successful answers made reference to the interconnectedness of countries. Partial answers tended to provide an example of globalisation, such as a transnational corporation.

Question 19

Most answers were able to explain a problem of using an absolute definition of poverty, usually with reference to cultural differences in defining basic necessities. A minority of students wrote answers that were tangential, such as by discussing the merits of the benefit system.

Question 20

In general, many students struggled with this question. They seemed to be unfamiliar with the idea that economically inactive did not include those who are unemployed (ie looking for work). Many answers therefore defaulted into an explanation for unemployment. Some students took this question as an opportunity to express the idea that those on benefit were lazy and undeserving of support. These answers often struggled to address the actual question. Successful answers made reference to groups such as full time carers, those who were disabled or long term sick and therefore unable to work, people who had taken early retirement and people who were in higher education.

Question 21

Some students were hampered in their attempts to answer this question because they were unclear about what means tested benefits are. These answers often developed into general criticisms of the provision of welfare benefits and struggled to make relevant points. Successful answers made reference to problems such as the complexity of the system, the stigma attached to claiming and the relatively low amount of money received. Top band answers were able to explain these problems in terms of their effect or scope or underlying causes. For example, by discussing stigma in the context of media stereotypes, the effect this had on claimants and illustrating the issues with examples, such as the provision of free school meals.

Question 22

There were some very good responses to this question. Many answers gave a clear account of different aspects of alienation and were able to discuss different perspectives on the issue of whether alienation is inevitable in capitalist society. These answers often started with the Marxist view of alienation and then discussed the impact of technology on the labour process. Typical answers referred to automation, deskilling, re-skilling, Fordism, post-Fordism, job enrichment as well as issues of control and job satisfaction. Weaker answers either had a much narrower view of alienation (usually job satisfaction) and/or spent a long time discussing the impact of technology in the work place without tying it explicitly to the issue of alienation. Some weaker answers merely presented general material on the nature of changes to work in contemporary society.

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](#)