

# SOCIOLOGY

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Paper 9699/01

Essay

## General comments

The Examiners were impressed with the depth of knowledge that many candidates demonstrated and their ability to analyse relevant issues in a coherent and logical manner. Less creditable were answers that addressed the broad subject of the question without responding directly to the analytical issues raised by the specific wording of the question. Such answers tend to be rather descriptive and lacking in a clear understanding of the subtleties of the question set. Marks are gained for knowledge with this type of answer, but there is often little to reward in terms of assessment and evaluation. Candidates in this category might benefit from more guidance and practice in composing tightly structured, analytical responses to the type of questions that are set for this paper. There were fewer really poor answers this session and most candidates now appear to recognise the need to use appropriate textbook knowledge in responding to the questions. It should be emphasised that answers relying solely on general knowledge of the question topic (i.e. where there are no references to relevant sociological studies, concepts, theories and data) invariably achieve very low marks.

As in previous sessions, questions from **sections A** and **B** proved most popular. Answers to the **Section C** questions are often short of appropriate knowledge and a lack of references to relevant recent studies of social stratification is particularly noticeable. It was good to see though that some Centres are now teaching the subject of postmodernism in relation to social stratification and that helped many candidates to provide well informed answers to **Question 5** especially. **Question 5** overall was answered much better than **Question 6**.

It is pleasing to note that many Centres are making good use of the recommended CIE textbook, *Sociology*, by A. Barnard, T. Burgess, and M. Kirby, published by Cambridge University Press. Access to this textbook is proving to be a help for candidates in answering questions across the range of subjects covered by the AS and A Level Sociology papers. We would encourage Centres to ensure that candidates have access to this textbook and to a selection of other relevant texts from the CIE recommended reading list for the subject.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Question 1**

Weak answers to this question were often confined to a few basic remarks about the process of socialisation, with references to feral children often featuring prominently. Better answers recognised that the question offered the opportunity to distinguish between conflict and consensus theories of social order. Some answers though relied too heavily on describing the functionalist theory and offered little coverage of contrasting perspectives. Good answers outlined several different theories of social order and made a concerted attempt to assess the part that coercion and power play in explaining social conformity.

### **Question 2**

There were some weak answers that were rather vague in describing Marxist theory and/or somewhat rambling in discussing the relevance of that theory for understanding modern industrial societies. Better answers provided a clear and accurate account of Marxist theory and went on to assess some of the strengths and limitations of that theory. In some cases, the assessment was confined simply to juxtaposing Marxist theory with other sociological perspectives. A more creditable assessment focused specifically on discussing the value of Marxist theory in understanding key features of industrial societies today. Very good answers often distinguished between different strands of Marxist theory and noted that the theory is still evolving and continues to be adapted in response to changes occurring in modern industrial societies.

### **Question 3**

Some candidates were unclear about the distinction between questionnaires and interviews and that misunderstanding led to flawed responses to the question. Most answers though showed a good understanding of the different types of interview. A typical answer meriting marks in the middle of the range comprised a basic account of a few strengths and limitations of structured and unstructured interviews. Better answers linked the discussion to different theoretical perspectives and also addressed directly what is meant by the reference in the question to the data collected by interviews being socially constructed. The best answers included clear, well formulated conclusions about the value of interviews as a method of sociological research.

### **Question 4**

There were very few examples of really weak answers to this question. A basic type of response often comprised a simple run through of ways in which choice of research method might be influenced by the time and finances available to the researcher. Better answers considered a wider range of factors that might influence choice of research method, with attention given to the relevance of theoretical perspectives in particular. Answers that merited the top mark band successfully identified a range of practical and theoretical factors that influence choice of research methods and drew well-informed conclusions about the relative importance of each factor.

### **Question 5**

This question inspired some really thoughtful and varied answers of good quality overall. There were some weak answers though that were confined to merely describing a few characteristics of the poor or distinguishing between different types of poverty. Better answers correctly situated the question in the context of cultural explanations of poverty, often with references to the 'culture of poverty' thesis. Even better answers went on to contrast the cultural explanations with the structural approach associated with, for example, Marxist accounts of poverty. Some candidates also made useful links with feminist and post-modernist theories.

### **Question 6**

This was the least popular question, though it still attracted quite a few answers. A few candidates confused ethnic conflict with class conflict and provided weak answers that were confined mainly to a discussion of the Marxist theory of class exploitation. There were many more answers though that rightly described one or more theories of why racism and ethnic conflict arise. Better answers went further in linking these theories to the specific issues of competition for jobs and housing. There were a few very good answers that emphasised the multi-faceted and historically variable nature of ethnic conflict and correctly warned against over-generalising when discussing the factors that explain racial and ethnic tensions in modern industrial societies.

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Paper 9699/02  
Data Response

## General comments

The standard of responses for this paper continues to improve. There has been a welcome decrease in the number of candidates who make poor use of their time by writing over-long answers to the **part (a)** and **(b)** questions. Most of the candidates now seem to recognise that the majority of their time in the examination should be devoted to answering the **part (c)** and **(d)** questions, as 76% of the marks available for the paper are assigned to these questions. It is worth reminding Centres that the **part (a)** questions can be answered quite adequately using no more than one or two simple sentences. Likewise, the **part (b)** questions can be answered fully in two short paragraphs, equating to less than half a side of the answer sheet. Candidates who write much longer answers to the **part (a)** and **(b)** questions are likely to be using their time inappropriately and should be encouraged to be more concise in responding to these questions.

Use of relevant examples from sociological studies was often a feature of good responses to the questions requiring longer answers. However, some candidates failed to mention any studies. Centres should encourage candidates to learn the basic details of key studies and to make references to those studies appropriately in answering the **part (c)** and **(d)** questions. Candidates should also be encouraged to apply knowledge of the main theoretical perspectives as one aspect of a good response to the questions on this paper that requires longer answers.

There were few rubric errors. Some candidates continue to answer three questions rather than the specified two questions. Answers to the third question are usually weak and the Examiners feel that in most cases, rather than attempting to answer a third question, the candidate would have gained more by using the time available to improve his/her answers to the first two questions undertaken.

## Comments on specific questions

### Questions 1

- (a) Most candidates answered this question well and correctly noted that variables are the factors that may influence the outcome of an event or experiment.
- (b) Most candidates were able to identify two problems with using laboratory experiments in sociological research and many were able to describe these problems with sufficient clarity to gain full marks. A few candidates confused experiments with laboratory research.
- (c) Weaker answers were often confined to a simple account of how attitudes and values are shaped by socialisation. Better answers focused on academic knowledge and how that might be influenced by social processes. Some candidates made good use of the ideas of thinkers such as Kuhn, Lakatos and Lynch, who highlight some of the social influences on scientific enquiry. Answers that considered the influence of funding bodies on the construction of knowledge merited high marks.
- (d) Weak answers often comprised a few simple points about the positivist perspective with no further development. Better answers focused on the interpretivist critique of positivism. Answers that merited high marks combined a good descriptive account of the interpretivist critique of positivism with an assessment of that critique. The assessment in most cases was delivered through an attempt to defend some aspects of the positivist perspective against the interpretivist critique.

## Question 2

- (a) A few candidates confused validity with reliability. However, most candidates were able to define the term accurately for two marks.
- (b) Some candidates wrongly interpreted this question as an invitation to discuss general problems in carrying out participant observation studies. To be creditable, the problems identified needed to relate specifically to the difficulties of gaining access to a group at the beginning of the research process. Good answers referred to problems such as tracking down and making initial contact with group members, rejection by the group, difficulty of establishing trust, and possible differences between the researcher and the study group in terms of social characteristics such as age and gender.
- (c) There were a lot of very good answers to this question. Weaker answers merely identified a few features of participant observation without relating the material to the question as set. Better answers made clear what aspects of participant observation help the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the group under study.
- (d) A few candidates confused covert observation with overt observation. Answers that discussed participant observation in general gained a few marks, but no higher due to the failure to focus on covert observation specifically. Good answers discussed a wide range of practical, theoretical and ethical issues related to covert participant observation. To reach the top mark band, answers also needed to include an assessment of the value of the covert approach.

## Question 3

- (a) Quite a few candidates confused inter-generational mobility with intra-generational mobility. However, a high percentage of candidates were able to define the term accurately for two marks.
- (b) A few candidates wrongly interpreted the question as an opportunity to distinguish between achieved status and ascribed status. Most of the answers though correctly identified two ways of achieving upward social mobility, with many referring to career progression and marriage as the relevant factors.
- (c) Weaker answers were often confined to a review of different models/theories of social class. Better answers discussed the limitations of using occupation as an indicator of social class. The highest marks were gained by candidates who referred specifically to problems in studying social mobility where occupation is used as an indicator of social class position.
- (d) There were some weak answers to this question that merely offered a few random points about social class in general. Better answers demonstrated some understanding of the functionalist theory of social stratification and many good responses also discussed the meritocracy thesis. To reach the top mark band, candidates needed to assess the idea that social position is achieved on the basis of merit in modern industrial societies. Some candidates achieved this requirement by juxtaposing the functionalist theory with other theories of social stratification, such as the Marxist and the feminist. Other candidates offered an assessment based on the use of evidence from studies of social inequality and social mobility.

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Paper 9699/03

Essay 2

## General comments

Once more the standard of answers continues to be maintained and a majority of candidates submitted responses that displayed sociological knowledge. However insufficient detail and the lack of sociological references limited the success of some candidates. Most candidates selected their answers from the first four sections of the examination paper but a few answered questions on the mass media and of those that did almost all answered **Question 12**. As usual few opted to answer questions on work and leisure; however, some of those that do are showing a greater understanding of the topic than previously.

A continuing cause of difficulty for many candidates is the lack of understanding of sociological concepts, in particular terms like meritocracy, educational systems and anomie amongst others. This was shown in both the definitions and in the extended essays. Some candidates continue to offer generalised answers to the questions rather than answering the one that was set. Others showed that they had good sociological knowledge about the topic but failed to use it in order to answer the set question, rather displaying information in list form.

In order to improve marks candidates must make sure that they spend at least some part of the answer directly answering the central issue that has been outlined in the question as well as looking at other contextual issues. A few candidates wrote longer answers for **(a)ii** than for their **b** essay. This is poor use of examination time, candidates need to pay attention to the mark allocation when planning how long to spend on each element of the paper.

There were a small number of rubric errors in this examination but a small number of candidates who displayed a sound sociological knowledge for two answers then struggled to produce a convincing answer for their third. Although not a rubric error a small number of candidates answered all **part (a)** (or **part (b)**) questions first and then went on to answer the other sections, in some cases not numbering their answers. This was rather confusing for Examiners. However, there continues to be more candidates who are displaying the skills of analysis and evaluation which is pleasing and Examiners noted some original conclusions which is another trend to be commended.

## Comments on specific questions

### *Section A*

#### **Question 1**

This was a popular question which most candidates understood and answered either competently or well.

- (a)** Patriarchy was well understood and most scored two or three marks. Better answers defined it in the context of society as well as the family and that was what was required as the family was not specifically mentioned in the question. Two substantial examples were given by most, a number quoting extended and nuclear families, but better answers were specific with such examples as Arensberg and Kimball's classical extended family or the Nayer. Many candidates seemed to think that nuclear and extended families must be patriarchal. Some weaker answers described family roles rather than structures.
- (b)** Answers gave the full range to this question not only interrogating the meaning of democracy for husbands and wives but also considering the position of children as well as other family members. Most answers focused on conjugal roles in terms of who does what and few considered aspects of decision making. A number of candidates looked at democracy in society rather than the family whilst others described loss of function either as a part or the entirety of their answer. There was

appropriate use of both up to date theory and texts from candidates who offered the most sophisticated answers.

## **Question 2**

This was the most popular question on the paper and the answers that were given covered a range of responses.

- (a) Most candidates understood the meaning of cohabitation as a couple living as in a marriage but without the legal ties and gave sound responses. A few confused it with habitation and therefore scored no marks. If the meaning was well understood then the examples were appropriate, and most were. Some candidates gave cohabitation as an example even though it had been expressly prohibited in the question and others offered elopement, but these were the minority of candidates.
- (b) Answers to this question were for the majority clear and well constructed. There were a few that were full of excellent arguments and material but had not one reference to either theory or research and these are needed if the higher bands are to be accessed. More could have been related to industrialisation as many candidates made little or no reference to the process. Some showed confusion between the meaning of industrialisation and urbanisation. Again a few candidates misinterpreted the question and either discussed which sort of families are 'best' or gave lengthy descriptions of the functions of the family and how these may or may not have changed.

## **Section B**

### **Question 3**

This question that was selected by many candidates most of whom understood the meaning of the question and selected appropriate material to answer it.

- (a) Good understanding of meritocracy was shown with the majority of candidates answering well in the context of society. Weaker candidates still scored marks but rather focused on the effect of meritocracy on the individual rather than meritocratic structures. Examples were generally excellent and the best ones were specific. Candidates who gave generalised examples like comprehensives frequently then repeated a very similar situation for their second example. The weakest examples were taken from society and not from education as specified by the question. Other candidates quoted fee paying schools as an example of meritocracy.
- (b) Once candidates had identified the question as one of social mobility they were able to give good and frequently detailed answers. Others who had failed to grasp the meaning of the question then gave list like 'catch all' answers that were limited to the lower bands. There were many excellent debates developed in answers to this question with candidates displaying well focused arguments. Weaker candidates struggled with the term 'social advancement'.

### **Question 4**

This question was also popular with many candidates and gave rise to a range of answers.

- (a) There were many excellent definitions of the hidden curriculum many of which made reference to Marxist theory. A few who then went on to give appropriate examples did not adequately define the term as they failed to show understanding of it. A number of candidates gave detailed understanding and provided excellent examples amongst which issues of gender, class and ethnicity were used to good effect. Weaker candidates relied on personal experience in giving examples and this did not generally result in a sound sociological response.
- (b) Although there were many excellent responses to this question many answers were very disappointing. This was because candidates who very obviously knew a great deal of excellent sociology had either not understood the question or not considered it in enough detail before starting. What they failed to do was to consider 'those who control the curriculum' in their answer. This gave rise to list like answers of information that did not allow the development of a debate.

## **Section C**

### **Question 5**

This question was answered by a relatively small number of candidates.

- (a)** Answers to this question fell into two categories. Those who knew what the term meant and described its meaning well. On the other hand those who were confused as to the meaning and frequently described another term like disenchantment or atheism. It followed that examples related to understanding, with good candidates describing the separation of church and state and those who had misunderstood describing some other feature of secularisation or even the breaking off of an engagement.
- (b)** There were few really good responses to this question but those that were included much information on a whole host of reasons why individuals from all social positions may or may not be attracted to religious organisations. Other answers were limited to discussions of Marxism. However it was noted that the candidates of several Centres offered mature arguments well supported by evidence.

### **Question 6**

In this section this question was by far the most popular.

- (a)** The vast majority of candidates showed clear understanding of the term and gave detailed and accurate definitions, but a number of candidates only saw it as a building. Again the success with which examples were given followed the definition with the best answers using denomination and sects. Some candidates offered sects and cults, which were permissible, but descriptions of these two organisations could be problematic as they are in many ways so similar in meaning that denominations made a much more substantive answer. Some of those candidates who had defined church as a building then tended to give temple and mosque as their examples. Others referred to different religious faiths.
- (b)** Secularisation remains a popular choice with candidates and there were many well constructed essays that built a debate between the arguments for secularisation or not. Some excellent answers included the ideas of the 'classical' theorists as well as more up to date material. A large number of candidates only considered Christianity in the context of secularisation which limited their answers. A few candidates described the functions of religion rather than answering the question set.

## **Section D**

### **Question 7**

A question answered by many candidates.

- (a)** Candidates correctly identified the term as one associated with labelling the best of who acknowledged this to be a negative label. There were some significant errors of understanding as a small number of candidates appeared to be describing the stigmata. For the examples there were some excellent descriptions of the amplification of deviance given and once again candidates who gave specific examples did better than those who offered generalised ones. It was noted for this questions that a number of candidates only gave one example.
- (b)** A well constructed essay on the part of the majority of candidates but a few again overlooked the focus of the question and offered several explanations of the nature of crime and did not direct this to a debate about labelling by the powerful but rather went on to discuss other theories.

### **Question 8**

This question was slightly more popular in this section than the previous one.

- (a) Anomie was defined well and many did this with theoretical reference to the work of Durkheim or Merton. Some candidates seemed to think their theories were the same and not that Merton's was a later adaptation of that of Durkheim. Examples tended to revolve around groups isolated from mainstream of society. Many candidates struggled to give two relevant examples.
- (b) Good understanding of the role of socialisation was displayed in the majority of answers as well as an understanding of many other theories about the nature of deviance. The best answers focused their response on deviance as was asked in the question. A number of weaker candidates spent a disproportionate amount of time on sociological explanations whilst others concentrated on crime when they should have been concentrating on deviance.

### **Section E**

This section of the paper remains the least popular amongst candidates and very few answered this question.

### **Question 9**

- (a) The concept of ageism was understood but few candidates were able to support their answer with more than one appropriate example.
- (b) Most answers were restricted to one explanation and tended to agree uncritically with the proposition and showed little understanding of the 'systems of management'.

### **Question 10**

This question was the more popular in the section but was still answered by a limited number of candidates.

- (a) The term was generally well understood as well as the problems of measuring unemployment although some candidates struggled to find two appropriate problems to describe. A small number of candidates chose to explain why being unemployed was a problem rather than measuring it as the question asked.
- (b) A limited number of really good answers were seen to this question the majority of which also tended to agree uncritically to the proposition in the question. Better answers used the work of Blauner and Zuboff successfully but there was little evidence of contemporary material. In this question there was a marked difference between Centres as candidates from some had been prepared excellently with relevant and up to date material whilst others gave the impression that their answers were based on common sense and not sociological material.

### **Section F**

### **Question 11**

This was answered by very few candidates and those that did were very weak especially in the response to the essay.

### **Question 12**

The mass media continues to be of growing interest to candidates and Centres and this year almost all candidates who answered this section opted to do so with this question.

- (a) Representation was well understood as an image portrayed by the media and examples generally revolved around gender, disability and ethnicity. Again specific examples worked better rather than generalised ones. A small number of candidates did not understand the term and took representation to mean different types of media.



- (b)** There were a number of excellent responses to this question which evaluated the pluralist view of the media against a range of others, amongst which the Marxist perspective figured prominently. Again there were a small number of candidates who took the question to mean that all types of people are seen on the television rather than the interest of all groups being reflected on the different types of media.