

SOCIOLOGY

Paper 2251/12
Paper 12

Key messages

- For **Question 1(c)** candidates should make an explicit reference to the source which they can then go on to develop through description.
- In **Questions 1(a)** and **1(b)**, candidates are asked to 'identify' something, they should keep answers short as long descriptions or explanations are not required.
- In **Question (f)** candidates should concentrate on making positive points rather than engaging in negative evaluation in order to answer the question.
- Candidates need to be clear about questions which ask them to describe the 'ways' in which something is done, as in **Question 2(b)**. Candidates should describe this in terms of 'how' rather than 'what', in this case how the hidden curriculum is taught.
- In questions which refer to modern industrial societies, candidates should keep comments about the past to a minimum.
- It remains the case that candidates do not need to spend time defining key terms in the question before beginning their answers.
- More confident students should practice writing evaluative rather than summative conclusions in which they make a judgement about the 'extent' to which the claim in the question is correct.

General comments

Candidates showed a very good level of engagement with the question paper and the assessment objectives. Many candidates showed good knowledge and understanding of sociological concepts and theory. Many were able to apply this knowledge well to the demands of the questions. In essay responses more successful candidates demonstrated their evaluation skills by examining other perspectives and going beyond comparing arguments for and against. Most candidates were able to discuss several strengths and limitations of methods. Methodological issues such as stratified sampling and concepts such as reliability proved to be more challenging. Use of the source for the relevant questions in **Question 1** was once again variable (see key messages). The option 'Culture, identity and socialisation' was more popular than 'Social Inequality', but in both candidates showed a good grasp of the key theories, ideas, concepts and arguments and many used these to good effect. There were very few rubric errors but a relatively high number of non-responses on the more extended questions.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

- (a) Most candidates were able to identify the two reasons why the researchers needed to gain the trust of the male students. A small number of candidates identified reasons not taken from the source, such as 'to get valid answers'. In addition, a few candidates wrote at too much length for a 2 mark 'identify' question.
- (b) Most candidates were able to correctly identify two methods that could be used to study students' behaviour and attitudes. A small but significant number of candidates wrote descriptions or justifications of their choices which was not required. A few candidates referred to observation which was not creditworthy as the question asked for methods 'apart from observation'.

- (c) This question drew some good quality answers focusing on the ability of longitudinal studies to achieve an in-depth understanding of the boys, to monitor changes in their situation across time or identify the factors leading to such changes. Some candidates wrote in purely generic terms about why longitudinal studies may be used, rather than basing their points on information in the source. A few candidates copied out the aim of Willis' study without further elaboration.
- (d) The most successful candidates showed a clear understanding of stratified sampling and were able to link this to its key strengths such as its representativeness and the ability to avoid the over-representation of some populations in the sample. Less successful candidates described stratified sampling but found it more challenging to describe the strengths. A significant number were able to describe one strength for example representativeness and generalisability. A few candidates appeared less secure in their knowledge of stratified sampling and some candidates confused stratified sampling with other sampling methods, such as random sampling, citing an 'equal chance to be chosen'.
- (e) Many candidates responded well to this question with most able to develop a range of strengths and weaknesses of using unstructured interviews. Less successful candidates needed to be able to accurately use the concepts of validity and reliability and qualitative and quantitative data.
- (f) The most successful answers to this question were characterised by a clear focus on several reasons why researchers use participant observation which were then developed conceptually, by reference to validity, or verstehen and empathy, or by reference to studies such as Ventakesh. Overall, many candidates found this question a challenge in terms of focusing their attention on the 'participant' aspect of observation. Some less successful candidates concentrated largely on describing overt and covert observation, often contrasting these approaches without linking to the fact that researchers are participating in the groups they are studying. Some candidates drifted into discussions around the disadvantages of participation.
- (g) Many candidates responded well to the demands of this question demonstrating a sound understanding of the debate between interpretivism and positivism or structuralism. More successful candidates made a range of points on both sides of the debate and were able to link these to sociological concepts in an impressive way. Stronger answers went beyond mere description of the approaches and clearly identified criticisms and strengths which linked back to the question. Many candidates attempted to draw a conclusion though often these summarised the arguments presented rather than evaluating them. Less successful candidates wrote list-like answers with a limited range of points with some candidates needing to be more secure in their understanding of the concepts of validity and reliability.

Section B

Question 2

- (a) Most candidates were able to define the hidden curriculum and make links to the informal teaching of norms and values. Examples such as punctuality and conformity were also used. Less successful candidates referred to school subjects and learning at home.
- (b) Whilst many candidates responded well to this question, a significant number of responses focused on what is transmitted via the hidden curriculum rather than the ways in which it is taught. Good examples of ways in which the hidden curriculum is taught in schools included via teacher expectations, rules and regulations and guidance into gendered subject choices.
- (c) Many candidates were well prepared for this question on how primary socialisation affects an individual's gender identity. More successful candidates often drew on the work of Ann Oakley and developed an explanation of concepts such as canalisation, manipulation and verbal appellation. These were generally well described with examples. Less successful candidates needed to link back to masculinity or femininity to make the link between their concepts and the question more explicit. Some candidates only focused on primary socialisation and/or a lack of socialisation rather than focusing upon gender. Other responses drifted into a discussion of families socialising boys and girls into the 'opposite gender' and a small number of candidates misunderstood the question and referred to socialisation in education and by peer groups.
- (d) Many candidates found the question of how social control leads to social conformity a challenge. Many responses demonstrated some knowledge and understanding of social control and

conformity – often successfully explaining rewards and sanctions. Less successful candidates needed to fully address the question of why one leads to the other. The most successful responses cited examples such as prison and then explained why this leads to conformity via a discussion of the fear of prison acting as a deterrent, or conforming in education due to the impact of positive sanctions which mean that students want to repeat 'good' actions.

- (e) Many candidates responded well and were able to engage in an interesting debate about changing gender identities, deploying appropriate knowledge and understanding. The most successful candidates produced a balanced debate with range, detail and conceptual knowledge. In favour of changing gender identities many candidates made intelligent links to feminism, equal opportunities legislation, the rise of the 'new man' and better opportunities and outcomes for women in both education and work. Arguments against changing gender identities included references to discrimination in various areas of social life, such as education, the workplace and the family, and the continuation of traditional gender socialisation. Some candidates needed to fully understand the requirements of the question and refer to modern industrial societies rather than past and/or traditional societies. In some responses only a one-sided response was offered, usually focusing on the fact that gender identities are changing. Less successful responses were also often characterised by arguments that confused gender with sexuality/sexual orientation and some candidates spent time discussing issues such as same sex marriage which was not relevant to the question.

Section C

Question 3

- (a) Most candidates were able to give a clear definition of the 'glass ceiling', often in terms of an unseen barrier preventing the upward mobility of women. Some candidates also referred to other minority groups and were rewarded appropriately.
- (b) This question drew a mixed response. More successful candidates correctly described features such as inequalities in income and wealth, education, health, housing and the workplace. Candidates who were less successful often strayed from discussing social class and instead talked about features of gender or ethnic inequality.
- (c) In this question candidates were asked to explain how feminism has challenged gender inequality. Many candidates were able to discuss changes in the role of women in society, e.g. better opportunities in education and increased social mobility in the workplace. More successful candidates were also able to apply their knowledge and understanding of feminism to the changes in the social position and status of women and how feminist campaigns, legal changes and awareness raising have challenged gender inequality. Less successful candidates needed to apply the reasons for the changes in the position of women to the impact of feminism.
- (d) Many candidates gave good responses to this question as they were able to discuss a range of reasons linked to issues with female education, traditional expectations about women's role as housewife and mother, overt discrimination, patriarchy/sexism and the glass ceiling. Less successful candidates needed to fully develop their answers by referencing high status jobs rather than concentrating on describing difficulties with women's social position.
- (e) This question required candidates to discuss the extent to which ethnicity is the most important factor in determining a person's life chances. Many candidates focused on a discussion of the types of discrimination that are faced by ethnic minorities such as education, jobs, crime, healthcare, etc. Many candidates were also able to present a two-sided response drawing upon arguments suggesting that either gender, social class and/or age are arguably more important than ethnicity in determining life chances. More successful answers fully developed their arguments in paragraphs. Less successful candidates needed a clearer understanding of ethnicity and how it compares to other factors which determine a person's life chances. Some candidates could have used knowledge that they had demonstrated elsewhere to enhance their response. The most successful candidates attempted to address the 'to what extent' aspect of the question in their conclusion.

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Key messages

More candidates this session showed understanding that **Question (e)** requires a debate – a range of for and against points with a conclusion. There were fewer one sided (**e**) answers than in the past sessions which is great to see. It would be advisable for candidates to try to counter the points on the ‘for’ side and specifically address the question asked.

A number of candidates still repeat questions in their opening paragraph or spend too long on definitions or historical context before starting to address the specific question asked. This may help candidates prepare to answer the question but is unlikely to gain any marks and can often result in timing issues across the paper.

Candidates should take care that what they write specifically addresses the issues raised in the question – several examiners commented that candidates were often failing to score additional marks because they were just describing and writing about sociology or topic areas generally rather than answering the specific question set. This will never result in a high mark being awarded and so should be avoided.

Candidates should aim to refer to sociological terminology, theory and concepts where relevant; using sociological terms will raise the overall quality of the candidate’s answer and will allow access to those marks awarded for sociological/conceptual engagement if done accurately.

Candidates should spend time thinking about the question and planning answers and should use their designated 15 minutes of reading time – this is particularly important in the 15 mark essay questions to ensure that candidates remain focused on the specific demands of the question.

Some candidates are not using paragraphs in the longer responses, making it difficult for examiners to see where points begin and end. The ‘point per paragraph’ structure is recommended. Candidates would benefit from Centres teaching discrete essay writing skills and techniques for the ‘part e’ questions to try and rectify this as ‘range’ is one of the key factors considered by the examining team when awarding their mark.

A surprising number of candidates struggled to access questions when they did not understand the key term in the question (e.g. alternatives to the family, vocationalism, dark figure of crime, audience selection etc.). As the key terms in the questions will be drawn directly from the specification, it is essential that candidates become familiar with all of these in their examination preparation. Many students did not get any marks at all for some questions because of this issue.

Candidates should be encouraged to use the marks per question as guidance for how much is to be written and how long should be spent on a particular question. Some candidates, for example, were writing as much for a **part (c)** question worth 6 marks as for a **part (e)** question worth 15. Time needs to be better managed in order to maximise the marks awarded.

Command words are crucial. In the **part (b)** questions, for example, some answers were insufficiently developed (remember that the command word is to ‘describe’), so in some cases, the candidate was unable to achieve full marks even though it was evident that they possessed some relevant knowledge, unless they ‘described’ in detail and gave examples where possible.

General comments

For the November 2019 marking session, **Section A** (Family) was by far the most popular option, followed by **Section B** (Education). **Section C** (Crime) was also answered by a significant number of candidates. The least answered option was **Section D** (Media) which included a higher number of less successful responses across all sub-questions.

There were a significant number of excellent candidate responses seen by the examining team, demonstrating not only very strong sociological knowledge and understanding but also a clear awareness of the requirements and demands of the examination. This was most encouraging to see. Many candidates are thinking sociologically in terms of theory, concepts, studies and evidence and are successfully applying their classroom knowledge to the specific examination questions set. Relevant contemporary, global and localised examples were seen alongside the more traditional 'textbook' examples in order to justify several of the points made. These were all duly credited.

There were several 'common sense' answers seen this session which is disappointing. The sociological approach, guided by the syllabus content, needs to be carefully covered in order to allow candidates to demonstrate their abilities and knowledge.

Very few rubric errors were seen in the examination session, allowing most candidates to maximise their chances of success. Some candidates did not number or incorrectly numbered their answers, though, and centres would be advised to ensure candidates are aware of the importance of doing this diligently.

There was a good range of answers produced, with marks awarded across the full spread of available marks. In the **part (a)** question, candidates should look to include **two** separate elements in their definition. Examples can be a really useful way of adding a second element to an answer and are thus to be encouraged. **Part (b)** needs **two** distinctly different points – candidates should separate these and label them clearly for the examiner. In **part (c)** questions make sure there are more than two points made: evidenced and developed. For **part (d)** adopt the same approach as for **(c)** but develop ideas further, consider more range and ensure concepts/theory are used appropriately. Concepts and explicit sociological engagement tend to be the key differentiator between a **part (c)** and a **part (d)** question. 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 using theory, studies, examples and/or concepts wherever relevant. Aim for three points for and three against the claim in the question. Each point should be directly focused upon what the question is asking and should engage sociologically and conceptually wherever possible. Scoring well on the 15 mark questions obviously helps to boost the overall marks on the paper for candidates so is thus really important. Some candidates are choosing to answer the 15 mark questions first to make sure that they do not run out of time, this worked well for several candidates this session but ultimately this is the candidates' own decision to make.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Family

- (a) Many candidates provided the correct definition of 'matriarchy'. Those candidates who got it wrong typically described matriarchy as 'equality between the spouses' or confused it with patriarchy. Some answers were vague as to control over men/children/family and were thus classed as partial.
- (b) Many candidates across both variants did not understand what was meant by an 'alternative to the family' and gave as answers other types of family (e.g. single parent, cohabiting). The most common correct answers were communes, sharing with friends and living alone (singlehood).
- (c) Some excellent answers were seen here. Candidates understood primary socialisation and were able to explain how primary socialisation led to social conformity using well thought out examples and concepts. However, there were some candidates whose answers focused mostly on the description of primary socialisation rather than how this led to conformity.
- (d) There were a wide range of marks awarded for this question. Many answers unfortunately lacked sociological terminology and conceptual engagement and typically scored within band 2. Many candidates described the functions of family instead of the importance of marriage which can only be partially credited. The best answers matched lots of the mark scheme e.g. functionalist view, cohabitation leading to marriage, civil partnerships, changing legislation, religious importance etc.

- (e) The vast majority of candidates were able to access this question well – less successful candidates gained marks looking at the ‘for’ side, and discussing problems with the single parent family. Primary socialisation, social control and economic issues were frequently discussed. Candidates’ generally produced competent responses, making references to functionalists, feminists and the new right. Many though wasted time on introductions explaining why there were more single parents or more divorce.

Section B

Question 2

Education

- (a) The vast majority of candidates who answered to this question provided a partial definition of the ‘culture of masculinity’. Candidates found it difficult to give a complete definition. Some repeated parts of the question – culture or masculinity – and few made it to male characteristics/behaviour. Many thus gained only one mark here.
- (b) A large proportion of candidates did not understand ‘gratification’ and wrote for example about labelling and streaming instead, particularly in the 2251 variant. Those who did understand provided very good, accurate definitions and were duly rewarded.
- (c) Many candidates managed to identify and describe different functions of education. However, some candidates failed to relate the functions to the good functioning of society, as per the question. This was a question providing a range of possible answers; the main ones seen in answers were: social control, hidden curriculum and gaining qualifications for a job. Some of the best candidates understood ‘sifting and sorting’ (seeing employment from a societal rather than an individual view) and value consensus through e.g. national flag and anthem.
- (d) This was a very mixed question. There were some top-quality answers seen but many others did not know what the term meant and confused it with vacations or voice training. Some of the better answers showed good knowledge of vocational education in their own country through well-chosen examples (usually Mauritian centres).
- (e) The question was explicitly focused on gender and thus where candidates talked generally about social class, ethnicity etc. they could not be rewarded. The importance of reading the question carefully and using reading time to plan and prepare answers really is essential as this question demonstrated. A general awareness of the issues were shown by many candidates, but a significant minority wanted this to be a question about gender discrimination in the workplace and hardly or never mentioned the actual education system which limited the marks awarded. Most successful ‘for’ answers related the subject choice favoured by boys to high paying jobs, attitude of teachers, including deference to boys, high positions in schools as role models being mainly male; on the ‘against’ side changes towards equality, positive discrimination, female role models and high achievement and the positive attitude of girls compared to low achievement and poor attitude of boys were discussed.

Section C

Question 3

Crime, deviance and social control

- (a) There was some confusion about this term, with many partial answers being seen with some links to ‘doing crime’. The better answers defined it in terms of the breakdown of social bonds and shared values; a state of normlessness and chaos.
- (b) This question was well answered by those candidates who understood the term ‘dark figure of crime’ but unfortunately a number of candidates did not. The most common correct answers were crime not being reported or recorded - not reported because of embarrassment or fear of reprisals and not recorded because of the trivial nature of the offence. A few candidates wrote about the police being bribed or covering up crimes as well.

- (c) This question was well answered, with most answers showing good sociological knowledge of new internet crimes. This was a question that allowed some candidates who had considerable knowledge of internet crimes (which some even examiners might not have been aware of) to do well. There was a tendency to list rather than explain though, which should be avoided.
- (d) This was a generally well answered question, not just with common sense arguments but also through discussion of things like rehabilitation, punishment, public safety and deterrence. There was also some interesting use of sociological theory here, particularly functionalism and the reinforcing of moral boundaries, by the better candidates.
- (e) Most candidates were able to correctly interpret the term 'deprivation' – this could be economically, culturally or socially. This (e) question produced the most references to theorists (Merton, Cohen, Marxism etc.) and sociological terms (deviancy amplification, status frustration, strain, capitalist inequalities etc.). Some answers were better on the 'against' side, showing good knowledge of a range of alternative explanations for crime e.g. patriarchy, masculinity, postmodernism etc. Deprivation was stretched as a term to include lacking in almost anything, but better answers used sociological knowledge of material, cultural and relative deprivation very well indeed.

Section D

Question 4

Media

- (a) This question was well understood with most of the few candidates attempting this section getting both marks. Key points typically focused on media affects upon the audience being direct and immediate. Examples were also used.
- (b) This was not answered well with most candidates not knowing what was meant by the term 'audience selection'. Some candidates explained how the media influenced the audience instead of explaining how the audience were actively selecting media content.
- (c) This was a question on which most candidates had some knowledge but struggled to find enough to say. The best answers considered gender contrast in types of magazines/newspapers or the way television was watched/used. There was surprisingly little reference to video games and social media use in terms of gender differences.
- (d) Social media, citizen journalism and the instant availability of global news were the main ways of control outlined with surprisingly few mentions of interactivity seen. The majority of the candidates presented a few common-sense points with little sociological engagement or concepts used. A few of the answers additionally discussed traditional media but those points could not be credited.
- (e) This was a very accessible question which generated both common-sense and very sociological responses from the few candidates who selected the 'Media' option. There was some knowledge of the hypodermic syringe model put to good use but little use of other models of media effects. Some well-chosen examples were seen e.g. video nasties and gratuitous violence in film/TV.