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SOCIOLOGY

Paper 9699/12
Paper 12

Key messages

- Candidates should read the questions carefully and direct answers to the question as set.
- Answers should be supported with key theories, terminology and empirical evidence.
- Candidates should be clear about the work of specific key thinkers such as Murdock and Parsons.

General comments

Candidates used their time well and there was little evidence of rushed final answers and nearly all candidates answered all the questions with no one answering both **Questions 2** and **3**. The time devoted to **Question 1** and the essays were about equal but there were still some over lengthy answers to low scoring questions, especially **1(b)**. Candidates are advised to keep their answers to this question focused and short.

Many answers used a range of theory with accuracy and there was some good use of a range of concepts, such as the trailing spouse, which showed a detailed understanding of the topic. In order to improve, candidates should try and use concepts as well as theories and empirical data as well as be clear in their understanding of the work of different sociologists. Other candidates could improve their performance by introducing evaluation into their answers for **1(d)** and the essay.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

(a) The term patriarchy was very well understood by the majority of candidates. Many answers were short and focused on male domination of either the family or society and both of these alternatives were acceptable. Some answers, while demonstrating a sound understanding of the term, were overlong and included unnecessary detail of the consequences of patriarchy for women. These comments used up time which could have been spent on later questions. Uncommon errors were to show a limited understanding of the concept in that it was to do with men but not to link it to power others simply described the instrumental role.

(b) Most candidates had a firm grasp of the meaning of symmetrical family and could describe two characteristics most commonly joint conjugal roles and an increased level of equality between partners. More successful answers made clearly distinct points and these were helped by being labelled or numbered. A common error was to link symmetrical families to the middle class which may be a correlation but is not a characteristic of that family type. Candidates should pay careful attention to the wording in the questions and direct their answers to that wording, in this case 'characteristics'. Other errors were to include irrelevant detail on the research of Willmott and Young, describe what symmetrical families are not or to describe the effects of life in a symmetrical family on children. A small number of responses misunderstood the term *symmetrical family* as they described patriarchal families as symmetrical or argued symmetry was to do with 'balanced' numbers in a family. In order to improve performance, candidates need to have a firm understanding of sociological terminology which was not displayed in all answers. A small number of answers were far too long or only identified one characteristic of the symmetrical family.

(c) Most answers concentrated on the harm that may be done to women and children in family life mainly from a feminist perspective, many of these answers showed a good understanding of the material; especially those who used data about children from 'broken homes' to show how they

could be harmed, others would have benefitted from the inclusion of more empirical detail to develop their answer. Candidates need to be sure that they read the questions carefully as some explained how family life benefits men, described happy families and the warm bath theory, or how family life can benefit members or society which was not what the question was asking. A significant number failed to pay attention to the 'some' family members in the question rather treating family members in general and such answers lost focus on the question. Common errors were to include irrelevant points about progress towards equality, why domestic violence is not reported, how family life supports capitalism, explanations of why women may be oppressed and to not recognise child abuse as a form of domestic violence. Other answers would have been improved if descriptions of harmful behaviour had been linked to which family members had been harmed or developed by reference to empirical evidence about such behaviours. Some candidates evaluated their evidence which was not a requirement of this question.

(d) Almost all candidates interpreted the question as one referring solely to wives and husbands. The performance of many candidates would have been improved by a consideration of the treatment of sons and daughters within families or that of elderly males and females. Other improvements could have been made by a more solid understanding of the work of different feminists, whilst it is true that liberal feminists see much progress in gender relationships they have to be specifically identified as liberal feminists when making the point about progress in gender equality as saying 'feminists' is misleading as most feminists would argue that little progress, if any, has been made. Common errors were to spend time outlining family (mainly conjugal roles) in preindustrial societies and to describe changes in paid work. Others answers lost focus on equality and instead of evaluating if equality existed in families or not, evaluated the different theories in a generalised way. In order to improve performance, candidates need to have a firm grasp of sociological theories and terms, some candidates confused asymmetrical and symmetrical families as well as joint and segregated conjugal roles.

Section B

Both questions were selected by candidates with **Question 3** being slightly more popular.

Question 2

Many candidates displayed a sound understanding of a variety of family types found in different societies. The best of these were supported with sociological evidence including concepts, theory and research evidence. Many candidates argued that societies had changed from a situation of dominance of one family type to that of diversity but only the very best answers included a consideration of whether this diversity had been exaggerated or not. Common misunderstandings were to explain **why** diversity has increased rather than **if** it had increased, to describe the consequences of different family structures or why nuclear families exist at all. Other answers would have been improved by showing a more secure understanding of key sociological terms and issues as some answers confused family with marriage and confused structure, role and responsibilities. Other answers wrote lists of factors that relate to the experience of family life; many of these were sociologically knowledgeable but the material did not relate to the question.

Question 3

There were some excellent answers which explored the loss or continuation of the functions of the family in depth using a range of empirical data. Other answers were characterised by a lack of understanding of the topic and diverted into a discussion of whether the nuclear family existed in pre-industrial times or not, gave lengthy descriptions of how the family has evolved through time, outlined detail about the process of industrialisation, or gave arguments about the consequences of loss of function which were not what the question was asking. Many of these answers made little or no reference to functions and in some answers it was clear that the candidate was unsure of what a function is. Candidates need to be clear of the meaning of key terms and how to apply them. Other answers agreed with the quotation in the question, outlining evidence that the family has lost functions, but did not assess the limitations of this view by considering evidence that the family still retains important functions.

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Paper 9699/22
Paper 22

Key messages

- High-scoring answers were characterised by good application of a range of relevant sociological evidence and theory.
- Many candidates were able to apply their understanding effectively to the questions.
- Many answers demonstrated sound knowledge and understanding of positivism and interpretivism.
- Many candidates showed good understanding and application of key methodological concepts.
- High scoring answers usually included good use of applied empirical support.

General comments

The standard of responses overall was good. Good time management was evident in the way candidates typically wrote appropriate length answers. In particular, this meant the majority allocated sufficient time to complete the essay question in ***Section B***. A number of key concepts, notably validity and reliability were well understood and applied effectively. This was especially the case with **Question 1(c)**. Those candidates who focused their attention on the wording of a question rather than addressing the general topic area invariably produced responses of higher quality. This was most notable in **Questions 1(d)** and **3** where a number of candidates wrote answers that lacked a direct application to the question. There was weak knowledge and understanding of the use of secondary data in **1(b)** which suggests that centres might benefit from revision of this area. In ***Section B*** there was a fairly even distribution of responses between the two questions. The standard of response was also similar. Candidates showed less confidence discussing action theories compared to structural ones.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

(a) The majority of responses were able to demonstrate a good understanding of unstructured interviews as a method involving the use of few if any pre-set questions with the flexibility to explore issues in an informal setting.

(b) Most candidates were able to identify two advantages of secondary data but many did not develop these points well enough to gain further marks. Overwhelmingly the most popular advantages identified were practical ones (time and money) but few candidates were able to expand on these much beyond common sense. Other advantages identified included secondary data as the only readily available source, as well as the ability to access historical data. There was greater success at developing these points.

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(c) Many candidates produced good answers to this question and were able to link their knowledge of scientific enquiry to features of experimental research. The best responses illustrated their answers by using empirical examples, notably Bandura. Less effective responses did not always apply their points explicitly to experiments and instead discussed some of the issues in relation to quantitative methods in general.

(d) Most candidates showed a good understanding of the view set out in the question. The strongest answers made careful links between interpretivist concepts and qualitative methods. These higher scoring answers also clearly demonstrated an understanding of the meaning of validity. Some candidates opted for a range of points while others went into greater depth focusing on one or two points or examples in detail. Both approaches were acceptable. Less effective answers tended to either outline interpretivism but with few or no links to methods; or, they simply described a range of qualitative methods with few or no links to interpretivism. There were many evaluation routes available to address this question and the majority of candidates were able to navigate the options well.

Section B

Question 2

Most candidates provided a sound overview of functionalism and Marxism though not always identifying them explicitly as structural theories. Those that focused directly on the debate between determinism and agency produced the most successful responses. Less effective ones tended to describe functionalist and Marxist approaches but with few direct links to individual identity. This approach often led to evaluation by juxtaposition. Interactionism and sometimes postmodernism were used as assessment tools, although candidates were generally less confident with this side of the argument.

Question 3

The majority of responses demonstrated a sound understanding of participant observation in both its overt and covert forms. Most were also adept at setting out the argument against its use and the contention that the method produced data of little value. A range of arguments were used to highlight shortcomings, in particular the impact of the Hawthorne effect, potential for bias and lack of objectivity, and ‘going native’. Relatively few responses focused on representativeness as a limitation. Most candidates provided arguments that countered the view but often did so with less conviction and use of supporting evidence. The range of supporting studies was quite narrow. Venkatesh was commonly cited. Evaluation was present in the majority of responses but most sided with the stated ‘view’, and only a few reached a balanced conclusion on the basis of the evidence presented. Not that many responses included much reference to positivism or interpretivism, which would have been a useful way to address the question.

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Paper 9699/32
Paper 32

Key messages

- Good answers included references to relevant concepts, theories, and studies.
- High scoring responses to the **part (a)** questions offered detailed explanations of several relevant points.
- Higher marks could be gained for the **part (b)** questions by including more analysis and evaluation.
- Some candidates appeared to have only limited knowledge of recent sociological theories, particularly postmodernism.
- There is scope for candidates to make greater use of empirical evidence as a way of supporting key points in their answers.

General comments

The best answers were tightly constructed in a way that demonstrated clarity of thought and careful attention to the wording of the question. No marks are awarded for the use of evaluation in answering the **part (a)** questions, yet some candidates misallocate their time in the exam by writing evaluative answers to these questions. Some responses to the **part (b)** questions were too descriptive, relying on a summary of relevant knowledge without providing any related analysis and evaluation. More practice in formulating evaluative answers for the **(b)** questions would be helpful for these candidates. Some candidates attempted to answer the questions without reference to appropriate sociological material. Answers of this kind which rely on personal observation and general knowledge fall some way short of meeting the assessment objectives and so gain only low marks. One way in which candidates generally could achieve higher marks would be to make more use of evidence from sociological studies in answering the questions. Answers would also be enhanced by using a wider range of sociological concepts to support key points.

Most candidates answered three questions in the time available. The questions on Education and Religion proved most popular, with those on Global Development less frequently attempted.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

(a) There were some good answers that identified a range of ways in which schools prepare young people for the workplace. High quality responses often included references to Bowles and Gintis's correspondence theory. Some candidates also cited the findings from Willis' 'Learning to Labour' study. There were some low scoring answers that mentioned a few links between schools and the workplace without references to appropriate sociological material.

(b) High scoring answers demonstrated a good understanding of pupil subcultures and relevant links to educational achievement. Different examples of pupil subcultures were discussed in good responses and references to appropriate sociological studies also featured. Evaluation was delivered through weighing the influence of pupil subcultures against other factors that affect educational achievement, such as home background, gender, ethnicity, and processes within schools. Lower scoring answers often lacked references to studies of pupil subcultures and the evaluation was limited to a few basic points at best.

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Question 2

(a) Good answers demonstrated a clear understanding of the concept of cultural capital and its relevance in explaining the educational achievement of middle-class pupils. Examples of cultural capital often featured in high scoring responses and some candidates made good use of references to appropriate sociological studies. Lower scoring answers lacked a clear understanding of the concept of cultural capital and/or addressed the question more from the point of view of working-class pupils than middle-class pupils.

(b) Candidates who answered this question well recognised that it provided an opportunity to consider the ideological role of education. Marxist theory featured extensively in high scoring answers, with good references to the ideas of thinkers such as Althusser, Gramsci, and Bowles and Gintis. Evaluation was provided by contrasting Marxist views about the role of schools with views associated with other sociological perspectives, particularly functionalist theories. There were some low scoring responses that discussed the role of schools in general without reference to appropriate sociological concept and theories.

Section B

Question 3

(a) Good answers explained several consequences of poverty for children in developing societies. High quality responses often considered consequences across different areas of society, such as education, health, income, employment, and lifestyle. There were some low scoring answers that were confined to a few general points about inequality, with no particular reference to the consequences of poverty for children.

(b) Answers meriting high marks demonstrated a clear understanding of the differences between cultural and structural explanations of poverty. Lewis' work on the causes of poverty was often cited as an example of the cultural approach, while Marxist accounts often featured in explanations of the structural approach. High quality responses included a sustained evaluation of the view that poverty is caused by a combination of cultural and structural factors. Lower scoring answers often lacked references to relevant concepts and theories.

Question 4

(a) There were a few high scoring answers that used relevant concepts and studies to demonstrate the importance of literacy for economic development. Some less successful answers lost focus on the reference to literacy in the question and discussed instead the importance of education generally for economic development. Low scoring answers were confined to a few examples of how illiteracy may hold back development, with no reference to appropriate sociological materials.

(b) Good answers explained why population growth has been identified as a key variable that can affect economic growth in developing societies. High-quality responses also considered the arguments for and against the view that population must be controlled in order to achieve economic growth. Some candidates made good use of references to population policies in different countries and to evidence of the impact of demographic changes on economic growth. Lower scoring answers often agreed with the view expressed in the question without offering supporting arguments and evidence from sociological sources.

Section C

Question 5

(a) There were a few high-quality answers to this question that demonstrated a clear understanding of how discourse analysis is used in the study of the media. Good responses often used examples to illustrate the use of discourse analysis and some candidates also referred to relevant studies of the media. There were a lot of low scoring answers that demonstrated little understanding of what is meant by discourse analysis.

(b) Good answers were provided by candidates who recognised that the question provided an opportunity to discuss different models of media effects. A clear distinction was made between models that assume the recipients of media messages are passive consumers and those that view audiences as actively shaping the way media messages are received and processed. High scoring responses also critically examined the claim that media audiences are active consumers and often arguments for and against the underlying proposition. Lower scoring answers often discussed the influence of the media in general terms, without references to models of media effects or other relevant sociological concepts and theories.

Question 6

(a) Good answers examined several ways in which the media help shape the social identities of women. Examples were used to illustrate key points and some candidates made good use of references to relevant sociological studies. Lower scoring responses lacked detail and covered only one or two ways in which the media help shape the social identifies of women.

(b) There were some high-quality responses that recognised the underpinnings of the mass manipulation model in Marxist theory and provided a sustained evaluation of the strengths and limitations of that particular perspective on the influence of the media. Good answers also often made relevant comparisons between the mass manipulation model and the hegemonic model, as two strands in Marxist theorising about the influence of the media. Lower scoring responses demonstrated little understanding of the theoretical background to the mass manipulation model and focused instead on general points about media influence, with little or no reference to relevant sociological concepts and evidence.

Section D

Question 7

(a) Good answers provided a clear explanation of several difficulties in measuring secularisation. Difficulties in operationalising the concept of secularisation were often cited in high scoring answers and there were good references to problems in using secondary sources when studying levels of religious participation and belief. Lower scoring answers were often confined to a few underdeveloped points about the evidence supporting the secularisation thesis.

(b) There were some high-quality responses that demonstrated a good understanding of the postmodernist perspective on the role of religion. Good answers included references to relevant postmodernist concepts such as metanarrative, post-secularisation, spiritual shopping, privatised religion, new age movements, and globalisation. The postmodernist understanding of the interrelationship between the media and religion today was also explored in many of the best answers. There were some low scoring responses that demonstrated little understanding of the postmodernist perspective and discussed the role of religion in general terms only.

Question 8

(a) There were a few high scoring responses that provided a clear explanation of several ways in which churches differ from denominations. The differences identified in good answers referred to factors such as size of membership, power and influence, bureaucratic structures, hierarchy, links to the state, and inclusiveness in relation to membership. Lower scoring answers lacked detail and explained only one or two differences between churches and denominations.

(b) High scoring answers used a range of relevant sociological sources to consider whether the growth of sects is a response to social deprivation. The work of theorists such as Weber, Turner, Barker, Wallis, Stark, Johnstone, and Troeltsch, often featured in responses that triggered the higher mark bands. Good answers also included a sustained assessment of the arguments for and against the view that the growth of sects is a response to social deprivation. At the lower end of the mark range, answers often lacked references to relevant sociological concepts, theories, and studies, and the discussion was often based on the relationship between religion and social deprivation generally rather than focusing on the growth of sects specifically.