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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**



SOCIOLOGY

GCE Advanced Level and GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

Paper 9699/01

Essay

General comments

The standard of response overall was pleasingly high. There is evidence that the candidates are becoming more skilled in identifying and addressing the key analytical issues that the questions raise. There were fewer examples this session of scripts that are detailed in terms of knowledge, yet fail to develop appropriate arguments and evaluation. An analytical response to the questions is essential in order to achieve the top marks and the tendency to write over-descriptive responses is to be discouraged. The work of weaker candidates continues to be characterised by reliance on assertion rather than informed sociological comment. Answers at the lower level generally lack references to appropriate studies and theories.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Weaker answers, generally, were confined to a few simple points about the positivist perspective. Better responses demonstrated a sound understanding of positivism and made useful comparative points by referring to the interpretivist perspective. Answers at the top of the mark range focused explicitly on discussing what might be meant by 'greater certainty' in the context of sociological research. At the highest level the assessment of the positivist perspective was sustained and well informed.

Question 2

A typical response at the lower end of the mark range was confined to a simple outline of the functionalist theory of socialisation. Candidates who compared the functionalist theory with other perspectives on socialisation achieved higher marks. The best answers included an analytical response to the question and this was often developed through contrasting structural and interactionist theories of human behaviour. Some candidates made good use of Dennis Wrong's concept of 'over-socialisation' as part of the evaluation.

Section B**Question 3**

Some candidates were confused about the nature of interviews in sociology. Interviewing is a distinctive research technique that is different from questionnaires and participant observation. Candidates who wrote about questionnaires and participant observation as supposed examples of interviews, therefore, achieved few marks. Answers in the middle of the mark range demonstrated a sound understanding of the strengths and limitations of interviews in general. Better answers distinguished between the different types of interview: structured, semi-structured, unstructured, and group interviews. The best responses examined both theoretical and practical issues in assessing the strengths and limitations of each type of interview technique.

Question 4

Some candidates provided answers that were of tangential relevance to the question only. For example, there were quite a few answers that merely listed the advantages and limitations of the main research methods used in sociology. While that approach achieved a few marks, it failed to address the main requirements of the question and so could not be placed higher in the mark range. Good answers demonstrated the possible links between theoretical perspective and choice of sociological method. Other factors, both practical and theoretical, were also reviewed in the best answers. At the top of the mark range, the assessment was explicit and sustained.

Section C**Question 5**

This seemed to be a popular question among weaker candidates. Answers were often confined to a few general observations about the nature of class relations today. A better response set out the reasons why it is considered that class divisions may be breaking down and links were made to relevant sociological debates, such as the theory of proletarianisation and the embourgeoisement thesis. Good answers brought the discussion up-to-date with a review of the post-modernist perspective on social class relations.

Question 6

Candidates who recognised that the question was an invitation to discuss the Marxist theory of power generally wrote good answers. To reach the upper levels of the mark range, it was necessary to contrast the Marxist theory with other perspectives on power, such as the functionalist, feminist and post-modernist theories. Some candidates also made good use of evidence from relevant studies of the distribution of power in particular societies. In the very best answers, candidates made good use of the distinction between economic and political power in developing a sustained and incisive assessment of the issues raised by the question.

<p>Paper 9699/02</p> <p>Data Response</p>

General comments

There was further evidence this session of improvement in the techniques that the candidates employ in answering the structured data response questions. For example, there were fewer cases of candidates providing unnecessarily long answers to the part (a) and (b) questions. In general, answers to the part (c) and (d) questions, appropriately, were fuller and more carefully planned than had been the case in the November 2004 session.

Comments on specific questions**Question 1**

- (a) Candidates generally understood that social policy refers to the objectives formulated by government that are directed towards meeting the social needs of the population.
- (b) Most of the candidates were able to describe accurately two social problems from their own societies.
- (c) Some candidates struggled to identify an appropriate sociological context for answering the question. Good answers often drew on labelling theory as the background to identify groups that may benefit from having the power to define what is considered a social problem. The Examiners were particularly impressed by candidates who wrote about how various professional groups may achieve and maintain status and power through their occupational relationship with those who are defined as 'problem' groups in society.
- (d) Good answers discussed different views on the role of values in sociology. Some candidates impressed the Examiners by contrasting those perspectives that favour the use of sociological knowledge as a basis for social engineering with those who argue that sociologists should side with the underdog. Weak answers were often confined to a basic descriptive account of functionalist and Marxist theories, with few explicit links to the question.

Question 2

- (a) Most candidates were able to distinguish between covert and overt forms of participant observation, though a few confused the respective definitions.
- (b) A few candidates appeared not to have understood the meaning of the term 'ethical issues', with some confusing ethics with ethnicity. Some candidates wrongly identified the possible danger involved in carrying out participant observation on criminal gangs as an ethical issue – it is a practical concern more than an ethical issue.
- (c) In the middle of the mark range answers were often limited to a few general observations about the strengths and limitations of participant observation. Better answers described the main features of the interactionist perspective and explained why interactionists support the use of participant observation in sociological research.
- (d) Weak answers offered only a few general points about participant observation. Better answers demonstrated a sound understanding of the concept of validity and its links with participant observation studies. Candidates who made good use of references to relevant studies tended to secure the highest marks.

Question 3

- (a) Some candidates confused absolute poverty with relative poverty. Others clearly understood the concept of absolute poverty, but struggled to provide a definition sufficiently clear to merit the award of full marks.
- (b) Most candidates were able to describe two examples of relative poverty.
- (c) A few candidates clearly had not heard of the term 'underclass'. Some answers described the main characteristics of the underclass, but failed to explain why the concept has been criticised by some sociologists. Answers at the upper end of the mark range identified a number of purported limitations with the idea that an underclass exists in modern industrial societies. For example, it was noted that those commonly identified as the underclass are not a homogeneous group and that the concept may have been used to link diverse social problems such as the rise of lone parents, ethnic discrimination, poverty and increasing criminality.
- (d) Weak answers identified a few basic explanations for the existence of poverty without demonstrating awareness of Lewis' 'culture of poverty' thesis. Answers in the middle of the mark range described Lewis' theory, but without providing any assessment of its claims. Good answers contrasted cultural explanations of poverty with structuralist perspectives.

Paper 9699/03
Social Change and Differentiation

General comments

As has been the trend over the last few years, candidates produced very few rubric errors. Although, a few candidates are still running the two parts of the question into one, leaving it to the Examiner to guess where the break should be. There was also evidence of good use of time and there were few candidates who appeared to have run out of time and produced a final rushed answer. Some candidates displayed a lack of knowledge about sociological concepts and this resulted in weak answers. In the questions that require an explanation of a concept with examples this resulted in a number of weak responses.

All candidates should be aware that answers that are given to part **(b)** essay style questions should always look at, at least two sides of an argument if the answer is to receive a high mark. Many candidates who have good sociological knowledge are not reaching their potential as evaluations are missing and conclusions are merely a repetition of what has already been written. Some candidates are still producing longer answers for the first part of their response compared to the second. Weaker candidates are still being over reliant on assertion, and to move up the mark bands their points need to be backed up with sociological evidence whether this is theoretical or empirical.

Relevance and evidence remain issues, selecting the correct information for the question and then supporting it with appropriate theory and empirical evidence. Candidates should be encouraged to support their answer with more contemporary material for, although theorists such as Murdock still have relevance, there has been much sociological research since he first published.

Comments on specific questions**Section A****Question 1**

This was the most popular question on the paper and full ranges of answers were offered to it.

- (a) Answers submitted to this question were amongst the most disappointing on the paper. Although there were many candidates that answered well, there were many who clearly did not know what kinship was. A number of candidates gave descriptions of the functions of the family and some described friends as kinship. Many confused kinship with family/household. Few explored what kinship actually means, i.e. the obligations. All were able to give examples of kin.
- (b) This part of the question was well answered with candidates showing a range of ways in which the functions of the family may or may not have changed. The majority of candidates were able to outline the functionalist view of the family. Some gave several examples of functions being taken over by the state in some detail, usually education, and health and welfare provision. A few then continued to illustrate the continued importance of the family in terms of support, both social and economic. Stronger answers included the contrasts between developed and developing societies. Some answers were very detailed but there is still a worrying tendency for some candidates to use the Nayer as an example of a modern industrial society.

Question 2

Although few candidates opted to answer this question, the ones that did had a good understanding of the question.

- (a) Candidates described a good range of factors both from modern and traditional societies that effect fertility rates. In the best cases, these not only explained why the rates went down but also gave reasons for the rate rising. Most candidates were able to offer some detailed explanation of two relevant factors affecting fertility rates. A few became confused and commented on the state of marriage/teenage pregnancy. A few explained four or more factors in detail. Some also gave relevant examples of contrasting societies/cultures. Very few candidates attempted a definition of the term.
- (b) Those candidates who understood the nature of matrifocal families did well (there was some confusion with matriarchal families) showing why these exist and how they may be developing but also why they still are a minority type in most places. Some candidates did not know what they were and gave confusing answers. The majority of candidates used a relevant example of a matrifocal family type. Some saw this in terms of the general 'trend' to diverse family patterns of today, usually contrasted with the functionalist assertion of the nuclear family 'ideal type'. A few did this in a way which was overtly assessing the view that matrifocal families are or are not becoming the norm, many implied an assessment. Fewer gave the range/depth of sociological evidence to support their responses.

Section B**Question 3**

Of the questions on education this was by far the most popular. Most candidates had a good grasp of what was required and some excellent answers were offered especially to part **(b)**.

- (a)** Most candidates offered clear explanations of the way in which labelling can influence the formation of identity, a few relying on the hidden curriculum. Fewer developed this as a way of developing a positive as well as a negative identity. The majority concentrated on the negative, but there was recognition of the interactionist flavour of the question. However, stronger responses were able to show both positive and negative outcomes of labelling and several then gave examples of rejection of the label (usually Fuller). The very best answers considered the way in which the self is developed. Less clear answers described socialisation.
- (b)** Candidates who showed that the factors that exist within schools should be balanced against the factors that effect achievement outside school then went on to make some evaluation of the way in which these interrelate and tried to judge the most important received excellent marks. Many answers only looked at the factors outside of school and although their comments were valid they were limited and tended to be descriptive. However, the answers to this question displayed a very good level of sociological knowledge.

Question 4

Although this question was answered by fewer candidates than **Question 3**, those that did tended to have a clear understanding of both parts of the question.

- (a)** Some excellent examples of the way the hidden curriculum operates were offered with examples tending to focus on gender and ethnicity. Many candidates failed to explain the nature of the hidden curriculum and restricted their answer to examples. Bowles and Gintis were the most frequently quoted theorists; as a consequence the hidden curriculum was invariably seen as a sinister process. The best answers detailed what is different about the hidden curriculum compared to the overt one.
- (b)** As with the majority of essay style questions, those candidates who explored the influence of sub-culture on an individual's performance and then juxtaposed that against the other influences on performance achieved the best results. Good use was frequently made of the work of Willis. A few candidates confused sub culture with culture and this weakened their responses. Answers would have been strengthened by clear definitions of school subculture before looking at studies of labelling. Some candidates noted to their credit that the sub-culture could have a positive as well as a negative influence on the achievements.

Section C**Question 5**

A smaller number of candidates answered in this section than is the norm. Answers to this question had a tendency to show misunderstanding of the concept involved.

- (a)** Answers to this question were characterised by the use of much irrelevant material. Many answers were as long as would be required for a part **(b)** answer and included lengthy references to Marxism. However, good knowledge of Functionalism was shown (mainly Durkheim) especially in relation to social solidarity and value consensus but there was a tendency to focus on the functions or the role of religion in general. Some candidates became over detailed in their descriptions of the work of such key thinkers as Malinowski and lost the focus of the question. Few answers entered the top band, as they did not show that they understood what social order was or the way in which religion maintains it from a Functionalist view.
- (b)** Some candidates gave very clear answers to this question and displayed a good understanding of the way in which the marginalised use religion as well as others groups or individuals. Many linked this to secularisation which could also be useful. There was also a tendency for some candidates to show that they were uncertain as to the nature of marginalisation and to go into over long descriptions of the role of religion as 'opium'.

Question 6

This question was slightly less popular than **Question 5** and it failed to elicit a range of good answers.

- (a) Some excellent typologies of the features of a church were submitted for this question with many candidates contrasting it with other religious organisations. There were also a large number of candidates who described it as a building in which people pray. There was an over-reliance on Christianity from some candidates and a tendency to give only one example.
- (b) Most candidates struggled to come to grips with this question and almost all failed to pick up on the 'apparently' in the title. Many candidates gave a range of classical theories ignoring the question that was set. Some candidates argued that secularisation is happening and then gave examples of the continuance of religion in society. The question itself was hinting that religion may continue to have an influence but most described a drift into secularisation. A discussion of sects and NRMs could have helped.

Section D**Question 7**

Of the questions in this section this one proved to be the least popular.

- (a) This was a very straightforward question and candidates had to explain how victim surveys are carried out and then support that explanation with examples. The vast majority chose to explain why crime statistics are unreliable or why a sociologist might undertake a victim survey.
- (b) As long as candidates knew what New Left Realism was they were able to answer this question well. Many did not. There were a very small number who had knowledge and understanding of Young and/or Lea and these few produced excellent answers which explained the focus of attention around issues such as status frustration and relative deprivation and included reference to key thinkers such as Cicourel. Few then went on to produce a genuine assessment of the 'usefulness' of the New Left Realism.

Question 8

A more popular question that received a full range of answers.

- (a) There were many good answers to this question but the major limitation on candidates' answers was again having a clear understanding of the concept involved. Many wrote about deviant sub cultures and not delinquent ones. Few candidates gave more than one example to illustrate their answer.
- (b) In this part of the question there were many sound answers. Candidates quite correctly placed the feminist theories on crime and deviance with the broader studies of crime and deviance and showed how feminist theories have added to knowledge. Many candidates offered lists of studies without evaluating. Weaker candidates struggled to go beyond the description of male crime compared to female crime. They interpreted 'feminist' to mean 'female' crime rather than the theoretical and empirical work on crime done by female sociologists. There is some overlap but the focus of the question was lost. Very weak responses described general reasons for crime. Some candidates gave an answer to a question on women and crime while others were still describing biological and psychological theories as sociological.

Section E

A tiny number of candidates answered these questions, nearly all of whose answers were entirely unsociological.

Question 9

- (a) The few clear responses to this question used Daniel Bell to give a definition and description confirming knowledge and understanding of the concept.
- (b) Weak responses offered generalised comments that things are becoming more equal.

Question 10

- (a) The best answers attempted a definition and gave some examples of leisure. Most gave partial definitions or limited examples.
- (b) Only a few candidates were able to use the work of Marx or Blauner. Assessment was almost wholly lacking. Many candidates struggled with the question and described general changes in the workplace with no reference to the concept.

Section F**Question 11**

This question shows the growing popularity of the study of the mass media and was answered by a significant number of candidates. As with the next question some candidates only answered one part of the question.

- (a) The majority of candidates confined their answers in this question to the role of the media in advertising knowledge about the media. Generally, answers were weak, with mainly passing reference to the political process such as 'to give people information'. However, some candidates did use relevant examples from their own societies to describe political control of the media and the ability of the press or TV to ruin the reputation of politicians. There were candidates that described the power of media and the role of newspapers in assisting politicians. A few also looked at the way the media can affect the outcome of elections.
- (b) A few candidates gave excellent answers to this question looking at manipulative model of control as well as a range of Marxist views. The key to a good answer to this question was being able to show an understanding of ideological control and then use sociological evidence. Some candidates limited their answers to an agreement with the proposition and did not consider a pluralist critique. In order to answer this question well it was necessary to have a firm understanding of the nature of ideological control. Some candidates had this and were able to explain ideological control and the Marxist-Pluralist debate. Some referred to gatekeepers and the power of owners from which they gained credit.

Question 12

This was the less popular of the questions about the mass media and was generally poorly answered. As with the last question, some candidates only answered one part of it.

- (a) The majority of answers confined themselves to common-sense responses that contained no sociological detail.
- (b) A large number of candidates who answered this question did not understand the sociological definition of cultural effects studies and instead answered on how culture effects the society. A few had a good understanding and those candidates were able to use the evidence of such theorists as Golding and McQuail to show how the media can have this slow effect. Some were also able to evaluate these theories by using others like the hypodermic syringe model.