SOCIOLOGY

Paper 9699/11
Paper 11

Key messages

Candidates should:

1. read the examination paper carefully to ensure they understand the specifics of the questions
2. plan their time carefully to avoid having to rush their final answer
3. revise key sociological terminology
4. support their points with sociological evidence such as concepts, theories and studies.

General comments

Most candidates demonstrated sound knowledge and understanding but many candidates did not sufficiently demonstrate the skill of evaluation. The best responses supported the points made with sociological knowledge such as concepts, theories and studies. Candidates should plan a structure for their essays so that they maximise their time and avoid repetition. By planning, they should be able to avoid list-like essays that repeat points. Some candidates were successful in their use of studies and concepts but would have benefited by using more theories.

Many candidates wrote out the questions. This is not required and uses up valuable time. It is important that candidates spend the right amount of time on each question, taking into account the number of marks available. Candidates need to address the exact question that has been set, so more work on interpreting questions may improve performance.

Candidates displayed good knowledge and understanding on feminism, the nuclear family and its role in society and the impact of divorce an families. Their understanding of factors contributing to diversity in family structures was weaker.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Nearly all candidates answered all parts of **Question 1**. Some wrote too much on **Questions 1a** and **1b**, leaving themselves short of time to finish the paper. A very small number failed to answer either **Question 1c** or **1d**.

Question 1

(a) Most candidates had a clear understanding of the meaning of fertility rate, defining it as the average number of children that a female will have in her fertile years. Others had a partial understanding and knew it was connected to births or children born. A common error was to confuse it with infant mortality rate. A less common error was to explain why rates are changing.

(b) Most candidates gave at least one example of a way in which relationships in families are changing. Excellent use was made of the way in which conjugal roles are changing from asymmetrical to symmetrical in some societies and how parent-child relationships are changing with the development of child-centred families. Less successful responses tried to use the same information for both examples; this was especially true for conjugal roles. It is always better to use two clearly different examples to ensure two distinct points are made. A common error was to confuse relationship with structure and described changes form extended to nuclear families. Another common error was to describe different family types without referring to changes in relationships. Some answers failed to develop their response in terms of why the change happened or the impact or consequence of the change on family relationships. Almost all changes described were seen as positive; however some did describe negative consequences of some changes, for example dual working parents losing out to grandparents in relationships with their children.

(c) There were many excellent answers describing how divorce legislation, the changing role of women, changing social attitudes, the introduction of compulsory education, the delay in marriage or choosing to live alone has led to an increase in single person households. The best of these supported their answers with specific references to sociological sources. Some answers failed to develop their response in terms of why the number of single person households might have increased. A common error was to show a misunderstanding of the question by referring to single parent and cohabiting couples as single person households. Some answers described how divorce leads to a split in the family, creating a single parent family, but without mentioning that this may also create a single person household. Some excellent answers explained at least two factors in some depth with appropriate sociological support. For example, citing confluent love (Giddens) to explain an increase in divorce and linking this to the postmodern focus on people having freedom of choice and so deciding to live alone.

(d) The vast majority of candidates had a clear understanding of the meaning of life expectancy but some responses showed little understanding of the term discussing the question in terms of individual life-span or the impact of miscellaneous events such as war or famine on individual families. The majority of answers took the view that increased life expectancy did lead to the creation of more extended families in modern industrial societies. Other answers raised other factors that can influence family structure, including industrialisation, class, ethnicity and culture. The best of these assessed the significance of each factor in relation to life expectancy by considering structural changes in terms of modern variants such as the beanpole, modified, dispersed and attenuated families. The most successful answers of this type made specific reference to theorists such as Brannon. Successful answers also addressed this in terms of the Rapoports' types of diversity, even if the Rapoports themselves were not identified, or as an expression of choice as outlined by post-modernism.

Most answers made reference to divorce causing changes in structure but candidates did not always spell out the resulting change in structure such as single parent or reconstituted families. Many answers also included points about changing fertility rates and falling infant mortality rates, but again struggled to explain how these affected family structure as the question asked.

Common errors were to describe the effects of falling life expectancy on family structures, to describe the effects of an ageing population on society or to describe changing roles within families. Other answers asserted that a factor such as class was an important influence but then did not go on to explain how this influenced family structures. In order to gain more marks it is necessary to develop points made with sociological detail.

Few answers directly addressed the question of which factor was the *most* significant.

Section B

Both questions were selected by candidates although **Question 2** was the most popular.

Question 2

The vast majority of responses showed some understanding of the 'functional fit' thesis and the debate about the dominance of the nuclear family, though weaker candidates tended to focus on pre-industrial societies. Better answers drew out the concepts of geographical mobility and labour flexibility. Some attempted to cover additional points such as the decline in nepotism, switch from ascribed to achieved social status, or the takeover of family functions by the state, though only the very best answers were able to apply these clearly

to the issue of nuclear family dominance. Some answers described the family fulfilling the needs of society rather than the nuclear family fulfilling the needs of modern industrial societies and this sometimes resulted in the inclusion of irrelevant information about the Nayer and other non-industrial societies.

Evaluation was often limited to debates about the prevalence of extended families before industrialisation or their decline in the nineteenth century, usually with references to theorists such as Laslett, Anderson, Carlin and Finch. More confident candidates offered alternative explanations for the rise of nuclear families using Marxist and feminist perspectives. Some responses explored the dark side of the nuclear family, but rarely managed to present this clearly in terms of a challenge to the fit thesis; such answers often drifted into discussing whether the nuclear family is 'a good thing or a bad thing'. Family diversity was described well in many essays, but not analysed well in terms of the question. It was often a case of writing 'On the other hand...' followed by a rote-learned account of the various diverse family forms, with little understanding of their relative frequency or if they did 'fit' with society's needs. Some responses looked at the continuing existence of extended families, but rarely attempted to establish whether these were really challenging the dominance of nuclear families. There was some coverage of factors such as class and ethnicity as forms of diversity though again this was often not clearly linked to the question. Common errors were to describe how the family serves the needs of its members or describe functions with no reference to the family or how they might aid society.

Question 3

Although this was not a popular question there were many excellent and sophisticated answers which showed very detailed knowledge of the different feminist theories. Many responses were supported with sociological evidence such as the ideas of radical/Marxist/liberal feminists and some responses also included black and/or post-modern feminists. The very best responses focused explicitly upon the value of feminist theories by assessing their usefulness to our understanding of the family. Less successful responses were limited to summarising what each perspective had to say about the position of women in families, with no explicit comment on the relative usefulness/value of each theory, beyond pointing out that they were different from each other. More successful answers included the work of such key thinkers as: Ansley, Firestone, Delphy and Leonard, Somerville and Greer. Oakley's work was often referenced as a generic feminist approach. Evaluation often took the form of juxtaposing feminist perspectives with functionalist ones, without clearly identifying their similarities and differences. In other responses much time was devoted to the position of women in society (the world of work) rather than keeping focused on the family. It is worth noting that most answers only referenced wives in their answer and little mention was made of mothers or daughters.

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SOCIOLOGY

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Paper 9699/12
Paper 12
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Key messages

Candidates should:

1. plan their time to avoid having to rush their final answer
2. number the parts of their answer to **Question 1b** to ensure that two points are covered
3. avoid lengthy introductions that are then repeated in the body of the answer wasting time
4. ensure they include points of evaluation for **Questions 1d, 2** and **3**.

General comments

Most candidates demonstrated a good range of sociological knowledge but it was not always successfully applied to the set question. As a result, some answers addressed the general topic of the question rather than the specific issue posed in the question. Time spent working on past examination questions may help to build the interpretation and application skills required to achieve the higher marks.

Many candidates were able to use the source material as a trigger to their knowledge and those achieved good marks. Others simply copied sections from the source material without developing or applying it. Those candidates who achieved the best results planned their time throughout the examination using the appropriate amount of time for each question. Some candidates are limiting their success by spending more time than is needed on low scoring questions and consequently leaving some promising essays unfinished.

Some answers to **Questions 1d, 2** and **3** did not include evaluation. When preparing for the essays in the examination it may be useful for candidates to have a checklist of the skills they need to employ.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Candidates displayed a good level of sociological knowledge in answering all parts of this question but a small number failed to offer a response for either **Question 1c** or **Question 1d**.

(a)   Most candidates correctly identified at least one aspect of the definition with many candidates demonstrating a full understanding of the term civil partnership. Others confused it with marriage or cohabitation. Frequently the answer was partial because the answer stated that it was a marriage rather than it was a legal agreement similar to a marriage or like a marriage. A common error was to explain why civil partnership had been granted rather than what it is.

(b)   There were many excellent examples of how the family serves the interests of the ruling class, mostly drawing on the Marxist concepts of ideological apparatus, reproduction of the work force or consumption of goods. Others identified a way, such as women being a reserve army of labour but then failed to specify how this helped the ruling class. A common error was to try and use the same factor for both points such as the reproduction of the work force. It is much clearer to use two different factors in order to ensure there are two separate points. Other errors were to describe a function, such as socialisation, without developing the response in terms of how it served the interests of the ruling class or to re-interpret the question to mean serving the interests of ruling class men. Some very interesting answers explained how the ruling class uses the family to protect their wealth.

(c)   Some excellent answers applied a good range of knowledge to show how social policies can influence family life. Most of these concentrated on positive effects but some negative effects were highlighted as well. Excellent use was made of child protection legislation (better answers linked this to the development of child-centred families) and China's one child policy. A few answers then developed this to show how this had changed families for example through the tendency toward beanpole families in China. Others used the managerial state, divorce, welfare benefits, civil partnerships and gender equality. Good use was made of how changes in divorce legislation have led to an increase in family breakdown. Other answers applied the ideas of the New Right to argue that welfare benefits can give rise to a culture of dependency. Many referred to legislation regarding domestic violence, but these largely relied on common sense rather than sociological insight. Many answers only identified and described these policies and so did not fully address the question as few referred to how these policies have influenced family life. Common errors were to confuse social policies with social values or social pressure or to describe the effects of a social policy without naming it; this was despite the detail in the data explaining what social policies are. Candidates should be reminded that the data is there to be used. A significant number of underdeveloped responses stated that functionalists see government policies as supporting the family and then went on to outline family functions, ignoring the question completely. Other unsuccessful answers focused on family problems such as drug taking or criminal activity and law breaking leading to problems for families which was not what the question has asked.

(d)   Some answers demonstrated good sociological knowledgeable about relationships in the family but lacked focus on how family serves the interests of men. Many answers struggled with the core of this question, writing at length about how the family is bad for women without explicitly discussing how this made it good for men. There seemed to be little sense of what the 'interests of men' might actually be. More successful answers utilised appropriate perspectives, studies and concepts. Other less successful responses tried to cover both sides of the debate but simply described functionalist points, for example outlining Murdock's four functions of the family, without relating these to the question.

A number of answers went on to refer to the different feminist theories and used a range of studies, theories and concepts to support their points. These frequently made good use of the concept of patriarchy within the traditional nuclear family. They also contrasted these to functionalist views as well as liberal feminism and post-modernism.

Successful responses evaluated the view in the question using functionalism and Marxism. For example, arguing that rather than serving the interests of men, the family serves the interests of society as a whole (functionalism) or serves the interests of capitalism (Marxism). Weaker responses tended to focus on how the position of women is improving, sometimes in terms of changing conjugal roles, but often referencing the world of work rather than family life. A number of answers demonstrated a lack of sociological knowledge by defining the triple shift as paid work, housework and child care rather than paid work, domestic and emotional work. In order to improve performance candidates need to be more precise with sociological terminology.

Section B

More candidates answered **Question 3** than **Question 2**.

Question 2

Less successful responses simply described, rather than compared, both theories. The best responses outlined what functionalism and Marxism have in common. For example, they are both structuralist and agree that the family has an important role in socialisation. They also outlined differences between the two. The very best selected a feature such as socialisation or the purpose of the family to show both how both theories view the same social process in the same way and also both see it in a different way and then explicitly evaluated the points that they had made. Others clearly highlighted the functionalist view of the family benefitting society and/or all members of the family and/or the Marxist view of the family benefitting capitalism but just outlined these theories pointing out no points of similarity or difference. Others just asserted there were differences or similarities then described functionalist and Marxist views of the family offering no points of similarity or difference.

Question 3

Many answers were well-developed and supported sociologically showing the ways in which industrialisation may or may not have led to a decline in the extended family. Successful responses clearly identified and outlined the functionalist links to the question and Parson's 'fit thesis' covering a range of points from this. Most concentrated on geographic mobility and loss of functions with better responses also including nepotism. Some also used Young and Wilmott's four stages of the family in their response. There was evidence of evaluation in many essays, with better responses referring to Laslett, Anderson, Finch, Carlin, beanpole families, modified extended families as well as other structures. Assessment via the continued existence of extended families was usually more appropriately handled. There were some reasonable accounts of cultural variations (e.g. the persistence of traditional extended families in South Asia) and of modified extended families. On the other hand, these accounts tended to lack supporting studies and were sometimes limited to assertive points about the benefits of living in an extended family. Too often, answers failed to address the specific question adequately. Rather than focus on industrialisation and the family, candidates wrote about family diversity with no mention of industrialisation. But generally, candidates showed an adequate knowledge of the topic and merely needed to use apply this knowledge more effectively to respond to the specific question. Common errors were to outline a range of family types with little or no reference to the presence of extended families or to produce an answer based on common sense such as the assertion that conflict between grandparents and children leads to the children moving to towns. Others avoided the issue in the question by starting with a brief paragraph on the 'fit thesis, and then outlining secularisation, the rise in divorce/cohabitation/same sex marriage, the emancipation of women etc. as explanations for the decline of the extended family. Other answers were confused over time scales and the difference between rural and urban communities. A number of essays would have benefitted by linking their answer to industrialisation and supporting their points with sociological evidence.

SOCIOLOGY

Paper 9699/13
Paper 13

Key messages

Candidates should:

1. read the examination paper carefully to ensure they understand the specifics of the questions
2. plan their time carefully to avoid having to rush their final answer
3. revise key sociological terminology
4. support their points with sociological evidence such as concepts, theories and studies.

General comments

Most candidates demonstrated sound knowledge and understanding but many candidates did not sufficiently demonstrate the skill of evaluation. The best responses supported the points made with sociological knowledge such as concepts, theories and studies. Candidates should plan a structure for their essays so that they maximise their time and avoid repetition. By planning, they should be able to avoid list-like essays that repeat points. Some candidates were successful in their use of studies and concepts but would have benefited by using more theories.

Many candidates wrote out the questions. This is not required and uses up valuable time. It is important that candidates spend the right amount of time on each question, taking into account the number of marks available. Candidates need to address the exact question that has been set, so more work on interpreting questions may improve performance.

Candidates displayed good knowledge and understanding on feminism, the nuclear family and its role in society and the impact of divorce an families. Their understanding of factors contributing to diversity in family structures was weaker.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Nearly all candidates answered all parts of **Question 1**. Some wrote too much on **Questions 1a** and **1b**, leaving themselves short of time to finish the paper. A very small number failed to answer either **Question 1c** or **1d**.

Question 1

(a) Most candidates had a clear understanding of the meaning of fertility rate, defining it as the average number of children that a female will have in her fertile years. Others had a partial understanding and knew it was connected to births or children born. A common error was to confuse it with infant mortality rate. A less common error was to explain why rates are changing.

(b)   Most candidates gave at least one example of a way in which relationships in families are changing. Excellent use was made of the way in which conjugal roles are changing from asymmetrical to symmetrical in some societies and how parent-child relationships are changing with the development of child-centred families. Less successful responses tried to use the same information for both examples; this was especially true for conjugal roles. It is always better to use two clearly different examples to ensure two distinct points are made. A common error was to confuse relationship with structure and described changes form extended to nuclear families. Another common error was to describe different family types without referring to changes in relationships. Some answers failed to develop their response in terms of why the change happened or the impact or consequence of the change on family relationships. Almost all changes described were seen as positive; however some did describe negative consequences of some changes, for example dual working parents losing out to grandparents in relationships with their children.

(c)   There were many excellent answers describing how divorce legislation, the changing role of women, changing social attitudes, the introduction of compulsory education, the delay in marriage or choosing to live alone has led to an increase in single person households. The best of these supported their answers with specific references to sociological sources. Some answers failed to develop their response in terms of why the number of single person households might have increased. A common error was to show a misunderstanding of the question by referring to single parent and cohabiting couples as single person households. Some answers described how divorce leads to a split in the family, creating a single parent family, but without mentioning that this may also create a single person household. Some excellent answers explained at least two factors in some depth with appropriate sociological support. For example, citing confluent love (Giddens) to explain an increase in divorce and linking this to the postmodern focus on people having freedom of choice and so deciding to live alone.

(d)   The vast majority of candidates had a clear understanding of the meaning of life expectancy but some responses showed little understanding of the term discussing the question in terms of individual life-span or the impact of miscellaneous events such as war or famine on individual families. The majority of answers took the view that increased life expectancy did lead to the creation of more extended families in modern industrial societies. Other answers raised other factors that can influence family structure, including industrialisation, class, ethnicity and culture. The best of these assessed the significance of each factor in relation to life expectancy by considering structural changes in terms of modern variants such as the beanpole, modified, dispersed and attenuated families. The most successful answers of this type made specific reference to theorists such as Brannon. Successful answers also addressed this in terms of the Rapoports' types of diversity, even if the Rapoports themselves were not identified, or as an expression of choice as outlined by post-modernism.

Most answers made reference to divorce causing changes in structure but candidates did not always spell out the resulting change in structure such as single parent or reconstituted families. Many answers also included points about changing fertility rates and falling infant mortality rates, but again struggled to explain how these affected family structure as the question asked.

Common errors were to describe the effects of falling life expectancy on family structures, to describe the effects of an ageing population on society or to describe changing roles within families. Other answers asserted that a factor such as class was an important influence but then did not go on to explain how this influenced family structures. In order to gain more marks it is necessary to develop points made with sociological detail.

Few answers directly addressed the question of which factor was the *most* significant.

Section B

Both questions were selected by candidates although **Question 2** was the most popular.

Question 2

The vast majority of responses showed some understanding of the 'functional fit' thesis and the debate about the dominance of the nuclear family, though weaker candidates tended to focus on pre-industrial societies. Better answers drew out the concepts of geographical mobility and labour flexibility. Some attempted to cover additional points such as the decline in nepotism, switch from ascribed to achieved social status, or the takeover of family functions by the state, though only the very best answers were able to apply these clearly

to the issue of nuclear family dominance. Some answers described the family fulfilling the needs of society rather than the nuclear family fulfilling the needs of modern industrial societies and this sometimes resulted in the inclusion of irrelevant information about the Nayer and other non-industrial societies.

Evaluation was often limited to debates about the prevalence of extended families before industrialisation or their decline in the nineteenth century, usually with references to theorists such as Laslett, Anderson, Carlin and Finch. More confident candidates offered alternative explanations for the rise of nuclear families using Marxist and feminist perspectives. Some responses explored the dark side of the nuclear family, but rarely managed to present this clearly in terms of a challenge to the fit thesis; such answers often drifted into discussing whether the nuclear family is 'a good thing or a bad thing'. Family diversity was described well in many essays, but not analysed well in terms of the question. It was often a case of writing 'On the other hand...' followed by a rote-learned account of the various diverse family forms, with little understanding of their relative frequency or if they did 'fit' with society's needs. Some responses looked at the continuing existence of extended families, but rarely attempted to establish whether these were really challenging the dominance of nuclear families. There was some coverage of factors such as class and ethnicity as forms of diversity though again this was often not clearly linked to the question. Common errors were to describe how the family serves the needs of its members or describe functions with no reference to the family or how they might aid society.

Question 3

Although this was not a popular question there were many excellent and sophisticated answers which showed very detailed knowledge of the different feminist theories. Many responses were supported with sociological evidence such as the ideas of radical/Marxist/liberal feminists and some responses also included black and/or post-modern feminists. The very best responses focused explicitly upon the value of feminist theories by assessing their usefulness to our understanding of the family. Less successful responses were limited to summarising what each perspective had to say about the position of women in families, with no explicit comment on the relative usefulness/value of each theory, beyond pointing out that they were different from each other. More successful answers included the work of such key thinkers as: Ansley, Firestone, Delphy and Leonard, Somerville and Greer. Oakley's work was often referenced as a generic feminist approach. Evaluation often took the form of juxtaposing feminist perspectives with functionalist ones, without clearly identifying their similarities and differences. In other responses much time was devoted to the position of women in society (the world of work) rather than keeping focused on the family. It is worth noting that most answers only referenced wives in their answer and little mention was made of mothers or daughters.

SOCIOLOGY

Paper 9699/21
Paper 21

Key messages

- Good answers showed sound knowledge and understanding of a range of sociological ideas, theories and concepts.
- The examination skills required for success in elements of **Question 1** could be improved.
- There was some misunderstanding of key sociological concepts.
- To score highly, essay responses should apply sociological knowledge and evidence to answer the question.

General comments

A number of candidates produced responses that showed a very good application of a range of relevant sociological evidence and theory. These scripts also contained evaluative content that was well-focused on the questions.

In *Section A*, candidates did not always demonstrate good exam technique. For example, in **1(b)** more carefully written identification points and clearer developments could have led to more candidates achieving higher marks for this question. In **1(c)** a majority of candidates provided descriptions of variations in norms between social groups rather than explaining them, which the question demanded. This approach limited the number of marks candidates could access on this question. **1(a)** revealed a deficit in knowledge of a key sociological term, with candidates struggling to show understanding of the concept of 'values'.

In *Section B* the essay questions produced a fairly even distribution in terms of the question attempted, and in quality of response. In **Question 2**, whilst there were some very good responses, there was also evidence that some candidates were either not reading the question carefully enough, or were refocusing it in terms that they had already rehearsed. In both **Questions 2** and **3** there was quite a lot of juxtaposition as well as material not clearly linked to each question.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

(a)   Some candidates gained one mark for a partial definition, referring to something that implied beliefs that guided behaviour in a social context. However, very few responses provided a clear and accurate definition.

(b)   Most responses gained at least two marks with examples of peer group gender-based activities or expectations. Most candidates did not obtain above two marks, typically because they did not distinguish between peer groups and gender identity clearly enough in their descriptions and examples. Often points were repeated or too similar to be credited. The best responses clearly separated the two ways and linked these to appropriate concepts. Some candidates explained both contexts and processes very well.

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(c) Responses that directly explained reasons why norms varied between social groups were in the minority. Most candidates described a wide range of examples of cultural differences from common knowledge, for example, Muslim clothing or diet, Asian hard work and respect, African tribal customs, etc. Mostly these examples did not have a firm sociological basis or any empirical references. These largely descriptive responses often only merited three or four marks. Good answers adhered to the command word in the question and *explained* variations in norms between social groups, for example, by showing clear links between how religious beliefs or economic situation could influence expected behaviour.

(d) Most candidates were familiar with the concepts linked to this question (e.g. Oakley's), but there was a wide variation in how accurately they were explained. Parsons also featured quite frequently, as did Mead and Cooley, but these sources were not always carefully linked to the question. Most candidates included evaluation, usually through comparison with the influence of schools or media, and a few referred to biology, agency or the post-modern diffusion of identities. Some responses tended to lose focus on the family and drifted into lengthy discussions of other agencies with only a very brief acknowledgement of the family's role.

Section B

Question 2

Many responses veered away from the question in the direction of the general debate as to whether or not sociology is a science. This refocusing led to some responses that were rather abstract or that were focused on the advantages and disadvantages of certain quantitative methods. Better responses captured the vision of positivism and used key concepts to explore how it has been applied in practice as well as how it has been challenged by interpretivism's alternative approach to understanding. Greater use of studies to illustrate points would have helped improve many responses.

Question 3

Most candidates were able to identify some strengths and limitations of questionnaires, with varying amounts of detail provided. A number of responses tended to concentrate on practical considerations with limited reference to theoretical issues. Others juxtaposed qualitative methods with questionnaires but did not always explicitly link this to the focus of the question. There were some that clearly focused on the gaps or distortions left by questionnaire research and used appropriate concepts and theoretical debate to explore these. It was popular to conclude that triangulation will solve all these problems.

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SOCIOLOGY

Paper 9699/22
Paper 22

Key messages

- Good answers showed sound knowledge and understanding of a range of sociological concepts and theories.
- The best essay responses contained content that was evaluative and well-applied to the question.
- Some key terms and methods were not well understood.
- The examination skills required for success in elements of **Question 1** could be improved.
- A number of essay responses were overly descriptive and lacked analysis and evaluation.

General comments

A number of candidates produced responses that showed a very good application of a range of relevant sociological evidence and theory. These scripts also contained evaluative content that was well-focused on the questions. There was fairly similar performance in the data response and essay sections of the paper

Section A revealed a deficit in knowledge of some key sociological terms, for example, in **1(a)** the majority of candidates struggled to show understanding of the concept 'representative sample'. To a lesser extent this was the case in **1(b)** where some candidates were clearly not that familiar with the term 'pilot study'. The focus of attention in **1(c)** was on mixed methods in sociological research. Here it was also evident that not all candidates were fully familiar with this approach and the range of issues and concepts linked to its use. In **1(d)** a number of responses were balanced in terms of the argument presented and quite often they were more focused on the evaluative element of the question, i.e. in disputing the importance of practical factors in sociological research. It is worth noting that **1(d)** is not an essay question and that there are only three marks available for evaluation. In *Section B* most candidates opted to answer **Question 2** which invited comparison between questionnaires and unstructured interviews. With this question there were some good responses that were both analytical and evaluative. A number of responses were overly descriptive and not directly focused on the wording of the question, i.e. few addressed the central claim that one of the methods produced 'data of little value.'

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

(a) Many candidates appeared not to understand the term 'representative sample' and even those that did were not always able to explain its meaning with precision. Only the best responses were able to articulate the idea that such a sample should reflect the characteristics of the survey population.

(b) Most candidates were able to identify reasons why researchers might use a pilot study. The strongest responses structured their answers by clearly separating each reason and making sound development points in support. A number of responses outlined what a pilot study is rather than why it might be used. Some candidates were unclear as to the meaning of the term.

(c) Many responses to this question suggested that candidates lacked full knowledge of why a sociologist might use more than one method in their research. Whilst many candidates were able to produce fairly competent responses from their general knowledge of different methodologies (typically quantitative versus qualitative) a lack of detailed understanding of the use of methodological pluralism meant that they often did not receive the highest marks. Effective

answers tended to focus on methodological perspectives, mainly positivism and interpretivism though a few also discussed realism. These responses often supported their arguments with relevant concepts and empirical studies such as Barker's study of the Moonies.

(d) Whilst most candidates had some idea of what practical factors are in sociological research, a minority did not. A small number of candidates did not respond to this question. Most candidates identified time and/or cost as practical issues for researchers. However, these points were not often developed that sociologically. Good responses considered how funding sources such as government and companies can exert a problematic influence on the validity of research findings. Strong candidates also described factors such as accessibility to the sample and/or nature of the study group, e.g. the differences researchers face in accessing high and low status groups. Some candidates tended to focus more of their attention on the evaluation element of the question – the importance of ethical and theoretical factors. This left these responses balanced in terms of the amount spent on both sides of the argument. However, it is worth pointing out that for this question evaluation is only worth three marks.

Section B

Question 2

Most responses contained sound descriptions of the advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires and unstructured interviews. There were some good answers to this question with the best ones able to refer to a range of studies to support their points. Typically, these responses were also able to incorporate effective links to sociological perspectives. Many responses juxtaposed the two methods rather than directly comparing them or applying knowledge to the specific wording of the question. Only the best responses candidates were really successful in assessing the view that questionnaires are of less value than unstructured interviews. Only a few recognised the strengths of both approaches or argued that much depended on the context and specific goals of a research study.

Question 3

There were a number of approaches taken to this question. The majority of responses provided a broad outline of the central themes of functionalism, along with a discussion of the distinctive ideas of leading theorists (usually Parsons, Durkheim, and Merton). However, this often led to a loss of direct focus on the question. Some good answers focused more on alternatives to the functionalist approach, in particular interactionism, Marxism and postmodernism. Responses that explicitly addressed the issue of explaining human behaviour were the most successful. A number of candidates introduced functionalism but then went on to discuss positivist and interpretivist methodological perspectives, focusing on sociological research methods rather than sociological theories of human behaviour. Other candidates focused on detailed descriptions of cases of feral children rather than pertinent sociological studies and key concepts.

SOCIOLOGY

Paper 9699/23
Paper 23

Key messages

• Good answers showed sound knowledge and understanding of a range of sociological ideas, theories and concepts.
• The examination skills required for success in elements of **Question 1** could be improved.
• There was some misunderstanding of key sociological concepts.
• To score highly, essay responses should apply sociological knowledge and evidence to answer the question.

General comments

A number of candidates produced responses that showed a very good application of a range of relevant sociological evidence and theory. These scripts also contained evaluative content that was well-focused on the questions.

In *Section A*, candidates did not always demonstrate good exam technique. For example, in **1(b)** more carefully written identification points and clearer developments could have led to more candidates achieving higher marks for this question. In **1(c)** a majority of candidates provided descriptions of variations in norms between social groups rather than explaining them, which the question demanded. This approach limited the number of marks candidates could access on this question. **1(a)** revealed a deficit in knowledge of a key sociological term, with candidates struggling to show understanding of the concept of 'values'.

In *Section B* the essay questions produced a fairly even distribution in terms of the question attempted, and in quality of response. In **Question 2**, whilst there were some very good responses, there was also evidence that some candidates were either not reading the question carefully enough, or were refocusing it in terms that they had already rehearsed. In both **Questions 2** and **3** there was quite a lot of juxtaposition as well as material not clearly linked to each question.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

(a)   Some candidates gained one mark for a partial definition, referring to something that implied beliefs that guided behaviour in a social context. However, very few responses provided a clear and accurate definition.

(b)   Most responses gained at least two marks with examples of peer group gender-based activities or expectations. Most candidates did not obtain above two marks, typically because they did not distinguish between peer groups and gender identity clearly enough in their descriptions and examples. Often points were repeated or too similar to be credited. The best responses clearly separated the two ways and linked these to appropriate concepts. Some candidates explained both contexts and processes very well.

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(c) Responses that directly explained reasons why norms varied between social groups were in the minority. Most candidates described a wide range of examples of cultural differences from common knowledge, for example, Muslim clothing or diet, Asian hard work and respect, African tribal customs, etc. Mostly these examples did not have a firm sociological basis or any empirical references. These largely descriptive responses often only merited three or four marks. Good answers adhered to the command word in the question and *explained* variations in norms between social groups, for example, by showing clear links between how religious beliefs or economic situation could influence expected behaviour.

(d) Most candidates were familiar with the concepts linked to this question (e.g. Oakley's), but there was a wide variation in how accurately they were explained. Parsons also featured quite frequently, as did Mead and Cooley, but these sources were not always carefully linked to the question. Most candidates included evaluation, usually through comparison with the influence of schools or media, and a few referred to biology, agency or the post-modern diffusion of identities. Some responses tended to lose focus on the family and drifted into lengthy discussions of other agencies with only a very brief acknowledgement of the family's role.

Section B

Question 2

Many responses veered away from the question in the direction of the general debate as to whether or not sociology is a science. This refocusing led to some responses that were rather abstract or that were focused on the advantages and disadvantages of certain quantitative methods. Better responses captured the vision of positivism and used key concepts to explore how it has been applied in practice as well as how it has been challenged by interpretivism's alternative approach to understanding. Greater use of studies to illustrate points would have helped improve many responses.

Question 3

Most candidates were able to identify some strengths and limitations of questionnaires, with varying amounts of detail provided. A number of responses tended to concentrate on practical considerations with limited reference to theoretical issues. Others juxtaposed qualitative methods with questionnaires but did not always explicitly link this to the focus of the question. There were some that clearly focused on the gaps or distortions left by questionnaire research and used appropriate concepts and theoretical debate to explore these. It was popular to conclude that triangulation will solve all these problems.

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Key messages

- Sociological evidence, including theories, studies, and concepts should be used to support point made.
- Most candidates demonstrated good knowledge of the concepts used in the question wording.
- There are no marks for evaluation in the **(a)** questions.
- High quality answers to the **(b)** questions included a sustained evaluation.

General comments

The standard of the scripts overall was high. However, there are still a lot of answers to the **(b)** questions that are descriptive (they rely on knowledge primarily) rather than demonstrating the higher order skills of analysis and evaluation. Some candidates write extremely long answers, but the structure adopted is weak and some of the material covered has only marginal relevance to the question. Candidates who fall into this category would be better advised to write shorter answers and take more time to think about the requirements of the question and how best to structure the response. Many of the answers made good references to sociological concepts, but knowledge of relevant theories and explanations was often lacking. High scoring answers often referred to evidence from sociological studies and other appropriate sources. However, many responses lacked references to relevant evidence and candidates could have gained higher marks by avoiding this omission.

Most candidates answered three questions in the time available and there were few rubric errors. The questions on Education proved most popular, with those on Global Development less frequently attempted. Some candidates made poor use of their time by including an evaluation in their answers to the part **(a)** questions. These questions target knowledge, understanding, and application; there are no marks for evaluative content in these questions.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

(a) Most candidates who attempted this question demonstrated a sound understanding of what is meant by labelling. Good responses identified several ways in which labelling may influence which pupils succeed in school. There were some lower scoring answers that were confined to just one or two undeveloped points about the influence of labelling.

(b) Good answers considered various reasons why it might be thought that the education system favours middle-class pupils. High quality responses discussed both cultural and material factors influencing the educational performance of working-class and middle-class pupils respectively. There were some low scoring answers that were confined to a few personal observations about the disadvantages faced by working-class pupils in the education system.

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Question 2

(a) There were some high-quality answers that identified several ways in which male pupils may be disadvantaged by processes within schools. Good responses often distinguished between the position of different groups of male pupils, referring to differences of social class and ethnicity. There were a few low scoring answers that focused on how female pupils may be advantaged in the education system, with little mention of male pupils.

(b) There were a few good answers that discussed a range of factors influencing the school curriculum. References to Marxist theories of education often featured in some of the higher scoring responses. There were quite a few low scoring answers that either misunderstood the question or else made only a few simple points about the factors influencing what is taught in schools.

Question 3

(a) Good answers discussed a number of difficulties in measuring the extent of poverty in developing societies. High scoring responses often distinguished between different forms of poverty, particularly the distinction between absolute and relative poverty. There were some low scoring responses that focussed on difficulties in defining poverty rather than difficulties in measuring the extent of poverty in developing societies.

(b) There were a few high-quality answers that considered the impact of globalisation on developing societies in a number of dimensions, including cultural, economic, political, and social. Lower scoring responses often lacked an appropriate structure for discussing the impact of globalisation, offering just a few isolated observations that lacked links to appropriate sociological debates and explanations.

Question 4

(a) Good answers demonstrated a sound understanding of a range of cultural factors that may be used in defining development. Lower scoring responses often confused cultural factors with other approaches to defining development that are based more on economic and social considerations.

(b) A lot the answers to this question relied on references to different theories of development, with modernisation theory used to represent the view that free-market competition is best for economic development. High scoring responses explained the possible benefits of the free market, and liberal approaches to development generally, and followed this with a sustained assessment of the view on which the question was based. There were some low scoring answers that discussed development in general, with little or no reference to free market competition.

Question 5

(a) Most answers demonstrated a sound understanding of the concept of deviance amplification. High-quality responses provided a sustained account of the role of the media in deviance amplification. There were some answers at the lower level that discussed deviance amplification with little or no reference to the media.

(b) Good answers used a range of relevant sociological sources to assess the impact of watching violent media on behaviour. References to studies of the relationship between violent media and violent behaviour often featured in high scoring responses. Lower level answers relied on general observations and speculation about the influence of violent media content, with only limited links to appropriate sociological material.

Question 6

(a) There were some high-quality answers that discussed a range of factors influencing news reporting. Lower scoring responses were limited to a brief account of just one or two influences on the way that news is reported.

(b)   Good answers discussed several examples of how the new media might limit the power of governments to control individuals. High-quality responses also provided a sustained assessment of the view on which the question was based. There were some lower scoring answers that failed to refer to the new media specifically, with the focus instead on how the media in general may limit the power of governments to control individuals.

Question 7

(a)   There were a lot of good answers that described a range of evidence supporting the view that religion has lost its social significance. Lower scoring responses were confined to a few simple points about a narrow range of relevant evidence.

(b)   High-quality responses discussed several explanations for the growth of new religious movements and also provided a sustained assessment of the view on which the question was based. References to relevant studies and theories often featured in good responses. There were a few low scoring responses that demonstrated only a limited understanding of what is meant by new religious movements.

Question 8

(a)   Good answers reviewed several reasons why religious participation is higher among women than men in many societies. References to studies often featured in high-quality responses and some candidates made useful distinctions between the role of women in different religions. Lower scoring responses were confined to just one or two simple points about why religious participation is higher among women than men in many societies.

(b)   Most candidates who attempted this question recognised that it offered an opportunity to discuss different theories of religion. Good answers identified functionalist theory as the source of the idea that the role of religion is to promote social solidarity. High-quality responses often used other theories of the role of religion to assess the strengths and limitations of the functionalist viewpoint. There were a few low-scoring responses that discussed the role of religion with little or no reference to relevant sociological theories.

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Key messages

* High scoring responses made good use of relevant sociological concepts and theories.
* Good answers to the **(b)** questions combined detailed sociological understanding with sustained assessment.
* Good answers to the **(a)** questions offered detailed explanations covering a range of relevant points.
* Some answers to the **(a)** questions included assessment, which was not required.
* Low scoring answers often relied on assertion and general knowledge rather than relevant sociological material.
* Higher marks could be gained by making more use of relevant sociological evidence.

General comments

This series there were some excellent answers that demonstrated detailed sociological understanding and incisive analysis of the relevant debates. Good application of sociological concepts and theories was a feature of the higher scoring responses. Answers that triggered the middle of the mark range were often characterised by sound knowledge and understanding, but a lack of relevant assessment in addressing the **(b)** questions. More practice in formulating evaluative answers for the **(b)** questions would be helpful for these candidates. A few candidates appeared unprepared for the exam, relying on assertion and general knowledge to answer the questions rather than drawing on relevant sociological evidence and theories. Marks for this type of answer are inevitably at the lower end of the range.

There were few rubric errors and it appeared that most candidates were able to answer three questions fully in the time available.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

(a) Good answers used a range of concepts, theories and explanations to demonstrate how language use may influence which candidates succeed in education. Bernstein's distinction between restricted and elaborated language codes featured in many answers. There were some low scoring responses that were limited to a few general comments about the importance of language in education with little or no reference to relevant sociological sources.

(b) Most of the answers demonstrated a sound understanding of the concept of ideological control. There were some good responses that drew on Marxist theories of education to explain the view expressed in the question. Some high-quality answers offered an assessment of Marxist theories of education by considering contrasting perspectives, including the functionalist and feminist positions. Lower scoring responses lacked references to relevant studies and thinkers and were often confined to a few general observations about the role of schools.

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Question 2

(a) There were many good answers that explained a range of ways in which material deprivation may lead to educational underachievement. Some lower scoring answers appeared to be confused about the meaning of material deprivation, with some conflating the concept with cultural deprivation.

(b) A lot of answers to this question demonstrated only a limited understanding of the concept of compensatory education. Good responses explained the concept accurately and used relevant studies and arguments to assess the value of compensatory education in helping working-class candidates to succeed in school. The assessment was often delivered by contrasting supporting arguments for the value of compensatory education with a review of the obstacles to working-class candidates succeeding in school that are not so readily overcome through programmes of compensatory education.

Question 3

(a) Most candidates understood what is meant by convergence theory and many were able to identify a range of limitations with that theory. Rostow's modernisation view of development was often well quoted in good responses; Marx was also rightly identified as a thinker within the sphere of convergence theory. There were some lower scoring answers that either failed to understand the idea of convergence theory or else offered only one or two simple observations about that theory.

(b) There were some good answers that demonstrated a detailed understanding of dependency theory and offered a sound assessment of whether that theoretical approach has overestimated the extent to which developing societies are dominated by developed societies. Lower scoring responses showed only a vague understanding of the features of dependency theory and were limited in terms of understanding the analytical issues raised by the question.

Question 4

(a) Good answers identified several types of aid for developing societies and offered clear explanations of each type. Some lower scoring answers were confined to a definition of what is meant by aid in general, or else made just a few simple observations about one or two types of aid.

(b) There were some high scoring answers that demonstrated a clear understanding of several different explanations of the causes of poverty. Good responses often distinguished between structural and cultural explanations of why the poor remain in poverty. Lower scoring answers often lacked references to relevant sociological concepts and theories, relying instead on general knowledge and personal observation about the causes of poverty.

Question 5

(a) There were a lot of lower scoring answers that offered some points about changes in ownership and control of the media, without making relevant links to the impact of globalisation. Better answers explained how globalisation has brought about, or involved, changes in media ownership and control. Some low scoring responses discussed trends in media content rather than considering issues of ownership and control.

(b) Most candidates recognised that this question provided an opportunity to discuss Marxist ideas about the role of the media. Good responses often distinguished between the mass manipulation and hegemonic models of the media. High scoring answers also included an assessment of the Marxist analysis, drawing on other theories of the media to demonstrate knowledge of contrasting viewpoints. Lower scoring answers relied on general observations about the media rather than reference to appropriate sociological concepts and theories.

Question 6

(a) Most responses to this question demonstrated some awareness of what is meant by agenda setting. In lower scoring answers, the understanding of the concept was vague and few relevant links were made to the presentation of news. Higher scoring responses offered a clear definition of the concept and also explained how agenda setting may influence the presentation of news.

(b) Good answers to this question used appropriate sociological sources to consider whether social class is the main variable influencing the extent to which people are affected by the media. Other variables (gender, age, ethnicity) that might influence how far people are influenced by the media were referenced in assessing the view expressed in the question. There were a lot of lower scoring responses that focused on factors influencing media content rather than analysing the variables that might influence the extent to which people are affected by the media.

Question 7

(a) There were some good answers that identified several reasons why participation in religious ceremonies may be a poor measure of religiosity. Lower scoring responses offered a few relevant points, but with little or no support from relevant sociological sources.

(b) Most of the candidates who attempted this question understood what is meant by secularisation. Good answers used various sources of evidence to explain and assess the secularisation thesis. Some responses demonstrated a sound understanding of the secularisation thesis, but lacked references to evidence when assessing the thesis. There were a few low scoring responses that were confined to a basic account of the meaning of secularisation, with little reference to relevant sociological sources and debates.

Question 8

(a) Good answers used a range of sociological concepts and theories to explain why men hold the positions of power within most religious organisations. Feminist accounts featured strongly in many high scoring responses. There were some lower scoring answers that lacked reference to sociological sources and offered only one or two general points about the position of women within religious organisations.

(b) Some candidates demonstrated only a vague understanding of the concept of religious fundamentalism. In a few cases, sociological explanations for the existence of sects constituted the main material used to address the question. Such answers gained credit, but were limited by failure to see that religious fundamentalism is a broader phenomenon that can feature across a range of religious organisations, not just sects. There were some high scoring responses that made good use of relevant sociological explanations of the growth in religious fundamentalism, analysing the strengths and limitations of each and reaching plausible conclusions about whether religious fundamentalism is a response to uncertainty in the modern world. Low scoring answers were often confined to just one simple explanation for the growth of religious fundamentalism, with little or no reference to appropriate sociological sources.

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Key messages

•   Sociological evidence, including theories, studies, and concepts should be used to support point made.
•   Most candidates demonstrated good knowledge of the concepts used in the question wording.
•   There are no marks for evaluation in the **(a)** questions.
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The standard of the scripts overall was high. However, there are still a lot of answers to the **(b)** questions that are descriptive (they rely on knowledge primarily) rather than demonstrating the higher order skills of analysis and evaluation. Some candidates write extremely long answers, but the structure adopted is weak and some of the material covered has only marginal relevance to the question. Candidates who fall into this category would be better advised to write shorter answers and take more time to think about the requirements of the question and how best to structure the response. Many of the answers made good references to sociological concepts, but knowledge of relevant theories and explanations was often lacking. High scoring answers often referred to evidence from sociological studies and other appropriate sources. However, many responses lacked references to relevant evidence and candidates could have gained higher marks by avoiding this omission.

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