

# SOCIOLOGY

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**Paper 2251/12**  
**Paper 12**

## Key messages

- On **Questions 1(d) and (e)** a good technique is for candidates to first identify a feature of the method in question and then describe the strengths and/or limitations.
- When teaching field experiments a good idea to use examples to reinforce the kind of approach and methodologies used. Classic examples include the Hawthorne experiment, the Stanford prison experiment or Rosenthal and Jacobsen's 'Pygmalion in the Classroom' study. Other more recent examples can be found on the internet, e.g. the ethnicity and job application experiment in 2009.
- There are no marks available for evaluation in **1(f)** so candidates should be discouraged from making points against the question.
- Candidates should write extended responses to **1(f), 1(g) and (c), (d) and (e)** in question 2 or 3 in paragraph form to prevent distinct points overlapping or coalescing into each other.
- Whilst the unpacking and development of points with evidence is crucial to success in questions **2/3 (c), (d) and (e)** the level of development required for **(c)** is not as great as the other, higher tariff questions **((d) and (e))** where more detailed analysis is expected.

## General comments

Candidates showed a satisfactory level of engagement with the question paper and the assessment objectives. Time management appears to have been good, with very few candidates not finishing the paper. Many candidates showed a basic to good knowledge and understanding of sociological concepts and theory. Most then applied this knowledge to the demands of the actual questions. In essay responses the evaluation skills evidenced by some candidates were good, with most giving a two-sided response. The research methods unit was challenging for many candidates and the technique for answering the data response question (**1(c)**) and the methods evaluation questions (**1(d)** and **1(e)**) could be improved. **Question 2** (Culture, socialisation and identity) was far more popular than **Question 3** (Social inequality) and tended to be done slightly better overall. There were very few rubric errors though noticeably several non-responses.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Section A: Theory and Methods**

#### **Question 1**

- (a) A particularly good response here with most candidates achieving full marks by correctly identifying from the source the two approaches used by sociologists. Candidates who did not achieve marks invariably named approaches that were not in the source, e.g. structuralism or interpretivism. A few candidates did not give an 'approach' and incorrectly gave answers such as snowball sampling or observation, both of which featured in the source.
- (b) This question was done well. Most candidates identified two types of historical document. The most common responses were diaries, newspapers/journals, magazines and photographs. A few candidates incorrectly cited official statistics which were not credited as historical documents. Candidates who did not achieve both marks gave vague responses such as 'life stories', 'old research', etc. or cited research methods such as questionnaires.
- (c) The source analysis question drew a mixed response. Candidates were asked to describe two reasons from the source why researchers chose to use snowball sampling. The key to achieving full marks was to first identify two points from the source (e.g. that no sampling frame of young

smokers was available) and then to say why that meant snowball sampling was appropriate (e.g. because in snowball sampling no sampling frame is needed as one young smoker finds another and so on until a full sample is gained). Some candidates did not use the source and asserted that snowball sampling is the quickest and most convenient type of sampling which is incorrect.

- (d) This question asked candidates to describe two strengths of using focus groups in sociological research. Some candidates chose to define the method in their first sentence and then go on to select appropriate aspects of the method and their strengths. The key to success in this question and in **1(e)** is to identify an aspect of the method and then describe why or how that is a strength. Popular correct answers included that as researchers interview a group of people together it is time and cost efficient compared to interviewing them one by one and that some people are likely to be more comfortable and supported being interviewed in a group and are thus more likely to open up and give valid answers. Another common creditworthy point was that a focus group allows for discussion and interaction between group members adding a qualitative dimension to data not achievable if being interviewed separately. Some candidates developed such points sociologically, but others missed marks by not explaining the positive impact of their point. Where candidates scored fewer or no marks responses were vague and not linked to focus groups as a method, e.g., they are high in validity or they give a lot of information.
- (e) This question on the strengths and limitations of field experiments proved particularly challenging for many candidates. Some responses started with a definition of field experiments as experiments done in a natural setting but did not include a description of its strengths and limitations. Many candidates did not appear to fully understand what field experiments are and therefore could not give possible strengths and limitations, as a result very few scored full marks. Many candidates linked this type of experiment with qualitative data and the use of participant observation to give *verstehen* which would be very unlikely in an experiment. The most popular creditworthy strengths included the natural setting (e.g. a workplace or school) which may put people at their ease and allow them to show their normal behaviour thus enhancing validity, and the idea that researchers can manipulate the variables in the experiment to test and measure a hypothesis. Popular limitations focused on the possibility of the Hawthorne Effect if people became aware they were being studied, thus changing behaviour and negatively impacting validity. Another common limitation was that ethical issues may arise if informed consent is not taken (in covert research) or possible harm and distress caused (as may have been the case in the Stanford experiment and the Rosenthal and Jacobson study). A third common limitation was that researchers cannot fully control variables in the same way as in a laboratory and hence the study will be difficult to repeat and get the same results, thus impeding reliability.
- (f) This question required candidates to explain why longitudinal studies can be useful in sociological research. It is an extended response question and requires a minimum of three well developed points to score in band three. Most responses scored in bands one and two due to a lack of development. Many candidates correctly identified longitudinal studies with the idea that they are done over an extended period, usually years, and that the sample is revisited at intervals. Often these points were then used as strengths. For example studying a sample over a long period requires commitment from the sample and may facilitate the growth of trust, both of which may enhance the likelihood of valid data. The idea of studying the sample at intervals gave rise to the idea that it allows researchers to chart the changes and even explain the factors that led to the changes in a person's life. Another common creditworthy point was the flexibility of the approach in terms of the kinds of methods that can be used to give both quantitative and qualitative data. Other candidates focused on the likely quantitative results that allow researchers to identify patterns and to make comparisons between different groups in the sample. Some candidates included evaluation points and discussed the disadvantages of longitudinal studies which was not required by the question. Some candidates provided vague points relating to the method being easy to do or that just because it takes a long time that somehow this makes it more 'valid and reliable.' Candidates who scored less well made fewer than three points and these were often undeveloped or only partially developed.

- (g) The essay question focused on evaluating the extent to which official statistics are useful for sociological research. Many candidates formulated a balanced debate with quality of development being the main differentiator. Many responses demonstrated some knowledge of official statistics, for example that they are easy to access and often free quantitative data, often about the whole population, generated by governments. These basics were often then translated into positive points, e.g. that because they are generated by the government sociologists can use them as a source of secondary data thus saving time and effort for researchers who do not have to research the topics themselves. Other common creditworthy points included that they are quantitative data and hence can be used to identify patterns and trends in social behaviours and allow for comparisons to be made, a few candidates referenced Durkheim's comparative suicide study. On the 'against' side many candidates identified the possible bias in official statistics due to political interference designed to make the government look good. Others pointed out that official statistics are not always accurate, citing rape figures or the census as examples where there may be 'hidden figures' which detract from the validity of the data. Some gave an interpretivist critique on the problems with a purely quantitative approach to research and the inability to find out the reasons or the 'why' behind the quantitative picture. A few candidates included non-official statistics and referenced other possible research methods by way of evaluation with no reference back to official statistics, an approach which was not creditworthy in the question. A minority of candidates gave no response or showed no relevant knowledge of official statistics. Where candidates did include conclusions, often they were simple and summative and only the strongest candidates made thoughtful judgements based on evidence presented.

### **Section B: Culture, identity and socialisation**

#### **Question 2**

- (a) This question asked candidates to define the term 'masculinity.' Most candidates scored at least one mark. Those that achieved two marks gave a response which identified masculinity with a set of social expectations associated with males. Many candidates received one mark for giving an appropriate example such as being strong and unemotional.
- (b) This question required candidates to describe two sanctions used to control young people. Candidates approached the question in several different ways. Some focused on negative and positive sanctions as examples in and of themselves, others gave concrete examples such as having mobile phones confiscated or detention in school. Others talked about punishments and rewards as examples. All of these were creditworthy. For the second mark candidates could either give extra detail about the sanction identified or give some description of how the sanction was effective in controlling young people, e.g. being kept in detention deterred students from misbehaving in future. Many candidates scored full marks on this question though a few candidates did not link their examples to the control of young people specifically.
- (c) Candidates found this question demanding. It asked candidates to explain how societies are culturally diverse. A common error was that some candidates unnecessarily explained why rather than how social diversity exists. Thus many talked about globalisation and immigration. Sometimes these points were creditworthy but only if candidates then made reference to examples of cultural diversity. Common creditworthy examples of how societies are culturally diverse were in food, clothing, language and religion. Many candidates successfully linked such diversity to multiculturalism. A few candidates misunderstood the question and spent time discussing the merging of cultures in a global culture.
- (d) The eight-mark question asked candidates to explain why traditional femininity is changing. In general there was solid understanding of what traditional femininity involves with many candidates highlighting submissiveness and the expressive housewife role of taking care of the household. In explaining why femininity has changed many referred to the extension of female rights through legislation, including the right to work. This in turn was seen as key to greater confidence and independence for women in both the domestic and public sphere. So women can now be breadwinners, marry later or not at all and/or take care of children themselves without the need of a man. Women no longer need to tolerate domestic violence and can seek divorce more easily in a social environment which is more supportive. Whilst knowledge was generally good relatively few candidates sustained development over three or more points and hence few achieved top band. Some candidates spent a little too long on explaining traditional femininity rather than focusing on the reasons why it is changing.

- (e) The essay question focused on the extent to which value consensus exists in modern industrial societies. There was a mixed response reflecting and there were a few non-responses. However most responses did attempt a debate. Responses that scored well often argued that value consensus clearly exists because it is something that is taught to us through the various agencies of socialisation. Candidates often then went on to discuss how norms and values are transmitted through the family, school, the media and religion. In addition some focused on the existence of social control which attempts to bring people back into line with accepted norms and values of society, whether this be informally or formally through agencies such as the police and courts. Some candidates described functionalist arguments regarding the necessity for all agencies and institutions to work together for the common good though sometimes these descriptions did not come back to the question of value consensus explicitly. The 'against' side of the argument featured the fact that not everyone follows the value consensus, for example criminals and subcultures. Also, many candidates used Marxist and feminist theory to question whether in fact a value consensus exists at all as people are 'brainwashed' into a passive acceptance of capitalist/patriarchal worldviews. Some of these points were developed well in relation to concepts like ideology whilst others tended to focus in a simpler way on 'conflict'. Some candidates were vague and did not demonstrate understanding of value consensus and hence tended to score in band one.

### **Section C: Social Inequality**

#### **Question 3**

- (a) Candidates who achieved both marks defined intergenerational social mobility in terms of movement between the social classes (one element) across generations such as from parents to children (the second element). Both elements were needed to score two marks. Answers which only scored one mark lacked one of the two definitional elements or simply gave an example with no definition.
- (b) There was a mixed response to this question which asked candidates to describe two examples of vertical segregation in the workplace. Ideally candidates should have focused on the idea that different social groups can occupy different levels in workplace hierarchies. Common correct answers included men being CEOs of companies whilst women worked in lower occupations such as secretaries or that ethnic minorities struggle to gain promotion to the highest positions in some organisations. Those who did not achieve full marks either identified one feature or identified two but left one or both undeveloped. A small number of responses focussed incorrectly on related ideas such as prejudice and discrimination or the gender pay gap.
- (c) This question asked candidates to explain how institutional racism affects individuals. Popular responses included the impact on ethnic minorities in terms of workplace discrimination and the effect this has on financial wellbeing; whilst others focused on the affect institutional racism can have in schools where teachers may label ethnic minority children as failures leading to a self-fulfilling prophesy. Many candidates noted the likelihood of mental health problems and low self-esteem though often such points tended to be generalised and not well linked to institutions. Another common point concerned police racism and the targeting of ethnic minorities as a result. A minority of candidates did not demonstrate understanding of the meaning of institutional racism and instead made references to sexism and ageism which were not creditworthy. Few candidates gave three developed and conceptual/evidenced points to score full marks.
- (d) This question asked candidates to explain why governments choose to redistribute wealth. The best responses began each point with a clear statement of the 'why' element of the question; so, because they want to alleviate poverty or tackle inequality or pacify the working class/proletariat, etc. Such reasons were then unpacked with extra detail, sometimes with reference to government measures such as progressive taxation, unemployment benefits, free education or initiatives that provide opportunities for work or self-employment. Localised examples were given and rewarded. Other candidates took a more theoretical approach by referring to functionalist arguments about the desirability of meritocracy and social mobility as a reason for governments to redistribute wealth or Marxist criticisms of the welfare state as a ploy by the ruling class to distract the proletariat from oppression.
- (e) The essay question asked candidates to discuss the extent to which it is possible to escape the poverty trap. Most candidates gave a balanced argument with several points on each side. To score in band three a minimum of four sociological points each with some development/evidence

are needed. For band four a minimum of six well developed points must be made. On the 'for' side many responses argued that there is a meritocracy where social mobility is possible via equal opportunities legislation and hence people can climb out of the poverty trap. Such arguments were often linked with the existence of free education which was seen as key to social progress particularly for groups such as women and ethnic minorities. Others focused on the welfare state and the fact that benefits keep families out of absolute poverty and allow them to meet their subsistence needs. A few candidates also discussed marriage and winning the lottery as ways of moving out of poverty though such points were more difficult to develop with sociological evidence. On the 'against' side candidates made reference to the structural barriers that make it difficult to escape poverty such as continuing discrimination against certain groups, social exclusion from services and the generational cycle of poverty. Other popular arguments put forward to keep people in poverty were the culture of poverty and the dependency culture. Most candidates scored in band two though a few candidates were able to present cogent, well developed arguments and score in bands three and four. Candidates who scored less well offered fewer points and often offered minimal evidence in development of those points. Whilst a few responses addressed the 'to what extent' and provided focused conclusions, these tended to be in the minority.

# SOCIOLOGY

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Paper 2251/22  
Paper 22

## Key messages

- Some candidates write out the question, a definition or an introduction or conclusion when it is not necessary for the question, this wastes time and no additional marks can be gained.
- Responses given to **part (e)** questions need to cover both sides of an argument, a one-sided response limits the marks that can be achieved.
- Some candidates would benefit from practice in organising their answers, e.g. enumerating their points and/or writing in separate paragraphs as required.
- Candidates should have a solid understanding of key terms and be able to clearly define them. This would enable them to not only obtain full marks in **part (a)** questions, but would also help them to understand key terminology in other questions. A definition should aim to include two clear elements.
- Candidates should show their sociological knowledge by using terms, concepts, studies and theories whenever possible. This approach allows candidates to achieve good marks.
- Responses based on common-sense rather than explicit sociological understanding will not be able to achieve full marks.
- Candidates would benefit from spending some time thinking about what the questions are asking and planning answers to those longer questions accordingly before they start to write – this is particularly important in the 15 mark essay questions to ensure that candidate's remain focused on the specific demands of the question set.
- Some candidates are not using paragraphs in the longer responses, making it difficult to see where points begin and end. The 'point per paragraph' structure is therefore recommended. Candidates would benefit from developing discrete essay writing skills and techniques for the **part (e)** questions.
- Candidates should be encouraged to use the marks per question as guidance for how much should be written and how long should be spent on a particular question. For example, some candidates were writing as much for a **part (c)** question worth 6 marks as for a **part (e)** question worth 15.
- Command words are crucial; candidates should be familiar with the requirements of the various command words used.

## General comments

Many responses showed a generally good level of engagement with the question paper and the assessment objectives. Time management appears to have been good with there being very few candidates who did not manage to finish the paper. There were relatively few rubric errors or non-responses.

In the 15-mark essay responses the evaluation skills evidenced by some candidates were good, though relatively few candidates developed the full range of points with suitably robust evidence. Most candidates created a debate but a significant number of candidates offered only one-sided responses which cannot score higher than Band 2.

**Questions 1 and 2, *Family and Education***, were the most popular questions and in both cases some candidates showed a good grasp of the key theories, concepts and arguments and these candidates often used these to good effect. **Question 3 (*Crime, deviance and social control*)** was the next most popular question with only a minority choosing **Question 4 (*Media*)**. The quality of answers on the media option were noticeably lower than on other options.

Some candidates tended to spend too much time on lower scoring questions, such as the **part (b)** questions, thus not having sufficient time to devote to the higher tariff **part (d)** and **(e)** questions which was detrimental to their overall mark.

## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Section A**

#### **Question 1**

##### *Family*

- (a) The question was answered correctly by many candidates who linked the term ‘step-parent’ to the new marriage partner of a parent, i.e. non-biological parent, after a divorce or death of the previous partner. The formation of a reconstituted family was often mentioned. Many candidates achieved two marks by identifying two clear elements, frequently the idea that one parent re-marries and that the second parent is not a blood relation but takes responsibility for the child/children. Candidates who only scored one mark often repeated the term in the question or omitted one of the two core elements.
- (b) The vast majority of candidates correctly identified two types of family, apart from step-families, most frequently providing brief but sufficient development of their points. The most commonly described types of family were the nuclear and the extended family, followed by single parent and same sex families.
- (c) Most candidates demonstrated some understanding of how marriage can vary cross culturally but not all applied their knowledge well to the question. The best answers made three points, each with a cultural contrast indicating different marriage styles in different cultures. For example, contrasting arranged marriage in Pakistan with love marriage in the UK or contrasting Islamic polygamy with the idea of monogamous marriage in Christian culture. Many responses scored in band 1 because they simply described different types of marriage without any cross-cultural contrast. Some candidates discussed intra-cultural marriage which was not applicable to this question.
- (d) Responses generally showed good knowledge of why not all contemporary families are symmetrical though some included a long and unnecessary explanation of what the term ‘symmetrical’ means. Those students who were clear on the meaning of ‘symmetrical’ gave excellent answers discussing instrumental and expressive roles, dual burden/triple shift, decision making and domestic violence/control. Many candidates supported these ideas within a framework of feminism and functionalism. However, a number of responses demonstrated a lack of understanding of the terms symmetrical or contemporary.
- (e) There were very mixed responses to this question with some very generic and common sense answers about children being special and cared for in families. The more successful responses included explanation and development of several reasons for the emergence of child-centred families, such as legal changes, fewer children, better medical care, compulsory education, consumerism and the perception of children as innocent. Evaluation of the question tended to be stronger and more conceptually developed with candidates discussing Postman and changing technology, the dark-side of the family, poverty, war, Aries, child-labour and the growth in childless families. Overall, this questions was answered well but responses often lacked sociological concepts.

### **Section B**

#### **Question 2**

##### *Education*

- (a) A number of candidates described the term ‘secondary socialisation’ correctly, linking it to learning norms and values after primary socialisation and/or in schools. Where candidates only scored one mark it was usually due to them only giving one correct element of the definition, e.g. only talking about the teaching of norms and values.
- (b) A broad range of answers were acceptable as findings of IQ tests. Most candidates identified the idea that they are a measure of intelligence, that that they can be used to indicate academic potential or to secure places in certain schools. Some alluded to the New Right link between intelligence and ethnicity. A minority of responses focused on exam results rather than IQ tests. Some inferred a link between intelligence and gender which was not creditworthy.

- (c) Functionalist theory was often discussed, often including points about socialisation, social control, role allocation and acquiring knowledge and skills to benefit the workplace. A small number of candidates made excellent reference to Marxist and feminist accounts of the functionality of education for the systems of capitalism and patriarchy. Weaker answers offered common-sense and/or undeveloped points.
- (d) Most candidates identified several reasons for girls performing better than boys in examination results; maturity, role-models, labelling by teachers, different leisure pursuits and boys forming anti-school sub-cultures were the most common ideas seen. Some candidates developed these with reference to the likes of Sharpe, Willis, Mac an Ghaill or McRobbie with accompanying concepts. Weaker responses were more common-sense and less sociological, including ideas of girls being more motivated because they could now attend school and boys being lazy and deviant.
- (e) Many candidates demonstrated a good knowledge of the material barriers faced by some students in education. Most responses were two-sided with the 'for' side of the debate often lacking in concepts but abounding in relevant examples which were duly credited. Common points on this side of the debate focused on a lack of necessary materials such as textbooks, extra tuition or the limitations of state education as opposed to private education. Material factors such as home conditions like cramped housing with a lack of study space also featured. The 'against' side of the argument was often more explicitly sociological with candidates drawing on a good range of explanations such as cultural factors (language, cultural capital and home values), in-school factors (teacher labelling, an ethnocentric curriculum or setting and streaming) or the type of school attended (Rutter). Some candidates offered gender or ethnicity as contributory factors in the case against purely material issues. Many candidates offered a simple, summative conclusion but few developed an effective critical conclusion to their debate.

### Section C

#### Question 3

##### *Crime, Deviance and Social Control*

- (a) Candidates demonstrated knowledge of the term 'judicial system' by linking it to a court system, laws, dealing with crime and punishment. Some confusion was seen as a number of responses talked instead about the police which could not be credited.
- (b) Overall, this question was answered well and candidates appropriately described two internet crimes, most frequently hacking, internet fraud, identity theft and cyberbullying. Some candidates did not make explicit connections to the internet, for instance describing just fraud in general, and so could not gain full marks for development.
- (c) This question on how courts deal with crime drew a mixed response. Many candidates wrote one long, undifferentiated answer instead of separating and signalling separate points and hence often scored in band one. More successful answers were organised as a series of discrete points, often linked to different punishments that the court can give e.g. from fines, community service and drug rehabilitation to different custodial sentences. Other credited approaches included the outlining of different aspects of the court procedure such as the work of lawyers, jury and judges.
- (d) It was evident a large number of candidates did not understand what victim surveys were so were discussing policing and recordings of official statistics or talking about self-report studies – such answers could not be credited. Some candidates did discuss clearly sociological criticisms of victim surveys such as the lack of validity caused by victims not telling the truth due to faulty memory, or the idea that the offender is known to them so they do not wish to speak out of fear of reprisal leading to a dark figure of crime. Other creditworthy points that featured included the idea that the sample size may not be wholly representative of the population (for example children sometimes do not feature) and that the surveys offer little evidence of white-collar or sexual crimes and are thus inadequate.
- (e) Most candidates demonstrated some understanding of the demands of the question, presenting reasons why prisons may prevent crime as well as arguments against this claim. The better answers focused on issues such as public safety, deterrence and/or rehabilitation on the 'for' side, and reoffending rates, crime within prisons and/or crimes that are not prosecuted, e.g. white-collar



crime, as evaluation points. A few candidates argued that other forms of social control were more efficient in preventing crime which were duly credited. Many responses were well balanced but some presented confused and undeveloped/underdeveloped points which could not be fully credited.

### **Section D**

#### **Question 4**

##### *Media*

- (a) The definitional question on postmodernism drew a mixed response from the small number of candidates who selected to answer the media option. Some did not define the term correctly at all but some did describe an emphasis on individual choice and the death of the meta-narrative.
- (b) The majority of candidates did not demonstrate understanding of what news values were, thus very few secured marks. Some candidates interpreted the question incorrectly as asking about who determines the content of the media and so gave answers such as journalists and editors. For those who did understand what 'news values' were the most common responses seen were celebrities and negative press or the reporting of negative news such as disasters and war.
- (c) This question focused on how pluralists view the media. Better answers referred to increasing media diversity, audience choice and competition between media companies as core elements of this perspective. Many responses were limited to band 2 and below as they did not include appropriate knowledge or did not develop points made sufficiently.
- (d) This question on why the hypodermic syringe model has been criticised proved challenging. Some candidates correctly linked the model with Bandura's Bobo Doll experiment but spent too long describing this rather than answering the question. Most answers made the criticism that media effects do not have a direct and immediate effect. The best answers used other media effects theories to identify flaws within the hypodermic syringe model itself. The audience selection model and the uses and gratifications model featured in this way. Responses that scored less well tended to lack full development of points, included an insufficient number of points or did not demonstrate an understanding of what the hypodermic syringe model was.
- (e) Few candidates showed understanding of the demands of the question, to evaluate the extent to which patterns of media use are affected by the gender of the audience. A number of responses misinterpreted the question, discussing differences in gender representation instead which could not be credited. For those candidates who did interpret the question correctly, on the 'for' side of the debate points included males being more likely to be 'gamers' than females, that the choice of programme is often gender-based with females drawn to drama, males to action or that males dominate the decision-making process when it comes to what to watch on tv. On the 'against' side there were some accurate references to the digital divide based on social class as being more important or that today individuals have free choice and are not impacted by their gender in what they choose to consume. However few responses included an unpacking of such points in sufficient detail.