

MARK SCHEME for the November 2005 question paper

9699 SOCIOLOGY

9699/02

Paper 2 (Data Response)

maximum raw mark 50

This mark scheme is published as an aid to teachers and students, to indicate the requirements of the examination. It shows the basis on which Examiners were initially instructed to award marks. It does not indicate the details of the discussions that took place at an Examiners' meeting before marking began. Any substantial changes to the mark scheme that arose from these discussions will be recorded in the published *Report on the Examination*.

All Examiners are instructed that alternative correct answers and unexpected approaches in candidates' scripts must be given marks that fairly reflect the relevant knowledge and skills demonstrated.

Mark schemes must be read in conjunction with the question papers and the *Report on the Examination*.

The minimum marks in these components needed for various grades were previously published with these mark schemes, but are now instead included in the Report on the Examination for this session.

- CIE will not enter into discussion or correspondence in connection with these mark schemes.

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1 A social problem is any condition or form of behaviour that gives rise to concerns about the cohesiveness and stability of society. Delinquency, divorce, unemployment, and industrial conflict, are just some of the phenomena that may be considered social problems. However, it is important to note that what constitutes a social problem in one society may not be regarded as such in another. Alcohol consumption is an example of this. Even within a particular society social problems can be and often are viewed differently. For example, some groups in a society may regard immigration as a problem while others may regard racism as a problem. It is usually the most powerful groups who are able to define what is considered a social problem and what social policies are adopted for dealing with it. Hence, it is important to discover where power lies in order to identify and understand social problems.

(a) What is meant by the term *social policy*? [2]

Social policy may be defined as *objectives formulated or adopted by the government that are directed towards meeting the social needs of the population*. A clear definition along these lines would merit two marks, with one mark for a good but flawed attempt.

(b) Describe two social problems in your society. [4]

Credit any examples of social problems. One mark for each example plus one mark for development (2 x 2 marks).

(c) Explain how some groups may benefit from having the power to define what is considered a social problem. [8]

0-4 A few broadly relevant observations with little or no development might justify 3 or 4 marks. Generally, answers will lack a clear grasp of the question at this level.

5-8 Groups who may benefit from having the power to define what is considered a social problem might include, for example: various professions who achieve and maintain their status and power through their employment relationship with those who are defined as 'problems'; various commercial interests, such as the media; the ruling class through the inclusion of social problems within ideologies that present the rich and powerful as the respectable, reliable stratum of society. A basic account of one or two groups who may benefit from having the power to define social problems would merit 5 or 6 marks. To go higher, the answer would need to be more developed, in terms of detail and/or sharpness of observation.

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- (d) **Assess the view that sociological research should be used to as a basis for solutions to social problems.**

[11]

- 0-4 This is a question about the purposes of sociological research and, more generally, the role of values in sociology. However, at this level answers are likely to show only the most modest understanding of the question.
- 5-8 A rather basic general discussion of different views about the role of values in sociology would deserve 5 or 6 marks. A more sustained discussion along these lines would trigger the top of the band. Answers at this level are likely to be descriptive primarily, and any assessment may well be through the juxtaposition of different perspectives.
- 9-11 Answers will demonstrate a good understanding of the question and develop links with relevant sociological arguments and perspectives. The assessment will be explicit and, at the top of the band, it will be detailed and well informed. A good line of attack on this question would be to contrast those perspectives that favour the use of sociological knowledge as a basis for social engineering versus those (such as Becker and Mills) who argue that the sociologist should side with the underdog. Similarly, much credit should be awarded for answers that question whose interests would be served by using sociological knowledge to find solutions to social problems.

2 Participant observation is a major research strategy in Sociology. It is used to gain a close and detailed understanding of a given area of study through an intensive involvement with people in their natural environment. Laud Humphreys's study of homosexuals in *Tearoom Trade* and William Foote Whyte's study of the gang in *Street Corner Society*, are classic examples. Participant observation may be overt or covert. Supporters of this research strategy argue that it enables the sociologist to achieve a detailed understanding of the subject under study and the data it produces is high in validity. However, critics identify a number of drawbacks with participant observation, not least the many ethical problems that it gives rise to. In general, interactionists favour the use of participant observation as a research strategy, while positivists find many faults with it.

- (a) **Distinguish between *covert* and *overt* participant observation.**

[2]

Two marks if both terms are explained clearly and accurately, and one mark for a worthy effort that perhaps lacks sufficient clarity or is partly flawed in some other respect. No marks if the two terms are confused with each other.

- (b) **Describe two ethical issues associated with covert participant observation.**

[4]

The ethical issues might include, for example, the confidentiality of information gained, lying and deception by the researcher, the impact on the group if they later find out that they have been studied without their permission, and whether or not the researcher should get involved in dubious activities if necessary in order to prevent their cover being blown. One mark for each example plus one mark for development (2 x 2 marks).

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(c) Explain why interactionists favour the use of participant observation as a research strategy.

[8]

0-4 At this level a few general observations about the advantages of participant observation is perhaps all we can expect. There will be few, if any, explicit links to interactionism.

5-8 A basic account of the interactionist perspective with links, possibly implicit, to the reasons for choosing participant observation as a research strategy, would merit 5 or 6 marks. To reach the top of the band, the connections need to be made explicitly.

(d) Using examples, assess the factors that may affect the validity of studies that are based on participant observation.

[11]

0-4 A few basic observations about the meaning of validity and its relationship to participant observation studies may be worth 3 or 4 marks with no further development. Answers at this level are unlikely to use examples appropriately or to identify reasons why the level of validity may be compromised in certain situations that can arise when using participant observation.

5-8 Some relevant factors that may affect the validity of participant observation studies will be identified, though there will be little development and perhaps no use of examples at the lower end of the band. Factors that may affect validity include, for example: the degree to which the researcher is accepted within the group; the length of the study possibly; the extent to which the researcher remains objective (avoids 'going native'); the use of appropriate techniques for recording information; and the skills of the researcher in achieving empathy and understanding with the group under study.

9-11 A range of relevant factors will be identified and a good attempt will be made to assess their impact on the validity of participant observation studies. Examples will be used, probably taken from particular P/O studies. At the top of the band, the assessment will be sustained and well articulated.

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3 There is no agreed measure of the extent of poverty in modern industrial societies. Most people would agree that poverty exists, but judgements about how much there is and why it exists depend on how it is defined and measured. Most definitions of poverty are relative, though an absolute standard may also be used. Using a relative concept of poverty, some sociologists have argued that an ‘underclass’ exists in countries like the USA and the UK. This group consists of people who live on very low incomes, such as the long-term unemployed, single-parent families living on welfare benefits, and elderly pensioners who are entirely dependent on state pensions and benefits. It has also been claimed that some ethnic minorities, such as Hispanic and Afro-Caribbean groups in the USA, are disproportionately represented within the underclass. However, not all sociologists agree that an underclass exists or that it is a helpful concept.

(a) What is meant by the term *absolute poverty*? [2]

Absolute poverty may be defined as *a state of poverty in which a person lacks the minimum needs to keep them alive and healthy*. Two marks for a clear definition along these lines; one mark for an incomplete definition that has some merit.

(b) Describe two examples of relative poverty. [4]

A wide range of possible examples. One mark for each example plus one mark for development (2 x 2 marks).

(c) Explain why the concept of an underclass has been criticised by some sociologists. [8]

0-4 Answers at this level will show only a very limited understanding of the question. Some recognition that the composition of the most disadvantaged stratum of society is too diverse and transient to be deemed a ‘class’, with little or no further development, may be worth 3 or 4 marks.

5-8 A clear explanation covering a few relevant points would merit 5 or 6 marks. A more developed response would reach the top of the band. Criticisms of the concept of an underclass include the following: those commonly identified as the underclass are not in fact a homogeneous group; members of the purported underclass (or many of them) are not detached and isolated from the rest of society; the concept has been used as an umbrella term to attempt to link social problems such as the rise of lone parents, ethnic discrimination, relative poverty and increasing criminality that are in reality only tenuously linked. There are also many criticisms of the idea of a black underclass that could be made relevant to answering this question.

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(d) Assess ‘the culture of poverty’ explanation for the existence of poverty in modern industrial societies.

[11]

- 0-4 An answer based on a few simple points about the culture of poverty thesis is all we might expect at this level. Some general reflections on the causes of poverty, with little or no sociological backing, may also be worth 2 or 3 marks.
- 5-8 A sound descriptive account of Lewis’ thesis would merit 5 or 6 marks. A more developed account and/or one that adds some assessment would reach the top of the band. Any assessment at this level will be pretty basic and may occur by juxtaposing Lewis’ thesis with, say, a Marxist account of the causes of poverty.
- 9-11 Answers at this level will demonstrate a good understanding of the culture of poverty thesis. Other sociological explanations for the existence of poverty may also be discussed and provide the basis for a well-informed assessment of Lewis’ theory. At the top of the band, the assessment will be both explicit and sustained, noting the limitations of cultural explanations and also possibly recognising some strengths although this is not an essential requirement for achieving top marks.