

SOCIOLOGY

GCE Advanced Level and GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

Paper 9699/01

Essay

General comments

Many of the candidates were well prepared and produced a high standard of work for this paper. There were very few examples of answers that demonstrated little or no relevant sociological knowledge. A lot of the responses were heavily descriptive, with extensive references to appropriate studies and research evidence. However, a pleasing number of candidates also demonstrated sound analytical skills by, for example, assessing arguments and evaluating evidence. Analysis of this kind is a prerequisite to achieve marks at the top of the range. Worthy answers that are largely or wholly descriptive tend to gain marks in the middle of the range.

Questions 2 and 3 were the most popular. Answers to **Questions 5 and 6** were generally less well done than answers to the other questions. Knowledge and understanding of issues relating to social stratification was limited in many candidates who attempted the questions in **Section C**. Some candidates penalised themselves by confining their answers to just one part of the question. It is recommended that candidates note all of the key terms in the question and try to respond to each aspect of the question.

The Examiners were pleased to note that candidates were making more references to up-to-date sociological sources and theories. References to post-modernist thinkers in particular added a useful extra dimension to many answers. Candidates also generally demonstrated good essay writing technique, though many would benefit from focusing more directly on the key terms in the question and providing an analytical response that builds to a balanced and well-formulated conclusion.

There were very few cases of rubric error and generally candidates made good use of their time to produce two complete and sustained answers. Some Centres submitted scripts where the sheets of paper were inadequately tied together, and in some cases sheets were in the wrong order. Candidates may be disadvantaged by administrative shortcomings of this kind.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Although not a popular question, the answers were usually sound and in quite a few cases very good. A basic response provided a descriptive account of functionalist and Marxist theories. A better answer assessed the strengths and/or limitations of one or both perspectives with particular references to the concept of social order. Some candidates impressed by considering other sociological theories of how societies cohere, such as those within the feminist and post-modernist perspectives. Attempts to show that social order often results from a mix of consensus and coercion also featured in some of the best answers. References, to the work of Gramsci, for example, often featured in this context.

Question 2

This was the most popular question. Weaker answers were limited to a few observations about the nature of socialisation and the main agencies through which it is transmitted. A better response described the processes involved in socialisation, often drawing on the ideas of sociologists in the interactionist tradition. Good answers also attempted to assess how far human behaviour is influenced by socialisation and reached an overall conclusion. Discussion of the relative merits of psychological, biological and sociological accounts of human behaviour often featured in this regard. Good references were also made to evidence about what may happen to people in the absence of human socialisation for example, the examples of so-called feral children. Cross-cultural variations in norms and values were also often cited as evidence of the importance of socialisation in shaping human behaviour.

Question 3

Some candidates wrongly saw this question as an invitation to write about the strengths and limitations of different research methods. Answers of this kind gained some credit, but not enough to reach the higher bands in the mark scheme. Better answers identified a range of practical and theoretical factors that may influence the choice of research method. At the top of the mark range, answers also included an assessment of the importance of the relevant factors, with most concluding persuasively that theoretical perspective in general has the greatest influence on the type of method the sociologist selects. A few candidates wrongly identified sampling techniques (random, quota, snowball, etc.) as examples of research methods and Centres are encouraged to correct this misunderstanding as it seems to be a perennial problem.

Question 4

Weaker answers identified the main characteristics of official statistics and referred to one or more examples, usually crime and suicide data. However, they made little or no attempt to discuss the strengths and limitations of this source of sociological evidence. A more creditable response focused on the practical strengths and limitations of official statistics, referring to issues such as cost, availability, and relevance to the sociologist's own research topic. Better answers also considered theoretical issues, usually through an account of the interpretivist critique of Durkheim's use of official statistics in studying suicide. Candidates also gained credit for considering the possible sources of bias in official statistics, and some impressed by comparing this with the difficulty sociologists face in achieving objectivity in their own primary research.

Question 5

Candidates often struggled to find an appropriate focus and structure for their answers to this question. Many settled for a rather disparate review of supposed changes in class relations since the nineteenth century, with few references to relevant sociological theories and evidence. Better answers located their discussion within a recognised theoretical debate, such as a critical assessment of Marx's theory of class or the embourgeoisement thesis. The concept of proletarianisation was discussed in some of the more competent responses. Answers at the top of the mark range provided a balanced assessment of the arguments for and against the proposition that class divisions are disappearing in modern industrial societies. In some cases this included useful references to the post-modernist argument that 'consumption' now plays more of a role than 'production' in shaping social identities.

Question 6

There were a lot of fairly weak answers that merely described the social inequality experienced by many minority ethnic groups. Some limited responses also relied solely on assertion, offering a simplistic explanation of social inequality in their own terms. Better answers demonstrated awareness of the part that racism may play in the social deprivation experienced by some minority ethnic groups, and also took account of other possible explanations such as structural constraints within the class system, labour market dynamics, and specific cultural and historical influences. References to appropriate studies and sociological theories featured in answers at the top of the mark range. At this level, candidates also often referred to relevant contrasts in the experiences of different minority ethnic groups and the influence of class and gender on the forms of social inequality encountered.

Paper 9699/02

Data Response

General comments

It was pleasing to note that many of the candidates appeared to have no difficulty coping with the structured data response style of questions. There was a tendency with some, however, to write over-long answers to the shorter questions (parts **(a)** and **(b)**) and thereby leave themselves insufficient time to provide full answers to the longer questions (parts **(c)** and **(d)**). Centres and candidates should note that it is possible to answer the shorter questions quite successfully in just a few lines. There is no point in using valuable examination time in producing answers to parts **(a)** and **(b)** that extend to a full page or more of text.

Overall, candidates demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of the concepts and ideas expressed in the source materials. Most seemed particularly well prepared for **Question 2**. Knowledge of relevant theory was often lacking in answers to questions one and three. Some candidates impressed the Examiners by demonstrating good analytical skills, but many relied too heavily on descriptive material and failed to address the more demanding aspects of the questions.

A few candidates attempted to answer all three questions, and this usually resulted in a rather poor level of response overall. Some failed to delineate their responses to each part of the question so that it was difficult for the Examiners to distinguish where answers started and finished. Centres are therefore requested to remind candidates that they may be disadvantaged by failing to show clearly at the start of each answer the number and letter that denotes the part of the question they are answering.

A new textbook that has been specially prepared for the CIE AS and A Level syllabus will be available from January 2003. Published by Cambridge University Press, *Sociology Explained* is a standard introductory work that also covers key topics from the CIE syllabus that other textbooks tend to neglect. The book has been extensively reviewed and endorsed by the examination team.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) The majority of candidates rightly linked the reference to 'social being' with the concept of socialisation. Poorly expressed answers that nevertheless made this connection gained one mark; two marks were awarded for clear and accurate definitions.
- (b) Some candidates defined what is meant by 'taken-for-granted' assumptions without providing the specified examples. Others gave examples of general norms rather than referring to examples of specific actions or behaviour, and this type of response gained only half marks at best. Good answers described two relevant examples, such as dress codes, table manners, culinary practices, and greetings between people.
- (c) This was well answered overall. Good responses generally featured well-informed references to the work of sociologists in the interactionist tradition, such as G. H. Mead, Cooley and Becker. Weaker answers made a few general points about the role of the family and education in the socialisation process.
- (d) Weaker answers offered a few vague points, mainly based on assertion rather than sociological evidence and reasoning. Slightly better answers provided a descriptive account of differences between the norms relating to men and women respectively. Good answers attempted to explain these differences, either in terms of particular sociological perspectives (feminist, Marxist, functionalist, etc.) or through references to specific studies of gender divisions.

Question 2

- (a) Most candidates defined the term accurately, though there were also some vague answers that referred only to the idea that a hypothesis is a theoretical statement and so gained just one mark.
- (b) Good answers described two research methods e.g. questionnaires, interviews, participant observation, longitudinal studies, content analysis, etc. Weaker answers referred only to the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods or else wrongly identified sampling techniques as examples of research methods. Some candidates also showed a confused understanding of the term social survey. In future, candidates may benefit from paying closer attention to the differences between research methods and sampling techniques, and to the meaning and different types of social survey.
- (c) Good answers identified several features of the hypothetico-deductive methods. Some also gained credit by considering Popper's concept of falsification and/or discussing the fact/value relationship in science. Weaker answers made a few basic observations about positivism in sociology or offered a few reflections on the nature of laboratory experiments in the natural sciences.

- (d) At the lower end of the mark range, answers relied on a few descriptive comments about the value of a scientific approach in sociology. Basic references to the work of Comte and/or Durkheim figured at this level. Better answers offered an accurate account of the positivist versus anti-positivist debate. At the top of the range, the strengths and limitations of the two viewpoints were assessed and a balanced conclusion was offered.

Question 3

- (a) Some candidates wrongly defined the term 'ethnic minority' through reference to features of the underclass. To achieve full marks, candidates were required to define the concept of ethnicity accurately and explain what minority means in relation to the concept.
- (b) Most candidates identified two relevant reasons, though not all went on to describe the reasons in sufficient detail to gain full marks.
- (c) Weaker answers relied on a few commonsense observations about the reasons for the emergence of an underclass. Better answers referred to relevant sociological theories and evidence. Some good responses used the contrast between Murray's welfare dependency explanation and the neo-Marxist theories of structured inequality, to address the issues raised by the question.
- (d) A lot of weak answers merely described the characteristics of the underclass and assumed that all ethnic minorities experience this form of inequality and deprivation. Better answers assessed the issues raised by the question and avoided over-generalising about the socio-economic position of ethnic minorities. Some also gained credit for questioning the coherence and value of the concept of an underclass.

Paper 9699/03

Social Change and Differentiation

General comments

Many Centres had prepared candidates well and this showed in the good range of sociological terms and concepts used. Many candidates demonstrated a good knowledge of sociological research in their answers and much of this was up to date. However it was disappointing to find some candidates attempting to answer questions for which they were ill prepared.

Many candidates seemed unable to find both a question (a) and (b) that they were equally competent to answer. Centres should take care, when preparing candidates, to ensure that candidates have sufficient knowledge to have a wider choice of questions. Candidates should take care, when making a choice of question, to read both the part (a) and (b) before they begin their answer. This way they should ensure they are able to answer both parts before they begin.

Although, for the most part, rubric errors were few some candidates did chose 'illegal' combinations of questions or part questions. For example candidates attempted **Question 1 (a)** then **2 (b)**. One major problem, that many Examiners were disappointed to note, was that many candidates failed to clearly distinguish between parts (a) and (b) of their answers. This did candidates no favours as in the worst cases Examiners were forced to guess where part (b) of an answer began. Candidates should also be advised to make better use of their time as many part (a) answers were longer than those for part (b).

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This was by far the most popular question on the paper and was answered extremely well by many candidates.

- (a) Many candidates were able to give a full and clear definition of a family although there was a tendency towards over reliance on Murdock's definition. Candidates' understanding of the concept of a household was generally weaker than their understanding of the family. Many were unable to distinguish between the two concepts. A common misconception was expressed by one candidate as: 'A household is where a family lives'. At worst candidates confused the concept of household with housework or house.
- (b) Candidates demonstrated a good knowledge of the work of Murdock and the concept of a nuclear family. Many were able to offer criticisms of his theory that the nuclear family was universal. Candidates generally offered a range of evidence from anthropological studies although fewer candidates offered evidence from contemporary societies. Some candidates carelessly argued about the universality of the family rather than the nuclear family.

Question 2

This was not such a popular question with candidates.

- (a) Many candidates found difficulty with the concept of conjugal relationships, rather than discussing concepts like 'joint' and 'segregated' roles many candidates simply described different family types.
- (b) Candidates generally did better on this part of the question showing awareness of the feminist perspective on this issue and its key thinkers.

Section B

Question 3

A popular question with candidates.

- (a) Although many candidates had a clear understanding of this concept, some confused a self-fulfilling prophecy with ideas of personal fulfilment. Other candidates just gave very vague descriptions of labelling theory which did not take account of the individual actor's response.
- (b) Good answers to this question really relied on a clear understanding of the concept of patriarchy. Unfortunately some candidates misinterpreted this as 'practical'. Many candidates misapplied their knowledge by simply producing a list of why girls failed.

Question 4

This was the most popular question on education.

- (a) Although many candidates had the vaguest idea that meritocracy involved merit, many got little further than this. Certainly many candidates did not recognise that meritocracy also requires equality of opportunity. Many went on to evaluate the concept but as this was not required of them this was poor use of their time.
- (b) There were some very good answers to this question although some candidates confused social mobility with geographical mobility. Many related how education could result in success but did not relate this to mobility, conversely, others discussed social mobility but failed to relate this to education.

Section C

Question 5

Few candidates attempted this question in **Section C**.

- (a) This question was not generally well answered. At best candidates were able to offer a definition of both a sect and a denomination but were unable to explain why one might become the other. Candidates needed more than this to describe the process of change.

- (b) Good answers to this question really relied on a clear understanding of the concept of marginalisation. Without this candidates were unable to score highly and many simply produced accounts of the Marxist perspective on religion or descriptions of sects.

Question 6

This was an extremely popular question and generally answered well by candidates.

- (a) Candidates generally were able to offer an account of the Functionalist and Marxist views of the role of religion. Some candidates used Marx and Weber which was equally valid. However some candidates offered two functionalist theorists which was not two distinct explanations.
- (b) There were some excellent answers to this question. Candidates showed awareness of secularisation in answering this question and also other terms like disengagement and individuation, which they were able to use appropriately to answer the question.

Section D

Question 7

Many candidates attempted this question but had insufficient knowledge to do part (b) well.

- (a) Many candidates were able to offer clear definitions of crime and deviance but often they then failed to consider the relative nature of these concepts.
- (b) This question was not answered well, as only a few candidates attempting this question had even sufficient knowledge of Durkheim's work to attempt an answer. For the most part candidates described why people kill themselves.

Question 8

This was the most popular question of Crime and Deviance.

- (a) Although many candidates knew why crime statistics could be inaccurate, few actually addressed the issue of the activities of the Law Enforcement Agencies in answering this question. When they did, this was generally limited to the police.
- (b) There were some very good answers to this question. Candidates not only showed awareness of the major explanations of why young working class males commit crime but also an understanding that this was not the complete picture and that other sections of society have tended to be ignored both in general and by sociological researches. Unfortunately, there was an over reliance by some candidates on the work of physiological theorists like Lombroso.

Section E

Question 9

This was an extremely unpopular question with candidates. Examiners reported either no examples or too few to comment on.

- (a) Too few examples to comment on.
- (b) Too few examples to comment on.

Question 10

There were very few answers to this question.

- (a) Many candidates were familiar with the concept of alienation as it is applied to work and gave examples of assembly line workers turning to sabotage because of alienation; however, there were few answers which used alienation in the every day sense of being estranged or divorced from the world.

- (b) This question was generally not well done. At best candidates were able to discuss corporate practices where companies made an effort to give their employees job satisfaction. At worst there were general discussions of why people hate work.

Section F

Question 11

This was not a popular question with candidates.

- (a) Generally candidates who attempted to answer this question did have some notion of the role of gatekeepers and agenda setters.
- (b) Candidates tended to agree with the question and illustrate how this was the case. There were some better answers that compared the Marxist and Pluralist approaches to this issue.

Question 12

Again this was not a popular question with candidates.

- (a) There were not many good answers. Generally candidates answering this question had not the slightest idea of what deviance amplification was.
- (b) Many candidates unfortunately misinterpreted this question and wrote about role models presented by the media rather than stereotypes.