



UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL EXAMINATIONS  
General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary Level and Advanced Level

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**SOCIOLOGY**

**9699/23**

Paper 2 Principles and Methods 2

**May/June 2011**

**1 hour 30 minutes**

Candidates answer on the Question Paper.

No additional materials are required.

**READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST**

DO **NOT** WRITE IN ANY BARCODES.

Write your Centre number, candidate number and name on all the work you hand in.

Write in dark blue or black pen.

You may use a soft pencil for any diagrams, graphs or rough working.

Do not use staples, paper clips, highlighters, glue or correction fluid.

Answer **two** questions.

You may not need all the answer lines for your answer.

The number of marks is given in brackets [ ] at the end of each question or part question.

This document consists of **13** printed pages and **3** blank pages.



Answer **two** questions.

For  
Examiner's  
Use

- 1 Positivists believe that the best way to study society is through adopting the methods and procedures of the natural sciences. They believe that by taking a scientific approach it is possible to identify patterns in human behaviour that are similar to the laws of the universe studied by natural scientists. For the positivist, the aim of research is to gather data that may be used to confirm or deny a hypothesis. This involves testing theoretical statements against evidence that is gathered by the most logical method in an objective manner and interpreted in an impartial way. Positivists believe that it is possible for sociologists to study society without the research findings being influenced by *value judgements*.

Interpretivists have questioned whether it is appropriate to study society using the methods and procedures of the natural sciences. They have also challenged the notion that value freedom is possible when studying society, or even whether it is desirable. Interpretivists prefer methods of research that enable the sociologist to enter the lives of the people they are studying and develop an in-depth understanding of how they interpret and negotiate their social relationships.

- (a) What is meant by the term *value judgements*?

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..... [2]

- (b) Describe **two** methods of sociological research favoured by positivists.

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2 Interviewing is a popular technique used by sociologists to gather data. Positivists prefer to use structured interviews. With this type of interview, a carefully worded set of questions is chosen and each respondent is asked the same questions in the same order. The researchers try to standardise their interview technique so that they behave in exactly the same way with each respondent. The purpose of all this care is to make sure that nothing 'irrelevant' in the wording of the questions or the performance of the interviewer will influence the answers. In this way it is hoped that the data collected will be free from any *researcher bias*.

Interpretivists prefer to use unstructured interviews. With this approach, the interview resembles more an informal conversation between the researcher and the respondent. It allows scope for the respondent to expand on the answers given and the researcher can vary the questions that are asked in order to explore their research topic in a more flexible way. Unstructured interviews are thought to be high in validity but low in reliability.

(a) What is meant by the term *researcher bias*?

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(b) Describe **two** reasons why it may be difficult for a researcher to avoid influencing the answers when carrying out interviews.

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3 There are many different views in sociology about how poverty should be defined and measured. Most definitions of poverty are relative, though an absolute standard may also be used. Marx wrote about the immiseration of the working class. By this he meant that, under capitalism, the wages paid to manual workers would gradually fall to a level where working class families were living at, or close to, absolute poverty. However, it can be argued that most sections of the working class in modern industrial societies have remained free from absolute poverty in the years since Marx was writing and that relative poverty has been by far the greater problem.

Using the concept of relative poverty, some sociologists have argued that an 'underclass' exists in modern industrial societies. In this view, the underclass refers to groups of people who live on very low incomes, such as the long-term unemployed, single-parent families living on welfare benefits, and some of the elderly population. It has also been claimed that certain ethnic minorities, such as Hispanic and African-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 when studying the nature and extent of poverty in modern industrial societies.

(a) What is meant by the term *relative poverty*?

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(b) Describe **two** factors that influence the level of poverty in a society.

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