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SOCIOLOGY

Paper 0495/01

Paper 1

General comments

It is pleasing to report that the quality of response to this Paper was very high overall. Many candidates demonstrated a level of knowledge and understanding in excess of that required for success at IGCSE and, on this basis, would have been well prepared for the AS examination in Sociology. There were fewer examples this year of candidates attempting to answer the questions through references to their own commonsense, knowledge and understanding as opposed to relying on recognised sociological sources. This helped to raise the standard of performance, particularly at the lower end of the mark scale.

Congratulations to candidates and Centres for such excellent work overall. The Examiners were very gratified to see so much evidence of well-focused endeavour and academic achievement.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) Most candidates rightly identified 'socialisation' as the relevant answer. Some candidates wasted time by providing detailed accounts of what socialisation involves. The question did not require an extended answer and candidates should be reminded that a short answer only is required for questions that carry just two marks.
- (b) Weaker answers relied on descriptive accounts of the mechanisms of socialisation. Better answers highlighted the importance of interaction specifically and often included references to the work of G.H. Mead and other social theorists in the interactionist tradition.
- (c) Good answers were characterised by references to a range of mechanisms for achieving social control. Some candidates also made good use of the distinction between formal and informal social control.
- (d) Candidates gained credit for recognising that socialisation extends beyond childhood and is put into effect through a range of mechanisms that impact on every stage of a person's life. The best answers explained why social learning is an ongoing process, often supported by useful references to the importance of interaction in understanding and negotiating social situations.

Question 2

- (a) Most candidates understood the distinction between absolute and relative poverty very well. Weaker answers often relied solely on examples of the two types of poverty rather than providing appropriate definitions.
- (b) Well answered overall, with candidates mentioning relevant factors such as the existence of state welfare provision and the relative affluence of modern industrial societies.
- (c) Most candidates were able to identify several relevant groups, though weaker answers were list-like rather than providing a brief description of each group.
- (d) Weaker answers mentioned just one or two factors, with little expansion or illustration. Better answers explored several factors, often including links to relevant theories from the Marxist and functionalist perspectives.

Question 3

- (a) Some answers failed to gain marks because they repeated the term 'discrimination' rather than defining it. An example of this type of answer would be: 'discrimination is where weaker groups are discriminated against by more powerful groups'.
- (b) Good answers considered a range of evidence about the ways women are discriminated against in paid employment. Some candidates particularly impressed the Examiners by distinguishing between the discrimination experienced by different groups of women e.g. working class/middle class, young/old, different ethnic groups, etc.
- (c) Some answers failed to mention more than one relevant reason. Better responses identified a range and some included references to relevant theories such as the 'dual labour market' and 'the reserve army of labour'.
- (d) Weaker answers were often list-like. Better answers explained and/or justified each recommended course of action.

Question 4

- (a) Most candidates were able to define this term accurately.
- (b) Some candidates wrongly identified the symmetrical family as an alternative to the nuclear family structure. However, most were able to describe two acceptable alternatives.
- (c) Well-answered overall, though again weaker answers tended to be rather too concise and list-like.
- (d) Weaker answers merely listed a few reasons why the nuclear family supposedly is in decline in modern industrial societies. Better answers responded to the question directly by discussing to what extent decline is evident.

Question 5

- (a) Most candidates demonstrated some understanding of the term, though often it was too limited or poorly articulated to justify both marks.
- (b) Answers to this question were often rather short and relied on references to representation through elected politicians and governments. Other forms of representation, such as through pressure groups and the legal process, were often overlooked.
- (c) There were some rather simple and undeveloped answers to this question. Better answers often referred to different perspectives of democracy, such as the pluralist, Marxist and elite theories.
- (d) There were some very well thought through answers to this question. Points covered included: the reluctance of the more affluent majority to bear higher taxes to pay for welfare measures; the lack of economic and technical resources available to governments; the capitalist economic system and the benefits it derives from the existence of a low paid and economically insecure workforce; and bureaucratic inefficiency in distributing welfare benefits to the poor.

Paper 0495/02

Paper 2

General comments

The scripts were of a similar quality to last year, with many candidates sustaining a high standard of response across the question range. Weaker answers were again characterised by failure to develop points rather than by lack of basic knowledge. Answers that were short often demonstrated some understanding of the question, but failed to explain or illustrate their response with sufficient accuracy or detail to justify full marks.

There were no common rubric errors and no evidence that candidates made inappropriate use of their time or struggled to answer all of the questions within the time available.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Most candidates rightly identified Kenya and Brazil, though a few cited one of these countries only for just one mark.

Question 2

Most candidates rightly noted that gender inequality refers to the unequal treatment of males and females in society. Some answered by giving examples rather than a definition and so they received no marks.

Question 3

Most candidates were able to identify two appropriate reasons, e.g. governments may deliberately distort information and methods of collecting the data may vary between countries. However, in some cases, the reasons given were poorly explained and so less than full marks were awarded.

Question 4

A few candidates confused the two terms, but most gained full marks by providing a clear and accurate response.

Question 5

Weaker answers were often list-like, relying on a short phrase or single words to convey the advantages or disadvantages identified. Better answers supported each point with appropriate development and exemplification.

Question 6

While most candidates demonstrated some understanding of this term, it clearly confused others. A few candidates referred to passing the examinations required to obtain a license to fly an aeroplane. Others wrongly assumed that a pilot study is undertaken after a research project has been completed in order to check the accuracy of the main study.

Question 7

This question was mostly well answered, though again some candidates compounded their misunderstanding of what a pilot study involves. Others had identified relevant points, but then struggled to express themselves with sufficient clarity to achieve full marks.

Question 8

This proved a quite demanding question, though again the high standard of many of the candidates shone through and there were some highly creditable responses that demonstrated a good understanding of the importance of a representative sample in sociological research. Weaker answers were characterised by a focus on the reasons why some employers might refuse to take part in the study rather than examining the implications of this for the reliability and validity of the study findings.

Question 9

Weaker answers were poorly developed or else identified causes of bias that had only a tenuous relationship at best to the use of the interview method. Good answers described three possible sources of bias linked directly to interviewing.

Paper 0495/04
Alternative to Coursework

General comments

Candidates demonstrated a good level of knowledge and understanding of the key concepts for this Paper, though some were confused about the meaning of 'ethical issues' for **Question 4**. Answers to **Question 6** once again proved the main discriminator, with the responses from some candidates being disappointingly short and/or poorly linked to the source material. The sources are intended to assist the candidates in addressing the demands of each question and should be studied carefully before writing the answers.

There were no common rubric errors and no evidence that candidates made inappropriate use of their time or struggled to answer all of the questions within the time available.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Most candidates achieved full marks by defining each term with accuracy.

Question 2

Most candidates achieved at least two or three marks for this question. Some required a little more development or clarity in expressing their points in order to merit full marks. The ready availability and low cost of secondary data were the main advantages cited. Disadvantages often mentioned included the possibility that the data may be out-of-date, the difficulty in adapting the material for sociological purposes, and the potential for lack of objectivity in sources such as diaries and newspaper reports.

Question 3

The responses to this question were rather mixed. Some candidates wrote tangential answers about the reasons why white-collar crimes are rarely reported/detected. Better responses focused on relevant points such as the difficulty of gaining access to people who may be committing highly secretive crimes, often within closed institutions. Careful study of sources A and B, in particular, might have helped stimulate the right thought processes for answering this question.

Question 4

A few candidates confused the term 'ethical issues' with 'ethnic relations issues'. Other inappropriate responses discussed the practical problems faced by the researcher in hiding his or her identity when carrying covert participant observation studies.

Question 5

Weaker answers were poorly developed or else identified causes of bias that had only a tenuous relationship at best to the use of participant observation. Good answers described four possible sources of bias or inaccuracy linked directly to ethnographic studies.

Question 6

Good answers, of which there were many, addressed each of the four requirements of the question systematically and in detail. They also developed their points through frequent references to the particular subject of the research, which was a study of the links between poverty and crime in the candidate's society. Weaker answers were shorter and offered only partial coverage of the various stages in planning and implementing a research project. References to the context of the research were infrequent or non-existent.