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SOCIOLOGY

Paper 0495/01

Paper 1

General comments

The overall standard of the scripts was similar to previous years. The questions on education and the family were the most popular, and they were answered well by the majority of candidates who attempted them. Answers to the other questions were of more variable quality. A few candidates continue to provide list-like answers to the questions. This approach limits the number of marks that can be awarded because simple bullet points inevitably lack the necessary development and depth to constitute a full answer. Examiners emphasise again, therefore, that to gain high marks for this Paper answers must be written in sustained prose.

There were no rubric errors and the candidates appeared to have no difficulty answering three questions in the time available.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) Most of the candidates rightly referred to a household unit consisting of spouses and their dependent children.
- (b) The extended and single parent family types were the examples most frequently described.
- (c) Weaker answers identified just one or two relevant points, with limited development. Better answers covered a range of relevant points, sometimes with well-chosen references to studies and examples.
- (d) A lot of answers merely reiterated the functionalist account of the functions of the family and concluded that most of these functions are still performed by the family today. Better answers provided an assessment of the issues that was balanced and recognised that there are different views about the importance of family life today.

Question 2

- (a) The term was defined accurately by most candidates.
- (b) Well-answered overall, with useful references to both cultural and material factors linked to home background. Weaker answers were limited to just a few common sense observations.
- (c) Many of the answers relied on references to labelling and they generally achieved at least half of the marks available. The best answers often combined references to labelling with other school factors such as peer group influence, quality of teaching and type of school and teaching resources available.
- (d) Good answers described a range of possible initiatives and made a plausible case for each one.

Question 3

- (a) Some answers contained a lot of preamble without identifying clearly any relevant reasons why people work in industrialised societies.
- (b) This question elicited some good answers, with useful references to the distinction between ascribed and achieved status and the relationship between work and home and social life.

- (c) Some candidates made good use of the concept of alienation in responding to this question. Many also noted that the answer depended to some extent on the type of work under consideration.
- (d) Some candidates impressed the Examiners by referring to Parker's distinction between extensive opposition and neutral patterns of work/leisure relationship. Weaker answers were confined to a few elementary points about the relationship between income and leisure activities.

Question 4

- (a) Most candidates gained high marks by identifying a range of relevant points.
- (b) Weak answers were limited to a few general observations about policing with little direct relevance to the question. Better answers focused on the way that decisions about the extent and distribution of police resources may affect the types of crimes and offenders that appear before the courts.
- (c) Weak answers were often characterised by simplistic observations such as 'boys are braver than girls' and 'men are more aggressive and violent than women'. Better answers referred to relevant differences in gender socialisation and differences in methods/forms of social control applied to males and females respectively.
- (d) Candidates who wrote about victim studies and self-report studies as the main alternatives to official statistics gained high marks for this question.

Question 5

- (a) Most candidates who attempted this question recognised that a social elite is a privileged, high status group in society.
- (b) Good answers considered the concepts of self-recruitment and social closure, with useful references to appropriate examples such as the British public school system.
- (c) Weak answers focused on just one or two methods, such as threats of violence and other repressive means. Better answers recognised that a range of methods may be used that goes beyond the crudely repressive to include, for example, deployment of ideological and economic forces.
- (d) Good answers referred to points such as exploitation of internal divisions within elite groups, revolution, war, and socio-economic changes undermining the power of the dominant groups.

Paper 0495/02

Paper 2

General comments

The candidates demonstrated similar strengths and weaknesses to previous years. Most showed a good understanding of the sociological research process and the factors that may affect validity and reliability. However, many were let down by a limited knowledge of the terms 'case studies' and 'documentary evidence'. Accordingly, there were only a few scripts that achieved high marks for all of the questions. Some candidates were also handicapped by difficulty in expressing their points accurately. In such cases the candidate often appears to have some relevant knowledge to offer, but lacks the means of communicating it in a creditable form. More practice in writing clear and accurate answers may help candidates avoid this problem in future.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Both parts of the question were answered correctly by virtually all of the candidates.

Question 2

Only about half of the candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of a case study. Some confused it with participant observation and/or longitudinal studies. Others recognised vaguely that it is a study of a particular example, but failed to add that the purpose of it is to learn about other members of the research population.

Question 3

Good answers identified relevant advantages and developed each point with a suitable explanation. Weaker answers were often limited to simple statements such as 'get more detailed evidence' or 'may be cheaper', and this type of response could achieve no more than half of the marks available.

Question 4

Most candidates were able to identify a few relevant reasons, such as unrepresentative sample and researcher/subject bias. To gain high marks, however, it was necessary to explain and/or develop the reasons given, and only a minority of candidates were able to satisfy that requirement.

Question 5

Some candidates rightly noted that documentary evidence refers to the systematic study of written materials that already exist in order to gather evidence related to the topic of the research. There were many other answers though that were either irrelevant or incomplete. Some candidates merely gave examples of documentary evidence, such as historical records, diaries, and newspaper reports. Others confused documentary evidence with the notes that a researcher may write in the course of interviewing respondents or engaging in a participant observation study.

Question 6

The answers were often poorly related to the strengths and weaknesses of documentary evidence, and so only a few candidates gained full marks for this question.

Question 7

Weaker answers tended to focus on just one issue, such as the limitations of the sample size or the nature of the evidence (a selected sample from a diary). Better answers identified a number of relevant issues and discussed each in reasonable detail.

Question 8

Most candidates were able to identify three sources of bias accurately.

Question 9

Most candidates identified some relevant evidence. In the better answers the range of sources and types of evidence were greater and more carefully explained.

General comments

It is pleasing to report that once again the candidates for this Paper demonstrated good understanding of research methods and their uses. There were several examples of virtually faultless scripts and many more that came close to reaching that standard. As in previous years, the main discriminator was **Question 6**. Some answers to this question were too short and compacted to merit high marks and this contrasted sharply with other answers that were extremely detailed and thorough.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Most candidates demonstrated at least basic knowledge of the terms 'participant observation' and 'secondary evidence'. Many were able to define each term with sufficient clarity and accuracy to gain full marks.

Question 2

Most answers gained full marks by identifying two advantages and disadvantages of participant observation.

Question 3

Many of the candidates identified three appropriate reasons for using secondary evidence in sociological research. Some answers though repeated the same points in different ways and so failed to gain full marks.

Question 4

Good answers referred to reasons such as problems of confidentiality, people lack the time or do not want to be studied, and the sensitivity of the issues. Most candidates identified at least one or two relevant reasons.

Question 5

The points made were sometimes too vague or speculative to be credited. Repetition of points was a further weakness with some answers. Only a few candidates were able to discuss four problems accurately.

Question 6

About half of the answers were detailed and thorough. The others were generally too brief to merit more than half marks at best. Good answers identified several sources of information and offered reasons for their selection. They also provided an accurate description of research methods that were linked directly to the aims of the investigation. Weaker answers offered little or no justification for their choice of evidence and research methods. Moreover, the research strategy developed had few, if any, links with the specific subject of investigation.