



General Certificate of Education

Sociology 5191

**SCY1 Families and Households; Health;
Mass Media**

Report on the Examination

2007 examination - June series

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SCY1

General

This summer's papers produced the expected wide range of responses in terms of both quality and variety of approach to many of the questions. Many candidates produced work of an extraordinarily impressive standard, well above that required for an 'A' grade, showing thorough preparation and a sound grasp of sociological findings, methods and debates.

At the other extreme, a small minority of candidates were very badly prepared. In some cases, this was obviously due to lack of effort or ability on their part. In others, however, all the candidates from a given centre showed serious misunderstanding of the demands of certain questions or an inability to respond with suitable sociological material. This indicates that some parts of the specification are not being taught satisfactorily. Fortunately, however, this was the exception rather than the rule.

More widespread was the persistent tendency of many candidates to write too much in answer to the shorter questions, both at AS and at A2. In essays, very many candidates failed to respond to all the elements in the question, instead picking out and writing about only one. This is clearly related to a tendency to produce prepared answers and not to make or follow a plan that addresses the set question.

As in previous examinations, some candidates produced scripts that were all but illegible. While examiners always do their best to decipher and mark these scripts fairly, centres are doing such candidates a disservice if they fail to avail themselves of the options for presenting such work in other formats, such as by means of an amanuensis or use of a word processor.

Question 1: Families and Households

The great majority of candidates attempted this question.

- (a) A substantial number of candidates did not know the meaning of the concept. Others were able to explain 'ascribed' (for example as 'born into') but did not explain 'status' (for example in terms of 'a social position'). It should be noted that where both terms in a pair are placed inside inverted commas, then both need to be explained in order to gain the two marks.
- (b) Although this was generally answered quite well, some candidates mistook the word 'flourished' to mean 'declined' or thought that the question was about extended families becoming nuclear. Others failed to score because they focused on pre-industrial rather than early industrial conditions, eg with ideas about gathering in the harvest together. Correct answers generally included ideas about sharing finance/rent, providing childcare, helping to find jobs for kin, or high adult death rates producing many orphans.
- (c) Most candidates had no difficulty with this. Features commonly cited included that it is nuclear; couples sharing domestic labour, childcare and leisure; both partners working and home-centredness.
- (d) Appropriate reasons identified included the introduction of compulsory education, child protection laws and the fall in the infant mortality rate or birth rate. Most candidates were able to explain these satisfactorily. However, a significant number made general

descriptive points about changes to childhood that have taken place without citing any reasons for the changes. Some candidates had little idea of when industrialisation might have taken place; for example, some described the effect of the invention of the printing press, supposing it to have occurred since industrialisation.

- (e) Almost all candidates were able to provide some relevant points for this question. Most were able to identify several types of households/families. Weaker answers tended to be thin and descriptive accounts of family types with little consideration of reasons. Some strayed outside the forty-year time frame of the question, eg into the history of divorce legislation. Some otherwise quite good answers examined the reasons in some detail but failed to connect these to any specific family types. Better answers included a greater variety of types; a clear focus on reasons for increasing diversity and a thorough discussion of them, rather than simply a descriptive account of types and effects; more development of the reasons identified, and greater use of theory and concepts. Among the reasons commonly offered were secularisation and changes in the law, eg on divorce, civil partnerships, sex equality, etc; in social attitudes, eg to births outside marriage; in expectations, eg of marriage, etc. Theoretical frameworks, where offered, generally drew on the New Right, feminism, and/or versions of post-modernism or late modernism, eg Giddens.
- (f) The weakest answers tended to recycle material from Item 1B, though without adding much to it. Rather better were answers that showed a genuine knowledge of some functionalist material on the family, such as Parsons' functional fit thesis. However, many of these tended to be descriptive and lacking in both conceptual detail, eg on social and geographical mobility, ascribed and achieved status, etc, and evaluation. Others were able to present a number of alternative views – usually Marxist and/or feminist, though some drew on Laing or Leach – without, however, generating an explicit evaluative discussion. Rather, theories were juxtaposed, leaving the examiner to identify the points of debate. The best answers were distinguished by their grasp of a range of functionalist contributions to different aspects of the family, and by their ability to interpret and use empirical and theoretical material from elsewhere appropriately to arrive at a balanced evaluative conclusion.

Question 2: Health

This was the least popular question on the paper.

- (a) There was a clear variation between centres in terms of whether or not candidates were familiar with this term. Correct answers generally included the idea that the medical profession now controlled areas of life previously controlled by other institutions such as religion. Some scored one mark for a suitable example (usually connected with childbirth) without an explanation or definition of the term.
- (b) Most candidates had no difficulty with this, suggesting differences in smoking, diet, exercise, etc. However, a few failed to score because they referred not to cultural but to structural factors such as housing or jobs.
- (c) Most candidates were able to offer three appropriate changes, such as improved working conditions, housing or sanitation. However, a few ignored the wording of the question and included improved medical knowledge or practice as a reason.

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- (d) There were some good responses to this question. The most popular was to identify the idea that medicine may keep the workforce fit for work, explaining this from a Marxist perspective in terms of exploitation or surplus value. Other responses included policing the sick role, the idea that medicine was a source of capitalist profits, or that it performed an ideological function in making capitalism appear to care for the workforce. However, not all candidates were able to give explanations of both parts of their answer.
- (e) Weaker responses tended to focus mainly on one or two aspects of health chances (such as illnesses associated with men and women). Better answers focused more appropriately on health care. Of these, some restricted themselves to a comparison of, say, the middle class and working class. Others offered broader coverage by considering gender and/or ethnic (or occasionally age or regional) differences too. In addition to differences in breadth, answers could be distinguished in terms of depth of discussion and conceptual detail. The best answers introduced and applied a range of relevant concepts, such as the inverse care law, patriarchy or institutional racism in the health service, etc, supported by empirical material from studies. A few considered access to different types of care, eg preventative versus curative.
- (f) Many candidates showed little knowledge of sociological material on mental illness beyond what was offered in Item 2B and, in general, the range of studies and theories used was narrow. A depressing number of candidates – and not always the weakest ones – wrote about people who were ‘mental’ (while also sometimes condemning the stigma attached to mental illness). Many candidates conflated the labelling approach within sociology with the labelling process carried out by psychiatrists and others and its effects on patients (and a few of these became sidetracked into discussing its effects in education). This conflation often meant that evaluation of the concept or approach was confused, and sometimes confined simply to the idea that it was unfair to label people. In general, candidates struggled to analyse or evaluate the material. Alternative viewpoints, such as positivist or structural approaches, and criticisms, such as determinism, were largely absent and, where present, usually undeveloped. However, some answers used a range of appropriate material, eg on gender and ethnicity in relation to labelling of the mentally ill.

Question 3: Mass Media

This was the second most popular question on the paper.

- (a) Many candidates were able to convey the notion of hierarchy but without a notion that it was ‘sources’ that were credible or acceptable to the media. Some wrongly thought the concept referred to the credibility of stories rather than sources.
- (b) Some candidates failed to score because they suggested various news values (excluded by the wording of the question and the contents of Item 3A), but most scored for suggesting factors such as cost, time, space, owners’ or journalists’ ideologies, etc. Some weaker answers were unable to distinguish between the requirements for this question and those for 3 (c).
- (c) This was generally the best answered of the short questions. Answers included news values such as: elite persons; human interest; meaningfulness; negativity and immediacy. However, it appeared that some centres had not covered the concept of news values.
- (d) As in previous examinations, some candidates did not identify criticisms of Marxist views of the media, but rather, Marxist criticisms of the media. Those who responded appropriately

often identified criticisms such as: audiences are active, or are not dupes; owners cannot have direct control; the variety of media available. Some explanations of these and other criticisms suffered from being poorly expressed or presented. In other cases, the two identified criticisms were too close in substance to one another to score twice.

- (e) Answers to this question were often disappointing, with a general lack of empirical material from sociological studies of media representations. Many candidates instead fell back on anecdotal accounts in which various television programmes, teen magazines or news items were the only evidence cited. Similarly, in terms of deployment of sociological concepts, many candidates failed to move beyond a basic notion of stereotyping or under-representation. Wider theory was largely absent. Of the different categories in the question, ethnicity was the most popular and generally the best handled option. Despite the fact that gender was not one of the categories in the question, some candidates nonetheless chose to write prepared but irrelevant answers about it. Most candidates considered two groups, but a few covered three or four, with the predictable consequence that only the best two of these were able to score marks. Disability was often poorly handled, relying on very general material. With age, the focus on youth was often quite successful, but other age groups were dealt with cursorily. Better answers were able to present a range of studies and discussed change and diversity in representations.
- (f) Most answers showed knowledge of potentially relevant material on various models of media/audience relationships. However, weaker answers commonly confused, described inaccurately, or simply named models without any explanation of them. All but the best answers tended to recount a catalogue of such models rather than to use this material to address the question explicitly. For some, the issue of 'social groups' was often at best an afterthought towards the end of their answer, while others focused on groups of media professionals rather than audiences. However, many reasonably good answers did succeed in focusing to some degree on audiences' interpretations of media messages. The most successful answers applied a sound, conceptually detailed knowledge of media/audience models to the specific issues raised by the question. These included discussion of opinion leaders, peer groups, class location, individual needs, media literacy levels, media-saturated society, hegemony, ideology, etc.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.