



General Certificate of Education

Sociology 5191

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

Report on the Examination

2008 examination - June series

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SCY1

General

There was evidence that some centres had not covered significant aspects of the specification adequately. This was most apparent in answers to Questions 1(e) on childhood, 2(e) on mental illness and 3(e) on media representations. These are important elements of the respective areas of study within this module and it is disappointing to see so many candidates ill-prepared to tackle questions on them, more especially as these are all topics on which questions have appeared in previous papers.

Among those candidates who had covered the topics on which the questions were set, knowledge of empirical material was sometimes dated. This was most notable in answer to Question 1(f), where research by the likes of Oakley and Young and Willmott was dealt with as if these were studies of conjugal relationships today.

Familiar problems and patterns recurred in responses to this paper. Most notably, on all three questions, too many candidates wrote excessively long answers to parts (c) and (d), while, in response to part (f), too few made appropriate use of material from the Items or displayed well-developed skills of evaluation.

At the other extreme, many candidates were able to allocate their time and efforts appropriately in response to the mark-value of each part of the question, and to show an up-to-date knowledge of sociological research, as well as explicit evaluation and analysis of relevant issues, to draw an appropriate conclusion.

Question 1: Family and Households

This was by far the most popular question on the paper.

- (a) Most candidates offered acceptable answers and scored both marks, sometimes for 'stepfamily', but others required lengthy accounts in order to make their point. A few scored only one mark, usually for omitting reference to children in their explanation (eg focusing on divorce and re-marriage).
- (b) This was generally well answered, with only a minority lapsing into biologicistic responses such as 'maternal instincts' or 'women are natural carers' as a reason. The most popular acceptable answers were courts giving custody to mothers and paternal abandonment (or 'one-night stands').
- (c) This was answered less well. The commonest fault was to present potentially relevant points inappropriately. For example, some candidates failed to score for suggesting that cohabitation as an *alternative* to marriage was responsible for later marriage. By contrast, those who stated that it was increasingly a *precursor* to marriage (or a trial marriage) gained the marks. Other acceptable reasons included the increasing desire to establish a career first, or higher education resulting in postponement of marriage. Oddly, a minority of candidates gave reasons why couples were marrying *earlier*; these failed to score.

- (d) This was mainly answered well, with many candidates gaining full marks for identifying and then explaining reasons, such as reduced stigma attaching to divorce, secularisation, women's greater financial independence or rising expectations of marriage. Others were better able to identify such reasons (often giving several) than to explain them. Most avoided the pitfall of referring to changes in the law, which was proscribed by the question.
- (e) A significant number of candidates seemed ill-prepared for this question, with whole centres producing answers on, for example, family structure and industrialisation that had only minimal links to changes in the status of children. Among candidates who had evidently studied the topic, there was still a tendency to write descriptive answers that lacked adequate focus on reasons or on the period since industrialisation (in many cases, because they had little notion of when industrialisation had taken place, whether in the UK or elsewhere). Better answers were able to identify and elaborate upon a range of reasons, including changes in the law (on compulsory schooling, child labour, child protection, etc), the decline in infant mortality and family size, the rise of the child-centred family or society, children as consumers, children as an economic liability, the role of the media, etc. Good answers put these into a conceptual or theoretical framework, usually centred on the notion of social construction of childhood or on the debate between child liberationism and 'march of progress' views. A few raised the possibility of a current or future 're-construction' of childhood in postmodern society.
- (f) Somewhat surprisingly, answers to this seemingly straightforward question were often rather mediocre. While a few candidates knew little or nothing of the topic and were reduced to paraphrasing Item B, the majority were familiar with some potentially relevant material, yet were unable to organise a very effective response. One common shortcoming was to focus on gender equality issues outside the home (mainly in relation to paid work, such as equal pay legislation) without linking these to conjugal equality. A second problem was the empirical material offered. While Young and Willmott versus Oakley is legitimate as part of an answer, a good mark is unlikely to be earned by responses that fail to consider more recent research. Thirdly, many candidates saw the question as being solely concerned with the domestic division of labour and failed to consider issues such as decision-making, control of resources or domestic violence. Good answers were broader in scope, more contemporary in their sources and able to offer explicit evaluation of the view from within a theoretical framework, generally based on a debate between feminism (especially radical feminism) and other approaches (including functionalist, the New Right, liberal feminist or march-of-progress views).

Question 2: Health

This was the least popular question on the paper.

- (a) Many candidates were unfamiliar with this explanation of the relationship between social class and health, despite its being one of those dealt with by the Black Report and subsequent studies of this area.
- (b) By contrast, this was well answered. Candidates identified features such as that it is hospital-based, curative or is based upon the mechanical metaphor of the body as a machine.

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- (c) Most gained full marks here, for factors such as smoking, diet, exercise, awareness of health issues. However, candidates failed to score for suggesting structural or material factors such as risk of unemployment, working or housing conditions, etc.
- (d) Some candidates offered generic criticisms of statistics without being able to link these to issues of health and illness. However, most candidates were able to identify at least one problem with health statistics, such as people not visiting the doctor when ill, misdiagnosis, problems with social class categories used in health statistics, etc. However, some were unable to formulate a satisfactory explanation of one or other of the criticisms that they had identified.
- (e) Responses here varied strongly between centres, suggesting that some had not covered this topic thoroughly. Of those who had studied it, some had no understanding of what the 'patterns' in the question might refer to and thus produced rather general accounts of one or more studies of mental illness – most often Goffman or Rosenhan. Among those who were able to identify patterns, most often these dealt with apparent differences in rates of mental illness by gender and/or ethnicity. Good answers produced empirical evidence from studies as well as a broader theoretical context, usually of positivist or structural versus interpretivist or interactionist approaches to mental illness.
- (f) On the whole, this question was answered reasonably well. Most candidates were able to present sociological explanations for differences in access to health care in relation to at least one social group, with social class being the most popular, but better answers went on to discuss gender, age and/or ethnicity as well. Some candidates drifted into a discussion of differences in the patterns of health chances rather than of access to health care. Concepts such as patriarchy and the inverse care law were widely employed to characterise or explain patterns of access. However, there was a widespread tendency to ignore material in Item 2B that could have helped candidates develop their response (such as class differences in consultation times, or institutional racism). Evaluation was often limited to a juxtaposition of alternative views, notably structural versus cultural obstacles to access.

Question 3: Mass Media

This question was the second most popular on the paper.

- (a) Most candidates found this straightforward, centring their answers on a notion of selection of news output by media professionals, though a few confused it with news values or the news diary.
- (b) Many candidates gained all the marks here, usually for noting that owners and professionals both come from privileged backgrounds and that owners can hire those with similar views to their own.
- (c) Good answers suggested ways such as censorship, race relations legislation, libel laws, privacy laws, 'leaks', the work of spin doctors, etc. However, some candidates failed to focus on 'ways in which' and instead chose to address reasons why government or the law might influence media output. Others discussed media owners, ruling class ideology, etc rather than government.
- (d) A few candidates had no idea what content analysis is. Among those who were familiar with the method, a number chose to describe findings that had been obtained from its

use, for example through the work of the Glasgow Media Group, rather than its strengths or limitations. Others were able to identify an appropriate strength (such as cheapness) and/or limitation (such as the subjective nature of coding categories). The best answers went on to link this to news coverage, for example by noting that news output can be accessed at little or no cost from television or radio broadcasts. Answers were generally better on strengths than on limitations.

- (e) Despite this being a familiar question, answers here were often very disappointing, with a large number of responses showing little or no knowledge of any of the widely reported empirical sociological research findings in relation to the categories specified in the question. These candidates were consequently thrown back upon assertion or anecdotal evidence, usually based upon characters from this or that soap opera, and/or drifted into a 'media effects' answer (eg 'representation of women as supermodels leads to anorexia in young girls'). This was often a centre response, indicating that a considerable number of teachers are not covering this topic adequately. Of those who had been taught the topic, gender was the most popular choice, as well as the best answered. Predictably, some candidates were much stronger on one category than the other, but the best answers produced a range of relevant research reflecting the different representations. These candidates generated evaluation, for example by considering different genres or media, or changes over time and the reasons for these.
- (f) Most candidates performed reasonably well here and showed knowledge of a range of views of the relationship between the media and their audiences. Good answers were able to present these views accurately, in conceptual detail and with supporting evidence from appropriate studies, and to use this as the basis for debate and evaluation of the view in the question, generally in terms of media-centric versus audience-centric approaches. Some candidates considered different contexts (eg consumer behaviour, voting behaviour, violence) and/or audiences in relation to the issue of manipulation. Somewhat weaker responses often listed a number of different views or studies, sometimes with lengthy descriptive accounts of Bandura or similar research, but without explicit evaluation. Some of these were unclear about or conflated some of the models they described. A minority of answers showed little knowledge or ability to select and apply relevant material. These often fell back on paraphrasing Item 3B.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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