8.2 Applying Issues and Debates to Conformity and Obedience Research: 30-minute Pack

AQA 7182 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

At least six answers must be written in full sentences. Total time suggested 30 minutes. The final 16-mark question must be answered in full sentences and structured paragraphs.

1 Explain how findings from conformity and obedience research can be applied ethically to reduce harm in real institutions, giving one concrete example in a prison or military context.

(Total for Question 1 is 3 marks)

2 An investigator argues that publishing dramatic examples of obedience research risks social harm by normalising abuse. Analyse two ways researchers might present results to reduce this risk while still informing policy, referring to the publication context.

(Total for Question 2 is 6 marks)

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3 Discuss the extent to which research into conformity and obedience can be explained in terms of determinism. In your answer, consider both situational and dispositional explanations, the implications for individual responsibility, and how ethical concerns about applying such explanations impact research communication. Use relevant research evidence where appropriate.

(Total for Question 3 is 16 marks)

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Mark scheme · 8.2 Applying Issues and Debates to Conformity and Obedience Research: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

identifies an application, e.g. staff training, clear chains of accountability, rotating roles, or supervising authority in prisons or the military	**M1**
explains how this reduces harm, e.g. training reduces blind obedience and rotating roles prevents role depersonalisation	**A1**
gives a concrete example, e.g. in prisons require independent welfare officers and mandatory empathy training to reduce abusive role enactment	**A1**

Answer: Apply findings by introducing staff training on ethical decision making, clear accountability structures and rotating roles. For example, prisons could mandate independent welfare officers and ethics training so staff are less likely to follow harmful orders and more likely to intervene to protect inmates.

Question 2

first way identified, e.g. contextualising findings with clear limitations about sample and setting	**M1**
analysis of effect, e.g. prevents overgeneralisation and reduces risk of normalising extreme behaviours as inevitable	**A1**
second way identified, e.g. emphasising actionable recommendations for policy and safeguards rather than deterministic headlines	**M1**
analysis of effect, e.g. focuses attention on prevention and responsibility, guiding policy to reduce harm	**A1**
development, e.g. use careful language, avoid sensationalist framing, and include voices of affected groups	**M1**
analysis of overall benefit, e.g. this maintains informative value for policymakers while reducing social sensitivity and potential misuse	**A1**

Answer: Researchers can contextualise findings with clear limits on sample and setting to avoid implying inevitability, and emphasise practical safeguards and policy recommendations rather than sensationalist conclusions. Using careful, non-sensational language and including stakeholder perspectives helps inform policy while reducing the risk of normalising abuse.

Question 3

Level 4 Knowledge of research into conformity and obedience is accurate and detailed. Discussion of determinism is thorough and well balanced, integrating situational and dispositional explanations and evaluating implications for responsibility. Ethical implications for communicating research are considered and linked to the argument. Evidence is used effectively and the answer is coherent and well structured.	**13-16**
Level 3 Knowledge is generally accurate with some detail. Discussion addresses situational and dispositional views and includes consideration of individual responsibility and ethical communication, but may be less developed or slightly one-sided. Some relevant evidence and evaluation are present and the answer is mostly well organised.	**9-12**
Level 2 Knowledge is present but limited or partially inaccurate. Discussion of determinism is basic and may miss links to responsibility or ethics. Little evidence is used. The answer may be fragmented and show limited critical evaluation.	**5-8**
Level 1 Very limited knowledge and understanding. Discussion is minimal, largely descriptive or irrelevant. No effective evaluation or consideration of ethical implications. The answer lacks structure.	**1-4**
Level 0 No creditable content.	**0**

Indicative content:

- AO1: Situational determinism perspective: classic research (e.g. conformity and obedience paradigms) shows environmental and social pressures such as unanimous majorities, assigned social roles or authority figures can strongly influence behaviour, suggesting external causes determine actions.
- AO1: Dispositional perspective: individual differences, personality, moral reasoning and prior values can explain why some resist conformity or refuse to obey, indicating non-deterministic elements and preserving individual agency.
- AO1: Interactionist accounts: behaviour arises from interplay between person and situation, so neither pure determinism nor absolute free will fully explains social influence.
- AO3: Implications for individual responsibility: a deterministic reading may reduce perceived blame and affect justice systems and organisational accountability, whereas emphasising dispositional agency supports individual moral responsibility and sanctions.
- AO3: Evidence-based nuance: cite that many participants in conformity studies did not conform on all trials and some in obedience studies refused to continue, which challenges strong determinism; yet robust situational effects point to powerful constraints on choice in certain contexts.
- AO3: Ethical and communication implications: researchers must avoid deterministic headlines that normalise harmful acts; careful reporting, discussion of limitations and policy-relevant recommendations are ethically important to prevent misuse of findings.
- AO3: Practical consequences: accepting some determinism can drive institutional reforms (training, checks, accountability) to reduce situational pressures that lead to harm, showing a constructive role for situational explanations without absolving individuals.
- AO3: Evaluation: consider methodological limits of lab studies for generalisation, cultural and temporal variations that qualify deterministic claims, and the possibility that emphasising agency supports moral development interventions.

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