4.9 Measuring Religiosity: Defining and Operationalising Religious Belief: 30-minute Pack

AQA 7192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. For the longer, levels-marked question, write full sentences and give a brief conclusion. Show application to the Items where asked. Use sociological terms where appropriate.

1 Item B: Excerpt from a hypothetical government report comparing two measures of religiosity in a region: (1) Census 2021 self-identified religion: 58% identify with a religion, 42% state no religion. (2) National survey 2022 measuring weekly worship attendance: 12% report weekly attendance. The report notes a large gap between self-identification and attendance and suggests measurement differences may explain some of this gap.

(a) Using Item B and your knowledge, give two plausible reasons for the large gap between 58% self-identifying with a religion and only 12% reporting weekly attendance. **(2)**

(b) Using Item B and your knowledge, explain one implication of this measurement gap for the secularisation debate. **(2)**

(Total for Question 1 is 4 marks)

2 Explain two ways qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, can help address problems in measuring 'believing' that are not solved by official statistics.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

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3 Using Item B and your sociological knowledge, evaluate the usefulness of official statistics, such as census religion questions and attendance records, for measuring religiosity. In your answer consider strengths and limitations and give a reasoned judgement.

(Total for Question 3 is 12 marks)

4 Define what sociologists mean by 'believing' when using the believing, belonging and behaving framework to measure religiosity.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

5 Outline two problems in measuring religiosity using official attendance records from places of worship, in the context of sociological research on religion.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

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Mark scheme · 4.9 Measuring Religiosity: Defining and Operationalising Religious Belief: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

(a) identifies one reason from Item B context, e.g. many who self-identify are cultural or nominal members who do not attend worship — **B1**

(a) identifies a second reason, e.g. surveys and censuses use different questions and timeframes so measures are not directly comparable — **B1**

(a) Answer: Many who self-identify are cultural or nominal members who do not attend worship, and the census and survey use different questions and timeframes, so the measures are not directly comparable.

(b) identifies an implication for the secularisation debate: the picture of religiosity depends on the measure used, since self-identification measures affiliation whereas weekly attendance measures practice; accept equivalent implications, such as cultural belonging coexisting with limited regular worship — **B1**

(b) explains the implication using Item B: higher affiliation than weekly practice shows a measurement gap, not evidence of historical decline in either measure; comparable observations of the same indicator over time would be needed to establish decline. Credit equivalent explanations; do not infer a sharper decline in attendance from this gap — **B1**

(b) Answer: Self-identification measures religious affiliation, while weekly attendance measures practice. Item B therefore gives different pictures of religiosity: cultural belonging may persist alongside limited regular worship. This qualifies claims about secularisation, but the gap does not establish decline in either measure; comparable observations of the same indicator over time would be needed to establish decline.

Question 2

identifies one way, e.g. interviews can explore the meaning and depth of belief behind a simple yes/no response — **B1**

development, e.g. they can reveal private practices, ambiguities and the language respondents use to describe belief — **B1**

identifies a second way, e.g. qualitative methods can uncover reasons for nominal identification, such as family tradition or social identity — **B1**

development, e.g. this helps explain why self-identification may not equate to practice and allows richer comparison across faiths — **B1**

Answer: Interviews can explore the meaning and depth of belief behind a yes/no response, revealing private practices and respondent language, and they can uncover reasons for nominal identification, such as family tradition, helping explain why self-identification may not equate to practice.

Question 3

Level 1 Basic statements about official statistics with little or no application to Item B. Limited sociological knowledge or undeveloped assertions about strengths or weaknesses. No clear judgement. — **1-3**

Level 2 Some accurate knowledge of official statistics and one or two limitations or strengths. Limited use of Item B to illustrate points. Superficial evaluation, a simple balancing of a few points, and no strong conclusion. — **4-6**

Level 3 Good knowledge of ways official statistics measure religiosity and several relevant limitations and strengths. Clear application to Item B, explaining how the gap between self-identification and attendance affects interpretation. Some analytical evaluation, considering implications for reliability, validity and comparability. — **7-9**

Level 4 Detailed, well-organised knowledge and analysis of official statistics with sustained application to Item B. The answer considers reliability, validity, representativeness, cultural and temporal comparability, and implications for debates such as secularisation. Arguments weigh strengths and weaknesses and reach a supported judgement about how useful official statistics are, noting contexts where they are or are not appropriate. — **10-12**

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Indicative content:

- Knowledge of what official statistics include: census self-identification, church membership lists, attendance registers, administrative records.
- Strength: coverage and scale, censuses and administrative data can provide large, representative samples and allow population-level estimates and demographic breakdowns.
- Strength: consistency over time if questions and methods are stable, allowing trend analysis of the same indicator.
- Limitation: differences between belonging, believing and behaving mean a single statistic cannot capture all dimensions of religiosity; Item B shows self-identification (58%) versus attendance (12%) as an example.
- Limitation: cultural or nominal identification inflates census figures, producing high belonging without corresponding behaviour or private belief.
- Limitation: attendance and membership records can under-record private belief and informal practice, and can be inflated by one-off events or visitors.
- Limitation: cross-country and cross-faith comparability is problematic because of differing definitions, categories and recording practices.
- Discussion of reliability and validity: official statistics can be reliable in measurement if methods are consistent but may lack validity as measures of belief or practice depending on the indicator chosen.
- Methodological implications for secularisation debates: depending on whether researchers use attendance, membership or self-identification, they may reach different conclusions about decline; Item B shows how choice of measure shapes apparent trends.
- Ways to improve usefulness: combining measures, using mixed methods, adjusting for nominal affiliation, including questions on private practice or belief strength, and careful reporting of what a given statistic actually measures.
- Conclusion should make a reasoned judgement, for example that official statistics are useful for some purposes, such as large-scale demographic description and trend tracking of a particular indicator, but are limited as sole evidence of overall religiosity or private belief.

Question 4

identifies 'believing' as the private or personal acceptance of religious doctrines, faith or spiritual convictions (oe) **B1**

development, e.g. it refers to inner, subjective commitment rather than external actions or group membership **B1**

Answer: Believing refers to private acceptance of religious doctrines or spiritual convictions; it is inner, subjective commitment rather than external actions or group membership.

Question 5

identifies one problem, e.g. attendance records only capture behaviour at certain services and miss private practice or other rituals **B1**

development of that problem, e.g. many believers practise at home or attend irregularly so attendance underestimates religiosity **B1**

identifies a second problem, e.g. records may be inflated by one-off events or by counting visitors rather than regular members **B1**

development of second problem, e.g. festivals and weddings create spikes that do not reflect routine commitment **B1**

Answer: Attendance records miss private practices and irregular attendance, so they can underestimate religiosity; they can also be inflated by one-off events or visitors, producing spikes that do not reflect regular commitment.

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