4.9 Measuring Religiosity: Defining and Operationalising Religious Belief

AQA 7192 · about 50 minutes · Write-in edition

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 Explain one methodological problem that arises when researchers try to compare religiosity between countries using official statistics such as national church membership lists or census religion questions.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 Describe two ways researchers can try to operationalise 'believing' in surveys to capture private religious conviction.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

3 State one ethical issue researchers must consider when asking detailed questions about private religious beliefs in surveys.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

4 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 4 is 4 marks)

5 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 5 is 4 marks)

6 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 6 is 12 marks)

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

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

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

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

9 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 9 is 4 marks)

10 State one difficulty of comparing religiosity across different religions using a single question asking 'Do you consider yourself religious?'.

(Total for Question 10 is 2 marks)

11 Identify one strength of using a repeated national survey question about weekly worship attendance for tracking trends over time in religious behaviour.

(Total for Question 11 is 1 mark)

Mark scheme · 4.9 Measuring Religiosity: Defining and Operationalising Religious Belief

Question 1

identifies a problem, e.g. different countries use different definitions and categories of religion and different methods of counting — **B1**

development, e.g. one country may record legal membership while another records self-identification, making direct comparison invalid without adjustment — **B1**

Answer: Different countries use different definitions and counting methods; for example, one country may record legal membership while another uses self-identification in a census, so direct comparisons can be invalid without careful adjustment.

Question 2

identifies one method, e.g. asking Likert-style questions about strength of belief in core doctrines or belief in God — **B1**

development of first method, e.g. using multiple items increases reliability and captures degrees of belief — **B1**

identifies a second method, e.g. asking about frequency of private prayer or meditation as a proxy for belief — **B1**

development of second method, e.g. frequency measures can pick up private practice linked to conviction even when people do not label themselves religious — **B1**

Answer: Researchers can ask Likert-style questions about strength of belief in doctrines or in God, using multiple items to increase reliability, and they can ask about frequency of private prayer or meditation as a proxy for belief, capturing private practice even when people do not label themselves religious.

Question 3

identifies an ethical issue, e.g. privacy and confidentiality of sensitive belief data — **B1**

brief development, e.g. respondents may fear discrimination if their beliefs are revealed, so anonymity is important — **B1**

Answer: Privacy and confidentiality are key concerns; respondents may fear discrimination if their beliefs are revealed, so anonymity and secure handling of data are important.

Question 4

(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 5

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 6

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**

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 7

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 8

identifies 'behaving' as observable religious actions such as attendance, ritual practice, dietary rules or prayer frequency **B1**

development, e.g. it focuses on measurable practices rather than inner belief or identity **B1**

Answer: Behaving is observable religious actions such as attendance, ritual practice, dietary rules or prayer frequency; it focuses on measurable practices rather than inner belief or identity.

Question 9

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.

Question 10

identifies a difficulty, e.g. the question is interpreted differently across religions, cultures or languages **B1**

brief development, e.g. some traditions emphasise practice not verbal identification, so self-labelling misses believers who do not adopt the 'religious' label **B1**

Answer: Different religions and cultures interpret 'religious' differently; some traditions emphasise practice rather than verbal identification, so a yes/no label can miss believers who do not adopt the word 'religious'.

Question 11

identifies a strength, e.g. consistency over time allows comparison of trends if the question stays the same **B1**

Answer: Consistency over time allows comparison of trends if the question and method remain the same.