2.6 Secondary and Official Statistics: 30-minute Pack

AQA 8192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Use sociological vocabulary and name sociologists where you can.

1 Using your knowledge of official statistics, explain what is happening in this scenario, including the percentage increase in recorded exclusions.

(Total for Question 1 is 6 marks)

2 Evaluate the view that official statistics are a reliable and valid source of data for sociologists. In your answer you should refer to sociologists' views and consider more than one point of view.

(Total for Question 2 is 12 marks)

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3 Calculate the overall percentage change in recorded incidents between 2021 and 2024, and explain one reason a sociologist would be cautious about concluding from this alone that the offence itself has become more common.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

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4 State one piece of additional information a sociologist could look for to help judge whether the rise in Q16's recorded incidents reflects a real change in behaviour rather than a recording change.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

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Mark scheme · 2.6 Secondary and Official Statistics: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

calculates the percentage increase in exclusions: (60-40)/40 x 100 = 50%	**B1**
identifies the news report's interpretation as treating the statistics as a straightforward, objective measure of worsening pupil behaviour (a positivist-style reading)	**B1**
identifies the change in recording policy as a key piece of contextual information	**B1**
explains that at least part of the rise is likely to be a product of officials now recording incidents that would previously have gone unrecorded, not necessarily a real rise in bad behaviour	**B1**
explains this supports the interpretivist view that official statistics can be socially constructed, reflecting recording decisions as much as reality	**B1**
accurate use of terminology throughout (official statistics, socially constructed, positivist/interpretivist)	**B1**

Answer: (60-40)/40 x 100 = 50% increase in recorded exclusions. The news report treats this as straightforward proof pupil behaviour is worsening, but the Local Authority's change in recording policy means at least part of the rise likely reflects officials now recording incidents that previously went unrecorded, not necessarily a real change in behaviour, supporting the interpretivist view that official statistics can be socially constructed.

Question 2

Level 4 A detailed, well-balanced evaluation that accurately explains BOTH the positivist case for official statistics AND the interpretivist critique of them, supported by accurate reference to Durkheim and to Atkinson/Douglas. Strengths and weaknesses are analysed, and a reasoned, supported judgement is reached. Sociological terminology is used accurately and consistently throughout.	**10-12**
Level 3 A clear evaluation that explains both the positivist case and the interpretivist critique, with some accurate detail. Some analysis of strengths/weaknesses. An attempt at a conclusion, which may be only partly supported.	**7-9**
Level 2 Some relevant explanation of official statistics, with limited development or accuracy. Little clear evaluation or comparison of views.	**4-6**
Level 1 One or two isolated, undeveloped points about official statistics, with little or no sociological terminology or accurate detail.	**1-3**
Level 0 No relevant content.	**0**

Indicative content:

- Positivist case: official statistics, such as those used by Durkheim in his study of suicide, are standardised, large-scale and free to access, allowing patterns to be tested scientifically.
- Positivist case continued: they cover whole populations or very large samples, giving a reliable, comparable basis for research no individual sociologist could otherwise afford.
- Interpretivist critique: statistics are socially constructed, the end product of officials' interpretive decisions, as shown by Atkinson's study of coroners classifying suicides and Douglas's related work.
- Interpretivist critique continued: recording practices can change over time or between areas, as illustrated by scenarios like Q12, meaning shifts in recorded figures may reflect administrative decisions rather than real social change.
- The dark figure problem, especially in crime statistics, means recorded figures can significantly underestimate the true scale of a behaviour.
- Evaluation: reliability is high, since official statistics are collected in a standardised way and can be checked/repeated, but validity is more contested, since figures may not measure what they appear to measure.
- A balanced conclusion should weigh official statistics' scale, cost and reliability against real concerns about their validity, noting sociologists often combine them with other sources, such as victim surveys, to check their accuracy.

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Question 3

calculates the change in recorded incidents: 156 - 120 = 36	**B1**
calculates the percentage change: 36/120 x 100 = 30% increase	**B1**
identifies that a rise in recorded incidents could reflect a change in reporting or recording practices, for example more victims coming forward, or a police policy change, rather than a genuine rise in offending	**B1**
concludes that recorded figures alone cannot show whether the true, underlying rate of the offence has changed, illustrating the dark-figure/social-construction problem with official statistics	**B1**

Answer: 156 - 120 = 36; 36/120 x 100 = 30% increase in recorded incidents. However, this rise could reflect more victims reporting the offence, or a change in police recording practice, rather than a genuine rise in the offence itself, so the figures alone cannot prove the true rate has changed.

Question 4

identifies a genuine additional source, e.g. victim survey data covering the same years and area	**B1**
brief development, e.g. since victim surveys are less directly affected by police recording decisions	**B1**

Answer: A sociologist could compare the figures with victim survey data covering the same years and area, since victim surveys are less directly affected by police recording decisions than police-recorded statistics.

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