



GSOC.RM6 Secondary and Official Statistics

AQA 8192 · Calculators not allowed · about 75 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

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

- 1** Data that has already been collected by someone else, for example government records or a previous study, which a sociologist reanalyses for their own research, is called...

- ☐ A) primary data
☐ B) secondary data
☐ C) a pilot study
☐ D) a hypothesis

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

- 2** Define what sociologists mean by 'official statistics'.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

- 3** Official statistics have both advantages and disadvantages for sociological research.

(a) State one advantage of using official statistics in sociological research. (2)

(b) State one disadvantage of using official statistics. (2)

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 The positivist tradition takes a particular view of official statistics.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 The interpretivist tradition criticises the positivist view of official statistics.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

6 Not all crime that occurs is captured by official crime statistics.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

7 State one way sociologists can try to get around the limitations of official crime statistics.

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

8 State one criticism J. Maxwell Atkinson made of using official suicide statistics as straightforward, objective evidence.

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

9 Emile Durkheim's classic study 'Suicide' (1897) is famous for using...

- ☐ A) covert participant observation
- ☐ B) official statistics
- ☐ C) unstructured group interviews
- ☐ D) a self-written questionnaire pilot

(Total for Question 9 is 1 mark)

10 Durkheim's Suicide study is a classic example of a positivist use of official statistics.

(Total for Question 10 is 2 marks)

11 Durkheim's use of official statistics in his suicide study has been criticised by later sociologists.

(Total for Question 11 is 2 marks)

12 A sociology student is investigating school exclusion rates using official statistics published, for this exercise, by a fictional Local Authority. The published figures show permanent exclusions rising from 40 in one year to 60 the following year, a result widely reported in the local news as proof that 'pupil behaviour is getting worse'. The student discovers that in the same year the figures rose, the Local Authority had also changed its policy, telling schools to record certain incidents as exclusions that had previously been dealt with informally, without being recorded at all. [This is a hypothetical scenario, with invented figures, written for this exercise.]

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

(Total for Question 12 is 6 marks)

- 13** Sociologists disagree about how reliable and valid official statistics are as a source of data. 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 13 is 12 marks)

- 14** Not all official statistics are equally straightforward to interpret.

(Total for Question 14 is 2 marks)

- 15** State one example of a 'soft' official statistic whose collection depends heavily on subjective interpretation or decisions by officials.

(Total for Question 15 is 2 marks)

- 16** The table below, produced for this exercise, shows recorded incidents of a particular offence in a fictional town over four years.

Year	Recorded incidents
2021	120
2022	132
2023	145
2024	156

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 16 is 4 marks)

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- 17** 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 17 is 2 marks)

Mark scheme · GSOC.RM6 Secondary and Official Statistics

Question 1

- **B1** B (secondary data)
- **Answer: B**

Question 2

- **B1** identifies official statistics as numerical data regularly collected and published by government departments or other official bodies (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. often produced as a by-product of routine administrative work, such as crime, education or health records
- **Answer: Official statistics are numerical data regularly collected and published by government departments or other official bodies, such as figures on crime, education or health, often produced as a by-product of routine administrative work.**

Question 3

- (a) **B1** identifies a genuine advantage, e.g. they are free and quick to access
- (a) **B1** development, e.g. and often cover a very large, sometimes whole-population sample that an individual researcher could never afford to survey themselves
- **(a) Answer: Official statistics are free and quick to access, and often cover a very large, sometimes whole-population sample that an individual researcher could never afford to survey themselves.**
- (b) **B1** identifies a genuine disadvantage, e.g. they are collected for administrative purposes, not the sociologist's specific research question
- (b) **B1** development, e.g. or the definitions used to collect them may change over time, making comparisons difficult
- **(b) Answer: Official statistics are collected for administrative purposes, not the sociologist's specific research question, and the definitions used to collect them may change over time, making comparisons difficult.**

Question 4

- **B1** identifies that positivists see official statistics, such as crime or suicide rates, as objective, reliable indicators of real patterns in society
- **B1** development, e.g. because they are collected in a standardised way across a large sample, they can reveal patterns, such as a correlation between social class and an outcome
- **B1** further point, e.g. positivists argue statistics can be used to test hypotheses about the causes of social behaviour scientifically
- **B1** further point, e.g. Durkheim's use of suicide statistics to identify patterns by religion and marital status is a classic example of this approach
- **Answer: Positivists see official statistics as objective, reliable 'social facts', comparable to facts in natural science, which can reveal patterns and be used to test hypotheses scientifically. Durkheim's use of suicide statistics to identify patterns by religion and marital status is a classic example of this positivist approach.**

Question 5

- **B1** identifies that interpretivists argue statistics do not simply record objective facts but are the end product of decisions and interpretations made by officials
- **B1** development, e.g. whether an incident is recorded as a crime can depend on a police officer's judgement, not just what 'really' happened
- **B1** further point, e.g. this means official statistics may tell us more about officials' decision-making than about the true scale of a behaviour
- **B1** further point, e.g. interpretivist sociologists such as J. Maxwell Atkinson studied the interpretive work coroners do when classifying a death as a suicide
- **Answer: Interpretivists argue statistics are 'socially constructed', the product of decisions and interpretations made by officials, such as a police officer's judgement about whether to record an incident as a crime. This means statistics may reveal more about officials' decision-making than the true scale of a behaviour; Atkinson's study of coroners' interpretive work in classifying suicides is a classic example.**

Question 6

- **B1** identifies the 'dark figure' as the gap between the true amount of crime that actually occurs and the amount recorded in official statistics
- **B1** development, e.g. much crime is never reported to the police, for example because victims are embarrassed, fear not being believed, or see it as too trivial
- **B1** further point, e.g. some crime that is reported is never recorded by the police, for example due to lack of evidence
- **B1** concludes this means official crime statistics likely underestimate the true extent of crime
- **Answer: The dark figure of crime is the gap between the crime that actually occurs and the amount recorded in official statistics. Much crime is never reported, for example because victims are embarrassed or fear not being believed, and some reported crime is never recorded due to lack of evidence, so official crime statistics likely underestimate the true extent of crime.**

Question 7

- **B1** identifies a genuine method, e.g. using a victim survey, such as the Crime Survey for England and Wales
- **B1** brief development, e.g. alongside police-recorded figures, to get a fuller picture of crime
- **Answer: Sociologists can use a victim survey, such as the Crime Survey for England and Wales, alongside police-recorded figures, to get a fuller picture of crime than official statistics alone can give.**

Question 8

- **B1** identifies that a death is only recorded as a suicide after a coroner interprets the available evidence
- **B1** development, e.g. applying their own common-sense assumptions about what a 'typical' suicide looks like, so the resulting statistics reflect coroners' interpretive work as much as the true number of suicides
- **Answer: Atkinson argued a death is only recorded as a suicide after a coroner interprets the available evidence, applying their own common-sense assumptions about what a 'typical' suicide looks like, so the resulting statistics reflect coroners' interpretive work as much as the true number of suicides.**

Question 9

- **B1** B (official statistics)
- **Answer: B**

Question 10

- **B1** identifies that Durkheim compared official suicide-rate statistics between different countries, religions and social groups to look for patterns
- **B1** development, e.g. from these patterns he argued suicide rates were explained by differing levels of social integration and regulation, not simply individual psychology
- **Answer: Durkheim compared official suicide-rate statistics between different countries, religions and social groups to look for patterns, and argued from these patterns that suicide rates were explained by differing levels of social integration and regulation, not simply individual psychology.**

Question 11

- **B1** identifies a genuine criticism, e.g. interpretivist critics such as Atkinson and Douglas argue Durkheim treated suicide statistics as straightforward objective facts
- **B1** development, e.g. when in reality they are shaped by the differing ways coroners in different countries/religions interpret and classify deaths, undermining the comparisons Durkheim made
- **Answer: Interpretivist critics such as Atkinson and Douglas argue Durkheim treated suicide statistics as straightforward objective facts, when in reality they are shaped by the differing ways coroners in different countries and religions interpret and classify deaths, undermining the international comparisons Durkheim made.**

Question 12

- **B1** calculates the percentage increase in exclusions: $(60-40)/40 \times 100 = 50\%$
- **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)
- **Answer: $(60-40)/40 \times 100 = 50\%$ 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 13

- **Level 4** (10-12): 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.
- **Level 3** (7-9): 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.
- **Level 2** (4-6): Some relevant explanation of official statistics, with limited development or accuracy. Little clear evaluation or comparison of views.
- **Level 1** (1-3): One or two isolated, undeveloped points about official statistics, with little or no sociological terminology or accurate detail.
- **Level 0** (0): No relevant content.
- **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.

Question 14

- **B1** identifies 'hard' statistics as official figures collected through a standardised, largely factual recording process, such as births, deaths or marriages
- **B1** development, e.g. generally seen as more straightforwardly reliable than 'soft' statistics, such as crime figures, which depend more on subjective interpretation
- **Answer: 'Hard' statistics are official figures collected through a standardised, largely factual recording process, such as births, deaths or marriages, generally seen as more straightforwardly reliable than 'soft' statistics, such as crime figures, which depend more on subjective interpretation.**

Question 15

- **B1** identifies a genuine example, e.g. crime statistics, depending on police recording decisions, or suicide statistics, depending on coroners' judgements
- **B1** brief development linking the example to Q14's definition of a soft statistic
- **Answer: Crime statistics are a soft statistic, since whether an incident is recorded as a crime depends on police officers' judgements, not just what happened; suicide statistics are another example, depending on coroners' interpretive judgements.**

Question 16

- **B1** calculates the change in recorded incidents: $156 - 120 = 36$
- **B1** calculates the percentage change: $36/120 \times 100 = 30\%$ 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
- **Answer: $156 - 120 = 36$; $36/120 \times 100 = 30\%$ 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 17

- **B1** 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
- **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.**