



## GSOC.RM7 Research Ethics

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** Agreeing to take part in research only after being given enough information about its purpose and what will happen, without being pressured or deceived, is called...

- ☐ A) confidentiality  
☐ B) informed consent  
☐ C) protection from harm  
☐ D) the right to withdraw

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

- 2** Define what sociologists mean by 'confidentiality' in research.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

- 3** Participants in research are usually given a 'right to withdraw'.

**(a)** State what is meant by a participant's 'right to withdraw'. (2)

**(b)** State one reason the right to withdraw is harder to guarantee in covert research. (2)

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 Sociologists must consider whether their research could cause harm to participants.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

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5 Researchers must take special care when carrying out research involving children or other vulnerable groups.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

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6 Covert research, such as covert participant observation, raises particular ethical problems.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

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7 State one argument sociologists sometimes use to justify carrying out covert research despite these ethical problems.

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

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8 State one role of the British Sociological Association (BSA) in relation to research ethics.

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

**9** A professional body that publishes ethical guidance for UK sociologists, covering issues such as informed consent and confidentiality, is called the...

- ☐ A) Office for National Statistics
- ☐ B) British Sociological Association
- ☐ C) Crime Survey for England and Wales
- ☐ D) Local Education Authority

(Total for Question 9 is 1 mark)

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**10** Ethical guidance from bodies such as the British Sociological Association shapes how researchers plan their studies.

(Total for Question 10 is 2 marks)

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**11** Following ethical guidelines fully is not always straightforward in practice.

(Total for Question 11 is 2 marks)

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**12** A university researcher wants to study how 15-year-old pupils use social media. She contacts a secondary school, who act as gatekeeper and agree to let her carry out the research on school premises, on the condition that she also obtains signed consent from each pupil's parent or guardian, as well as the pupil's own agreement to take part. All questionnaires are anonymous, with no names collected, and pupils are told at the start that they can stop and leave at any point without giving a reason. [This is a hypothetical scenario, written for this exercise.]

Using your knowledge of research ethics, explain how the researcher's approach addresses the specific ethical challenges of researching children.

(Total for Question 12 is 6 marks)

**13** Sociologists disagree about how far ethical guidelines restrict valuable research.

Evaluate the view that ethical guidelines make it too difficult for sociologists to carry out valuable research. In your answer you should refer to sociologists' views and consider more than one point of view.

(Total for Question 13 is 12 marks)

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**14** Confidentiality and anonymity are related but distinct ethical principles.

(Total for Question 14 is 2 marks)

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**15** State one reason researchers might choose to guarantee anonymity, rather than only confidentiality, when researching a sensitive topic.

(Total for Question 15 is 2 marks)

- 16** In a hypothetical study of 80 pupils' wellbeing, the researcher's sample is made up of 55 pupils aged under 16 and 25 pupils aged 16 or over. Under the researcher's ethics protocol, every participant aged under 16 requires signed parental or guardian consent in addition to their own; participants aged 16 or over may consent for themselves.

Calculate the percentage of the sample that requires parental or guardian consent, and explain why this extra requirement exists for that group.

(Total for Question 16 is 4 marks)

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- 17** State one additional safeguard, beyond parental consent, that a researcher studying under-16s might be expected to put in place.

(Total for Question 17 is 2 marks)

# Mark scheme · GSOC.RM7 Research Ethics

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## Question 1

- **B1** B (informed consent)
- **Answer: B**

## Question 2

- **B1** identifies confidentiality as keeping the personal information a participant provides private (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. not disclosing it in a way that would let the participant be personally identified, without their agreement, such as by using a pseudonym in the published research
- **Answer: Confidentiality means keeping the personal information a participant provides private, and not disclosing it in a way that would let the participant be personally identified without their agreement, for example by using a pseudonym in the published research.**

## Question 3

- (a) **B1** identifies that participants can choose to leave the study, and have their data removed, at any point
- (a) **B1** development, e.g. without having to give a reason and without facing any negative consequence
- **(a) Answer: The right to withdraw means participants can choose to leave the study, and have their data removed, at any point, without having to give a reason and without facing any negative consequence.**
- (b) **B1** identifies that participants do not know they are taking part in research at all
- (b) **B1** development, e.g. so they cannot exercise a right they do not know they have
- **(b) Answer: In covert research, participants do not know they are taking part in research at all, so they cannot exercise a right to withdraw that they do not know they have.**

## Question 4

- **B1** identifies that researchers must not expose participants to physical, or especially in sociology, psychological harm, such as distress, embarrassment or anxiety
- **B1** development, e.g. asking about a traumatic experience without adequate support could cause distress
- **B1** further point, e.g. researchers should consider offering support or a debrief after sensitive research
- **B1** further point, e.g. harm can also include damage to a participant's reputation or relationships if confidentiality is broken
- **Answer: Protection from harm means researchers must not expose participants to physical or, especially in sociology, psychological harm, such as distress, embarrassment or anxiety, for example from being asked about a traumatic experience without adequate support. Researchers should consider offering a debrief after sensitive research, and harm can also include damage to reputation or relationships if confidentiality is broken.**

## Question 5

- **B1** identifies that children and vulnerable people may not fully understand what they are agreeing to, so cannot give the same quality of informed consent as an adult
- **B1** development, e.g. researchers usually need consent from a parent or guardian as well as, where possible, the child's own agreement (assent)
- **B1** further point, e.g. extra safeguarding steps are needed, such as background/DBS checks on researchers, a responsible adult present, and going through school or organisational gatekeepers
- **B1** further point, e.g. extra care is needed to avoid causing distress, given children's more limited ability to cope with upsetting questions
- **Answer: Children and vulnerable people may not fully understand what they are agreeing to, so cannot give the same quality of informed consent as an adult; researchers usually need parental/guardian consent as well as the child's own agreement (assent). Extra safeguarding steps, such as background checks, a responsible adult present, and going through gatekeepers, are needed, along with extra care to avoid causing distress.**

#### Question 6

- **B1** identifies that covert research involves deceiving participants about the researcher's identity or purpose, breaching informed consent
- **B1** development, e.g. participants cannot exercise a genuine right to withdraw if they do not know they are being studied
- **B1** further point, e.g. the researcher may have to behave dishonestly, or even take part in activities they would not otherwise condone, to maintain their cover
- **B1** further point/example, e.g. a covert participant observation of a gang, modelled on classic studies such as James Patrick's A Glasgow Gang Observed, where the researcher could not reveal he was a researcher
- **Answer: Covert research involves deceiving participants about the researcher's identity or purpose, breaching informed consent, and participants cannot exercise a genuine right to withdraw if they do not know they are being studied. The researcher may have to behave dishonestly to maintain their cover, as in covert participant observation studies of gangs modelled on classic work such as James Patrick's A Glasgow Gang Observed, where the researcher could not reveal he was a researcher.**

#### Question 7

- **B1** identifies a genuine argument, e.g. some groups, such as criminal gangs, would never agree to be studied openly
- **B1** development, e.g. so covert research may be the only realistic way to gain valid insight into their behaviour
- **Answer: Some groups, such as criminal gangs, would never agree to be studied openly, so covert research may be the only realistic way to gain valid insight into their behaviour.**

#### Question 8

- **B1** identifies that it publishes ethical guidance for sociologists, such as a Statement of Ethical Practice
- **B1** development, e.g. covering issues such as informed consent, confidentiality and protection from harm, to encourage ethical standards across the discipline
- **Answer: The British Sociological Association publishes ethical guidance for sociologists, such as its Statement of Ethical Practice, covering issues such as informed consent, confidentiality and protection from harm, to encourage ethical standards across the discipline.**

#### Question 9

- **B1** B (British Sociological Association)
- **Answer: B**

#### Question 10

- **B1** identifies that sociologists are generally expected to seek participants' informed consent, explaining the purpose of the research and what taking part will involve
- **B1** development, e.g. also considering how they will protect participants' confidentiality, avoid causing harm, and plan for a genuine right to withdraw
- **Answer: Sociologists are generally expected to seek participants' informed consent, explaining the research's purpose and what taking part will involve, and to plan how they will protect confidentiality, avoid causing harm, and offer a genuine right to withdraw.**

#### Question 11

- **B1** identifies a genuine practical difficulty, e.g. gaining fully informed consent from every member of a large group, such as everyone present in a public space being observed
- **B1** development, e.g. is often practically impossible, so researchers may only be able to follow ethical guidelines partially
- **Answer: Gaining fully informed consent from every member of a large group, such as everyone present in a public space being observed, is often practically impossible, so researchers may only be able to follow ethical guidelines partially.**

### Question 12

- **B1** identifies the school acting as a gatekeeper, controlling and approving access to the pupils
- **B1** identifies parental/guardian consent being sought, in addition to the pupil's own consent, addressing children's limited capacity to give full informed consent alone
- **B1** identifies the anonymous design, with no names collected, as protecting participants' confidentiality
- **B1** identifies pupils being told they can stop at any point without giving a reason as protecting their right to withdraw
- **B1** explains that together these steps show the extra safeguarding needed when researching a vulnerable group such as children, beyond what would be expected researching adults
- **B1** accurate use of terminology throughout (gatekeeper, informed consent, confidentiality, right to withdraw)
- **Answer: The school acts as a gatekeeper, controlling access to pupils. Seeking parental/guardian consent alongside the pupil's own agreement addresses children's limited capacity for full informed consent, the anonymous, no-names design protects confidentiality, and telling pupils they can stop at any point protects their right to withdraw. Together, these steps show the extra safeguarding needed when researching a vulnerable group such as children.**

### Question 13

- **Level 4** (10-12): A detailed, well-balanced evaluation that accurately explains BOTH the case that ethical guidelines restrict valuable research AND the case that they are necessary and do not simply block good research, supported by accurate reference to examples such as covert observation studies and BSA guidance. 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 restriction case and the necessity case, with some accurate detail. Some analysis and an attempt at a conclusion, which may be only partly supported.
- **Level 2** (4-6): Some relevant explanation of research ethics, with limited development or accuracy. Little clear evaluation or comparison of views.
- **Level 1** (1-3): One or two isolated, undeveloped points about ethics, with little or no sociological terminology or accurate detail.
- **Level 0** (0): No relevant content.
- **Indicative content:**
  - Case that ethics restrict research: covert methods that could reveal important truths about closed or deviant groups, such as gangs studied in the style of James Patrick's work, become harder to justify under strict informed-consent rules.
  - Case continued: gaining full informed consent from every participant, for example in large-scale observation of a public setting, can be impractical, limiting what researchers can study.
  - Case continued: strict ethical requirements around children and vulnerable groups can slow down or block otherwise valuable research, for example on school bullying.
  - Case that ethics are necessary: protecting participants from harm and deception is a basic moral obligation that should not simply be set aside for research convenience.
  - Case continued: guidance such as the BSA's still allows well-designed covert or child-focused research to proceed where genuine safeguards, such as gatekeeper consent and anonymity as in Q12, are built in.
  - Case continued: unethical research risks damaging participants directly, and can damage the reputation of sociology as a discipline, reducing access for future researchers.
  - A balanced conclusion should weigh the real practical restrictions ethical guidelines place on some valuable research designs against their essential role in protecting participants and the discipline's credibility.

### Question 14

- **B1** identifies anonymity as ensuring a participant's identity is not known or recorded at all, e.g. no names collected
- **B1** development, e.g. so that even the researcher cannot link data back to a specific individual, going further than simply keeping identifiable data private (confidentiality)
- **Answer: Anonymity means ensuring a participant's identity is not known or recorded at all, so that even the researcher cannot link data back to a specific individual, going further than confidentiality, which only means keeping identifiable data private.**

### Question 15

- **B1** identifies a genuine reason, e.g. participants may be more willing to answer honestly about something sensitive
- **B1** development, e.g. if they know not even the researcher can identify who gave which answer
- **Answer: Participants may be more willing to answer honestly about a sensitive topic, such as bullying, if they know not even the researcher can identify who gave which answer, which anonymity, but not confidentiality alone, guarantees.**

### Question 16

- **B1** identifies the correct number requiring parental/guardian consent: 55 (the under-16s)
- **B1** calculates the percentage:  $55/80 \times 100 = 68.75\%$  (awrt 69%)
- **B1** explains that under-16s are generally considered less able to fully understand and independently weigh up what taking part in research involves
- **B1** links this to the broader ethical principle of extra protection/safeguarding for children as a vulnerable group
- **Answer:  $55/80 \times 100 = 68.75\%$  (awrt 69%) of the sample requires parental or guardian consent. This extra requirement exists because under-16s are not considered able to give full informed consent alone, so parental/guardian agreement is needed alongside the child's own consent, as part of the special care taken when researching children.**

### Question 17

- **B1** identifies a genuine additional safeguard, e.g. an enhanced background/DBS check on the researcher
- **B1** brief development, e.g. or having a responsible adult, such as a teacher, present during data collection
- **Answer: An additional safeguard would be an enhanced background/DBS check on the researcher, or having a responsible adult, such as a teacher, present during data collection.**