



L-Università
ta' Malta

MATSEC
Examinations Board



Examiners' Report

IM Sociology

First Session 2025

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A. STATISTICAL INFORMATION

The total number of candidates who registered to sit for the IM Sociology First 2025 session amounted to **347**.

GRADE	A	B	C	D	E	F	ABS	TOTAL
NUMBER	29	53	70	60	36	28	71	347
% OF TOTAL	8.4	15.3	20.2	17.3	10.4	8.1	20.5	100

Table 1: Distribution of Levels

B. COMMENTS ON CANDIDATES' PERFORMANCE BY QUESTION

The first part of the Sociology Intermediate exam paper focused on the thematic area of 'Culture and Identity' which forms an integral part of the MATSEC syllabus. Given the compulsory nature of Section A, candidates were expected to answer all set of questions posed. Each question carried different marks, which offered candidates an indicative guideline of the length and depth expected in their response.

The questions were designed to test candidates' knowledge and understanding of basic aspects of culture and identity that are addressed at Intermediate level. In terms of analytical requirements, the questions focused primarily on demonstrating 'Knowledge' and 'Comprehension' which fall within the lower levels of cognitive thinking of Bloom's Taxonomy (by briefly describing, outlining and explaining main sociological aspects) and did not specifically request candidates to evaluate, critically appraise, compare or carry out in-depth analysis of the subject matter.

The allocation of marks demonstrate that most candidates have a good grasp of the foundations of sociological analysis in terms of culture and identity. The majority of candidates managed to successfully respond to all the questions posed. A good number of candidates also went beyond the descriptive by presenting an analytical and critical reflection and complementing response through theoretical material. A good number of candidates were also able to contextualize their response through the application of concrete and practical examples. Moreover, the length and detail offered by candidates, on average went beyond the allocated marks for each question. Some candidates even presented an essay type response. Very few candidates did not attempt to respond to any of the questions.

Question 1a & 1b

Responses to the question requiring a brief definition of 'dominant culture' were varied. While a significant portion of candidates provided accurate and concise definitions, demonstrating a fundamental grasp of the concept, a common and notable misconception emerged. Many candidates erroneously associated 'dominant culture' almost exclusively with 'high elite culture,' such as opera or classical art forms. This narrow interpretation overlooked the broader sociological understanding of dominant culture as the set of cultural practices, values, and beliefs that are widely accepted and reinforced by the majority, often through mainstream institutions. Consequently, candidates who

held this misconception struggled to provide relevant and illustrative examples of the features of dominant cultures, such as prevailing languages, popular media, core social norms, or widely accepted political ideologies. This suggests a need for clearer distinction between the sociological concept of dominant culture and the more colloquial understanding of 'high culture' or 'elite culture.'

Question 1c & 1d

Responses to the definition of 'subculture' showcased a solid understanding, with many candidates providing accurate core definitions. However, while definitions were often correct, they frequently lacked the depth required for Intermediate-Level Sociology, omitting distinctions between various forms such as resistance or deviant cultures or interest-based subcultures. Moreover, responses did not make any reference to theoretical underpinnings of sub-cultural analysis. This became particularly apparent in their answers to the subsequent question. Instead of listing features as subcultures as being smaller groups within a larger culture, distinguishable by their distinct norms, values, beliefs, and practices, which are often shared around common interests, lifestyles, or identities, a significant number of candidates merely provided examples of subcultures, such as Goths or hippies. This demonstrated a confusion between illustrating a concept and articulating its defining attributes. Consequently, their understanding of the fundamental sociological characteristics that delineate a subculture from the dominant culture or other social groupings was not fully demonstrated, demanding a deeper exploration of subcultural theory.

Question 1e & 1f

Responses to the definition of 'stigmatized identity' and the subsequent request for examples showed a significant range in candidates' understanding. While some candidates delivered exceptionally strong and detailed answers that often surpassed the expectations for the allocated marks, others demonstrated a very weak grasp of the concept. Those who excelled clearly referenced Goffman's foundational work on stigma, effectively explaining its nature as a deeply discrediting attribute that fundamentally alters how individuals are perceived and treated by society. Their examples, such as ex-prisoners or persons with visible disabilities, were highly pertinent and illustrated a nuanced understanding of how such identities lead to social exclusion or devaluation. Conversely, many candidates exhibited a limited comprehension of stigma, frequently conflating it with mere stereotypes. This conceptual misunderstanding led them to provide inaccurate examples, often focusing on general prejudices rather than identities marked by a profound, pervasive discrediting characteristic. Such responses underscored a need for deeper sociological understanding of stigma, distinct from broader notions of prejudice or stereotypical thinking.

Question 1g

This question aimed to assess candidates' knowledge of sociological theoretical work on leisure and consumption. Given its more complex subject matter as compared to the previous questions under this section, a good number of candidates did not present an adequate and detailed theoretical response on how leisure and consumption have been subject to theoretical sociological analysis. Indeed, many candidates presented a generic discussion on how people spend their leisure time within contemporary societies without substantiating their arguments through theoretical work in

the field. On the other hand, those who fared well in this question referred to theoretical analysis on post-modern critique of leisure and consumption, by for example referring to the work of Strinati, Bradley, and Featherstone. Reference was made to how leisure and consumption are formed through contemporary notions of capitalist consumer society, where people shop for identity and 'pick 'n' mix' from different cultures and the power of the media and globalised popular culture in identity formation. The blurring distinction between high and mass culture in postmodern contexts was noted by some candidates. However, a small number of essays presented an adequate critique of the postmodern perspective by referring to how structural factors such as class, age and gender may still impact one's 'choice' of identity within the postmodern period.

The second part of the paper presented a set of four questions covering the following thematic areas; the sociology of the family, religion, media and poverty and social exclusion. Candidates were expected to choose and answer two questions from the four questions presented in the paper. The essay questions were designed to test candidates' knowledge and understanding of main sociological aspects covered at Intermediate level on these thematic areas. The essay questions posed were quite specific and straightforward and questions specifically referred to the theoretical perspective which was expected to be utilised by candidates as a guide to effectively address questions posed.

Though only a very few number of candidates did not attempt to respond to any of the questions posed, as evident from the marks allocated, a significant number of candidates did not successfully address and interpret the questions posed, with a good number nor making reference to the issues and concepts presented in the model answers. Apart from lack of relevant content, a significant number of candidates did not consolidate their response through the application of theories, the work of prominent sociologists in the field or use of contextual examples. Moreover, a more critical understanding and application of sociological theory is warranted, since a good number of essays provided only a passive 'description' of the theories without making any significant effort to directly link the information presented to the specific requirements posed by the essay question.

In terms of writing style and presentation, a good number of essays lacked an adequate structure which factor hindered the flow of argument and appreciation of the different streams of thought addressed in the essay. In particular, not enough attention was addressed to the introductory and conclusion parts of the essay, with a number of essays foregoing with such need altogether. Syntax and grammatical issues arising from lack of good command of the English language but also from negligence were evident in a significant number of essays.

Question 2

This question required candidates to explain why the traditional nuclear family is considered a patriarchal institution by some feminist theorists. Candidates were expected to present arguments which explain why the traditional nuclear family is patriarchal in nature and the harmful effects it can have on women's career paths, individual fulfilment and health. Most candidates, who chose this question made reference to Liberal feminists, Marxist feminists and Radical feminists in their reply and demonstrated a good understanding of the concept of patriarchy. A small number made a brief reference to Ann Oakley when discussing unpaid domestic labour and the impact that this work has

on women, as well as discussed, the double and the triple shift. Their answers demonstrated adequate comprehension but showed very little engagement with feminist theory. A small number of candidates made no reference to any theoretical framework in their essay and vaguely discussed why the family is harmful to women, briefly referring to domestic violence, as the reason why traditional nuclear family is considered patriarchal. In such cases, the candidates' examples showed adequate comprehension and understanding of relevant concepts but demonstrated a very poor application of theory. A small number of candidates simply outlined the Functionalists and the Marxists perspectives on the family, with no attempt at addressing the question, despite being guided by the essay title to discuss from a feminist perspective.

Question 3

This question required candidates to discuss whether society is becoming more secular or not by referring to relevant theories in the secularization debate. Several candidates who chose this title were able to critically discuss and evaluate the various arguments in the debate. For instance, candidates defined secularization, highlighted how difficult it is to measure it and explained how secularization can be evaluated on several dimensions - individual thought, church membership and attendance and the social influence of religious organizations in society. These candidates demonstrated a very good level of understanding of the question, provided a clear argument with regards to the secularization debate and discussed alternative perspectives to this debate, mainly the rise of the tribes by Michel Maffesoli, as well as everyday 'lived religion' by Robert Bellah. Those candidates who did not fare well in this question simply reproduced the Functionalist and the Marxist perspective on religion. A number of these candidates did apply these theories to the secularization debate. However, some of them simply outlined the theories, without any reference to key concepts and without linking it to the question.

Question 4

This question required candidates to discuss how sexism, racism and discrimination are perpetuated in mainstream media against persons with disability. Candidates were required to show understanding that a person may hold more than one aspect to their identity and therefore they might experience sexism based on their sex, racism based on their presumed 'race' and other forms of discrimination pertaining to their disability. Candidates were expected to show that they understand that sexism, racism and any other form of discrimination can be intertwined. Most candidates who chose to answer this question discussed sexism and racism, as separate concepts, not in relation to persons with disability. These candidates were able to show good knowledge of the concepts and supplemented their answer with relevant examples of how experiences of sexism and racism are a form of discrimination and impact a person's life. Several candidates showed very poor understanding to this question and reproduced media theories that left the question unanswered. For instance, candidates who chose to focus on Stewart Hall's (1980) Reception theory, briefly outlined how the cultural background of individuals impacted how the audience made sense of the media message. None of the candidates linked this theory to highlight how the social position of persons with disability would allow them to interpret dominant media messages from a different perspective due to their social positioning in society. Similarly, some candidates simply discussed

media imperialism (Herman & McChesney, 2003) in a generic way, without any reference to concepts of sexism, racism and discrimination against persons with disability.

Question 5

This question required candidates to distinguish between two types of poverty, absolute poverty and relative poverty, as well as discuss different measurements of poverty. Candidates were expected to refer to relevant concepts, such as poverty line, Townsend's deprivation index, at risk of poverty or social exclusion rate (AROPE), as well as discuss the advantages and disadvantages of absolute and relative poverty. Several candidates provided a general discussion on poverty and chose to discuss either relative poverty or absolute poverty. These candidates were able to evaluate absolute or relative poverty with brief reference to relevant theorists e.g. Rowntree or Townsend respectively, briefly mentioning relevant measurements. Some candidates compared the two concepts and showed adequate understanding of absolute and relative poverty. These responses focused on the advantages and disadvantages of measuring poverty either in absolute or relative terms. However, references to relevant theories or theorists were left out in such responses. A small number of candidates provided a general essay about poverty, without any attempt to answer the question in a sociological manner. These responses tended to present generic arguments without substantiating their arguments with relevant examples, concepts or through relevant sociological theory.

Chairperson

Examination Panel 2025