

1. Outline and explain two reasons sociologists may prefer to use primary research methods when investigating sociological issues. [10]

One reason why sociologists may prefer to use primary research methods when investigating sociological issues is their methodological perspective. For example, interpretivist sociologists look to gain an insight into the lives of individuals and uncover the meanings and motivations behind their actions. To do so, they rely upon primary qualitative methods to that are high in validity, such as unstructured interviews and observations. These allow them to gain in-depth information on specific issues. Whilst this type of data may be provided by secondary sources, researchers using primary methods are able to ask follow-up questions if something is not clear or take the research into different directions than they had initially thought if something of interest occurs. For example, using primary methods such as observations and group interviews, Paul Willis was able to uncover the motivations of 'the lads' in his study as wanting to enjoy their last days at school before going to the world of work, rather than assuming that they were anti-school if he had relied upon secondary sources such as school reports. As a result, he was able to gain an insight into the true motivations for their behaviours, and challenge existing ideas about pupils being passive puppets.

A second reason sociologists may prefer to use primary research methods when investigating sociological issues is to ensure greater validity of their findings. Many secondary sources are designed for uses other than sociological research, and so do not always reflect the interests of the sociologists studying them. For example, official statistics on poverty and deprivation were seen by Townsend in his research as not reflecting the true nature of poverty in the UK. As a result, Townsend designed his own deprivation index that looked at relative deprivation and used primary research methods in order to collate the data from a number of towns and cities. Secondary sources, like official statistics can be subject to manipulation for political purposes and so will not reflect the true nature of the issues sociologists look to investigate and therefore, the use of primary methods will provide them with more valid data, based upon the definitions that the sociologist uses in their research.

2. Outline and explain two explanations why sociology should be used to inform social policy. [10]

One explanation offered for why sociology should inform social policy is put forward by Bauman. He suggested that sociology was ideally placed to investigate social issues and for this information to be fed back to government who could formulate policies to address these issues. Bauman focused on the usefulness of sociology in investigating poverty and welfare, and these ideas were expanded upon by Anthony Giddens, who assisted New Labour in drawing up their manifesto in the late 1990s. Giddens, as an

advisor to New Labour, was successful in implementing sociological ideas into social policy and this enabled the development of 'third-way' politics, merging social security for those most in need, with neo-liberal economic policy to provide economic development. This illustrates the usefulness of sociology in informing social policy, as policies such as Sure Start, EMA and educational reforms were introduced on the back of sociological research.

A second explanation for why sociology should be used to inform sociology is put forward by positivists. Early positivists such as Comte and Durkheim, saw the scientific study of society as a way in which social issues could be tackled. They proposed that through examining 'social facts' in an objective manner, that solutions could be found for many of the social issues of the day. Whilst later positivists distanced themselves from these ideas, the use of quantitative data and objective measures of issues such as poverty, has been undertaken by sociologists on behalf of governments. For example, Townsend examined the scale of poverty in the UK, devising his own scale of relative deprivation which is still used in some quarters. Furthermore, sociologists are often asked to collate and review data in order to report to government on what should be done to address social issues, for example the Black Report. Furthermore, sociologists are used indirectly by governments through compiling data for the office of national statistics and other research centres. This echoes the ideas of early positivists in using sociology to investigate wide-ranging social issues such as inequality and poverty.