

# 5 HEALTH

## Example answers

### AS LEVEL

1 Define the term 'stigma'.

[2 marks]

#### STUDENT RESPONSE

When someone has been labelled as mentally ill, people will judge negatively on that.

#### TEACHER COMMENTS

Ensure that when you are trying to define a concept that you don't just give an example. Can you add a specific definition for the term before using the example?

2 Using **one** example, briefly explain why women have higher mental illness rates than men.

[2 marks]

#### STUDENT RESPONSE

Women can be seen as having a larger workload.

#### TEACHER COMMENTS

Always remember to briefly explain the answer that you have given. Can you add a brief explanation to meet the demands of the question?

- 3 Outline **three** reasons why Scotland and the North of England generally have higher mortality rates than the South East of England.

[6 marks]

## STUDENT RESPONSE

One reason is because of what is known as the inverse care law.

Inverse prevention law.

A final reason is that the North of England and Scotland are generally poorer than the South East of England.

## TEACHER COMMENTS

It is important that you clearly identify, explain and illustrate responses with accurately described concepts and sociological studies. Can you add brief explanations to each of these points?

- 4 Outline and explain **two** ways in which disabled people are 'disabled by society'.

[10 marks]

## STUDENT RESPONSE

Marxists argue that disabled people are disabled by capitalist society. Finkelstein looked at how, as capitalism emerged during industrialisation, the capitalist class wanted 'able-bodied' people to work in the factories. The reason for this was because these individuals are more productive, and therefore make greater profits for their employers. In contrast, disabled people were seen as less productive and less useful to capitalism. They are viewed by capitalists as an economic burden, as they produce nothing and cost money to support.

## TEACHER COMMENTS

What do you think is effective about this paragraph? Can you create your own and therefore provide a second point to the question?

5 Read **Item A** and answer the question that follows.

## ITEM A

Some sociologists argue that medical professionals such as surgeons and GPs deserve their rewards because they have been through extensive training and their competence has been thoroughly tested by exams. Moreover, they work for the good of society. In contrast, some sociologists claim that doctors are actually a danger to society. Others claim they are agents of the capitalist state.

Applying material from **Item A** and your knowledge, evaluate sociological explanations of the medical profession

[20 marks]

## STUDENT RESPONSE

There are a number of sociological theories which consider whether doctors are good or bad for society.

Functionalists view the medical profession very positively, because it keeps society going. Their belief is, as expressed in Item A, that medical professionals deserve their high financial rewards, because they work 'for the good of society'. They also believe that doctors make large personal sacrifices, spending years in training and with low pay. They also point out that doctors have to be intelligent, and that they have acquired their qualifications through studying and exams. Barber points out that doctors are good for society because they have to follow ethical rules, such as keeping to the Hippocratic Oath.

Marxism is very critical of the medical profession, because they claim doctors are the agents of the capitalist class. The medical profession also keeps the working class healthy, so that they can keep working to make money for the capitalist class by being exploited at work.

Finally, some postmodernist sociologists point out that some people are turning away from modern medicine because it has failed to cure them or they are worried that they might get addicted to prescription drugs. They instead are using traditional alternative approaches from other countries and cultures like acupuncture or homeopathy.

## TEACHER COMMENTS

Students should try to develop and summarise their ideas effectively and aim, in their application and analysis, to express themselves using sociological terminology. They should also aim to provide an evaluation that achieves more than just a juxtaposition of the arguments. This can be achieved by using specific links between the theories and/or the use of specific research studies that can illustrate the differences between the perspectives. Can you add some examples of sociologists from the functionalist, Marxist and postmodernist perspective and find direct contrasts between them?

**A-LEVEL**

- 6 Outline and explain **two** ways in which sociologists have challenged the biomedical model of health.

[10 marks]

**STUDENT RESPONSE**

The biomedical model argues that medicine is good for society, but modern medical treatment often results in iatrogenesis. This means that medicine can actually do more harm than good. Illich believes that the medical profession has too much power. He claims that medical treatment often results in death, injury and addiction, e.g. doctors making surgical or diagnostic mistakes, while infections such as MRSA have killed thousands of people in hospitals.

The biomedical model is a very Western model and fails to understand there are different ways to approach health and illness. For example, what is considered ill in one society isn't necessary the same for another. In some societies, they see the body as linked to the mind, so both are treated at the same time. In some places, illness is interpreted as witchcraft or spirits. These differences challenge the biomedical model.

**TEACHER COMMENTS**

What is your view of this response? Do you think it meets the demands of the question?

- 7 Analyse **two** ways in which poverty may lead to early death.

[10 marks]

**STUDENT RESPONSE**

One way poverty can lead to an early death is that an individual living in poverty cannot afford to buy goods that may improve their health and life expectancy. For example, those in poverty cannot afford to buy healthier foods, and the food that they can buy may be of a lower quality.

There are also inequalities in income. One such inequality is low pay. Many of the poor are either in low-paid jobs and on zero-hour contracts, or they are unemployed. Typically, working-class people on the poverty line do manual labour. These are often dangerous and stressful occupations. They put a strain on the body, and can lead to an early death. Unemployment can be depressing and lead to mental illness.

**TEACHER COMMENTS**

To add substance to this answer, can you think of one research study for each paragraph that would enhance the analysis of this response?

8 Read **Item B** below and answer the question that follows.

## ITEM B

Social constructionist or interactionist perspectives argue that mental illness is merely a label by which the powerful can socially control less powerful people who they see as a nuisance or an embarrassment or who are potentially disruptive and threatening to society. Interactionists point out that once labelled as mentally ill there are a number of negative consequences that result from the label.

Applying material from **Item B** and your knowledge, evaluate the interactionist view that mental illness is a label that the powerful use to control the less powerful.

[20 marks]

## STUDENT RESPONSE

Mental illness affects one in six people in the UK. However, as stated in Item B the social constructionist perspective sees mental illness as a label, which the powerful use to control the behaviour of the less powerful, people they see as a nuisance or embarrassment to them. For example, there is evidence that in the early part of the 20th century many young women were confined to mental health hospitals because their families disapproved of their independent or sexual behaviour. They were regarded as an embarrassment, because they had brought 'scandal' upon their families. It was easier for families to explain away this behaviour by having them diagnosed by doctors and psychiatrists as 'mad'. Similar diagnoses were made for men who were gay. In fact, homosexuality was defined as a mental illness until 1974. There is evidence, too, that in the Soviet Union, people who criticised the communist way of doing things were diagnosed as mentally ill and shut up in asylums.

Thomas Szasz argues that the label of 'mental illness' is simply a convenient way for powerful people to deal with behaviour that they do not like or which they find disruptive. Szasz uses ADHD as an example. Szasz says ADHD does not exist. He argues behaviour in children which is labelled as 'illness' is simply naughtiness or lack of concentration which all children experience and which is perfectly natural. He also argues that it is bad parenting or boring teachers that causes naughtiness in children rather than mental illness. However, powerful people like parents and teachers prefer doctors to diagnose children as mentally ill rather than acknowledge their role. Szasz claims that giving drugs to children without their knowledge or permission is unethical, and a form of child abuse.

Szasz believes that apart from some psychotic conditions and depression, mental illness in general does not exist. He argues that mental illness is merely behaviour which has been labelled as problematic by the opinions of psychiatrists. For example, as said earlier, homosexuality was seen as a type of mental illness until psychiatrists decided it no longer was. Katz's experiment using British and American psychiatrists seems to support Szasz. Katz discovered that American psychiatrists were much more likely than British psychiatrists to diagnose behaviour as the product of mental illness. There was no agreement between the two groups as to what the symptoms of mental illness were.

As Item B points out there are a number of negative consequences that result from being labelled 'mentally ill'. People may shun or mistreat the mentally ill because they believe the stereotypes that they are dangerous or threatening. Hate crimes against the mentally ill have increased in recent years.

Even when a person is committed to a mental institution, there is evidence that the mentally ill label can affect treatment by doctors and nurses. Rosenhan found in his study of hospitals that once someone is labelled as mentally ill, that the label covers all their behaviour. For example, patients waiting outside a canteen for food were said to be showing behaviour related to their supposed schizophrenia, instead of them simply being hungry. The label of mental illness became their master status, because all their behaviour was perceived 'through' the label of mental illness. Goffman claimed that leaving such places is exceedingly difficult because the mentally ill are only seen to be cured when doctors say they are. If the patient shows signs of disagreement with doctors, or openly challenges them this may be seen as a symptom of their illness. Such patients are in danger of becoming institutionalised because they will be kept in the hospital for longer periods.

## TEACHER COMMENTS

It is important for students to remember to evaluate the focus of the question rather than just focussing on their knowledge of the topic. Could you add some theoretical evaluation from other perspectives that would either support or criticise the interactionist view?