

Markscheme

May 2026

Psychology

Higher level

Paper 3

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Paper 3 markbands

Marks	Level descriptor
0	• The answer does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.
1–3	• The question is misunderstood and the central issue is not identified correctly, resulting in a mostly irrelevant argument. • The response contains mostly inaccurate references to the approaches to research or these are irrelevant to the question. • The reference to the stimulus material relies heavily on direct quotations from the text.
4–6	• The question is understood, but only partially answered resulting in an argument of limited scope. • The response contains mostly accurate references to approaches to research which are linked explicitly to the question. • The response makes appropriate but limited use of the stimulus material.
7–9	• The question is understood and answered in a focused and effective manner with an accurate argument that addresses the requirements of the question. • The response contains accurate references to approaches to research with regard to the question, describing their strengths and limitations. • The response makes effective use of the stimulus material.

1. (a) Identify the research method used and outline **two** characteristics of the method. **[3]**

Award [1] for identification of correct research method: Semi-structured interviews.

Award [0] for interview, structured interview, unstructured interview or focus group interview.

Answers related to an outline of characteristics of the research method may include two of the following characteristics: Award [1] per relevant point. Maximum of [2].

The characteristic marks are specific to the research method (semi-structured interviews) rather than the described study.

- Semi-structured interviews are conducted based on an interview guide / a list of pre-determined questions / topics that need to be covered. The interviewer also has the flexibility to ask follow-up questions.
- Semi-structured interviews use a balanced blend of both open and closed questions.
- Semi-structured interviews are more informal and conversational in nature than a structured interview. This makes it more possible for the interviewer to establish rapport with the respondent.
- The flexible format allows the interviewer to follow the participant's emotional lead, making semi-structured interviews appropriate for highly personal, stigmatized, or sensitive topics.
- Semi-structured interviews are most effective when carried out by an interviewer who is trained and experienced.
- Semi-structured interviews are more time-consuming to analyse than structured interviews.
- Because each semi-structured interview includes questions specific to that participant, there is less comparability between answers than in a structured interview.

- (b) Describe the sampling method used in the study. **[3]**

Award [1] for naming the correct sampling method: Snowball sampling (also accept chain sampling, chain-referral sampling, referral sampling, respondent-driven sampling, and network sampling).

Description of the sampling method used in the study may include two of the following characteristics: [1] per relevant point. Maximum of [2].

Award [0] for description of the sample rather than the sampling method.

- The process of carrying out a snowball sample begins with a small group of participants who then recruit others in their network and who meet the study's criteria.
- The process continues until the desired number of participants is reached / data is saturated.
- A snowball sample is a non-probability sampling technique, which means that participants are not chosen randomly from a target population.
- Used to recruit niche, hidden, or hard-to-reach participants, or when studying sensitive topics.
- There is a risk of sampling bias because the sample is found through referrals. A specific type of person may be more likely to be referred; for example, people who have more friends.
- Snowball sampling can lead to a biased sample that may only represent part of the population; for example, those who are known by another participant. This means that the findings cannot be easily generalized.
- Anonymity is not possible to maintain. The initial participants often have an existing connection to the researcher(s), and these participants know exactly who they have recruited from their network. The researcher(s) may know who recruited whom.
- Snowball sampling is cost effective, easy to collect, and not time consuming.

- (c) Suggest **one** alternative **or one** additional research method that could be used to investigate the aim of the original study, giving **one** reason for your choice. **[3]**

*Award **[1]** for naming an alternative or additional research method and up to **[2]** for reason with rationale.*

The student may choose to write about an alternative or an additional method. Either approach to answering the question is acceptable. The rationale may differ depending on which is chosen.

If more than one method is suggested, only the first method can be considered for credit.

Suitable alternative or additional research methods and reasons (with rationale) could be, but are not limited to:

Focus group interviews

- The facilitator could encourage the participants to share their experiences of and strategies for coping with the negative effects of using social media.
- The focus group as an additional research method would allow triangulation and could compensate for the limitations of the semi-structured interviews and vice versa.
- The focus-group approach could provide the researcher information they may not have thought of themselves when preparing the pre-determined questions for the semi-structured interviews.
- The focus group provides a natural setting for interactions.
- This method gives a special dynamic to the interview because participants continue the conversation among themselves. This is likely to generate rich data, although there may be problems of conformity within a focus group.

Surveys

- A survey with closed questions could collect quantitative data that focuses on the use of harm reduction strategies by young people.
- A survey could provide method triangulation if carried out as an additional method.
- Data from a large-scale survey could add data to the investigation. This would allow for statistical comparisons.
- Surveys generally allow researchers to collect a large amount of data in a relatively short period and they are less expensive than qualitative methods.
- With a survey it is easy to collect and analyse data from a large number of participants. This makes it more possible that the findings can be generalized to a target population.

2. Describe the ethical considerations that were applied in the study and explain if further ethical considerations could be applied. [6]

Describe the ethical considerations that were applied in the study: Award [1] per relevant point made, up to a maximum of [3].

The description of each point must include a detailed account.

If a student names relevant ethical considerations without also accurately describing them, a maximum of [1] should be awarded.

- **Informed consent:** The participants were fully informed about the aims of the research. They also gave written consent before taking part, which shows that they were willing to take part in the research.
- **Deception:** The participants were given full information about the aims of the study and were therefore NOT deceived. The researchers also had no reason to use deception.
- **Confidentiality:** Participants were given information about how their data would be protected by being stored safely until it was time for it to be destroyed.
- **Anonymity:** Participants were not required to provide any personal information that could identify them, such as their names or phone numbers. However, the two initial young people that the researchers already knew, will not have had anonymity.

Explain if further ethical considerations could be applied: Award [1] per relevant point made, up to a maximum of [3].

The explanation of each point must include reasons and/or causes.

If a student names relevant ethical considerations without also accurately explaining them, a maximum of [1] should be awarded.

- **Parental consent:** The researchers also needed to receive consent from some parents because some of the participants were as young as 15.
- **Debriefing:** The participants should be debriefed after they have completed the study and the researchers should explain how the results will be used and answer any questions the participants may have. Contact information could be provided so that participants could contact the researchers if they have any questions/concerns.
- **Right to withdraw:** The participants should be informed about their right to leave the study and/or withdraw their data at any time. This includes being able to have the audio recordings of their calls destroyed. When they were given the opportunity to check the report's conclusions before it was published, they should have been asked if they still agree to their results being used.
- **Protection from harm:** The researchers must be attentive to personal and sensitive issues. Participants are being asked to provide data related to negative experiences they may have had to deal with when using social media. It may have been distressing for some participants to think about this. Researchers need to remind participants of their right to withdraw and provide further support as necessary/appropriate.

3. Discuss how the researchers could ensure that the results of the study are credible. **[9]**

Refer to the paper 3 markbands when awarding marks.

Marks should be awarded according to the descriptors in the markbands.

The command term “discuss” requires students to offer a considered review of how the researchers could ensure that the results of the study in the stimulus material are credible.

Students may refer to measures that were taken in the study or suggest measures that could have been taken, or combine the two. All approaches are equally acceptable.

Credibility refers to the degree to which the research gives a true picture of what is being investigated and that the results represent the perceptions and opinions of the research participants. Credibility is a factor in establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research. (A definition of credibility is not necessary to reach the top markband.)

Discussions related to how the researchers in this study could ensure that the results of the study are credible could include, but are not limited to:

- Collecting rich data: Rich data and thick description can help in establishing the meaning that these young people place on action and words as they see it themselves.
 - Triangulation: If similar results can be arrived at and validated using multiple sources of data, multiple methods or different researchers, then the results of the study will have greater credibility. In this study, the full research team was involved in analysing the data and through detailed discussions, a high level of agreement was reached.
 - Having reflexivity, for example:
 - Personal reflexivity - the researchers should use critical self-awareness as to how their personal beliefs and expectations could influence the research process and conclusions. This is particularly the case with the female lead researcher who is carrying out all of the interviews and identifying the general patterns on her own.
 - Epistemological reflexivity – the researchers need to consider factors such as the strengths and limitations of semi-structured interviews (in which the interviewer was trained and experienced) and the possibility of bias from using snowball sampling (in which the two initial young people were already known by the researchers).
 - Using a “decision trail” (or audit trail). For example, the researchers could develop a reflective journal where they make regular entries, with regard to methodological decisions and reasons for them, and/or how the researchers’ own values, beliefs, and interests may have come into play during the research process. It would also be appropriate to walk through every step of the research process to determine if there are examples of researcher bias.
 - The researchers could invite an external researcher to check their findings. This measure could increase credibility as it could illuminate blind spots and overall make the findings more robust and well-documented.
 - Participant verification / member checking: The participants were given an opportunity to check the researchers’ conclusions before the report was published. This allows them to judge whether or not the findings actually represent their experiences and opinions.
 - By using iterative questioning, that is, being attentive to ambiguous answers and later rephrasing the same question in order to get a deeper insight into this topic.
 - Examination of previous research findings on the same topic: Assessing the degree to which the findings of this study are congruent with the limited research carried out previously.
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