

# Sociology Bridging Work

Welcome to your Year 13 bridging tasks. Before you return in September, you are required to engage with three core topic areas — Research Methods, Crime and Deviance, and Beliefs in Society. This document will guide you through case studies, key concepts, and reflection tasks that will prepare you for a timed assessment at the start of Year 13. Engage seriously with the material: your understanding of these cases will form the foundation of higher-level sociological analysis.



## Task 1: Research Methods

Revise all strengths and limitations of research methods for a 20-mark essay question (Paper 3).



## Task 2: Crime & Deviance

Read four criminal case studies and answer the optional questions to check your understanding.



## Task 3: Beliefs in Society

Read the religious organisation case studies and answer the optional questions to check your understanding.



## Example Paper 3 Question (2018)

### Question 6

Read Item C below and answer the question that follows.

#### Item C

Structured interviews are a relatively cheap way of studying a sample. Positivist sociologists favour structured interviews because they produce reliable data that can be used to test hypotheses.

However, critics argue that structured interviews are inflexible and that their results lack validity.

Applying material from Item C and your knowledge, evaluate the advantages of using structured interviews in sociological research.

[20 marks]



Your knowledge and understanding will be assessed on **all three areas** in a timed assessment when you return in September. Begin early and revisit the material more than once.

# Harold Shipman: The Doctor Who Killed

Most people trust doctors implicitly. They are highly trained professionals who dedicate their lives to caring for others. Harold Shipman appeared to be exactly that kind of person. Born in Nottingham in 1946, Shipman qualified as a GP and became a respected practitioner in Hyde, Greater Manchester. Patients trusted him, colleagues respected him, and families welcomed him into their homes. Yet behind this respectable image was one of the most prolific serial killers in British history.

## The Crimes

Over more than 20 years, Shipman murdered patients by injecting them with lethal doses of diamorphine. Most victims were elderly women. He frequently completed death certificates himself, recording natural causes, meaning few questions were ever asked.

## How Was He Caught?

In 1998, undertaker Deborah Massey noticed an unusually high number of deaths among his patients. After the death of 81-year-old Kathleen Grundy, whose forged will left £400,000 to Shipman, exhumation and toxicology tests revealed the truth. He was arrested shortly after.

## Key Facts

- GP in Hyde, Greater Manchester
- Victims mainly elderly women
- Convicted of 15 murders in January 2000
- Public inquiry estimated approximately **215 victims**
- Used diamorphine (a powerful painkiller) to kill
- Never admitted his crimes; died in prison in 2004

## Conviction

In January 2000, Shipman was convicted of murdering 15 women and received a whole-life sentence. He was found dead in his prison cell in 2004, having never confessed.

## Questions for a Sociologist

- Why do you think patients trusted Shipman so completely? Consider the concept of **professional authority** and the power attached to medical roles.
- How might his status as a doctor have helped him avoid detection? Think about how **institutional trust** shapes what people question and what they accept.
- Why do you think most of his victims were elderly women? Reflect on vulnerability, power, and social invisibility.
- Shipman killed over many years without being caught. What does this suggest about the limits of trust in professional relationships? Who, if anyone, should have questioned him sooner?
- Why might society react differently to a doctor who commits murder compared to a stranger?

# Myra Hindley: The Moors Murders

When people think about serious violent crime, they typically imagine male offenders. Myra Hindley challenged this assumption in one of the most disturbing ways imaginable. Born in Manchester in 1942, Hindley worked as a secretary and appeared to lead a relatively ordinary life. After meeting Ian Brady, however, she became involved in a series of crimes that would permanently shock British public consciousness and force society to reconsider its assumptions about gender and criminality.

## The Crimes

Between 1963 and 1965, Hindley and Brady abducted, tortured, and murdered five children. Several victims were buried on Saddleworth Moor in Greater Manchester — hence the name. The crimes generated enormous public outrage because of the victims' ages and the extreme brutality involved. Some families waited years before their loved ones' remains were located.

## Key Facts

- Crimes committed between 1963 and 1965
- Five child victims
- Offended alongside Ian Brady
- Convicted in 1966; sentenced to life imprisonment
- Brady died in prison in 2017
- Hindley died in prison in 2002; repeatedly denied parole

## Why Did the Case Become So Famous?

The case attracted extraordinary media attention. Many newspapers focused heavily on Hindley because of her gender. Women were traditionally viewed as caring and nurturing — unlikely perpetrators of serious violence. Her police photograph became one of the most recognisable images in British criminal history. Decades later, she remained one of Britain's most hated figures.

## Gender and Media Representation

Sociologists argue that female offenders are often judged against idealised notions of femininity. Hindley was condemned not only for the murders themselves but also for violating expectations about how women should behave. This moral outrage arguably exceeded the coverage of Brady, despite their equal culpability.

## Questions for a Sociologist

### Gender & Criminality

Why do you think the public reacted so strongly to Hindley? How did she challenge traditional ideas about femininity and crime?

### Media Coverage

Why might female offenders receive different media coverage to men? Should the media report female offenders differently from male offenders?

### Collective Memory

Why do some crimes remain in public memory for decades? What does the lasting infamy of the Moors Murders reveal about social values?

# The Murder of Stephen Lawrence

Stephen Lawrence was an 18-year-old student from South London. Described by friends and family as hardworking and ambitious, he hoped to become an architect. On the evening of 22 April 1993, while waiting for a bus with a friend, he was attacked by a group of young men in a racially motivated assault. Stephen was stabbed and died from his injuries. His death, and what followed, would permanently transform public debate about race, policing, and institutional discrimination in Britain.



The sequence above captures the lasting significance of Stephen's case: it moved from a tragic individual murder to a national reckoning with how institutions can perpetuate discrimination even without conscious intent.

## The Investigation & Its Failures

Almost immediately, concerns were raised about the police investigation. Stephen's family believed that officers failed to take the case seriously. Several suspects were identified early on, but progress was slow and critical mistakes were made. The investigation became one of the most controversial murder inquiries in modern British history, prompting the government to launch an independent public inquiry.

## The Macpherson Report (1999)

Sir William Macpherson's report concluded that the investigation had been affected by "**institutional racism**" — discrimination embedded within organisations rather than in individual prejudice alone. The report led to major changes in policing, race relations legislation, and the way hate crimes are recorded. Several of Stephen's killers were eventually convicted years after the original investigation.

## Questions for a Sociologist

- 1 What is meant by **institutional racism**? How does it differ from individual prejudice?
- 2 How might ethnicity affect experiences of the criminal justice system? Use evidence from this case to support your answer.
- 3 Why was a public inquiry necessary? What does its existence suggest about public trust in the police?
- 4 How can institutions unintentionally discriminate? What structural or cultural factors might enable this?

# The James Bulger Case

On 12 February 1993, two-year-old James Bulger was abducted from the New Strand Shopping Centre in Liverpool whilst briefly separated from his mother. He was taken by two boys — Robert Thompson and Jon Venables — both aged just ten years old. After leading James away from the shopping centre, they subjected him to a violent attack which resulted in his death. The case shocked Britain to its core, not simply because of the crime itself, but because of the extreme youth of those responsible.

## Public Reaction

The crime dominated newspaper headlines for weeks. Many people struggled to comprehend how children could commit such a serious offence. The case generated wide-ranging debates about parenting, childhood, family life, and the influence of violent media. Some commentators argued that society itself was becoming more violent and less disciplined. Others focused on the social backgrounds of the offenders and questioned what had gone wrong.

## Key Facts

- Crime occurred on 12 February 1993
- Victim: James Bulger, aged 2
- Offenders: Robert Thompson and Jon Venables, both aged 10
- Youngest convicted murderers in modern British history
- Generated intense national and international media coverage

## The Trial and Its Legacy

Thompson and Venables were tried in an adult court and became the youngest convicted murderers in modern British history. The trial attracted intense media attention, with many newspapers publishing highly emotional coverage and demanding severe punishment. This raised profound questions about **criminal responsibility**, **age of culpability**, and whether children should ever be treated as adults within the justice system.

More than thirty years later, the case continues to be discussed in sociological and legal contexts. It is frequently used in debates about **socialisation**, the influence of early childhood experiences, and how society constructs the idea of childhood itself.

## Questions for a Sociologist

1

### Youth and Crime

How might age influence criminal behaviour? What factors may contribute to youth offending?

2

### Socialisation

What does this case suggest about the importance of primary socialisation? How might a child's background shape their behaviour?

3

### Media & Public Fear

Did the media coverage of this case seem fair and balanced, or did it exaggerate public fear? What might be the consequences of highly emotional media reporting on a criminal case?

4

### Justice System

Should children be treated differently from adults in the criminal justice system? What are the arguments on both sides?

# Peoples Temple: Community, Control, and Catastrophe

Peoples Temple was founded in the 1950s by Jim Jones, a charismatic religious leader who combined Christian teachings with a strong rhetoric of equality, racial integration, and social justice. In its early years, the organisation attracted many followers — particularly those who felt marginalised in wider American society — because it offered a powerful sense of belonging and community. Members were encouraged to live together, share resources, and dedicate themselves to one another, creating intense emotional bonds that made the group feel like a genuine alternative community.

## From Community to Control

Over time, however, the organisation became increasingly authoritarian. Jim Jones demanded complete loyalty from members and actively discouraged any criticism or independent questioning. This mirrors what sociologists identify as a key characteristic of sects: the replacement of critical thinking with unquestioning obedience to a single charismatic authority figure. Members became progressively more isolated from the outside world as the group's internal culture intensified.

## Jonestown and the 1978 Tragedy

In the late 1970s, the group relocated to an isolated settlement in Guyana called Jonestown. Here, daily life was strictly controlled and punishments were used to enforce obedience. In 1978, following growing concerns from the outside world, over **900 members died** in a mass murder-suicide. This event is regarded as one of the most extreme examples of what can happen when religious authority becomes total and members lose all autonomy.

## Sociological Significance

### Sect Characteristics

Peoples Temple demonstrates classic sect features: it began as a breakaway group from mainstream religion, demanded high commitment, claimed an exclusive truth, and existed in tension with wider society.

### Social Marginalisation

Many early members were drawn from groups who experienced exclusion and discrimination in wider society. This illustrates how new religious movements can appeal to those seeking belonging, dignity, and a sense of purpose beyond mainstream institutions.

## Questions for a Sociologist

### → Belonging and Exclusion

Why do you think people from marginalised backgrounds were particularly drawn to Peoples Temple? Consider belonging, identity, and social exclusion.

### → Religion and Power

What does this case suggest about the relationship between religion and power? Can religion ever become a tool of control?

### → Sect, Cult, or NRM?

How might sociologists classify Peoples Temple — as a sect, a cult, or a new religious movement? Justify your answer using the correct A-level definitions.

### → Isolation and Danger

What does the Jonestown tragedy suggest about the dangers of total isolation from wider society?

# The Amish: Tradition, Community, and Voluntary Separation

The Amish are a traditional Christian group with roots in 17th-century Europe who now live primarily in Pennsylvania and other parts of the United States. Their way of life is guided by a commitment to simplicity, humility, family, and community. Unlike the more extreme groups examined in other case studies, the Amish do not seek to control members through fear or isolation. Instead, their identity is maintained through shared values, religious tradition, and a collective agreement to limit engagement with aspects of modern society that they believe can weaken family and community bonds.

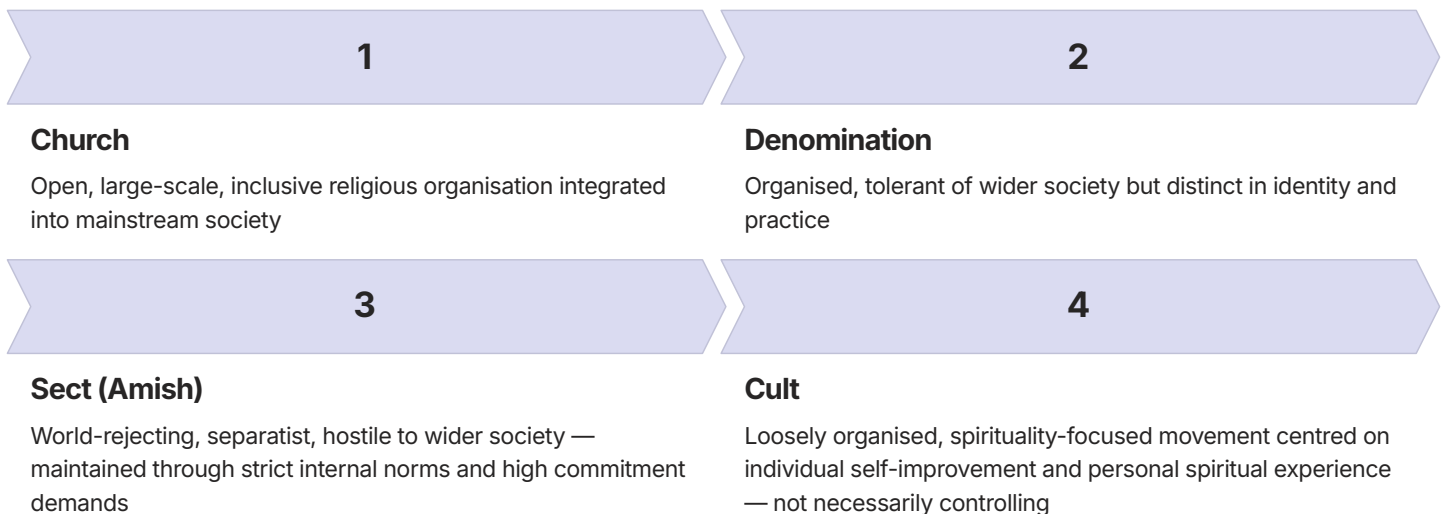
## Key Characteristics

The Amish limit the use of modern technology — including cars and electricity — not out of ignorance, but out of a considered religious conviction that such technologies fragment communities and encourage individualism. Membership is primarily by birth, and socialisation into the faith begins in early childhood. There is no single charismatic leader dictating behaviour; instead, rules are upheld through shared norms and communal social pressure.

## Rumspringa: An Unusual Feature

One of the most sociologically interesting aspects of Amish life is **Rumspringa** — a period during which young people are given the opportunity to experience aspects of life outside the community before deciding whether to commit fully to the Amish faith. The majority choose to return. This suggests that Amish identity is in many cases genuinely chosen rather than simply imposed, distinguishing the group from sects where leaving is made extremely difficult or dangerous, or from more coercive movements altogether.

## Where Does the Amish Community Sit on the Sociological Spectrum?



The Amish sit firmly in the **sect** category: they are separatist and strict in their beliefs, but their structure is based on tradition and community consent rather than coercive control. This makes them a useful point of comparison when evaluating more extreme religious organisations.

## Questions for a Sociologist

### → Technology and Society

The Amish choose to reject modern technology like cars and smartphones. Do you think this makes their community stronger or weaker? What might be lost and what might be gained by living this way?

### → Rumspringa and Commitment

What does Rumspringa suggest about the nature of religious commitment? Is it more meaningful when it is chosen rather than inherited?

### → Social Control

How does the Amish community maintain social control without a single charismatic leader? What mechanisms replace individual authority?

### → Classification

Would you classify the Amish as a sect, a denomination, or something else? Use A-level definitions to justify your answer.

### → Community Cohesion

What does the Amish example suggest about the relationship between religion and community cohesion?

# Scientology: Self-Development, Structure, and Controversy

Scientology was founded in the 1950s by the science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard and has since grown into one of the most high-profile and controversial new religious movements in the world. At its core, Scientology teaches that individuals can improve themselves and achieve spiritual freedom by removing harmful mental experiences — a process known as **auditing**. Members progress through a hierarchy of levels, working towards a state called "**Clear**", at which point they are said to be free from psychological burdens accumulated in this life and previous ones.

## Structure and Recruitment

Unlike many of the organisations examined in this document, Scientology does not require total commitment from the outset. New members can engage at a relatively modest level, which lowers the initial barrier to joining. However, progressing within the organisation involves significant financial costs, as courses, materials, and assessments must be paid for. This commercial dimension is one reason why sociologists often classify Scientology as having both religious and business-like characteristics — an unusual combination in the sociology of religion.

## Controversy and Criticism

Critics argue that Scientology becomes increasingly controlling as members advance through its levels. There are documented accounts of pressure to remain within the organisation, discouragement of contact with critical outsiders, and strong disincentives to leave. The organisation has also faced legal challenges in several countries regarding its status as a religion. Sociologists note that these features — combined with its commercial structure — make it a particularly complex case study for classifying religious organisations.

## Classifying Scientology: Key Debates

### Is it a Religion?

Scientology claims religious status and has been legally recognised as such in some countries but not others. The debate hinges on definitions of religion and the role of belief, ritual, and community.

### Is it a Cult?

In A-level Sociology, a cult is a loosely organised, spirituality-based movement focused on individual development. Scientology's emphasis on personal auditing and self-improvement has cult-like features in this sense. However, its hierarchical structure and institutional organisation make it more complex than a typical cult.

### Is it a Business?

The financial structure — where spiritual progress requires paid courses — distinguishes Scientology from most religious organisations. This has led some scholars to describe it as a hybrid of religion and commercial enterprise.

## Questions for a Sociologist

### → Attraction to Scientology

Why might someone be attracted to Scientology's promise of self-improvement and spiritual freedom? What does this suggest about the appeal of new religious movements?

### → Religion and Money

How does the financial structure of Scientology challenge traditional definitions of religion? Does charging for spiritual progress make it less of a religion?

### → From NRM to Sect

Scientology started as a small movement and grew into a large global organisation. How might an organisation change as it grows bigger? Does size affect how controlling or open a group becomes?

### → Leaving the Organisation

Why might it be difficult for someone to leave an organisation they have invested a lot of time and money in? Think about what might make people stay even when they are unhappy.

### → Celebrity and Public Image

Why might a religious organisation want to recruit famous or high-profile members? How might celebrity involvement change the way ordinary people view that organisation?

# The Unification Church: Family, Faith, and Global Reach

The Unification Church was founded in 1954 by Sun Myung Moon in South Korea. It combines elements of Christianity with new teachings centred on restoring harmony to the world through the strengthening of family structures. Moon taught that the breakdown of family life was the root cause of social and spiritual disorder, and that the church's mission was to rebuild the world through ideal marriages and devout family units. This focus on family distinguishes the Unification Church from many other new religious movements, which tend to demand that members deprioritise family ties in favour of the group.

## Mass Weddings and Distinctive Practices

One of the most distinctive and widely reported aspects of the Unification Church is its practice of **mass wedding ceremonies**, in which thousands of couples are married simultaneously, often with partners chosen or approved by the organisation. These events attracted enormous media attention and were frequently portrayed as evidence of the church's controlling nature. Members are also expected to dedicate significant time to group activities, including recruitment and fundraising, which creates strong bonds within the community but can strain relationships with outsiders.

## Organisation and Stability

The Unification Church has a clear global organisational structure and has maintained a significant international presence since the mid-20th century. Whilst critics argue that it exerts strong influence over members' personal lives, it is generally considered less extreme than groups such as Peoples Temple. It has shown considerably greater institutional stability over time and has not experienced the catastrophic episodes that have characterised more coercive movements. This makes it a useful example for comparing degrees of control across different types of religious organisation.

## Comparing the Religious Organisations: A Summary

- i** When comparing religious organisations, sociologists use a spectrum from **church** to **denomination**, **sect**, and **cult**. In A-level Sociology, a **church** is large, inclusive, and integrated with mainstream society; a **denomination** is organised and tolerant of wider society; a **sect** is world-rejecting, hostile to wider society, and typically expects high commitment and coercive control; and a **cult** is loosely organised, spirituality-focused, and centred on individual self-improvement — not necessarily controlling or dangerous. Consider where each organisation in this document sits on that spectrum and be prepared to justify your classification in the assessment.

## Questions for a Sociologist



### The Family and Society

The Unification Church places the family at the centre of its beliefs. From what you have studied about the family in sociology, why might a religious organisation see strong family units as essential to a healthy society?



### Mass Weddings

How might the practice of mass weddings be interpreted sociologically? Consider both the perspective of members and outside observers.



### Classification

Where would you place the Unification Church on the church–denomination–sect–cult spectrum? Justify your answer with reference to its key features.



### Criticism and Control

Why might critics describe the Unification Church as controlling, whilst members themselves may not experience it that way? What does this suggest about the sociology of religion?



### Global Reach

The Unification Church has millions of members across the world. What does this suggest about the continued appeal of religion in modern society? Does widespread religious belief surprise you?