

# Markscheme

**November 2023**

**Psychology**

**Higher level**

**Paper 3**

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**Paper 3 markbands**

<b>Marks</b>	<b>Level descriptor</b>
<b>0</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The answer does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.</li> </ul>
<b>1–3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The question is misunderstood and the central issue is not identified correctly, resulting in a mostly irrelevant argument.</li> <li>The response contains mostly inaccurate references to the approaches to research or these are irrelevant to the question.</li> <li>The reference to the stimulus material relies heavily on direct quotations from the text.</li> </ul>
<b>4–6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The question is understood, but only partially answered resulting in an argument of limited scope.</li> <li>The response contains mostly accurate references to approaches to research which are linked explicitly to the question.</li> <li>The response makes appropriate but limited use of the stimulus material.</li> </ul>
<b>7–9</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The question is understood and answered in a focused and effective manner with an accurate argument that addresses the requirements of the question.</li> <li>The response contains accurate references to approaches to research with regard to the question, describing their strengths and limitations.</li> <li>The response makes effective use of the stimulus material.</li> </ul>

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

*Award [1] for identification of correct research method.*

Focus-group interview (acceptable alternative terms: focus-group, group interview)

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

- A focus-group interview is carried out with a small group of participants who all have something in common and all take part in the interview at the same time.
- A focus-group interview is a discussion guided by a facilitator. The facilitator keeps the conversation focused and brings the group back to the topic if need be.
- The facilitator may use a guide with a list of topics developed in advance, but it is possible to adjust the topics. This is beneficial because the discussion between participants may open up new areas of interest that the researcher has not considered.
- In a focus-group interview, participants are encouraged to talk amongst themselves rather than to the facilitator.
- Participants can use their own language, and this together with the special dynamic in a focus group helps to generate rich data.
- Because a focus-group interview is very similar to everyday interactions, it is considered to have higher ecological validity than other forms of interviews.
- A focus-group interview can experience issues related to group dynamics. These include conformity/social desirability bias, some participants sharing less and an unwillingness to share personal information in front of other participants.

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

*Award [1] for naming the correct sampling method.*

Purposive sampling.

*Description of the sampling method may include two of the following characteristics: Award [1] per relevant point, up to a maximum of [2].*

*No marks should be awarded for description of the sample rather than the sampling method.*

- A purposive sample is a non-probability sampling technique, which means that participants are not chosen randomly from a target population but rather based on specific selection criteria / salient characteristics.
- Purposive sampling is used when researchers have a clear idea of the characteristics they want to study.
- A purposive sample is a relatively easy procedure because all the researcher has to do is select people who fit the criteria. However, finding these specific participants is not necessarily easy.
- Researchers can use an already established network to gain participants.
- A purposive sample is flexible because it can be supplemented with more participants during the research process if needed.
- A purposive sample is inherently biased because the participants are chosen based on characteristics that the researcher judges to be salient. It is not likely to be representative of a population.

- (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 candidate 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:

#### **Semi-structured interviews**

- The semi-structured interview as an additional research method would allow triangulation and could compensate for the limitations of the focus group – such as issues around group dynamics.
- A semi-structured interview can be used to elaborate on some of the themes obtained in the focus groups. The SSI can be tailored to the research question, in this study, what adolescents thought of the mental health programme they had completed. The interview guide can also be made to fit the age group being interviewed. This could give more in-depth information on both the benefits of the programme as well as any criticisms of it. This would help in making revisions of the programme, for example, focusing more on promoting positive mental health and concentrating less on problems.
- The semi-structured interview as an alternative research method would allow participants to have greater anonymity which may allow the participants to feel more comfortable to share, especially given the sensitive nature of the topic.

#### **Surveys:**

- A survey with questionnaires using closed and some open-ended questions is less time consuming as it is easy to collect and analyse large amounts of quantitative data. The survey can be used as an alternative method in order to include all adolescents who have completed the school-based mental health programme. This could result in a larger group, which is more representative of the entire population and it would be easier to generalize findings. However, because of the nature of a questionnaire the data may not represent the true meaning of an experience.
- Data from the survey could also be used as a follow-up to the focus group interviews in order to check whether the findings from the focus group interviews can be supported (method triangulation)
- 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 analyse the data statistically. If the sample is randomized then 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].*

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

- **Informed consent:** The participants were fully informed and signed consent forms. This means that they were aware of the aims of the study.
- **Parental consent:** The researcher also needed to receive consent from a parent because the participants were younger than 16 (they were aged 13-15 years old).
- **Deception:** The participants were NOT deceived and the researchers had no reasons to use deception. The parents were also given information about the aims of the study.
- **Confidentiality:** Participants were told that their data would be kept confidential. This involves all of their personal information, the recordings, transcripts, notes and analysis being kept in secure storage. Researchers will also provide clarity for participants regarding how and when their data will be destroyed.
- Any other relevant points.

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

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

- **Privacy:** Since this study focuses on sensitive issues and the risk of depression researchers should take care to inform participants that the focus group interviews could potentially touch on issues that they would feel were private and that they had the right to refuse to answer. This is important as some participants may find it upsetting to have revealed how they feel about themselves.
- **Anonymity:** Participants in a study must be sure that nobody can identify them in research reports. However complete anonymity cannot be provided because the other participants and the interviewer in each focus group know who participated in their interview.
- **Right to withdraw:** Before the study started participants should have been informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point. And that they could withdraw their data even after they have participated in the focus group interviews.
- **Protection from harm:** In this study, it is particularly important to make sure that the participants do not suffer from psychological harm. Since the study is about their participation in a mental health programme, the researcher must be attentive to personal and sensitive issues. In addition, since these are group discussions, the researcher should divert or even stop a discussion that may harm a participant.
- **Debriefing:** The researchers should make sure that all participants are debriefed after the study is over, and that they have the opportunity to ask questions. The researchers should also be attentive to the possibility of vulnerable participants who may need support or counselling and make sure that this is offered to those who need it. This is particularly important because the participants are so young and the topic of investigation touches upon very sensitive issues.
- Any other relevant points.

3. Discuss how a researcher in this study 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 candidates to offer a considered review of how the researcher in this study could ensure that the results of the study in the stimulus material are credible.

Candidates may refer to measures that were taken in the study or suggest measures that could have been taken, or a combination of the two. Each of these 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: Qualitative research uses an idiographic approach where the focus is on subjective data representing participants’ own opinions and experiences with the phenomenon under study. In qualitative research, rich data can encompass the complexity of adolescents’ perceptions of the mental health programme they have completed. Rich data and thick description can help in establishing the meaning that these adolescents’ place on action and words as they see it themselves.
  - Using triangulation: If similar results can be arrived at and validated using multiple sources of data, multiple methods or different researchers, then the result of the study will have greater credibility. There were two researchers in this study and both of them participated in the research process as one conducted the focus group interviews, and the other made the transcriptions from the recordings. Both of them took part in coding of the transcripts, and interpretation of the data, which could help to protect against researcher bias. The researchers in this study also invited a third researcher to check their findings. This measure could increase credibility as an external review could illuminate blind spots and overall make the findings more robust and well-documented.
  - Having reflexivity: the researcher should use critical self-awareness with regard to personal interests (personal reflexivity) as well as methodological choices (epistemological reflexivity).
  - 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.
  - Participant verification / member checking: This means asking participants in a study to check the results and the statements chosen to support the conclusions. Have the participants themselves judge whether or not the findings actually represent their experiences and opinions. This was not done in this study, but had it been implemented, the findings would increase in credibility.
  - Examination of previous research findings on the same topic: Assessing the degree to which the findings of this qualitative research are congruent with previous studies.
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