Worksheet 1.3
Additional practice questions for Chapter 1

The stimulus material below is based on a research article

According to Weiner (2005), the transition from communism to capitalism in Eastern and Central Europe has been beneficial for many but has left behind some groups, such that the post-communist world can be divided into ‘winners’ and ‘losers’. Women and workers have been identified as two groups of losers. Weiner aimed to study the nature of discontent among female factory workers in the Czech Republic, who would be expected to be among the most dissatisfied with post-communist life.

The researcher began by looking at the Czech media, focusing on articles and interviews with women in order to help identify appropriate questions for discussion. This was followed by focus groups in light-manufacturing factories with 48 women aged between 35 and 55. From these women, the researcher gathered a purposive sample of 19 women to interview individually. The age range was deliberately set to ensure that women who would have no memory of work prior to 1989 were not included in the study. Questions were asked with a focus on changes in family and work life since 1989.

Key findings were as follows.

1. Women had less educational capital and therefore fewer opportunities to move out of their factory jobs than men, who had tended to gain technical qualifications since 1989.

2. Women workers’ wages did not increase compared to inflation as much as men’s or skilled workers’ so that ‘we became the poorest group.’

3. Job and social security disappeared and created more psychological stress along with a fear of family bankruptcy.

4. The mother role was incompatible with work as it was not valued by employers or acknowledged as bringing special needs.

5. Women are more likely to be exploited in the workplace with minimal union protection, allowing wage discrimination to intensify.

Reference
Answer all the following questions

1 The study described above used focus groups to gather data initially. Evaluate focus groups as a research method. [10 marks]

2 Discuss considerations involved before, during and after an interview. [10 marks]

3 To what extent can findings be generalized from qualitative studies? [10 marks]

Answer guidelines

1 You do not need an introduction for 10-mark questions. You should begin by explaining what focus groups are, highlighting the key features of the method that are visible in Weiner’s study. You should then identify at least three strengths and three limitations. One of the easiest ways to identify these is to imagine why the researcher preferred this method over others: for example, focus groups often encourage individuals to say more than they might in a one-to-one interview (strength) but it is often the case that more confident people dominate while quieter people are inhibited (limitation). Remember that the question asks about focus groups in general, not about this study, but a full answer should link generic strengths and weaknesses to details found in the text.

2 Considerations before, during and after an interview are detailed in Chapter 1. Remember practical considerations such as designing questions for the interview and checking if the recording device works (where appropriate) and ethical considerations such as conducting a debriefing afterwards. You should be able to explain why these considerations are important and where possible, link your answer to the research stimulus given.

3 The issue of generalization from qualitative studies is important. Remember that quantitative research is usually intended to investigate relationships between variables and provide statistical information that can be used for comparison and generalization. In qualitative research, the aim is usually to understand and describe, so it is not usually necessary to generalize beyond the specific context of the research. Look for reasons why the research stimulus provided may or may not be able to be generalized and consider whether this is necessary or desirable. Some researchers argue that it is more important for researchers to give enough detail about the context of the research so that readers can themselves decide if the method and conclusions are transferable to a different context. If this is the case for the research stimulus here, explain what context you think you could transfer it to. Be sure to end with a conclusion briefly detailing to what extent you think findings can be generalized from qualitative studies.