

OCR A LEVEL
PSYCHOLOGY

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TOPIC ESSAYS

Criminal Psychology



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**(b) Assess the usefulness of research in relation to the effect of imprisonment.
(15 marks)**

Psychological research into the effects of imprisonment can be considered useful: the research increases academic knowledge about our understanding of the individual versus situational explanation of behaviour. The key research by Haney et al. demonstrated that normal members of the public with no psychological issues still acted in extreme ways under the constraints of a prison situation. The psychological effects of the study were severe, especially for the prisoners who reacted with extreme emotional depression, crying, rage and acute anxiety. The guards, on the other hand, began to abuse their position of power by being cruel and harsh to prisoners. Haney et al. concluded that it was the situation that caused the participants' behaviour, not their individual characteristics. This is useful for the legal system and prison officers to know. If they are aware of the situational psychological effects of prison life and how this can negatively influence inmate behaviour, programmes could be developed to ensure prisoner well-being and to reduce inmate violence or emotional distress.

There is effective use of examples from Haney et al.'s key research. The key research is not just simply described, but the usefulness and potential implication of it are discussed.

However, the usefulness of research into the effects of prison life is limited by its lack of ecological validity: the extent to which the research reflects real prison life. Haney et al. tried to make their experiment as realistic as possible, which included having the prisoners 'arrested' at their homes. It was conducted in a specially designed mock prison built in the basement of Stanford University psychology building. However, the 'prisoners' and 'guards' were not real prisoners or trained guards; they were in fact white, male college students. Furthermore, the participants knew they were taking part in a mock prison experiment and that they could leave the prison at any time. This limits the usefulness of the study, because we don't really know how real prisoners and guards would act in real life. Real prisoners cannot leave prison when they wish; and real guards would most likely not be act in a brutal way, as they have had formal training. The prisoners would also probably not have as many extreme reactions because they wouldn't be being treated as badly as they were in this study, where they had food and toilet breaks withheld. As it was a psychology experiment, the participants may have shown demand characteristics and behaved in way they thought they were supposed to for the study. Therefore this is not a realistic or useful indication of the effects of imprisonment.

The possible lack of usefulness is discussed. The argument is competently organised, balanced and well developed with a variety of problems raised and counter arguments considered.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that there was a clear lack of ecological validity, Haney's research can be considered high in internal validity, which ultimately increases the usefulness of the findings. Although the study was set up in a mock prison

and employed a number of controls of possible confounding variables, such as Haney controlling for personality variables. The behavioural data collected on the prisoners and guards demonstrates how they became immersed in the situation. They became completely absorbed in the roles to which they had been assigned; and this means that the findings can to an extent be generalised beyond a mock prison setting. Their reactions, therefore, confirm the high realism of the situation and thus the data is useful. Furthermore, this would be the only way to study the effects of prison life, as experiments cannot be conducted with real prisoners or guards, and a simple observation in a prison could not control for variables that would influence prisoner or guard behaviour.

There is good relevant knowledge and understanding of issues that can influence the usefulness demonstrated in each paragraph. Psychological terminology has been described appropriately and effectively.

But the usefulness of research into the effects of imprisonment is ultimately impacted by the ethical implications. Haney et al. deceived participants. The prisoners were arrested at the start of the experiment, which was something they were not informed about. There was also clear evidence of psychological harm, which can be seen from the extreme reactions of the prisoners. Furthermore, stress would have developed because, despite prisoners showing negative reactions early on in the experiment, the study lasted several days before it was abandoned. Ethical implications impact the usefulness of psychological research. If several ethical guidelines are broken, then this can give psychology a bad reputation and discourage participants from taking part in further psychological research. This means other research cannot be undertaken, and ultimately limits the usefulness of any original findings that cannot be supported or refuted.

Arguments are substantiated from the key piece of research. Valid conclusions have been provided at the end of each paragraph.

[~700 Words]

Examiner style comments: *Mark Band 4: 12–15 marks*

This is a well-detailed and accurate answer. The response demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of usefulness (A01), and demonstrates effective evaluation, considering both strengths and weaknesses of a range of issues that can impact the usefulness of research into the effects of imprisonment. The extent to which research into the effect of imprisonment is useful is assessed, rather than simply identified and illustrated (A03). The argument is competently organised and balanced with points for and against the usefulness of the research. These arguments are well developed, and appropriate examples are used effectively to substantiate the debate. The answer is explicitly related to the context of the question, with all arguments being linked back to the usefulness of the key research. Furthermore, the answer incorporates good use of psychological terminology throughout.

CRIMINAL PSYCHOLOGY ESSAYS

1.Explain how the research by Raine et al. (1997) could be used to understand physiological explanations of criminal behaviour. (10 marks)

2.Assess the nature/nurture debate with regard to explanations of criminal behaviour. (15 marks)

3.Assess the methodological issues involved when conducting research into the motivating factors and bias in the collection and processing of forensic evidence. (15 marks)

4.Explain how the research by Memon and Higham (1999) could be used to improve the collection of evidence from witnesses. (10 marks)

Tim is a detective with a team of police officers who are investigating a high-profile murder case in London. Several witnesses have been called forward; some have taken part in the standard police interview and others have taken part in a new interview technique which uses components of the cognitive interview. Those witnesses who took part in the new interview method recalled more information and Tim now wants all the police officers to use this method with future witnesses. However, some of the officers are reluctant and believe it is a waste of time.

5.Discuss how Tim might apply his knowledge of the collection of evidence to explain why the police interview led to high levels of recall in the witnesses and why this method should be used by his officers in the future. (10 marks)

6.Describe how research into the characteristics of witnesses and defendants can influence a jury's decision-making process. (10 marks)

7.Assess the reductionism and holism debate in regard to how juries can be persuaded by the characteristics of witnesses and defendants. (15 marks)

Jamie is a defence lawyer who is representing a black client with a strong Mancunian accent who runs several nightclubs in the Manchester area. His client has been charged with drug dealing. Jamie is worried that his client's characteristics may make him more likely to receive a guilty verdict from the jury despite his innocence. However, Jamie has two witnesses to call on: his client's friend and a retired police officer.

8.Suggest one or more strategies that Jamie could use in court to persuade the jury of his client's innocence. (10 marks)

9. Using Wilson and Kelling's (1982) article, discuss how crime can be prevented by the features of a neighbourhood. (10 marks)

A local neighbourhood has recently spent a large amount of money on new playground equipment. However, the local parish council has received several complaints that the equipment is being vandalised and the playground is used as an area where teenagers socialise and drink alcohol late at night.

10.Suggest a strategy that the local police could use to reduce anti-social behaviour in this area. (10 marks)

11. Assess the usefulness of research in relation to the effect of imprisonment. (15 marks)

Dale is a repeat offender who has been in prison twice already for crimes such as burglary and vandalism. He is on trial again, with the possibility of being sent to prison for a third time. It is obvious that a prison sentence is not deterring Dale from committing further crimes.

12.Discuss a strategy that can be used alongside imprisonment to reduce Dale's reoffending. (10 marks)