

ITEM B: ETHNICITY AND CRIME

There is a significant overrepresentation within the prison system of ethnic minorities, and in particular black people. Statistics show that despite constituting only 2.8% of the population, black people make up 11% of the prison population. Sociologists would attribute these trends to a range of factors such as police targeting, a lack of positive male role models and material deprivation.

However, others would note that ethnicity itself does not in fact cause greater criminality, rather that the police statistics do not include sufficient details of those crimes committed by the white middle classes as these are rarely investigated by the police. Similarly, there are other explanations of criminality such as gender or social class that might prove more significant.

Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate the view that ethnicity is the most significant cause of crime. (30 marks)

Some sociologists would agree that ethnicity is the most significant cause of criminal and deviant behaviour whereas others would disagree and argue that other factors such as ethnicity or social class play a greater role.

According to Item B, “there is a significant overrepresentation within the prison system of ethnic minorities, and in particular black people. Statistics show that despite constituting only 2.8% of the population, black people make up 11% of the prison population. Sociologists would attribute these trends to a range of factors such as police targeting, a lack of positive male role models and material deprivation”.

To address each of these issues in turn, there have been important trends in policing that have resulted in a bias towards black people and other ethnic minorities in terms of the way they are stopped and searched. Phillips and Bowling (2007) have described policing as oppressive towards ethnic minorities and they claim that the police have taken advantage of their ability to stop and search based purely on ‘reasonable suspicion’. Black and Asian people are around eight times as likely to be stopped and searched by the police according to data from the British Crime Survey and this situation has got increasingly worse since the introduction of the Terrorism Act of 2000 which allowed new powers to the police to search without reasonable suspicion if there were terrorist concerns. Labelling theorists such as Becker would argue that the reason why the police target ethnic minorities has little to do with their likelihood of actually committing a crime and much more to do with prejudicial or outdated stereotypes

A clear introduction that outlines the question succinctly.

Immediate reference to the item which is developed using wider knowledge and which clearly addresses the demands of the question.

Sociological evidence is used effectively and there is reference to sociological theories such as Labelling.

Studies are used appropriately, though greater use of contemporary examples could have been an area for improvement here.

There is some evaluation of the points raised.

held by police officers which regard ethnic minorities as being criminal (based upon scapegoating or moral panics created by the mass media). However, it is important to recognise that there is a genuine threat posed by terrorism which informs policing and similarly other factors such as material deprivation or a lack of male role models, as well as status frustration, may indeed result in greater criminality amongst ethnic minorities.

Left Realists would argue that ethnic differences in offending do indeed reflect a social reality as crime is seen to be a product of relative deprivation. Due to prejudices and discrimination which continues to exist in society it is inevitable that ethnic minorities will turn to crime in order to survive. Ethnic minorities have fewer job prospects and are more likely to occupy low paid and low status professions. They are also more likely to live in poorer areas and there is a greater level of crime in such areas due to poorer security systems and a general sense of status frustration that exists in society. Similarly, there is a greater chance of ethnic minorities developing delinquent subcultures as they have little else to do to occupy their time as many young black men are unemployed and therefore turn to criminal behaviour.

With regards to police targeting, Lea and Young do acknowledge that there are discriminatory procedures in place. However, they also draw attention to the fact that over 90% of crimes known to the police are actually reported to them, rather than being a result of their own investigations. Therefore it is not necessarily the police themselves that are racist, it is wider society – or perhaps trends in ethnic minority offending do indeed reflect a particular social reality.

A further explanation of ethnic minority offending could come from the New Right theory which argues (according to Charles Murray) that the increased likelihood of young black males being raised in a single-parent family meant that they did not receive as much attention from their mothers as they were likely to be the breadwinner for the family. Where those mothers in fact chose to accept state benefits instead of working, the New Right argued that they were encouraging their children to grow up to expect money to be freely accessible and so they were more likely to engage in crime to achieve it or become benefits scroungers themselves as they have been socialised into the values of fatalism and immediate gratification. Similarly, the

Further development of the issues and new sociological concepts and theories have been introduced and analysed in response to the demands of the question.

Statistical evidence has been used well and there is some explicit evaluation of the previous paragraph.

Consensus theories are introduced as further evaluation and there are synoptic links made to the family topics.

Key concepts are used effectively.

lack of a male role model could mean that black males were unlikely to aspire to the instrumental role suggested by Parsons (Functionalist) and instead would turn to criminal means to achieve material success as they did not fully accept or understand the norms and values of society due to poor socialisation.

Critics, however, would argue that it is less to do with poor socialisation and more to do with a lack of opportunity to gain social status in a legitimate way that leads ethnic minorities to crime. Cloward and Ohlin, for example, suggested a subcultural theory of crime which referred to the way ethnic minorities were unable to access legitimate opportunity structures and so turned to criminal means to achieve success. Strain theorists such as Merton would also echo this view and would suggest that the pressure to achieve the material success goals of society take their toll and so ethnic minorities turn to criminal means such as innovation (theft) or retreatism (drug use) to deal with their status frustration (Cohen).

Other sociologists, however, would argue, according to Item B, that “ethnicity itself does not in fact cause greater criminality, rather that the police statistics do not include sufficient details of those crimes committed by the white middle classes as these are rarely investigated by the police”. Marxist sociologists are highly critical of the police for targeting ethnic minorities and they would argue that the criminogenic nature of capitalism is what causes crime as it is based upon inequality and unachievable levels of competition. Similarly, laws that are introduced by the state tend to penalise the crimes of the working classes, but as Snider (1993) notes, they are reluctant to pass laws that threaten the profitability of capitalism.

Feminists too would point to the influence of gender in determining criminality as they would argue that women are more tightly controlled (Heidensohn) by society and their socialisation into the role of housewife and mother and this means that they have little opportunity to commit crimes. Similarly, men actually gain social status by adopting a hegemonic form of masculinity which is more responsive to the needs of criminality as it encourages violence, aggression, competition and risk taking.

Critics of this approach would argue that women are in fact just as criminal as men but that the justice system itself is actually too chivalrous towards women and therefore treats

More explicit evaluation with new theories and studies introduced as evidence.

The item has once again been clearly referenced and built upon.

Conflict theories are used effectively.

There is reference to sociological studies.

Additional evaluation and alternative explanations to criminality are offered and there are supporting concepts/studies as well as reference to other topic areas such as family.

Evaluation of the previous points are offered and clearly explained.

them leniently. This explains their underrepresentation in the crime statistics.

Based on the evidence, sociologists would agree that there are in fact significant trends amongst ethnic minority groups that make it appear as if some groups are more criminal than others. However, the reality is that it is more about the perception of these groups by law enforcement agencies and wider social issues such as the inequality created by the capitalist system and prejudicial attitudes that prevent them from achieving social status and social mobility that bring about criminality. This suggests that ethnic minorities themselves are not inherently more criminal but that they are forced to a life of crime by the social system in which they live.

[1191 words]

Examiner style comments: **Mark band 25–30**

This is a top mark band essay that focuses on a range of factors that explain differences in offending amongst ethnic groups. Each point is well analysed and explained using sociological evidence and there is clear evidence of evaluation throughout which again is well supported by evidence. Use of Item B is explicit and the points referenced have been further developed.

To improve further the candidate could devote more time to the recent social trends that have seen a greater number of Arab and Asian people represented in the police statistics and the social issues that have caused this.

A clear conclusion that summarises the issues and addresses the original question.