

ITEM B: FEMALE CRIMINALITY

As a general rule, the majority of crimes in society tend to be committed by males. Statistics show that four out of five crimes committed in England and Wales were by men and men were also statistically more likely to be repeat offenders or to embark on criminal careers. However, it is important to note that the rate of female criminality has been understated in sociological research, with many blaming a 'chivalry' thesis for the reason why men appear to be more criminal than women. Females are also more likely than men to commit property offences (except burglary).

Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate the view that men commit more crime than women. (30 marks)

Some sociologists would argue that men are more likely to commit a crime than women. According to Item B, "statistics show that four out of five crimes committed in England and Wales were by men and men were also statistically more likely to be repeat offenders or to embark on criminal careers". There are a number of reasons why men may be more likely to commit crime than women because of their masculinity. Messerschmidt (1993) argues that masculinity is a social construct that men need to continually work at in order to prove themselves in society and as such are more likely to engage in criminal or deviant behaviour as represents the most hegemonic form of masculinity (which is socially regarded as the most desirable as it brings with it the highest level of social status). Men therefore tend towards crimes that are demonstrative of their power such as violence, sexual crimes or crimes involving property that include high levels of risk. However, critics of Messerschmidt have questioned whether or not his concept of hegemonic masculinity actually explains why the crime takes place, or whether it is simply a label that could be used to describe the nature of the offender. He also fails to establish why it is that the majority of men do not demonstrate criminal or deviant behaviours if hegemonic masculinity is indeed so desirable.

There is, however, some compelling evidence from sociologists such as Ann Oakley who investigated gender socialisation in the family and saw males as significantly more likely to be socialised into characteristics that potentially made them excellent criminals such as competition, aggression, risk-taking and extrovert behaviour. The sorts of toys, games and activities that boys are directed towards at an early age facilitate the development of these characteristics and these qualities are generally more pronounced amongst the criminal

A clear introduction that introduces the main argument and which uses Item B well to raise a point that is then developed.

Analysis is supported by sociological studies and key concepts are introduced and used appropriately.

Knowledge is applied well and is relevant to the demands of the question.

There is some evaluation of the points raised in this initial paragraph.

A continuation of the view that men commit greater levels of crime which focuses on socialisation and which makes synoptic links to the family topic.

Good use of supporting sociological theories and examples.

population. Additionally, because males are generally regarded to be more able to look after themselves they are less tightly controlled by the family and this explains why young males have the freedom to go out and about independently and therefore have the opportunity to commit crime. This is also driven by a general sense of boredom and a sense of frustration amongst young males at the lack of opportunities they have in society.

Similarly, males may tend towards criminality because they have been socialised into assuming the instrumental role (Parsons – Functionalist theory) which means they are responsible for providing financially for their families. In situations where they are unable to do so using legitimate opportunity structures (Cloward and Ohlin – Subcultural theory) they turn to illegitimate opportunity structures such as criminal subcultures (apprenticeships in crime), conflict subcultures (gangs or violence) or retreatist subcultures (illegal drug taking) in a bid to gain prestige and status and potentially material gain to support their families. The lack of opportunity towards males tends to be a particular problem amongst the working classes as it is within this social class that there are the fewest employment opportunities since there has been a significant decline in manufacturing industries and therefore the working world has become more feminised – and so it is a less appealing prospect for men. This means many of them turn to crime as they are experiencing a sense of status frustration, which Marxist sociologists believe emerges from the unequal nature of society. They believe that capitalist societies are criminogenic in the sense that they inevitably bring about crime as there is such pressure to consume that those who are unable to keep up using traditional methods of success turn to criminal means.

This is echoed by Merton's Strain theory which argues that individuals respond in a variety of ways to the pressure to achieve socially constructed success goals. Those who are in a position to access opportunities legitimately (women or the middle classes) are able to conform, whereas those who are not (working class males) turn to alternative means of achieving success such as innovation (theft or fraud), retreatism (illegal drug use) or rebellion (revolutionaries or counter-cultures such as hippies). Thus far, the sociological evidence suggests that males are more likely to commit crimes than females.

However, there is sociological evidence that suggests that

Key concepts are used appropriately.

Consensus theories are introduced and there is some detailed analysis within this paragraph.

New sociological concepts and studies are used to support points and examples are given.

There is some evaluation as conflict theories such as Marxism are introduced.

Clear links are made back to the original question and this paragraph offers appropriate knowledge which has been applied sensitively to the demands of the question.

This paragraph sets the scene

women in fact commit just as many crimes as men, or indeed that they have the potential to be just as criminal, but that there are numerous restrictions placed upon them by a patriarchal society that mean they are unable to.

According to Item B, “the rate of female criminality has been understated in sociological research, with many blaming a ‘chivalry’ thesis for the reason why men appear to be more criminal or commit property offences (except burglary)”. However, these types of crimes are less likely to be reported to the police and therefore are often dealt with internally by store security and so do not appear in the official crime statistics. Similarly, Pollak (1950) argues that the criminal justice system is generally more lenient with women than men. Females are also more likely than men to be regarded as weaker and also more central to the family. Therefore, a mother who has committed a crime is much less likely to receive a custodial sentence due to the impact it might have on the children whereas a woman who is caught speeding, for example, may also find her femininity is used as a reason for letting her off of a ticket.

There is, however, significant evidence against the chivalry thesis which suggests in fact that at times the criminal justice system can actually be biased against women – particularly those who do not conform to the gender stereotypes. Heidensohn (1996) argues that courts are harsher towards females who have behaved in a promiscuous way or those that have decided against motherhood.

Generally speaking, however, it is accepted in sociology that women do indeed commit fewer crimes than men, largely because of their own socialisation and also the lack of opportunity because of the way in which they are controlled. Heidensohn (1985) also remarked upon the way in which women were controlled within the home as they took primary responsibility for childcare which prevented them from committing crimes in the public space. Dobash and Dobash (1979) also argued that women were more likely to be victims of crime within the home as they suffered higher levels of domestic abuse. Women were also more likely to be controlled in the public space as they feared male violence against them. This means they were less likely to engage in crimes such as violence, property crime and significantly less likely to be the perpetrators of sexual crimes.

for the evaluation that follows and introduces new concepts.

A further use of Item B which has been appropriately developed using wider knowledge.

Sociological studies and examples have been used appropriately.

New sociological theories are introduced and there is a clear evaluative structure.

Studies used to support points and examples are drawn.

Synoptic links are made to the family module and a consideration of women as victims of crime rather than perpetrators is introduced.

Based on the evidence, therefore, it does indeed seem to be the case that men commit more crimes than women, largely due to differences in their socialisation and the levels of opportunity they have to commit them. However, it is also important to note that there have been significant increases in the number of female perpetrators with the advent of feminism and with changing social attitudes to women, which mean that they are more likely to occupy the public space or feel the pressure themselves to be the main breadwinners for the family, and in a time of economic recession it is inevitable that more women than ever before turn to crime. The criminal justice system, however, does still operate on the assumption that women are weaker and more central to the family and as such they are less likely to be arrested and charged with crimes – so female crimes do in fact make up a significant proportion of the dark figure of crime, meaning we are unable to trust official statistics fully as they provide an invalid picture of the true extent of crime.

[1278 words]

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

This essay fully addresses the issues raised in the question and uses Item B well to raise points but also builds upon them with wider knowledge. There is good supporting sociological evidence throughout in the form of concept, theories and studies and the essay has a good evaluative structure that goes into a good range of arguments in depth.

To improve further there could be more explicit links back to the original question throughout each evaluative section and perhaps also some more up-to-date sociological evidence in the form of recent studies/contemporary examples.

A clear conclusion that explicitly addresses the original question and which is based on the evidence presented.