

ITEM B: CRIME PREVENTION

There are a range of sociological approaches which argue that they offer the most effective solution to crime prevention. Sociologists argue on the one hand that situational crime prevention (reducing opportunities for crime) is the most effective method, whereas others suggest environmental crime prevention has a bigger impact (changing the environment to prevent crime from occurring). A further approach that has been suggested by sociologists is social or community crime prevention which suggests stronger bonds and social controls could play the biggest part.

However, more traditional approaches to preventing crime focus on the impact of punishment and the different punitive measures that can be implemented to prevent crime.

Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate the view that punishments are the best way to prevent crime. (30 marks)

According to Item B some sociologists would agree that punishment is the best way to stop individuals from committing crime in society. They would focus on the “impact of punishment and the different punitive measures that can be implemented to prevent crime”. However, other sociologists would argue that other approaches might be more effective in reducing criminality such as the situational approach, the environmental approach or the social or community approach (Item B).

Sociologists that advocate punishment as the most effective form of crime prevention would argue that there are a range of ways in which it can help to reduce criminality. The first of these is through deterrence and this corresponds to the Functionalist ideas about crime and deviance, as they too suggest that there is a need for punishments to reinforce the norms and values of a society by imposing sanctions on those who fail to conform. There is a belief that making an example of offenders can result in them being less likely to commit crimes in the future so they themselves are deterred, but also our knowledge of the sanctions they receive and the subsequent impact this has on their life chances makes the rest of society less likely to engage in criminal activity. This approach was well documented as part of the Thatcher government which believed in short stints in young offenders institutes as a way of sending a clear message to youth offenders that their behaviour would not be tolerated.

Another aspect of punishment is the view that it can actually be used to rehabilitate offenders. By providing education and guidance to offenders and making this compulsory as part of

A clear introduction that makes reference to Item B and which outlines the debate.

Reference to sociological theory.

A clear outline of one of the ways in which punishment can help reduce crime, which has been well supported by sociological evidence.

Appropriate examples have been used, as has key terminology.

Further analysis of the issue with additional concepts introduced.

their sanctions they are better equipped for the future and are therefore less likely to engage in criminal behaviour in the future.

The third aspect of punishment that can cause a reduction in crime is incapacitation. By placing an individual in jail in response to their crimes or even stronger sanctions such as execution or chemical castration, law enforcement agencies are sending a clear and direct message that a failure to conform to the laws of a society will not be tolerated and the strength of sanctions imposed will correspond to the severity of the crime that has been committed and the negative impact it has on society. By physically removing the most serious offenders from society we are inevitably seeing a reduction in crime as these individuals are far more likely to reoffend if allowed to remain free.

The final aspect of punishment that serves to reduce crime in society is retribution. For many, there is a real sense that crimes committed must in some way be paid for and although this will of course prevent future crimes, it is also based on the assumption that past violations against the law must be paid for in some way. By expressing social outrage towards the perpetrator of a crime it significantly reduces their chances of reoffending and once again asserts to dominant norms and values of a society.

Based on the evidenced presented so far it would appear that punishment alone is a very effective measure of crime prevention. However, other sociologists would be critical and would argue that it does not address the reasons why crime occurs in the first place and the social conditions which bring it about. Situational crime prevention is described by Clarke (1992) as a means to pre-empt crime and is based largely on reducing the opportunities to commit it. Basic measures such as locking doors or using surveillance such as CCTV, for example, have a dramatic impact upon the number of crimes that are possible. This is because situational crime prevention is based on an underlying rational choice theory whereby the criminal weighs up their chances of being caught for an offence and if enough obstacles have been placed in their way, they are much less likely to engage in criminal activity. Similarly, there is an additional element to situational crime prevention called displacement. This involves the movement of crime from one place to another which can actually have an impact on crime levels rather than simply moving them on as

Clear links back to the original question and continued analysis of relevant sociological issues.

Appropriate examples are used to support points.

A final focus on punishment which extends the arguments and again uses sociological ideas and concepts effectively.

A clear link back to the question as part of the evaluative structure.

Sociological studies and examples are used to support points and concepts are used effectively.

Good analysis.

Appropriate examples are used.

again it makes it more difficult to commit a crime. An example of this could be dispersal orders which make it difficult for young offenders to congregate in large groups to commit crime – instead moving them on to other areas which may prove more difficult to commit crime in. This suggests, therefore, that punishment is not the only effective measure of controlling crime.

Another aspect of crime prevention is environmental crime prevention which focuses on the physical environment and has found that by managing it effectively, law enforcement agencies can have a significant impact upon the crime rate. Wilson and Kelling (1982) famously published a study on 'broken windows' which suggested that if areas that showed signs of social disorder such as broken windows, graffiti, litter, dog fouling, etc. were allowed to remain in this state, it actually had the impact of encouraging further criminal behaviour as members of society felt the clear signs of previous criminal activity meant they themselves were less likely to be caught for it in the future. This is because areas with 'broken windows' also lacked forms of social control (no formal police presence and no informal community policing) which meant individuals were free to violate laws without fear of repercussions. Wilson and Kelling therefore proposed a zero-tolerance approach to policing and immediate restoration of any signs of social disorder to prevent this from happening in the future. This is further evidence to suggest that punishment is not necessarily the most effective strategy for controlling crime.

A final element of crime prevention comes from social and community policing and crime prevention. This approach places the emphasis on the context of offending and aims to remove the social issues that cause crime in the first place. This could mean tackling social inequality and unemployment levels or reducing the opportunities to commit crimes amongst some social groups, e.g. young males. It could also focus on the methods used in policing to ensure that they are more effective and less discriminatory towards social groups.

Based on the evidence, sociologists would argue that although punishment is a fundamental part of crime prevention, it needs to be conducted alongside situation, environmental and social methods to control crime in order to be most effective. There needs to be a more holistic approach which focuses on the needs of society and the issues of discrimination that are

Further evaluation with new issues and concepts introduced.

Sociological studies and examples are used to support points.

There are clear links back to the original question.

Essay is well structured to show it is approaching the conclusion.

New evaluative points are introduced and are well explained.

A clear conclusion that addresses the question and which is based on the contents of the essay.

faced by social groups and which is active in overcoming these to create a more meritocratic society where individuals and social groups are more able to achieve using legitimate opportunity structure (Cloward and Ohlin) to prevent future crime.

[1122 words]

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

This essay falls within the top mark band and has a good range of perspectives considered. These are well supported with sociological evidence and form an evaluative argument which has strong levels of analysis throughout. Key concepts have been used effectively, as have sociological studies, and there is explicit reference to Item B. The conclusion is clear, there are links back to the question throughout and intelligent issues are raised based on the content of the essay.