ITEM B: VICTIMS OF CRIME

Victimisation has become an issue of increasing sociological importance and therefore greater emphasis has been placed upon identifying the social groups most at risk of victimisation and the sociological explanations for these trends. Marxist sociologists would argue that the poor are also the most likely social group to be victims of crime as there was a sense of status frustration and material deprivation that drove the poor to criminal activities.

Other social factors that played a part included age (with younger people being more at risk of victimisation), as well as minority ethnic groups and young men in particular.

Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate the view that class is the main issue influencing the likelihood of being a victim of crime. (30 marks)

Some sociologists would argue that class is the main issue influencing the likelihood of being a victim of crime, whereas others would argue that there are other factors that play a more significant role in criminality such as age, gender or ethnicity. The United Nations defines victims of crime as anyone who has experienced harm, economic loss or impairment of their rights as a result of actions that violate the laws of a given society. Some sociologists, such as Christie (1986), argue that the victim is a socially constructed term and stereotypically in the media appears as being weak, innocent and often physically smaller and that they are more likely to be victims as a result of an attack by strangers. However, the reality is that there is a much greater diversity amongst victims and there is a greater range of social factors that determine the likelihood of being a victim of a crime.

A clear introduction which explicitly addresses the question and which offers a clear definition of the term 'victim'.

Sociological evidence is used effectively to support points and synoptic links are made which relate to the mass media topic.

Key concepts have been used appropriately.

Sociologists studying victims of crime are said to be researching 'victimology' and there are two key approaches to this. The first is known as Positivist victimology which aims to identify the patterns in victimisation, and which aims to identify victims who have contributed to their own victimisation. The very earliest Positivist sociologists focused on the concept of victim proneness which aimed to identify the social and psychological characteristics of victims that makes them more vulnerable than non-victims. A sociologist that has argued for this approach is Hans Vin Hentig (1948) who conducted research into the characteristics of victims and found that they shared certain characteristics such as being female, elderly, or suffering from some sort of mental impairment. This approach seems to be suggesting that in some way the victim is to blame for

A clear outline of the different sociological approaches to victimology which show a good understanding of theoretical perspectives.

Sociological evidence has been used to support points and there has been a clear analysis of the issues.

their own victim status.

The second approach to victimology is Critical victimology which is drawn from a conflict approach and which is concerned with the state's power to define people as criminal and the way in which the label is applied more to some social groups than others. Tombs and Whyte (2007), for example, explain how crimes within a workplace setting, particularly those relating to safety, are often explained away as being an accident rather than recognising the way in which the employer has violated the laws. The approach also focuses on the social structures that bring about criminality and therefore victimisation such as patriarchy or poverty as a result of capitalism.

Evaluation is present through an opposing perspective on victimology and again supporting sociological studies have been used as evidence and are well supported with analysis and explanation.

Key concepts used appropriately.

The critical approach to victimology is therefore more concerned with the patterns of victimisation that occur in society and many believe that social class is the most important social factor in defining victim status. According to Item B, "Marxist sociologists would argue that the poor are also the most likely social group to be victims of crime as there was a sense of status frustration and material deprivation that drove the poor to criminal activities". The poor are significantly more likely to be victims of crime because they are from areas suffering social and material deprivation and therefore have the highest levels of unemployment. Sociological evidence that supports the view that people from the lower social classes are more likely to be victims of crime comes from the increased property crimes in the area as people are desperate to survive and often need to turn to crime against members of their own community in order to survive. Poorer communities may also experience a sense of status frustration which means they are less likely to confirm to social norms and values as they want to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the social inequality they have experienced. This means that they are more likely to commit crimes involving property and violence, and due to poorer levels of security, etc. these often end up being against members of the lower classes. Further sociological evidence to support this comes from the study conducted by Newburn and Rock (2006) who investigated the experiences of homeless people and determined that they were 12 times more likely to have been on the receiving end of violent crime and as many as one in ten stated that they had been urinated on whilst sleeping.

Clear use of Item B which has been expanded upon and which has been used appropriately to develop the line of argument.

Points have been analysed in great detail and examples have been used effectively.

Key concepts are present throughout.

There is also reference to sociological studies as evidence.

However, other sociologists would argue that there are

A clear evaluative paragraph

other factors which play a part in determining victimisation, such as age. Sociological evidence suggests that young people are significantly more likely to be victims of crime than older people. This was the case even for very young infants who were seen as being particularly vulnerable members of society. Infants under one were significantly more likely to be murdered by their parents as there is a belief that what goes on in the family is private and so often sexual, physical or emotional abuse against children goes unchallenged until it is too late. As infants are dependent on their parents to care for them it is inevitable that in situations where they fail to do so that the very young become victims of crime. There are, however, patterns of victimisation amongst teenagers too who find themselves much more likely to be victims of crimes such as assault, sexual harassment, theft or abuse in the home. This is often because young people have greater opportunities to both commit and therefore be victims of crime as they are more likely to be in social situations where crimes take place, e.g. out late at night. Because young people also gain status from their peers and material goods they may also find themselves as victims of property crime and violent crime. Lastly, the very old may also find themselves more likely to be victims of crime as they are often abused by their carers and therefore powerless to stop it.

There are also sociological trends in terms of gender as males are significantly more likely to be victims of crime than females – particularly victims of violent attacks. This is due to a culture of masculinity that encourages physical violence and risk taking behaviour and as such around 70% of homicide victims are male. There are, however, certain areas in which women are significantly more likely to be victims of crime such as domestic violence, stalking or harassment, people trafficking and rape. Feminists would argue that this is due to the patriarchal nature of society which still sees women as being the property of men and explains why they experience victimisation of sexual and economic crimes against them.

Finally, ethnic minority groups are also more likely to be victims of crime. This is largely due to the correlation between ethnicity and social class as well as poor relationships with the police due to stereotyping and scapegoating which leads to targeted policing and discrimination against minority groups. As such, ethnic minorities are reluctant to seek police protection and are more likely to be victims of property crime as they live in

which focuses on other social factors which influence victim status.

Well developed with supporting examples based upon sociological ideas and trends.

Further evaluation which is supported by statistical evidence and which makes synoptic links to issues raised in globalisation and crime.

Key concepts are used effectively and there is reference to sociological theory.

Synoptic links to issues such as labelling and stereotyping and a detailed evaluation which focuses on the connections between class and ethnicity.

poorer areas, as well as violent crime as they are more likely to engage in dangerous behaviours as part of subcultures.

Based on the evidence, there is a significant argument to suggest that social class is the biggest factor determining victimisation; however, there is evidence to suggest that factors such as gender, ethnicity and age also have a role to play.

A clear conclusion which explicitly addresses the question.

[1189 words]

Examiner style comments: *Mark band 25–30*

This is a top mark band essay which has a strong evaluative argument throughout and which focuses on both theoretical perspectives and supporting sociological evidence to support the question. Item B has been used effectively and has been developed through appropriate sociological analysis.

Sociological studies have been used and synoptic links made to other crime topics and also other modules such as mass media.