2.7 Eyewitness Testimony: The Effect of Anxiety on Recall: 30-minute Pack

AQA 7182 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Identify one ethical issue with laboratory studies that simulate anxiety by staging a violent incident, and suggest how researchers could reduce this ethical concern while retaining experimental control.

(Total for Question 1 is 4 marks)

2 A witness, Kwame, was close to a shop window when an armed robbery occurred. He saw the robber's face clearly for several seconds and later reported being extremely frightened. Would you expect Kwame's recall to be accurate? Apply both the weapon focus literature and the inverted-U theory to justify your judgement.

(Total for Question 2 is 6 marks)

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3 Discuss the effect of anxiety on the accuracy of eyewitness testimony. In your answer, refer to relevant studies and to theoretical explanations.

(Total for Question 3 is 16 marks)

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Mark scheme · 2.7 Eyewitness Testimony: The Effect of Anxiety on Recall: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

identifies a genuine ethical issue, e.g. causing psychological harm or severe stress to participants through deception or staged violence oe	**M1**
explains why this is a concern: participants may experience lasting distress and their right to protection from harm is at risk oe	**A1**
suggests a way to reduce the concern, e.g. use milder stressors, full risk briefing, staggered informed consent, or an independent ethics check oe	**M1**
explains how the suggestion reduces harm while retaining some control, e.g. milder manipulations lower distress while standardising arousal levels across participants oe	**A1**

Answer: Staging violent incidents can cause psychological harm through deception and distress; researchers can reduce this by using milder, ethically approved stressors, providing thorough pre-screening and debriefing, and obtaining ethics committee approval to balance protection with experimental control.

Question 2

identifies that Kwame experienced very high arousal and close proximity to the event oe	**M1**
applies weapon focus: if a weapon was present attention may have focused on it and impaired facial identification, predicting lower accuracy oe	**A1**
applies Deffenbacher's inverted-U: very high arousal may lie on the impairing side of the curve, predicting reduced recall oe	**M1**
contrasts with field studies: some real-world witnesses at high arousal have shown accurate recall, so Kwame could still be accurate if his attention was on the face rather than the weapon oe	**A1**
draws a justified conclusion that recall might be impaired if attention was drawn to a weapon or arousal exceeded optimal levels, but may be accurate if he had clear unobstructed view and encoded the face well oe	**B1**
acknowledges uncertainty and suggests that additional information such as presence of a weapon and duration of viewing would change the prediction oe	**B1**

Answer: If Kwame's attention was drawn to an obvious weapon, weapon focus literature predicts impaired face ID; Deffenbacher's inverted-U also predicts that very high arousal can reduce accuracy. However, field studies show some highly aroused witnesses can be accurate, so if Kwame had an unobstructed clear view of the face for several seconds his recall might still be good. Overall, impairment is likely if a weapon captured attention or arousal was extreme, but good accuracy remains plausible depending on viewing conditions.

Question 3

Level 4 Knowledge is accurate and detailed. Discussion demonstrates a thorough, well integrated evaluation of theories and studies about anxiety and eyewitness testimony, showing strong links between empirical evidence and theory. The answer considers strengths and limitations, methodological and ethical issues, and reaches a balanced, justified conclusion using specialist terminology.	**13-16**
Level 3 Knowledge is generally accurate with some detail. Discussion evaluates and links studies and theory, but may be less thorough or slightly unbalanced. Some methodological or ethical points are made and applied to the question. Conclusion is supported but may lack full development.	**9-12**
Level 2 Knowledge is present but limited. Discussion consists mainly of descriptive points about studies or theory with limited evaluation. Application to the question is partial. Conclusions are simple and not well substantiated.	**5-8**
Level 1 Knowledge is minimal and answers are simplistic or disorganised. Little or no evaluation. Conclusions, if present, are unsupported. Specialist terminology is largely absent or misused.	**1-4**
Level 0 No creditworthy content.	**0**

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Indicative content:

- AO1: Key studies include Johnson and Scott (1976) showing weapon focus in a lab setting leading to reduced identification accuracy, Yuille and Cutshall (1986) and Christianson and Hubinette (1993) field studies showing high arousal witnesses can be accurate, and Deffenbacher's meta-analytic inverted-U account reconciling these findings.
- AO1: Theoretical accounts include weapon focus and tunnel vision, which propose attention narrows to central threat stimuli under high anxiety, reducing peripheral encoding, and the inverted-U (Yerkes-Dodson style) where moderate arousal improves performance and very high arousal impairs it.
- AO2: Apply studies to examples, noting that a witness's accuracy depends on factors such as whether attention was captured by a weapon, the witness's proximity and viewing time, and the level of arousal relative to the inverted-U peak.
- AO3: Methodological evaluation contrasts high experimental control in lab studies that allow causal inferences but may create artificial arousal or ethical problems, with high ecological validity of field studies but lower experimental control and reliance on retrospective self-report of anxiety.
- AO3: Ethical considerations include the inadmissibility of intentionally inducing severe stress in lab participants and the acceptability of studying naturally occurring incidents; ethical constraints therefore shape what can be learned experimentally.
- AO3: Alternative explanations and moderators include individual differences in stress sensitivity, the role of attention and memory consolidation, measurement issues such as physiological versus self-report indicators of anxiety, and the nature of the memory tested (central versus peripheral).
- AO3: Practical implications for police and courts include cautious evaluation of eyewitness testimony that acknowledges arousal effects, training for interviewers, and using converging evidence rather than relying solely on high-arousal eyewitness accounts.
- Balanced conclusion: the effect of anxiety on eyewitness accuracy is complex; evidence shows both impairment and enhancement depending on arousal level, attention focus, and methodological context, so a nuanced stance acknowledging the inverted-U and methodological limits is appropriate.

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