# 16.2 Biological and Psychological Explanations of Offending Behaviour: 30-minute Pack

AQA 7182 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

**Answer ALL questions.**

**1** Outline Eysenck's theory of the criminal personality, naming its key dimensions (extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism) and explain briefly how high scores on extraversion and neuroticism are proposed to increase the risk of offending.

**(Total for Question 1 is 4 marks)**

**2** Explain two strengths and one limitation of biological explanations of offending behaviour, using evidence and considering ethical or practical implications.

**(Total for Question 2 is 6 marks)**


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**3** Discuss biological or psychological explanations of offending behaviour. In your answer you should refer to at least two explanations from the specification, include relevant evidence, consider strengths and limitations, and reach a supported conclusion.

**(Total for Question 3 is 16 marks)**


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# Mark scheme · 16.2 Biological and Psychological Explanations of Offending Behaviour: 30-minute Pack

## Question 1

| | |
|---|---|
| identifies Eysenck's dimensions: extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism oe | **M1** |
| states Eysenck proposed criminals tend to score high on extraversion and neuroticism, and sometimes psychoticism oe | **M1** |
| explains that high extraversion means a need for stimulation and underactive inhibition, so individuals seek arousal and may be less conditioned by punishment oe | **A1** |
| explains that high neuroticism leads to emotional instability and a tendency to react strongly to stress, increasing the chance of impulsive or aggressive acts oe | **A1** |

**Answer: Eysenck proposed a criminal personality based on extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism. High extraversion involves a need for stimulation and weaker conditioning to punishment, making rule-breaking more likely, while high neuroticism means emotional instability and impulsive reactions under stress, also increasing offending risk.**

## Question 2

| | |
|---|---|
| identifies a strength, e.g. scientific methods such as neuroimaging provide objective data linking brain differences to offending behaviour oe | **M1** |
| explains why this is a strength, e.g. objective measures allow causal hypotheses and targeted interventions such as programmes focusing on impulse control oe | **A1** |
| identifies a second strength, e.g. genetic research can identify probabilistic risk factors that help explain individual differences in offending vulnerability oe | **M1** |
| explains advantage, e.g. combining genetic with environmental data supports gene environment interaction models and more personalised prevention strategies oe | **A1** |
| identifies a limitation, e.g. biological explanations risk biological determinism and reductionism, ignoring social and psychological influences oe | **M1** |
| explains consequence, e.g. this can lead to unethical policies or stigma and may divert attention from social prevention measures oe | **A1** |

**Answer: Strengths: biological explanations use objective scientific methods such as neuroimaging to link brain differences to offending, supporting causal hypotheses and potential interventions; genetic research identifies probabilistic risk factors that, combined with environmental data, can inform prevention. Limitation: biological accounts can be reductionist and risk deterministic interpretations that ignore social influences, raising ethical concerns and potential stigma.**

## Question 3

| | |
|---|---|
| **Level 4** Knowledge of biological and psychological explanations of offending is detailed and accurate. The discussion is thorough and analytical, integrating evidence for and against explanations, considering methodological limitations and ethical implications. Evaluation is balanced and used to reach a reasoned conclusion that is well supported. | **13-16** |
| **Level 3** Knowledge is clear and mostly accurate. The answer offers a reasonable discussion with some analysis and evaluation, including relevant evidence and some consideration of limitations. A conclusion is reached but may be less developed or balanced. | **9-12** |
| **Level 2** Knowledge is present but may be partial or simplified. Discussion and evaluation are limited or descriptive, with little integration of evidence. Any conclusion is weak or not fully supported. | **5-8** |
| **Level 1** Knowledge is minimal and answers are brief or fragmented. Little or no evaluation is present and any conclusion is unsupported or absent. | **1-4** |
| **Level 0** No creditable content. | **0** |


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**Indicative content:**

- AO1: Biological explanations could include Lombroso's atavistic form as a historical biological account, candidate gene explanations such as MAOA variants, twin and adoption study evidence suggesting heritability, and neural explanations linking prefrontal cortex differences to impulse control and aggression.
- AO1: Psychological explanations could include Eysenck's theory of the criminal personality (extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism), cognitive explanations such as low levels of moral reasoning and cognitive distortions like hostile attribution bias and minimalisation, differential association theory which explains crime as learned through association, and psychodynamic accounts such as an inadequate superego.
- AO3: Evaluate the evidence, for example twin and adoption studies that suggest a genetic contribution but are limited by shared environment confounds and non-random placement; neuroimaging studies that show correlations between brain differences and offending but cannot alone prove causation and may be affected by prior substance use or head injury.
- AO3: Consider Eysenck's theory strengths such as linking personality measures to behaviour and using empirical questionnaires, but limitations include mixed empirical support and cultural or age-related variability; cognitive explanations have utility in explaining how offenders justify actions and in leading to cognitive behavioural interventions, but measuring moral reasoning and distortions can be subjective.
- AO3: Discuss differential association theory strengths in explaining how criminal techniques and values are transmitted through social groups and its policy implications for social interventions, but limitations include difficulty in falsifiability and less emphasis on individual biological vulnerability.
- AO3: Consider ethical and practical implications of biological accounts, for example risks of stigma, determinism, and potential misuse in courts, and the value of integrating biological risk with environmental and psychological explanations via gene environment interaction models.
- AO3: Consider applications such as targeted prevention, rehabilitation approaches focusing on cognition and social context, and the caution required when translating biological findings into policy.
- Conclusion: Strong answers will weigh the explanatory power of biological versus psychological accounts, argue for an interactionist perspective that combines genetic, neural and social learning or cognitive factors, and justify this position with balanced evidence and consideration of limitations.


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