



GSOC.CR8 The Effectiveness of Prison and Rates of Reoffending

AQA 8192 · Calculators not allowed · about 75 minutes

Total Marks

--

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. Write full sentences for extended responses and for any question asking you to explain. Aim to spend about 75 minutes on the whole paper.

- 1** Which of the following is a stated aim of imprisonment used by supporters to justify custodial sentences in the UK criminal justice context?

- ☐ A) Rehabilitation is never considered for prisoners
- ☐ B) Incapacitation removes the offender's ability to harm the public while inside prison
- ☐ C) Prison eliminates all future offending by the individual
- ☐ D) Prison sentences are always shorter than community sentences

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

- 2** Define what sociologists mean by 'incapacitation' when discussing prison as a form of punishment in the criminal justice system.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

- 3** Identify one argument used by supporters of prison that refers to public perception and punishment being visible to society.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

- 4** Explain one way in which imprisonment is claimed to act as a deterrent to potential offenders in society.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

- 5 Explain two sociological criticisms of using prison as a primary response to crime in terms of effects on reoffending and prison culture.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

- 6 State one financial criticism of using imprisonment that is commonly raised in UK public debate about effectiveness of punishment.

(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)

- 7 Explain how a custodial sentence can affect the family of the offender, as discussed by sociologists studying the social consequences of imprisonment.

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

- 8 Identify two practical problems often reported in UK prisons that critics say reduce the effectiveness of custody as a response to crime.

(Total for Question 8 is 4 marks)

- 9 Using sociological ideas, give one reason why a short custodial sentence might be less effective at reducing future offending than a longer, well-supported sentence.

(Total for Question 9 is 2 marks)

10 Define the term 'recidivism' as used by sociologists studying prison and reoffending in the UK.

(Total for Question 10 is 2 marks)

11 Using the context of prison effectiveness, explain one theoretical sociological reason why reoffending might remain high despite imprisonment.

(Total for Question 11 is 4 marks)

12 Identify one strength of the argument that prison protects the public by incapacitation, as used by politicians and some criminologists.

(Total for Question 12 is 2 marks)

13 State one sociological limitation of evaluating prison effectiveness solely by looking at reconviction figures.

(Total for Question 13 is 2 marks)

14 Explain two reasons why some sociologists argue that prison may reduce crime for certain offenders even if overall reoffending rates remain high.

(Total for Question 14 is 4 marks)

- 15** Identify one sociological reason why overcrowding in prisons might undermine the goal of rehabilitation.

(Total for Question 15 is 2 marks)

- 16** Write a balanced, evaluative answer that considers competing sociological perspectives and reaches a supported conclusion about the effectiveness of prison in reducing crime, including discussion of incapacitation, deterrence, reoffending, prison culture and the wider social consequences of custody.

Discuss how far sociologists would agree that prison is an effective way of reducing crime in society.

(Total for Question 16 is 12 marks)

Mark scheme · GSOC.CR8 The Effectiveness of Prison and Rates of Reoffending

Question 1

- **B1** B (incapacitation removes the offender's ability to harm the public while inside prison)
- **Answer: B**

Question 2

- **B1** identifies incapacitation as making an offender unable to commit crimes against the public while held in custody (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. by removing offenders from the community for a period of time
- **Answer: Incapacitation means making an offender unable to commit crimes against the public while held in custody, for example by removing them from the community for a period of time.**

Question 3

- **B1** identifies visible retribution or public shaming as an argument, e.g. prison shows society that offenders are punished
- **B1** brief development, e.g. this can reassure victims and the public that justice has been done
- **Answer: Supporters argue visible retribution, that prison shows society offenders are punished, can reassure victims and the public that justice has been done.**

Question 4

- **B1** identifies the claim, e.g. the threat of losing freedom and facing a prison sentence discourages some people from offending
- **B1** development, e.g. publicised sentences can create fear of punishment that reduces willingness to commit crime
- **Answer: Imprisonment is claimed to deter because the threat of losing freedom and facing a sentence discourages some people from offending; publicised sentences can create fear of punishment that reduces willingness to commit crime.**

Question 5

- **B1** identifies first criticism, e.g. prison can become a 'university of crime' where inmates learn criminal skills from other prisoners
- **B1** development of first criticism, e.g. exposure to more experienced offenders and gangs in custody can increase likelihood of reoffending
- **B1** identifies second criticism, e.g. high reoffending or recidivism rates indicate custody may not reduce crime long term
- **B1** development of second criticism, e.g. releasing offenders without addressing underlying problems such as addiction or housing may lead to repeat offending
- **Answer: Prison can act as a 'university of crime', where inmates learn criminal skills and networks, increasing the risk of reoffending; and high reoffending rates suggest custody may not reduce crime long term if underlying issues like addiction or housing are not addressed.**

Question 6

- **B1** identifies high cost of keeping people in prison as a criticism
- **B1** brief development, e.g. money spent on custody could be used for prevention or rehabilitation in the community
- **Answer: A common criticism is the high cost of imprisonment, with the argument that money spent on custody could instead fund prevention or rehabilitation in the community.**

Question 7

- **B1** identifies an effect, e.g. separation can cause financial hardship and emotional stress for partners and children
- **B1** development, e.g. loss of the offender's income and increased childcare responsibilities can harm family stability and wellbeing
- **Answer: A custodial sentence can separate the offender from their family, causing financial hardship and emotional stress; loss of income and extra childcare responsibilities can harm family stability and wellbeing.**

Question 8

- **B1** first practical problem identified, e.g. overcrowding
- **B1** brief development of first problem, e.g. overcrowding can limit access to education and rehab programmes
- **B1** second practical problem identified, e.g. lack of funding or staff shortages
- **B1** brief development of second problem, e.g. staff shortages may reduce supervision and the quality of rehabilitative work
- **Answer: Two practical problems are overcrowding, which can limit access to education and rehab programmes, and lack of funding or staff shortages, which can reduce supervision and the quality of rehabilitative work.**

Question 9

- **B1** identifies a reason, e.g. short sentences may not allow time for rehabilitation or to resolve causes of offending
- **B1** development, e.g. quick release can return individuals to the same environments and problems that led to offending
- **Answer: Short custodial sentences may be less effective because they do not allow time for rehabilitation or to address causes of offending, and quick release can return people to the same environments that led to offending.**

Question 10

- **B1** identifies recidivism as reoffending or returning to criminal behaviour after release from custody
- **B1** development, e.g. often measured by reconviction or reimprisonment rates over a time period
- **Answer: Recidivism is reoffending, returning to criminal behaviour after release from custody, often measured by reconviction or reimprisonment rates over a period of time.**

Question 11

- **B1** identifies a theoretical reason, e.g. labelling theory suggests imprisonment can stigmatise offenders and limit lawful opportunities
- **B1** development, e.g. a labelled ex-prisoner may find employment and housing harder to secure
- **B1** further development, e.g. this social exclusion can push people back towards criminal networks
- **B1** links the theory clearly to why reoffending might remain high after prison
- **Answer: Labelling theory suggests imprisonment can stigmatise offenders and limit lawful opportunities; labelled ex-prisoners may find employment and housing harder to secure, creating social exclusion that can push people back towards criminal networks and reoffending.**

Question 12

- **B1** identifies a strength, e.g. incapacitation does prevent the imprisoned individual from committing further offences against the public while they are inside custody
- **B1** brief development, e.g. this can reduce immediate risk to victims and neighbours
- **Answer: A strength is that incapacitation prevents the imprisoned person from committing further offences against the public while in custody, reducing immediate risk to victims and neighbours.**

Question 13

- **B1** identifies a limitation, e.g. reconviction figures may not capture unreported or undetected offending
- **B1** brief development, e.g. changes in policing or recording practices can affect recorded reconvictions independently of true offending levels
- **Answer: Reconviction figures may not capture unreported or undetected offending, and changes in policing or recording practices can affect recorded reconvictions independently of true offending levels.**

Question 14

- **B1** identifies first reason, e.g. for some dangerous individuals putting them in custody removes immediate risk of harm to the public
- **B1** development of first reason, e.g. incapacitation can protect potential victims while the offender is imprisoned
- **B1** identifies second reason, e.g. lengthy sentences combined with effective rehabilitation for some prisoners can address causes of offending
- **B1** development of second reason, e.g. those who receive and complete relevant treatment or training may be less likely to reoffend
- **Answer: Prison may reduce crime for some offenders because incapacitation removes immediate risk of harm for dangerous individuals; and because lengthy sentences combined with effective rehabilitation can address causes of**

Question 15

- **B1** identifies that overcrowding reduces time and access to education and treatment programmes
- **B1** brief development, e.g. less access to programmes means fewer opportunities for offenders to change behaviour
- **Answer: Overcrowding reduces access to education and treatment programmes, which means fewer opportunities for offenders to change behaviour and undermines rehabilitation goals.**

Question 16

- **Level 1** (1-3): Basic statements about prison and crime with little development or use of sociological ideas. Limited or no evaluation and no clear conclusion.
- **Level 2** (4-6): Clear description of arguments for or against prison with some sociological explanation. Some evaluation present but may be limited in balance or depth. A simple conclusion may be offered.
- **Level 3** (7-9): Good analysis that compares arguments for and against prison, using sociological concepts such as incapacitation, deterrence, labelling and prison culture. Evaluation is balanced and supported, with a plausible conclusion.
- **Level 4** (10-12): Comprehensive, balanced discussion drawing on several sociological perspectives. Considers strengths and limitations of evidence about reoffending and about immediate public protection, analyses wider social consequences for families and communities, and reaches a well-supported judgement on how effective prison is at reducing crime overall.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Arguments that prison is effective: incapacitation removes dangerous people from the community and prevents immediate harm; visible retribution and publicised sentences may deter potential offenders; custody can provide a controlled environment for structured rehabilitation for some individuals.
 - Arguments that prison is not effective: high rates of reoffending suggest custody often fails to prevent future crime; prison can act as a 'university of crime' where inmates learn criminal techniques and networks, increasing recidivism; overcrowding and funding shortages limit access to rehabilitative programmes.
 - Sociological theories and evidence: labelling theory warns custody can stigmatise and exclude ex-offenders, reducing lawful opportunities and increasing reoffending; strain or deprivation explanations suggest that unless underlying social causes like poverty or addiction are addressed, imprisonment alone will not reduce offending.
 - Practical and social consequences: effects on families, loss of housing or employment while imprisoned, and difficulties on release should be weighed against immediate public protection benefits; short sentences may be particularly ineffective at rehabilitation.
 - Evaluation of evidence: critique of relying solely on reconviction statistics, recognition that prison may reduce crime in the short term for dangerous individuals but may not lower community crime rates long term unless combined with meaningful rehabilitation and social support.
 - Conclusion: careful judgement that prison can be effective in specific cases for public protection but is limited as a general method for reducing crime unless structural and rehabilitative issues are addressed; suggested balance between custody for high-risk offenders and alternative measures for others can be discussed.