Your notes

GCSE Psychology: revision notes

Criminal psychology

Contents

1. Why people commit crime
2. Learning to offend
3. Eysenck's criminal personality
4. Key studies
5. Punishment and rehabilitation
6. Key terms
7. Quick questions
8. What to do next

Why people commit crime

- Crime is any behaviour that breaks the law. Psychologists ask why some people offend: what they learn from others, their personality, and whether punishment works.
- (OCR) Types of crime include violent, drug-related, acquisitive, sexual and anti-social offences.
- (OCR) Criminal behaviour is a **social construct**: what counts as a crime depends on a society's norms and culture, and it can change over time.
- (OCR) Crime is measured with official statistics and self-report surveys. Neither is perfect, as many crimes aren't reported and people don't always admit to them.

Learning to offend

- **Social learning theory** (Bandura) says that we learn behaviour by watching others. We identify with **role models**, observe them, and imitate them.
- **Vicarious reinforcement** means seeing someone else rewarded for a behaviour, which makes us more likely to copy it.
- Direct reinforcement is being rewarded for it ourselves. Once it has become part of how we behave, it has been internalised.
- A strength is that it explains why crime can run in families and friendship groups. A weakness is that it ignores biology: not everyone who sees crime commits it.
- (Edexcel) Operant conditioning (Skinner) also explains it. Positive reinforcement adds something good, such as stolen money. Negative reinforcement takes away something bad, such as being bullied by a gang.
- (Edexcel) Positive punishment adds something bad, and negative punishment takes away something good. Primary reinforcers meet a basic need, such as food, and secondary reinforcers, such as money, get their value from what they can buy.

Eysenck's criminal personality

- Eysenck said that personality has a biological basis, and has three dimensions: **extraversion**, neuroticism and **psychoticism**.
- Extraverts are outgoing and seek excitement, as their nervous systems are under-aroused. Introverts are the opposite.
- Neurotic people are anxious and emotionally unstable. People high in **psychoticism** are aggressive, cold and impulsive.
- He said that people high on these three are harder to condition as children, so they don't learn to control their impulses as well, and are more likely to offend.
- A strength is that it can be tested with questionnaires. A weakness is that personality may not stay the same in every situation, and it doesn't explain individual differences well.
- (OCR) Overactive dopamine is linked to **psychoticism**, dopamine reward systems and the reticular activation system to **extraversion**, and the autonomic nervous system and limbic system to neuroticism.

Key studies

- (Edexcel) Bandura, Ross and Ross (1961): 72 children aged about 3 to 6 watched an adult act aggressively or calmly towards a Bobo doll, or saw no model. Those who had seen aggression copied it most, and boys showed more physical aggression.
- (Edexcel) Charlton et al (2000): TV arrived on the remote island of St Helena in 1995. Children's playground behaviour was filmed before and five years after, and it hardly changed: watching TV didn't make them more aggressive.
- (OCR) Cooper and Mackie (1986): children played or watched an aggressive or a non-aggressive video game, then played freely. Girls who'd had the aggressive game were more aggressive afterwards, but boys weren't.
- (OCR) Heaven (1996): a self-report study of teenagers that looked at how delinquency is linked with **extraversion**, **psychoticism** and self-esteem.

Punishment and rehabilitation

- (Edexcel) **Recidivism** means offending again after being punished. It's how the success of a punishment or treatment is judged.
- Prison keeps the public safe and deters some people, but it can also teach crime, and it's expensive.
- Community sentences, such as unpaid work, keep people in their jobs and families, but may not seem like much of a punishment.
- (OCR) Fines are another deterrent, though they don't teach new behaviour.
- **Restorative justice** brings the offender and the victim together, so that the offender sees the harm they've done. It only works when both agree to it.
- (OCR) Positive **role models** can also increase pro-social behaviour.

Your notes

- (Edexcel) A **token economy** rewards good behaviour with tokens that can be swapped for treats. It works in prison, but the behaviour may stop once the tokens do.
- (Edexcel) Anger management teaches offenders to spot what makes them angry, and how to stay calm. It tackles the cause, but it takes time and depends on them wanting to change.

Your notes

Key terms

Social learning theory	Learning behaviour by watching and imitating role models.
Role model	A person someone identifies with and copies.
Vicarious reinforcement	Being more likely to copy a behaviour after seeing someone else rewarded for it.
Recidivism	Offending again after being punished.
Restorative justice	Bringing an offender and their victim together, so the offender understands the harm they did.
Token economy	Rewarding good behaviour with tokens that can be swapped for treats. (Edexcel)
Extraversion	A personality dimension: being outgoing and seeking excitement.
Psychoticism	A personality dimension: being aggressive, cold and impulsive.
Social construct	Something defined by a society's norms and culture, not by nature. (OCR)

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Which theory says that we learn behaviour by copying role models?
2. What is vicarious reinforcement?
3. What are Eysenck's three personality dimensions?
4. According to Eysenck, why do extraverts seek excitement?
5. What does recidivism mean?
6. What does restorative justice involve?
7. (Edexcel) In operant conditioning, what is negative reinforcement?
8. (Edexcel) What is a token economy?

Answers

1. Social learning theory
2. Seeing someone else rewarded for a behaviour
3. Extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism
4. Their nervous systems are under-aroused
5. Offending again after being punished

6. An offender meeting the victim to see the harm they did
7. Taking away something unpleasant, so the behaviour is repeated
8. Rewarding good behaviour with tokens to swap for treats

What to do next

Practise 14 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

Free revision for GCSE and KS3 at lycolearn.co.uk. Some notes are for one exam board only, and say so in brackets.

Your notes