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| **Defining and measuring crime** | | | |
| **Defining and measuring crime AO1** | | | |
| **Problems in defining crime**  Crime might be defined as any act that breaks the law and therefore warrants some form of punishment. However, this legalistic definition is complicated by the fact that laws are often subject to change and that not all acts that break the law are punished. Researchers have pointed out that what counts as a crime varies from culture to culture as well as over time.  **Cultural issues in defining crime:**  What is considered a crime in one culture may not be judged as such in another, One example of this is laws on marriage. In the UK having more than one wife is the crime of bigamy. However, it is not a crime in cultures where polygamy is practised (having multiple partners). In 2014, forced marriage was made illegal in the UK, yet this is still practised in some cultures.  **Historical issues in defining crime:**  Definitions of crime change over time. A parent’s right to smack their child was outlawed in 2004 with the introduction of the Children’s Act. Homosexuality was considered a crime in this country until 1967. The latter is an example of how some behaviour judged to be criminal may be historically and culturally specific. There are many African and Asian countries where homosexuality is still classed as illegal. | | | |
| **Ways of measuring crime-** Three methods are used to measure crime rates: official statistics, victim surveys and offender surveys.  **Official statistics:** Official statistics are government records of the total number of crimes reported to police and recorded in the official figures. These are published by the Home office on an annual basis and are a useful ‘snapshot’ of the number of crimes occurring across the country and in specific regions. This allows the government to develop crime prevention strategies and policing initiatives, as well as direct resources to those areas most in need.  **Victim surveys:** Victim surveys record people’s experience of crime over a specific period. The Crime Survey for England and Wales asks people to document the crimes they have been a victim of in the past year. In order to compile the figures, 50,000 households are randomly selected to take part in the survey and this has enabled the Office for National Statistics to produce crime figures based on victim surveys since 1982. In 2009, a separate survey was introduced to record the experiences of younger people aged 10-15, and the complete results (from both surveys) are published on an annual basis.  **Offender surveys:** Offender surveys involve individuals volunteering details of the number and types of crimes they have committed. These tend to target groups of likely offenders based on ‘risk’ factors such as previous convictions, age range, social background, etc. The Offender Crime and Justice Survey, which ran from 2003-2006, was the first national self-report survey of its kind in England and Wales. As well as measuring self-reported offending, the OJS looked at indicators of repeat offending, trends in the prevalence of offending, drug and alcohol use, the role of co-offenders and the relationship between perpetrators and victims. | | | |
| **Defining and measuring crime AO3** | | | |
| **Official statistics**  **P:**  A weakness of measuring crimes it that they have been criticised for being unreliable, particularly official statistics.  **E:** Results can be unreliable for a number of reasons; one of these reasons could be police recording rules.For example, one study found that police in the borough of Nottinghamshire were more likely than other regions to record thefts of under £10 and this explained an apparent ‘spike’ of thefts in this area.  **E:** This is a weakness as it is suggesting that policing priorities may distort official statistics.  **L:** As a result this reduces the credibility of using official statistics as a way of measuring crime. | **Victim surveys**  **P:** A strength of using victim surveys to measure crime is that they are more accurate in comparison to official statistics.  **E:** For example, 2006/7 official statistics suggested a 2% decrease in crime from the previous year whereas the British Crime Survey showed a 3% increase. *(This said, Victim surveys rely on respondents having accurate recall of the crimes they have been a victim of)*  **E:** This is a strength because victim surveys are more likely to include details of crimes that were not reported by the police.  **L:** Subsequently, the credibility of using victim surveys to measure crime is increased. | **Offender surveys**  **P:** A strength of offender survey over alternative methods is that they provide insight into how many people are responsible for certain offences.  **E:** For example, you can identify whether a small group of people committed a crime, or single individual has committed many crimes.  **E:** This is a strength because crime is not left unrepresented. *(However offenders may want to conceal some of the more serious crime they have committed, or even exaggerate. They also over represent certain crimes such as burglary, whereas ‘middle class’ crimes such as corporate crime and fraud are unlikely to be included)*  **L:** This suggest that there are many benefits of using offender surveys to measure crime. | **The politics of measuring crime**  **P:** A weakness of all the ways of measuring crime is thatthey may lack validity.  **E:** For example, political parties have a vested interest in using some measures rather than others when discussing rates of crime across the country. The political party in opposition will typically focus on measures that make the government look bad suggesting that crime in increasing, whereas the party in power will emphasise measures that show crime is falling.  **E:** This is a weakness because even though crime statistics in the UK are compiled by an independent body free from political interference, questions are frequently raised as to their validity.  **L:** As a result this reduced the credibility of all the ways of measuring crime. |