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A-Level Psychology

Criminological Psychology · Key Studies

Edexcel Psychology (9PS0)

Key Studies

4 entries

The named classic and contemporary studies for Criminological Psychology - crime, eyewitness testimony and treatment.

Classic study

Loftus and Palmer (1974) - Reconstruction of automobile destruction

Aim: test whether the wording of a question alters a witness's memory of a car accident, in particular the estimated speed. **Method:** lab experiment in two parts. In experiment 1, 45 students watched seven film clips of crashes then answered questions; the critical question changed one verb - 'About how fast were the cars going when they hit/smashed/collided/bumped/contacted each other?' In experiment 2, 150 students saw a clip and were later asked, after a one-week delay, whether they had seen broken glass (there was none). **Findings:** mean speed estimates rose with verb intensity - roughly 31.8 mph for 'contacted' up to 40.5 mph for 'smashed', a difference of about 8.7 mph between extremes. In experiment 2, 32 percent of the 'smashed' group reported broken glass versus 14 percent of the 'hit' group. **Conclusion:** leading questions can distort recall; the verb reshapes the stored memory rather than merely biasing the answer, supporting reconstructive memory. **Evaluation:** + tightly controlled and standardised, so highly replicable with clear cause and effect; - low ecological validity, since watching film clips lacks the stress and consequence of a real crash, and a student sample limits generalisability.

Contemporary studies

Valentine and Mesout (2009) - Anxiety and eyewitness memory in the Horror Labyrinth

Aim: investigate how high anxiety affects the accuracy of eyewitness identification and recall in a realistic setting. **Method:** field experiment in the London Dungeon's Horror Labyrinth; 56 visitors wore heart-rate monitors and were split by state anxiety into high- and low-anxiety groups. Inside they encountered a scary actor; afterwards they described him and tried to pick him from a nine-person photo line-up. **Findings:** the high-anxiety group recalled fewer correct details and were markedly less accurate at identifying the actor - only about 17 percent of high-anxiety participants chose correctly versus around 75 percent of low-anxiety participants. Women reported more anxiety and were less accurate than men. **Conclusion:** high anxiety impairs eyewitness identification and recall, challenging confidence in stressed witnesses. **Evaluation:** + high ecological validity from a genuinely frightening real-world environment with a physiological anxiety measure; - little control over extraneous variables such as lighting and time spent in the labyrinth, and the actor's appearance is hard to compare to typical crime scenarios.

Howells et al. (2005) - Brief anger management for offenders

Aim: evaluate whether a brief, structured anger-management programme reduces anger in violent offenders. **Method:** 418 offenders in Australia were assessed before and after a roughly 20-hour cognitive-behavioural anger-management course; measures included anger knowledge, anger experience and expression, compared with a waiting-list control. **Findings:** the programme produced only small overall improvements compared with controls; gains were larger for offenders who were highly motivated, had higher pre-treatment anger and showed greater treatment readiness. **Conclusion:** brief anger management has limited general impact, but readiness and motivation strongly shape who benefits, so suitability assessment matters. **Evaluation:** + large applied sample with real offenders and pre-/post-measures, giving practical value for the criminal-justice system; - the brief format may be too short to change entrenched behaviour, and reliance on self-report risks social-desirability bias.

Memon and Higham (1999) - Review of the cognitive interview

Aim: review the cognitive interview, evaluating which of its components improve eyewitness recall and the methodological problems in testing it. **Method:** a review and evaluation of existing studies comparing the cognitive interview (context reinstatement, report everything, recall in changed order, change perspective) with standard police interviews, examining accuracy, the amount of correct and incorrect detail, and confounding factors such as interviewer training. **Findings:** the cognitive interview generally elicits more correct information than a standard interview, but can also raise the amount of incorrect information; it is hard to identify which single component is most effective, and comparison is complicated by differences in interviewer skill and the measures used. **Conclusion:** the cognitive interview is a useful tool for improving the quantity of accurate recall, yet its effectiveness depends on how it is conducted and measured. **Evaluation:** + draws on many studies to give a balanced, practically relevant overview that has shaped police practice; – as a review it offers no new data, and inconsistent methods across the reviewed studies make firm conclusions difficult.