

(b) Assess the reductionist views from evidence into crime prevention. Refer to examples from both British and American policing approaches. (15 marks)

A reductionist view is one that claims behaviour can be reduced down to one single explanation or cause. With regard to crime prevention this would be looking at the individual ways in which crime can be reduced and how it can be prevented in the future. The 'Broken Windows Theory' proposed by Wilson and Kelling (1982) offers a situational explanation of crime, which helps explain the idea that disorderly neighbourhoods lead to serious crimes. They draw on the well-established idea that when one window is smashed in a building and left unrepaired, psychologists and police come to expect that the rest of the windows will soon be broken. Wilson and Kelling suggest that this is true in any neighbourhood because a broken window left unrepaired suggests that no one cares about the property. The theory of broken windows has an effect on the attitudes of residents. They become isolated from neighbours and less concerned with or involved in what happens in their community. This idea was highlighted in their review which documented a study by Zimbardo (1969). He arranged for a car without license plates to be parked with its bonnet up on a street in the Bronx, New York (an area of high crime rates) and also in Palo Alto, California (a low crime area). In the Bronx the car was vandalised quickly, followed by random destructive acts such as parts being torn off and upholstery being ripped. In Palo Alto the car was left untouched for more than a week. Zimbardo then intervened by smashing it with a sledgehammer within a few hours, the car was vandalised. He concluded that all areas are vulnerable to criminal invasion where there is a breakdown of community controls. This takes a reductionist view by suggesting that the broken windows theory is one factor influencing crime rates, so consequently could be addressed for crime prevention strategies. However, Zimbardo failed to consider other plausible explanations for this criminal behaviour such as the factors motivating the criminals themselves. In addition, Wilson and Kelling propose that if order is maintained and minor crimes are also identified then crime will be reduced. This theory can be seen as reductionist because other extraneous variables occurring in communities, besides maintaining order, could account for criminal activity. For example, homicide rates in New York naturally declined as the use of crack cocaine decreased. Thus a more holistic approach should be considered. Another reductionist view is to consider the idea of safe neighbourhoods. Traditionally in the UK we adopt a community led approach to policing with foot patrols and 'bobby's on the beat', but this has since been replaced by more police patrols in cars. Similarly in America the idea of regional police districts and police patrols in vehicles are now more common than foot patrols. According to Wilson and Kelling's review article an officer in a squad car can observe as much as an officer on foot. However, an officer on foot cannot separate himself from the street people; if he is approached, only his uniform and his personality can help him manage whatever is about to happen. In a car, an officer is more likely to deal with street people by rolling down the window and looking at them. The door and the window exclude the approaching citizen; they are a barrier. This was tested in the Newark police foot patrol experiment in New Jersey, USA in the mid-1970s, called the 'safe and clean neighbourhoods' programme. The programme was designed to improve the quality of community life by putting more officers on foot patrol on the street. Although popular with politicians, the initiative was unpopular with police chiefs who saw foot patrols as reducing police mobility. It was also disliked by many police officers

who viewed it as hard work and punishment because they were outside in all weather. This has implications for the role of the police by putting a strain on their resources. One way to tackle features of the neighbourhood is to look at concepts such as 'defensible space' as proposed by Newman (1972). Space is considered defensible if it can be clearly perceived as belonging to a particular person or group. Newman & Franck (1982) investigated the relationship between features of a neighbourhood and their impact on crime by looking at housing developments in America. By reducing this down to factors within the neighbourhood such as building size, fear of crime and experience of crime they were able to find a positive correlation. This was also supported by a British study by Bramley and Power (2009) who found that people living in high density areas are more likely to consider crime a problem. This means that such reductionist views can be useful in crime prevention strategies.

