

Sample Answer

(c) The police have a new suspect to interview in an armed robbery case, following a police line-up where 4 separate witnesses identified the same man as the one they saw commit the crime.

The police want to avoid a false confession, what suggestions, could you as a psychologist make, about how they should conduct the interview? (10 marks)

One way in which the police could avoid a false confession is to conduct a cognitive interview. This technique was devised by Geiselman (1985) and includes four key components to improve the accuracy of memory recall. The first component asks witnesses to mentally reinstate the context of the crime in which they are encouraged to visualise the scene of the crime. The second asks them to change the order of events by recalling information in reverse. The third asks witnesses to change their perspective on the events, therefore recall information from someone else's viewpoint. Finally the fourth component asks them to report every detail, however insignificant it may seem. Evidence from Fisher et al (1989) found that police officers from Florida's Police Department trained to use the cognitive interview technique were more successful in gaining accurate information from suspects and witnesses without losing detail. They had a 63% improved accuracy rate compared to police officers not trained to use the cognitive interview. This suggests that if the police officers want to avoid a false confession they should employ the cognitive interview technique with the four witnesses to the armed robbery. Another way in which the police could avoid a false confession is to use the PEACE model as devised by Savage and Milne (2007). This is made up of five components; planning and preparation; engage and explain; account, clarify and challenge; closure and evaluate. Evidence from Walsh and Bull (2010) suggests that the PEACE model leads to more accurate information gathered at interview. They found that 92% of interviewers who did not effectively use the PEACE model failed to obtain a comprehensive account or confessions from suspects or witnesses. In addition an evaluation of the PEACE model was undertaken by McGurk, Carr and McGurk (1993) who found certain improvements in police officers' interviewing such as questioning and listening skills. This suggests that the police officers could also use the PEACE model to help avoid false confessions from the four witnesses in this case.

