

## **Outline and evaluate research into institutional aggression** (8 and 16 marks)



There are 3 main forces that drive institutional aggression; situational, individualistic and systemic.

Situational forces can be best explained through the deprivation model. This states that aggression in institutions is a result of the oppressive conditions of the institution itself such as overcrowding, heat and noise, and these can increase fear and frustration levels and so aggression results as an attempt to reduce stress and obtain the desired resources. The Abu Ghraib prison is a real-life example that can be explained by this model. The guards were working in stressful conditions and were subjected to deindividuation, conformity and dehumanisation which led them to commit horrendous atrocities.

Individualistic forces are shown by the importation model. This suggests that the people in institutions import their own social histories and violent characteristics into the institution with them and so it is the individuals themselves that are aggressive, not the conditions. Abu Ghraib can be explained here too as it is known that one of the guards had a violent history so it's likely that he brought those values with him into the institution.

To evaluate the deprivation model, it can be commended for having real-life applications as new institutions can be formed to reduce the deprivations and thus reduce aggression. However, the research is not consistent and cannot be generalised from most studies which have looked into prisons. This is because Nijman found that in psychiatric institutions, increased personal space failed to decrease violence. This finding contradicts the model and perhaps lends more support to the importation model which is more sensitive to individual differences.

The model is also reductionist. This is because it fails to provide a complete view of aggression and does not appreciate the important influence of other factors such as biology or biostructure and it cannot explain why not all people are aggressive in the same situations. For example, Joe Darby faced the same situational pressures as all the other guards at Abu Ghraib yet he resisted and tried to put an end to it.

Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Study can help demonstrate the situational influences on institutional aggression as all the participants were tested and were free of sadistic tendencies beforehand. Therefore the fact that they acted aggressively must have been a result of the situation they were placed in. However, the actions of the guards may have been driven by perceived social roles and not the institution's environment and thus these demand characteristics could have confounded the results, making them less generalizable to the model.

As for the importation model, Harer found that misconduct in prisons paralleled misconduct observed outside. However, he only studied American prisons and so the sample bias could reduce the study's internal validity. It's also been shown that gang members are 10 times more likely to commit murder and are also more likely to be violent in prisons, suggesting that they bring their aggressive tendencies in with them.

There are methodological problems with most studies into institutional aggression. Firstly, given its nature, it is hard to control all variables and so a cause and effect relationship cannot be established. They also suffer from gender bias as the research is often conducted on male inmates which, of course, cannot show if women would react similarly. Thirdly, researchers don't take into

account the reason people are in prison; some may be prisoned but have not necessarily committed an aggressive crime.