

Subject:	Criminology
Subject Context:	WJEC Level 3 Diploma in Criminology
Reading List:	<p><u>Book</u> Criminology: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions) by Tim Newburn</p> <p><u>Documentaries</u> The Jury: Murder Trial on 4OD Forensics: The Real CSI on BBC iPlayer (Please get parental permission before watching these)</p>
Essential resources or equipment required for the course:	Pens, highlighters, lined paper, a folder. A textbook will be provided by the college.
Taster Activity:	Does Prison Work? Activity See below.
Resources needed to complete the activity:	A computer with internet access. You can either type or handwrite your response.
Estimated time required to complete the activity:	60 minutes
How you could extend your learning:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Watch some other true crime related documentaries. 2. Follow the news; make sure you are aware of big criminal cases being reported on over the summer holidays. 3. Explore the websites of some campaigns for change e.g. CrimeStoppers, #LivesNotKnives, Mencap: Hear my voice

Does Prison Work? Year 11 taster task

In order to assess the effectiveness of prisons, we must consider the extent to which they achieve the *reform* of offenders. In criminological terms, reform means that the offender as let go of their offending behaviours and improved their behaviour so that it is not considered criminal and/or deviant anymore. Reform is arguably one of the most important reasons why prisons are vital. In order to effectively reform offenders, prisons need to provide the right services and opportunities that support rehabilitation to prevent a return to crime. Some of the areas they mention are:

- Improving prisoners' mental health and tackling substance misuse
- Improving prisoners progress in maths and English
- Increasing the numbers of offenders in employment and accommodation after release.

Additionally, offenders should also be supported in learning about money and finance, improving their confidence, developing their understanding of supportive relationships, dealing with issues that may arise or previous traumas. Reform is about equipping someone with the tools to successfully navigate life's difficulties without resorting to crime.

Sometimes we hear talk of "Life after prison". This relates to the support needed by prisoners once they are released. This includes working with probation services. This highlights the need for services to support prisoners from the transition 'through the gate'. The main factors here seem to be employment and accommodation. When looking at the statistics for prisons achieving their target for accommodation on the first night following release, this is only 17.3%. When we look at employment targets within the first 6 weeks of release, this was at only 4%, which is very low. These statistics raise concerns as to whether prison is successful in rehabilitation. Or is it merely a punishment that puts people's lives on hold?

Criminological arguments for prisons

- One argument for prison is that it is an effective deterrent. Prison can be seen as a tough type of punishment because it takes away your freedom, potential support networks and in many ways, it strips away your identity. The thought of prison is enough for some people to not even contemplate committing a criminal act.
- Prison sentences are also a message to the wider public that this is what will happen if you commit a crime. Prison advocates would say this is a message to wider society about what is right and wrong and what will happen if you commit a crime.
- Additionally, prison advocates argue that prison is such a difficult time for people that the experience should then deter them from committing any further offences. However, we know that is not the case because many individuals who have committed an offence and go to prison then commit further offences. This makes us question, is prison a) effective and b) enough of a deterrence?
- Another argument for prison is that by putting people in prison, we protect the public by ensuring these individuals cannot commit any further offences. Additionally, prison sentences provide a sense of justice to the victims affected by the crime and the public.

Of these arguments, which do you find most convincing? Which do you find least convincing? Why?

Criminological arguments against prisons

- The first argument would be that prisons do not work. Those advocating for prison reform highlight reoffending statistics as an example of the ineffectiveness of prisons.
 - The adult reoffending rate for the October to December 2018 cohort was 27.5%. This means that nearly a third of all people who have been in prison will reoffend.
 - Almost 101,000 proven re-offences were committed over the one-year follow-up period by around 25,000 adults. Those that reoffended committed on average 3.97 re-offences. [Source – Home Office – Proven reoffending statistics for England and Wales, published October 2020].
- Research shows that long prison sentences have little impact on crime. Time in prison can actually make someone more likely to commit crime — by further exposing them to all sorts of criminal elements. Prisons are also costly, using up funds that could go to other government programs that are more effective at fighting crime.
- While there are some opportunities in prison, this does not always meet the needs of the prisoners and does not help them on their release due to the views people in society have about imprisonment and criminal records. On release, three-fifths of prisoners have no “identified employment or education or training outcome”. If prison punishes people through the experience itself but then does not offer those individuals the opportunity to improve and change their lives once they are released, can we realistically expect people to be rehabilitated and not return to crime?
- Some believe that the whole prison system is an oppressive institution governed by the powerful that cages the marginalised and powerless. They would argue that prison further damages people because it causes further trauma, exposes them to further violence, reinforces disadvantage and creates further crime and social harm.
- The prison system also does very little to tackle the underlying causes of crime in communities. However, some have argued that by reducing the prison population, we are still widening the net and criminalising people, as community sentences and alternatives to custody would be increased rather than looking at some of the structural inequalities that may lead to crime and criminal behaviour.
- Others argue that prison mainly holds those that are from lower socio-economic backgrounds and ethnic minorities, punishing poverty and disadvantage while protecting the crimes of the powerful. For example, where are the imprisoned individuals from corporations that cause widespread harm, such as those that need to be held accountable for the Grenfell Tower fire, multi-million corporations and so on?

Of these arguments, which do you find most convincing? Which do you find least convincing? Why?

There are many arguments for abolishing prison, and then there are arguments that recognise prison cannot be abolished completely but needs reforming.

The **United Nations** Office on Drugs and Crime highlights some of the reasons why prisons need to be reformed. These are:

- Human rights, as prison is a deprivation of the basic right to liberty.
- Imprisonment disproportionately affects individuals and families living in poverty. From the potential loss of income from an individual going to prison, lawyer costs, costs to visit and communicate with that individual, the lack of employment opportunities when released, the marginalisation and so on.
- Public health consequences – It is argued that many prisoners have poor health and existing health problems when entering the prison. These problems are exacerbated due to; overcrowding, poor nutrition, lack of exercise and fresh air. Then there are also the infection rates, self-harm and poor mental health. The argument is that staff will be vulnerable to some of these diseases, and so will the public once these individuals are released.
- Detrimental social impact – Imprisonment disrupts relationships and weakens social cohesion.
- Costs – The cost of each prisoner for their upkeep, but also the social, economic and health costs mentioned previously, which are long-term.

The Howard League for Penal Reform says on their website:

“The prison system is like a river. The wider it gets, the faster it flows – and the harder it becomes to swim against the tide. Rather than being guided to safer shores, those in the middle are swept into deeper currents of crime, violence and despair. What began as a trickle turns into a torrent, with problems in prisons spilling into the towns and cities around them.”

Your task

Now you have read through the information, have a look at these articles/case studies:

[Pentonville prison's future in doubt after highly critical inspection report | Prisons and probation | The Guardian](#)

[Inside Oakwood prison: the private jail struggling to prove bigger is better | Prisons and probation | The Guardian](#)

[Why Norway's Prison System Is so Successful \(businessinsider.com\)](#)

[Why aren't all jails like Norway's? - The New European](#)

Now complete:

“Prisons are an effective way to reduce crime”

Evaluate this statement with arguments for and against.

Refer to real-life cases
