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| **Theory …**Violence and aggression is not a product of an institution itself but rather the product of the characteristics of individuals who enter it (Irwin & Cressey 1962). | **Research support****Keller and Wang (2005)** - prison violence, and assaults on staff are more likely to occur in high-security prisons (inmates had committed more violent crimes on ‘the outside’), than those with lower security inmates. | **Strengths**Looks at prisoners in a more ideographic way. This explains why some prisons are aggressive and some are not. | **Weaknesses**A study of over 800 male inmates found litte evidence of a relationship between previous gang membership and misconduct within prison – found deprivation factors to play an equally important role (DeLisi, 2004) |
| **….. further detail**Prisoners are often the product of a difficult background and experiences.They bring their own social histories and personality traits with them to prison (due to genetics, hormone levels SLT etc.).Prisoners ‘import’ their personalities, difficulties and histories with them from the outside into the prison. | **Research support*****Drury et al (2011) –*** Found pre-prison gang membership tends to be exacerbated in prison. Gang members were significantly more likely to engage in murder and assault in prison. | **Media influences on aggression** | **Weaknesses**Gives no practical suggestions for how to decrease violence in institutions. Implications for rehabilitation – consider the home environment and the individual. |
| **Theory ….**Low levels of serotonin mean aggressive people tend to respond more rashly and harshly to emotional stimuli.Individuals may actively seek out aggressive encounters because of the rewarding sensation of high dopamine levels. | **Research support****Mann et al (1990)** administered dexfenflouromine to 35 healthy adults (depletes serotonin). Ppts filled in questionnaires which assessed hostility and aggression. Levels found to increase in males, but not females.**Buitelaar (2003)-** Dopamine antagonists (which reduce dopamine activity) are used successfully in the treatment of violent delinquents | **Strengths**Practical applications - If the role of biochemistry can be understood it can perhaps be treated or managed. Although there would be ethical issues associated with giving people drugs simply to alleviate aggression (ie. for social control), or male castration. | **Weaknesses**Contradictory research evidence - For example, both increases and decreases in serotonin activity have been linked to increased aggression.Much of the evidence on the link between serotonin/dopamine and aggression is correlational‐ we cannot say there is a cause and effect relationship. There may be a third variable which affects aggression levels. For example, serotonin and dopamine control other behavioural functions‐ it may be their effect on these functions which cause aggressive behaviour. Also significant empirical evidence for role of environmental factors, such as SLT, therefore reductionist and falls too heavily on ‘nature’ side of debate. |
| **…. further detail**High levels of testosterone have been found to correlate with aggression. Likely linked to low levels of cortisol, as this hormone inhibits the production of high levels of testosterone. (Also calms the body after the stress response). | **Research support****Dabbs et al (1995) –** measured testosterone in saliva of 692 adult male prisoners. He found higher levels in rapists and violent offenders than in burglars and thieves (less aggressive convictions).**McBurnett et al (2000)** - 4 year study of boys with behavioural problems. Those with low cortisol levels: Anti-social behaviour began earlier and 3 times as many aggressive symptoms. | **Strengths**Can be linked to evidence for the role of MAOA in aggression. | **Weaknesses**Majority of studies in area conducted on men. This means there is a significant gender bias in the research, and it is therefore difficult to generalise the conclusions from the studies done on males to the female population. This is because, potentially, women have slightly different underlying genetics and socialisation. This issue can be demonstrated by one of the few studies that has looked into women, conducted by Eisenegger et al (2011) that found high testosterones levels in women actually correlated with less aggressive behaviour. |