Outline and Evaluate the Biological Approach to Psychopathology

The biological approach suggests abnormal behaviour is due to underlying biological causes meaning the structure or functioning of the brain has been damaged. These causes being brain damage, neurotransmitters, infection or genetics.

Raine et al 1997 showed enlarged ventricles in the brains of schizophrenics, an example of an abnormality due to a damaged brain structure.

Neurotransmitters are chemicals in which carry information between brain cells e.g dopamine, serotonin. There are links between high levels of dopamine leading to schizophrenia and low levels of serotonin leading to depression.

Brown’s research has suggested 14% of schizophrenia cases may be due to exposure to the flu virus while in the womb, showing abnormal behaviour as a result of infection.

McGuffin et al 1996 carried out a study on twins and found identical twins showed a 46% concordance rate for depression.

A strength of the biological approach is that there is no blame to those with abnormalities. This is therefore thought of as an ethical, humane approach, leading to help, sympathy for those with mental disorders, rather than stigma and punishment.

Another strength is the large amount of research carried to support this approach. Therefore increasing our understanding of these possible biological factors.

However, with the research carried out, cause and effect is often uncertain. For example, McGuffin’s twin study’s findings may have been due to environmental factors rather than genetics, e.g issues with family, school.

This approach is also reductionist. The cause of abnormalities have been broken down too simplistically where there may be multiple influencing factors which are not accounted for, e.g cognitive, behavioural factors.