

## **Sample Answer**

**Assess the usefulness of research into the collection and processing of forensic evidence.**

**(15 marks)**

Usefulness is based on real life applications where the concepts of such research offer a valuable contribution to society. This is the idea that the findings can offer help or advice for future behaviour. One way in which the research into the collection and processing of forensic evidence is useful is that it has practical applications in real life in the court system. For example, Hall and Player (2008) found that emotional context of a situation did not affect the decision-making process of fingerprint analysis, and therefore it is extremely useful and reliable to be used in court. This means that the decision-making process in court is more reliable and suggests that fingerprint experts will not be influenced by additional background information from the case. However, it would be advisable to note, fingerprint experts could still be influenced to give biased judgments as they are individual people with their own minds, which means there could still be an influence of subjectivity. Nevertheless, expert evidence in a court is better than non-experts' evidence in producing more reliable information.

Another way in which the research into the collection and processing of forensic evidence is useful is that most of the research is conducted in a lab experiment, which are under controlled conditions where the IV is manipulated and the DV is measured objectively. For example, Hall and Player (2008) conducted a lab experiment but designed it to be as realistic as possible. It took place during the fingerprint experts normal working day in a typical fingerprint examination room. The IV was whether the participants were allocated to a high context (murder) condition or a low context (forgery) condition. The DV was whether the participants read the crime scene report before examining the fingerprint, and whether they found it to be a match and if it could be used in court. This means that we can infer cause and effect from the findings as all variables in a lab experiment were strictly controlled which produces more reliable data. However, lab experiments are prone to a risk of demand characteristics which is where the participants change their behaviour to please the researcher. In addition, lab experiments also lack ecological validity as they are still an artificial environment.

One way in which the research into the collection and processing of the forensic evidence is less useful is that it is still at risk of individual differences, which could make findings more subjective. For example, Hall and Player (2008) took a group of volunteer fingerprint experts from the Metropolitan Police Department at Scotland Yard who had experience that varied from 3 months to 30 years. From the large sample of 70 experts, 12 of them were no longer active but still registered of fingerprint practitioners. This means that there is a lot of variation within the sample of fingerprint experts and their unique experiences could make judgements more subjective. This could make the findings in the research less valid. However, it is presumed that all of the experts would have had the same training and would be expected to make objective judgements when deciding if a fingerprint is a match or not.

Overall, the research into the collection and processing of forensic evidence is useful and has made a valuable contribution to our understanding of the process of fingerprint analysis without any bias.

