

## Sample Answer

### **Discuss the validity of the research investigating the collection of evidence. (15 marks)**

Validity is the idea that research should measure what it intends to, and by doing so valuable conclusions can be made. There are different types of validity; internal and external (ecological, population, temporal). When considering the validity of research investigating the collection and use of evidence it is important to assess the internal validity, which helps establish cause and effect. This is useful when collecting information about the crime from witnesses or offenders. The review by Memon and Higham (1999) highlighted the effectiveness of using the cognitive interview technique. This was tested by Fisher and Geiselman (1985) who can be said to have high internal validity as they measured the effectiveness of the cognitive interview pre and post-training with detectives. They found that when comparing the trained detectives against themselves, 47% more information was recorded in the post-training interview. However, validity may be affected here as this was a field experiment, so there could have been extraneous variables which could have affected the interview performance which again may limit usefulness. In another study, by Gudjonsson (1990) which could be seen to have internal validity, as they describe the case study of a 17 year-old boy who they identified giving a false confession due to the pressure of the interview situation. However, as this is a case study, although they have identified the reason for the crime it cannot be generalised meaning that it can be considered to have limited usefulness. Research into collecting evidence from witnesses or suspects can be said to have high ecological validity if it makes use of real crimes and genuine interviews with suspects or witnesses. In the cases highlighted by Memon and Higham (1999), they cite real life criminal interviews using detectives from the Miami Police Department. In addition, Gudjonsson (1990) utilised a real life case of a 17 year-old boy who gave a false confession to the double murder of two elderly women after being interrogated without break or solicitor for 14 hours, giving the case as evidence of how coerced compliant false confessions can occur. This research highlights the benefits of using witnesses to real crimes, maintaining ecological validity. This means that the findings from such studies can be generalised to witness or offender interviews outside the investigation. This is useful because if we can see the realistic impact of certain police interview techniques, then when they appear successful we can justify training more officers to use those techniques. However it could be argued that studies that utilise real crimes and witnesses could lack internal validity as they do not tend to have much control over the variables. The use of field experiments to compare techniques in interviewing witnesses also lack control groups and so any additional information from the witness could be from a reason other than the feature of the interview used, meaning the conclusions drawn may not be valid. Another argument related to validity is that in some cases it could be argued that studies into the collection of evidence from suspects and witnesses lack population validity this is because the studies are often on specific groups of people. Memon and Higham (1999) refer to cases from America which limits the application to other countries such as the UK. Moreover, in the case study by Gudjonsson (1990) they only took into consideration the false confession of the one young male. The study did not take into account other false confessions from other innocent suspects, who may have made false confession for reasons other than the pressure of the interview. This limits the generalisation and as such findings may lack population validity, meaning that the results may not be representative of all police interviews where things go wrong and could be a one off occasion. Therefore this limits usefulness as the insight into the problems that can occur in the interviewing of suspects restricts our understanding, which in turn limits our ability to develop techniques for police to overcome these issues. However it could be argued that by looking at a real suspect who made a false confession it does have some population validity.

