**Example Research Methods Essay**

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| **Example Essay:**  *Discuss one research method used to study social responsibility.* | |
| ***PLAN***  ***CentA\**** *- correlational studies are used to study relationships between naturally-occurring factors and social responsibility.*  ***Evidence*** *– Levine’s studies on helping behaviour (1994 in USA and 2001 cross-cultures).*  ***CountA #1 –*** *Causation vs. Correlation – correlational studies cannot provide us with understanding of causal relationships.*  ***Concl*** *-* | *Always plan before answering the question*  *Write in fragments in plan*  *Thinking out evaluations in full can be helpful as these are tricky and require careful consideration* |
| ***Correlational Studies and Social Responsibility***  Studies on social responsibility often look at relationships between social and cultural factors and the likelihood that someone else with help another person. ~~That is to say, how[[1]](#footnote-1)~~ With this aim of studying ~~possible reasons why people may or may not help~~ rates of prosocial behaviour, correlational studies are a valuable research method because the strength of relationships between variables related to sociocultural influences and ~~helping~~ prosocial behaviour can be measured. While benefits of a correlational method can be seen in Levine’s research on helping behaviour, this method ~~is limited~~ may have limitations because “correlation does not mean causation.”  A correlational study measures the strength of a relationship between two continuous variables. ~~That is to say,~~ There is said to be a correlation if as one variable changes, so does the other. The measurement of strength of the relationship between the two variables is calculated as a correlational coefficient and 1.0 is a strong positive correlation, -1.0 a strong negative and 0.0 is no correlation. Studies on social responsibility use the correlational method by ~~measuring~~ gathering data on variables that they might think are related. In this context, it is often one or more variables that are hypothesized to affect helping behaviour (or bystanderism) and the rate of helping behaviour. For example, scores on cultural dimensions, economic productivity and population size (and density) are all continuous variables that have been correlated with rates of helping.  One reason why the correlational method is valuable in the study of social responsibility is that it can be used to measure possible relationships between these naturally existing variables and behaviours related to social responsibility (i.e. helping). They are ~~impossible~~ very difficult (if not impossible) to manipulate in a laboratory environment and so studying correlations between these variables can allow researchers to construct hypotheses about how and why these factors may affect social responsibility.  ~~The~~ This use of the correlational method can be seen in two of Levine’s studies on rates of helping behaviour. His first study was conducted across 36 cities in the United States (1994). The study involved having a confederate walking in a public place and then doing something that required others to help. E.g. they may have dropped a pen or pile of magazines, pretended to be blind and needed help crossing the street or dropped a postcard. A researcher nearby gathered data on the rate of those people around that helped. ~~The~~ One correlation measured in this study was ~~between~~ the relationship between population size of the city and the rates of helping behaviour. Levine, like many social psychologists, wanted to see if there was a relationship between how many people lived in a certain area and whether or not this affected how helpful people were. This is a common field of study in social responsibility and the results showed that there was a negative correlation between population density and size and the rate of helping; that is to say, as one of these variables increases (e.g. amount of people living in the city) the other (e.g. helping) decreases.  This first study shows the benefits of a correlational study as it would have been impossible for Levine to manipulate the variable of population size and density in a city in a laboratory environment, but he still wanted to see if it was possibly related to rates of helping. This allows him and other researchers to construct hypotheses about *why* these variables might be related and perhaps design other studies to test their hypotheses.  In Levine’s ~~second~~ next study, he wanted to control for the variable of population density (because he had studied it already) and was interested in other variables across-cultures that may influence rates of helping other people. ~~Three~~ Two of these variables were cultural values (i.e. levels of individualism) and economic productivity (measured by gross domestic product). Data was gathered on these measures and were correlated with levels of helping that were measured in similar ways to his study in the US (e.g. a confederate dropping a pen, etc.) The results showed a weak negative correlation between individualism and helping and a stronger negative correlation between economic productivity and helping.  Once again, we see that the correlational method here is valuable because existing variables that are hypothesized to be related to social responsibility can be measured and the strength of their relationship is calculated.  However, one major limitation of using correlational studies is that correlation does not mean causation. As we’ve seen, these studies can be used to generate hypotheses and perhaps inspire further research that might study causal relationships between variables, but these studies do not provide us with an understanding of what might *cause* different rates of helping behaviour. For example, it might not be that low economic productivity is the variable that is *causing* the increased rate of prosocial behaviour. It might be that there’s another related variable that is influential. For instance, perhaps cultures don’t achieve high economic productivity if they value having more free time and leisure time. This could mean they work less hours in a day, have less work to do and so they have more time to help someone out if they see them in need of help. Because a correlational study doesn’t isolate the IV and can’t control extraneous variables, it means that we only understand relationships between variables, but not causal ones.  In conclusion, while correlational studies are valuable ~~methods~~ when studying possible relationships between naturally occurring social and cultural variables and can inspire hypotheses and further research, they are limited because we cannot draw causal relationships which affects our ability to *explain* behaviour, which is a primary goal of psychologists. (950 words, approx.) | *~~Deleted lines~~ show my own editing during writing the answer.*  The intro begins with a broad statement that identifies the topic.  The central argument is stated (which method is used and why).  The supporting evidence is stated and so is the counter-argument.  The method is defined, which shows knowledge.  A general summary of characteristics shows knowledge.  How the method is used is explained specifically as it relates to the field of social responsibility – this shows understanding.  After how the method is used, the answer goes on to explain why it’s used to study social responsibility.  The study has a topic sentence that introduces the relevance of the study.  Relevant methods of the study are described.  Specific terminology (e.g. negative correlation) is used.  The answer doesn’t end with the results of the study, but also includes an important explanation of how it shows the benefit of the method.  A second study is used to further support the argument.  Conclusion about the benefits of the use of the correlational method are included.  The counter-argument is sign-posted.  The evaluation identifies the limitation as it applies to this particular topic.  The critical thinking is well-developed because it shows possible alternative explanations for the results, which helps to highlight the limitation of the method.  The conclusion briefly summarizes the central argument and the counter-argument. |

1. Proof reading edits have been left in because this is reflective of what happens in real exams. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)