Applied sociological research skills
Key terms

Objectivity
- A lack of bias, preconceptions or prejudice. Lack of bias = keeping your opinions and your values separate from what you're studying and try to look at the issue as scientifically as possible. (related to value freedom)

Value freedom
- Where the research of a sociologist ought to be carried without their beliefs and ideas influencing the project. (see also positivism)

Ethical issues
- Issues which have a moral dimension, such as the debates over euthanasia and abortion. It goes against the mores, norms and values of society as people see it as not the right thing. In research we need to be sensitive aware of peoples morals and values.

Positivism
- A view where phenomena should be studied in a scientific manner. To find out things for certain.

Case study – strengths and weaknesses
- A detailed in-depth study of a group or event.
- Weakness – it is not representative of others which are similar to it
- Strength – it is good to use as a hypothesis, an untested theory, for research that you may plan to do in the future.

Methodological pluralism
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Sampling methods / Sampling frame – strengths and weaknesses
- A sampling method is how you plan to choose a sample from a population. The aim usually being to get a sample which is representative of the population. For example random sampling, where you choose people at random like every tenth person. Random sampling is a technique that is unbiased; this is because everyone has the same chance of being selected.
- A sampling frame is a list of people from which you can then choose a sample. A good sampling frame to choose is the electoral register, or telephone directory. This gives a good mix of people. It does not however include the whole population e.g. some people are ex-directory.

Different types of survey questionnaire – strengths and weaknesses
- Structured questionnaire – questions that usually give yes, no or one word answers. An advantage is that it gives good quantitative data, which can be used to look at trends and patterns. A weakness is that it is low in validity.
- Semi-structured questionnaires – leave room for opinions but do have direct questions. One of its strengths would be it gives higher validity. A weakness is that the people may lie on the questionnaire making it low in reliability.

Interviews
- Structured – a set of questions asked to the respondent. Not much room for discussion. You get the direct answers.
- Unstructured – more of a relaxed feel to the interview, informal. Can get a more valid response. The respondents may give you the answers that they think you want this could make it unreliable.
- Group discussions – these are a good way of getting a group of people together who then will go in to much more depth of what has been asked. It is good for getting valid answers. Some people in the group may feel uncomfortable and agree rather than argue what they really think.

Observation
- Covert – this is where the researcher will go undercover. In covert participant observation the researcher may have to take pert in deviant acts. It is good for getting studying people in their natural environment.
- Overt – this is where you are openly observing people. A disadvantage is that the people being observed will act differently knowing they are being watched.

Content analysis
- A method used when studying the media. Can be used when looking at the newspaper coverage on crime.

Semiotic analysis
- Analysis of symbols used by the media, and myths that are created by them.

 Secondary data
Statistics
- Good for getting information about groups and looking at trends, if any, over the years e.g. criminal statistics. Can be unreliable.

Historical documents
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Personal documents
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