

## **METHODS OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY – UG SEMESTER II NOTES**

Social psychology uses both **scientific** and **systematic** methods to understand how people think, feel, and behave in social situations. The major methods include **observational, correlational, experimental, survey, case study, field study**, and **qualitative methods**.

### **1. OBSERVATIONAL METHOD**

#### **Meaning**

Systematic watching and recording of behaviour as it occurs naturally.

#### **Types**

##### **a) Naturalistic Observation**

- Conducted in real-life settings.
- The researcher does not interfere.
- Example: observing crowd behaviour in a marketplace.

##### **b) Controlled/Laboratory Observation**

- Conducted in a lab setting.
- Researchers manipulate the environment.

#### **Advantages**

- Provides real and rich data.
- Good for studying natural behaviour.

#### **Limitations**

- Observer bias.
- No control over variables.
- Cannot establish cause–effect.

### **2. CORRELATIONAL METHOD**

## Meaning

Studies the relationship between two or more variables without manipulating them.

## Correlation Coefficient (r)

- Ranges from **-1 to +1**.
- **Positive**: variables move in same direction.
- **Negative**: variables move in opposite direction.
- **Zero**: no relationship.

## Advantages

- Helps in prediction.
- Useful when experimentation is not possible.

## Limitations

- **Correlation does NOT imply causation.**

## 3. EXPERIMENTAL METHOD

### Meaning

Researcher manipulates one variable (**Independent Variable**) and measures its effect on another (**Dependent Variable**) under controlled conditions.

### Key Concepts

- **Independent Variable (IV)**: the cause.
- **Dependent Variable (DV)**: the effect.
- **Experimental Group**: receives the treatment.
- **Control Group**: does not receive treatment.
- **Random Assignment**: reduces bias.

### Advantages

- Establishes **cause-effect relationships**.

- High level of control.

### **Limitations**

- Artificial environments may reduce realism.
- Ethical limitations.

## **4. SURVEY METHOD**

### **Meaning**

Collecting information from a large number of people using **questionnaires** or **interviews**.

### **Types**

- **Structured** (fixed questions)
- **Unstructured** (open-ended)
- **Face-to-face, telephone, online surveys**

### **Advantages**

- Can collect data from large samples.
- Cost-effective.

### **Limitations**

- Response bias.
- Questions may be misunderstood.

## **5. FIELD STUDY / FIELD EXPERIMENT**

### **Meaning**

Conducted in natural settings but with experimental manipulation.

### **Example**

Studying helping behaviour in public places.

### **Advantages**

- High ecological validity (natural behaviour).

### **Limitations**

- Hard to control extraneous variables.

## **6. CASE STUDY METHOD**

### **Meaning**

In-depth study of a single individual, group, or event.

### **Advantages**

- Detailed information.
- Useful for rare or unique cases.

### **Limitations**

- Cannot generalize results.
- Subjectivity possible.

## **7. QUALITATIVE METHODS**

Used to understand **meaning, experiences, and social interactions**.

### **a) Focus Groups**

Small group discussions led by a moderator.

### **b) In-depth Interviews**

Detailed one-on-one conversations.

### **c) Content Analysis**

Systematic study of documents, media, speeches, etc.

### **Advantages**

- Provides deep insights.
- Useful for exploring new topics.

## **Limitations**

- Interpretation may be subjective.
- Harder to analyze compared to quantitative data.

## **8. ETHICAL ISSUES IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH**

- **Informed Consent**
- **Deception** (used only when necessary)
- **Debriefing**
- **Confidentiality**
- **Protection from harm**

## **9. TRIANGULATION**

Using multiple methods to study the same phenomenon to improve **validity**.