

PET – OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Define the method	Statistics created by Government through surveys or through the activities of its agencies. (Used as secondary data by sociologists)				
Example(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crime Statistics, employment statistics, taxation and government finance, school league tables etc. [statistics generated by governments and their agencies in the course of their work] • Census (decennial), Crime Survey of England and Wales etc. [specific surveys] 				
Circle correct	Quantitative	Qualitative	Positivist	Realist	Interpretivist
	Strengths		Weaknesses		
Practical	<p>Often Official Statistics are the only practicable source for certain studies</p> <p>They are often easily accessible from government sources – especially through libraries or increasingly via the internet</p> <p>Many are free – so reducing the cost of research to the sociologist using them</p>		<p>If statistics are not created then they are not available to anyone. For example if particular activities are not illegal, police forces will not collect statistics on them.</p> <p>Governments may not be interested in collecting (and publishing) a number of statistics, for example in cases of sensitivity to embarrassment or issues of national security</p> <p>There may be problems of collection – especially where the public are required to report honestly, for example tax returns are likely to minimise the amount of tax that the respondent will want to pay</p>		
Ethical	<p>If secondary data is already publicly available, Official Statistics present almost no ethical problems of data gathering for sociologists who use them “second-hand”.</p> <p>No need to obtain informed consent, no need to anonymise responses, etc this is already done</p>		<p>No particular ethical issues if held in the public domain.</p> <p>On the other hand public services’ ethical duties may well hold back these materials, denying it to sociological researchers (like the 100 year moratorium on census returns). That will create practical problems...</p>		
Theoretical	<p>Official Statistics are likely to be reliable as they are often gathered in the same way over extended periods of time</p> <p>Official Statistics are likely to be representative as governments are able to ensure that they are collected even from those who might not want to participate (fines and/or imprisonment for refusing to complete the census?)</p> <p>Governments have the resources to engage in very large scale research</p>		<p>Official statistics are socially constructed, they rely on rules and cultural assumptions and this affects their validity, i.e., do they measure what they seem to measure?</p> <p>Verification is difficult – the replication of any statistical survey is generally too costly and impracticable. We might doubt their representativeness on occasion, but cannot check this.</p> <p>Reliability is problematic – the use of statistics and criteria for assessing them as accurate may change over time or between authorities</p>		