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Q3(b)

Describe the basic postulates of scientific method. How far are these followed in sociological research?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · Sociology GS 1 · 15 marks · Sociology as Science

Sociology as Science: Science, scientific method and critique; Major theoretical strands of research methodology; Positivism and its critique; Fact value and objectivity; Non-positivist methodologies.

Core demand of the question

- Describe the basic postulates of scientific method. How far are these followed in sociological research?
- Keep the answer within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

- **Postulates:** evidence, ordered explanation, public procedure, revisable hypotheses, organised scepticism.

Durkheim, Merton, Census, and NFHS show substantial following.

Weber, Mead, and Marx bend laboratory copies toward meaning, interaction, and critique.

Parsons's untested system talk falls short.

- **How far:** regulative core, not physics in a social lab.

Introduction

Scientific method is a set of postulates about how claims should be made and checked. Sociology follows them in part. Meaning, values, and the lack of a closed laboratory limit a copy of experimental physics.

Body**Basic postulates**

- **Empiricism:** claims answer to observation, records, or experiment, not to authority alone.
- **Order and explanation:** events are not miracles; we seek relations among variables.
- **Publicity and replicability:** procedures can be stated so another can try.
- **Fallibilism:** hypotheses are testable and revisable, as Karl Popper stressed against closed dogma.
- Logical consistency and conceptual clarity, which Max Weber's ideal types serve.
- Organised scepticism, in Robert K. Merton's ethos of science.

How far sociology follows

- Emile Durkheim's suicide study is a model of using rates against prenotions.
- Surveys, Census, and NFHS operationalise variables and publish methods.
- Comparative historical work follows publicity more than laboratory replication.

Where it bends

- **Weber's** verstehen is empirical about meaning, not a laboratory stimulus.
- George Herbert Mead's interaction is hard to replicate as a protocol, yet can be triangulated.
- Value-relevance selects problems; Sandra Harding argues that unnamed values violate the spirit of publicity.
- **Karl Marx's** critique treats surface empiricism as ideology if relations of production are ignored.
- Talcott Parsons's grand system is often under-tested, which Merton's middle range tried to correct.

Verdict

- Postulates are regulative. Sociological research follows them more in survey and official data, less in unstated ethnography and in unfalsifiable system talk.
- Following them "fully" as physics is the wrong test.

Flow diagram

Empiricism publicity fallibilism -> Sociological research
Sociological research -> Surveys Census tests
Sociological research -> Meaning values history

Conclusion

Scientific method postulates evidence, order, publicity, and revisable hypotheses. **Durkheim**, Merton, and survey practice follow that core. **Weber**, Mead, **Marx**, and Harding show why sociology cannot copy a closed experiment and must still keep the postulates as discipline, not as costume.

Facts & figures

Popper

Emphasised falsifiability and conjectures against dogmatic verification.

Merton's ethos

Communism, universalism, disinterestedness, organised scepticism as institutional norms of science.

Durkheim's Rules

A sociological attempt to state scientific method for social facts.

Ideal type

Weber's device for clear, comparable concepts rather than blurred common sense.