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Q1(c)

Illustrate with example the significance of variable in sociology research

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2017 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 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

- Illustrate with example the significance of the variable in sociological research
- Keep the illustration within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

A variable is a concept with more than one comparable value.

It states relations and forces **operational definition**.

Durkheim's suicide rates illustrate theoretically named variables.

Census and NFHS work variables can hide unpaid care if poorly coded.

Blumer's warning is part of the significance, not a footnote.

Introduction

A variable is a concept that takes more than one value and can be compared across cases. Without named variables, research is a pile of stories. With poorly named ones, it is a pile of numbers that do not answer the question.

Body

Why the variable matters

- **It turns a vague interest, such as "integration", into something that can vary:** church membership, marital status, or urban density in **Durkheim**'s suicide study.
- Independent and dependent variables state a claimed relation. Controls guard against a third factor.
- **Operational definition** ties the name to an indicator, so another researcher can repeat or dispute the measure.

Illustrations

- **Durkheim** treated suicide rate as the dependent variable and integration or regulation as independent. The significance was theoretical, not a love of tables.
- In Indian files, female work as a **Census** or NFHS variable changes meaning if unpaid care is excluded. The variable decides what inequality is seen.
- **Max Weber**'s ideal type is not a variable, but it guides which contrasts, such as inner-worldly asceticism, become measurable later.

Caution

- Herbert **Blumer** warned that variable analysis can freeze meanings actors still negotiate. Significance includes knowing that limit.

Flow diagram

Concept -> Variable values

Variable values -> Indicator coding

Indicator coding -> Relation test

Blumer meaning -> Limit of grids

Conclusion

The variable is significant because it makes comparison and test possible. **Durkheim**'s rates and **Census** work-status show the gain. The gain is lost if coding hides unpaid labour or living meaning.

Facts & figures

Durkheim on suicide

Turned official counts into a dependent variable related to integration and regulation.

Operational definition

The rule that links a concept to an observable indicator.

Census work status

A public variable whose coding of women's work shapes the picture of inequality.

Blumer

Criticised variable analysis that treats meanings as already fixed.