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Q1(b)

Do you think ethnomethodology helps us in getting reliable and valid data ? Justify your answer

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Sociology

Sociology - The Discipline: Modernity and social changes in Europe and emergence of sociology; Scope of the subject and comparison with other social sciences; Sociology and common sense.

Core demand of the question

- Do you think ethnomethodology helps us in getting reliable and valid data? Justify your answer
- Keep the answer within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Garfinkel studies members' methods, **indexicality**, and accountability.

That can validate how categories are produced, including official ones.

Reliability of national rates needs stable instruments such as **Census** and **NFHS**.

Cicourel links ethnomethodology to the making of statistics.

- **Justify:** yes for interactional validity; no as a sole reliability design.

Introduction

Harold **Garfinkel**'s ethnomethodology studies the methods members use to produce a sense of orderly social fact. It can raise validity for meaning in situ. It is a weak tool if the aim is reliable population measurement.

Body

What it can validate

- Indexical talk and accountability show how a category such as "household" or "migrant" is done in interaction, which a **Census** cell conceals.
- Breaching experiments reveal the background expectancies that actors treat as natural. That is a validity check on the researcher's prenotions, in **Durkheim**'s sense of discarding common-sense.
- Aaron **Cicourel** showed that official rates are assembled in offices. Ethnomethodology makes those assembly rules visible.

Where reliability fails

- Reliability needs stable instruments and repeatable coding. **Garfinkel**'s unique scenes and ad hocing do not yield test-retest scores like **NFHS** items.
- The findings travel poorly across settings unless they are turned into a documented method, not a one-off breach.
- The observer is inside the production of order, so another team may not recover the same transcript of "what happened".

Justification

- Use it for valid reconstruction of members' methods and for critique of official data.
- Do not use it alone for national rates. Mix it with standardised instruments when reliability of counts is the claim.

Flow diagram

Ethnomethodology -> Validity of members methods

Ethnomethodology -> Weak population reliability

Official stats -> Cicourel assembly

Validity of members methods -> Mixed with survey

Weak population reliability -> Mixed with survey

Conclusion

Ethnomethodology helps valid data on how people make social facts accountable. It does not, by itself, give reliable census-like series. Garfinkel and Cicourel justify a division of labour with survey method, not a replacement of it.

Facts & figures

Garfinkel

Ethnomethodology: the study of the methods people use to produce a sense of social order.

Indexicality

Meaning depends on context; members repair it through accountable talk.

Cicourel

Showed that rates in offices are negotiated products, not raw mirrors of the street.

NFHS

A standardised household instrument whose reliability ethnomethodology cannot replace but can interrogate.