

Reading Official Statistics

Sociology

What administrative data is actually a record of, and how to use it anyway.

Cheap, large and long-running, and produced for another purpose.

Why use it

Population scale, at no collection cost.

Long series allow change over time.

Standard definitions across regions.

Often the only source on rare events.

Enables comparison between countries.

What to ask first

Who produced it, and for what purpose?

What counts, and who decided the threshold?

Did the definition change mid-series?

What is a record of an event, not the event?

Which groups are systematically undercounted?

Interactionists read them as institutional output.

Educational reference. Unemployment, crime and hate-incident series all shift with counting rules as well as with the world.