

# OFFICIAL STATISTICS

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- Official statistics are both sources and topics for social research. We need to remain cautious about treating them simply as unproblematic 'facts' and pay attention to how they are constructed.
- The examples of the construction of crime statistics, or the generation of data on economic growth and sustainability, illustrate how particular values inform the decision-making process and influence the collection of statistics.
- Realist, institutional and radical perspectives provide frames for understanding how researchers approach official statistics.
- Contemporary debates on their use include the democratization of data and statistics and the rise of citizen science. Contemporary trends in social research question what is 'official' and who collects data in the first instance.

“Data and statistics are major political sites for struggle over how we know society.”

(May and Perry, 2022: 97)



## DISCUSS

- What are the different types of official statistics that are available to the social researcher?
- Bearing in mind your answer to the first question, why do you think they are produced and what are they used for?
- How might official statistics perpetuate inequalities in society?
- How are the concept and production of 'official' statistics challenged by more participatory forms of data collection?

## DO

*You have been asked to compile a statistical report for a government agency on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on different groups in society. The agency intends to use your report to make decisions on how to allocate funding.*

- What issues do you need to consider in relation to the types of sources and their validity?
- Will you use existing or develop new statistical datasets? How and with whom?
- How will you analyse the data?
- What ethical issues might you encounter?

This summary has been developed as an Open Access resource to support educators, students and researchers to develop and extend their understanding of the practice of social research. It draws on May, T. and Perry, B. (2022) *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process*. London: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill. To buy the book, please visit [Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process](#), use code OPENUP20 for a discount.