Official statistics are constructs or labels coroners give to deaths. Qualitative data allows us to get behind these labels to find the deceased real meanings, can discover real rate of suicide.

ATKINSON accepts first point but rejects the second: Can never really know the real meaning of suicide- never know for sure what meanings the dead gave to their deaths = impossible. Pointless trying to discover the real rate - can only study is how people make sense of their world. Studying how the living come to classify a death as a suicide, accident etc. Only study how statistics are constructed.

Focuses on how coroners categorise deaths- uses range of qualitative methods including conversations with coroners, observations of inquests and examination of court records. Concludes coroners have common sense theory about typical suicide- death fits the theory- label as suicide.

Relevant evidence:
- Suicide note or suicide threats prior to death
- Mode of death, e.g. hanging is ‘typically suicidal’ whereas road deaths are ‘typically accidental’
- Location and circumstances death by shooting is more likely to be suicide if in deserted place
- Life history: disturbed childhood, history of mental illness, difficult social/personal situation likely causes of suicide

Concludes coroners have assumptions of the ‘typical suicide’ – more of the assumed group end up in statistics = unreliable = coroners common sense theory bot discovering the real cause.

EVALUATION OF ATKINSON

BARRY HINDESS – structuralist (1973)- criticise ethnomethodologists a) popular b) self-defeating - we can all have interpretations rather than objective truth- own accounts are only interpretations, no reason to accept them.

Most ethnomethodologists accept their own accounts are interpretations.


Argues suicide statistics can’t be taken as valid- study of 32 people who died after being hit by London tube trains- just over half = suicide- no evidence of suicidal intent. Coroners saw factors such as history of mental illness as indicators of suicidal intent and this increased likelihood of suicide verdict. Can discover real patterns and causes and adopts a realist approach- aims to reveal underlying structures and causes.

DEFINING SUICIDE

TAYLOR: “any deliberate act of self-damage or potential self-damage where the individual cannot be sure of survival”

TYPES OF SUICIDE

Inner or self-directed suicides (ectopic) where the individual is psychologically detached from others- suicide attempt is private, self-contained act, two types of ectopic suicide:
- Submissive suicides, where the person is certain about themselves, they know they have no future and their suicide attempt is serious because they want to die.
- Thanatation suicides, where they are uncertain about themselves- they may be uncertain about what others think of them and their suicide attempt involves risk taking- they may or may not survive it, chance will decide.

Other two types are other-directed (or symphysic) suicides, where the individual has an