

## THE USES AND ABUSES OF STATISTICAL ANALYSES IN SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

Sushila Niles

Today more and more social science research has come to use the sophisticated techniques of data analyses of the pure sciences. Data analyses especially of large sample surveys have some clear benefits. We have been able to generalize for instance to larger and larger populations and formulate some theories about important issues. But there are some obvious shortcomings which the enthusiasts have tended to ignore. This has led to a great deal of contradiction and confusion in final results of research.

Social science data is such that they do not lend themselves to mathematically precise methods of analyses. All variables are not comparable because some variables however carefully measured are far from precise (eg: attitudes) There are therefore objective as well as subjective variables and the two cannot be treated similarly.

Social science research often results in policy decisions. For example American policy concerning education was based on the Coleman (1966) report. The report concluded for example that schools do not have much direct bearing on the educational attainment process, but subsequent analyses of the same data have challenged this conclusion.

Obviously when analysing social science data we cannot blindly follow the techniques of analyses of the pure sciences. Data analyses however are important and extremely useful if carried out in complete awareness of their limitations.