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Q1(c)

Analyze the importance of qualitative methods in social research

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Research Methods and Analysis

Research Methods and Analysis: Qualitative and quantitative methods; Techniques of data collection; Variables, sampling, hypothesis, reliability and validity.

Core demand of the question

- Analyze the importance of qualitative methods in social research
- Keep the analysis within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Qualitative methods recover meaning, process, and context.

Weber, Mead, Blumer, Geertz, and Merton justify that object.

They reach hidden groups and latent functions that tables miss.

They still need triangulation and comparison.

Importance is complementarity with Census and survey magnitudes.

Introduction

Qualitative methods recover meaning, process, and context. They are important because social action is not only a cell in a table. They are not a soft substitute for proof.

Body**What they uniquely do**

- Max Weber's *verstehen* needs talk, documents, and comparison of motives, not only rates.
- George Herbert Mead's self and Herbert Blumer's interaction are seen in situations, which *participant observation* and unstructured interview catch.
- Clifford Geertz's *thick description* makes public symbols disputable.

Importance beside numbers

- Emile Durkheim's suicide files still hide the meaning of a death. Qualitative work can interpret a type without replacing the rate.
- Robert K. Merton's latent functions are often found in ethnography of an office or a rite.
- Hidden groups, informal labour, and stigma have no sampling frame; qualitative designs reach them.

Discipline

- Saturation, triangulation, and reflexive notes, as Ann Oakley demanded of the interview, keep the method honest.
- Census and NFHS remain vital for magnitudes. Importance is complementarity.

Flow diagram

Qualitative methods -> Meaning process
Qualitative methods -> Hidden groups
Surveys Census -> Magnitudes
Meaning process -> Social research
Magnitudes -> Social research

Conclusion

Qualitative methods are important because they make meaning, interaction, and **latent function** visible. **Weber**, Mead, Merton, and Geertz justify that role. Their importance fails only if they refuse comparison and evidence.

Facts & figures

Verstehen

Weber's interpretative understanding of intended meaning.

Participant observation

Prolonged presence in a setting to see interaction as it is organised.

Thick description

Geertz: meaning located in public symbols other readers can contest.

Latent function

Merton: unanticipated consequences often visible only in close study of practice.

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