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Q6(c)

Explain with examples, the explanatory and exploratory designs of social research.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2018 · Sociology GS 1 · 15 marks · Sociology

Sociology - The Discipline: Modernity and social changes in Europe and emergence of sociology; Scope of the subject and comparison with other social sciences; Sociology and common sense.

Core demand of the question

- Explain with examples the explanatory and exploratory designs of social research
- Keep the explanation within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

Exploratory design maps unclear fields with flexible qualitative tools.

Explanatory design tests named relations with comparison and controls.

Durkheim's suicide is explanatory; a first gig ethnography is exploratory.

They often sequence; mixing is legitimate.

Do not sell a case as a national explanation.

Introduction

Research design is the plan that links question to evidence. Exploratory design maps an unclear field. Explanatory design tests a stated relation. Both are scientific when their claims match their reach.

Body**Exploratory design**

- Used when concepts are weak or the population is hidden.
- **Tools:** unstructured interview, participant observation, pilot survey, theoretical sampling after Glaser and Strauss.
- Example: first mapping of gig riders' unpaid waiting time, or of a new sect's household practice.
- **Output:** types, hypotheses, and better indicators, not a national rate.

Explanatory design

- **Used when a relation is named:** an independent and a dependent variable, with controls.
- **Tools:** comparative tables in **Durkheim's** suicide, multivariate survey models, historical comparison.
- Example: does female education associate with lower fertility in **NFHS** after controlling wealth? Does contractor use raise injury in a mill sample?
- **Max Weber** still wants meaning-adequacy inside explanation.

How they sequence

- Exploration often precedes explanation. Reversing them produces false precision.
- **Mixed designs are common:** ethnography to interpret a **Census** pattern.

Indian caution

- An exploratory village case cannot "explain India". An explanatory **NFHS** model cannot "understand" a ritual without further meaning work.

Flow diagram

Exploratory -> Types hypotheses
Types hypotheses -> Explanatory test
Explanatory test -> Stated relation
Ethnography plus survey -> Fuller claim

Conclusion

Exploratory design discovers the map. Explanatory design tests a relation. Gig ethnography and Durkheimian or **NFHS** comparisons illustrate the pair. Match the design to the question's maturity.

Facts & figures

Grounded theory

Glaser and Strauss: exploration until theoretical saturation.

Durkheim

Explanatory comparative design on suicide rates.

NFHS

A survey vehicle often used for explanatory models of fertility and health.

Weber

Explanation in social science still needs adequacy of meaning.