

Q: Discuss the fundamental Postulates of Edwin Sutherland's 'Differential Association' theory with examples.

Introduction

Sutherland initially outlined his theory in 1939 in his book "Principles of Criminology". Differential theory has remained popular since 1947. Edwin Sutherland's differential association theory proposes that people learn their values, motives, techniques and attitudes through their interactions with other people. In the world of criminology, it is the process which helps a person "learn" how to become a criminal. When the choices to commit a crime seem "normal" within the environment of an individual, then the risk of becoming a criminal become higher. The theory looks at the act of learning how to become a criminal, but does not address why criminal behavior is chosen over behaviors that are more accepted as a social norm. There are many ways to approach Sutherland's differential association theory. There are several factors that are often considered to be influential in the learning process of a criminal. This might include their socioeconomic status, the relationship their parents have with each other, or the acceptance of criminal behavior by an individual with whom they have a close attachment.

2- Differential Association Theory

Exposure to competing definitions of appropriate and inappropriate conduct

Definitions favourable or unfavourable to criminal behaviour are learned through interaction in intimate social groups

Excess of definitions favourable to law violation

Learning and criminal motivations and techniques

Delinquent and criminal behaviour

Date: _____

3. The Differential association theory.
A. Social Process theory

The differential association theory is a social process theory that states that criminal behavior is learned when you associate with other people who indulge in criminal behavior. According to Sutherland "Criminal behavior is learned in interaction with persons in a pattern of communication. A person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favorable to violation of law over definitions unfavorable to violations of law." (Sutherland, 1950).

4. Differential Association theory Principles

Sutherland further explained that there are different principles of differential association theory.

4a- Criminal Behavior is learned.

According to Sutherland, criminal behavior is not inherited or biologically determined but learned through interaction with others. The theory posits that criminal behavior is not an inherent trait or characteristic of an individual but is acquired through social interactions and learning.

Example:

Criminal behavior can be learned

through various means, and one common example is through the influence of peers. A teenager who is part of a friend group where petty theft is normalized. This teenager influence gradually change his attitude and behaviors, leading to engage in similar criminal activities.

4b. Learning is a by-product of interaction:

Learning is a process that is often not under our control and is wrapped up with the environment we inhabit and the relationships we make. It involves encountering signals from the senses; attending to them; looking for connections and meanings; and framing them so that we may act.

Example:

A teenager who spends time with peers involved in drug dealing may learn about the methods, risks, and rewards of dealing drugs from those peers, leading them to engage in similar activities.

4c. Learning occurs within intimate groups:

Edwin Sutherland proposed that criminal behavior is learned through interactions within intimate groups, such

as family, friends and peer groups. According to this theory, individuals learn criminal behavior in the same way they learn other types of behavior—through communication and social interactions.

Example:

A young person who grows up in a family of criminals where violence is common. He will adopt similar behaviors. The family environment is intimate and influential, providing the primary context for learning these behaviors.

4d. Criminal techniques are learned:

The learning of criminal behavior occurs within intimate groups, such as family, friends and peers. These interactions provide the context in which individuals learn the values, norms, and techniques associated with criminal behavior.

Example:

A person learns a criminal behavior by observing, imitating, and receiving feedback from those who are experienced in criminal activities. Interacting with criminals, techniques are learned like shoplifting, picking a lock etc.

4e. Perceptions of legal code influence motives and drives:-

The likelihood of an individual engaging in criminal behavior depends on the balance of definitions they are exposed to. If an individual is exposed to more favorable definitions (attitudes and justifications for criminal behavior) than unfavorable definitions (attitudes against criminal behavior), they are more likely to engage in criminal behavior.

Example:

No strict enforcement of laws on domestic violence; or no laws till now in Pakistan therefore paved way for domestic violence.

4f: Differential associations may vary in frequency, duration, priority and intensity.

Frequency

(The more often a person is exposed to criminal behavior)

Duration

(longer exposure to criminal behavior increase likelihood of adopting it)

Priority

(Early interaction in life have more significant impact on individual's behavior)

Intensity

(The emotional closeness and significance of the groups influence impact of criminal behavior learned)

Example:

Frequency

(A person who frequently participate in criminal activities)



Duration

(A child who grows up in gang environment)



Priority

(Early exposure to criminal behavior, such as child growing up in a household with criminal activity)



Intensity

(An individual who deeply respect their gang members will be more influenced by criminal behaviors)

Criticism on differential Association theory

The theory is sometimes criticized for placing too much emphasis on social learning while underestimating other factors that contribute to criminal behavior, such as biological, psychological, or economic influences. Differential association theory assumes that criminal behavior is learned in a

uniform way across all social contexts and groups. It does not adequately account for the variation in how different social contexts influence behavior. Differential association theory is often criticized for being too general and not distinguishing between different types of crime. It may not apply equally well to all forms of criminal behavior, particularly those involving complex motives.