

Q: Discuss postulates of Differential Association Theory proposed by Edwin Sutherland.

Differential Association Theory of Edwin Sutherland

One of the most famous theories of criminology is "Differential Association Theory" of Edwin Sutherland which views crime as a function of socialization process. Edwin Sutherland contended that criminality is learned and learning is a by-product of interacting with others. An individual being a social being interacts with the rest of the world around him. These interactions may vary depending upon the social status of the individual. The interactions with criminals make a person learn criminal behavior. More frequent interaction increases the inclination of an individual for crime. This learning is more influenced by the interaction with close intimate groups. Moreover, this learning process is also influenced by definitions of legal codes. Thus, in an environment where violation of legal code is appreciated, an individual becomes more prone to violate

Law.

Expounding the Social Processes that Control Human Behavior in the Light of "Sociological Theories"



All these social process theories suggest that any individual regardless of class, gender and race can become criminal. Elements like family, peer group, school and religious institutions contribute to socialization processes. Children subjected to abuse, neglect and poverty are more likely to adopt criminal behavior. Even the young generation that is unemployed and deprived of their basic rights and are also labelled by societies are more likely to become criminals.

Postulates of Differential Association Theory proposed by Edwin Sutherland

Following are the postulates of Differential Association Theory of Edwin Sutherland that explains the relation between criminal behavior of individuals and ^{their} learning process influenced by socialization.

a. Criminal Behavior is learned

The behavior of individual is deeply influenced by the norms, values and structure of his society. When the young are taught such norms that are in contradiction to middle-class norms and are taught that showing respect to law and order is a sign of weakness then this leads the individuals towards criminal behavior.

b. Criminal Behavior is learned in interaction with others

An individual learns criminal behavior in interaction with others. He may learn this deviant behavior from ^{family,} neighbors, friends, school and religious institutions. This behavior is learned through interpersonal communication rather than being inherited.

c. Criminal Behavior is learned in interaction with close intimate personal groups

An individual learns criminal behavior in interaction with close intimate personal groups.

Within these tightly-knit groups individuals are exposed to justifications for their criminal activities.

d. Learning criminal behavior involves assimilating the techniques of committing crime

This postulate explains that criminal behavior is learnt by assimilating the techniques of committing crime including motives, drives, rationalization and attitudes.

e. Specific Direction of motives and drives is learnt from definitions of legal codes as favorable or unfavorable

The individuals learn specific behavior they consider to be acceptable or unacceptable based on their perceptions of legal system and its codes. They consider certain aspects of legal codes as favorable and some as unfavorable.

f. Delinquency is the result of an excess of definitions favorable to violation of law

This postulate aligns with Rational Choice theory proposed by Cesare Beccaria which

suggests that individuals commit crime after making cost and benefit analysis and when pleasure obtained after committing a crime exceeds the pain that he could suffer for that offence, then a person commits crime.

g. Differential Associations vary in frequency, duration, priority and intensity

This postulate highlights the dynamic nature of social influences on criminal behavior, emphasizing that the impact of differential associations can vary in terms of how often they occur, how long they last, their relative importance to individuals and the strength of their influence.

h. Process of learning criminal behavior is the same as of any other learning process

This postulate explains that the mechanisms involved in learning criminal behavior are not different from those involved in any other learning process, such as reinforcement, imitation, identification.

i. Criminal and non-criminal behavior express the same needs and values

Criminal behavior is an expression of general needs and values, it is not explained by these needs and values, since non-criminal behavior is an expression of the same needs and values.

Factors Contributing to Learning Criminal Behavior in Pakistan

a. Acute Poverty of Pakistan

One of the factors of Pakistan that compel an individual to learn criminal behavior is the acute poverty level of country. All people have same goals i.e. education, food, health, clothes, shelter. But in Pakistan, 95 million people live in poverty and more than 12.5 million people have fallen below poverty line of \$3.65 per day income (World Bank, poverty in Pakistan, 2023). In these situations, people learn criminal behavior to fulfill their basic needs like theft, robbery, burglary etc.

b. Chronic unemployment of Pakistan

In Pakistan, out of 64% young population almost 5.6 million people were unemployed (UNICEF, World's youth unemployment, 2023^{-ed}).

Moreover, in Pakistan it is a common culture to 'label' individuals as troublemakers particularly to label those who are young and unemployed. This unemployment and labelling process increase inclination of the youth towards street crimes.

c. Informal social control in Pakistan

Pakistan is suffering from conditions like lack of adherence to law and order, polarized politics, staggering economy, adverse healthcare system. In these sort of situations, when crime rate is already surging rapidly in main cities like Karachi where 90,000 cases_{of street crimes} have been reported in 2023 (Tribune, Street crimes in Karachi, January 2024), people learn criminal behavior very easily to make their both ends meet.

d. Lack of Adherence to rule of law

In Pakistan, the violation of rule of law by police and the incompetency of law enforcement agencies to provide protection to people give an escape route to individuals to learn norms that challenge these authoritative bodies. The bitter incidents like Modal Town Case 2014 where unarmed protesters were fired by police; play a key role in learning process of criminal behavior of individuals.

e. Culture of Corruption in Pakistan

In Pakistan, corruption continues to thrive until justice system will punish wrongdoing. This culture of corruption is one of the main causes of criminal behavior because when the structure of whole society accepts and promotes corruption whether in the form of money laundering or bribery then the individuals will easily learn criminal behavior. For instance, Pakistan ranked at **133** in **Corruption perception index report of 2023**. This is the most compelling factor that contributes to learning

process of criminal behavior of individuals.

Concluding Thoughts

Differential association theory explains the relationship between criminal behavior and the factors involved in learning process of criminal behavior. This theory has argued with positivist school of thought of criminology that viewed crime as genetically inherited behavior. But this theory has explained how family relations, financial status, structure of society affect the behavior of individuals and compel them towards criminality.