

- Q) Discuss the fundamental postulates of Edwin Sutherland's Differential Association theory with examples.

## INTRODUCTION:

One of the most important theories of crime is Edwin Sutherland's Differential Association theory. He was of the view that crime, like any other behavior is learned through interactions and socialization.

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Crime is learned behavior. The individual does not acquire it as he might acquire measles. He is not born with it, he comes to be in contact with it, to know it and even love it. "-

- Edwin Sutherland

According to Sutherland, criminals are not born, even the most professional they picked their behavior from other people. Young people learn delinquency as a result of association

with deviant people as they grow up.

# Differential Association Theory:

The theory was put forth by Edwin Sutherland in 1940. It immediately gained popularity among criminologists. According to this theory, criminal behavior is learned through interactions and associations with criminals.

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Differential Association may be the most important principle for understanding deviant behavior.”

- Edwin Sutherland

Differential Association theory helps to understand the learning process that criminals go through to commit crimes. Sutherland believed that most criminals come from socio-economically deprived



areas.

# Fundamental Principles of Differential Association Theory:

There are nine fundamental principles that encompass Differential Association theory:

## 1) Criminal Behavior is Learned:

According to Sutherland, criminal behavior, values and attitude are learned through the socialization processes. Those who interact with criminals are more likely to engage in deviant activities.

Example: A study published in the Journal of Research on Crime and Delinquency found that adolescents who have friends involved in delinquent activities are more likely to



participate in similar behaviors.

## 2) Criminal Behavior is Learned Through Interactions, Associations, and Communication:

Criminal learning takes place via communication and interactions. When children observe crimes happening around them, the actions are being stored in their subconscious mind as acceptable.

Example: A study published in *Computers in Human Behavior* explored how individuals' engagement with online communities influence their attitudes and behaviors, finding that exposure to deviant online content can increase the likelihood of engaging in similar behavior offline.

## 3) Criminal Behavior is Learned in Intimate Personal Groups:

The principle learning of criminal behavior takes place in close intimate circle. If someone from close family is a criminal and is in close contact



with a child, he or she is more likely to become one too.

Example: Danny Trejo, a well-known American actor, activist and author, also an ex-criminal spent a lot of time with his uncle who taught him from a very young age, how to be a successful criminal.

He was arrested multiple times for assault, theft and drug related crimes.

#### 4) Learning Includes Techniques, Drives and Motives:

Learning of criminal behavior includes the techniques of committing crime, drives, motives and potential gains.

Example: Studies have found that individuals may learn cybercriminal techniques <sup>from</sup> online communities, forums and illicit networks.

### 5) Drives are Learned From Definitions of Law as Favourable or Unfavourable:

Criminals measure risks and benefits of committing crimes with respect to the definitions of legal code as either favourable or unfavourable. If the implications of punishment is certain, criminals are less likely to commit a crime as compared to when the opposite is true.

### 6) Delinquency Occurs in Absence of the Definitions Favourable to Violations of Law:

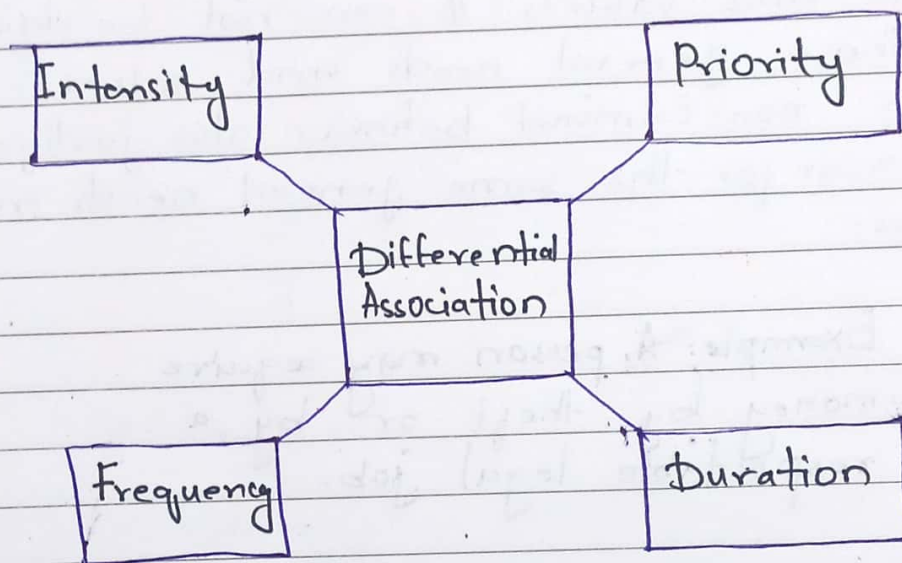
If the definitions favourable to violations of law are more than the definitions unfavourable to violation of law, criminals are confident enough to commit crimes. They always weigh the potential pain and gain of committing a crime and then act accordingly.

### 7) Differential Association Vary in Frequency, Duration and Intensity:

Interactions with offenders may vary in frequency, duration, intensity and priority. How often a person meet the



offender?, for how long they stay in touch?, How important the relationship is of a person to the offender?, and how early the associations occur? These are the type of questions Differential Association theory asks while studying criminal behavior.



### 8) Learning of Criminal Behavior Contains all the Learning Mechanisms:

Learning of criminal behavior contains all the learning mechanisms that any other learning may require, this includes observations, experiments, rewards and punishments etc.

Example: Research has found that students may learn violent behavior



from their peers or be influenced by social norms that condone or reinforce aggression.

### 9) Criminal Behavior is not Defined by General Needs and Values:

Although all or most criminal activities take place due to general needs and values, it can not be defined by those general needs and values since non-criminal behavior also justifies to occur for the same general needs and values.

Example: A person may acquire money by theft or by a respectable legal job.

## Conclusion:

The most prominent theory in criminology is Differential Association theory of Edwin Sutherland. He suggested that crime is learned through the socialization process with other criminals. The learning may take place in close intimate personal groups. The learning includes techniques of committing crimes and possible risks and benefits calculation.



Do I need to number  
the main headings including  
the introduction and conclusion?

Please recommend what can  
I do more to get at least  
15-16 marks per question?

Thank you!