

Question:

Explain R.K. Merton's Strain Theory.

Critically elaborate its effects on youth and suggest remedies.

Strain Theory Introduction:

Criminologists who view crime as a direct result of lower-class frustration and anger are referred to as strain theorists. They believe that most people share similar values and goals but that the ability to achieve personal goals is stratified by socio-economic class. Strain is limited in affluent areas because educational and vocational opportunities are available. To relieve strain, indigent people may be forced either to use deviant methods to achieve their goals, such as theft and drug trafficking, or to reject socially accepted goals outright and substitute other, more deviant goals, such as being tough and aggressive. Robert K. Merton, in his work titled "On Theoretical Sociology" of 1967, states:

"When legitimate opportunities are blocked, individuals innovate new ways to achieve success, often leading to criminal behavior."

The focus of Strain Theory is that underprivileged groups as they were incapable of achieving their rights/goals that led to their indulgence in criminal behavior. Though this theory proposed in 1938, but gained prominence in 1950s when American criminologists like Albert Cohen and sociologists like Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin also put forth their ideas.

g) Social Adaptations

Merton argued that each person has his/her own concept of the goals of the society and the means at his/her own disposal to attain them. The description of each of these modes of adaptation:

Types of People	Accept Culturally Recognized Goals	Accept Means-Institutionalized
Conformists	✓	✓
Innovatives	✓	✗
Ritualists	✗	✓
Retreatists	✗	✗
Rebellious	✓/✗	✓/✗

Pakistan has the largest ~~Youth~~ Among these types of people - the most ~~vulnerable~~ segment is

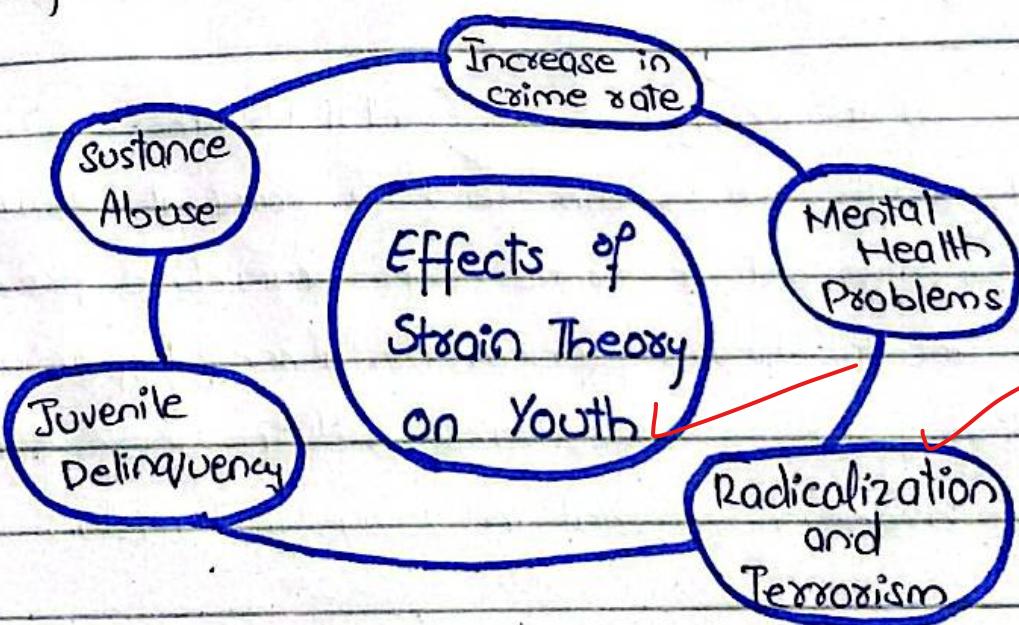
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youth. Due to inequalities, economic disparities, political instability, and unemployment, Pakistan's youth is majorly exposed to crime.

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II Effects of Strain Theory on Youth

In the last decade, Pakistan has been grappling with growing crimes in country. There has been a 34.3% increase in the number of total crimes. The cause of such deviant behavior is socio-economic issues such as poverty, unemployment, economic inequality and limited access to high-quality education.



1) Increase in Crime Rate:

Due to economic disparities, youth suffers from financial stress and engages in criminal activities, such as mobile snatching and robbery etc., to fulfill their

needs. According to Rational Choice Theory, man is a rational being and commits crime after analyzing the costs and benefits of doing crime. In 2023, Cyber crime wing of Federal Investigation Agency reported a 30% increase in cybercrime in Pakistan.

2) Mental Health Problems:

Anxiety and depression are common mental health problems among youth due to social pressure and high competition in society. Youth crime and mental health disorders are directly proportional. The Bi-directional Relationship is often seen.



Mental health issues can lead to criminal behavior, while involvement in crime can exacerbate pre-existing mental health problems. In a recent year, nearly 1.3 million juveniles were arrested in U.S., 1584 juveniles taken under trial in 2024, in Pakistan.

3) Radicalization and Terrorism

According to Rebellion Mode of Strain Theory, youth replaces the legitimized goals with alternative ideologies and extremist notions. As a result, the

unemployed and financially deprived individuals are recruited by militant groups - particularly in tribal areas of Pakistan. Robert Merton (1938) asserted that certain goals and values, such as monetary success, are highly prized by society. Most famous example of social, culture, and religious inspiration is Hezbollah - who support ideas of 1)Jihad 2)Atawa 3)Istishhad or 4)Fedayeen. Furthermore, Agnew's (1992) general theory of strain was also proposed to middle-class delinquency.

4) Juvenile Delinquency:

Due to lack of proper attention from parents, psychological issues, and economic deprivations juveniles engage in criminal behavior such as theft, use of narcotics, and violent crimes. Differential Association

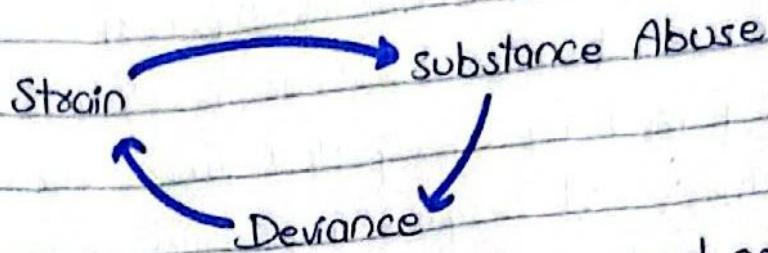
Theory puts forward that children learn criminal behavior from their environment (family and peer groups). Since 1995 till now, world has experienced an increase in juvenile crimes from

5) Substance Abuse:

Due to socio-economic disparities, youth is pushed towards substance abuse and deviant activities.

According to Social Disorganization Theory, weak societal structures and increased poverty leads to an

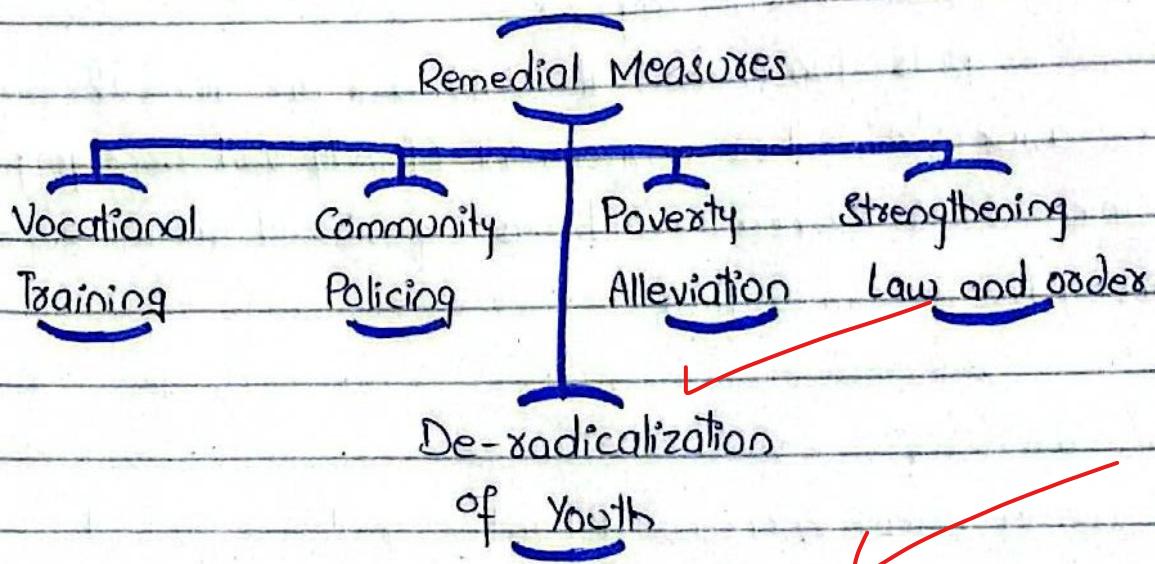
increase in criminal behavior and use of narcotics.
There is a cyclic relationship between:



According to GST, drug use may be used as a way of managing (or escaping) negative effect triggered by strain. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reported more than seven million drug addicts under age of 30.

III. Remedies to Overcome the Effects

of Strain on Youth



1) Vocational Training:

In order to minimize the stress due to deprivation of

fundamental needs and economic instability, training the youth is paramount. Through the Kamyab Nojawan Program, five lakh people were provided with vocational training in Pakistan in order to minimize crimes that are caused due to unemployment.

2) Community Policing:

Community policing enhances confidence between law enforcement agencies and the public, where public report crimes and surveillance as well. For example, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, community policing led to 12% decrease in criminal activities by youth.

3) De-radicalization of Youth:

De-radicalization programs in order to transform negative notions and destructive behaviors of youth into positive mindsets and constructive behaviors are crucial. For example, the Sabaoon Project in Swat by the Pakistan Army helped in transforming hundreds of radicalized youngsters.

4) Poverty Alleviation:

The sustainable development of a country and poverty alleviation from society can help people to

achieve their objectives through legitimate means. Among the four elements of disorganization presented by Sampson, poverty is substantial one that leads to the crime. For example, rates of juvenile delinquency are relatively higher in the impoverished areas of Bangladesh.

5) Strengthening Law and order:

Law and order is the backbone of any society. To strengthen law and order means to improve the system of justice. Law enforcements hold excellent significance in minimizing the criminal behavior.

Law and order \propto 1
crimes

In cold war era, youth, particularly teenagers were engaged in criminal activities in Germany.

Critical Analysis:

Strain Theory of Deviance by Robert K. Merton explains how culturally defined goals and institutionalized means to achieve those goals can cause stress among individuals. Due to peer pressure, youth wants to achieve those objectives by hook or by crook. Strain caused by society not only leads to

crime but also causes health problems. According to the Relative Deprivation Theory by Robert Ted Gurr, when an unprivileged group or an individual perceives injustice and feels deprived as compared to a relatively privileged group, then it can cause conflict. Therefore, in order to reduce strain and its effects among youth, structural reforms should be introduced.

Conclusion:

To sum up, R.K. Merton's Strain Theory is actually the source to get to know criminal behavior causes through the background investigation of a person. Every person on earth wants to be successful by using either means. Some people strive and achieve that level and others either settle for less or try to achieve those goals through bad means. In this way, they are socially forced to act deviant or rebellious. So, Strain Theory critically elaborated its effects on youth - who are more exposed to social pressure.

good answer is well composed and satisfies
conclude the answer on 8th page
and manage the time accordingly
over all answer is good