

Explain labelling theory. Critically elaborate its effects on youth and suggest remedies too

1) Introduction:-

Labeling theory is one of the main theories in the contemporary era that aims to explain the causes/nature of crime by associating it with social reactions to crime. Labeling of individuals as criminals condemns them to the ghetto of self-labelling and lead them to isolation. These negative impacts lead them to their self-fulfilling prophecy, where ~~there~~ they continue to commit crime. Focus on diversion programs and restorative justice can save youth from the effects of 'criminal' labels. Decriminalization of minor offences and sensitization of

about the effects of labeling
can also produce positive impacts.

2) Labeling Theory: Pioneer and Postulates

This theory was first presented by Howard Becker in his work *Outsiders* (1963)

According to the theory:

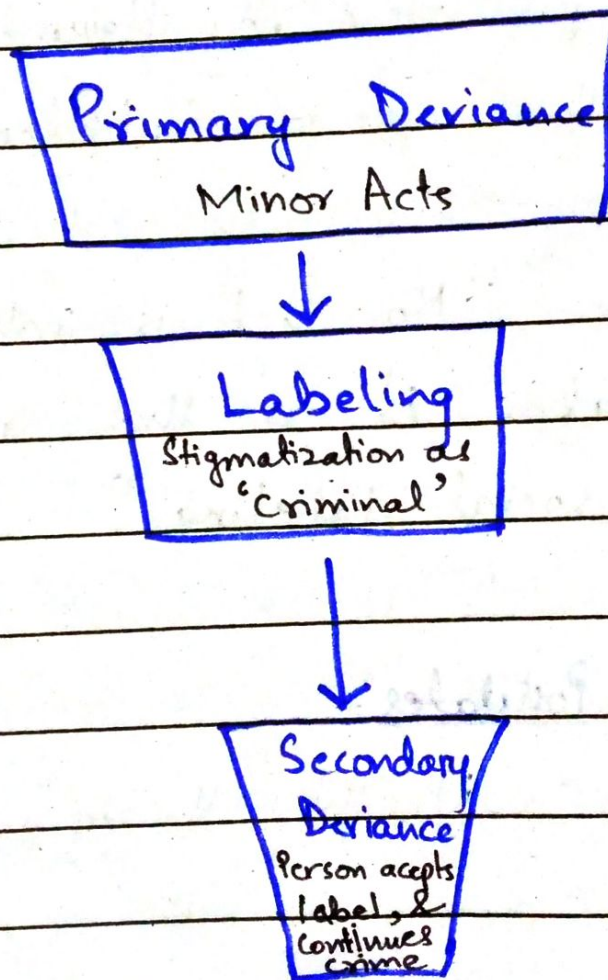
"No act is inherently criminal; it is the result of social labeling."

a) Postulates:-

i) This theory posits that criminality is a self-fulfilling prophecy. When an individual is stigmatized for a minor act, he/she internalizes the labels and 'becomes who he/she is thought to be.'

ii) This theory also emphasizes the impact of formal and informal labelling in amplifying crime/deviance

3) Process of Amplification of Crime (as explained by H. Becker) :-



4) Effects of Labeling on Youth:-

The most detrimental effects of this labeling process is on youth, who often commit

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minor acts ^{against} moral or social order and gets criminal labels instantly. Let's take a look at the effect that it has on youth.

a) Internalized Identity

Continuous labeling of youth as 'deviant', 'bad' or 'criminal' leads them to internalize their labels. Instead of making amends, their minds and personality gets mixed in criminal trends.

b) Social Isolation

This happens at two levels -

- i) their peers start avoiding them.
- ii) they themselves start to avoid their close family and peers.

c) Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

This is the ultimate effect of labeling.

Once a youngster internalizes his/her criminal label, they start to act ~~like~~ like that in daily life.

It's like saying - "Why should I care, I am already a bad person."

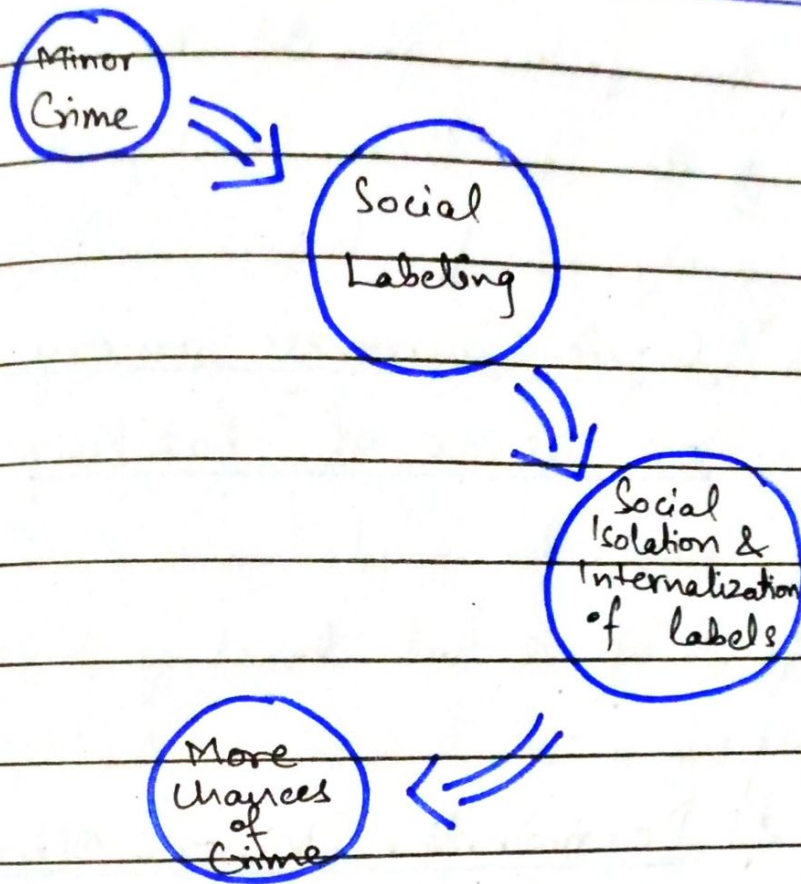
d) Reduced Access to Opportunities

This is a broader implication of social labeling. Once an individual gets labelled as deviant, that identity spreads to the whole society. Educational institutes, job market and other social institutes start to avoid that person. This leads them to miss out of vital life opportunities.

e) Increased Chances of Deviance

This is the final nail in the coffin. This is when the marginalized individual starts to seek criminal gangs or deviant individuals to finally find some company. Hence, their chances of offending are except.

The Process of Labeling & Ultimate Marginalization and Criminality



5) Remedies:-

Following are some of the remedies that can be employed to reduce social labeling

- a) Keep them away from formal Justice System

This step can prevent minor offenders from getting in touch with the issues of criminal justice system and other criminals (in jails). Instead use of diversion programs is suggested.

b) Encourage Reintegration in Society

Restorative justice should be used to help youth in their reintegration within the society as functional members of it.

c) Create awareness among public on issues of labeling

Public needs to be made aware of the ill effects of social labeling and stigmatization.

d) Decriminalize Minor Offences

This is yet another way to keep minor offenders out of criminal formal justice system thus helping protect them from social labeling.

6) Conclusion:-

Social labeling of youthful offenders is a phenomena that occurs in almost every society. However, what is required is the recognition of the impacts of these labels and prevent such labeling to avoid internalization of criminality.