Explain the concept of crime as a social problem. How does the perception of crime as a social problem vary accross different societies?

1) Introduction:-

The concept of crime as a social problem implies that crime is a social phenomena because it occurs in a social setting, because of socially motivating aspects and their causes society-wide impacts illiciting society-wide reactions. So, in all aspects crime is a social problem.

The perception of crime varies across societies based on how that society, its social institutions see and interpret crime and

how its legal and political institutions regulate, deter or punish crime.

2) <u>Crime as a Social Problem</u> :-

According to <u>Edwin Sutherland</u> :-

"Criminology is the body of Knowledge regarding crime as a social problem."

His definition directly establishes the status of crime as a social problem. He goes on to elaborate the aspects in which crime relates to society.

"It includes the processes of making laws, breaking laws and reacting towards the breaking of law"

3) <u>Crime Evolved with Formation of Society</u> :-

If we are to by the ideas of Sociologist J.J Rosseau, we find that crime was itself

the product of society. According to him, man in the primitive state was living a life of 'idyllic happiness'. But the growth of population gave rise to the concept of 'mine and thine', chaos erupted and then social government was formed to bring peace back.

4) **Key Aspects of Viewing Crime as a Social Problem :-**

Following aspects exhibit the social nature of crime

a) Crime has Social Causes.

This point of view highlights that most often crime is produced due to causes of social nature including factors like:

- poverty
- inequality
- failure of education system

- weak law enforcement.
- social disorganization

b) Crime has Social Consequences:

Crime has wide-ranging consequences on society. Although it causes personal individual harm or losses too but social consequences are more severe and long-lasting - These include,

i) <u>Crime defies social norms and values</u>

Erosion of norms leads to break down of trust within the entire society. Example: Corruption

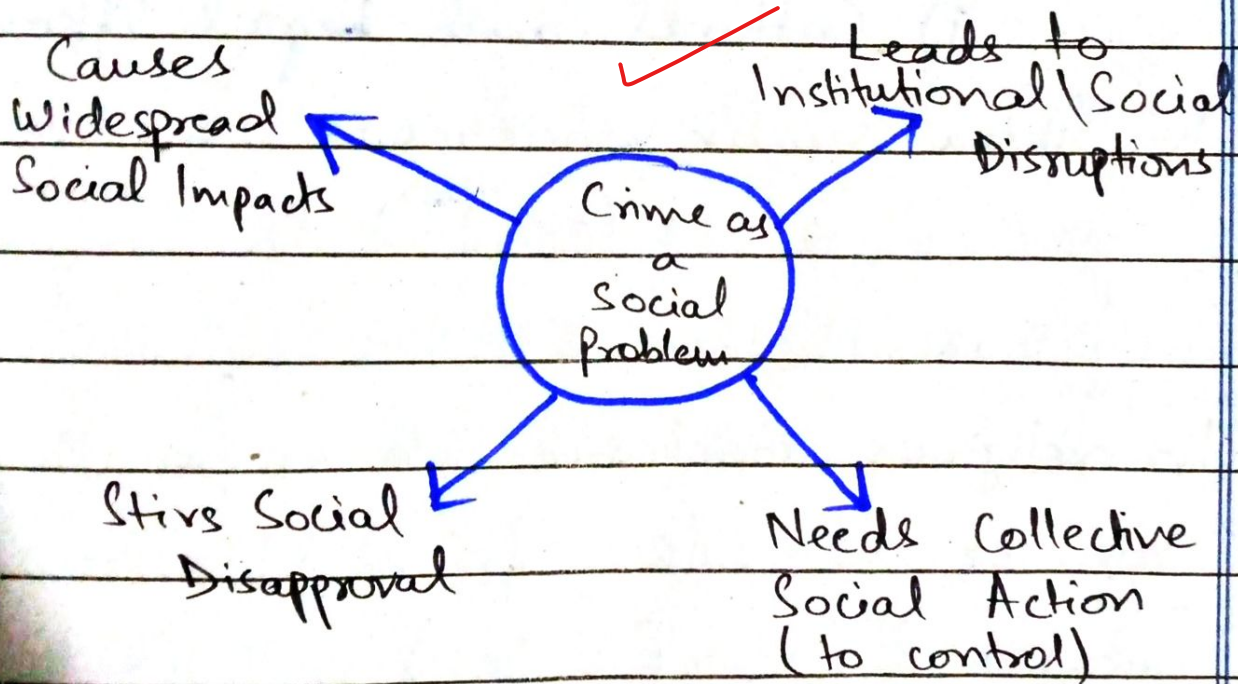ii) <u>Crime breaches physical, social and economic security</u>

Crime breaches physical security eroding public cohesion and leads to social and economic harms Example: Sectarian violence in Kurram Agency leading to business shutdown

c) Crimes Require Social Control:

Understanding crime as a social problem also involves looking at how effectively societies respond to it. This involves role of LEA, judicial system and social policies of deterrence.

Causes Widespread Social Impacts

Leads to Institutional\Social Disruptions

Crime as a Social Problem

Stirs Social Disapproval

Needs Collective Social Action (to control)

| Social Disorganization Theory | Erosion of Social Value System leads to crime |
| Strain Theory | Excessive Strain due to Societal Pressures Lead to Crime |

⇑ Theoretical Perspectives

5) Varying Perceptions of Crime as a Social Problem in Societies:-

Since crime is a social problem, its perceptions, definitions and reactions to various crimes varies drastically within different societies Consider the following differences.

i) Cultural and Legal Differences

- In liberal secular societies :- Here crime is seen as a violation of individual rights e.g assault, murder

- In religious societies :- Here crime is seen as the erosion of morals and violation of religious code. e.g theft laws in Saudi Arabia

- In authoratarian societies :- Here crime is defined based on policies of the rulers example. Criminalization of protests in China

ii) Variations based on Social Harm Awareness

This depends on the sensitization of public to crime

High crime Societies:- In such societ

public reacts only to heinous crime and not petty crime

Example :- Poor social response to street crimes in India

Low Crime Societies :- Such societies react strictly even towards petty crimes

Example :- Strict laws against street crimes in Singapore.

iii) Role of Media

Media can change perception of crime in a society too either via sensitization or censorship.

Media Sensationalism :- Media coverage and debates on crime can increase public fear and rally for stringent laws

Example :- Debate on Arms laws in USA

Media Censorship :-
Some countries/societies like to silence their media when it comes to crime coverage to promote a sense of calm and peace.

Example :- Media censorship in UAE.

6) Conclusion:-

Seeing crime as a social problem highlights the social nature of causes and consequences of crime but also paves way for us to formulate policies for systemic policies of change that can help control crime. This process also helps us to see the social differences that exist b/w different societies regarding crime.

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