
The motivation for crimes: Experiences of criminals from district jail Karak, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

*Farhan Ahmad &
Rabia Ali*

Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the causes of criminal behaviour among individuals by using qualitative research design. Theoretically the study was influenced from Differential Association Theory of Edwin H. Sutherland (1939) – one of the most influential theories within the academic discourse of Sociology of criminal behaviour. Empirical data for this study was collected from 15 prisoners who were selected by purposively from a total of 150 prisoners in the age group of 20 – 40. The findings illustrate that the majority of the respondents reported to have criminal relatives or criminal peer group who had inspired them to be criminals. The motivation to be criminals for the majority of them was also to gain wealth and status through short cuts. The respondents were aware of specialized techniques to commit crimes and they were of the view that they learnt these techniques in the company of criminal friends and relatives. The respondents had no regrets of being criminals and they had no plans to quit their professions after being released from the prison.

Keywords: Differential Associations, Criminal Behavior, Family, Peer Group

Introduction

The struggle for crime prevention has been an ongoing journey for decades. Sociologist and criminologists have paid special attention to the presence and causes of crimes worldwide. For instance for Emile Durkheim (1964) crimes have a social function. Likewise, Frank Tannenbaum, Robert K Morten, Cesare Lambroso, Edwin H Sutherland and Akers have addressed the causes and consequences of crimes in their work. Correlation between association of criminals peer's groups and criminal behaviour formation has been a longstanding curiosity of criminology. Criminologists give substantial consideration to the connection between criminal peer's group and delinquent behaviour formation (Hochstetler, 2002). Social learning theories are grounded in the supposition that behaviour is learned in relation to some processes i.e. imitations, observations and behaviour modelling (Ormrod, 2004). The social learning theories have paid special emphasis on the individual and the social factors of behaviour. Therefore,

the criminal behaviour is more likely to be analysed in the context of environment in which the crime is learned (Icli & Coban, 2012).

To understand the causes of criminal behavior among criminals Differential Association Theory of Edwin H. Sutherland (1883-1950) is one of the most influential theories within the academic discourse of sociology of criminal behaviour. The theory explains the various agents related to crime (Curran & Renzetti, 2001). It was developed in 1939 to account for criminal behaviour but may be applied to other forms of deviant behaviour as well. The basic assumption in this theory is that deviant behaviour is learned through association, just as is conformity (Matsueda, 2006). Sutherland believed that the principal part of the learning of criminal behavior occurs within intimate and personal groups. Due to strong link and interaction with criminal intimate group an individual becomes a habitual criminal and commits crimes several crimes. In this way criminal activities are rationalized as a normal. Sutherland (1939) argued that criminal behaviour is learned instead of inherited. It is learned through interpersonal communication and social interaction within intimate and primary groups (Curran & Renzetti, 2001).

According to the theory when criminal behavior is learned, the learning includes techniques of criminal activity, which are sometimes very complicated, sometimes very simple. The process contains face-to-face communication among people who are close to each other. Skills, knowledge, values, sentiments, motives and traditions of crimes are passed to other through interpersonal communication. Means of communication such as the mass media including television, magazines, and newspapers play secondary role in the formation of criminal behavior. Individuals are not persuaded to engage in crimes by reading a newspaper or a book, watching television or watching a movie. An association with criminals will increase the probability of becoming criminal (Smith & Brame, 1994).

Finally an individual turns to criminal activities due to getting an excess of definitions favourable to criminal activities (Payne & Salotti, 2007, p. 556). It has been argued that a person indulges in crimes due to learning of “definitions” (rationalization and attitudes) favourable to law violation in “excess” as compared to the unfavorable definitions of law violation (Akers, 2000; Ronaldi, 2004). According to the theory the definitions of criminal behaviour convert as a favourable or unfavourable to law violation according to the values assigned. Values are granted to ones’ definitions in one’s social interaction with others, the interactions vary in intensity,

priority, frequency and duration. A person is exposed to criminal activity on the basis of duration of exposure, the frequencies of exposure and priority through which a person is exposed to law-abiding or law violating definitions (Cullen & Agnew, 2003: p. 125).

Objective of the Study

1. To explore the motivation to be criminals specifically looking at the role of family and peer group in making criminals.
2. To investigate the techniques involved during the process of being criminals.
3. To examine how the criminals perceived being criminals.

Literature Review

Previous research has demonstrated that criminal behaviour transmits within family through intergeneration (Van de Rakt et al, 2009; Rowe & Farrington, 1997). Often it can happen that a very limited number of families may be responsible for large numbers of crimes (Farrington et al., 2001). Criminal behaviours of brothers and sisters have high correlation (Haynie & McHugh, 2003; Rowe & Gulley, 1992). A study conducted by Van de Rakt et al. (2009) shows an association of criminal convictions between family members including siblings and parents. The findings of this study demonstrated a positive relationship between crimes' history in the family and individual involvement in criminal activities. Likewise, research by Rowe & Farrington (1997) on familial transmission of criminal convictions found that the criminal activities breed within the family system. The findings illustrate that 5/15 i.e. one third majority of the respondents (criminals) were the product of their families. Yet, the peer group of the respondents had greater influence on their criminal activities i.e.11/15 respondents were reported to have been influenced from peer groups.

Criminal history of family members i.e. parents, brothers and sisters increases the chances of a person to get involved in criminal activities (Buehler, 2006; Farrington et al., 2001; Thornberry et al., 2003). There are two explanations for brothers and sisters resemblance regarding criminal activities involvement. Firstly, the siblings directly learn behaviours and attitudes from each other. Thus the brothers and sisters offer reinforcement and modelling for criminal activities. Secondly an association concerning the criminal behaviour of siblings remains spurious. Certainly, brothers and sister sharing same house have to be exposed to same parents. So, the

resemblance of their behaviour may be due to their parent involvement in criminal activities (Van de Rakt et al, 2009).

Farrington et al. (2001) have illustrated six justifications regarding intergenerational similarity of law violation. The explanation offers understanding of the intergenerational diffusion of criminal activities along with prediction of parental criminal activities to explain the connotation between criminal activities of siblings. First criminal behaviour is a minor portion of the diffused behaviour. Often unwanted behaviours, i.e. living in destitute communities, teenage pregnancy and poverty, are conveyed from generation to generation. Second the appliance of “assortative mating” i.e. criminal men have higher chances of having marriage with criminal women. These couple are more likely to put their children at risk which will increase the chances of their involvement in criminal activities. Third the intergenerational diffusion is an imitational process. Children internalize criminal activities through modelling and observations of the parents’ criminal behaviour. Fourth criminal parents may have genetic tendency to criminal behaviour, which can be diffused from generation to generation. Fifth, criminal parents live and raise their offspring in least-favourable social backgrounds, which increases the chances of children’s involvement in criminal activities. Finally, some families are observed intensively through law enforcement agencies due to official preconception as criminal families (Farrington et al., 2001).

In addition to pressure and inspiration from family peer group is also likely to affect formation of criminal behaviour among youth (Barnes et al., 2006; Young et al., 2007). The criminal peer group may pressurize an individual to get involved in criminal activities. Elements like peer group’s approval of criminal behaviour, peer group’s criminal behaviour, attachment or loyalty with peer group, time spent within peer group and peer pressure for criminal activities are mostly linked to teenage delinquencies (McCord & Ensminger, 1995).

Research Methodology

The study was conducted in District Jail Karak in Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Drawing on Bryman (2004), the decision of size of the universe and sample size was based on time and resources available. The decision was also taken considering the research design. The study is qualitative in nature and qualitative researchers typically intend to conduct in-depth interviews, relying on relatively small population and sample size (Patton, 1990). This is because the purpose is not generalization of the

findings on a large population but in-depth exploration of the respondent's perspective on the phenomenon under research. Qualitative research stresses the appropriateness of sample size that provides rich and relevant data. Thus, unlike quantitative research, qualitative research does not depend on large number of respondents but rich and detail information/data (Lamneck, 1988). Keeping in view the aims and objectives of the study, non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed for selecting the respondents. Inspired by Patton (1990) and Bryman (2004) the sample size of the study was fifteen male criminals out of one hundred & fifty prisoners. The respondents belonged to the age group of 20-40.

The data for this research was collected through face to face interviews using interview guide. Informed consent of all the respondents was taken prior to conducting the interviews. At the first stage of the field the respondents were put at ease and were assured that the data will be used purely for academic purpose and their information will not be disclosed to anyone. The interviews started with a general discussion to build rapport with the respondents and to gain their trust. Followed by this in-depth interviews were conducted from the respondents.

During the interviews the respondents were asked a set of open ended questions regarding formation of their criminal behaviour. Some of the questions asked were: Who inspired you to be a criminal? How did you learn the techniques to be a criminal? What is your major motivation to be a criminal? What is the major reason for being a criminal? How do you perceive yourself as a criminal? Interviews were carried out until the stage of saturation of data was achieved. The interviews were conducted in Pashtu language by the first researcher and the cases were recorded in the field, after collection the cases were transcribed and translated into English. The data was read repeatedly and codes were assigned to the data. Themes were developed by putting together the codes. Pseudonyms have been used in the paper to maintain confidentiality of the research participants.

Findings of the study

The majority of the respondents who participated in this study were involved in multiple crimes including murder, illegal drugs supply and theft cases of various kinds. All the respondents had been in the prison for more than six months or more. In the light of the crimes the respondents had committed three categories were clearly evident. Among these five prisoners were those who were found clearly exposed to an excess of

definition favourable to law violation. These prisoners were socialized within criminal companions and adopted the values and attitudes of the criminals to whom they were exposed. They were exposed to law violation definition from both side i.e. family and peer group. Here from “family” we mean the father, mother, brothers and sisters of the prisoners.

The second category of prisoners who were six in number had relatively different experiences of engagement in criminal activities. These prisoners had grown up within law-abiding families but were found exposed to an excess of definition favourable to law violation within the company of peer groups. These respondents explained that the family members had always encouraged them to obey the laws of the country and to avoid indulging in criminal activities. The last category included of four prisoners. No evidence was found in the lives of these four prisoners that showed an excess to criminal definitions. Although in their lives law-abiding definitions were found exceeding over the law violation. Some of the common themes which emerged from the interviews with the respondents are being discussed below.

Inspiration and Motivation to be Criminals

All the respondents acknowledged to have had companions or relatives who had history of being engaged in criminal activities. Additionally, the respondents reported to have had lack of inspiration for obeying the state’s laws. Also, they had repeatedly experienced events where the violation of law from both families and peer groups had been common. These were some of the reasons which had motivated them to get engaged in criminal activities. The majority of them were of the view that not only had the relatives and friends been inspiration to get engaged in such activities but they had also provided guidelines to follow.

One of the respondents named Ashraf while discussing this explained that, his brother had continuously trained him to go against the law. He acknowledged that he had learnt all the tactics to get engaged in criminal activities from his brother who had been a criminal from a young age. Ashraf was of the opinion that like his brother he too believed that laws are biased and are made for the fulfilment of the interest of wealthy and elite class. He explained that participation in illegal/criminal activities was the only way for the survival of people like him who had no other means of survival.

Similarly, other respondents shared their experiences of engaging in criminal acts. Rehan stated that he had been engaged in criminal activities from a young age. His father had been a criminal and he had first committed a crime when his father had been in jail. His brother had also been through punishment several times for committing theft. When Rehan was asked about the activities of his other siblings he explained that he had one more brother (step brother) who was not involved in criminal activities. However Rehan was of the view that his brother discussed criminal activities a lot. He was afraid that such discussions will eventually lead to criminal activities in future.

Similarly, Faheem explained that he had been influenced from his uncle who was a drugs user. His uncle trained him about using and selling drugs among young boys. His friends too had been drug addicts which had inspired him to use drugs. Likewise, Qasim had been motivated to be a criminal by his brother.

In the law-abiding families, the respondents reported to have criminal minded peer group. One of the respondents Salman who spent most of his time in the company of his peers shared that his friends had inspired and encouraged him to get engaged in criminal activities. He had lack of confidence in the criminal justice system of Pakistan. Salman stated, "*The state is unfair and everyone takes care of his/her own interests in this country.*" Similarly, Anwer who was unsatisfied from the judiciary system of Pakistan, said,

Most of the state's law are biased and the citizens are treated differently according to their wealth and economic statuses (Anwer, interview).

When prisoners like these who lacked faith in judiciary system were probed they reported that they were dis-hearted from the system because it was unfair. Some of them reported that they were given punishment for crimes they had not committed which prompted them to be criminals since they were labelled criminal anyway. Some reported to have been were given wrong punishments. For example Anwer stated "*courts are not supportive and do not give right decisions.*" This illustrates that besides criminal family members and criminal peer group unfair system was one reason to make criminals in the country.

Though majority of the respondents in this study did not have very positive perceptions about laws and judiciary system in the country yet some were quite optimistic. For example, Razwan was of the view that laws are meant to protect civilians and so need to be abided. He stated, "*Laws are necessary for the peaceful and smooth functioning of the society*" (Razwan). This indicates that some criminals did have understanding about the importance of laws for the society yet they continued to engage in criminal activities.

The prime motive to get engaged in criminal activities for the majority of the respondents was to get wealth easily and quickly. Regarding his attitudes towards crimes the emphasis of Qasim was to get an access to material resources. He stated, "*Getting material resources through illegal activities is much easier and faster than legal activities.*" Similarly, Anwer explained that his main motivation for committing crimes was to get wealthy, to have a satisfied life and to secure economic status in the society through an easy way. Some of the respondents in the younger age group were of the view that entertainment was also one motivation for indulging in crimes. Besides, wealth and status one reason stated by the respondents was personal satisfaction. According to Faheem the main reason for using and selling drugs was to get mental satisfaction.

Techniques of Being Criminals

The respondents also shared their experiences of how criminals learn criminal techniques. The data shows that mostly the criminal activities were learnt from criminal friends and relatives. A respondent named Khursheed stated, "*From my teenage I started association with peer group of criminal minded people.*" In association with peer group Khursheed mostly discussed about the crimes and criminal activities.

Discussing techniques of learning crimes one of the respondents Asif stated, "*Hints about criminal techniques can be learnt from criminal minded friends.*" Similarly, Mehmood explained that he had two friends from childhood and these were the ones who had inspired him to get engaged in criminal activities. He was also of the opinion that his own brother too was involved in criminal activities. He stated;

My brother and friends had always encouraged me to get money through illegal means since they believed that this was the only way to get money through shortcuts (Mehmood, interview).

He also mentioned that his brother had trained him to improve his skills in committing crimes. For example he taught Mehmood to avoid police as much as he could.

Highlighting on the techniques of committing crimes one of the respondents Faheem stated;

The techniques and map reading were very important for involving in criminal activities. These techniques could be learnt from the other criminals (Faheem, interview).

He exemplified that if someone is planning to steal from a store, he/she requires having prior knowledge regarding the location of everything in that store and must have techniques of access to store and successfully committing the crime.

Likewise, Alam explained that the techniques of committing a particular crime are very much important. He stated, *“One must take into account the time schedule, location of concerning place, and road map in mind for committing any crime.”* He was of the view that these techniques can be learnt through personal observations and discussion with other expert criminals.

The respondents explained that often the criminal minded people had companionship with like-minded people. They often met in groups/gangs and discussed their activities. They shared their way of doing crimes. These gatherings provided the space for training and learning from each other. Re-affirming this Airf explained that criminals often discussed and planned criminal activities together in the form of a group and their major concern was to get away with the criminal activities safely. Airf was of the view that that confidence is significant for committing any type of crime. He believed that criminal techniques and confidence can be built through practise and appreciation from peer group.

Referring to the group/gang meetings Safdar stated,

One thing I learnt from the gatherings initially was getting away safely after committing a crime. Also, the foremost principle we learnt regarding crimes was not to get caught by the police (Safdar, interview).

These narratives clearly depict that being a criminal involved a lifelong training and calculated planning. Usually individuals who were established

criminals were the ones who trained the younger criminals. These experiences of the respondents show that the family including brothers and the peer group played an important role in this process of making criminals.

Being Criminals

The question of how these individuals perceived committing crime is also important. Discussing this one of the respondent who spent most of his time in the company of his elder brother and elder brother's peer group stated,

My brother and his friends were of the view that there was nothing wrong if someone was involved in the criminal activities and they encouraged me to commit crimes. Now I feel in the same way. (Qasim, interview)

Similarly Rasheed explained, *"The sale and delivery of drugs is actually not a crime, for me it is providing service to people who need it badly."* Likewise, one of the respondents Arif shared that he and his friends were enjoying participation in criminal activities and had no regrets.

The responses of the respondents demonstrate that they seemed to be enjoying their profession and had no regrets in being criminals. They considered the criminal activities as their means of employment for living and their contribution to people who need their services. They were of the view that they had no plans to quit crimes after being released from the prison. They believed that crimes should take place since the system of judiciary was not working in the country. Nevertheless, some of the respondents had feelings of guilt due to their involvement in criminal activities. These respondents were largely from families where they had been trained to abide the rules and laws of the country. The findings have implications for the judiciary system of Pakistan. These illustrate that in order to reduce the rate of crimes in the country strategies should be made to change the judiciary system of the country so that people have more faith in the system.

Conclusions

The findings of this study have extended Sutherland's Theory of Differential Associations in multiple ways. The data shows that criminal activities are learnt through intimate personal relations including family and friends. Five respondents of this study were brought up within criminal background family members & peer group and indulged in criminal activities. Six respondents in this study rejected the attitudes and values of

law-abiding family members and accepted those of criminal minded peer groups. Four prisoners were not exposed to definitions favourable to law violation. These findings do not relate with the Sutherland's Theory of Differential Association for the formation of criminal behaviour for these four prisoners. The findings indicate that Sutherland's Theory of Differential Association alone cannot explain the formation of all kind of law violation. It was found that there were 4/15 respondent who's families or peer groups were not involved in the criminal activities and they had not been involved in criminal activities through their families or peer groups. The exploration shows that there are some other factors involved along with the differential association for criminality.

The paper illustrated that the respondents learnt criminal motives, drives and criminal techniques in multiple ways. Status, money and entertainment were the typical causes that motivated them to commit crimes. The majority that is eleven out of the fifteen respondents were aware of criminal techniques. It was reported that the criminal techniques can be learnt through discussion with experienced criminals. Some of techniques were reported to be; observing the criminal intentions' objects, practice, mass media and prison experience. Almost all respondent believed that status and money can be earned by legal ways. However, they had internalized their behaviour through rationalizations.

In the light of the findings it is argued that in order to control crime rates in the country efforts are needed on part of all stakeholders including the government. Efforts should be made on part of the state to make the judiciary system more reliable and transparent. It is also recommended that the probation and parole services should be extended in jails to monitor and change the behaviour of the prisoners.

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About the authors

Dr. Rabia Ali works as Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at the International Islamic University Islamabad. Her research interests include gender, Sociology of children and youth, Sociology of peace and conflict and Sociology of education. She can be reached at rabi.ali@gmail.com

Mr. Farhan Ahmad is a PhD Scholar in the Department of Sociology at the International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan.