

Researchers studied three generations of several families, noting the frequency and type of offending. They found that sons and grandsons of offenders often committed similar crimes themselves. The researchers also interviewed people who knew the families, such as friends and neighbours. Most friends and neighbours were not concerned by the offending behaviour, and some said it was a good way to behave in the circumstances.

Describe differential association theory in the context of offending. Refer to the research above in your answer. **(8 marks)**

Sample Answer

The differential association theory was proposed by **Sutherland (1939)** who suggested offending behaviour is learned from those in our social environment, or whom we have been socialised with. Differential association claims that criminal behaviour allows individuals to learn the values, attitudes, techniques, and motives from other people. It can arise from two factors; learned attitudes towards offending, and the learning of specific offending techniques. In the scenario it states that 'three generations of several families' are offending and 'committing similar crimes themselves'. This is a possible indication that specific techniques had been passed down from one generation to the next. **Farrington et al (2006)** supports this idea after they conducted a longitudinal study using 411 boys from London. Their results showed that 41% had criminal convictions between the ages of 10 and 50 years, and 91% of those who started committing crimes between 10 and 13 years were reconvicted at least once. This was attributed to poor parenting, poverty, and family criminality. This supports the statement in the scenario that whole families show deviant behaviour, as 'they found that sons and grandsons of offenders often commit similar crimes themselves'. This suggests that criminal behaviour is accepted as the norm within the family. The theory also explains how the expectations and attitudes of those around us (family, friends etc) reinforce our behaviour (criminal or otherwise) through acceptance and approval. This can be seen in the scenario as 'most friends and neighbours were not concerned by the offending behaviour, and some said it was a good way to behave'. This shows that the criminal social norm is shown by friends and neighbours who also accept the behaviour.

