

Economic environment during infancy linked with substance use, delinquent behavior in adolescence

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The larger economic environment during infancy may be associated with subsequent substance use and delinquent behavior during adolescence, according to a report published Online First by *Archives of General Psychiatry*, a JAMA Network publication.

The current economic crisis has received much attention from policy makers, although the focus has been on short-term effects, while the long-term influences of such financial crises, especially on young children, have generally not been examined, according to the study background.

Seethalakshmi Ramanathan, M.B.B.S., D.P.M., of the State University of New York Upstate Medical University, and colleagues examined the relationship between the high unemployment rates during and after the 1980 and 1981-1982 recession, and rates of subsequent adolescent substance use and delinquent behaviors. Researchers used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997, which included a group of 8,984 adolescents born from January 1, 1980 through December 31, 1984.

"The results demonstrate a strong correlation between the [unemployment rate](#) during infancy and subsequent behavioral problems. This finding suggests that unfavorable economic conditions during infancy may create circumstances that can affect the [psychological development](#) of

the infant and lead to the development of behavioral problems in adolescence," the authors note.

According to the study results, exposure to a 1 percent deviation from mean regional unemployment rates at the age of 1 year was associated with an increase in the odds ratios of engaging in marijuana use (1.09), smoking (1.07), alcohol use (1.06), arrest (1.17), gang affiliation (1.09), and petty (1.06) and major theft (1.11). No significant associations were noted with the use of hard drugs and assaultive behavior, the results indicate.

"Although the past does not necessarily predict the future, it provides important lessons. Our findings suggest an important static risk factor that [mental health professionals](#) may want to take into account when dealing with children exposed to the current economic crisis," the authors conclude. "We hope that the study inspires mental health professionals to look for potential causes and explore interventions that can mitigate some of these long-term consequences."

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