

Do stress and strain lead to deviant behavior?

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Chances are good that youngsters growing up around family members who gamble will also start doing so to release the strains of daily living. This is not necessarily true for adolescents whose family members find their escape in alcohol or drugs. Given that gambling and substance abuse are both potentially addictive, and often go hand in hand, this is a significant finding and one of the many interesting results of a new study just published. Romy Greco and Antonietta Curci of the Libera University SS Maria Assunta (LUMSA) in Italy conducted the research, which appears in Springer's *Journal of Gambling Studies*.

Their study looked at the extent to which groups such as families influence younger people to start [gambling](#) or use specific [substances](#) as coping strategies. It formed part of investigations into the phenomenon of gambling and substance use in terms of the General Strain Theory. It holds that deviant behavior is the result of how people adapt to specific strains (financial difficulties, death in the family) and the negative emotions (depression, anxiety or anger) that go with it. It follows that people try to handle their inner turmoil by engaging in deviant behaviour such as substance use or gambling.

Altogether 262 families totalling 2,248 participants aged between 12 and 91 years old filled in self-administered questionnaires about their backgrounds and the type of strains they had experienced in the preceding three months. These ranged from being victimized to having issues at work with the police, their health or their families. Respondents indicated the negative emotions (anger or irritation) they experienced as a result, and they elaborated on their gambling habits and substance use.

The findings support the idea that strain leads to inner-directed [deviant behavior](#) such as gambling or [substance abuse](#), as well as to [negative emotions](#) such as depression and anger. In all, 97 percent of participants experienced depressive emotions and 96 percent felt anger following stressful events. Women more often felt depressed, while men found more release in gambling and substance. People tended to gamble more frequently once their depressive emotions about a negative life event subsided.

Younger participants were angrier about the strain they experienced, and likely to more frequently gamble or abuse substances than adults in similar situations did. "Adolescence and the beginning of adulthood are the most deviant times in life, on account of the accumulation of numerous stressful experiences in a very short time," elaborates Greco.

The study further found that growing up in a family where addictive behaviours are common strongly predicts whether someone will also have such tendencies. "The involvement and tendency to gamble in particular appears to be strongly influenced by the modelling of [family members](#) with respect to dysfunctional coping strategies like substance use and gambling," says Curci.

More information: Romy Greco et al, Does the General Strain Theory Explain Gambling and Substance Use?, *Journal of Gambling Studies* (2016). [DOI: 10.1007/s10899-016-9654-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-016-9654-2)

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