The Role of Strain Variables in Explaining the Attitude toward Alcohol Consumption: Case Study of University Students

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1-Introduction
In recent years, the criminological community has witnessed a resurgence of interest in strain theory. "Traditional strain theory (1955, 1960, 1970) posits that individuals are pressured into crime when they are prevented from achieving cultural goals like monetary success or middleclass status through legitimate means. This goal blockage may pressure some to pursue their goal through illegitimate means" (Wang & Holtfreter, 2011, p. 5). But Strain development is largely attributable to Agnew’s (1992) formulation of general strain theory (GST).

2- Theoretical Framework
“According to GST, individuals may encounter aversive social relations in which they experience goal blockage, are presented with noxious stimuli, and/or are deprived of positively valued stimuli” (Brezina, Piquero, & Mazerolle, 2001, p. 361). “These relations tend to generate negative affect, create pressures for corrective action, and increase the likelihood of criminal/delinquent behavior” (Brezina et al., 2001, p. 361) Agnew (1992) argues that “various negative relations with others (strain or stress) lead to negative emotions and encourage some type of coping. That coping is more likely to be criminal when the strains are severe, seen as unjust, and are linked with anger” (cited in Kaufman, 2009, p. 411). “To further clarify the meaning of strain, Agnew (2001) differentiates objective strain from subjective strain. Objective strains are defined as events or conditions that are disliked by most members of a given group” (Moon, Blurton, & McCluskey, 2007, p. 584).

Numerous stressful conditions or events such as physical assault, financial difficulty, and criminal victimization can be considered objective strains. A majority of previous research on GST focused on objective strains, under the assumption that these stressful events and conditions always cause strain in all

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individuals. Agnew (2001), however, recognizes the importance of measuring “subjective strains,” which refer to “events or conditions that are disliked by the people who are experiencing them” (Moon et al., 2007, p. 585).

He argues that individuals evaluate objective strains differently, depending on various factors such as personal characteristics, social resources, or life circumstances, positively. Agnew, therefore, suggests the necessity of measuring both objective and subjective strains to better understand the relationship between strain and delinquency (cited in Moon et al., 2007).

3- Methodology

The current study intends to test the assumptions of Agnew’s theory (1992) among students of the University of Mazandaran. The current study tests the ability of a general theory of crime and deviance, to explain gender differences in attitude to consume alcohol. For this purpose, 467 students (309 girls and 158 boys) were selected by proportional random sampling. The data for this study were collected by questionnaire.

Measures

Failure to achieve positive goals: This variable is operationalized as the independent variable of a number of indicators such as: academic failure, financial failure, emotional breakdown, blocked goals, etc. The alpha value of the scale of failure to achieve positive goals is 0/6.

Remove positive stimulus: This variable is operationalized as the independent variable of a number of indicators such as: divorce, remarriage, illness, death, unemployment, family conflict, and suicide. The alpha value of the scale of remove positive stimulus is 0/5.

The presentation of negative stimulus: This variable is operationalized as the independent variable of a number of indicators such as: neglected by the family, ignoring the talent, financial problems, injury, neglect by the teachers, negative relations, etc. The alpha value of the presentation of negative stimulus is 0/8.

Negative emotions. Agnew (1992) emphasizes anger as a “key” emotion leading to crime, but according to Agnew, more research is needed to investigate the relationships between strain, deviance, and negative emotions other than anger. In our study, respondents were asked about two negative emotions that might potentially influence the relationship between strain and attitude to consume alcohol. The alpha value of the scale of negative emotions is 0/8.

Unfavorable situation neighborhood: This variable is operationalized as the independent variable of a number of indicators such as: theft in the neighborhood, drug use in the neighborhood, insecurity in the neighborhood, vandalism in the neighborhood, etc. The alpha value of the scale of unfavorable situation neighborhood is 0/7.
**Attitude to consume alcohol**: Attitude to consume alcohol is considered as the dependent variable. This variable has three indexes. Cognitive attitude to consume alcohol, emotional attitude to consume alcohol, and behavioral attitude to consume alcohol. The alpha value of the scale of attitude to consume alcohol is 0.8.

**4- Results & Discussion**

We examined the linkages between strain, negative emotions, and attitude to consume alcohol among students of the University of Mazandaran. The results of this study are consistent with much prior research in gender differences about attitude to consume alcohol. However, this study do not confirm the strain theory. Among different variables of strain theory such as failure to achieve positively valued goals, removal of positively valued stimuli, unfavorable situation neighborhood, anger and depression, just presence of negative stimuli and anger were confirmed.

**5- Suggestions**

Future research should focus on other variables such as self-esteem, self-control, and social and emotional protection. Agnew argues that “strain, when perceived as unjust, high in magnitude (i.e., duration, recently, and centrality), associated with low social control, is more likely to be related to delinquent behaviors” (Moon et al., 2007, p. 583).

**Key words:** Anger, Depression, Failure to achieve positively valued goals, Unfavorable situation neighborhood, Removal of positively valued stimuli, Cognitive attitude, Emotional attitude, Behavioral attitude.

**References**


