

And Now They're Stressed Out: University as a Source of General Strain for Impulsive Students

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Presentation Description:

Using the theoretical framework from Agnew's general strain theory, an examination of possible strains that could lead to criminal behaviour from university students was conducted using a vignette survey. The scenario specifically examines the intention to steal from a workplace when the stress of paying bills is high.

Abstract:

Robert Agnew's general strain theory presents a framework for how strains can lead to criminal acts as a coping mechanism. Strains come from the inability to achieve goals, the removal of positive stimuli, or the introduction of negative stimuli. The negative emotions that come from unresolved or unfair strains are the catalyst for criminal coping. People with low self-control, who have more difficulty with problem-solving and who do not consider the consequences of their actions, respond to strains quickly and with little thought. Criminality is seen as a viable solution to those people when the rewards are immediate and the strain they are experiencing is deemed threatening. This research examines how university students would react to a strain that threatens their living situation using a vignette scenario. The survey used to gauge intent to commit a crime is based off of a vignette used in a previous study. Responses from an undergraduate criminology class at a university in British Columbia are analyzed to determine if traits that indicate low-self control are consistent with a person's intent to engage in criminal activity. Based on the general strain theory framework, students who score higher on low self-control traits will be more likely to have criminal intent when presented with a strain.