

**Gender and Crime: An Empirical Test of General Strain Theory  
among Youth in Babol  
(A City in Northern Part of Iran)**

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***Abstract***

This paper presents an attempt to use Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST) (1992) for explanation of the criminal behavior differences between young males and females in Babol, a city in northern part of Iran. General Strain Theory (GST) is essentially regarded as a set of ideas formulated to explain the occurrence of crime as a result of the strain in social life. This study explores the relationship between gender and criminal behavior among males and females. To achieve this aim it was used a theoretical model based on Agnew's general strain theory (GST) design and finally this casual model conceptualized and operationalized the variables. In this study the independent variable is gender. Data gathered from a sample of 140 young persons who lived in Babol. The findings indicate that there are significant differences between gender and crime.

***Keywords:*** Stain theory, Gender, Crime, Criminal behavior.

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## 1. Introduction

General Strain Theory concerns "types of strain rather than sources of strain" (Agnew, 1992, p. 53). The contributions of previous strain theorists are necessary for development of a complete model and Agnew (1992) also suggests drawing upon other disciplines. Solitary adaptations are possible for two main causal factors.

Stressful events interfere with achievement of existentially based expectations or fair outcomes. "All manners of positive stimuli" which previously experienced or observed constitute the expected goals, and their frustration leads to "anger, resentment, rage, dissatisfaction, disappointment, and unhappiness, that is, all emotions customarily associated with strain in criminology" (Agnew, 1992, p.52). General Strain Theory claims that actors do not enter interactions with specific outcomes in mind, only that certain distributive justice rules will be followed in establishing equitable relationships. Distress occurs when individuals feel unrewarded for their efforts compared to the efforts and rewards of similar outcomes. The negative emotions associated with negative relationships which may be more successfully handled by engaging in delinquent behavior than in nondelinquent behavior (Brezina, 1996). The Anomie Theory that Merton had introduced quickly gained support and acceptance by criminologists and sociologists who further researched and developed this theory. During the 1950s, the Anomie Theory was widely being applied to delinquency in many different types of subcultures (Akers, 2000, p. 145). Robert Agnew and his co-researcher and co-writer, Helene Raskin White (1992), produced an empirical evidence that suggested the general strain theory had positively been able to relate delinquents and drug users. They further concluded that the strongest effect on the delinquents was related to the delinquency of their peers (Akers, 2000, p. 160). The Anomie Strain Theory has progressed steadily in the field of criminology since its beginning. First, Durkheim defined the term anomie to explain this phenomena in the sociological field. Then, Merton narrowed the definition of anomie to describe the ideas based on societal incoherence. His research tested during the 1950s-60s to explain this approach. Later, in a research performed by Agnew and others showed further developments of Merton's original theory. Today, the Anomie Strain Theory continues to attract attention and support as the empirical evidence acquired from constant testing.

## 2. General Strain Theory

Agnew's three major types of "Deviance-Producing Strain" are described as follow:

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### **2.1. Failure to Achieve Positively Valued Goals**

The first of the three major types in the failure to achieve positively valued goals is subdivided into three further categories. These are the traditional concept, the gap between expectations and actual achievements, and the difference between what a person believes the outcome should be and what the results are actually.

Under the first subcategory, Agnew includes personal goals that are both long term and immediate. In addition, he presents this personal realization that some of goals will never become true because of certain circumstances that are unavoidable in life and existence of individual weaknesses and blocked opportunities.

The second subtype continues to increase personal disappointment and the final subtype encourages the person to stop desiring to put as much effort into relationships (Akers, 2000, p. 159).

### **2.2. Removal of Positively Valued Stimuli**

The next major type of “deviance-producing strain” identified by Agnew occurs primarily during adolescence when a dramatic change or loss happens. Examples of this type include experiencing the stressful impact felt before and when a death or serious illness befalls a family (Akers, 2000, p. 159).

### **2.3. Confrontation with Negative Stimuli**

The last major type of “deviance-producing strain” also applies more to adolescents than any other age group. Usually the individual is forced to remain among negative actions that create deviant behavior. Examples of negative inescapable stimuli include peer pressure and child abuse (Akers, 2000, p. 159).

## **3. Gender and Crime**

General Strain Theory can be used to explain the differences in crimes between larger groups, such as the difference in crime rates between communities and the high rate of crime in adolescents (Agnew, *ibid*). General Strain Theory has also been applied in criminology to explain the high rate of crime among males as opposed to females. Agnew and Broidy (1997, p. 275) used this theory to explain the increased rate of crime among males and the reason why females commit crime.

In an attempt to explain the high rate of male delinquency as compared to female delinquency, Agnew and Broidy (1997) analyzed the gender differences between the perception of strain and the responses to it. The first explored area related to the amount of strain that each gender experiences. Also, females tend to be higher in

subjective strain as well. That females experience more strain than males and they can't explain the higher rate of male delinquency according to the general strain theory. Due to this, Agnew and Broidy explored further differences in male and female strain (Agnew and Broidy, 1997, pp. 275-278). Since females experience more strain and commit less crime, Agnew and Broidy investigated the different types of strain that males and females experience. Their findings are listed in Table 1. There was found to be a difference in the types of experienced strain between genders, and this subject explain the gender difference in the types of committed crimes (Agnew and Broidy, 1997, p. 281).

**Table 1. Sex differences in types of strain (Agnew and Broidy, 1997, pp. 278-281)**

Females	Males
Concerned with creating and maintaining close bonds and relationships with others (lower rates of property and violent crime)	Concerned with material success (higher rates of property and violent crime)
Negative face treatment such as discrimination, high demands from family and restricted behavior	More face conflict with peers
Failure to achieve goals may lead to self-destructive behavior	Failure to achieve goals may lead to violent crime

Then, they hypothesized that there may be differences not only in the types of strain, but also in the emotional response to the strain as well. The gender differences are discussed in Table 2. Since they found that there were sex differences in this regard.

**Table 2. Sex differences in emotional response to strain (Agnew and Broidy, 1997, pp. 281-283)**

Females	Males
To respond with depression and anger	To respond with anger
Anger is accompanied by fear, guilt and shame	Anger is followed by moral outrage
To blame themselves and worry about the effects of their anger	To blame others
Depression and guilt may lead to self-destructive behaviors (i.e. eating disorders)	Moral outrage may lead to property and violent crime

Because of emotional response to strain, this can be used to explain gender differences in crime participation (Agnew and Broidy, 1997, pp. 281-283).

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Males and females have been found to experience different types of strain and different emotions according to the general strain theory (Agnew and Broidy, 1997, PP. 283-287).

#### **4. Measuring Strain**

Agnew noted two different ways of identifying and measuring strain in an individual's life. The first way is the subjective approach. In this approach the researcher directly asks the "individual whether they dislike the way that they are being treated or not. The second approach is the objective view in which the researcher asks individuals about pre-determined causes of strain. The causes of strain are things that the researcher identifies as treatment. The objective approach is the one often used in research, and it usually involves relationships with friend, family, and the community. One factor that must be considered is that individuals have different reactions to certain types of strain and subjectively view in different types of objective strain (Agnew, 1997).

#### **5. Method**

The sample of this study was 140 formal families (males and females) who were interviewed in the city of Babol. The groups were interviewed by contacting them at home. It was very difficult to have a random sample of families in Babol. The instrument of the study was a questionnaire designed to collect the indicators strain, and demographic variables for this aim related to the delinquency scale (Agnew and White, 1997, See appendix A). The data were collected in 2017 in the city of Babol, a northern city of Iran. In this survey, gender is an independent variable and type of crime, family conflict, self-control, family control, negative life events, attachment to significant others, socialization context, family control are dependent variables. To analyze the association between the variables with T-test statistical persuader the researcher used Minitab and SPSS statistic package.

#### **6. Findings**

Table 3 displays results of the comparisons between males and females on mean levels on various predictors' variables.

**Table 3. Relation between males and females on mean levels on various predictor's variables**

Variable	Mean		T-value	Significance
	Male (n=70)	Female (n=70)		
Negative life events	14.7	12.73	.47	NS
Crime type experiment	43	35.8	2.25	S
Family conflict experiment	4.63	6.03	.35	NS
Social control	16.55	22.82	2.07	S
Family control	6.59	10.77	2.67	S
Gender socialization	51.08	34.57	2.71	S

P<.05, S= significant, ns = not significant

## 7. Conclusion

Based on Table 3, comparisons between males and females on mean levels on various predictors' variables indicate that the statistical significant relation between four variables and other variables is not significant. Based on this study, males and females have been found to experience different types of strain.

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