

The Uniqueness of Negative Urgency as a Common Risk Factor for Alcohol Consumption, Self-harm Behaviors, and Eating Problems in College Students

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Research suggests that self-control, affective lability, and negative urgency are associated with deliberate self-harm, problematic alcohol consumption, and eating problems. Few studies have fully examined how negative urgency might uniquely explain the effects of self-control and affective lability on these outcomes, as compared to other impulsivity-related traits. This was the goal of the current study. Of an initial group of 734 undergraduate students, 29% indicated a history of deliberate self-harm. These 215 individuals were randomly matched with a group of non-self-harmers (total $N = 430$; mean age = 22.36, $SD = 6.59$; 76.2% female). Self-harmers showed higher rates of alcohol use ($F(2, 186) = 5.48, p < .001$) and eating problems ($F(2, 186) = 7.74, p < .001$). In a structural equation model, negative urgency was significantly associated with self-harming frequency ($\beta = 3.81, p < .001$), variety of self-harm methods ($\beta = 5.79, p < .001$), the number of years of self-harming ($\beta = 2.75, p < .001$), problematic alcohol use ($\beta = 1.80, p < .05$), and eating problems ($\beta = 3.99, p < .001$). Negative urgency was positively associated with affective lability ($\beta = 7.71, p < .001$) and negatively associated with self-control ($\beta = -13.59, p < .001$). Negative urgency is the only impulsivity-related trait that is a common risk factor associated with increased self-harm, problematic alcohol use, and eating problems.

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