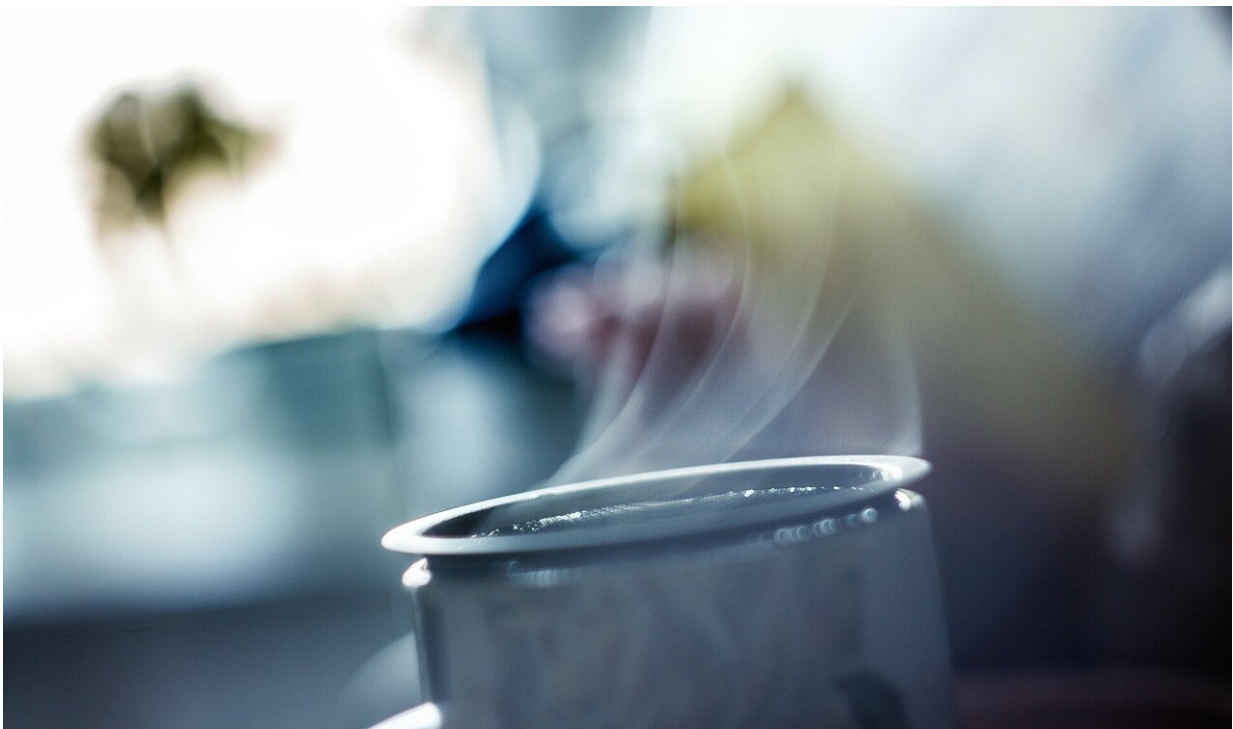


It's a crime—but for meth cooks, it's also a job

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The motivation to start cooking meth is often driven by addiction, but a new study takes a closer look at the reasons cooks engage in this criminal behavior and come to see it as a job.

Iowa State University researchers say the work offers insight into the

world of [meth](#) production and an understanding of why cooks chose this [lifestyle](#), which can help with the development of prevention and rehabilitation efforts. Jacob Erickson, lead author and a Ph.D. candidate in sociology, says many addicts struggle to maintain normal employment and cooking is a way to feed their addiction without resorting to other forms of crime.

Erickson; Andy Hochstetler, Iowa State sociology professor; and Heith Copes, University of Alabama at Birmingham criminal justice professor, interviewed 33 former meth cooks who were living in faith-based transitional facilities at the time. In the paper, published last fall in the journal *Justice Quarterly*, some of the participants shared how they took a lot of pride in their work and the rush they would get from the [cooking process](#). The authors shared this quote from one former cook:

"I'd instantly get chills and goosebumps as soon as the last process was, like when you smoke it off [the last step in cooking meth], and you just see powder falling out of the bottom of the jar. Instantly, I feel almost high at that point."

Erickson says more than the money, it was the intangible rewards related to status, pride and lifestyle that really bound cooks to their job. The fact that cooking meth was illegal also added to the high.

"The majority of our respondents had embodied that role of drug dealer or meth cook so fully and deeply that they drew some level of enjoyment from it," Erickson said. "Within their community, their status was associated specifically with the fact that they were cooks and they appreciated their elevated position relative to other meth users."

The researchers found the motivation to cook varied by gender. Hochstetler says the hypersexuality and party atmosphere associated with meth were attractive components of the lifestyle for men. However,

women in the study never mentioned this aspect unless asked. Many women said they cooked for financial independence—to avoid selling sex for drugs or to get out of a violent romantic relationship.

Understanding the path to cooking

Many participants held legitimate jobs at one point, but shared how the lifestyle and mental effects of the drug made it difficult to stay employed. Some failed to show up for work or made serious mistakes while on the job, including car crashes and injuring co-workers. One participant said:

"I couldn't hold a steady job. I couldn't be in control of two or three other people while they was working for me. I just would go off the job site and leave them for two or three days and let them go on their own and that went to hell real quick."

ISU researchers say many of the participants were from low-socioeconomic backgrounds with limited education, which may have influenced their decision to start using meth. Cooking gave them personal fulfillment and a status level that the conventional [jobs](#) they had could not provide. Addressing some of these economic and educational barriers must be part of drug-prevention efforts, the researchers said.

Understanding the rush and social status associated with cooking meth is important for rehabilitation and helping offenders find and stick to a new career path, Hochstetler added. Some participants said they were more addicted to the lifestyle than the drug, which is hard to give up.

"Many former offenders don't like the slow pace and the planning that is part of everyday life. When they're encapsulated in a criminal lifestyle, it pulls them in and they're not that worried about aspects of conventional lifestyles," Hochstetler said.

More information: Jacob H. Erickson et al. Meth Cooking as a Job: Identity and Dirty Work, *Justice Quarterly* (2019). [DOI: 10.1080/07418825.2019.1675746](https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2019.1675746)

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