

The rich have more money but the poor are rich in heart: study

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(PhysOrg.com) -- The world could one day be an economically equal place, if the lower-income population have anything to do with it. In an interesting yet disheartening series of socioeconomic experiments, led by a team of UC Berkeley researchers, the findings are that those on the lower-income levels are more likely to give and be charitable than their higher paid counterparts.

In one experiment in particular, led by doctoral student, Paul Piff and his researchers, participants completed a questionnaire reporting their [socioeconomic status](#) and a few days later were provided with \$10 to share anonymously. The findings concluded the more generous of the income brackets were on the lower-income scale. A recent national survey reiterates the results, revealing lower-income people give more of their hard-earned money to charity than the wealthy.

At a time when the richest one percent of Americans own more than the bottom 90 percent combined, Piff and his colleagues' findings are more than a little timely. "Our data suggests that an ironic and self-perpetuating dynamic may in part explain this trend," the study researchers write, to be published in the [Journal of Personality and Social Psychology](#). "Whereas lower-class individuals may give more of their resources away, upper-class individuals may tend to preserve and hold onto their wealth. This differential pattern of giving versus saving among upper--and lower-- class people could serve to exacerbate [economic inequality](#) in society."

Piff and his researchers, including Greater Good Science Center Faculty , Dacher Keltner, conducted a second experiment based on the definitive psychological evidence that the less people have, the more they give. The participants did an exercise stating how they felt people should divvy their annual income. They were able to choose from charitable contributions, recreation, food, and other miscellaneous things. The point of the activity was to make them feel higher or lower on the status bar. It showed, again, those on the lower end, thought a higher percentage should be charitable.

The researchers also found evidence that the likelihood of executing other compassionate, generous tasks and behaviors might be explained by their higher concern for equality and empathy for others. Though on the other end, when researchers provoked compassion in the higher-class participants, they were just as much -- if not more -- socially conscious as the lower-class participants. The researchers felt being "rich or "poor" wouldn't necessarily indicate social behaviors, but it is the starting level of compassion they might feel for others.

Prior research, found by Piff and his colleagues, suggests lower income people might be more compassionate because they're more closely rooted to and dependent on others, therefore more empathetic. It's also thought the more money the lower-earning people make in their lifetime and the higher their status becomes. As a result of it, the ability to connect with others' point-of-view disappears, including the low-income population they were once ties to.

More information: psycnet.apa.org/journals/psp/

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