

Spiteful behavior is 'extreme', according to study

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Given the option to commit spiteful acts, reducing the money payoffs of others at no cost to themselves, many people avoid acting spitefully, but those that do, consistently impose the maximum harm, according to research reported on Aug. 15 in the open access journal *PLoS ONE*.

The authors, Erik Kimbrough of Simon Fraser University in Canada and Philipp Reiss of Maastricht University in the Netherlands, created an artificial auction market scenario, with participants "bidding" for objects and having the opportunity to raise the price paid by others, to test the frequency and extent of spiteful behavior among 48 student participants.

Their results show extremes of spiteful and non-spiteful behavior across all participants, but individual spitefulness is typically consistent over time.

"We found it astonishing to see that people chose to be either maximally or minimally spiteful with really no one choosing something in between, and the fact that most people didn't change their [behavior](#) over time suggests that we're seeing something pretty fundamental", say the authors.

More information: Kimbrough EO, Reiss JP (2012) Measuring the Distribution of Spitefulness. *PLoS ONE* 7(8): e41812.

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