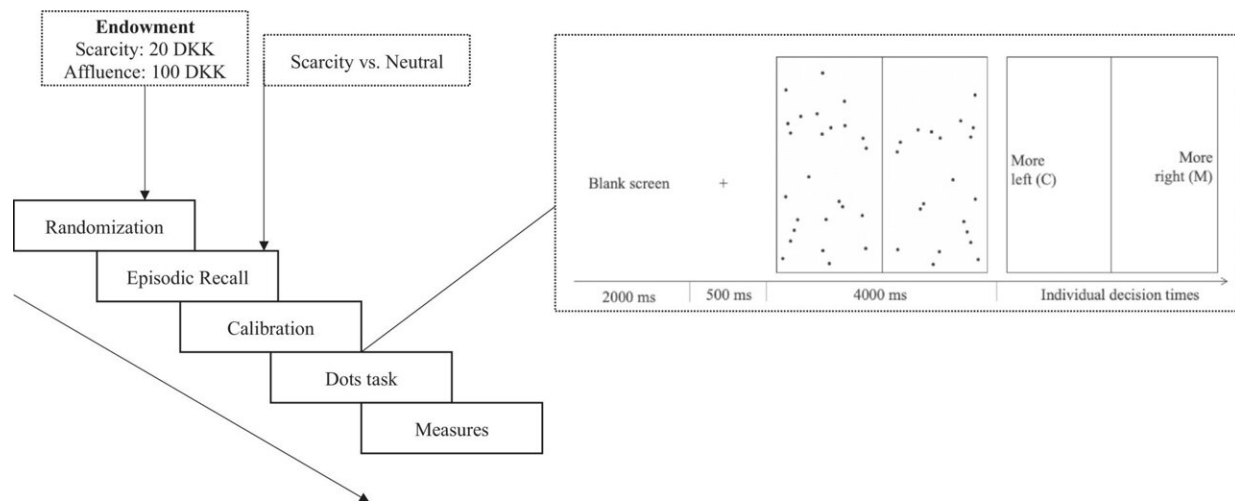


# People in financial distress behave more morally, says study

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Presentation of experimental flow and stimuli.

A new study conducted at Reichman University, in collaboration with Aarhus University in Denmark, challenges the negative stereotypes associated with individuals facing economic hardship. The study, led by Prof. Guy Hochman of Reichman University's Baruch Ivcher School of Psychology, head of the master's degree program in behavioral economics, explored the relationship between financial scarcity, information-seeking, and ethical behavior.

The research is [published](#) in the *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*.

It is a common belief that people living in poverty are less moral, as they are driven by a need to focus on survival, which may lead them to engage in unethical behavior to increase their income. Others suggest that this stems from a sense of social injustice. The purpose of the study was to investigate whether financial deprivation truly affects the processing of information and ethical decision-making.

The researchers used advanced eye-tracking technology to analyze the participants' behavior. During the experiment, participants performed a task in which they had the opportunity to cheat in order to increase their financial gain. Surprisingly, the results revealed that while the participants experiencing financial deprivation tended to focus more on "tempting" information that could have allowed them to cheat, they actually cheated less than the participants who were more affluent.

The findings of the experiment indicate that despite the economic temptation and the tendency to focus on information that could facilitate cheating, individuals in financial distress tend to uphold their [moral standards](#). Furthermore, the results imply that [negative stereotypes](#) associating immoral behaviors with economically disadvantaged populations are unfounded, showing that those in need actually tend to behave more ethically.

Prof. Guy Hochman, Baruch Ivcher School of Psychology, Reichman University, comments, "The study's results offer an optimistic view, revealing that individuals facing [economic hardship](#) are actually more likely to act morally than those living in abundance. These findings can help reduce prejudices against economically disadvantaged people and guide efforts to foster ethical behavior across society. Most importantly, the study demonstrates that people do not abandon their moral standards for [financial gain](#), even when under economic distress.

"This research may have a significant impact on social perceptions and

public policies on welfare and [social justice](#), and offers a new and encouraging perspective on human behavior under economic pressure."

**More information:** Caroline K. Børsting et al, Resource Constraints Lead to Biased Attention but Decrease Unethical Behavior, *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making* (2024). [DOI: 10.1002/bdm.2402](https://doi.org/10.1002/bdm.2402)

Provided by Reichman University

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