

# Money affects children's behavior, even if they don't understand its value, study finds

December 2 2015

---



The act of handling money makes young children work harder and give less, according to new research published by the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management and University of Illinois at Chicago. The effect was observed in children who lacked concrete knowledge of money's purpose, and persisted despite the denomination of the money.

"Money is a double-edged sword. It produces good outcomes in terms of concentration and effort, but bad outcomes when it comes to helping, taking, and donating." said Professor Kathleen Vohs, the Land O'Lakes Chair in Marketing at the University of Minnesota and co- author of the

study.

Five experiments and one study tested 550 [children](#) (ages 3-6) in Poland and the United States. In one experiment, the children were asked to either sort money or buttons before completing a challenging puzzle. In that study, 73 percent of the children who handled the money spent at least two minutes on the task, compared to only 56 percent of those who had sorted buttons.

Another study followed a similar design, however, after sorting money or buttons the preschoolers were asked to help the experimenter prepare a task for another child. The children who had sorted money were less helpful in terms of gathering crayons for the experimenter than those who had first handled buttons.

## **No Sugar Coating Results, Kids More Affected by Money than Candy**

An additional study tested whether candy might elicit a similar response to money. After sorting money, buttons, or candy, the children were informed that they could take up to six Disney stickers. All of the children who sorted money took at least three stickers, whereas only 78 percent of children who sorted candies and 76 percent who sorted buttons took as many.

The children were then told they could give some of their stickers to other children who didn't participate, or they could keep them for themselves. Kids who sorted money prior to receiving their stickers donated half as many stickers compared to kids who sorted buttons or candy.

"Money is a vital component of cultural life," said Lan Chaplin,

associate professor of marketing at the University of Illinois at Chicago. "Our findings with children as young as 3 years old suggest potentially significant implications for achievement, generosity, and interpersonal harmony."

According to Vohs, the results with children mirror patterns from European, Asian, and North American adult samples. "The similarities across developmental and cultural lines suggest common and basic properties in the psychology of [money](#)," she adds.

The study, "Money Cues Increase Agency and Decrease Prosociality Among Children: Early Signs of Market Mode Behaviors" is forthcoming in *Psychological Science*.

Provided by University of Minnesota

Citation: Money affects children's behavior, even if they don't understand its value, study finds (2015, December 2) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-12-money-affects-children-behavior-dont.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--