

Study uncovers the intricacies of the pursuit of higher self-control

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Self-control is a central human capacity associated with a wide range of personal and societal advantages. In view of its benefits, increasing self-control among children and adults has been advocated as a remedy to many of society's ailments, from childhood obesity to adulthood criminal behavior.

Although widely considered highly beneficial, a recent review uncovers some disadvantages to high self-control. The review, published in the journal *Current Directions in Psychological Science* by Dr. Liad Uziel, of Bar-Ilan University's Department of Psychology, explores the intricacies of the pursuit of higher self-control.

"Not acknowledged enough are potential undesired personal and societal consequences associated with high self-control and with the pursuit of higher self-control. Examples include inflexible behavioral patterns, over-emphasis on norm-adherence at the expense of personal discretion, and strict emphasis on cold and rational thinking while overlooking intuition and emotional inputs. These tendencies carry all sorts of potentially problematic implications on information processing, decision-making, as well as social and interpersonal behavior of individuals high in self-control" says Dr. Uziel.

Uziel's review builds on his earlier empirical research, which concluded that wanting to have more self-control can actually be an obstacle to achieving more [self-control](#). "There are studies showing that it is challenging to maintain high self-control over time. Intensive self-

regulatory efforts can lead to all sorts of problems, including health problems associated with intense stress. On that background, wanting to have more self-control contributes additional stress, and, in the short-run, demotivates one and reduces one's belief that she or he can actually demonstrate good self-control," he says.

"Examining potential shortcomings of high self-control (and of the pursuit of higher self-control) will provide informed knowledge about what self-control can (and cannot) offer in terms of solving society's weaknesses," adds Uziel. "Adopting a such a broad and balanced perspective on self-control holds the promise to advance more effective approaches to utilize [self-control](#) in the service of individuals and societies," he concludes.

More information: Liad Uziel, The Intricacies of the Pursuit of Higher Self-Control, *Current Directions in Psychological Science* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/0963721417744322](https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721417744322)

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