

From VOA Learning English this is As It Is.

Welcome back! I'm Caty Weaver. Today, we talk about two studies. One provides interesting findings about how poverty affects reasoning. The other shows the growing importance of technology in connecting young adults and their parents.

New research finds a link between poverty and poor decision making. The findings were reported in the journal *Science*. They may help explain why poor people sometimes make bad choices that prolong their economic hardship. Jim Tedder reports.

Earlier studies have found that poor people are less likely to take care of their health. Studies have shown they also do worse with their finances, and pay less attention to their children than do richer people. All of these actions make the poor less likely to escape poverty, research suggests.

But there has been little research on why the poor make decisions that make their lives harder. Until recently, it was economists who studied poverty, not psychologists.

Eldar Shafir is a psychologist with Princeton University in New Jersey. He says now scientists from both fields work together.

“And in the last few years the two disciplines sort of combined forces. And we just became interested in cognitive function and its impact when people struggle with not having enough.”

Mr. Shafir and his team did two experiments. One took place at a shopping center in New Jersey. Another was carried out among sugar cane farmers in rural India.

The New Jersey experiment involved individuals with low paying jobs and others said to belong to the middle class. All the volunteers were asked what they would do if their cars needed repairs. The researchers then performed tests for reason, such as choosing which shape fits in a pattern of shapes.

The volunteers were given two possible imaginary situations. In the first, the car repairs cost \$150. In the second, the repairs cost \$1,500.

“And what we found is, when we looked at the cases where the financial scenario in the background was not too challenging, the poor and the rich performed equally well on all the cognitive tests.”

Not so when the researchers raised the repair costs to \$1,500.

“Once we tickled their minds with financially more challenging problems, now the poor performed significantly worse.”

The study showed the poorer individuals lost about 13 intelligent quotient, IQ, points on average. This is about the loss experienced when a person has not slept for one night.

The scientists then wondered if they would see the same result outside the controlled environment of a New Jersey shopping mall. And they wanted to know if the same person reacted differently when he was rich and when he was poor.

That is where the Indian sugar cane farmers came in. They earn most of their money once a year, when the harvest comes in. But the money often does not last through the year.

“So they find themselves basically rich after the harvest when the income comes in and poor just before the harvest.”

The researchers gave them tests similar to the ones taken by the people in New Jersey. They tested the Indian farmers before the harvest and after.

And the results were much the same as with the mall shoppers.

“They performed much more slowly and with many more errors when they were poorer than when they were richer.”

Mr. Shafir says the results support 50 years of research that shows all humans have a limited amount of mental power to deal with the business of life.

For example, an earlier study tested people with chocolate. It found that individuals who resisted the desire for chocolate were not as strong afterward. They had more difficulty controlling their emotions or performing difficult mental tasks than people who had not resisted.

And struggling to pay the bills has a similar effect, Mr. Shafir says.

“And so the insight here is that, experiencing scarcity, having not enough of something in a way that weighs on your mind leaves less for everything else.”

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In the United States, more parents and their grown adult children are in daily contact by telephone or text messages than ever before. The findings are part of a large study of emerging adulthood by Clark University in Massachusetts.

University researchers studied 1,000 people, all between the ages of 18 and 29 years. They found that 55 percent of parents and their adult children are in daily contact, or almost daily contact, either by telephone or texting. Only three percent reported less than monthly contact with a parent.

James Arnett is a psychology professor at Clark.

“That’s remarkable. I think compared to when you and I were kids, I think that’s just a revolution.”

Mr. Arnett led the study last year. It included parents and young people from all social, economic and ethnic groups. He says growing up in the current environment and economic climate creates all kinds of emotional difficulties as children enter adulthood. And this, he says, makes it more difficult for parents to give up control. They see their children moving forward in life more slowly.

“They are sort of evaluating their own kids on the basis of the timetable they followed when they were young, and often it doesn’t match up. Their kids generally take longer to complete their education, longer to find a stable job, longer to marry, longer to have their first child. And so to parents, operating on the old timetable seems delayed when it’s really not by contemporary standards.”

James Arnett says technology has made daily communication between parents and adult children much easier. Billions of people around the world now own and use cellular telephones, making it possible to talk or text more often. He says most young people want continued parental guidance and support as they move toward adulthood.

And that’s AS IT IS for today. I’m Caty Weaver.

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