

Feeling Bad May Not Make You Behave Unethically! Lessons Learned From the 2022 Shanghai COVID-19 Lockdown

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Abstract : Shanghai experienced a 3-month lockdown in 2022. This unprecedented lockdown made local residents afraid, anxious and worried about the unpredictability of the future. During the lockdown, many unethical behaviors related to lockdown are noticed by the public. Our studies documented unethical behavior during this lockdown by moral hypocrisy and moral justification examined whether or not the lockdown makes people behave more unethically, and analyzed the relationship between negative emotions and unethical behavior. In Study 1, we recruited 240 participants from Shanghai (n = 120) and other cities (n = 120) to compare people in lockdown and non-lockdown areas. Surprisingly, we found that people in lockdown areas tend to behave more ethically, exhibiting less moral hypocrisy. In addition, residents of the lockdown area have significantly higher negative emotions (afraid, nervousness, upset, and feelings of uncertainty). In Study 2, we recruited 70 respondents from Shanghai and found that people behave relatively ethically in lockdown-related scenarios (negatively correlated with anxiety about the lockdown) with relatively less moral justification than in lockdown-unrelated scenarios. We propose that negative emotions may reduce unethical behavior that may exacerbate the causes (in our study, the lockdown) of these negative emotions. Experiments may help to establish the causal relationship and verify the model in future research.

Keywords : COVID-19, unethical behavior, emotion, anxiety, moral justification, moral hypocrisy, China

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