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# **Expectations bias moral judgments**

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## **Abstract**

People's expectations play an important role in their reactions to events. There is often disappointment when events fail to meet expectations and a thrill to having one's expectations exceeded (e.g. Mellers et al., 1997). Here, we examined how expectations influenced people's reactions to events with serious moral consequences, and their moral decisions concerning such situations. Participants judged pairs of events where a victim experienced a similar harm, but where victims were at different prior risk of being harmed (e.g. someone killed by a drunk driver on a Friday night versus a Saturday morning). People found unexpected harms to be more upsetting and they were more likely to choose to prevent an unexpected harm than an expected one. Further studies explored other factors that might have influenced judgments beyond expectations. This bias may have pernicious moral consequences, potentially leading to reduced concern for victims in most need of help.