

Omission-Commission Asymmetries in Morality: Meta-analysis of Omission-Bias

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Omission bias is people's tendency to evaluate inaction (omission) as less morally wrong and less responsible than action (commission), which often results in a decision not to act, when there is the possibility of harm. However, findings on the effect are mixed and inconsistent. We conducted a meta-analysis on 21 samples (13 articles; some with multiple dependent variables and scenarios) on omission (inaction) vs. commission (action) asymmetries in moral attributions and decisions of harm and blame. We found an overall large effect of $g = 0.80$ (95% CI [0.52, 1.09]), using two-level model, and $g = 0.74$ (95% CI [0.34, 1.14]. using multivariate three-level model. Different publication bias tests produced conflicting results regarding evidence of publication bias. We adopted various bias-adjusted methods and the effect remained medium to large using different methods. The heterogeneity across samples appear to be high, $Q(25) = 525.58$, $p < .001$, $I = 94.2\%$. We tested several moderators – familiarity with target, responsibility, outcome valence, dependent variables (DV) type, and study design. Our findings are inconclusive using two-level models versus three-level models. We conducted MetaForest analyses to address the issue of limited statistical power and found all 5 moderators are important, with study design (stronger effects using within-subject designs compared to between-subject designs) being the most important variable. However, such results should be interpreted with caution due to conflicting results using different models.