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Scarcity and Inattention

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Scarcity and Inattention

Abstract

A scarcity mindset focuses attention on immediate needs. This attention capture often results in having less attention (or “cognitive bandwidth”) for other concerns. We examine low-income parents’ inattention to information when they are experiencing two types of scarcity mindsets: financial scarcity; i.e., a subjective report of not having enough money to make ends meet, and social connections scarcity; i.e., a subjective report of loneliness. We measure inattention with an objective measure that reflects parents’ awareness of informational resources about support for managing life during the pandemic sent to them by their child’s school. We rely on survey data collected shortly after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic from 345 low-income parents of young children and from the directors of the 11 preschool centers attended by the children. In multivariate analyses, we find that both types of scarcity mindsets are significantly positively associated with inattention. Further, we show that financial scarcity and loneliness are largely independent phenomena and have roughly equivalent impacts on inattention. Parents who report a financial scarcity mindset and high levels loneliness are 63 per cent more likely than their counterparts who experience neither to be inattentive to information that was sent by the schools.

Keywords: Inattention, Loneliness, Financial Scarcity, Early Childhood Education

JEL Codes: D83, D91, I20, J10

Scarcity and Inattention:

Introduction

Researchers from a variety of fields seek to explain why people make decisions that seem counterproductive and short-sighted. One theory, drawing from cognitive psychology and economics, argues that decision-making can be compromised by mental distraction arising from the feeling of “having less than you feel you need” (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013). This “scarcity theory” proposes that people who are struggling to manage with less than they need, whether that is money, time, calories, or friendship, make decisions with a “scarcity mindset.”

The scarcity mindset is an adaptive response to threat. From an evolutionary perspective, it allows us not to be distracted by less threatening things to focus on the threat at hand. Indeed, more focused attention can increase efficiency or recall of information (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013; see also Carvalho et al., 2016; Fehr et al., 2019; Huijismans et al., 2019; Lichand & Mani, 2020, Ong et al., 2019; Plantinga et al., 2018). While scarcity can lead both to greater attentional focus on the scarcest resource, it can also lead to neglect of other concerns (Zhao & Tomm, 2018), a process known as tunneling (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013). The maladaptive consequences of a scarcity mindset thus arise when it diverts attention from information or actions with long-term consequences. Mullainathan & Shafir (2013) refer to this as the “bandwidth tax.” The bandwidth tax can perpetuate scarcity to the extent it induces suboptimal or shortsighted decisions, thus creating a “scarcity trap” (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013).

We examine this phenomenon in a new field setting in a sample of low-income parents of young children. We focus on two types of scarcity relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic. First, we examine financial scarcity mindsets as defined by individuals' subjective sense of not having enough money left over at the end of the month to meet their needs. Second, we examine scarcity of social connections as defined by respondents' subjective sense of loneliness. We examine the extent to which these scarcity mindsets are associated with parents' inattention to informational resources provided to them by their child's school during the period of COVID-induced school closures. The informational resources center on important topics that may have longer term benefits for parents and their children (i.e., online learning, stress management).

We rely on data collected from low-income parents of preschool-age children and data collected from the directors of those children's preschool centers. These centers closed on 17 March 2020 following the announcement of a statewide stay at home order. The unique feature of these surveys is that they asked the center directors to report what types of information they sent home to parents to support their children and families during the time that centers were closed, and they asked parents what types of information they had received from the centers. Assuming the center directors accurately report what information they provided, these data afford an objective assessment of parents' attention to information about key resources during a period of substantial economic and social disruption, which we can statistically model as a function of parents' reports of financial scarcity and loneliness.

In multivariate analyses we find that both types of scarcity mindsets are significantly positively associated with inattention. Further, we show that financial

scarcity and loneliness are largely independent phenomena and have roughly equivalent impacts on inattention. Parents who report a financial scarcity mindset and high levels of loneliness are 63 per cent more likely than their counterparts who experience neither a financial scarcity mindset nor loneliness to be inattentive to information that was sent by the schools about resources to help them during the COVID-19 pandemic. These associations are robust to controls for parental education, family size, whether the family has internet access, and school fixed effects. We see our evidence as part of a nascent body of literature that highlights the role of resource scarcity in individuals' cognitive attention.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has been widely reported as a challenging time for parents. Policy responses to the pandemic – including stay-at-home orders, new regulations for essential workers, and school closures – potentially created scarcity mindsets for families through various channels, including: working from home or the potential of job loss and consequently income loss; the sickness or death of family members and friends, the loss of social networks, the need to home-school children, and other possible consequences of living through this pandemic (Kalil, Mayer, & Shah, 2020). In particular, many low-income parents faced increased financial stress, especially at the beginning of the pandemic before federal stimulus funds had been deployed (Ganong et al., 2020). Further, the emotional state of loneliness, a signal that one's emotional needs are not being met, was deemed a public health crisis even before the pandemic and a recent synthesis of international research shows small, but robust increases in loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic across gender and age groups

(Ernst et al., 2022). Other research during the pandemic found significant increases in loneliness among low-income individuals and other groups already at higher risk for it (Bu, Steptoe, & Fancourt, 2020).

The onset of the pandemic also introduced new needs from parents for information about such topics as online learning for children and options for substitute childcare during COVID. Many preschools provided this information to parents; for some topics (i.e., online learning) they were likely the parents' sole source of information. The present paper examines how much parents' perceived financial scarcity and loneliness – psychological conditions that are salient for low income parents in non-pandemic times but were especially heightened during COVID-19 – affect their ability to attend to information. We place our work into the framework outlined in Mullainathan and Shafir (2013) in which financial scarcity leads to attentional neglect, a process in which stress may play a role (see also Zhao & Tamm, 2018). Our question is important because neglecting information sent by schools about how to navigate the economic and social challenges of COVID-19 may come at a cost for the low-income parents in our study and may perpetuate the very challenges they are experiencing.

As summarized by deBrujin & Antonides (2021) experimental studies have mainly been conducted in controlled lab experiments. Studies of focus on scarcity-related demands (i.e., “tunneling”) manipulate individuals' physiological needs such as hunger or thirst. In one well-known study dieters and non-dieters were given crossword puzzles to solve; the dieters found significantly more of the food-related words (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013). In another work, Shah et al. (2015; 2019) experimentally induced “time scarcity” among participants competing in a video game. Shah and colleagues showed

that competitors who were under more time pressure spent more time on each move compared to their competitors who were under no such pressure. In contrast, to demonstrate the association between financial scarcity and inattention, Mani, Mullainathan, Shafir and Zhao (2013) test the scarcity mindset among Indian sugarcane farmers over a planting cycle, showing that the same farmers perform more poorly on tasks of cognitive attention just before the harvest, a time of substantial financial scarcity, as compared to their performance just after the harvest when they are flush with earnings.

The mechanism through which subjective feelings of resource scarcity affects inattention is not well specified. Some have argued that stress or negative affect play some role (Haushofer & Fehr, 2014; Schilbach et al., 2016; Zhao & Tamm, 2018). It is not hard to imagine that experiencing scarcity can be stressful. One possibility is that stress induces a shift from goal-directed to habitual behavior, perhaps because it is cognitively less taxing to do so. Mullainathan and Shafir (2013) contend that while stress may play some role, it is not likely to be the primary mediator of linkages between scarcity and outcomes such as inattention.

Our study makes several contributions to this literature. First, following the original theory as articulated by Mullainathan and Shafir (2013) we rely on a definition of financial scarcity that asks survey respondents to report the extent to which they feel they have enough money to make ends meet each month. As noted in deBrujin & Antonides (2021) almost all cross-sectional and quasi-experimental studies of this question have used an objective measure of income as the measure of financial scarcity. The authors refer to this as a “remarkable mismatch” given that Mullainathan and Shafir (2013) already concluded that income is “at best a crude proxy for scarcity” (p. 72). To this we

would add that subjective feelings of financial scarcity are a crude mismatch for poverty or low income. Any one at any level of income can feel financial scarcity if their needs outpace their means. Second, we compare the relative influence of different types of resource scarcity on inattention by comparing perceived lack of financial resources with perceived lack of social connections; i.e., loneliness. Distinguishing the relative importance of different aspects of resource scarcity is important because different types of scarcity may demand different policy responses.

Third, our key outcome measure represents a plausibly objective indicator of inattention as opposed to a subjective report of thoughts or decisions. This is rare for data collected in a natural setting in the field. Similarly, unlike the controlled lab studies that characterize much existing work, we conduct our survey in a real-world field setting during a time – the height of the COVID-19 pandemic – when financial scarcity, loneliness, and parental attention allocation were particularly salient. Finally, we focus on attention to information relevant to family and child well-being in the short and long-term, thus extending applications of the theoretical framework.

Method

Survey Methodology

The study sample includes 345 parents whose children attended 11 preschools in Chicago. This is a convenience sample to test the relationship between resource scarcity and inattention. We recruited this sample through an ongoing study of low-income parents. All these parents were originally recruited from subsidized preschools in Chicago, including Head Start and Preschool for All schools. Of the original 594 parents in the ongoing study, 494 (83.16 per cent) had a valid phone number in May of 2020.

Low-income parents tend to be more mobile than the general population and to have phone numbers that change frequently. We asked all parents with a valid phone number to take a special survey focused on their experiences when schools were closing near the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. From that group 384 parents completed the survey. This is a 77.73 per cent response rate from the parents who had valid phone numbers. Survey data collection began 3 May 2020 and ended 20 July 2020.

For these 384 parents, we knew which preschool center the child was currently attending. We surveyed the administrators at the 13 preschool centers attended by the children of these parents and received responses from 11 of the administrators. This left us with a sample of 345 parents for whom we had data from both the parent and school administrator. 92 per cent of the parents in this sample are the mothers of the preschool child, and the average age is 32 years. 66 per cent have a high school diploma or GED, 41 per cent have at least some college, and 12 per cent have a bachelor's degree. 32 per cent of parents identify as black, 32 per cent as white, and 36 per cent as Hispanic. 38 per cent speak Spanish as their primary language. The median family income is around \$20,000. These sample characteristics resemble that of the broader set of Chicago parents with children in subsidized preschools (Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map, 2022).

All parents received an initial text message with a unique survey code and link to complete the survey online. Parents could opt out by replying that they did not want to take the survey. Parents who did not opt out in this way received two more text message reminders to complete the survey. The second reminder also notified parents that our team would be calling them the following week to help them complete the survey by phone or set up an appointment to do the survey by phone later. Thirty parents responded

to the initial text that they did not want to take the survey. Other parents who were not surveyed either ignored our phone calls or did not keep repeated appointments to do the survey by phone. For participants who did not answer or schedule a follow-up call, we called an average of 10 times before assuming that the person did not want to participate. A total of 13 parents refused to complete the survey. 59 per cent of parent surveys were completed by phone and 41 per cent were completed online. The average duration of the phone survey was 21 minutes.

Measures

We examine the association between financial resource scarcity and inattention as well as the association between loneliness and inattention. We measure inattention as the extent to which parents fail to report receiving information center directors reported sending. Our measures of parents' financial resource scarcity, loneliness, and control variables come from self-reports on surveys.

Dependent Variable

Inattention. Inattention occurs when a preschool administrator reports providing information to a parent but the parent does not report receiving it. We have seven categories of information that can potentially yield such an outcome. Parents were asked if the preschool their child attended provided them with information about (a) preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus, (b) accessing meals, (c) accessing the internet and technology, (d) online learning, (e) managing stress, (f) accessing social services, and (g) finding childcare. Preschool center administrators were asked if the preschool provided parents information in any of the same seven categories.

The modal parent missed no information and of parents who missed some information, it was most common to miss information in exactly one category. Our main specification reflects the view that missing any information at all is indicative of inattention. As such, we created a measure of “inattention” by assigning a “1” to a parent who, for at least one category, said he or she *did not* receive information when the administrator said the school *did* provide the information. Our sensitivity analysis shows that the main results are qualitatively similar if we instead specify the outcome continuously as the proportion of information missed (see the “inattention rate” variable in Table 2).

Note that if a parent said the information was provided but the administrator did not say they sent it, we did not count this as inattention because our focus is on cases where parents missed information that was reportedly sent. That said, the proportion of parents who said they received information when administrators said they did not send such information ranged between 3 and 8 per cent depending on the category type. These low rates give us confidence that administrators reports were accurate, which helps makes the case for our measure of inattention.

Independent Variables

Financial Scarcity. Participants were asked, “Think about (last month): Which of these statements best describes how much money you will have left over at the end of (that month)? The response options included “Some money left over,” “Just enough money to make ends meet,” and “Not enough money to make ends meet.” We create two dummy variables to capture different dimensions of financial scarcity: an indicator for

“not enough money” to make ends meet (24.3 per cent of our sample), which corresponds to Mullainathan and Shafir’s definition of scarcity, and an indicator for having “some money left over” (24.6 per cent of our sample) to assess the role of what we here call a “sufficient” mindset for attention. When these are used in our regression analysis, the omitted group is therefore those who indicated having “just enough money” to make ends meet.

Loneliness. Participants were asked “How often do you feel lonely these days?” and were asked to choose between “never”, “sometimes”, “often”, and “all the time.” 67 per cent said “never,” 24 per cent said “sometimes,” 5 per cent said “often,” and 3 per cent said “all the time.” We create a dummy variable for loneliness with a value of 1 for parents who said “often” or “all the time,” and 0 otherwise. Our main results do not change if we instead define this variable to also have a value of 1 for parents who report “sometimes” feeling lonely. Our preferred specification is based on wanting to identify the impact of relatively high levels of loneliness, which we think is not likely captured by “sometimes” feeling lonely, especially in the context of a pandemic.

Covariates

Our selection of covariates was guided by the need to preserve degrees of freedom while at the same time addressing the “third variable problem” i.e., controlling for observed measures that might be correlated with a parent’s financial scarcity or loneliness and affect the likelihood of missing information sent from the school to the home. We therefore controlled for whether the parent had internet access, a college education, and the family size.

No Internet. This is a dummy variable with a value of 1 if participants said they did not have consistent access to internet at home (9.9 per cent of the sample). We speculated that parents' financial scarcity might affect their ability to afford internet service and that the internet was a potential means of delivering information and possibly helping to maintain or foster social connections.

Education. This is a dummy variable with a value of 1 if the participant said they had "Some college" or more education, and 0 otherwise. In our sample, 41.4 per cent had some education beyond high school. We speculated that parents' education is inversely correlated with their financial scarcity and that better-educated parents might be more likely to attend to information sent to them from their child's school. Other research shows that people with lower education are at higher risk of being lonely (Bu et al., 2020).

Family Size. This indicates the self-reported number of adults and children (combined total) living in the participant's household. The average family size in our sample was 4.7. We speculated that family size is positively correlated with financial scarcity, negatively correlated with loneliness (insofar as it offers greater access to social connections) and that larger households might demand more attention from the parent, making it more challenging to attend to information sent to them from their child's school.

Missing Data

Each survey question included an option for "I don't know" and one for "Prefer not to answer." We count either of these responses from a participant as missing data. Most missing data values were "Prefer not to answer." However, Table 2 shows that for

most of our variables, there was little to no missing data. For instance, there were no missing observations for our outcome variable (inattention) and education. There was only one missing observation for the internet and family size variables. For our primary independent variable, we had values for 321 out of the 345 observations. We performed multiple imputation (using the variables for which there were no missing observations) following the code and method outlined in Stata User Guide¹ to impute missing values. This gives us an analytic sample size of 345 for each variable. Our results were qualitatively similar when running the analysis with or without imputation.

Results

Descriptive Results

The first panel of Table 1.1 shows the proportion of schools that provided each type of information. All schools provided information on accessing meals whereas only 82 per cent of the schools provided information on childcare. The second panel shows the proportion of parents who said they did not receive information (if their school said they did) for each of the seven categories of information. Very few parents reported not receiving information about meals whereas 43 per cent reported not receiving information about childcare. The inattention rate is highest for childcare and stress management information. Table 1.2 shows how many instances of inattention parents had out of seven possible. The distribution has a right skew; the modal parent has no inattention whereas one-third of the parents have 2 or more instances of inattention.

(Table 1.1 about here)

(Table 1.2 about here)

¹ <https://www.stata.com/stata11/mi.html>

Tables 2 shows the descriptive statistics for our study variables. The mean inattention rate was 21 per cent, implying that on average parents missed 21 per cent of the information schools said they sent. The binary variable “inattention” indicates that 57 per cent of the sample missed information for at least one category. Twenty-four per cent of families reported a “financial scarcity mindset” (not having enough money left over) and an equal share reported having a “sufficient mindset” (some money left over). As noted, 8 per cent of this sample is lonely often or all the time.

(Table 2 about here)

Regression Results

Our main results use the following OLS Regression, interpreted as a linear probability model, to estimate the relationship between inattention and resource scarcity:

$$I_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 F_i + \beta_2 M_i + \beta_3 L_i + \alpha X_i + \gamma_j + \varepsilon_i$$

Where I_i is the inattention indicator for individual i , F_i is the financial scarcity indicator (not enough money left over), M_i is the indicator for those who had money left over, L_i is the indicator for loneliness, X_i is the vector of covariates (internet access, education, and family size), and γ_j is the school fixed effect for school j . We control for school fixed effects to ensure that results are not being driven by a particular school. Our primary parameters of interest are β_1 and β_3 .

The estimate for this regression is shown in Table 3. The first two columns only consider financial scarcity and loneliness on their own respectively (with controls included), and the third column includes both variables together. The magnitudes and

statistical significance for both financial scarcity and loneliness do not change when the other variable is included and are approximately equal. That is, experiencing loneliness or financial scarcity increases inattention by 16 percentage points.

(Table 3 about here)

Table 4 shows the same regressions as Table 3, except with the outcome (inattention) specified as a continuous variable. This “inattention rate” is defined as the total number of pieces of information missed by that parent, divided by the number of pieces of information provided by their school (seven for most parents; six or five for the rest). The results are qualitatively similar, implying that our results are not being driven by the dummy specification of the outcome.

(Table 4 about here)

To further explore how financial scarcity and loneliness relate to inattention, we sorted participants into four mutually exclusive categories: those with neither financial scarcity nor loneliness, those with just financial scarcity, those with just loneliness, and those with both financial scarcity and loneliness. 71 per cent of the sample had neither financial scarcity nor loneliness, 21 per cent had financial scarcity without loneliness, 6 per cent had loneliness without financial scarcity, and 2 per cent experienced both financial scarcity and loneliness. The share of inattention in each of these groups is, respectively, 51 per cent, 69 per cent, 70 per cent, and 83 per cent. This is visually displayed in Figure 1. We also ran a regression model with an interaction term between loneliness and financial scarcity, and its coefficient was a precise zero. This pattern of

results underscores that financial scarcity and loneliness are largely independent phenomena and have roughly equivalent impacts on inattention.

(Figure 1 about here)

Discussion

This study contributes to a literature on the psychological effects of scarcity on attention using data from a real-world setting. Evidence from prior studies suggests that scarcity impairs cognitive capacity and executive functions, inducing a lack of cognitive attention (Mani et al., 2013; Haushofer & Fehr, 2014; Kaur et al., 2021; Lichand & Mani, 2020). We show how subjective perceptions of financial scarcity and loneliness affect parents' attention to information provided to them to help alleviate the consequences of the initial COVID-19 school closures. We find that parents exhibiting a financial scarcity mindset and those who report feeling lonely often or all the time are significantly more likely to miss information sent to them from their child's school about helping to find childcare, slow the spread of the virus, manage stress, access the internet, navigate online learning, and the like. Although we cannot measure the consequences of inattention to this information, parents may have missed out on the chance to pursue opportunities to relieve the very scarcity they were experiencing.

Our results suggest that feelings of financial scarcity and loneliness are independent phenomena and have roughly equivalent impacts on inattention. The chance of missing information rises by 63 per cent when parents experience both financial scarcity and loneliness, though it should be noted this is characteristic of only a small

share of parents in our sample. From a policy perspective this is important because it may be easier to reduce parents' feelings of loneliness than it is to reduce their feelings of financial scarcity. But it should also be noted that half of this sample misses information even when they are neither experiencing financial scarcity nor loneliness. To address the main policy goal of reducing inattention researchers need to identify the myriad other reasons besides feelings of resource scarcity that predict inattention, such as information overload, information irrelevance, information not actually getting to the individual, and so on.

Our data have strengths and limitations. Our measure of inattention is arguably objective and derived from a real-world circumstance. However, a weakness is that we cannot be certain of the causal linkages between resource scarcity and inattention because, unlike other studies (e.g., Lichand et al., 2018), we did not manipulate or "prime" individuals' feelings of scarcity but rather collected these data in a survey. The trade-off in this instance between external and internal validity is unclear.

Nonetheless, this survey data has provided some insights that lab experiments do not. For instance, our survey design allows for the possible conclusion that the association between resource scarcity and inattention endures over a meaningful length of time in the real world. Lab experiments typically prime, e.g., financial worries and ask respondents to attend to information or make a behavioral choice in the same moment. This has the effect of shutting down other channels through which scarcity might affect attention (such as through cognitive capacity, executive control, or stress) which is both an advantage and a disadvantage. Our survey data, which captures a longer time frame, allows us to see that scarcity is associated with inattention to at least some extent through

other mechanisms, which may have accumulated over time in this low-income population and increased even more after the onset of the pandemic.

These results also have practical implications. For instance, efforts to induce behavior change, including parental investments in children, often focus on providing information. Why is information not enough? A large literature discusses why people fail to act on information even when they attend to it because of present bias and other cognitive biases (Mayer et al., 2019). But if people do not even attend to information (as it was provided) when they are experiencing scarcity, suboptimal behavioral choice will remain a problem. Of course, a major tenet of behavioral science is that information alone is rarely enough to motivate behavior change. But it may be a necessary first step. Thus, different policy instruments may be needed for conveying information in the service of motivating behavior change.

There are three components to communication: (1) How information is sent; (2) Whether information is attended to; and (3) Whether information is acted on. In this paper we examined the second of these components and find that scarcity reduces the chance that information, however sent in this context, is attended to. To understand why information is not sufficient to promote action, we need to understand all three components and how they act together. For instance, do some forms of communication overcome inattention? How can institutions or practitioners can seek ways to make communication more salient? We do not know for example whether the information preschools sent to parents was done so in paper form, via email, or via SMS. We also do not know whether the information was sent once or multiple times. Many studies in behavioral science show how modifying the decision environment through the design and

presentation of information (in modality, frequency, and appearance) affects whether the information captures individuals' attention and prompts behavior change (Castleman, 2015; Allcott & Rogers, 2014; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009; World Bank, 2015). These results are highly relevant so long as information remains a primary vehicle for inducing behavior change.

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Table 1.1

Inattention Variable Description

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Given Info: Meals	345	1.00	0.00	1.00	1.00
Given Info: Online Learning	345	0.95	0.21	0.00	1.00
Given Info: Accessing Internet	345	0.94	0.23	0.00	1.00
Given Info: Prevent Virus Spread	345	0.94	0.23	0.00	1.00
Given Info: Social Services	345	0.94	0.23	0.00	1.00
Given Info: Stress Management	345	0.84	0.37	0.00	1.00
Given Info: Childcare	345	0.82	0.38	0.00	1.00
Inattention: Meals	345	0.07	0.25	0.00	1.00
Inattention: Online Learning	329	0.04	0.20	0.00	1.00
Inattention: Accessing Internet	325	0.23	0.42	0.00	1.00
Inattention: Prevent Virus Spread	325	0.09	0.29	0.00	1.00
Inattention: Social Services	325	0.25	0.44	0.00	1.00
Inattention: Stress Management	289	0.40	0.49	0.00	1.00
Inattention: Childcare	283	0.43	0.50	0.00	1.00

Note: The “Given Info” variables represent the proportion of parents who attended a school where the administrator claimed to give parents that category of information. The “inattention” variables represent the proportion of parents who said they did not receive that type of information, for schools that claimed to provide that type of information. Categories with a sample size of less than 345 are due to some schools reporting that they did not provide that category of information.

Table 1.2
Distribution of Instances of Inattention

Instances	N	Per cent
0	149	43%
1	72	21%
2	45	13%
3	40	12%
4	22	6%
5	13	4%
6	1	0%
7	3	1%

Note: The N represents the total number of parents in our sample (out of 345) who had the respective number of instances of inattention (out of seven total).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics Study Variables

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Inattention Rate	345	0.21	0.24	0.00	1.00
Inattention	345	0.57	0.50	0.00	1.00
Scarcity Mindset	321	0.24	0.43	0.00	1.00
Sufficient Mindset	321	0.25	0.43	0.00	1.00
Lonely	336	0.08	0.27	0.00	1.00
No internet	344	0.10	0.30	0.00	1.00
Family size	344	4.70	1.69	1.00	11.00
Some college or more	345	0.41	0.49	0.00	1.00

Note. All but Inattention Rate and Family Size are dummy variables. The mean for these dummy variables represents the proportion with a value of 1. Observations less than 345 indicate missing data.

Table 3

OLS Regression Results of Inattention on Financial Scarcity and Loneliness

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Inattention	Inattention	Inattention
Scarcity Mindset	0.160** (0.0667)		0.158** (0.0665)
Sufficient Mindset	-0.0314 (0.0700)		-0.0277 (0.0705)
Lonely		0.173* (0.0944)	0.166* (0.0938)
No Internet	0.120 (0.0844)	0.187** (0.0804)	0.125 (0.0835)
Some College or More	0.0670 (0.0573)	0.0714 (0.0577)	0.0682 (0.0572)
Family Size	-0.00574 (0.0162)	0.00505 (0.0160)	-0.00328 (0.0164)
Observations	345	345	345
School FE	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. Scarcity Mindset and Sufficient Mindset are mutually exclusive dummies for parents who reported “not enough money” and “money left over” respectively, and parents who have “just enough money left over” is the omitted group.

*** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1

Table 4

OLS Regression Results of Inattention Rate on Financial Scarcity and Loneliness

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Inattention Rate	Inattention Rate	Inattention Rate
Scarcity Mindset	0.0673** (0.0330)		0.0662** (0.0325)
Sufficient Mindset	0.000720 (0.0329)		0.00309 (0.0331)
Lonely		0.109* (0.0562)	0.107* (0.0554)
No Internet	0.0143 (0.0393)	0.0400 (0.0380)	0.0177 (0.0388)
Some College or More	-0.00565 (0.0270)	-0.00278 (0.0266)	-0.00488 (0.0269)
Family Size	-0.0124 (0.00822)	-0.00779 (0.00818)	-0.0109 (0.00821)
Observations	345	345	345
School FE	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note. Robust Standard errors are in parentheses. The outcome variable, Inattention Rate, is defined as the number of pieces of information missed by the parent divided by the total number provided by the school (seven in most cases). *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

Figure 1
Inattention Rate by Financial Scarcity and Loneliness

