

The Effect of Sleep, Fatigue, Caffeinated and Alcoholic Beverages on Unethical Decision-Making

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There is an increasing prevalence of unethical behavior and decisions in the corporate sector. The present study adopts psychological and neurocognitive perspectives to explore the effect of sleep, fatigue, and beverages on unethical decision-making at work. Given that low sleep decreases prefrontal cortex activity, and high fatigue depletes self-regulatory resources, I argue that both pathways lead to unethical decision-making. Since caffeine and alcohol influence prefrontal cortex activity, I argue that caffeinated and alcoholic beverages have direct and moderating effects on unethical decision-making. I test the hypotheses using a secondary sample comprising of 171 nurses from a large medical center (Christian and Ellis, 2011). Results from the study suggest 1) a significant positive relation between fatigue and unethical decision-making, 2) a significant positive relation between alcohol and unethical decision-making, 3) caffeine significantly moderates the effect of sleep on unethical decision-making and 4) alcohol significantly moderates the effect of fatigue on unethical decision-making. The study holds strong practical implications for the workplace, where managers can implement corrective and preventive measures to reduce unethical decision-making.