

## Writing down thoughts, discarding them helps to neutralize anger: Japan study

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NAGOYA -- Feeling angry? You may be able to neutralize that emotion by jotting down your thoughts on a piece of paper and then throwing it away or shredding it, according to a recent study by Japanese researchers.

Researchers including Nobuyuki Kawai, a professor of cognitive science at Nagoya University's Graduate School of Informatics, objectively demonstrated this anger-calming technique in a study published on April 9 in the British journal *Scientific Reports*.

Around 100 students took part in the study. First, they rated five states of anger -- angry, bothered, annoyed, hostile, and irritated -- on a scale of 1 to 6 to form a baseline "anger score."

Next, they were told to write essays on a given theme. In feedback on the essays, they were harshly evaluated with the insulting comment, "I cannot believe an educated person would think like this. I hope this person learns something while at the university." Following this, their anger scores were measured again, and it was found the scores increased for all participants.

The candidates were then asked to write as objectively as possible about their emotions on a sheet of paper. After this, one group of students was told to crumple up the paper and throw it in the trash, while another group was asked to place it in a clear plastic folder and keep it. When their anger scores were measured again, the figures for those who had discarded the paper returned close to their baseline level, falling below the scores for those who had kept the papers.

In a separate experiment, one group shredded the pieces of paper describing their feelings while another group retained them in a clear box. In the same way, the anger scores of those who had shredded the paper returned closer to the baseline level compared to those in the retention group.

A similar anger-calming method has long been employed during the "Hakidashi-zara" ritual at Hiyoshi Jinja, a shrine in Kiyosu, Aichi Prefecture. In this ritual, people write feelings they want to discard on a plate, which they then smash on the shrine grounds. It is said that this enables them to get rid of those feelings. The latest study provides objective evidence for the effectiveness of this method.

Kawai commented, "It seems that when something that a person put their thoughts into is broken, those feelings also disappear." He added, "When people feel anger at home or work, writing about it on a piece of paper and discarding the paper could help them control that anger and build smoother relationships with others."

In the future, the researchers plan to investigate whether similar effects can be achieved by writing and discarding angry feelings in electronic form.

(Japanese original by Shinichiro Kawase, Nagoya News Center)

