

Title: Factorial construct validity of the Reasons for Misfortune Questionnaire (RMQ)

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Abstract: The factor structure of the Reasons for Misfortune Questionnaire (RMQ; Higgins, 1992), which assesses attributional style for others' negative outcomes, was examined in two separate studies (Study 1 N = 424; Study 2 N = 381). Three distinct, reliable, and cohesive factors emerged indicating clear support for the attributional dimensions of Personal Controllability, External Control, and Stability.

Supporting Summary: Recent experimental research on individual differences in causal attributions about others corroborates the attributional model of helping behavior (Weiner, 1985), and has revealed that an "unsupportive attributional style" (i.e., explaining others' negative outcomes with causes controllable by the victim) is a "risk factor" for victim neglect (Higgins & Shaw, 1999) and for harsher treatment decisions (Higgins, Lundquist, & Prkachin, 2001; Lundquist, Higgins, & Prkachin, 2002). For example, in an experiment on people's reactions to pain patients undergoing physiotherapy, subjects with an "unsupportive attributional style" were more sympathetic and helpful to pain patients if physical evidence was present but were more punitive (choosing a harsher treatment) if there was no physical evidence. Subjects with a "supportive attributional style" were more sympathetic and helpful to pain patients. Notably, all participants quite accurately detected patients' pain levels from videotaped facial displays, but accurate detection of pain did not guarantee unbiased reactions toward the pain patient (Higgins, et al., 2001; Lundquist et al., 2002).

In another study, a field experiment, undergraduates with an unsupportive attributional style were less likely than students with the opposite style to lend their class notes to a fellow student who needed them (Higgins & Shaw, 1999).

More studies investigating unsupportive and supportive attributional styles are needed to understand the role of these styles as a risk factor for victim neglect or callousness in caregiver-patient interactions, and in compensation and therapy decisions.

The Reasons for Misfortune Questionnaire (RMQ; Higgins, 1992) was developed to examine individual differences in people's attributions about the negative outcomes of others, and it is currently the only person-perception attributional style questionnaire that exists. Demonstration that the RMQ's attributional dimensions possess factorial construct validity is an important step in further investigation of the RMQ's psychometric properties and the role of unsupportive and supportive attributional styles in helping behavior.

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