

Reactions to victimizations of other people exemplified by severe cases of cancer: The influence of just-world- and control beliefs - Abstract

Victims of severe strokes of fate (such as unemployment, traffic accidents, severe illness) often have to suffer additionally from derogation and isolation, accusations and reproaches of self-infliction by other people („blaming-the-victim“-phenomenon). What motivates people to bother victims instead of helping them? Two motives have been discussed. (1) By blaming the victims observers want to maintain control and the illusion that a similar fate could not happen to themselves (defensive attribution hypothesis). (2) By blaming the victims observers want to maintain their belief in a just world in which everybody gets what he/she deserves (just world theory). Both hypotheses have never been tested comparatively. Moreover, belief in control and belief in justice are related to each other and the instruments for their assessment are often very similar. In a questionnaire study on attitudes to cancer with 326 subjects it was shown that belief in a just world went along with blaming victims but without leading to a feeling of security. Belief in control was associated with invulnerability illusions without making a detour through blaming the victims. Despite their interrelations, belief in control and belief in justice could be differentiated in a meaningful way. Besides, different variants of belief in control and of belief in justice could be demonstrated with their differential effects.