

What Happened to the Perpetrator? The Role of Perpetrator's Outcome in Victim Blaming

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The Just World Theory (JWT) states that in a fair world, good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people[1] affecting one's ability to make judgments and victim-blaming. Here, in order to test how blame was perceived and assigned to victim(s), 92 students (58F, 33M, 1NB) were randomly assigned to one of three conditions based on the perpetrator's outcome (C0, no outcome; C1, perpetrator apprehended; C2, perpetrator got away). Participants read through several crime narratives, rated the level of blame associated with the victim(s) (7-point Likert-scale), selected emotions they felt towards the victim, and answered JWT questions[2]. Interestingly, participants expressed more sadness, sympathy, and empathy toward the victim, when the outcome of the perpetrator was uncertain than in C2 and C1. In order to test whether holding JWT beliefs predicts victim-blaming, we performed a linear regression on all conditions. The regressions for C0 and C1 were significant (C0: $p = 0.043$, $R^2 = 0.125$, $F = 4.442$; C1: $p = 0.024$, $R^2 = 0.450$, $F = 5.828$), whereas C2 was not ($p = 0.572$). We found that there was a correlation between VB and JWT when the situation was uncertain similar to prior research[3]. However, victim-blaming also increased in situations where the perpetrator got apprehended: more research needs to be conducted to examine why that was the case (e.g., the Defensive Attribution Hypothesis[4]). Although there is much work on VB, little is known about whether and how emotions influence VB. Understanding this relationship may contribute to fundamental theoretical debates about the psychological mechanisms mediating VB.

References:

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