

AUTHOR Muller, Robert T.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Several investigations have demonstrated that individuals tend to blame the victims of personal misfortune. However, few studies have been conducted to determine the dimensionality of the victim blame construct. Previous research has distinguished between two kinds of self-blame: behavioral and characterological. Individuals may blame themselves for having engaged in a certain activity. Alternatively, an individual may blame him/herself for being the kind of person he/she is. Prior research has assumed that victim blame in the cases of rape is separate and distinct from victim blame in other areas, such as child abuse. This study investigated the dimensionality of the victim blame construct using college undergraduate subjects (N=897) enrolled in introductory psychology at Michigan State University. Subjects were administered child abuse and rape attitude surveys. It was hypothesized that the multidimensionality of victim blame would be corroborated. Specifically, it was asserted that blame directed toward child abuse victims and blame directed toward rape victims would emerge as separate constructs. Additionally, it was proposed that behavioral and characterological components of victim blame would emerge as distinct factors. The results did not support these hypotheses. Instead, the data were consistent with a hierarchical measurement model. That is, a global victim blame construct emerged with child blame and rape blame as specific factors. Both behavioral and characterological victim blame also appeared to stem from a more global victim blame construct. (Author/ABL)

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The Construct Dimensionality of Victim Blame:
The Situations of Physical Child Abuse and Rape

Robert T. Muller, Robert A. Caldwell, & John E. Hunter

Michigan State University

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Robert T.
Muller, Department of Psychology, Psychology Research Building, Michigan State
University, East Lansing, MI, 48824.

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Abstract

The dimensionality of the victim blame construct was investigated on 897 undergraduates. Subjects were administered child abuse and rape attitude surveys. We hypothesized that the multidimensionality of victim blame would be corroborated. Specifically, we asserted that blame directed toward child abuse victims and blame directed toward rape victims would emerge as separate constructs. Additionally, we proposed that behavioral and characterological components of victim blame would emerge as distinct factors. The results did not support these hypotheses. Instead, the data were consistent with a hierarchical measurement model. That is, a global victim blame construct emerged with child blame and rape blame as specific factors. Both behavioral and characterological victim blame also appeared to stem from a more global victim blame construct.

Several investigations have demonstrated that individuals tend to blame the victims of personal misfortune (e.g., Lerner, 1980; Ledray, 1986). However, few studies have been conducted to determine the dimensionality of the "victim blame" construct. Janoff-Bulman (1979) distinguished between two kinds of self-blame; behavioral and characterological. Individuals may blame themselves for having engaged in a certain activity. Alternatively, an individual may blame him/herself for the kind of person s/he is. Janoff-Bulman (1979) found behavioral self-blame to be typical of rape victims and characterological self-blame to be typical of depressed persons.

Prior research has assumed that victim blame in the case of rape is separate and distinct from victim blame in other areas, such as child abuse. Several scales have been developed which assume specificity of these constructs. For example, Ward's (1988) Attitudes Toward Rape Victims Scale was designed to measure unfavorable or unsupportive attitudes toward rape victims. Similarly, Deitz, Blackwell, Daley, and Bentley (1982) developed an empathy scale specific to the rape situation.

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the dimensionality of the victim blame construct. Based on prior research, we suggested that victim blame would be a multidimensional construct. More specifically, we hypothesized the following:

(1) Behavioral and characterological components of victim blame would emerge as distinct factors.

(2) Blame directed toward rape victims and blame directed toward victims of child abuse would also emerge as separate and distinguishable constructs.

Method

Subjects. Participants consisted of 897 college undergraduates (Mean age = 19.3) enrolled in introductory psychology at Michigan State University.

Materials and Procedure. The Child Abuse Scenarios Questionnaire (CASQ) is a multidimensional measure of victim blame developed for this study. The questionnaire consists of 8 scenarios of child abusive situations. On a Likert scale, subjects indicate the extent to which they view the child victim as responsible for the event. The items were constructed so as to reflect the dimensions of behavioral and characterological facets of victim blame. An additional dimension, abuser justification, was also reflected in item construction.

The Attitudes Toward Rape Victims Scale (ARVS) (Ward, 1988) is a 25-item questionnaire designed to tap unfavorable dispositions toward rape victims with special emphasis on those attitudes which reflect disbelief, denigration, and trivialization of the effect of rape on victims. Subjects indicate on an intensity scale the extent of their agreement with each attitudinal statement. Reliabilities have ranged from .80 (test-retest) to .86 (Cronbach alpha) (Ward, 1988).

In order to test for parallelism of constructs (a test of construct dimensionality), several questionnaires were included which were expected to differentially correlate with each of the relevant constructs under investigation. These were: (a) the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (Straus, 1989), a measure of childhood experience of parental aggression; (b) the Self-Derogation Index (SDI) (Muller, 1990), a measure of self-blame; (c) the I, P, and C (locus of control) scales (Levenson, 1981); (d) the Just-World Scale (Rubin &

Peplau, 1973), a measure of the extent to which individuals endorse just-world beliefs; (e) the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) (Davis, 1983), an empathy measure; and (f) the Duncan Socio-economic Index (SEI) (Hauser & Featherman, 1977), a measure of socio-economic status. All of the above questionnaires were group administered. Subjects were informed of their right to decline participation.

Results

Several earlier researchers (e.g., Hunter & Gerbing, 1982) have suggested that in order to conclude that a scale is structurally unidimensional, the correlations among the items should be consistent with two product rules. These are internal consistency and external consistency (parallelism). If the correlations among the items within a cluster form a Spearman Rank 1 matrix, they are said to be internally consistent. Items are externally consistent if their correlations with all variables outside the cluster are directly proportional to one another (Hunter, Gerbing, & Boster, 1982). In order to analyze the measurement model of this study, the estimation procedure used was a multiple-groups confirmatory factor analysis, calculated using PACKAGE (Hunter & Cohen, 1969).

On the Child Abuse Scenarios Questionnaire (CASQ), the criteria of unidimensionality (internal consistency and parallelism) were achieved for each of the three clusters (behavioral child blame, characterological child blame, and abuser justification), although one item was rejected from the abuser justification subscale on the grounds of both internal and external consistency. The factor loadings on the subscales ranged from: .59 to .82 (Cronbach alpha = .97) on behavioral child blame; .66 to .83 (alpha = .97) on characterological child blame; and .53 to .76 (alpha = .95) on abuser

justification.

In order to test the dimensionality of the CASQ subscales, a second-order confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. In this procedure, the 3 subscales were treated as 3 items. Results indicated that the subscales met the second-order criteria of both internal consistency as well as parallelism to outside constructs. This indicated a higher order "total child blame" factor (Cronbach alpha = .91). The subscales loaded onto this factor as follows: .97, .88, and .79 for behavioral, characterological, and abuser justification respectively (see figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here

On the basis of content, four subscales were derived from the Attitudes Toward Rape Victims Scale (ARVS). These were items which reflected the beliefs that rape victims were: (a) lying, (b) overly provocative, (c) sexually desiring rape, and (d) sexually experienced. The cluster solutions were sought by repartitioning the items until the criteria of unidimensionality were achieved for each of the 4 subscales (alpha = .75, .57, .62, .57, for scales a to d respectively). A second-order factor analysis indicated that the four subscales were both internally consistent as well as parallel to one another, indicating a higher order "total rape blame" scale (Cronbach alpha = .87). The factor loadings on this higher order factor were .80, .60, .97, and .81 for the four subscales (see figure 1).

The final test of dimensionality was conducted as follows. The correlations of the total child blame factor with outside constructs were compared to the correlations of the

total rape blame factor with outside constructs. Results indicated parallelism between these two factors, indicating a still higher order "victim blame" factor. The correlation between the two factors was .48. Thus, child blame and rape blame factors each loaded onto the overall victim blame factor at $r = .70$ (see figure 1).

Discussion

The results do not corroborate our expectation that the victim blame construct is a multidimensional one. Instead, the results are consistent with a hierarchical measurement model of victim blame. There appears to be single global victim blame factor, perhaps reflective of a more general victim blame personality construct. As a consequence of this overall factor, victim blame may manifest itself in specific situations, such as in rape or child abuse. This seems to run counter to earlier investigators (e.g., Deitz et al., 1982; Ward, 1988) who assumed a multidimensionality to the expression of victim blame. Thus, investigating individual differences in the expression of "rape empathy" (e.g., Deitz et al., 1982) may not be so pertinent as examining factors that lead to differences in the manifestation of victim blame attitudes in general.

It also appears that the global victim blame factor accounts for the manifestation of the three kinds of victim blame discussed above: behavioral, characterological, and abuser justification. This finding calls into question the relevance of the distinctions suggested by Janoff-Bulman (1979). It is instructive to note that Janoff-Bulman's research was conducted on a clinical population (rape victims and depressed persons). For non-clinical populations, it may be more accurate to view victim blame more globally.

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FIGURE 1

