



**Finnish Institute of
Occupational Health**

Self-defensive attributions in the Finnish and Ghanaian work environment

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Attributions

- Explanations for the events in everyday life
- Started by Heider 1958 "The psychology of interpersonal relations"
- Different opinions even about basic concepts
- The hypothesis of divergent perspectives: "there is a pervasive tendency for actors to attribute their action to situational requirements, whereas observers tend to attribute the same actions to stable personal dispositions" (Jones & Nisbett, 1971, p. 80).

Defensive attribution hypothesis

Walster (1966) showed that an accident victim would be assigned increasing responsibility for his/her accident as its severity increased.

Literature reviews slightly confirmed this hypothesis

Shaver (1970) defensive attribution hypothesis: need to protect oneself directs the reactions of an observer of an accident towards the victim of an accident.

Personal similarity lessened the observer's attribution of responsibility

Later studies have confirmed the defensive attribution hypothesis: people think primarily their own situation, to avoid feeling guilty more important than to find reasons

Studies on defensive attribution

- Critic: simulated or dramatizations of accidents
- Kouabenan: French telecommunication workers
- witness attribute to victims and victim to bad luck
- Salminen: serious occupational accidents in Finland
- victims explained accidents by external factors like lack of safety training in the company, whereas supervisors thought that victims had deviated from the normal way of work

AIM

- To compare the responses of Finnish and Ghanaian industrial workers' causality and responsibility assignments for occupational accidents
- In line with the self-defensive hypothesis, victims of accidents were assumed to use more external attributions than co-workers and supervisors

METHODS

- A total of 564 participants of industrial accidents
- Finland: 72 victims, their 87 closest co-workers and 92 foremen
- Ghana: 120 victims, their 111 co-workers and 82 foremen
- Interview by the same questionnaire translated from Finnish to English

Victims' opinions

Item	Finnish %, n=64	Ghanaian %, n=95
Was victim's work dangerous?	56	64
Could he/she behave in another way?	60	41
Did he/she perceive the danger?	24	37
Were the hazards adequately signed?	66	56
Had accidents happen previously?	22	65
Did he/she follow safety rules?	88	97

Co-workers' opinions

Item	Finnish %, n=74	Ghanaian %, n=94

Was victim's work dangerous?	31	62
Could he/she behave in another way?	69	36
Did he/she perceive the danger?	32	39
Were the hazards adequately signed?	72	60
Had accidents happen previously?	23	60
Did he/she follow safety rules?	75	83

Supervisors' opinion

Item	Finnish %, n=82	Ghanaian %, n=76

Was victim's work dangerous?	52	49
Could he/she behave in another way?	69	51
Did he/she perceive the danger?	37	74
Were the hazards adequately signed?	72	82
Had accidents happen previously?	23	63
Did he/she follow safety rules?	72	42

Discussion

- Ghanaians used more external attributions than Finns
- One explanation is religion:
- Finns are Christians: everyone is responsible about their own acts and their consequences
- In Ghana people are Christians, but also Muslims and supporters of Traditional Nature Faith

Religions in Ghana

- A republic in Western Africa, population 20 million

Christians	67%
Muslims	18%
Traditional Nature Faiths	10%
Others: Buddhist, Shintoist	5%

The Protestant Work Ethic

The Islamic Work Ethic

both emphasize hard work, responsibility, commitment

Material

- 311 Ghanaian from three biggest cities
- 65% males, 35% females
- $\frac{3}{4}$ workers and $\frac{1}{4}$ supervisors
- textile and wood processing industries, breweries and saw mills
- interviewed 10-12 minutes during lunch breaks

Religious affiliation by education

Education	Christians %	Muslims %	Traditionalists %	Other %
Basic	35	33	25	7
Secondary	35	24	29	12
Vocational	71	12	9	8
University	88	12	0	0

External attributions by religion

Causal factors	Christians	Muslims	Traditionalists
Low wage	3.24	3.61	3.86
Time trouble saving	4.07	4.43	4.04
Curse/witchcraft	2.47	3.66	3.92
Religious beliefs	2.52	3.75	3.93

Organizational Citizenship Behavior

OCB	Christians	Muslims	Traditionalists
Total	74.14	66.70	65.51
Obedience	20.49	18.92	18.83
Loyalty	26.19	23.14	22.90
Participation	27.45	24.64	24.03

POS, job satisfaction, WSS and accidents

Item	Christians	Muslims	Traditionalists
Perc.organiz.support	28.45	23.12	22.15
Job satisfaction	3.51	3.11	2.90
Work Safety Scale	154.09	146.17	147.68
Accidents	1.55	2.17	2.16

Conclusions

- Christians had higher values than Muslims and supporters of Traditional nature faiths
- Christians are higher educated and perhaps more Western culture oriented
- The measures are mostly developed in the USA

Danke schön!

Selected references

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