

Abstract

This article examines the effect of perceived similarity on reducing unrealistic optimism about illness threats. Two hundred and forty six undergraduates were sampled in the Chinese University of Hong Kong. All subjects Hong Kong Chinese of which 102 are males and 104 are females. The study consisted of three parts: an elicitation survey and two experiments with different manipulations of similarity. Hypotheses were developed primarily based on the cognitive approach. Biases were explained in terms of the biased use of cognitive heuristics. The elicitation aimed at surveying relevant information of the target population for subsequent manipulation of similarity. The two experiments were designed to provide possible debiasing interventions. The results confirmed a causal role of perceived similarity and partially supported a cognitive explanation about its effect on risk perception. Suggestions were made on the designing of effective public health campaign.