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AN EXPERIMENTAL INVESTIGATION ON THE PERCEPTION OF DEPRESSION AMONG THE PUBLIC

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Studies on beliefs regarding mental disorders take an interest in the question what beliefs about the causes are prevalent among the public. Studies using case vignettes concluded that lay beliefs about the causes of mental disorders clearly differ from the results of psychiatric research in view of the fact psychosocial factors are predominating in comparison with biological factors (Angermeyer & Dietrich, 2006). The aim of the present study is the evaluation of the impact of causal labels (biological/genetic, psychological/environmental or cause unknown), sex of the person described in a case vignette and sex of the participants on the perception of depression. The sample consists of 312 non-clinical participants (47.10% men, 52.90% women; mean age \pm SD: 29.17 \pm 12.76) who are not involved in mental health settings. To identify participants' attitude towards depressive patients the experimental design of Lam et al. (2005) was modified and adjusted. A three way ANOVA was conducted to examine effects of causal labels, type of case vignette and sex of the participants on the attitude towards depressed patients. Simple main effects analysis only showed a significant main effect concerning sex of the participants ($F=5,148$, $df=1$, $p=0,024$). The results of the current study suggest that in comparison to men, women believe that depressive patients are more affected by the symptoms of the disorder. Neither the information about the aetiology of the disorder, nor sex of the person described in the case vignette seems to have an impact on the beliefs of the participants.