

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED THREAT/RESPONSIBILITY AND REASSURANCE-SEEKING BEHAVIOR IN ADULTS IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined the relationship between perceived threat/responsibility and reassurance-seeking behavior. Grounded in cognitive-behavioral theory, the study proposed that inflated responsibility beliefs and threat appraisals contribute to excessive reassurance-seeking behavior. A cross-sectional correlational research design was used, and data were collected from a sample of 300 adults (18-30) using a convenient sampling technique. Standardized self-report measures were administered to assess perceived threat/responsibility, and reassurance-seeking behavior. The results indicated a significant positive relationship between perceived threat/responsibility and reassurance-seeking behavior. The findings support cognitive-behavioral models of anxiety. The study contributes to a better understanding of cognitive mechanisms underlying reassurance-seeking behavior and suggests important implications for cognitive-behavioral interventions targeting anxiety-related processes in adults.

I. INTRODUCTION

Emotional People use several strategies to control their emotions when they feel uncertain or stressed. These coping mechanisms can become powerful and affect relationships and daily choices. Adults who experience prolonged worry or heightened sensitivity to danger often show reassurance-seeking behavior. This behavior is a key factor in anxiety-related disorders (Foa & Kozak, 1986). Research indicates that, in both clinical and non-clinical adult groups, this behavior maintains anxiety cycles and encourages dependency, even though it offers temporary relief (Parrish & Radomsky, 2010). Two strong factors linked to increase reassurance-seeking are perceived threat and responsibility. Individuals who feel accountable for preventing harm or negative outcomes are more inclined to check and seek reassurance to lessen their sense of danger (Salkovskis, 1996). According to Salkovskis (1996), perceived threat and responsibility describe a person's belief that they are responsible for preventing harm, danger, or negative results. They feel that failing to act could lead to serious consequences for themselves or others. Individuals who believe strongly in their responsibility often view regular situations as more dangerous, urgent, and personally significant than they really are. This idea has been widely studied in relation to anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder (Rachman, 1997). These individuals tend to overestimate the likelihood of danger and their ability to affect potential outcomes. As a result, even vague or low-risk situations can trigger intense guilt, fear, or pressure to act. The few research that are now available have looked at how relationship familiarity affects

real reassurance seeking (Neal & Radomsky, 2015) and how responsibility affects cravings to seek reassurance (Parrish & Radomsky, 2006, 2011).

In 2006, Parrish and Radomsky discovered that individuals who were informed that their performance on a color-sorting task would be used to develop a pill dispensing protocol for a Third World pharmacy, for example, reported much more urges to seek reassurance than those who were informed that the task was for basic research (Parrish & Radomsky, 2006). When asked to describe how they would behave in written situations that suggested greater responsibility, HR participants in another trial showed much higher needs to seek reassurance (Parrish & Radomsky, 2011). One of the most important models for comprehending how maladaptive responsibility beliefs contribute to the emergence and maintenance of anxiety and obsessive-compulsive behaviors is Salkovskis Cognitive Model of Responsibility (1996). According to this model, people who believe they have a direct and significant role in preventing harm, that acting improperly was result in negative outcomes, and that they were be personally responsible if such outcomes occur develop inflated or dysfunctional responsibility appraisals (Salkovskis, 1996). These ideas lead to a cognitive bias wherein even neutral, unclear, or insignificant thoughts are seen as extremely important and maybe harmful. The model's main idea is that these safety behaviors are key to maintaining the anxiety cycle. For instance, when someone seeks reassurance, the quick drop in anxiety reinforces the belief that reassurance is necessary to prevent harm or reduce danger (Salkovskis & Warwick, 1986).

This ultimately increases the person's perceived need for approval from others, makes them more dependent on people, and prevents them from challenging their views about threats. As a result, rather than being a transient reaction, reassurance-seeking turns into a recurrent and obsessive coping mechanism. Excessive reassurance seeking has been defined in a number of ways, from general behavioral definitions like "direct verbal requests for the repetitive provision of old information" (Salkovskis, 1985) to definitions that take into account the motivational elements believed to underlie excessive reassurance seeking in particular psychological disorders. The persistent need for safety-related information even after receiving it is known as excessive reassurance seeking (Kobori, Salkovskis, Read, Lounes, & Wong, 2012; Parrish & Radomsky, 2010; Rachman, 2002; Salkovskis, 1999). Overt, repetitive, direct queries (such as "Do you think these dishes are clean enough?") might be used to seek reassurance. Are you certain? Subtle remarks such as "its fine for us to leave our house and go on our trip now without checking for our passports again" are examples of covert reissuance seeking. or "You saw me clean it properly, so it must be safe for me to give our child a drink from this bottle"; Neal & Radomsky, 2015; Parrish & Radomsky, 2010; Rachman & Hodgson, 1980. Reassurance seekers may eventually experience social issues as their behavior becomes highly ritualized and takes over interpersonal relationships (Kobori & Salkovskis, 2013; Salkovskis, Forrester, Richards, & Morrison, 1998).

Salkovskis' Cognitive-Behavioral Model gives us a useful way to understand how people develop and maintain reassurance-seeking behaviors in anxiety disorders. This model sees reassurance seeking as a kind of safety behavior that isn't really helpful, mainly stemming from unhealthy attitudes about responsibility, how we assess danger, and the wish to avoid harm. When people have exaggerated views of their responsibilities, they tend to interpret intrusive thoughts, vague signals, or uncertain situations as threats that are both dangerous and personally important. This way of thinking can heighten emotional distress, especially anxiety and guilt, which then pushes individuals to seek reassurance to feel safer and more certain about their circumstances (Salkovskis, 1996). This theory suggests that seeking reassurance isn't just a random act but part of a bigger mental cycle. People don't just see doubts or intrusive thoughts as normal; they interpret these feelings as serious red flags indicating danger. This kind of thinking ramps up anxiety, creating a sense of urgency to prevent harm. So, individuals turn to others for reassurance like validation or safety tips to manage that anxiety. Although this can provide quick emotional relief, it also reinforces the belief that danger is always lurking and that they need outside confirmation to avoid bad outcomes. Because of this, seeking reassurance gets a sort of negative reward, making it more likely that people were do it again in the future (Salkovskis & Warwick, 1986; Rachman, 2002).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The examination of the cognitive and emotional mechanisms that lead to the manifestation of reassurance seeking behavior is vital in gaining an extensive knowledge of its genesis and maintenance. These are the concepts and

associations between perceived threat/responsibility, and reassurance seeking behavior that are discussed in the research currently being published. In particular, emphasis is made on how anxiety-related behaviors among adults may be influenced by maladaptive cognitive appraisals of threat and responsibility. Through the creation of these conceptual links, a systematic way of explaining the linkages among the variables in the research can be formed.

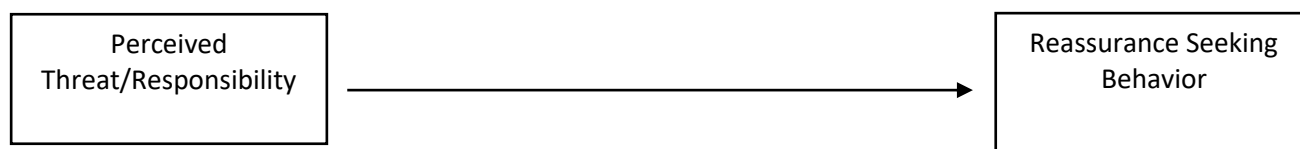
Perceived Responsibility/Threat and Reassurance Seeking

There is a strong connection between high perceived responsibility and amplified perception of threat and reassurance seeking behavior. Unclear thoughts and intrusive thoughts are more prone to be viewed as serious threats and immediately confirmed by individuals with high perceptions of their own personal responsibilities to prevent any injury or negative outcomes. Cognitive theories suggest that responsibility assessments were make neutral and ambivalent stimuli appear to be immediate danger warnings, increasing anxiety levels and motivating reassurance seeking as a way to correct the problem. As Salkovskis (1996) and Rachman (2002) state, reassurance seeking is an interpersonal safety response mechanism that only temporarily reduces the pain but prevents the confirmation of the false beliefs connected to the threat and perpetuates anxiety in the long run. Negative reinforcement and cognitive evaluation processes provide the most mechanistic explanation for the link between responsibility and reassurance seeking. People with strong responsibility views become more anxious and fearful of unfavorable consequences when they encounter intrusive doubts or unclear circumstances. In the near term, seeking comfort from others lessens this suffering, which detrimentally reinforces the behavior and raises the possibility that it may recur in similar circumstances in the future. The underlying responsibility views and the dependency on outside validation are strengthened over time by this reinforcement loop, which leads to interpersonal dependence and recurring reassurance-seeking behaviors (Parrish & Radomsky, 2010; Rachman, 2002).

Theoretical Framework

Following The responsibility-threat theory of Salkovskis (1996), which outlines the mechanisms by which dysfunctional beliefs about the perceived threat and personal responsibility to manage the threat result in anxiety reactions, forms the framework for the current study. According to the responsibility-threat theory, the development of anxiety is due to cognitive assessments of possible threats and the individual's own sense of responsibility to prevent adverse outcomes rather than a response to environmental events. The magnification of personal responsibility prompts individuals to perceive intrusive thoughts, non-threatening events, or unclear situations as meaningful warning signs that there are future threats, necessitating the need for proactive behavior to stop anything bad from happening. Under this perspective, people display behaviors aimed at gaining reassurance, which serve as a coping mechanism that employs extreme measures of safety. Although it may offer temporary relief from stress, it inadvertently perpetuates the problem by relying on external factors for security and fails to allow any refutations of their threatening beliefs. Empirical studies show that although reassurance seeking offers temporary relief from distress, it causes a person to develop further tendencies to engage in such behaviors in the long run, hence leading to a cycle of anxiety perpetuation (Parrish & Radomsky, 2010; Kobori et al., 2012).

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



Rationale

Anxiety-related cognitive processes play a central role in shaping how individuals interpret and respond to uncertainty, perceived threat, and potential negative outcomes in everyday life. Among these processes, heightened perception of threat, inflated responsibility beliefs, and reassurance-seeking behavior are considered key cognitive factors that contribute to the development and maintenance of anxiety-related difficulties. Reassurance-seeking behavior refers to repeated efforts to obtain confirmation, validation, or certainty from others in order to reduce distress and alleviate doubts. Although this behavior may provide temporary relief,

extensive research indicates that it often becomes maladaptive by reinforcing dependence on external validation and maintaining cycles of anxiety over time (Parrish & Radomsky, 2010; Halldorsson et al., 2021). Therefore, the present study is designed to address this gap by examining the relationship between perceived threat/responsibility and reassurance-seeking behavior among adults. By integrating cognitive-behavioral theory with contemporary empirical findings, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the cognitive vulnerability processes underlying reassurance-seeking behavior. The findings are expected to contribute to the existing literature by clarifying how intolerance of uncertainty influences the strength of the relationship between perceived threat/responsibility and reassurance-seeking, thereby offering valuable implications for psychological assessment and cognitive-behavioral interventions targeting anxiety-related behaviors.

Objective

- To examine the relationship between perceived threat/responsibility and reassurance seeking behavior.

Hypotheses

- There will be positive relationship between perceived threat/responsibility and reassurance-seeking behavior in adults

III. METHOD

Participants

The present study followed cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships between perceived threat/responsibility, reassurance-seeking behavior. Data was collected through convenient sampling technique; 300 young adults (18-30) will participate in present study. The sample of the present study was consisted of approximately 300 participants of both gender including male and female who meet the inclusion criteria. Participants were recruited from different universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Convenient sampling procedure was used to collect the data. Adults aged 18–30 years. 2) Able to provide informed consent. Participants currently undergoing psychological treatment.

Measures

[I] Responsibility Attitude Scale (Salkovskis, 1996): Measures perceived responsibility and threat-related cognitions consisted of 26 items. Single-factor scale assessing personal responsibility beliefs. 7-point Likert scale (0 = totally disagree, 6 = totally agree). Total score was calculated by summing all items; higher scores indicate stronger inflated responsibility beliefs. Cronbach's alpha reported between $\alpha = .90$ in adult sample (Salkovskis, 1996). **[II]** Reassurance-Seeking Scale (Rector et al., 2011): Assess extent and frequency of reassurance-seeking behaviours consisting of 30 items. 5-point Likert scale (0 = never, 6 = always). Scores are calculated by summing responses to all 30 items, with higher scores on the scale indicating higher levels of reassurance-seeking behavior. First subscale decision making items 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22 uncertainty about decisions. Second subscale social attachment items 4, 5, 8, 9, 21, 23, 2, and 30 measures attachment and security of relationship. Last subscale general threat items 1, 2, 3, 6, 24, 25, 26, 27 and 29 measures perceived general threat and anxiety. Cronbach's alpha 0.86 (Rector et al., 2011) indicates good reliability.

Procedure

The university's Institutional Review Board gave the researcher permission to do the research before they started collecting data. The researcher also got permission from the people who made the standardized scales to use them for the research via email. Once the researcher had all the permissions they met with the people who were going to be part of the research. The researcher explained what the research was about and what it was for. They also gave them a form that said it was okay to stop participating at any time without getting in trouble. This form was given to them in writing. The researcher also explained it to them in person. The people who were part of the research were given codes so their answers could be kept private. The researcher promised that all the data would be kept safe and only used for the research. The data was stored in files that only the researcher and their supervisor could access. When the researcher gave the questionnaires to the participants it was in a room where they could focus. The researcher followed all the rules that the university's Institutional Review Board said they had

to follow. The participants were told that their answers would be kept secret and that they could stop participating at any time.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were observed during all stages of the research. Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was granted by the appropriate Institutional Review Board (IRB) or ethics committee in the respective department. Study participants were briefed on the objectives and general nature of the research and provided written informed consent prior to taking part in it. Participation was voluntary, and it was explained to participants that they could terminate their involvement at any point in time without any punishment or adverse repercussions. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were ensured by assigning them codes rather than their real names or any other identifying data. It was explained to participants that their responses would be utilized solely for academic and research purposes and that their answers would be presented in aggregated form. The data collected were securely stored and accessed exclusively by the researcher and research staff members.

IV. RESULTS

The current study investigated the relationship between adult's reassurance-seeking behavior and perceived threat/responsibility. All analyses were performed using IBM SPSS (Version 27). Descriptive statics and reliability analysis were used to evaluate the psychometric qualities of the study variables, and mean scores and standard deviations are calculated to look at the distribution of the variables. The associations between perceived threat/responsibility, and reassurance-seeking behavior were investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation analysis. Confidence intervals for the interaction effect were estimated using bootstrapping techniques with 5,000 resamples. For every statistical analysis, a significance level of $p < .05$ was applied.

Table I: Descriptive Statistics and psychometric Properties of study variables

Variables	<i>k</i>	M	SD	Range		<i>S</i>	<i>Ku</i>	α
				Actual	Potential			
Responsibility attitude	26	102.60	7.51	26-128	88-126	.80	.10	.69
Reassurance Seeking Behavior	30	79.86	22.65	30-150	30-115	-1.06	.67	.94
Decision Making	13	34.13	10.10	13-65	13-48	-.91	.03	.90
Social Attachment	08	21.60	6.26	8-40	8-32	-.95	.06	.74
General Threat	09	24.13	7.92	9-45	9-40	-.26	.17	.86

Note. *k* = No of items, *M* = Mean, *S* = Standard Deviation, *S* = Skewness, *ku* = Kurtosis, α =Corhenban's Alpha Reliability

The research variable's psychometric qualities and descriptive statistics are displayed in Table 1. Reassurance Seeking Behavior and Responsibility Attitude Scale had the highest mean scores among the participants. All of the variable's skewness and kurtosis values were within an acceptable range, suggesting that the data had a normal distribution. There were no significant differences in the replies, since the actual score ranges matched the possible ranges. All scales exhibited acceptable to high internal consistency, according to reliability analysis, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .69 to .94. Reassurance Seeking Behavior and Decision Making had the highest dependability, whereas RAS, was still within an acceptable range, had the lowest reliability.

Table II: Pearson Product Bivariate Correlation among study variables (N = 300)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Responsibility attitude	-	.25**	.28**	.26**	.16**
2. Reassurance Seeking Behavior		-	.94**	.95**	.90**
3. Decision Making			-	.86**	.72**
4. Social Attachment				-	.82**
5. General Threat					-

** $p < .01$

The Pearson product bivariate correlations between the research variables are shown in Table 2. From the results, it is clear that there was a significant positive correlation between responsibility attitudes and reassurance seeking, showing that people with high responsibility attitudes seek reassurance more often. Also, responsibility attitudes had significant positive correlation with decision making, social attachment, and threat. Additionally, the behavior of seeking reassurance had a significant positive correlation with each of its subscales. All the subscales also had significant positive correlation among themselves, which means that the areas of decision making, social attachment, and perceived threat are all correlated with the behavior of seeking reassurance.

V. DISCUSSION

The current study looked at the connection between Pakistani adult's reassurance-seeking behavior and their perception of threat/responsibility. The responsibility-threat model of anxiety (Salkovskis, 1996), it was specifically predicted that people with higher degrees of perceived danger and responsibility would be more inclined to act in a reassurance-seeking manner. The study used a cross-sectional correlational research methodology and used standardized self-report questionnaires to gather data from 300 young adults in Pakistan. IBM SPSS (Version 27) was used for statistical analysis. The results were intended to advance knowledge of the cognitive vulnerability mechanisms that underlie anxiety-related behaviors, specifically how adult populations' perceptions of danger and responsibility and reassurance-seeking behavior are influenced by intolerance of ambiguity.

Discussion of Hypothesis

According to the study's first hypothesis, adults' reassurance-seeking behavior and perceived danger or responsibility would be positively correlated. This hypothesis was validated by the bivariate correlation analysis results, which showed there is a statistically significant positive correlation between reassurance-seeking behavior and responsible attitudes. This implies that reassurance-seeking activities were more common among those who reported feeling more accountable for preventing injury. This result is in line with cognitive-behavioral theories of anxiety, which postulate that people who have inflated responsibility beliefs overestimate threat and use safety behaviors, including seeking reassurance, to lessen their discomfort (Salkovskis, 1996; Rachman, 2002). These models suggest that people who believe they are personally responsible for averting unfavorable consequences feel more urgency and anxiety, which makes them more dependent on outside reassurance sources to deal with uncertainty and perceived risk. This link is supported by an increasing amount of empirical data. Increased perceived responsibility has been shown in experiments to increase the desire for reassurance and to participate in checking activities (Radomsky, Rachman, & Hammond, 2001). In a similar vein, Parrish and Radomsky (2006) discovered that, in contrast to low-responsibility situations, those exposed to high-responsibility conditions exhibited noticeably stronger reassurance-seeking inclinations. According to other studies, reassurance-seeking frequency and intensity are positively correlated with responsibility views in both clinical and non-clinical populations (Kobori & Salkovskis, 2013; Parrish & Radomsky, 2010).

Furthermore, reassurance seeking has been found to be a major sustaining element in anxiety-related disorders, especially in those with high perceptions of danger and responsibility (Abramowitz, Schwartz, & Whiteside, 2002; Salkovskis & Warwick, 1986). In an attempt to dispel uncertainty, these people constantly look for confirmation; unfortunately, this conduct perpetuates reliance on outside validation and prevents danger beliefs from being disproven. This leads to a maladaptive loop that eventually strengthens both reassurance-seeking behavior and responsibility attitudes (Lohr, Olatunji, & Sawchuk, 2007). The process of negative reinforcement might potentially account for the positive relationship found in this study. Reassurance seeking enhances the probability that the activity was be repeated in future circumstances involving perceived threat or uncertainty when it momentarily lowers anxiety. Over time, both exaggerated responsibility ideas and reassurance-seeking inclinations remain due to this reinforcement loop. Overall, the results strongly support the first hypothesis and are in line with previous theoretical and empirical research, indicating that adults' reassurance-seeking behavior is significantly predicted cognitively by perceived danger and responsibility. In the current research, the link between perceived threat/responsibility and reassurance-seeking behavior among young adults has been assessed. Data were collected from 300 adults between 18 and 30 years of age in a cross-sectional correlational design study. It has

been found that there was a significant positive correlation between perceived threat/responsibility and reassurance-seeking behavior.

VI. CONCLUSION

In the current research, the link between perceived threat/responsibility and reassurance-seeking behavior among young adults has been assessed. Data were collected from 300 adults between 18 and 30 years of age in a cross-sectional correlational design study. It has been found that there was a significant positive correlation between perceived threat/responsibility and reassurance-seeking behavior. These results imply that people with higher personal responsibility and greater perceived potential threat might tend to perform the reassurance-seeking behavior more often. Such a result is compatible with the cognitive-behavioral theory that predicts that higher responsibility and higher perceptions of potential threat might increase people's anxiety and thus cause them to seek safety through such behavior. Although reassurance might help to alleviate feelings of anxiety and uncertainties, continuous seeking of external validation might perpetuate doubts and keep this vicious circle alive (Salkovskis, 1985; Salkovskis & Warwick, 1986; Rachman, 2002). The empirical studies have also shown that perception of responsibility might lead to reassurance-seeking behavior (Parrish & Radomsky, 2006). In summary, this research adds to knowledge regarding the cognitive characteristics that affect reassurance seeking behaviors among adults. First, it emphasizes the need for interventions aimed at correcting maladaptive responsibility beliefs and appraisals of threat. Interventions can be focused on assisting individuals to assess their perceived responsibility appropriately, increase tolerance for uncertainty, and decrease their dependency on reassurance. It is also necessary to conduct future research that will be longitudinal and experimental in order to test temporal and causal relationship between perceived responsibility and reassurance seeking behaviors. It is recommended to employ a large sample size in future research.

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