

Healthcare Deservingness: How Risk Factors and Income Shape Responsibility Attribution for Health Outcomes and Healthcare Costs

Amidst the global surge in healthcare expenditures, there is a growing political and academic debate about individual responsibility for health and healthcare costs. This study explores the causal effects of health risks and income group cues on citizens' attribution of responsibility for health outcomes and healthcare costs to the sick. An original vignette experiment was fielded among the German population (n= 6,018). Sick people who have been exposed to environmental, institutional, or biological health risks are held less responsible for their health outcomes and healthcare costs than those with behavioural health risks. Furthermore, higher-income groups are more likely to be blamed for their health outcomes and are considered less deserving of society's help in paying for medical treatment. These findings elucidate how risk controllability and economic need simultaneously shape citizens' attribution of responsibility in the healthcare domain.