

The effect of causal attributions of child disruptive behaviour on parental reactions and advice seeking

Katerina Maniadaki & Efthymios Kakouros

Causal attributions about child disruptive behaviour have been found to mediate the association between child behaviour and the parent's response. The present research sought to explore a range of causal attributions parents form about a hypothetical child displaying disruptive behaviour and these attributions' relationship to specific parental responses and choice of professional or non-professional advice seeking.

The sample consisted of 317 mothers and 317 fathers of children aged 4-6. The participants completed "The Parental Account of the Causes of Childhood Problems Questionnaire" (PACCP; Sonuga-Barke & Balding, 1993), adapted to examine parental attributions of Disruptive Behaviour Disorders displayed by a child described in a vignette. Two sections, describing possible parental reactions and sources of advice seeking were added. A between-subjects design was used, with two versions of the PACCP: one presenting a male and one presenting a female vignette.

Results revealed that causal attributions were centred upon three categories: causes stemming from the child, the parents or the environment. Slight differences were revealed according to the child and the parent sex. Moreover, causal attributions were found to guide parental responses and referral practices, with causes stemming from the child warranting professional advice seeking significantly more frequently compared to the other two categories.

The contribution of parental causal attributions to the outcome of child disruptive behaviour is discussed. Emphasis is given to the necessity of including the change of erroneous parental attributions about child disruptive behaviour as a primary therapeutic goal in cognitive-behavioural interventions.