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Do expectations for causal patterns differ between domains? Studying physical, biological and psychological events across cultures

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Abstract

Fundamental theories of causal cognition suggest that causal inferences are guided by domain-specific knowledge in addition to domain-general strategies used to draw causal conclusions. In particular, a divide seems to exist between causal judgments on physical versus psychological events. In line with these assumptions, domain-specific expectations of causal patterns have been observed for psychological and physical events in a US-American context. The present study intended to augment these findings by integrating (a) a cross-cultural perspective and by including (b) biological events as part of an additional domain. Results replicated previous findings of domain-specific causal expectations in German and Turkish cultural contexts, but at the same time they indicated causal expectations for the biological domain to be partially less distinct.