

The Perception of Social Harm

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Abstract

When assessing an ambiguous social situation, people rely on similar events that come to mind to judge potential harm. This study investigates the influence of social safety policies on the perception of harm in ambiguous social situations, focusing on the moderating role of the availability heuristic. Ambiguous situations in this study are defined as those open to different interpretations. Using a vignette-based experimental design, 176 participants were randomly assigned to either a control group or an experimental group. The experimental group was exposed to a fictional social safety campaign. They were shown two workplace vignettes and asked to evaluate these ambiguous scenarios. Participants' perceptions of harm were measured after reading the two workplace vignettes. The availability heuristic was assessed through personal experiences, social network, and media exposure. Results indicated that the social safety policy did not influence the perception of harm in ambiguous situations. The moderating effect of the availability heuristic between the social safety policy and harm perception was non-significant. Even though the study did not show a moderation effect, it underscores the complexity of how social safety campaigns and personal experiences shape harm perception in social interactions.

The Perception of Social Harm

People are regularly exposed to various safety regulation in different environments, such as educational institutions, where they are often encounter policies addressing bullying, discrimination and intimidation. The primary purpose of social safety initiatives is to create a safer social environment and to increase awareness of both personal and collective behavior (Wang et al., 2020). However, failing to establish social safety can lead to social unrest among individuals and undermine social cohesion within institutions, potentially resulting in social instability (Wang et al., 2020). However, social situations can be ambiguous, leads to multiple interpretations ranging from perceiving them as harmful to not harmful (Keage & Loetscher, 2018). When interpreting a situation, people tend to rely on past experiences to judgements, a process known as the availability heuristic. This cognitive shortcut uses easily recalled information and is often a source of people's fear about certain harms, as these experiences are more salient (Sunstein, 2006). Despite extensive research on the perception of harm, the has been less examination of harm perception related to ambiguous social situations.

Theoretical Foundation

To examine the perception of harm in social ambiguous situation, the social amplification of risk framework is used (Wang et al., 2020). The social amplification of risk framework aims to explain how risks are perceived, interpreted and amplified within the society. It focusses on the distribution of information about risk event and the societal response mechanisms that follow (Mase et al., 2015). According to this framework, direct experience, media and social networks are driving forces in transferring risk information (Mase et al., 2015). When it comes to an ambiguous social situation, the lack of clarity can lead to multiple interpretations. Utilizing information systems derived from direct experiences can result in a harmful interpretation of the ambiguous situation (Wang et al., 2020). The

exposure to social safety policies, can make people aware of certain harms, depending on the aim of the policy (Gainsburg & Earl, 2018). As per the social amplification of risk framework, this activation can trigger the risk information system to perceive the event as harmful (Wang et al., 2020). The concept harm perception is complex and multifaceted that encompasses attitudes, beliefs, and both affective and cognitive components (Coleman, 1993). How individuals perceive social safety is a subjective affective or emotional response on the evaluation of social harm and social vulnerability (Wang et al., 2022). When evaluating a situation, people often rely on readily available examples of similar events to assess the level of harm (Efendić, 2021). This is when the availability heuristic comes at play, when assessing for harm.

The availability heuristic is often the source of people's fears about certain harm. If a particular harm is cognitively "available", both vivid and salient, people will then have a heightened fear of the harm in question (Sunstein, 2006). When making harm judgements, relying on similar events that come to mind is known as the availability heuristic. (Efendić, 2021). The recall of similar events can be through direct or indirect experiences. Availability heuristic of direct experiences, are the individual's own personal experiences. The availability heuristic of indirect experiences is exposure through one's social network, which is by interpersonal communication (Mase et al., 2015). Another form of indirect experience is the media, which plays a crucial role as the primary conductor for information transmission (Niu et al., 2022). In the media, the salience of information is key to capturing the audience's attention, which can cause for an ease in recall of these event (Pachur et al., 2012). Due to the combined influence of interpersonal communication and media, people are continuously exposed to social harm (Niu et al., 2022).

To examine the role of social safety policies on the perception of harm, this paper addresses the following research question: "How does exposure to social safety policies in

organizations influences the perception of harm, when taking into account the availability heuristic". Out of this research question, the following hypothesis emerges. The first hypothesis posits that the availability heuristic is a moderator in the relationship between the exposure to social safety policies and the perception of harm. This includes both direct and indirect experiences. Specifically, individuals who can easily recall similar events, heightens the relationship between the social safety policy and the perception of harm. The second hypothesis is that the availability heuristic of direct experience causes a higher perception of harm compared to indirect experiences as social network communication and the media. This because direct experiences are typically more affect-laden and vivid compared to indirect experiences.

The Perception of Harm

How people perceive harm is a key factor in affecting people's perception of social safety (Wang et al., 2022). The social amplification of risk framework states that there are all sorts of social amplification stations, such as institutions managing risk. This can be in the form of a social safety campaign (Mase et al., 2015). These messages of social safety play a crucial role in shaping behavior by influencing how individuals perceive harm and make decisions (Keage & Loetscher, 2018). Exposure to these messages is essential in persuasion, which often determines whether behavior change occurs (Vos et al., 2018). Other sources for the transfer of information are interpersonal communication and the media, which is particularly efficient in distributing information (Wang et al., 2020). Effective communication about harm frequently utilized fear appeals to promote protective behaviors, focusing on both the perceived susceptibility and severity of the harm (Vos et al., 2018). This aims to evoke emotional responses that can intensify the perception of harm. Another significant influences on the perception of harm is the experience of actual harmful events. According to the social amplification of risk framework, these experiences contribute to the systematic diffusion of

harmful information in the amplification station (Wang et al., 2022). Recalling and utilizing related events is known as the availability heuristic.

The Influence of the Availability Heuristic on Harm Perception

The availability heuristic serves as a cognitive shortcut that individuals often rely on when assessing for harmful situation (Keller et al., 2006). When faced with complexity, time or resource constraints, people tend to use heuristics automatically rather than engaging in more deliberate and systematic analysis (Mase et al., 2015). The availability heuristic highlights the impact of vivid and recent examples of harm, influencing perceptions of the likelihood and severity of such situations (Mase et al., 2015). When assessing the situation for harmful information, it depends on the information systems being used. According to the social amplification of risk framework, these information systems can include the media and social networks (Wang et al., 2022). In Keller et al. (2006) study on flood risk perception, participants who recalled vivid images related to floods tended to perceive the risk as greater compared to those who did not recall such images. This illustrates how the availability heuristic, based on direct experiences, leads to an increase in the perception of harm due to the salience of specific examples. People rely on direct experiences more than statistical data when evaluating harmful situations (Keage & Loetscher, 2018). Both direct and indirect experiences can heighten the perception of harm, but direct experiences are often more emotionally impactful and vivid compared to the indirect experiences.

Differences in Direct and Indirect Experiences

A distinction of the availability heuristic can be made between direct and indirect experiences. Examining these differences is crucial in understanding how people perceive harm (Pachur et al., 2012). Direct experience refers to personal encounters or exposures to specific harms, whereas indirect experience typically involves exposure through media, hearsay, or second-hand information (Pachur et al., 2012). Direct experience provides

individuals with firsthand knowledge and emotional engagement with harm, which can profoundly impact how people assess the likelihood and severity of harmful situations. These experiences are more affective-laden and vivid, which can cause for the heightened perception of harm in social situations (Pachur et al., 2012). For individuals without direct personal experience, interpersonal communication and the media are used to assess the situation. The interpersonal communication highlights the influence of social context on people's harm assessments (Keage & Loetscher, 2018). Meanwhile, the media has become a primary source of harmful information, significantly shaping the perceptions of harm (Wang et al., 2022). It plays a crucial role in transferring information and shaping societal views on what people perceive as harmful (Niu et al., 2022). In contrast to direct experiences, indirect experiences through interpersonal communication and the media, may lack the depth compared to personal experience (Pachur et al., 2012). Understanding these distinctions is essential for comprehending the nuanced mechanisms that underlie harm perception. Especially now, the media has become the primary source for transferring information.

Media as a Primary Information Source

The media acts as a social amplification station that allows risk information to reach a wider audience within minutes (Wang et al., 2020). The impact of media content on harm perception remains complex and multifaceted (Sjöberg, 2000). The internet serves as a social platform for interaction, information sharing, and social participation. It is believed that the information transmitted through media can amplify the social harm. This is because the media exacerbates the public perception of social harm, contributing to a sense of insecurity in the society (Wong et al., 2022). Media exposure often heightens the perceived harm levels, as frequent exposure can lead individuals overestimating the likelihood of certain harm (Sjöberg, 2000). The availability heuristic involves both the number of recalled instances and the ease with which they come to mind. Media plays a crucial role in this process by bringing specific

incidents to the forefront of public awareness, thereby influencing what individuals perceive as prevalent harm (Efendić, 2021). By highlighting certain events over others, the media shapes the availability of information that individuals use to evaluate the perception of harm. The availability heuristic involves recalling relevant events through direct and indirect experiences. To examine moderation effect of the availability heuristic, this study uses both direct experiences, and the indirect experience of social network and the media.

Method

Participants

The ethical committee of the Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences approved the study at the University of Groningen. For the purpose of this study, 6 bachelor thesis students collected data together in one Qualtrics questionnaire, where all 6 bachelor students performed the same study, however each focusing on a different moderator. The survey was administered through an online form on Qualtrics, with the responses collected in English. The participation in the study was entirely voluntary, with participants having the freedom to decline or withdraw from the study at any time. Informed consent was obtained at the beginning of the study. The participants were recruited through personal networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn, where the questionnaire was posted with a uniform message, and through Prolific, using funding allocated to the thesis group by the faculty. Participants were told that the study intended to examine how people perceive different kinds of workplace interactions, and how individual differences or personality characteristics influence those perceptions. Upon completing the survey, participants were debriefed and were given a chance to reflect on their participation in the study. They were also asked to indicate if they confirm their consent, or if they prefer to rescind it. They were also assured about the confidentiality of their responses. In total 176 participants were recruited, which contains of 85 women, 88 men and three preferred not to identify themselves. Upon looking at the data,

two participants were eliminated from the study for various reasons. The moderation analyses were done with 174 participants. In the survey there were three check questions to see if the participants were reading the question. There were 10 participants who had < 2 of the check questions correct.

Research Design & Procedure

The study employed an online vignette-based experimental design with two conditions, a control condition and an experimental condition. The participants were allocated either to an experimental or a control group at random. The control group was not exposed to any stimuli, while the experimental group was exposed to a social safety campaign. The purpose of it was to look at the difference in the perception of harm between the groups. By making it an online experimental design made it easier to recruit a larger number of participants. The survey in both groups included the same two vignettes, that described ambiguous work place situations. With the ambiguity of the situation it is open for multiple interpretations, which can be on a spectrum of harmful to a not harmful interpretation. The choice to display two vignettes was to increase the external validity for the measurement of the perception of harm over two different ambiguous situations. The main goal was to see if there is a difference in the perception of harm of the two vignettes based on the exposure to a social safety campaign.

Social Safety Campaign. The participants of the experimental group were primed with four different posters of a fictional social safety campaign, the control condition was not exposed to this fictional social safety campaign. The aim of the posters was to make the participants aware of social harm that come from words and make them feel responsible when they witness behavior that looks harmful. A short introductory text invited participants to take a close look at the posters and imagine that the campaign had been launched by their organization or institution. The posters were designed in the typical square format of

Instagram posts, as social media platforms are a realistic channel that institutions use to spread social safety campaigns. The layout of the fictitious campaign is inspired by the "Just Ask" poster campaign launched by the University of Groningen in April 2023 (University of Groningen, 2023). The slogans stand out in white lettering against a red background, which gives them a warning appearance at first glance. The aim of the campaign is to make people aware of the potential harm that may arise from social interactions ("Words can hurt"; "Didn't mean it?") and to define organizational norms of behavior ("Stand firm, speak out"; "Don't ignore the signals"). The two posters pointing out the potential harm of social interactions contain speech bubbles with examples of interactions that can be hurtful even without malicious intent. This makes it clear to the recipient which ambiguous forms of harmful behavior the campaign is targeting. The key message here is that harm can result from verbal interactions and that the assessment of this interaction can vary among individuals. The other two posters entail standards of behavior and direct calls to action, with the aim to make individuals feel responsible when recognizing and to address inappropriate behavior. They were also asked to briefly summarize the main message of the campaign in the designated place. Participants in both experimental and control conditions were then showed two workplace vignettes.

Vignettes. Two workplace vignettes were created in which the social harm is meant to be ambiguous. Choosing to develop two vignettes increases the external validity as it allows for the examination of harm perception on two different scenarios. The vignettes were designed as WhatsApp messages to increase the authenticity of real-life digital interactions. WhatsApp is a very popular message exchange platform and it's very likely that the participants are familiar with it. This contributes to making the vignettes more relatable and realistic. It also makes the vignettes accessible for a broader population. Both vignettes are based on workplace issues that should be familiar to most participants. Themes such as (in)appropriate

workplace compliments and inclusion or exclusion in the workplace are intended to touch upon themes that participants are very likely to have been exposed to already. This ensures familiarity and increases the chance of getting genuine responses. Several components have been incorporated into the vignettes to optimize ambiguity in both. Firstly, the vignettes were designed in a way that leaves room for interpretation. For instance, the outfit vignette was about a conversation between a manager and a team member. In the conversation the simple reply ‘right’ was added as a last statement to create an open-ended conclusion. This way, the participants are invited to make their own conclusions about how harmful the behavior in the vignette is. Secondly, through the use of WhatsApp messages, participants are not able to read body language and facial expressions. This way participants are required to rate intent and tone from text alone. Furthermore, the vignettes have been designed in a way that the harm is not overly explicit. For example, the WhatsApp group vignette was about the interaction among four employees, who work together at a large consultant firm. The exclusion is communicated casually, which could be perceived as either innocent or as deliberate exclusion of this person. Lastly, gender-neutral names were included in both vignettes to lessen the effect of gender bias on the participants responses and to simplify the study’s design.

Measurements

After familiarizing themselves with each vignette, participants were instructed to answer a set of questions measuring; moral outrage, intention to punish the perpetrator, perceived severity of the harm inflicted on the teammate, personal-organizational value congruence, and availability heuristic. This paper specifically focusses on the perception of harm and the availability heuristic.

Severity of Harm. Respondents were asked how much harm they thought the person in each vignette experienced by rating it on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ‘no harm at all’ to 6 ‘a great deal of harm’.

Availability Heuristic. The measuring of the availability heuristic in the study involved three specific question, each answered using a 7-point Likert scale. Participants were asked: first, have you seen/experienced a similar situation as the one described in the story above? Second, do you recall instances of a similar situation in the media? Third, do you recall instances of a situation similar to the one described above from your own social network? These questions aimed to gauge the accessibility of information related to the described situation through (1) direct exposure through personal experience, and (2) indirect exposure via media channels and within one’s social network. Participants rated their responses on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree to not at all) to 7 (strongly agree or very much). This method for availability heuristic allows to assess how readily available similar events come to mind, influencing their perceptions of the described harm scenario. For the first hypothesis, which posits that the availability heuristic moderates the relationship between the exposure to social safety policies and the perception of harm. The items measuring the availability heuristic will be combined into a single scale. For the second hypothesis, which suggests that the availability heuristic of direct experience lead to a higher perception of harm compared to indirect experiences of one’s social network and the media, these types of experiences will be used as separate items.

Results

For the analysis I used SPSS 28. The descriptive statistics of the two vignettes are presented in Table 1 and Table 2. The WhatsApp group vignette shows a higher mean for the perception of harm compare to the outfit vignette. This suggests that participants perceived the WhatsApp group vignette as more harmful than the outfit vignette. Additionally, the

availability heuristic item related to the media shows a relative higher mean compared to the other two items of the availability heuristic (direct experience and social network). This could indicate that the media serves a more prominent information source compared to the other availability items.

Table 1

WhatsApp Group Vignette Descriptives

Condition		n	M	SD
Control	Perception of harm	90	5.10	1.48
	Availability heuristic experience	90	2.72	1.49
	Availability heuristic media	89	3.38	1.56
	Availability heuristic social network	89	2.54	1.49
	Valid N (listwise)	88		
Social Safety	Perception of harm	84	5.20	1.29
	Availability heuristic Experience	84	2.45	1.24
	Availability heuristic media	83	3.40	1.47
	Availability heuristic social network	84	2.63	1.21
	Valid N (listwise)	83		

Note: for the measurement of the perception of harm a 6-point Likert scale is used and for the availability heuristic a 7-point Likert scale is used.

Table 2

Outfit Vignette Descriptives

Condition		N	M	SD
Control	Perception of harm	90	3.03	1.75
	Availability heuristic experience	90	3.00	1.57
	Availability heuristic media	89	3.76	1.65
	Availability heuristic social network	90	2.91	1.64
	Valid N (listwise)	89		
Social Safety	Perception of harm	83	3.37	1.73
	Availability heuristic experience	83	2.93	1.68
	Availability heuristic media	82	3.85	1.76
	Availability heuristic social network	83	2.66	1.54
	Valid N (listwise)	82		

Note: for the measurement of the perception of harm a 6-point Likert scale is used and for the availability heuristic a 7-point Likert scale is used.

A moderation analysis is conducted to examine the relationship between the social safety campaign and the perception of harm, with the availability heuristic as a moderator. For the moderation analysis there are the model assumptions for linearity, homoscedasticity of residuals, independence of the residuals, normality of the residuals, outliers and multicollinearity. To assess these assumptions, the results of the perception of harm and the availability heuristic for both vignettes were put in a histogram to assess the results. The histogram revealed that the results were skewed, due to the Likert scale that was used for the measurements. This visualization provided a clear visual impression of the collected data. Other analysis that were conducted for the assumption's checks are residual plot for the perception of harm of the 2 vignettes, which showed linearity and homoscedasticity. QQ-plot,

which showed a linear relation which indicate normality of the residuals. The collinearity statistics show a tolerance and VIF show that there is no correlation between the predicted variables.

To test the first hypothesis that the availability heuristic is a moderator in the relationship between the exposure to social safety policies and the perception of harm, a moderation analysis using Process was conducted for the two vignettes separately. The items of the availability heuristic measures were combined. The WhatsApp group vignettes showed $R^2 = .031$, indicating that the social safety policy and the availability heuristic together explains a very small amount of the variance in perception of harm. The comparison between the control condition and the social safety campaign condition yielded a non-significant result, $F(3,167) = 1.772, p = .155$. This presents that the social safety policy and the moderator availability heuristic, does not have a significant effect on the perception of harm. The interaction effect between the condition and the availability heuristic showed a significant result seen in table 3, indicating a moderation effect. The effect size of the moderation is $R^2 \text{ change} = .027$, which is how much additional variance is explained by adding the interaction term. The effect of the social safety policy on the perception of harm was only significant for a high value of the availability heuristic ($SD = 1, p = .043$).

The moderation analysis for the outfit vignette showed an $R^2 = .014$, which indicates the social safety policy and the availability heuristic explains a very small amount of the variance in perception of harm. This result is similar to the WhatsApp group vignette. The comparison between the control condition and the social safety campaign condition yielded a non-significant result, $F(3,169) = 1.608, p = .499$. This reveals that the social safety policy and the moderator availability heuristic, does not have a significant effect on the perception of harm. The interaction effect between the condition and the availability heuristic show a non-

significant result shown in table 4, which indicates there is no moderation effect of the availability heuristic in the outfit vignette.

Table 3

Moderation Analysis: WhatsApp group vignette

Variable	Coefficient	SE	T	P	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Constant	5.087	.147	34.569	<.000	4.797	5.378
Condition ^a	.150	.211	.712	.478	.267	.567
Availability heuristic	-.196	.120	-1.631	.105	-.432	.041
Intercept	.405	.186	2.173	.031*	.037	.773

Note: N = 171. CL = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit

* p <.05.

^a 0 = control condition, 1 = experimental condition

Table 4

Moderation Analysis: Outfit vignette

Variable	Coefficient	Se	T	P	CL	
					LL	UL
Constant	3.012	.185	16.263	<.000	2.646	3.377
Condition ^a	.375	.267	1.404	.162	-.153	.903
Availability heuristic	-.001	.015	-.083	.934	-.030	.028
Intercept	-.008	.021	-.805	.704	-.0505	.034

Note: CL = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit

^a 0 = control condition, 1 = experimental condition

The second hypothesis states that the availability heuristic of direct experience causes a higher perception of harm compared to indirect experiences of social network and the media. This is examined by using a moderation analysis in Process, with the availability heuristic as separate items. The WhatsApp group vignette showed for the direct experience a non-significant moderation effect shown in table 5. The availability heuristic by itself does show a significant effect on the perception of harm. This indicates that direct experiences do contribute in explaining the perception of harm, but not as a moderator. The indirect experience of the media also showed a non-significant moderation effect of $p = .223$. The indirect experience by the media, does not show any significant results, which indicates that the media does not have a moderating effect on the relation between the social safety policy and the perception of harm. The indirect experience through social network does contribute to the perception of harm and shows a significant moderation effect seen in table 6.

The outfit vignette showed for the direct experience a non-significant moderation effect of $p = .805$. Both the indirect experience of media and social network also showed a non-significant moderation effect or $p = .525$ for the media and a $p = .193$ for the social network. The availability items separately did not have a moderating effect on the relation between the social safety policy and the perception of harm.

Table 5

Moderation Analysis: WhatsApp Group Vignette and Direct Experience

Variable	Coefficient	SE	T	P	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Constant	5.127	.146	35.049	<.000	4.839	5.416
Condition ^a	.078	.211	.368	.713	-.339	.494
Direct experience	-.210	.098	-2.133	.034*	-.403	-.016
Intercept	.228	.157	1.449	.149	-.083	.538

Note: N = 174. CL = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit

* $p < .05$

^a 0 = control condition, 1 = experimental condition

Table 6

Moderation Analysis: WhatsApp Group Vignette and Indirect Experience of Social Network

	Coefficient	SE	T	P	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Constant	5.078	.146	34.907	<.000	4.791	5.365
Condition ^a	.123	.209	.588	.558	-.290	.535
Social network	-.275	.099	-2.790	.006**	-.469	-.080
Intercept	.318	.159	2.005	.047*	.005	.631

Note: N = 173. CL = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

^a 0 = control condition, 1 = experimental condition

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the influence of social safety policies on the perception of harm in ambiguous situation. An online vignette-based experimental design was used, with 2 conditions. A control condition, where no images were shown before the vignettes, and an experimental condition where posters of a social safety campaign were displayed. The purpose of the social safety campaign was to make them aware of the social harm. After that the participants were presented with two vignettes and asked to assess how they perceive the social harm in each vignette separately. The availability heuristic was utilized as a moderator to examine whether it strengthened the relation between exposure to social safety campaign, and the perception of harm.

With the research question: “How exposure to social safety policy in organizations influence the perception of harm, when taking into account the availability heuristic”. The moderation analysis of both the WhatsApp vignette and outfit vignette did not show that the social safety policy significantly influences the perception of harm in ambiguous social situations. One possible reason for this outcome could be that a single brief exposure to a social safety campaign, may not be sufficient to significantly raise awareness among participants. It is plausible that more frequent or sustained exposure to such campaigns might yield different result, potentially increasing awareness and influencing perceptions of harm more effectively.

The first hypothesis that the availability heuristic is a moderator in the relationship between the general exposure to social safety policies and the perception of harm. Only the WhatsApp group vignettes showed a significant moderation effect ($p = .031$). However, the effect of the social safety policy on the perception of harm was significant only for a high value of the availability heuristic. This could indicate that the availability heuristic is not a strong moderator in the relationship with the social safety policy and the perception of harm.

The WhatsApp group vignette compared to the outfit vignette showed a higher mean in the perception of harm. This could be a reason why there was only a moderating effect in the WhatsApp group vignette. The second hypothesis was that the availability heuristic of direct experience causes a higher perception of harm compared to indirect experiences of social network and the media. The data from WhatsApp group vignette does not support this hypothesis. The WhatsApp group vignette showed a significant moderation effect of the social network availability heuristic, which is not in line with the hypothesis, that direct experiences weigh more heavily than indirect experiences. The 3 items of the availability heuristic from the outfit vignette did not show any moderating effects.

Strengths of the Study

For the vignettes, various aspects were considered to ensure they were ambiguous and realistic. By creating WhatsApp messages to compliment the vignettes enhanced the realism, given the popularity of this communication method. Another important aspect was the use of gender-neutral names, allowing participant to envision their own personas and interpretations of the situations presented. Traditionally, research on the availability heuristic in relation to harm perception has primarily focused on individuals' recall of their own experiences, and to a lesser extent, their social networks. The inclusion of media in this study is notable because it recognized that through various media channels, individuals are frequently exposed to depictions of social harmful situations. These media exposures can influence perceptions of risk and harm by shaping what is readily available in individuals' minds when assessing ambiguous social scenarios. By incorporating measures of media recall alongside personal and social network experiences, the study aimed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how the availability heuristic operates in the context of perceived harm. This approach acknowledges the diverse sources from which individuals draw information and impressions about social risks, thereby enriching the analysis of how these perceptions are

formed and influenced. Moving forward, continued exploration of the media's role in shaping perceptions of harm could yield valuable insights into the mechanisms underlying risk perception in modern society in modern society.

Limitations & Future Directions

The study presented has several limitations that could be addressed in future research to deepen our understanding of the perception of harm, and the effectiveness of social safety campaigns. One limitation of this study is the absence of the exposure to a general safety campaign, that is not targeted at social safety. To get a better picture on the effect of safety policies is the inclusion of a third condition. In addition to the control condition and the social safety campaign conditions, a third condition could have been included where a safety campaign not related to social safety is shown. To see if safety campaigns in general increase awareness. The study of Wang et al. (2022) showed that harm perception negatively predicts the perception of social safety. This would provide valuable insights into whether exposure to any safety campaign, regardless of its focus, increases the perception of harm. Drawing from the study by Ito et al. (1998), future research could adopt a similar approach by incorporating multiple conditions. By including additional conditions, future studies could explore whether specific content or messages within safety campaigns impact perceptions differently. This approach could provide deeper insights into how various types of safety messaging affect public perceptions of risk, and harm in ambiguous social situations

The second limitation is related to the vignettes used to depict ambiguous social situations in the workplace. Due to resource and time constraints, the vignettes were not pretested before being administered to participants. This lack of pretesting meant that there was no opportunity to ensure the intended ambiguity and social nuances. The goal was to create scenarios where the purpose of the actions was open for interpretation by the participant.

Third, a deliberate choice was made to use gender-neutral names in the vignettes. This decision aimed to facilitate participants' interpretation of the vignettes, without being influenced by specific gender associations. However, this approach could not be validated beforehand to determine if using gender-neutral versus gender-specific names would affect participants' perceptions differently. In the context of the second vignette concerning attire in the workplace, it is recognized that perceptions of harm might vary between gender. Women often receive more comment about their appearance compared to men, which can be perceived positive or negative depending on the situation (Im et al., 2020). These gender differences was not explicitly addressed or controlled before in the study. For future research, it would be beneficial to conduct pretests of vignettes to ensure they effectively portray ambiguity and to explore the impact of gender-specific versus gender-neutral details on participants' interpretation. Additionally, considering and controlling for gender differences in perceptions of harm within vignettes could provide deeper insights into how social contexts and individuals characteristics influence risk perception and response. These adjustments could enhance the validity and applicability of findings related to risk perception and the effectiveness of safety campaigns in social environment.

Fourthly, future research can explore the role of media at how it shapes the perceptions of harm. Currently, there is a lack of distinction in the study between different types of media or how individuals use media, which could significantly impact perceptions of risk and harm. For instance, examining whether exposure to news media versus social media influences perceptions differently, or how active versus passive media consumption (e.g., actively seeking information versus incidental exposure) affects risk perception, would provide valuable insights. Media consumption patterns can be categorized into two distinct types: media use and media exposure. Media use refers to active engagement with media to fulfill needs or functions, whereas media exposure measures passive consumption of media

content, often quantified by frequency (Niu et al., 2022). Selective media use can contribute to confirmation bias, where individuals tend to favor information that aligns with their existing beliefs and opinions (Mase et al., 2015). To get more insight of the difference in consumption of media can be important in the effect of how we perceive harm.

Fifthly, future research could further investigate exposure to social safety policies. In the current study, the participants were briefly exposed to a social safety campaign before being presented with the vignettes. This limited exposure may not have been sufficient enough to increase the awareness of potential harm of the participants. Therefore, future research should experiment with the different methods of displaying social safety campaigns. This could include varying the duration and frequency of the exposure to determine the most effective ways to enhance the participants' awareness of potential harm.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study aimed to explore the relationship between social safety policies and the perception of harm in ambiguous social situations, focusing on the moderating influence of the availability heuristic. The findings indicate that the social safety campaign did not significantly influence the perception of harm overall. However, the combined availability heuristic, both direct and indirect experiences, did moderate the perception of harm in the WhatsApp group vignette, but not in the outfit vignette. These results suggest that while there was a notable finding in the WhatsApp group vignette, it may have been an isolated incident. This raises broader questions about why these outcomes differ between vignettes. Addressing these questions could be achieved through further research by refining the study design, using various types of ambiguous social situations, and involving different demographic groups. This approach aims to develop more comprehensive strategies and gain a deeper understanding of the complex interaction between social safety policies and perception of harm.

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