



Cross-national differences in levels of optimism bias

Optimism bias is also related to the perception of personal control, and therefore to social vulnerability. This cognitive bias refers to the general tendency to overestimate the probability of positive events while underestimating the probability of negative ones (Weinstein, 1984). In other words, people, by and large, believe that risky events, such as health or safety problems, are less likely to happen to them than to the others (Weinstein, 1984). However, it seems that there are cross-national differences in the level of optimism bias. In a meta-analysis of 27 studies, Klein and Helweg-Larsen (2002) found that American respondents perceived that they have higher control over risks and higher levels of optimistic bias than non-American samples (German, Canadian, Dutch, Mexican, Belgian, and Israeli were treated as non-American samples). The authors argue that this finding was expected given that 'American culture' (in the sense of a national cultural value) emphasizes individual power and responsibility. On the other hand, individual actions and responsibility might be a less frequent coping mechanism for non-American people (Klein & Helweg-Larsen, 2002).

Note: See source document for full reference.

Applicable to:

Stakeholders: [Worldviews](#), [Ethnicity](#)

Disaster Phases: [Prevention](#), [Preparedness](#), [Response](#), [Recovery](#), [All disaster phases](#)

Types of Actors Concerned: [Non-active citizens](#)

Hazards: [Natural hazards](#)

Recommendations:

- [Develop risk assessments methodologies, which consider cultural factors, the manner in which people cognitively process information and which employ a gender perspective](#)

Source

[Deliverable D4.2 "Report on 'risk cultures' in the context of disasters" \(page 43\)](#)

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