

Perceived Threat in Compliance and Adherence Research

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PURPOSE: To critically analyze the concept of perceived threat as it relates to treatment adherence. The concept of perceived threat is analyzed through a series of perspectives: the conceptual, the methodological, and the empirical.

METHOD: Four computerized databases (PsycINFO, PubMed, CINAHL, and HAPI) were searched using the key words of adherence, compliance, threat, cognitive appraisal, and risk. Sources included in this analysis were book chapters and journal articles including conceptual analyses, reviews, research studies, and articles describing the development and confirmatory testing of research instruments. Additionally, sources were identified from bibliographies of these sources.

FINDINGS: Perceived threat has been studied as a variable in adherence research from multiple perspectives in multiple patient populations. However, a conceptual analysis of the concept of perceived threat is lacking in the literature. Additionally, there is lack of consistency in operationalization of perceived threat as it relates to treatment adherence. Furthermore, measures of threat occur primarily through uni-dimensional measures that do not reflect the inter-relatedness of the threat experience to personal and contextual factors. Several models of investigation have been developed to study perceived threat. Several instruments have been constructed that contain measures of perceived threat. Most commonly cited in the literature are measures of threat in studies focusing on health beliefs (Health Belief Model research), and in the stress and coping paradigm.

DISCUSSION: Measures of threat occur primarily through uni-dimensional measures that do not reflect the inter-relatedness of the threat experience to personal and contextual factors. Future research examining perceived threat from a cognitive appraisal perspective, where both primary and secondary appraisals can be examined, may provide additional insight into factors affecting treatment adherence.