

Abstract

When traffic accidents result in personal injury damages are awarded to the injured party in numerous cases for pain and suffering. The intention is to compensate the injured party for the immaterial damages suffered on account of the injury. The goal of the present study was to investigate the relative level of contentment experienced by the recipients of compensation for pain and suffering as well as to identify the conditions of this contentment. The questions posed are investigated in an explorative manner due to the novelty of this subject. Theoretical and conceptual inputs are drawn from the fields of clinical psychology, social justice research, cognitive psychology and psychology of law. Guided interviews with the recipients of compensation well as vignette studies comprise the investigation's empirical methods. The interviewees provided differentiated responses to the central question of contentment. The actual monetary sum received proved to be just one causal variable among others. The interviewees identified several factors which influenced their level of contentment beyond the perceived impairments resulting from injury. These were: the justness of legal proceedings; the behavior of the individual who caused the accident; comparisons with guidelines for the award of damages; as well as the interviewee's personal financial situation. Laymen consider sums higher than those actually awarded as appropriate: this was one result of the vignette studies.