Risk Taking Behaviour

People want to avoid risks and hazards. These can be defined in many ways: the probability of all undesired consequences. The seriousness of maximum possible undesired consequences. The probability and seriousness of undesired consequences. The variance of all consequences about the mean.

Experts evaluations of risk are often considered as objective whereas layperson's subjective. But experts still make judgments.

Estimating Death Rates (Slovic et al. 1978) People estimated death rates from 40 hazards using the rate of car accidents as a reference (> or <). They **overestimated** deaths from infrequent causes but underestimated them from frequent ones (underadjustment from mean deaths anchor, see heuristics & biases). They also attributed more deaths to **salient hazards** (murder>diabetes, actually they are equal).

Risk Appraisal (Slovic et al. 1980) People rate hazards and their appraisal differs in 3 main ways. Firstly, by the degree of **fear** the hazard induces. The second is by the degree to which the risks are **unknown**. The third is concerned with how widespread **effects** are. Risk judgements correlate with first and third factors (fear and widespreadness).

Perceptions of Physical Risk

Individual Differences in Physical Risks

Risk taking is equated to **sensation seeking.** Zuckerman's Sensation Seeking Scale (1964) measures answers on various items to produce a sensation seeking score. These have been correlated with physiological responses (suggesting biological component). Also with psychopathy. It arguably has a 58% genetic component (Telegen et al. 1988)

Fear of Failure Atkinson (1957) argued that a high desire to achieve success and a low desire to avoid failure caused people to take the most moderate risks in skilled tasks. Others took more low risks.

Locus of Control (Liverant et al. 1960) Those with external locus of control were more likely than internals to opt for long shot bets (higher risk) as they believe they believed they were more lucky and erroneously felt chance systematically works in their favour.

Non-Physical Risk Taking

Is Risk-Taking Inherent or Situation Specific? Slovic (1982) correlated decisions in lotteries, questionnaire measures, ratings by peers etc. and found low correlations, suggesting a **situation-specific approach.**

Risk-Homeostasis Theory (Adams, 1995) Suggest that if drivers notice that a road safety measure increases their safety, they will go faster. This is because drivers will reach a speed at which there is an equal cost of time economy and danger. A road safety measure decreases the cost of danger and increases time and so increases the speed at which they drive. Behaviour here is constrained by costs, which we are not consciously aware of.

Preventative action can minimise the effects of risk!

Wagenaar (1987) analysed accidents at sea and found that 83% were **not** due to calculated acceptance of risk. People were taken by surprise. People in some cases took account of information helpful to solving the problem but did not act on it in an appropriate way. Risk assessment here is an unconscious process, they are **run rather than taken.** People do not **take risks** but are **hit by risks they have never considered.**