

BOOK REVIEW

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RISK

Cornel Havărneanu, Grigore Havărneanu (coord.), *Psihologia riscului*,
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The volume *Psihologia riscului* (*The Psychology of Risk*), published by Polirom publishing house, Iași, Romania, and edited by the distinguished professors Corneliu Havărneanu and Grigore Havărneanu, ranks as a pioneering, integrative work in social and human sciences, as it provides an overview of the theme of risk in areas viewed as relevant to Romanian society: organisations, healthcare, entrepreneurship, couple and family life, crime, transport etc.

The book is structured into sixteen chapters, which allow readers to become gradually familiar with the multifaceted nature of the risk. The first six chapters present the theoretical and methodological references in the psychology of risk, while the following ten chapters examine risk from the economic and social perspective.

The first part of the work provides a theoretical summary exploring those aspects which explain behavioural adaptation depending on level of risk acceptance (social control theory, social action theory, theory of situational rationality, etc.) and certain empirical results which support the influence of emotions on decision-making under risk and on our limited rationality. Andrei C. Miu and Mirela Bîlc emphasise in Chapter 2 that “emotions are double-edged swords” (p. 45), which have impairing and enhancing effects on such cognitive processes as decision-making under risk.

In Chapter 3, risk is analysed by looking successively at the emergence, development, implementation and engagement in risk behaviours. The authors, Oana Benga and Dana Oprea, aimed to summarise a number of studies centring on certain key concepts, e.g. the subjective perception of an uncertain situation, engagement in risky behaviours, individual behaviour based on conscious decision-making, and to highlight their practical relevance.

Chapter 4 highlights the social construction of the attitude towards risk and the fact that it varies “on a continuum ranging from risk aversion to risk-seeking” (p. 90). As risk may be encountered in diverse areas (financial, social, etc.),

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individuals may adopt different attitudes depending on the specific situation: risk aversion and tolerance; neutral attitude towards risk and risk-seeking.

The individual factors associated with risk perception and risk-taking (e.g. age, gender, hereditary and personality factors) are reviewed in Chapter 5. Cornel Havârneanu draws attention to the importance of these factors in the development of differentiated intervention strategies, which should take into consideration the area where a person exhibits a more marked tendency towards risk-taking.

From this perspective, at a general level, risk management is dynamic and involves identifying risk and planning actions to be undertaken in risk situations. In Chapter 6, Grigore Havârneanu and Cornelia Măirean define risk management along the axis “prevention - intervention - post-intervention” (p. 114), viewing risk as a process unfolding over three chronological stages (prior, during and after its occurrence). Thus, according to the authors, risk management enables the analysis of current risks and the forecasting of emerging risks, which will manifest in the near future and of future risks.

The second section of the volume *Psihologia riscului (The Psychology of Risk)* brings together a series of contributions that explore specific issues in the psychosocial area, offering in-depth analyses of aspects such as: methods of analysis of etiologic factors and continuation of criminal behaviour, the typology, informational value, and usefulness of biomarkers in predicting the risk of antisocial behaviour (Chapter 7); traffic safety and the interdependence high-risk driving behaviours – speeding, driving under the influence of alcohol/drugs, failure to use seat belts, crossing on red traffic lights or ignoring stop signs (Chapter 8); group influence over the decisions of members, showing under which conditions individual decisions are more risky or more balanced depending on the interaction with the social group. Ștefan Boncu stresses in Chapter 9 that “in groups with homogeneous attitudes, group discussion only serves to intensify attitudes” (p. 190): entrepreneurial risk-taking (ranging from financial risk to missed career opportunities and emotional risks etc.). In Chapter 10, Sebastian Pinteia presents and compares three risk approaches in entrepreneurship “do not exclude, but rather complement each other” (p. 224): the cognitive perspective, the psychological approach based on the personality traits of entrepreneurs and risk-taking in terms of social learning.

In Chapter 11, Daniela Victoria Zaharia examines risks within organisations, with reference to security and safety at work. At the organisational level, the management of psychosocial risk must start from the identification of stress factors and continue by implementing measures to mitigate them. The author identifies three types of interventions (p. 242): primary (focusing on changing the work environment); secondary (centring on developing employees’ skills to cope with stress); and tertiary (aimed at the rehabilitation of employees who have experienced health problems due to professional stress).

In Chapter 12, Andrei Holman and Ștefan Boncu present environmental risks (ranging from global warming to floods and the negative effects of pesticides in

agriculture) and emphasise that the attitude towards such risks consists of “complex psychological operations, based on factors beyond the objective definition of risk, referencing elements in the social, cultural, and cognitive realm” (p. 246).

Risk and its consequences in couple and family life are examined by Maria Nicoleta Turliuc in Chapter 13. The author argues that the emergence of family problems and risk behaviours in the marital and parental sphere is determined by socioeconomic crises, poverty, divorce and a number of family factors such as “inequality in roles and power, family dysfunction, conflict, low emotional support, poor community, delinquent behaviours, etc.” (p. 282).

The last three chapters of the book deal with specific aspects of risks in: healthcare, the therapeutic relationship and mental trauma.

Prevention and treatment of medical conditions involve processes under the control of beneficiaries and not exclusively of specialists (Chapter 14), which is why communication on activities that exacerbate or reduce the risks to health is all the more important to all stakeholders: patients, dependants of patients, medical staff, etc. Daniela Muntele Hendreș states that a great number of obstacles, such as panic and mistrust stand in the way of effective communication about health risks, so that “suggestions for preventative actions or therapeutic run the risk of not being adopted in time”.

The proximity of risk and psychotherapy in the occurrence of side effects or negative consequences is examined by Camelia Soponaru in chapter 15. The author concludes that the assessment of negative effects in psychotherapy must “play the same role as the study of the effectiveness of psychotherapy” (p. 318), although this proves to be a complicated objective.

In chapter 16, Cornelia Măirean discusses risk in terms of psychological trauma. Serious physical injury, sexual abuse, exposure to death and death threats entail multiple risks to the physical and mental health of a person. The appropriate identification and treatment of such trauma, “can reduce by a considerable degree the costs that they trigger for the individual and the organizational” (p. 335). When not addressed appropriately, the negative effects of such events can have long-term consequences, especially during the critical development periods.

In conclusion, this extensive summary of the most recent orientations in the areas listed above constitutes a particularly useful tool for all those interested in social life, as it seeks to boost interest in reflecting on a topical theme and on the role of psychology and sociology exploring this field.

By drawing on an extensive specialist literature and on the authors’ contributions in the field, the book *Psihologia riscului (The Psychology of Risk)* represents a valuable tool for a wide range of readers, students, practitioners, education professionals and researchers.