



Psychological Factors Linked to Risk Perception

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Risks are mental models, which allow people to cope with dangerous phenomena (Renn, 2008; Jasanoff, 1998). The term "risk" refers to the likelihood of an adverse effect resulting from an event. The aim of the present study is to identify the psychological factors that are most predictive of risk perception in relation with age, gender, educational level and socio-economical status. Earthquake hazard was considered, because it is an emerging danger for Bucharest. 80% of the laypeople sample are waiting for this event to happen in the next three years. By integrating all the research data, it was attempted to build a risk profile of the investigated population, which could be used by institutions responsible for earthquake risk mitigation situations in Bucharest.

This research appealed to the social learning Rotter (1966), auto-effectiveness Bandura (1977; 1983), and anxiety and stress theories. We used psychological variables that measured stress, personal effectiveness and the belief in personal control. The multi-modal risk perception questionnaire was structured on a 49 items sequence.

The sample was composed of 1.376 participants recruited on a voluntary basis.

The characteristics of risk (like probability and magnitude, time scales) are perceived differently according to psychological factors that play a role also in biases in people's ability to draw inferences from probabilistic information (like cognitive dissonance). Since the 1970's, it has been argued that those who perceive life's events as being beyond their locus of control (external locus of control) are significantly more anxious and less adapted. In this research, strongest associations and significant differences were obtained between sex, age and income categories with Stress vulnerability factor and the External Locus of Control factor.

The profile of the low risk perceiver is that of a young, more educated, male individual with a higher self- efficacy level and an internal locus of control.