

PHD THESIS BOOKLET

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RISK-TAKING, RISK-TAKING MOTIVATION AND DEVIANCE IN ADOLESCENCE

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TOPIC AND OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

My dissertation examines the topic of adaptive and deviant risk-taking in adolescents. In terms of personality development, risk-taking is of significant importance in adolescence, as it plays an important role in tackling the psychosocial challenges at this stage of life. Both adaptive risk-taking behaviours, which contribute to personality development, and maladaptive ones, which endanger balanced personality development, are highly frequent in this age group. The primary objective of my dissertation is to discover the motives of risk-taking behaviour, and to examine the correlations between different motives among the adolescents exposed to various levels of risk-taking behaviours and those with deviant risk-taking patterns.

In the adolescent risk-taking research, the field of motivation is underrepresented compared to its importance. Understanding the risk-taking motives gives important points in the interpretation of the adolescent risk-taking behavior equally in adaptive and deviant fields.

The models of risk-taking motivation describe general motive types: Trimpop's holistic risk-taking model lists exploration, ruling the environment, and social and material motives (Trimpop, 1994), Neighbors's approach involves autonomy, competence and affiliations (Neighbors et al, 2007), Lyng identifies the motive of 'edgework' (Lyng, 1990, 2005), while Kloep and his work group uncovered the motives of irresponsible behaviour, audience controlled behaviour, thrill-seeking, as well as calculated and hedonistic motives (Kloep et al, 2007). The studies of Kloep and his associates targeted adolescents specifically, they used qualitative methods (focus groups and essay analyses) to discover the motives, they investigated the cross-cultural differences between motives, as well as the coexistence of motives and risk-taking behaviour. According to the results, the motivation types correlate with the risk-taking behaviour, and that the different types of risk-taking behaviour correlate to certain motive patterns. Kloep studied healthy adolescents without behavioural problems or deviancies.

The objective of my research is to get a more nuanced picture of risk-taking motivation, to identify the deviant and non-deviant adolescents risk-taking motive patterns, to identify their similarities and differences, and to look for the determinants of different risk-taking behaviors.

STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH

Risk-taking motives are revealed using the method of in-depth interviews with average and slightly deviant adolescents. My objective is to determine the presence of risk-taking motives described theoretically and empirically in psychological literature, and to uncover possible new types. I created a questionnaire to measure the motivation types revealed in my qualitative research. In the second stage of my research I study the patterns of risk-taking motivation types, and their correlations with risk-taking behaviours in variously deviant adolescents by using questionnaires. The research involves convicted, heavily deviant groups, status offenders, as well as slightly deviant, at-risk and non-deviant groups.

RESEARCH OF RISK-TAKING MOTIVES BY IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Although the risk-taking motives of adolescents have been examined by qualitative methods, the in-depth interview method has not been used. The in-depth interview in individual interview setting gives the possibility to the adolescent to express himself alone, without any social pressure, and it facilitates the exploration of deeper motives. The in-depth interview technique gives the possibility to understand the interviewees' perspective, the experience and the personal meaning of the topic, and to explore the differences of adaptive and deviant motive patterns.

The basic objective of the research is to identify the motives behind risk-taking behaviours in adolescents. Are the types of motive described in psychological literature identifiable? Are there any new, so far undescribed motives to be discovered? Is there any difference in the risk-taking patterns of slightly deviant and non-deviant adolescents?

METHOD

Sample

I involved slightly deviant groups, adolescents with behavioural problems, status offenders by US law, as well as non-deviant groups without problematic behaviours.

The deviant sample consists of 15 wards of court, aged between 17-18, living in Budapest and in the country, while the non-deviant sample consists of 15 high school students from Budapest, who live in family environments and have shown no slight or severe deviance.

Measurement methods

I used semi-structured thematic interviews to assess risk-taking motivations. The draft interview included 8 topics, among which highly important were the definition of risk-taking through examples, the overview of experiences regarding risk-taking behaviour, the analysis of the subjects' own risk-taking motives and the question of the effects of risk-taking behaviour.

Procedure

I made contact with the adolescents via their teachers and social workers.

The interviews were conducted at the adolescents' schools or their affiliated social care institutes. I recorded the interviews on a dictaphone.

RESULTS

The analysis of the interviews highlighted six motives: stress release, strategic, instrumental motives, social motives, motives of experiencing competence, motives of learning, and motives of having experience.

Among the motives described by Trimpop, *ruling the environment*, control over the environment was clearly identified.

The *edgework motive* described by Lyng was not found independently, but related to the competence and learning motives. The learning motive covers mainly the self knowledge enlargement. Testing the competences in dangerous situations can be interpreted as one of the forms of edgework, but the interviewees were not referring directly to the edgework aspect. The aspect of emotion control was not at all identified.

The *social motive*, the affiliation, the social position, the appreciation of others were clearly identified in my sample. In the social motive I identified the emphasis is not on the fear of losing the appreciation of peers (Kloep, al., 2007), but the desire for appreciation and the sense of community are important elements.

The financial motive and the calculated risks are similar to the strategic motive. Kloep found risk-taking decisive in order to achieve future goals, while according to my studies, the achievement of current goals was dominant.

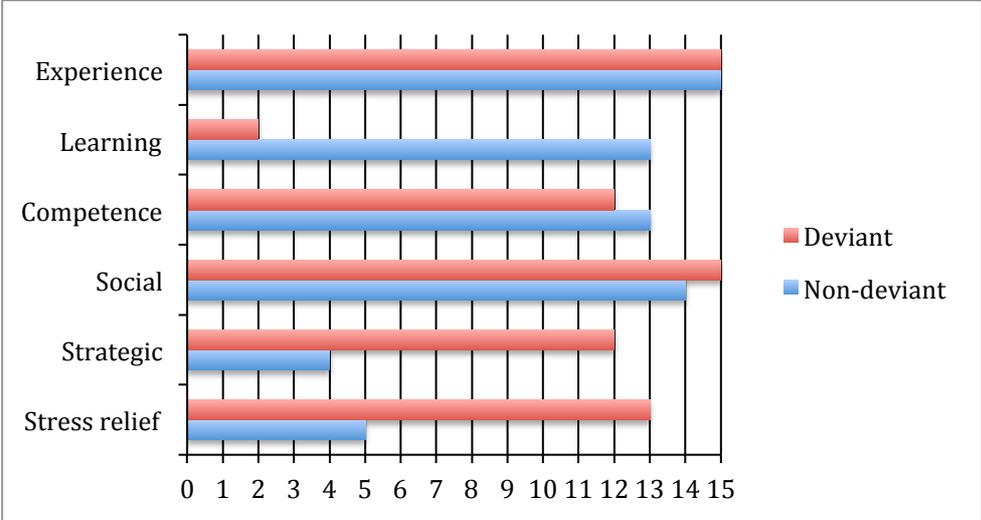
The motive of having experience is parallel with thrill seeking and with hedonic motive. It is important to notice that in my research this category is expanded by the flow experience.

The motives of exploration, autonomy and the irresponsible behavior were not identifiable in my research.

Among the new motives were the motives of stress release. This motive turns the attention to the role of risk-taking in the psychological homeostasis. The risk-taking is not only motivated by the reward of higher thrill, but it can be a mean of stress release.

Slightly deviant and non-deviant groups differed in the patterns of risk-taking motivation.

Graph 1: Frequency of mentioned motive types among slightly deviant and non-deviant groups



Differences between the groups were identified in three motives, the stress release, the strategic and the learning. The stress relief and strategic motives were more prevalent in the non-deviant group.

In the deviant group the self regulatory, stress level regulatory function of the risk-taking was highly outstanding, just as the strategic function, choosing the risky way to get desired, but hardly attainable things.

The learning motive was more significant in the non-deviant group, the use of the risky situations as a source of self knowledge and learning.

The comparison of the groups highlights that having experience, experiencing competence and social motives were similarly characteristic of both groups independently of deviance. The differences outline that for the non-deviants the adaptive, learning function of the risk-taking is more important, while for the deviants the self regulatory, stress regulatory and the instrumental functions of the risk-taking were primary.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE STUDY OF RISK-TAKING MOTIVATION AND ADAPTIVE AND DEVIANT RISK-TAKING BEHAVIOURS

The patterns of risk-taking motives and their correlations with risk-taking behaviours among adolescents of varying levels of deviance were examined in a quantitative questionnaire research.

HYPOTHESES

I test three groups of hypotheses in my quantitative research. In the first two hypotheses groups I can make assumptions on the differences, concerning the direction of differences I can only rely on my qualitative research results. In the third hypothesis group I can base my assumptions on literature.

1. One group of my hypotheses is about the pattern of risk-taking motives and discovering the differences between the patterns

- 1.1 I assumed that the 6 types revealed in my qualitative study would be identifiable during the data collection by the risk-taking motivation questionnaire among the samples of various deviance.
- 1.2 The motive of stress release will be more prevalent in deviant groups.
- 1.3 The strategic, instrumental motive will be more significant in deviant groups.
- 1.4 The motive of learning will be more prevalent in non-deviant groups.
- 1.5 There will be no difference in social motives.
- 1.6 There will be no difference in the experiencing competence motive
- 1.7 There will be no difference between the groups with regard to the experience motive

2. My second group of hypotheses concerns the correlations between risk-taking motives and risk-taking behaviour

2.1 I assume that the adaptive forms of risk-taking (conflicts with and disobedience to parents and instructors) can be associated in all groups to risk-taking motives.

2.2 I assume that the deviant forms of risk-taking (theft and police conflicts) can be associated in all groups to risk-taking motives.

2.3 I assume that the adaptive forms of risk-taking will have different motivational patterns in the different groups.

2.4 I assume that the deviant forms of risk-taking will have different motivational patterns in the different groups.

3. The third group of hypotheses concerns risk perception

3.1 I assume that there will be differences between the groups in the perception of behaviours of risks involving conflicts with and disobedience to parents/instructors: I expect the severely deviant, convicted group and the at-risk group to perceive the risk as higher. The risk perception of these behaviours are influenced by the conditions of socialization and the parents behaviour. In correctional facilities instructors expect obedience, having overt conflicts is risky. In the case of at-risk adolescents the overt conflict with the parents can lead to higher risks.

I assume the association of the deviant risk perception and the deviant behavioral experiences. The lack of the deviant experience might lead to higher risk estimates, the behavioral experience might lead to lower risk estimates and the behavioral and the negative consequence experience can lead to higher risk estimates in case of integration of the negative experience (Reyna, Farley, 2006, Benthin és mtsai, 1993, Gerrard és mtsai, 1996, Chassin és mtsai, 2001, Ben-zur, Reshef-Kfir, 2003).

3.2 I assume that the perception of the risks of theft, where both the danger of being caught and the subsequent punishment and legal consequences are uncertain, significant differences is to be expected between the groups.

3.3 I assume that the groups of varying experiences will have significant differences in the perception of risks involving conflicts with the police. Here, the thieves have been caught, but the degree of punishment is uncertain.

3.4 Adaptive risk-taking behavioural forms can be associated to risk perception.

3.5 Deviant risk-taking behavioural forms can be associated to risk perception.

METHOD

Sample

I used theoretical sampling, and 360 adolescents of varying deviance and at-risk, aged between 14 and 18, were involved in the study. The measurement of deviance and at-risk exposure and the grouping according to deviance level was based on official data.

1. The severely deviant group consists of adolescents convicted or in the case of some girls, held on probable cause and held in correctional facilities. They have committed property crimes.
2. The members of the slightly deviant group have been registered due to status crimes and slight deviances. They have been registered by child welfare institutions due to minor breaches of rules, behavioural problems, disobedience or severe disciplinary problems in school, but they have no involvement with the police.
3. The at-risk group consists of at-risk, neglected, abused adolescents who are endangered in their family and social environments and live under difficult circumstances. They have been registered and treated by child welfare institutions, and their cases are tracked and managed.
4. The members of the non-deviant group have not been registered by any official authority due to crimes or status crimes, they are not under protection, and they have similar socio-economically background.

Each of the 4 groups include 90 persons, with the male to female ratio nearly 50-50-% in every group.

Measuring method

The *Questionnaire on demographic variables* included questions about the basic data (sex, age, school class) as well as psychiatric conditions, criminal actions, institutional breaches of rules and criminal activity in the family.

Motivation questionnaire on risk-taking The self-edited questionnaire measures the 6 motivation types discovered in the qualitative research: stress release, strategic, instrumental, social, experiencing competence, learning and having experience. Each type has 4 associated items, and the degree of agreement was to be indicated on a scale of 4.

Assessment of risk-taking behaviour. My research question was aimed specifically at assessing the behaviours considered adaptive or deviant in the age group. Accordingly, my questions directly targeted the frequency of specific forms of behaviour. Items concerning

adaptive risk-taking behaviour: 1. Conflict with a parent/instructor. 2. Disobedience to a parent/instructor. Items concerning deviant risk-taking behaviour 1. Theft 2. Conflict with the police/law. The frequency of behaviour was to be evaluated on a scale of 4.

Assessment of risk perception. The research concept was aimed specifically at discovering the risk perception of the forms of risk-taking behaviour involved in the research, therefore I asked specifically about the frequency of studied forms of behaviour. The perceived risk of the adaptive and deviant forms of behaviour was to be evaluated on a scale of 4.

Procedure

The selection of the appropriate sample, establishing contact and the collection of questionnaire data was aided by social workers and school psychologists. The data collection took place in correctional facilities, child welfare institutions and high schools with the help of the local social workers and teachers. The questionnaires were filled in groups on paper.

RESULTS

The frequency of the deviant risk-taking behaviour, as self-reported deviance, can be used to confirm the official grouping data. In the non-deviant socio-economically matched sample the deviant behavior averages were very high similar to the severely deviant group. This result contradicts the official data and doubts the reliability of the questionnaire-filling in the non-deviant group. In order to ensure the reliability of my research I opted to stop the data analysis in the non-deviant group, and I decided to reach a new non-deviant group. In the new non-deviant group consists of 40 person (22 boys, 18 girls).

1. Testing my hypotheses about the pattern of risk-taking motives and discovering the differences between the patterns.

I verified the reliability of the risk-taking motivation questionnaire, the Cronbach alfa index proved that the entire questionnaire and the different motive type question groups were reliable. First I examined if the motive types that I identified in the qualitative research can be identified. For testing this question I used factor analysis on the whole sample.

I used exploratory factor analysis, with maximum likelihood, varimax rotation. A four factor structure was identified, but it did not fit well, and the fitness could not be optimized by taking out the not fitting variables. No independent factor was identified. The results raise the

idea that the motives are not organized in clear types that can be described theroretically or that were described empirically in the qualitative research.

I examined the risk-taking patterns of the groups by the differences in the motive items, by analysis of variance. Conforming to my assumptions the stress realese, the strategic and the learning motives were significantly different in the groups. Contrary to my assumptions the groups differed in one social and in ons competence motive as well. I examined the organization of the motives in the different groups by explorative factor analysis. In the severly deviant group 6 factor structure, in the slightly deviant group 5 factor structure, in the at-risk group 4 factor structure were identified, but the they did not fit well and the fitness could not be optimized. In the non-deviant group all the motive items were in one factor.

2. Testing my second group of hypotheses that concerns the correlations between risk-taking motives and risk-taking behaviour

I examined the correlations of the four risk-taking behaviours and the items of the risk-taking motivation questionnaire by Paersons correlation. The results show that the risk-taking motives are associated to the risk-taking behaviours. In the severly deviant, the slightly deviant and the at-risk groups both the adaptive and the deviant behaviours were in positive correlation with the motives, in the non-deviant group just the adaptive behaviours.

The adaptive and the deviant risk-taking behaviours correlated with different motives in the different groups. The adaptive risk-taking correlated in the severly deviant group with social motives, in the slighlty deviant and in the at-risk groups with having experience motives, in the non-deviant group with a highly mixed motive group. The deviant risk-taking behaviours are associated in the severly deviant group with stress regulation difficulty, in the slightly and at-risk groups with strategic motives.

3. Testing the third group of hypotheses that concerns risk perception

The variance analysis showed significant differences in the risk perception of adaptive risk-taking behaviours, in both cases the same answer pattern was identified. The highes risk was estimated by the severly deviant group confrom to my expectations. Contrary to my assumptions the second highest risk estimates were in the non-deviant group and not in the at-risk group. In case of the severly deviant going against the uniform institutional regulation lead to dangerous consequences, while in the at-risk family environment having conflicts does not lead necesserely to negative consequences.

The variance analysis showed significant differences among the groups in case of the theft. The non-deviants who do not have deviant behaviour experiences estimated the highest risks. The severely deviants with the experience of deviant behaviour and the negative consequences estimated the lowest risk. This highlights that experiencing the negative consequences do not have an impact on higher risk estimates. In case of the conflict with the police, the risk perception of the sure negative consequences were high in all groups, independently of the deviant behaviour experience.

I examined the associations of the risk perceptions and the risk taking behaviours by Pearson's correlations. My most important result is that I found the behaviour independent of the risk perception except of one case.

SUMMARY

Three points are worthy to highlight from the result of my research on motivation and psychosocial function of risk-taking motivation.

1. The qualitative in-depth research was clearly efficient. By the use of the in-depth interview technique I was able to identify new motives that are related to self regulation, to the strategic and the self knowledge enhancing psychosocial functions of the risk-taking behaviours.
2. My quantitative research results question the possibility of making typology of motives. My results give new interpretations of the general assumption in the risk-taking motivations literature that defines motives as independent. The variability of the motives organizations shows that the risk-taking behaviours have different functions and that the risk-taking behaviours can answer different needs of the adolescents.
3. My results verified the correlations of the adaptive and deviant risk-taking behaviours and the motives. I identified different association patterns in different deviant adolescent groups. Besides it is important to note that both adaptive and deviant risk-taking behaviour is affected by complex bio-psycho-social factors where the risk-taking motive is an element.

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