



## Press Release No. 23/2016

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### Risk perception and health

**A new research group at the University of Konstanz is examining the relationship between health risk perception and behavioural change.**

**How can people be encouraged to improve their health? The aim of the research group "The Dynamics of Risk - Perception and Behavior in the Context of Mental and Physical Health ( Riskydynamics )" at the University of Konstanz, is to help answer this question. The research project will begin in the winter semester 2016/2017 and will be funded until 2019 by the German Research Foundation (DFG) with almost two million euro. Spokespersons for the research group are Professor Dr Britta Renner, Psychological Diagnostics and Health Psychology, and Professor Dr Harald Schupp, General and Biological Psychology.**

People are exposed to a variety of health risks and threats in their daily lives, including communicable and non-communicable diseases, injuries, violence and natural disasters. Many of these health risks are directly or indirectly affected by individual choices and behaviours. "For this reason, the key question arises as to how people perceive health risks and how this affects their behaviour", summarises Britta Renner.

Although most dangers and risks in modern societies change over time, the phenomenon of perceiving risk and adapting to health risks has been mostly studied from a static perspective. Through a systematic research programme, the research group intends to remove this discrepancy between the dynamic nature of risk and its perception in the real world on the one hand and the static approach in research on the other hand.

The research group will analyse the stability and dynamics of such risk perceptions over time by evaluating processes before, during and after a risk event. Moreover, the project intends to determine how the current perception of risk is shaped by, for example, dispositions and expectations, and how, for example, a change in behaviour affects the perception of risk.

The risk communication in groups and social networks will also be taken into account.

"The long-term goal is to enhance concepts and theories of risk perception and behavioural change and to make these findings available for the design of effective health promotion", said spokeswoman Renner. The research group is made up of five interconnected research projects from various disciplines within psychology. The purpose is to advance an integrated, data-driven understanding of dynamic changes in the perception of risk from the perspective of risk cycles.

Overall, the German Research Council is setting up four new research groups. The establishment of research groups allow researchers to deal with current and pressing questions in their research areas and to establish innovative approaches.

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