More Than Fear Induction: Toward an Understanding of People’s Motivation to Be Well-Prepared for Emergencies in Flood-Prone Areas

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Abstract

This article examines the extent and manner to which evaluations of flood-related precautions are affected by an individual’s motivation and perception of context. It argues that the relationship between risk perception and flood risk preparedness can be fruitfully specified in terms of vulnerability and efficacy if these concepts are put into the perspective of prevention-focused motivation. This relationship was empirically examined in a risk communication experiment in a delta area of the Netherlands (n = 1,887). Prevention-focused motivation was induced by contextualized risk information. The results showed that prevention-focused individuals were more sensitive to the relevance of potential precautions for satisfying their needs in the context they found themselves in. The needs included, but were not limited to, fear reduction. Due to the heterogeneity of the residents, the evaluations reflected individual differences in the intensity and the selectivity of precautionary processes. Four types of persons could be distinguished according to their evaluation of precautionary measures: a high-scoring minority, two more selective types, and a low-scoring minority. For policymakers and risk communicators it is vital to consider the nature of prevention motivation and the context in which it is likely to be high.

Keywords: Efficacy; precautions; prevention motivation; risk communication; vulnerability.


The full article can be requested at the publisher or at HKV consultants (secretariaat@hkv.nl)