

The role of expert and lay knowledge in understanding and managing risk



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This report looks at the concept of risk which for the purpose of the report “ is a state in which there is a possibility of known danger/harm which if avoided may lead to benefits” (Carter and Jordan, 2009, p. 59) and examines ways in which different areas of knowledge are developed and what role they play in helping people to understand and manage risk. Risk1. Risk is “ is a state in which there is a possibility of known danger/harm which if avoided may lead to benefits” (Carter and Jordan, 2009, p. 59). 2. An activity that has the potential to put the user at risk of danger/harm3. All activities that have risks have an element of doubt; to be exposed to a risk is to be exposed to the chance that it may cause an element of danger/harm to one’s self. Beck’s account of Risk society (1989) claims that we are changing from an industrial society to one where, 1. There are significant effects from modernisation. 2. Invisible risks that cannot be determined by an individual’s own means. 3. Dependency on expert knowledge. 4. “ The extent of people’s material exposure to danger/harm is essentially reliant on knowledge created by experts” (Carter and Jordan, 2009, p. 80). 5. Rapid growth in public awareness of risk. 6. The amount of risks within society focuses at the distribution of harm. While examining the two types of knowledge used in determining how risks are made and understood this report will provide evidence for the importance of expert knowledge as Beck saw it and for lay knowledge and public opinion which is not so straightforwardly determined. Expert knowledgeExpert knowledge is used to define the risks in everyday life enabling people to determine how it may impact on them. In a case study of Jordan’s London borough of Hackney allotment there are two examples of noogenesis as a result of scientific tests on soil samples (Carter and Jordan, 2009, p. 63). Test one used a process of soil sampling and <https://assignbuster.com/the-role-of-expert-and-lay-knowledge-in-understanding-and-managing-risk/>

testing which is widely accepted to create a risk by raising awareness of poisons in the sampled soil, the test showed that the soil contained a level of toxins which were above acceptable limits. Due to the soil samples having been obtained from land used as allotments the allotment holders were alerted and were able to manage the risks caused by the toxins by no longer planting or coming into contact with the soil. The second test however concluded that the same soil was in fact safe by reasoning that although there were high levels of toxin in the soil it would not be able to enter the human body in such levels as such to cause harm. Jordan suggests that Beck's theory is relevant here as knowledge has been created as a result of the government trying to manage types of risk he states " So there was an invisible risk. No one can tell by looking at the soil whether it's poisonous or not, but there was also a government level in, one might say, a society wide attempt to manage a particular risk in a particular way. (A risky world?, 2009, track 2). The case study into the soil on the allotment raises the issues as follows, 1. Knowledge in relation to risk is difficult to produce as choices and assumptions are used in creating knowledge for example; which test to use. 2. Testing produced differing results and uncertainty. 3. Scientific debates on how best to assess risk and expert knowledge is not a unified body of work causing more uncertainty. 4. During testing complications that occur are not made public with the results and the public are left to make sense of the results such as the gardeners on the allotments of which many more readily accepted the results of the second test. 5. Risk becomes difficult for both expert and lay knowledge to assess. To examine further the production of knowledge in relation to risk at epidemiology using statistical techniques to reveal patterns of health within a population by producing <https://assignbuster.com/the-role-of-expert-and-lay-knowledge-in-understanding-and-managing-risk/>

probabilistic association between environmental factors and illness.

Epidemiology produces expert knowledge used by government to create policies on health services. Research cited in the case study on holiday makers and their attitude to sun tanning (Carter and Jordan, 2009, p. 71) found that members of the public easily remembered advice given by health services about the dangerous effect of ultra violet rays on the skin. It identified that although people did not always follow this advice they use individual and cultural opinions to judge the risk for themselves using a different type of knowledge to form their decision. Lay knowledge. Holiday makers believe a suntan gives them a feeling of health this opposes expert knowledge on the risks of sun tanning where advice is “ more concerned with the avoidance of distant danger” (carter and Jordan, 2009, p. 78).

Studies based on the population using epidemiological evidence showed that public health advice that changes behaviour should target the individual to be effective. This was observed by Rose when asking a group of people to change their behaviour thus creating a prevention paradox (cited in Carter and Jordan, 2009, p. 87). Educational health deemed the whole group to be at risk so it was necessary for the whole group to implement these changes in behaviour. Due to the complex nature of harmful factors which can cause illness evidence suggests the changes and choices to lifestyle would only benefit the minority rather than as suggested the majority leading to most people interpreting the advice as inaccurate. The public becoming ever more aware of their behaviour and lifestyle due to health education leading them to conclude that they are always in new at risk categories and also leading the public to become aware that there are always exceptions to the rule.

Davidson et used two examples of this and had the effect of neutralising the <https://assignbuster.com/the-role-of-expert-and-lay-knowledge-in-understanding-and-managing-risk/>

messages contained in public health advice. 1. " Uncle Norman" in an at risk category and avoiding simple health advice became sick. 2. " The last person" despite following health advice and still became sick. Non experts make decisions based on their own judgment however lay epidemiology is considered comparable with expert epidemiology and although conflict often occurs between the expert and lay opinions they do often have grounds to engage each other for example it is important to understand lay knowledge in creating effective public health messages. Conclusion Risk is subjective both expert and lay opinions are useful in determining if the risk is worth taking. Beck's risk society is evident in both case studies and risk knowledge is created by the expert field of epidemiology, however lay knowledge produced by the public is at individual level and each individual will interpret it for themselves leading them to question the public health advice. Each test or expert piece of knowledge can be contested as in the two allotment soil tests both had different results and outcomes that lead to the individual making up their own mind in which advice to follow.