

## AT-RISK YOUTH IN THE CONTEXT OF CURRENT NORMALITY – PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS

LUBOMÍR HLAD

Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts  
Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra  
Hodžova 1, 949 74 Nitra, Slovak Republic

**E-mail address:** [lhlad@ukf.sk](mailto:lhlad@ukf.sk)

**ORCID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1690-0057>

IRENA KONEČNÁ

College of Applied Psychology  
Akademická 409, 411 55, Terezín, Czech Republic

**E-mail address:** [konecna@vsaps.cz](mailto:konecna@vsaps.cz)

**ORCID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-89624906>

BOJAN ŽALEC

Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana  
Poljanska c. 4, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

**E-mail address:** [bojan.zalec@teof.uni-lj.si](mailto:bojan.zalec@teof.uni-lj.si)

**ORCID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8096-6937>

PETER MAJDA

Faculty of Theology, The Catholic University in Ružomberok  
Spišská Kapitula 12, 053 04 Spišské Podhradie, Slovak Republic

**E-mail address:** [budayova@gmail.com](mailto:budayova@gmail.com)

**ORCID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6171-3384>

TIBERIU CONSTANTIN IONESCU

Department of Clinical Neurosciences, Faculty of Medicine  
University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Carol Davila”  
Sos. Berceni, 10, PO:041914, 020021 Bucharest, Romania

**E-mail address:** [tiberiu.ionescu@drd.umfcd.ro](mailto:tiberiu.ionescu@drd.umfcd.ro)

**ORCID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1034-2202>



YULIA NICKOLAEVNA BIRYUKOVA

Russian Language Department  
Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University)  
Miklukho-Maklaya 6, 117198 Moscow, Russia

**E-mail address:** [yu.birukova@gmail.com](mailto:yu.birukova@gmail.com)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5977-4081>

## ABSTRACT

**Aim.** At-risk individuals have many forms, often it is the two opposing sides of a personality which can ultimately implement risky behaviour only to accept an individual into a peer group.

**Concept.** The risky behaviour of young people and children currently associated with a consumer society aggravated by the pandemic situation Covid-19 is the subject of interest in professional as well as scientific research of various professionals who work in different areas of life.

**Methods.** This study deals with the risks, social, but also individual consequences of at-risk youth, which occur at all levels of society. In the study, we proceeded in an analytical-synthetic way, interpreting and ascertaining the results of various other scientific and professional studies by foreign authors who deal with the given issue.

**Results.** The study confirms that risky behaviour requires a constant approach to educating a young person through not only the family but also the school environment, which allows a new perspective on risky youth behaviour. However, it is very important to integrate young people into society to see the risks of their behaviour not only for themselves, but for a narrower or wider community.

**Conclusion.** The scientific articles and contributions offered in this study point out the risky behaviour of young people, the risks of behaviour not only for individuals but also for groups, it points out the possible causes, reasons, but also consequences of risky behaviour.

**Keywords:** at-risk youth, normality, causes, origin, risk groups

## INTRODUCTION

In the second half of the 20th century, developed countries experienced a period of unprecedented economic growth, which brought a large group of their inhabitants' improvements in standard of living, resulting in a form of hedonistic prosperity and waste. Although the issue of social responsibility for the world and human society has also emerged in the social debate (Tkáčová, Pavlíková, Jenisová et al., 2021), prosperity more or less lasted until the beginning of 2020, when Covid-19 respiratory disease, for which there was no vaccine, was discovered in China (Budayová et al., 2020). The Coronavirus pandemic brought many negative consequences that were affecting all areas of society. In addition to its effect on health and mortality, the pandemic had an enormous influence on all economic

sectors – political, social, family, and personal life (Králik et al., 2022; Ludvigh Cintulová, Budayová, & Rottermund, 2022; Murgaš et al., 2022). The often-discussed economic crisis, or the actively-discussed healthcare crisis, were also a growing interest in the consequences of the corona crisis on the human psyche (Ludvigh Cintulová et al., 2021; Tkáčová et al., 2022). Inter alia, people's perception of quality of life, as well as overall satisfaction, risk behaviour and well-being has changed radically (Tkáčová, Pavlíková, Tvrdoň et al., 2021; Tvrdoň et al., 2020). Risk behaviour, the second of which we will address in more detail in the following lines, is tied to a certain cultural context, urbanisation, social perception but also to the definition of norm and normality, which delimits a certain situation where individuals or groups sufficiently respect and accept social established value systems. The culture represented by a group of norms, values or rules significantly influences the cognitive, emotional, behavioural spheres of its members. In connection with the behaviour of young people, it is necessary to take into account that with the development of the individual responsibilities. of a young person, the development of society and its perception and approach to what is the norm, behaviour. Each social norm has a certain internal content, which consists of orders, prohibitions, obligations and rights. At the same time, the standard has a certain structure, within which some prohibitions may be superior to others, respectively. They differentiate in a way in the range of manifestations and behaviour of the individual. However, each standard also has its own boundary lines and exceeding this boundary is perceived by society as risky, pathological, criminal, delinquent or deviant etc (Akimjak et al., 2022; Dolejš, 2010).

## RISK BEHAVIOUR

We can characterise risky behaviour as various forms of behaviour that have a negative effect not only on human health, but also on the social or psychological functioning of an individual, while endangering his social environment (Verešová, 2020). This threat may be real or anticipated. At a generalised level, it is possible to characterise risk behaviour with an unclear result and fluctuations between the possibilities of negative consequences, losses and positive consequences, profits (Roubalová, Kralik & Kondrla, 2021; Rychnová et al., 2022).

Young people in the age range of 15-20 can be considered at risk, as current experience in the field of social work shows that this is the most at-risk group of clients (Labáth, 2009). It is a phase in the individual's individual life, which is a sporadic transition from the developmental period of childhood to adulthood and is conjugated with enormous pressure and dynamics of revolutionary changes and variations. In addition to strong physical maturation, these phases are also characterised by emotional and cognitive, psychosocial personality structuring. Social progress plays an important role in the ten-

dencies towards risky behaviour, which is accompanied by a huge amount of new information composing a complicated entanglement in which one finds it difficult to navigate. This complication gradually leads in a negative sense to the elimination of interpersonal relationships, feelings of depression or violation of personal integrity (Dolejš, 2010). In connection with the emergence of risky behaviour and its symptoms, it is necessary to take into account the personality traits of young people. In this respect, the relationship to oneself, as well as the feeling of security and meaningfulness of life stand out as extremely important. Below-average self-esteem can have consequences ranging from endangering one's own life to violent acts, through which a young person wants to improve his or her reputation in a group, i.e. gain and gain the recognition of others, which is most likely to increase his or her self-esteem (Králik & Máhrik, 2019; Kulifaj et al., 2016).

In general, we divide the risk factors that significantly affect the adolescent into four groups, which are the individual, the family, the school environment and society (Bačová & Žiaková, 2019). In the above context, we consider it important to take into account the fact that various forms of risky behaviour are almost always the result of mutual influence of different variables, which are:

- biological, i.e. genetic, congenital;
- psychological (temperament, character, level of knowledge);
- social (society, peer groups, family or other social groups);
- spiritual (loss and absence of meaning in life) (Dolejš, 2010).

Miroslav Charvát and Martina Nevoralová (2015), based on Michal Miovský survey studies from 2015, state the following as factors of risk behaviour during adolescence: extreme economic deprivation, unfavourable biochemical genetic characteristics, early and consequently persistent behavioural problems, including aggressive behaviour of boys, hyperactivity during childhood but also adolescence, use of alcohol or other addictive substances in the family environment, weak educational activities and conflicts in the family, relatively low ties to the family, school failures, positive attitudes to the use of addictive drugs, peer rejection, neglect of school and study obligations, etc.

Michaela Širučková (2015) differentiates risk behaviour into the following categories:

- interpersonal aggressive behaviour. Violence against others, bullying, abuse, forms of discrimination (racial, sexual), etc. can be included in this category;
- delinquent behaviour in relation to ownership and property. Such behaviour is primarily vandalism, theft, etc.;
- risky health habits, such as alcohol use or tobacco use;
- sexual behaviour This type of risk management involves, in particular, the onset of sexual life, frequent rotation of partners, promiscuity, premature parenthood;

- risky behaviour in relation to social institutions, which includes, for example, problematic behaviour at school, truancy, irresponsible or no fulfilment of school duties, etc.;
- pathological gambling;
- risky sports activities.

Iveta Dolejší et al. (2020) on the basis of the “Strategy for the prevention of risky behaviour in children and adolescents” for risky behaviour. risk phenomena in youth behaviour are considered: aggression (Labáth, 2009), and forms of aggressive behaviour, use of addictive and psychotropic substances, bullying, cyberbullying and acts of violent behaviour, crime, vandalism, delinquency, manifestations of racism, anti-Semitism and xenophilia, political or religious extremism, truancy or eating disorders, sexual risk behaviour, HIV/AIDS or non-substance (Dolejší et al., 2020) such as gambling, uncontrollable use of a computer or mobile phone. Stable and thus with consequences for the young person’s future life are, above all, those types of risky behaviour which carry the risk of developing a habit, regardless of the social context (Pavlikova, 2017). For example, drug or alcohol addiction or pathological gambling over time create incentive systems that do not require external reinforcement, even though they have developed in close interaction with the social context. The opposite is the case of delinquent forms of risky behaviour, which are very closely linked and linked to the social environment. Based on this fact, it is, therefore, possible to assume that a change in the environment, in the event of disengagement from the original risk group, there will be a positive change in the individual. The third and different trend from the previous two is, for example, risky behaviour in the form of anti-Semitism, extremism, etc. In this case, the pathology is relatively deeply rooted on a social basis. Such behaviour is due to strong cohesion within a given extremist group (Kuzembayeva et al., 2022; Ludvigh Cintulová, Budayová & Buzalová, 2022; Širučková, 2015; Tvrdoň et al., 2020).

Other risk factors for young people undoubtedly include a more intense desire to expose the unknown and to experiment, more often than ever to look for positives in health or social, dangerous behaviour and attitudes. Finding your own values and lifestyle can often have a number of dangerous effects. Peter Kulifaj and his team of authors cite as an example the use of drugs, which is often interpreted to young people as a path leading to creativity, or, for example, extreme weight loss is rationalised by young people as the ability to control themselves and so on. Problems related to not managing physical changes, building identity and certain emotional lability lead to the creation of extremely stressful and demanding situations. Adolescents can easily fail in various stressful situations and their behaviour becomes deviant (Budayová et al., 2022; Kulifaj et al., 2016).

Socially risky behaviour Monika Bačová and Eva Žiaková (2019) indicate a deviation from normal behaviour that is socially accepted. It is a

behaviour that is on the periphery of the boundaries of behaviour, which is determined by the social norm of a particular society (Binetti, et al., 2021). Katarína Šišňanská (2019) describes risky behaviour as one of the types of social pathology, defining it as behaviour that directly or indirectly results in health or psychosocial destruction of the individual, other persons, environment or property. Such youth behaviour is the cause of a demonstrable acquisition of social, physiological, health, psychological, developmental risks for the individual, as well as his surroundings or for the society in which he coexists.

Dolejší et al. (2020) talks about the so-called anti-social behaviour, which refers to conscious and unconscious youth activities or adolescents who undermine the political, economic, political and, above all, moral foundations of society. Such behaviour is usually manifested by accidental or even systematic violations of legal norms and is perceived as undesirable by society and the adolescent's environment.

Risk behaviour can be divided into two categories. The first is behaviour that destroys physical or mental health in some way. In the second category, it is possible to incorporate behaviour conjugated with the negative impact and detriment of others, the threat to society. A person's risk can be perceived from several points of view, which can be somatic, personal, social, but also aspects of ability and behaviour (Bačová & Žiaková, 2009). Each risky behaviour is divided into individual types mentioned above, while these individual types, acts of undesirable behaviour represent certain psychological units in the interaction between a living organism and its environment, it is an element of psychological activity (Dolejš, 2010; Maturkanič et al., 2021).

For each type of risk social pathological behaviour, it is necessary to take into account the possible failure of the human factor in the social and intimate individual life of the individual (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021; Ionescu et al., 2021; Kondrla & Repar, 2017).

In addition to the above factors, personal traumatic experiences, various failures in personal, family life or even employment are the cause of undesirable risky behaviour. It may also be young people who have found themselves at a minimum level of income, illness, misunderstanding in the family or in the immediate vicinity and other critical complications in a person's life. These create favourable conditions for the emergence of risky behaviour and subsequent manipulation or abuse by the risky environment.

Maroš Šíp (2016) presents the symptoms of changes in persons who have undergone risky behaviour in the following points:

- personality change and conversion. This change brings with it misanthropy, hatred and reluctance to correct;
- loss of identity. Adolescents do not perceive themselves as an entity, an individual;
- paranoia. Any criticism is perceived as persecution;
- social disorientation. Adolescents, depending on the severity of their behaviour, lose the ability to exist in society, lose the ability to organise

their time, make decisions, and are typically naive (Budayová, 2019, 2021);

- guilt complex. Adolescents feel guilty on the one hand and rationalise their actions on the other, which are, for example, anti-social and risky.

The degree of danger of manifestations of risky behaviour is standardised and defined by social character, the intensity and severity of its harmfulness is therefore a social construct, the company specifies where the boundary between normal and risky behaviour is located. Manifestations and tendencies of risky behaviour can take the form of risky signs or they can even become an object that determines and conditions undesirable behaviour of young people. Usually, these undesirable tendencies are manifested in youth communities, which build their unmet goals or absent needs on ideologies and rationalise their relevance (Šoková, 2018).

Psychological science differentiates at-risk youth into two groups, the first of which is characterised by the fact that: primitive, indistinguishable instinctual derivatives overcome unstable defence structures. These incursions of unorganised and undivided instinctive material cannot be directed and corrected by intellectual and moral correctives, as they are insufficient and weak, they are too unstable, rudimentary, or completely absent (Štúrová, 2005).

Individuals belonging to this group of at-risk youth can be characterised as explosive, vehement, unrestrained, with a strong tendency to conflict and rebellion against authorities and social norms, as well as typical hostility, a strong tendency to violence and even anti-social organisation. At the same time, it should be recalled that the self-reflection of these individuals does not show signs of lability and stability impairment, but shows relatively satisfactory social skills (Karakose et al., 2022; Roubalová, Kralik & Kondrla, 2021).

The second group is represented by young people who: “suffer from the fact that similar rigid derivatives or accumulated emotionally unfavourable content of experience enter their rigid defence system, which is fixed and stationary. These disorders are not based on the fact that unconscious material does not find correction in a sufficient moral and rational defence system, but in a force that disrupts, destabilises and disorganises it” (Durani et al., 2022; Judak et al., 2022; Králik et al., 2022; Ludvigh Cintulová, 2021; Ludvigh Cintulová et al., 2021; Ludvigh Cintulová, Budayová & Rottermund, 2022; Štúrová, 2005).

At-risk individuals belonging to this group are characterised as shy, timid, socially isolated, with frequent tendencies to hypochondria. From the point of view of self-reflection, in the case of young people from this group, a significantly lower and largely unstable rate of self-reflection prevailed, with a tendency to avoid difficult situations, their constructive solution. Depressive behaviour and insecurity are also typical. Suicidal tendencies are often recorded in the anamnesis of such individuals (Kobylarek, 2019; Štúrová, 2005).

Furthermore, Numerous youths are exposed to traumatic childhood maltreatment, which might predispose them to poor affect regulation and later consequences, such as mental problems, drug misuse, and aggression. Childhood adversities stemming from “maladaptive family functioning clusters” (such as parental mental illness, substance abuse disorders, and criminality; family violence; physical and sexual abuse; and neglect) may be associated with subsequent mental health disorders, explaining (in a predictive sense) 32.4% of all disorders, 41.2% of disruptive behaviour disorders, 32.4% of anxiety disorders, 26.2% of mood disorders, and 21.0% of personality disorders (Bell, 2010; Green et al., 2010; McLaughlin, 2010).

In view of the above facts, it can be stated that the risky behaviour of young people is functional, instrumental and consciously focused on their goal. In many cases, young people’s risky behaviour acts as a means of acceptance, respect and acceptance by the peer group. It is during this period of development, 15-20 years of age, the role of the family is transferred by the adolescent to the peer community, which substitutes his / her needs or imaginarily breaks down the limits. It is the peer group that plays an important role in the process of group socialisation, which is characteristic and largely important for these stages of youth development (Verešová & Labáth, 2009, Verešová, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

The issue of this behaviour has become the focus of many sectors that deal with social pathology. Youth risk behaviour is currently becoming a major topic in several fields of science. Risk behaviour is a wide-ranging issue, including a number of types and forms of behaviour that are perceived by society as undesirable, negative. We can state that there is an urgent need to intensify integration and close cooperation as public authorities, educators, family members, as well as vulnerable adolescents themselves, in order to prevent the emergence of risk factors, which are manifested in some forms of this pathological behaviour.

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