

Determinants of environmental risk perception in adolescents.

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Keywords: Risk perception, environmental pollution, psychometric paradigm, adolescents, demographic variables.

The current study is part of a LIFE+ Environment Policy and Governance research project (GIOCONDA), which aims at involving the youth in the construction of effective evidence-informed policies on environment and health. One of its major priorities is to understand young people's perception of risk associated to environmental pollutants and how it is affected by demographic variables and by perceived pollution. In order to achieve this purpose, a population-based questionnaire study was conducted on a sample of 500 Italian students, aged 9-16 years, from four Italian areas identified by different environmental conditions (high or low pollution). The questionnaire on risk perception comprised 11 rating scales, modeled on the psychometric paradigm, assessing several important qualitative characteristics of the risks associated with environmental pollutants (e.g., knowledge of consequences, severity of consequences). Two further questions were also included, assessing perceived pollution and concern about pollution at school.

Factorial analyses revealed two principal components, labeled *risk perception* and *risk acceptance*.

Results showed that the *risk perception scale* significantly correlates with the two questions about air pollution at school. Younger students presented lower scores on the *risk perception scale* than older students, probably because their "ecological consciousness" is not fully developed yet. Finally, participants from the city of Taranto (notorious for a steel refinery) showed higher scores than participants from other cities (Ravenna, Arno, and Naples).

These findings highlight distinct patterns of risk perception depending of age and place of living. Their implication for theories of risk perception will be discussed.