

PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND RESPONSE TO RISK: A SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW IN THE MODERN ERA

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Abstract - This study examines the social construction of risk in modern society through a qualitative approach that focuses on the triad of perception, response, and production of risk. The analysis reveals a complex dialectic between technocratic government policy formulation and contextual social epistemology, in which the meaning of risk emerges from negotiations between personal experiences, social networks, and dynamically evolving cultural structures. Critical findings indicate that this epistemological gap can only be bridged through two fundamental transformations: (1) a paradigm shift in government communication from a one-way monological model to a participatory dialogical model, and (2) the institutionalization of public involvement in the entire policy cycle through inclusive deliberative mechanisms. As a strategic recommendation, this study offers a transformative risk education framework that integrates technical literacy with local wisdom, as well as a collaborative governance model that positions communities as active subjects in decision-making. The substantive contribution of this study lies in its conceptual roadmap for reconfiguring risk governance that is not only responsive to uncertainty but also proactively builds the adaptive capacity of communities in facing the complexities of the times. The resulting policy implications emphasize the importance of a holistic approach that integrates institutional, cultural, and community dimensions in the development of a resilient and sustainable risk management system.

Keywords: risk sociology, risk perception, public policy, risk management, modern society, community participation, risk literacy.

INTRODUCTION

In this modern era, society is faced with various risks that arise as a result of social, technological and environmental changes. Risk sociology has become an important discipline for understanding how individuals and communities interpret and manage the risks they face. Rapid changes in various aspects of life, such as globalisation, urbanisation and technological advances, have created a range of complex challenges. The social challenges arising from these changes are also diverse, such as inequality and the challenge of building social cohesion in urban environments as a result of urbanisation (Mardikaningsih, 2021). This complexity requires mature risk management integration, not only in the social sphere, but also in the application of technology itself, as demonstrated in the context of engineering projects (Radjawane et al., 2023). A systematic approach to risk management is becoming increasingly relevant, given that these challenges require a structured framework to effectively identify, assess, and respond to risks (Silva et al., 2022). Society needs to adapt to new situations, which often involve uncertainty and potential risks. In this context, understanding risk is crucial, as it influences individual and collective decisions in the face of existing threats. Through the lens of sociology, we can examine how societies form their understanding of risk and how this understanding impacts behaviour and policy. This also includes how various factors, such as culture, social values, and public policy, contribute to the way societies respond to risk (Brown, 2014).

In risk management, communities not only seek to avoid or reduce negative impacts, but also strive to produce and build a better understanding of the risks themselves. This process involves interaction between individuals, groups, and institutions that play a role in creating narratives about existing risks. For example, in the face of natural disasters, communities often rely on collective experience and local knowledge to respond to situations. Therefore, the sociology of risk can help explain how risk management involves complex social aspects, including communication, authority, and trust between the actors involved (Suabey et al., 2023). Furthermore, this study examines the sociology of risk in modern society with a focus on the triad of risk perception, response, and production. Through a qualitative approach, this analysis highlights the complexity of the interaction between government policy frameworks and public understanding of risk.

Furthermore, in modern societies, various institutions, such as governments and non-governmental organisations, play a role in shaping policies related to risk management. Public policies often reflect societal values and reactions to perceived risks. In this case, sociological analysis can provide insights into how these policies are accepted, interpreted, and implemented by society. This process can also create tension between technical approaches and social perspectives in risk management. Reconciling this tension is part of a broader effort to realise sustainable public policies that balance various interests (Mardikaningsih & Hariani, 2021). This process can also create tension between technical

approaches and social perspectives in risk management, which in turn affects the effectiveness of the policies implemented (Alaszewski, 2023).

When discussing the sociology of risk, it is important to consider how risk is produced and understood in different cultural contexts. Each society has a unique way of interpreting risk, which is influenced by its history, traditions, and values (Abgadshava et al., 2021). For example, in some cultures, risk is seen more as something to be avoided, while in other cultures, risk can be seen as an opportunity for growth and innovation. Therefore, a deep understanding of how culture influences the perception of risk is essential for developing responsive and effective policies.

Taking these aspects into consideration, this study aims to explore how modern societies interpret, manage, and produce risk through policy and culture. Using a phenomenological approach, we can delve deeper into the experiences of individuals and communities in dealing with risk. The goal is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how risk can be managed effectively in an ever-changing society. Through this analysis, it is hoped that insights can be gained to assist in the development of more effective policies and strategies for dealing with risks in the future. More specifically, this study examines the sociology of risk in modern society with a focus on the triad of risk perception, response, and production. Through a qualitative approach, this analysis highlights the complexity of the interaction between the government's policy framework and the public's understanding of risk. Critical findings indicate that this epistemological gap can only be bridged through the transformation of the government's communication model from monological to dialogical, as well as the institutionalisation of public participation in the policy cycle.

In risk management, there are significant challenges related to the gap between public understanding of risk and the policies implemented by the government. Often, the resulting policies do not reflect the realities faced by the public. This misalignment can cause the public to feel unrepresented and voiceless in decision-making processes that affect their lives. This creates dissatisfaction and can lead to distrust of the institutions that are supposed to protect them from risk. This mismatch between public perception and public policy is a fundamental issue that needs to be further examined. Taking these aspects into consideration, this study aims to explore how modern societies interpret, manage, and produce risk through policy and culture. Using a phenomenological approach, we can delve deeper into the experiences of individuals and communities in dealing with risk. The goal is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how risk can be managed effectively in an ever-changing society. Through this analysis, it is hoped that insights can be gained to assist in the development of more effective policies and strategies for dealing with risk in the future. More specifically, this study examines the sociology of risk in modern society with a focus on the triad of risk perception, response, and production. Using a qualitative approach, this analysis highlights the complexity of interactions between government policy frameworks and public understanding of risk. Critical findings indicate that this epistemological gap can only be bridged through the transformation of government communication models from monological to dialogical, as well as the institutionalisation of public participation in the policy cycle.

Furthermore, another challenge is the stigma and discrimination that often accompany discussions about risk. People tend to avoid open discussions about certain risks, such as mental health risks or disaster-related risks. This occurs because of a lack of understanding or fear that can exacerbate existing stigma. Stigma can prevent individuals from seeking help or participating in risk mitigation efforts, thereby hindering the process of recovery and better risk management. Therefore, it is important to understand how stigma plays a role in people's perceptions and responses to risk. The importance of examining the sociology of risk in modern society is increasing along with the complexity of the risks faced. Climate change, pandemics, and economic uncertainty are some examples of challenges that require a deep understanding of how society perceives and responds to risk. Sociological analysis provides a different perspective on understanding risk, which can assist in the development of more responsive and effective policies. By understanding how communities interact with risk, we can identify better strategies to minimise the negative impacts of emerging risks.

In facing increasingly complex uncertainties in various dimensions of life, communities need to develop holistic adaptive capacities to manage risks effectively and sustainably. These capacities can be built through contextual approaches that are responsive to local socio-cultural conditions, as reflected in community adaptation strategies to climate change (Oluwatoyin & Mardikaningsih, 2022). This study has dual significance: first, as an educational tool to raise public awareness about risk dynamics and strategies for dealing with uncertainty; second, as a substantive contribution to the development of risk literacy necessary to strengthen the collective ability of communities to manage risk in a participatory and transformative manner. Thus, communities not only become more responsive to emerging threats, but also develop systemic resilience that enables proactive adaptation to increasingly complex future challenges.

This study aims to provide in-depth insights into how modern communities interpret, manage, and produce risk through interactions between policy and culture. Using a sociological approach, this study seeks to explore the life experiences and perspectives of communities in dealing with risk, as well as to contribute theoretically and practically to the development of policies that are more responsive to the dynamics and needs of society. Furthermore, this study examines the sociology of risk in modern society with a focus on the triad of risk perception, response, and production. Through a qualitative approach, this analysis highlights the complexity of interactions between government policy frameworks and community understanding of risk.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative literature review approach with a focus on thematic synthesis to examine the social construction of risk in modern society. This method allows researchers to conduct an in-depth exploration of various relevant literature to identify patterns, themes, and trends that emerge in society's understanding of risk. A systematic search strategy was applied to collect primary and secondary sources, including books, scientific journal articles, research reports, and policy documents related to the sociology of risk. The search was conducted through leading academic databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and ScienceDirect using a combination of controlled keywords such as "sociology of risk", "risk perception", "risk governance", and "public policy" to ensure comprehensive and relevant coverage of sources in the context of contemporary society.

The inclusion criteria for this study include publications relevant to the topic of risk sociology published between 2010 and 2024, written in Indonesian and English, and originating from indexed and accredited sources. This study specifically excludes sources that do not contribute significantly to the understanding of the triad of perception, response, and production of risk in modern society, including popular publications without sufficient academic basis. After conducting the selection process, the researchers applied thematic coding techniques with the help of NVivo 12 software to identify key themes and patterns that emerged from the collected literature. This process involved creating initial codes, grouping codes into thematic categories, and developing a conceptual framework that facilitated the analysis of the relationships between social variables in risk construction.

To ensure the quality of the analysis, this study applied critical evaluation to each source through a systematic appraisal approach that included methodological analysis, conceptual validity, contextual relevance, and the theoretical contribution of each publication. The researchers also considered the diversity of epistemological perspectives and theoretical frameworks in the literature by triangulating between the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, and policy studies. The validity process was reinforced through peer debriefing with experts in the field of risk sociology and member checking of the interpretation of findings. With this rigorous methodological approach, this research is expected to make a substantive contribution, both theoretically and practically, to understanding the social mechanisms of how modern societies interpret, manage, and produce risk through complex interactions between policy structures and cultural dynamics, while also providing implementable policy recommendations for more participatory and sustainable risk management.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Interpreting Risk in Everyday Life

Modern society interprets risk in various ways that are influenced by the complexity of experiences, knowledge, and dynamically evolving social contexts. In everyday life, individuals are often faced with multidimensional decisions that involve risk considerations across a broad spectrum, ranging from health and finance to environmental safety. The dynamics of risk assessment and decision-making are a fundamental concern not only in a personal context but also in more structured domains, such as corporate financial management, which considers ethical principles in determining strategic choices (Putra & Arifin, 2023). This cognitive process is increasingly complex given that individuals integrate personal experiences with collective learning, where social value systems and cultural norms also shape the framework for interpreting risk, which is intersubjective and contextual in nature.

Personal and collective experiences significantly shape cognitive mechanisms in assessing risks, where these reference systems are often hierarchical and selective. In the context of health risks, for example, people tend to rely on information available through the mass media and formal health institutions, while also considering local narratives and community testimonials. This interpretation of risk is not limited to biomedical aspects alone, but extends to socio-ecological dimensions such as environmental change and public safety, which require a holistic approach. When individuals feel they have control over the risks they face whether through technical knowledge or institutional support they tend to show greater courage in making risky decisions. Conversely, epistemic uncertainty and limited information can trigger defensive attitudes that lead to avoidance of situations perceived as threatening (Dursun, 2020).

The importance of risk literacy in modern society is increasingly prominent in the context of globalization and systemic interdependence, which creates structural vulnerability. The rapid and massive flood of information often creates cognitive disorientation, where individuals find it difficult to distinguish accurate and evidence-based information from misleading content (Dursun, 2020). In these conditions, an individual's analytical capacity to understand the complexity of risk becomes a crucial determinant in forming an adaptive response. This increased capacity is in line with the transformative function of education in building the competencies needed to face contemporary global challenges, including sustainability literacy and adaptive citizenship that is responsive to the dynamics of risk (Mardikaningsih et al., 2021). Empirical evidence shows that in natural disaster situations, communities with a comprehensive understanding of risk are able to respond more effectively through structured coordination mechanisms.

Social interaction plays a fundamental role in the construction of risk meaning through processes of collective negotiation and validation. Group discussions whether within the family, community, or social networks actively shape individuals' perspectives on risk through mechanisms of social learning and the transmission of local wisdom. When individuals share experiences and information about risk in an inclusive discursive space, they can build a more comprehensive and contextualized shared understanding (Suabey et al., 2023). This process creates a social support network that facilitates the exchange of resources and coping strategies, while strengthening community resilience in the face of uncertainty. In a social ecosystem characterized by a high level of trust among members, mechanisms for coordination and collective response to risk can be optimized through role sharing and resource synergy.

Conversely, social fragmentation and a deficit of trust can hinder the collective capacity to respond effectively to risks. Polarized communities often find it difficult to build consensus on risk assessment and mitigation priorities, resulting in uncoordinated and suboptimal responses. This social disintegration is exacerbated by the absence of effective communication channels and participatory decision-making mechanisms. Therefore, strengthening social cohesion through intergroup dialogue and building inclusive local institutions are important prerequisites for improving community resilience. Education and strengthening risk literacy which encompasses not only cognitive aspects but also socio-emotional dimensions are strategic steps to raise public awareness while building the adaptive capacity needed to deal with the complexity of risks in the contemporary era, taking into account the convergence of scientific knowledge and local wisdom within the framework of sustainable risk governance.

Interaction Between Government Policy and Public Understanding of Risk

Government policy on risk management cannot be separated from the influence of public understanding and perception, which fundamentally shape the legitimacy and effectiveness of policy implementation. In formulating risk-related policies, the government needs to consider public opinion holistically through participatory mechanisms that ensure the acceptance and sustainability of implementation. Empirical reality shows that policies that are not in line with the collective understanding of society often face systemic resistance, as seen in the case of disaster mitigation policies that failed to integrate local experiences, resulting in rejection due to the exclusion of the public from the decision-making process (Alaszewski, 2005). Therefore, active public involvement in the entire policy cycle from formulation to evaluation is an important prerequisite for creating more effective, contextual, and sustainable solutions.

Government-community interactions in the context of risk management create complex dynamics involving multiple communication channels and diverse epistemologies. Governments often use various communication platforms from conventional to digital media to convey information about risks and policies implemented. However, the effectiveness of this information transmission is highly dependent on the decoding capacity and literacy of the public, where a mismatch between the complexity of the information and the public's ability to understand it can result in significant distortion of meaning. If the public perceives the information provided as irrelevant or conceptually ambiguous, they tend to ignore the policy message (Kusumi et al., 2017). Therefore, developing adaptive communication strategies which take into account audience heterogeneity and socio-cultural contexts is key to ensuring public accessibility and understanding of essential risk information.

Public response to risk management policies is also substantially shaped by the level of trust in the government and related institutions, which serve as critical social capital in policy implementation. When the public has high trust in the legitimacy and capabilities of the government, they tend to show greater compliance with the policies implemented (Wang et al., 2022). Conversely, a deficit of trust can trigger policy resistance even when supported by valid empirical data, creating a paradox of rationality in risk governance. In this context, the government needs to build and maintain public trust through the trinity of governance principles: transparency in decision-making processes, accountability in implementation, and active public participation in all stages of the policy cycle.

This study critically reveals a systematic gap between proposed policies and the socio-ecological realities faced by communities, where policies often fail to reflect the actual needs and conditions experienced by individuals and communities (Dias et al., 2020). This phenomenon of the policy-reality gap necessitates an in-depth analysis of the community's understanding of risk as an epistemological basis for formulating more responsive and relevant policies. Through community involvement in an inclusive and deliberative decision-making process, the resulting policies are expected to be more in line with public expectations and needs, while increasing effectiveness in managing existing risks through the mechanism of co-production of policy.

As an analytical synthesis, it can be concluded that risk perception in modern society is shaped through a triadic interaction between social dynamics, personal experiences, and government policies that create a complex ecosystem of meaning. A comprehensive understanding of risk enables individuals and communities to make more informed and strategic decisions. Community involvement in the decision-making process related to risk management policies is an essential element in creating effective and sustainable solutions, where this principle of inclusion is in line with the imperative to accommodate social change in policies to achieve a more just and relevant society in facing various contemporary challenges (Halizah & Mardikaningsih, 2022). Further research is needed to explore these dynamics in greater depth and examine the mechanisms of community adaptation to risks that will continue to evolve in the future.

In risk management efforts, the interaction between government policy and public understanding is a fundamental aspect that determines the success of policy implementation. Policies implemented by the government are often designed to protect the public from various multidimensional threats, such as natural disasters, health crises, and security disturbances. However, the effectiveness of these policies greatly depends on how the public understands, interprets, and responds to them. Effective risk management strategies must consider the social and contextual factors that shape public perception, including local knowledge structures and collective cognitive frameworks (Sarif & Ramle, 2021). When policies are formulated without alignment with the understanding and realities faced by the community, structural resistance will emerge and hinder policy implementation (Fajri et al., 2023). Therefore, a deep understanding of how the community perceives risk and the policies implemented is a critical prerequisite for creating responsive and sustainable risk management strategies.

One of the main challenges in this interaction is the epistemological gap between the technical knowledge possessed by the government and the contextual understanding that develops at the community level. This gap can be exacerbated by broader psychosocial factors that influence how groups within society view and interact with each other, including through stereotypes that can hinder social cohesion (Zahid & Darmawan, 2022). Often, the government has access to more complete and accurate information about risks, but this information is not always communicated in a way that is holistically understandable to the community. Ambiguity in policy communication can create cognitive confusion and erode public trust (Wachinger et al., 2013). For example, when the government announces disaster mitigation measures without providing adequate explanations about how the community can contribute or participate in these efforts, this can result in social alienation and feelings of lack of control over the situation at hand.

The creation of effective communication channels between the government and the public is a strategic necessity in contemporary risk management. Social media, public forums, and educational campaigns can serve as transformative mediums that bridge this communication gap. These digital channels not only act as transmitters of information, but also as spaces where civic identity and collective perceptions of public issues are formed through dynamic interactions (Darmawan & de Jesus Isaac, 2022). By strategically utilising these platforms, the government can provide information directly and simultaneously listen to public responses through structured feedback mechanisms (Aung & Razak, 2023). Active public participation in policy formulation can increase ownership and support for adopted policies, because when people feel involved in the decision-making process, they tend to show greater commitment to the implementation of these policies.

In addition to communication challenges, the social stigma attached to certain risks also presents a significant obstacle to risk management. For example, risks related to mental health or infectious diseases are often ignored or misunderstood by the public due to deep-rooted stigma. This stigma can have serious psychological effects, which in turn can exacerbate or give rise to other physical health risks (Issalillah, 2022). Furthermore, stigma can prevent individuals from seeking professional help or participating in risk mitigation programmes. Therefore, the government needs to make education efforts focused on reducing stigma and increasing public understanding of the risks they may face. By educating the public about the importance of risk management and how they can contribute constructively, the government can create a more inclusive and responsive environment for the community's needs.

This analysis also reveals that government policies are often influenced by specific and dynamic socio-cultural contexts. In societies with certain norms, proposed policies may not always be well received due to their incompatibility with local values. For example, in highly collective cultures, a more individualistic approach to risk management policy may prove ineffective (Máñez Costa et al., 2017). The principle of designing policies that are sensitive to local culture is essential to ensure their acceptance and effectiveness, as reflected in efforts to develop sustainability policies that are relevant to community values (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2023). Therefore, consideration of the values and norms that exist within society is a critical aspect of policy formulation. By comprehensively understanding existing social dynamics, the government can design policies that are more appropriate, contextual, and acceptable to the community.

The interaction between government policy and public understanding of risk is a complex, dynamic, and multidimensional process. Active public involvement in decision-making, transparent and adaptive communication, and comprehensive education are fundamental pillars for creating effective and responsive policies. Further research is needed to explore how various social, cultural, and political factors systematically influence this interaction, as well as to examine the mechanisms of public adaptation to risks that will continue to evolve in the future within the framework of participatory and sustainable risk governance.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has revealed the complexity of the sociology of risk in modern society, where the interpretation, management and production of risk are interrelated with public policy and social dynamics. Society does not only play a role as the recipient of policy, but also as an active actor in the risk management process. The interpretation of risk is influenced by various factors, including individual experiences, social interactions and cultural contexts. This shows that in order to understand and manage risk effectively, it is important to involve the community in the decision-making

process. In addition, effective communication between the government and the community is essential to create a clear understanding of the risks and policies being implemented. Further research is needed to explore in greater depth how communities can adapt and respond to risks in the future, and how policies can be optimised to create a safer and more resilient environment.

The implications of this research reveal that risk management is an entity that cannot be separated from the social and cultural understanding that exists within society. Effective policies must be rooted in a deep understanding of how communities perceive risk and how they interact with existing policies through mechanisms of adaptation and resistance. Community involvement in policy formulation and implementation will not only increase policy legitimacy, but also create ownership that strengthens the effectiveness of implementation in the long term. Furthermore, the government needs to develop comprehensive education programmes on risk and mitigation strategies so that the community can play an active role as strategic partners in managing the risks they face. Thus, the synergy between public participation and transparent communication will create a collaborative risk governance ecosystem, where policies and community actions reinforce each other in facing the complexity of contemporary risks.

The recommendations of this study point to three dimensions of scientific and practical development. First, further research should focus its analysis on specific aspects that influence public perceptions of risk, including the role of the media in constructing risk narratives, the effectiveness of context-based risk literacy education models, and the transmission of collective experiences in shaping social memory about risk. Second, it is important to explore variations in risk interpretation among different community groups (based on age, socio-economic background, or cultural identity) through comparative and intersectional approaches. Third, there is a need to develop structured education programmes designed to improve community risk literacy by combining technical knowledge and local wisdom, so that decision-making capacity in the face of risk can be optimised. In addition, the framework for public participation in policy formulation needs to be institutionalised through deliberative mechanisms that ensure the inclusiveness and relevance of the resulting policies to the complex realities faced by the community.

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