

Valuation of health and safety benefits

Dread risks

Prepared by the **University of Newcastle upon Tyne,**
University of East Anglia, Durham University,
University of London and **NERA Economic Consulting**
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Dread risks

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It is by now well-known that people typically fear the prospect of premature death by some causes considerably more than others – see for example Slovic, Fischhoff and Lichtenstein, 1981; Thomas, 1981; Mendeloff and Kaplan, 1990; McDaniels, Kamlet and Fischer, 1992; Savage, 1993; Tolley, Kenkel and Fabian, 1995; Jones-Lee and Loomes, 1995 and Sunstein 1997.

In the light of this, the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) commissioned a research programme comprising three separate studies.

In the first study, by the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, the focus was principally on causes that typically result in instant (or near-instant) death, such as road or rail accidents. In addition, individual attitudes were viewed primarily from the perspective of people's 'self-focused' preferences concerning personal safety.

By contrast, the second study, carried out by a team drawn from the University of East Anglia, Durham and Queen Mary, London, considered – amongst other issues – causes of death typically preceded by protracted periods of pain and discomfort, such as lung or breast cancer. In addition, the second study sought to investigate the public's attitudes to factors such as the victim's age and the question of blame or responsibility for the cause of death concerned. As a result, the focus was directed more towards people's preferences in their role as citizens, expressing their views and attitudes with respect to general principles of social decision-making concerning life-saving interventions.

Finally, the third study - carried out by Michael Spackman of National Economic Research Associates (NERA) – was aimed at summarising and evaluating the extensive body of work undertaken to date by sociologists, psychologists, philosophers and economists on the important but arguably somewhat elusive and nebulous concept of 'Societal Concerns', to which extensive reference is made by various regulatory agencies including the HSE itself.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page No.
i. Executive Summary	4
ii. Valuation of Health & Safety Benefits: Dread Risks Final Report of the Newcastle Study	8
1. The Focus Group Protocol	8
2. Inferring the “Dread” Effects from Contextless “Risk-Risk” Responses	12
3. Quantitative Findings of the Focus Group Study	18
4. The Qualitative Follow-up Study	22
5. The “Absolute Risk Equalization” Heuristic	39
6. Policy Implications of the Newcastle Study Findings	40
References	44
Appendix A: Assessing Variations in the Risk of Death by Different Causes: A note	45
Appendix B: Regression Results with Dread Effects Estimated Using Approach 3 with Top and Bottom Six Outliers Trimmed Out	48
Appendix C: HSE Dread Risk: Focus Group Protocol (B) August 2003	49
iii. Valuation of Health & Safety Benefits: Dread Risks Final Report of the UEA /Durham/Queen Mary team’s study:	69
1. Background	69
2. The Study Design	69
3. Implementation	74
4. Results	75
5. Computing Relative weights	104

iv.	Valuation of Health & Safety Benefits: Dread Risks Final Report of the Michael Spackman Study	107
	1. Background	107
	2. The R2P2 Approach to Societal Concerns	108
	3. Developments on Societal concerns outside R2P2	110
	4. Four Disciplinary Perspectives	113
	5. Discussion	138
	6. Conclusions and Recommendations	146
	Acknowledgements	148
	References	148

