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## **Trust as a psychological factor of personal security**

### **S u m m a r y**

The article discusses issues related to the psychological side of personal security. Emphasis is placed on trust as a phenomenon linking socio-psychological and personal sides of the influences that define it. As interpersonal relationship trust has a direct and indirect effect on the sense of personal security. It depends on both, the nature of the relations and the personal qualities of the individuals involved in the processing of signals from the environment and determine the direction of this influence.

**Keywords:** personal security, trust, interpersonal relations, self control, personal disposition

In the General Theory of Security personal security, also called individual, personal or human security, is represented as a level related to life experiences and state of the individual. It is defined in various content aspects influencing different sides of life, usually in the disposition objective-subjective. According to D. Yonchev “The person who has personal security is the one who enjoys healthy living conditions, whose habitat does not generate threats for his physical and mental health, who has the opportunity to plan his future and has the generally accepted level of freedom to take personal decisions.” [3, p. 88] But this point of view reflects only the objective side of the concept, which should involve the subjective side as well [4, p. 17], conceived as personal belief or sense of security<sup>1</sup>. At this point, in the subjective perception and evaluation of state within the vast range of situations, influences, inner incentives and responses, psychology should intervene, which part is not denied by specialists, yet it is underestimated.

The psychological approach to personal security is not exhausted with its subjective perception. It gives the opportunity to examine the influence of various environment factors, such as social relations and interactions, existing attitudes and mass behavior, which are traditionally subject of social psychology. They have significant and sometimes critical importance for perceiving facts from reality and activating reflective and affective processes in the personal aspect of security.

On the other side, the psychological approach could better explain the complex approach of dependencies between personal characteristics and experiencing security, no matter how it is perceived, as a satisfied or frustrated need, as a real situation or an imaginary threat.

Hardly could a serious objection be made to the fact that problems of personal security and security in general should be examined in psychological aspect. It is ascertained that people evaluate their security through cognitive processes determining their beliefs. [5, p. 59] Although outer events, economic, political and military are real, they become part of the individual reality after the relevant psychological “manufacturing”. This includes perception, thinking, emotional response and result, which could coincide with reality but it is subjective as a rule. People perceive information and evaluate it in accordance with their personal beliefs for security or not. Since this process is subordinate to the common psychological borders, it is universal, and those regarding security are not an exception. As they have different content (sense of security, sources of insecurity, conditions for higher security), their cognitive character is obvious. But it is not only the thinking of events and their juxtaposing to the experience and the system of personal beliefs that influences the evaluation. Among people this is always related to specific emotions which on their part influence the cognitive processing and even form attitudes for choice of behavior. In the security discourse their modality is

<sup>1</sup> According to A. Wallfus objective security is the absence of threat and subjective security is the absence of fear of threat. Quoted N. Slatinski. *Security – Nature, Sense, Content.*, S. 2011, p. 18

mostly negative, such as experiencing anxieties and apprehensions. Anxieties are spontaneously arising thoughts (verbal images) for potential threats [1, p. 102]. These thoughts lead to negative emotions, the reasons could be different: real threats, neutral or even sustaining security<sup>2</sup>. But they are rarely random reactions to what is happening. In most cases, they are a result of socio-psychological and personal detremnants, including past experience, attitudes, and character traits.

Socio-psychological factors are all those phenomena that determine the social cohesion of individuals. In general outline, they are related to main subject matters, such as social perception and thinking, social influence, interpersonal, intergroup and mass behavior. More precisely, in the attitude of security, to this category could be assigned phenomena such as awareness, media influence, anti-social activities, destructive behavior, institutional activities, economic conditions and political situations. All these things could influence the sense of security directly by evoking emotions and indirectly by creating specific background for perceiving facts from reality. But also through specific and unique for the human society relations and dependencies.

Such a phenomenon, revealed in the context of relationships, is trust. It is also a result of different, mainly social phenomena, existing in broad content meaning and deeply rooted evolutionary foundations in the human aspiration to affiliation. In socio-psychological aspect it is defined as a rule of social interaction, providing for predictability of behavior, based on reciprocity, belief in good and selfless intentions of the others. Thrust is a part of the ethic system, but it has strong psychologically-content and meaning potential. It is expressed in assessments and relevant reactions, arising from the expectation that participants in the social interaction would abide by certain standards. Viewed as attitude, it is inner willingness to give help or expectation to receive help. [1, p. 75] Referring to the problem of personal security, thrust has a positive impact as it facilitates social interaction and stabilizes social processes. Thereby, it contributes to the common psychological background through which people perceive and evaluate what is happening as dangerous or safe. In a society where mistrust is prevalent, it is normal to become suspicious, precautious and even hostile because people assess signals of the environment as a threat even though there is no reason for this.

On the other side, trust exists in specific relationships between the subjects in different circles. For instance, there is trust or no trust towards relatives, acquaintances or unknown people, towards groups or institutions. Its presence makes the person calmer, more self-confident and open, reduces anxiety and suspiciousness and provides for more effective interactions. On the contrary, the lack of trust in the circles of social interaction increases suspicions, the feeling of insecurity and personal vulnerability. Such “paranoid” state of social perception often leads to

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<sup>2</sup> It is paradoxical, but a person could react with anxiety and apprehension to information related with increasing security measures or when observing actions along these lines.

inadequate activities, which provoke counter mistrust in turn. For its part, this is an “argument” for enhancing self-mistrust and its generalizing thus transforming it into sustainable personal disposition. As such, it expands its regulatory functions regarding personal security and it becomes both socio-psychological and personal factor in line with the other dispositions, character traits and states.

Virtually, in the numerous life situations and relationships in different interaction circles there is no complete trust. As a specific social regulator, it is viewed as existing to “some extent”. As a specific attitude, it is always mixed with precaution. In other words, “one might not expect help, but he is sure that he will not be harmed” [1, p. 76]. According to A. Velichkov such reduced mistrust is in the grounds of maintaining routine interactions where people have no fears for their personal security. [1, p. 77] When such fears appear, reduced mistrust turns into mistrust. In the narrower circles of interpersonal relations this happens through accumulating disappointment or conflicts. In broader aspect, single cases, indicative of institutions malfunctioning for instance, could ruin the trust not only towards these institutions, but to generalize as common mistrust with consequences for the subjective sense of security. Therefore, it would not be exaggerated to state that the influence of different security levels on personal security is defined by trust.

Trust in the discourse of personal security could be a factor, per se. However, the counter reciprocal effect is also possible – the feeling of personal security or insecurity to increase or decrease trust. This is because feeling both security and insecurity is strongly influenced by personality. In this sense, personal dispositions such as anxiety, emotional lability, locus of control, sense of significance, optimism, etc. are able to change personal beliefs and attitudes through cognitive processing or direct emotional responses to the facts from social reality.

It is ascertained that people with external locus of control<sup>3</sup>, who are convinced that their life depends on external uncontrolled situations, are generally mistrustful. If this mistrust is stabilized as a trait of character, it could dominate the perception of people and situations as threatening personal security.

Emotional lability, usually related to increased neuroticism, makes the person pliable to easy change of emotions caused even by insignificant stimuli. In most cases, liable mood tends to project into interpersonal relations and interactions in negative modalities. This could lead to expectations for threats and troubles. If this emotional lability is attended by impulsive quasi-protective behavior, this could lead to reactions of avoidance by the others and even greater mistrust and insecurity.

The disposition of worldly pessimism is related mainly to negative expectations for the future. To define it as pessimistic, these expectations should refer to people,

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<sup>3</sup> Statistically prevalent.

occurrences and presumable events in broader causal aspect, obligatory related to the Ego. Therefore, pessimists are prone to expect negative consequences from their social interactions. With a view to protect themselves, they unconsciously form mistrust which leads to intensifying the sense of vulnerability due to its relation with personal security. Moreover, it is invariably persistent in the visions for the future and thus it is directly affected by the disposition itself.

Trust, respectively the sense of personal security, is influenced by the presence of long-term personal life objectives. Researches show that they have great importance for achievements, prosocial behavior, contentment of life, self-assessment and mental well-being. Their absence leads to depressiveness, situational and destructive behavior, inability for stable personal relations [2, p. 111] Although the lack of long-term objectives is not an absolute predicator for asociality, it affects trust. People with weak system of long-term objectives are more pliable to situational influences and more reserved in trust relationships, while those with long-term perspectives find there the resource to achieve their objectives. Naturally, this leads to intensifying the sense of security where the objectives are an additional factor for tangibility of the need itself.

Besides the mentioned characteristics, trust in the context of security is influenced by other personal variables such as personal value, learned helplessness, attributive style. These and other similar variables should be researched and studied due to the fact that depending on the situation and specific causal dependencies, they could be crucial for the trust and its effect on personal security.

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