

Individuals at Risk and the Manifestations of Insecurity

Although each individual has his or her own perception of security risks among the seven realms of human security, most people are usually able to deal with the insecurities they face. They develop personal security strategies or work with others to address those issues that concern them most. Since the mission of this **Report** is to foster human development, and human development is not possible in an environment of insecurity, this Chapter pinpoints those groups of people most likely to fall into intense states of insecurity. In addition, this Chapter describes the manifestations and consequences of insecurity that arise when a person lives under conditions in which he or she cannot feel secure for prolonged periods of time.

The authors of this **Report** used two criteria to determine those factors that undermine a person's sense of security: 1) People's own declared threats to their sense of security, compared among different groups (for example, whether women cite the fear of being unemployed more often than men); 2) Anxiety symptoms among people living under different conditions (for example, whether those outside the workforce feel more nervous and easily upset than those within it). High anxiety symptoms are the most direct manifestations of a sense of insecurity.

Individuals at risk

Risk groups were identified by analyzing the self-evaluations of **Survey** respondents, who answered questions in conjunction with an anxiety scale devised by the **Survey's** authors. Other studies on anxiety were also consulted. Groups with high insecurity levels are examined first in this Chapter, followed by groups with high anxiety levels. Often different insecurity factors overlap or combine to heighten the intensity of the insecurity, leading to extreme consequences.

High insecurity levels

By measuring the values assigned by respondents to a range of potentially threatening situations, the **Survey** was able to identify the following groups of people who tend to experience a high sense of insecurity. Individu-

als from these groups also tend to experience feelings of insecurity more intensely, regardless of the issue:

- Lowest income groups (from 2 to 40 lats/month/family member);
- Women;
- People who feel distrustful of others;
- People who are generally dissatisfied with their lives;
- People in poor health;
- Residents of the Latgale region.

Low-income groups

Insufficient and/or irregular income is a major source of insecurity, due to the extreme limitations that it imposes upon people's ability to affect the course of their lives and determine their destiny. The lowest income group is more likely to fear steep price increases (the third most often cited threat by people in this income group.) For those in the highest income bracket, the risk of such price increases rated only ninth. Financial instability contributes to fear and anxiety about future hardships and problems.

Women

Women consistently demonstrate higher values for the perception of risk to their security than men (1.60 vs. 1.38). Women's replies indicate that they are far more worried than men about physical threats such as traffic accidents, abuse and street crime. They are more likely to be disturbed by drug abuse than men, by the prospect of losing their jobs, by the risk of food poisoning and by potential threats to Latvia's independence.

Women also display higher indices of anxiety and depression than men. The results of this **Study** correspond to other research findings that indicate similar differences in rates of anxiety and depression among men and women (Bite, 2002). Women may have a more pronounced sense of insecurity because they actually are more at risk in certain realms, and because they feel more responsible for themselves, their families and the people close to them than do men. They are more likely to be involved in social

networks and more often concerned about other family members. Help is expected more often from them than from men (*Social Relationship and Social Support Network Study*, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, 2001).

However, it would be difficult to conclude from this that men in Latvia feel better than women. There are other negative indices related to male physical and psychological health – including a shorter life span, higher rates of alcoholism, etc. Men are less prepared to admit to their fears and talk about their problems. The male socialization process in Latvia and many other countries encourages men to convey the impression that they are strong and in control of their feelings.

Socially constructed gender differences may also account in part for the higher self-assessments of health displayed by male respondents, and for their reluctance to admit to harbouring feelings of insecurity.

People who feel distrustful of others

An individual who is unable to form well-grounded relationships with other members of society will often feel insecure. Such a person may be suspicious, resentful and preoccupied with finding scapegoats for his or her own problems. According to the *Survey on Social Relationships and Support Networks* (Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, 2001),

Box 3.1

Anita Mertena
Vice-President, Business and Professional Women's Federation of Latvia

Women and human security

What prompts women's inferiority complexes and feelings of insecurity? Lower wages than men in similar positions. Skepticism concerning women's professional skills and their ability to manage both work and family responsibilities. Insecurity because people doubt the success of projects authored by women. Rejection of a request for credit to the single mother. Fear of walking the streets in the evenings because someone might rape you or grab your purse. [...]

A close person can be a great threat to the life of a woman. Over 30 women are killed each year in Latvia by their husbands. Each week Riga police come to the assistance of almost 100 women who are the victims of family violence. Unfortunately, women in most cases do not turn to the police or social services for additional help.

These figures do not reflect the hundreds, possibly thousands of cases when women do not submit complaints against their employers' sexual advances in the workplace, against violence in the family and against threats by drunken neighbours in the stairwells.

Why lodge a complaint if the call to the police may elicit scarcely more than a smirk from the policeman on the line? Why complain if standing up for your human rights can get you fired? Many women don't want to publicize their problems or convey the image of a victim, so they bear the offences and keep the dark facts to themselves.

Women must be informed about the opportunities available to help them protect themselves and escape the vicious circle of insecurity. We cannot wait for others to do everything in our place.

Women must regain the belief in their own abilities and develop their self-esteem in order to speak out publicly about their role in the workplace, the family and the world as a whole. Then we shall be heard not only by local, but also by global decision makers.

Not everyone is endowed with a vibrant personality like that of Jeanne d'Arc, Madeleine Albright or Margaret Thatcher. However, it is within the power of every woman to protect herself.

Diena, May 16, 2003

three-fourths of people in Latvia claim to trust only a few people and three-fifths believe that “if you are not careful, then others will take advantage of you.”

People in poor health

The actual physical health of an individual, his or her physical abilities or restrictions, as well as the perceived threats to his or her personal health are factors that have a significant influence on an individual's sense of security and level of anxiety. The results of the **Survey** show that health-related issues are significant fear-raising factors. The primary fears expressed include the fear of being unable to cover one's medical costs in the case of accident or illness, or of

receiving inadequate medical care. When asked which diseases people worry about most, the typical answer was – “we worry about those that cannot be cured or are difficult to treat – cancer, coronary heart diseases, alcoholism.”

Residents of the Latgale region

Residents of Latvia's easternmost region of Latgale exhibit a greater fear of potential risks and in more areas than do residents of other regions. This is due primarily to the fact that the average income level in Latgale is markedly lower than in other parts of Latvia. In the **Survey's** self-assessment of family income, 4% of the respondents from Latgale said that

Box 3.2

Experiences of individuals reporting the highest anxiety levels

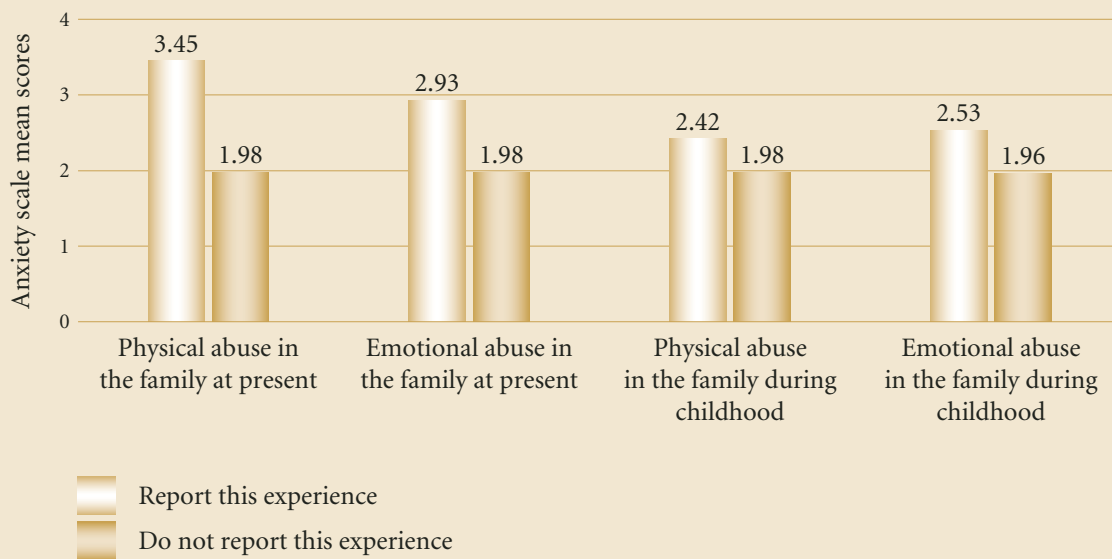
	Anxiety scale mean score
Current physical abuse within the family (compared to 1.98 points for those who reported no such abuse)	3.45
Current emotional abuse within the family	2.93
Permanent loss of work capacity / Disabled	2.92
Emotional abuse within the family during childhood	2.53
Physical abuse within the family during childhood	2.42
Close relatives have attempted suicide	2.27
Close relationship has recently ended	2.22
Close relatives have had alcohol or drug problems	2.18
Unemployed	2.18
Pensioners	2.15
Lost their jobs	2.15

1 – never 4 – often

UNDP Latvia Survey on Human Security 2002

Box 3.3

Mean scores of anxiety in relation to experience of abuse in childhood and adulthood



UNDP Latvia Survey on Human Security 2002

they live in semi-starvation, while 20% indicated they have just enough money to cover their food expenses. For more on the residents of Latgale, see the section on *Compounding insecurity factors* below.

High anxiety levels

Anxiety and depression are proof of high levels of insecurity, even when individuals deny feeling insecure. To determine which factors engender the most intense feelings of individual insecurity, respondents completed one part of the **Survey** confidentially. They responded from 1 (never) to 4 (often) to such statements as: “I feel tense,” “I am easily upset,” and “I feel nervous.” These scores were averaged and correlated with different factors, of which the most significant were the respondents’ experiences with abuse, employment-related issues, and loss, as listed in Box 3.2.

Abuse

Abuse in the family

Abuse within the family greatly increases individuals’ level of anxiety and poses a direct threat to their physical and psychological security. According to the

Survey, those who are currently experiencing or have experienced physical or emotional abuse – in adulthood or in childhood – report the highest levels of anxiety.

Respondents were considered to be experiencing (or have experienced) emotional abuse if they reported being criticized, ridiculed or made to feel guilty often. They were considered to be experiencing (or have experienced) physical abuse if they reported being slapped, struck or beaten often. Questions regarding sexual abuse were not asked, but it is known from other recent studies in Latvia that sexual abuse significantly increases the level of anxiety and insecurity felt by its victims. The mean anxiety scores were significantly higher for those reporting current experiences of physical abuse within their families (3.45), current experiences of emotional abuse within their families (2.93), physical abuse within their families during childhood (2.42), or emotional abuse within their families during childhood (2.53).

Other stress-producing factors were also related to heightened levels of anxiety, but these effects, with the exception of permanent loss of job capacity, were not as great as those related to abuse. Significantly, all of the reported forms of abuse are interrelated. Many of those who reported physical abuse in their

Box 3.4

Reported experiences of childhood abuse (%)

	Total (n=197)	Women (n=103)	Men (n=94)
Physical abuse	28	25	30
Sexual abuse	11	17	5
Parents threatening to abandon, hurt or kill the child	21	23	18

n = number of respondents

Bite, 2002

families also reported emotional abuse, and many of those who reported abuse in the present also experienced parental abuse during their childhood.

Parental abuse during childhood

Data from several studies have indicated significant levels of childhood abuse in Latvia. In one study, 44% of adult Latvians reported childhood experiences of emotional abuse by their parents, while 31% reported physical abuse (Sebre, 2000). In-depth interviews with adults frequently reveal childhood experiences of abuse, as well as emotional distance and coldness, including the mother's inability to express her love for her child.

A recent study (Bite, 2002) found that 28% of adult Latvian respondents reported experiences of physical abuse before the age of 17 (see Box 3.4). Eleven percent reported sexual abuse, while 21% reported strong emotional abuse inflicted by their parents (humiliation, threats to abandon or kill them). Women suffer from childhood sexual abuse more often than men, while men suffer from childhood physical abuse more often than women.

Those respondents who reported childhood experiences of physical, sexual or emotional abuse also indicated significantly higher rates of anxiety. Respondents whose parents humiliated, threatened or shouted at them during their childhood tend to be tense, anxious, and fearful about the future also as adults. The emotional abuse inflicted by their parents has had a negative effect on their self-esteem, leading them to

question their ability to cope with adversity. Threats experienced during childhood (for example, of being abandoned or left in an orphanage by one's parents, or even worse, of being beaten or killed), enhance feelings that the world is not safe, and that something dangerous or evil might happen.

The experience of physical or sexual childhood abuse is also correlated to higher anxiety in those cases when the abuse was experienced outside of the family – on the street, at school, etc. Episodes of physical or sexual abuse – when an individual's security is under actual threat and when there may be a real danger to his or her life – are traumatic and often leave a serious, negative, long-lasting effect. Such victims feel continuously anxious and fear a reoccurrence of future abuse, as well as other possible calamities. It is more difficult for people with such experiences to believe that they will be able to provide for themselves and their families. They also worry more about their personal health and other issues.

Partner abuse during adulthood

The **Survey** reveals a direct correlation between anxiety symptoms and abuse in partner relationships. Physical abuse in partner relationships had the single largest influence on anxiety symptoms.

Episodes of abuse between partners in intimate relationships are fairly frequent and their victims are usually women. The Riga Municipal Police receive an average of 400 calls per week, of which one-fourth are related to abuse in partner relationships within the

family. Approximately one-half of all the crimes committed against women in Latvia take place not on the street, but within the family. According to data from the Information Centre of the Ministry of the Interior, an average of 35 women are killed each year within their families by their partners.

In the Bite (2002) study on abuse, 29% of women respondents reported physical abuse committed by their partners. Twenty-two percent of men respondents admitted being abusive towards their partners. Women experiencing abuse reported markedly increased anxiety symptoms.

This study reveals a significant correlation between present abusive behaviour and childhood experiences of physical and/or emotional parental abuse. In other words, those who suffered from abuse as children are more likely to inflict it upon others as adults.

Employment status

Those **Survey** respondents who identified themselves as having a “permanent loss of work capacity/disabled” (mean score 2.92) had one of the highest degrees of anxiety, as did those who listed themselves as unemployed (2.18) and pensioners

(2.15). Average anxiety scores were reported by employed specialists, employed workers and housewives. Those who identified themselves as “entrepreneur, have my own business” (1.80) cited the least amount of anxiety. These differences in anxiety scores in relation to employment status are statistically significant.

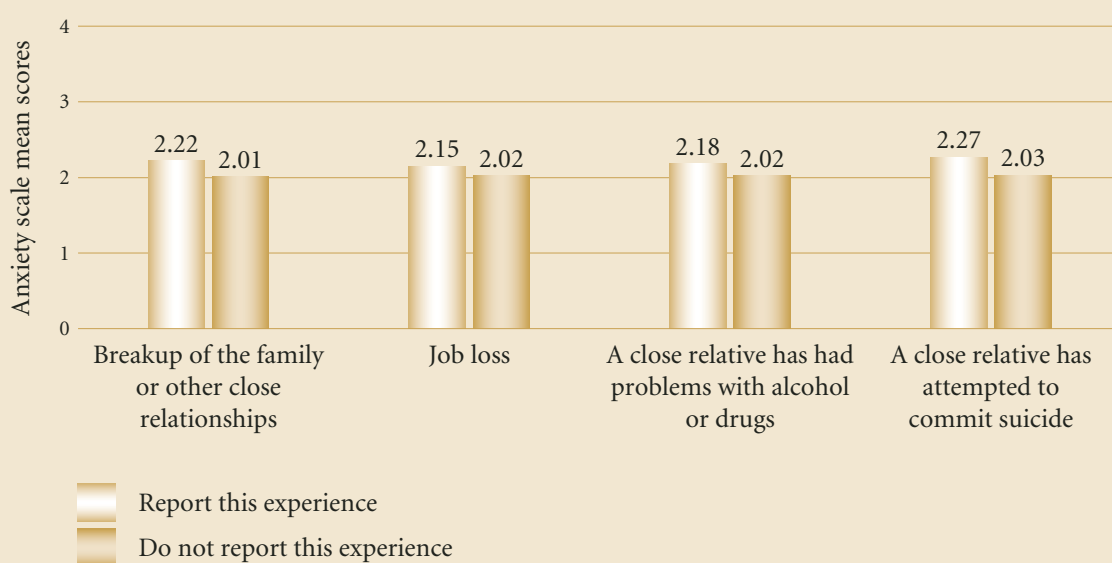
Significant personal loss

Stress-provoking experiences may increase the anxiety level and sense of insecurity that people feel. Grievous losses often cause both anxiety and depression (prolonged grief, decreased energy levels, sleep and eating disturbances, etc.) Problems in close relationships may also lead to intense anxiety, depression and/or anger.

Survey respondents were asked to note if they had recently experienced any serious feelings of loss – for example, through the death of a close person, the breaking up of a relationship, or the attempted suicide of a close relative. They were also asked about alcohol or drug problems within their families and requested to note how severely each of the above-mentioned stress-inducing situations had influenced their feelings of security. The **Survey’s**

Box 3.5

Mean scores of anxiety in relation to difficulties experienced in recent years



UNDP Latvia Survey on Human Security 2002

findings reveal that each of these stress-eliciting situations is associated with high anxiety levels.

As seen in Box 3.5, significantly higher anxiety levels are shown by those who have lost their jobs, those who are recovering from the end of a close relationship, those who have close relatives with alcohol or drug problems, or those with close relatives who have attempted suicide.

Compounding insecurity factors

As mentioned in Chapter 1, no single incident, unless it is overly traumatizing, pushes a person beyond his or her security threshold. A combination

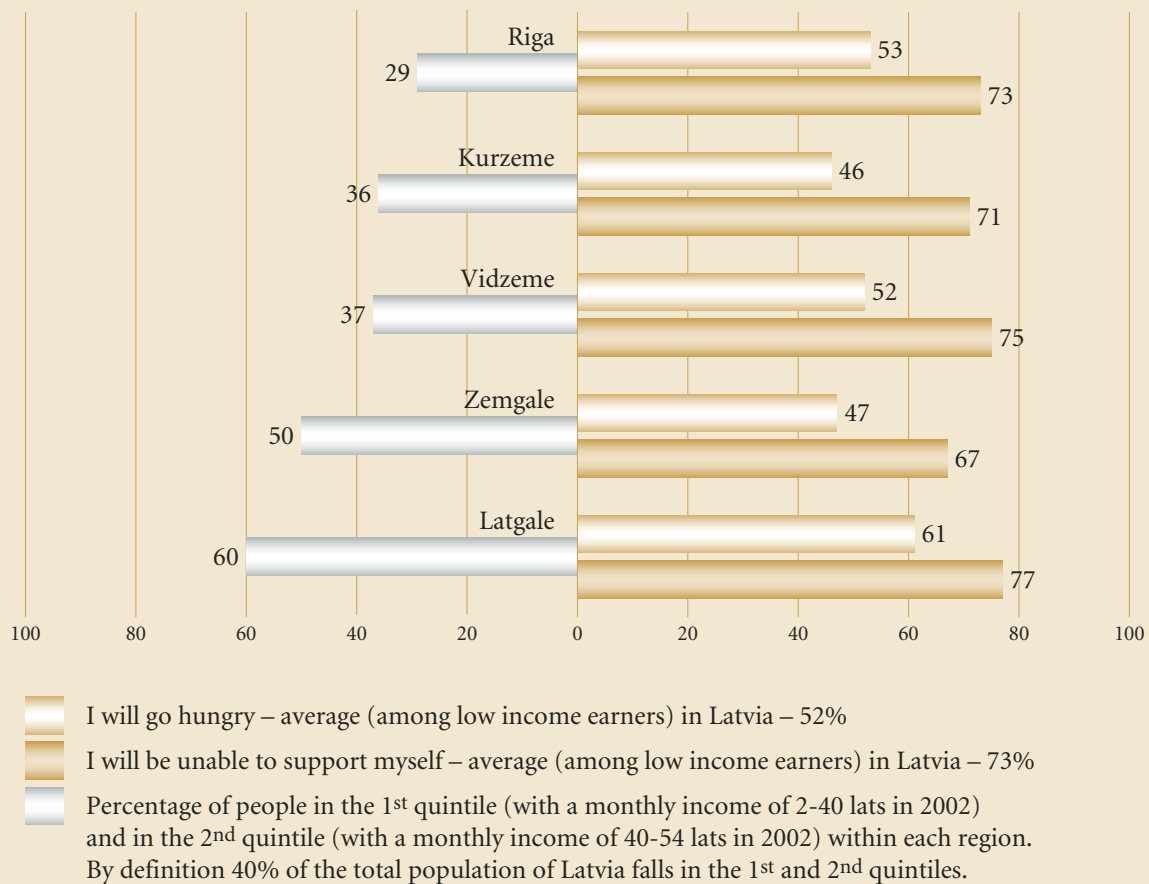
of factors, however, can significantly undermine a person's sense of security. This is illustrated by the example of women in Latgale with low incomes.

Taken together, residents of Latgale expressed a greater fear of potential risks from abroad, in Latvia, and in their personal lives than did residents of other regions. Low-income women in Latgale make up one of the most insecure groups of people in Latvia. Women over the age of 40, living in Latgale and with a family income of less than 40 lats per month indicated the highest levels of insecurity.

Currently people's sense of insecurity is overwhelmingly related to health care issues. Over four-fifths (83%) of the Survey's respondents said that they were extremely concerned about being unable to pay for medical care in the case of accident or illness.

Box 3.6

Level of concern about hunger and poverty among low-income earners (2-54 lats per month per family member) according to Latvia's regions (%)



UNDP Latvia Survey on Human Security 2002

These health-related fears are highest in the risk groups cited above, particularly women. **All** (100%) of the women respondents in Latgale over age 40 and with a family income of 2 to 40 lats per month expressed this fear. Three-quarters of them stated they were “very afraid” of such an eventuality.

Conversely, perceptions of security threats among men increase significantly along with declining income levels, but are unaffected by regional factors. There are no regional differences among men with an income of less than 40 lats per month.

Children in impoverished or psychologically dysfunctional families are another group likely to experience multiple threats to their personal security. Although children were not covered by the **Survey**, other studies have shown that children experiencing poverty, disabilities, and/or abuse deserve particular care and need to be at the centre of any concerted efforts to enhance *securitability* in the country.

In a 1998 UNICEF study on childhood abuse in Latvia, 29% of children aged 10 to 14 reported that their parents had been emotionally abusive, while 17% reported physical parental abuse. The children who reported emotional or physical parental abuse also reported higher levels of psychological trauma symptoms – anger, depression, anxiety, and a sense of insecurity. The children in the study were asked to indicate the employment status of their parents and whether anyone in the family was “drinking too much alcohol.” Within the framework of that study, 9% of the children reported that their father had no employment outside of the home, while 12% reported excessive alcohol use within the family. This subset of respondents also reported a greater incidence of emotional or physical abuse. These results confirm a view voiced by professionals that abuse is often linked with alcoholism and unemployment, which, in turn, is linked with the economic situation of the country. The above indicates the compounding of factors that may be at work in creating a sense of insecurity.

Children may also experience abuse at their schools. In a recent study in Ventspils (Sebre, 2001), 36% of boys and 18% of girls aged 11 to 16 indicated that they had been emotionally abused by their teachers. About half as many boys (18%) and 7% girls reported physical abuse by their teachers.

Of relevance in this regard is the national Children’s Rights Protection Law, which was adopted in 1998. This law stipulates the right of the child to be

protected against abuse and prohibits violence against children, as stipulated in Article 9: “The child shall not be subject to cruel treatment, torture or corporal punishment, humiliation and disrespect.” It has been found on several occasions that teachers violate this law. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by the Government of Latvia, encompasses these same principles.

Causes, manifestations and consequences of insecurity

Insecurity can manifest itself in all aspects of people’s lives: including their way of thinking, emotional state and behaviour. The consequences may include such attachment disorders as difficulties in developing positive close relations (see Box 4.2 in Chapter 4), anger, intolerance, and in extreme cases – suicidal behaviour.

Trauma

Trauma is one of the principle causes of insecurity. A person who has experienced traumatic episodes (violence, natural disaster, becoming permanently disabled, etc.) may also experience either short-term or long-term insecurity. The psychological symptoms of such insecurity can manifest themselves in the form of anxiety, depression, anger or aggression. These symptoms, in turn, may aggravate and increase one’s initial sense of insecurity. For example, a person who has suffered a significant loss may become depressed. These depressive thoughts and feelings may generate a gloomy outlook on life, which may then further reinforce existing feelings of insecurity. However, neither insecurity, nor anxiety, nor depression are the primary cause of the problem. The cause of trauma is the specific life situation and the resulting emotional fallout.

The long-term consequences of trauma can be categorized as follows: (1) **emotional consequences** (depression, low self-esteem, feelings of guilt, feelings of shame, anxiety, anger); (2) **interpersonal consequences** (isolation, alienation, difficulties in relationships, fear of intimacy); (3) **behavioural consequences** (self-destructive behaviour, eating disturbances, use of addictive substances); (4) **cognitive/perceptual consequences** (denial, distorted thinking, memory disturbances, nightmares, hallucinations); (5) **physical consequences** (psychosomatic pain, sleep disturbances, sexual dysfunctions).

Each individual reacts differently to a traumatic experience and each may demonstrate one or several of the aforementioned consequences. The way in which an individual reacts to trauma is determined by numerous factors, including inborn temperament, relationships and support from within the family, support from others outside of the family, and general socio-cultural conditions. In some cases the aforementioned consequences get worse with time, or build up to such an extent that the individual is unable to function adaptively in everyday life, thus becoming mentally ill and requiring professional help.

Anxiety

Anxiety has a negative impact on one's sense of security. It is defined as an unclear and unpleasant emotional state characterized by uncertainty, fear, stress, nervousness, and agitation. Anxiety may be related to a specific fear, when a person clearly knows what he or she is afraid of. However, it can also be unspecified, unclear, and without a concrete focus. For people who have a high level of anxiety, even if they do not admit to it and deny the problems causing it, anxiety often manifests itself somatically through such symptoms as stomach and intestinal dysfunctions, headaches, sleep disturbances, etc.

Feelings of anxiety influence the way an individual perceives his or her environment, and the way he or she assesses favourable or adverse conditions. The greater the general feeling of anxiety and insecurity, the greater the likelihood of distorted perceptions that heighten additional specific fears, which increase the general psychological and physical symptoms of anxiety and diminish the *securitability* of the individual.

All people encounter certain levels of anxiety in their daily lives. Anxiety can have a positive, defensive function when one's personal or family's human security comes under threat. Since unemployment, disease, death, natural disasters and violence are among the many eventualities that people must face during their lifetimes, a certain level of anxiety is also unavoidable.

A distinction must be made between the anxiety that is related to unavoidable factors of daily life, and the anxiety that reinforces feelings of insecurity and diminishes the capacity of individuals to address threats to their human security. Recent global studies

indicate that manifestations of anxiety are in part genetically determined. The genetic structure of certain individuals predisposes them to react to certain situations with increased anxiety levels.

Individuals must perceive themselves as having the adequate personal resources – physical, material, psychological, and spiritual – for coping with problematic situations. The lack of such a perception can lead to increased feelings of anxiety. People must also feel that help is accessible from others, ranging from their closest relatives to their work colleagues, to community and national institutions. If one is generally convinced of having these resources and of being able to expect help from other people, then one will tend to believe in one's own inherent self-worth, perceive the world as a safe enough place, and feel capable of coping with most difficulties.

The ways in which people try to reduce their anxiety levels are not always positive. Frequently alcoholism, drug addiction, violence against others, mental disturbances and suicides are the consequences of inner insecurity. The higher the general level of insecurity within a society, the greater the risk of such negative phenomena. Many respondents of this study answered that they often choose to "calm" themselves with the help of alcohol, drugs or medicines, which are short-term and illusory solutions.

Abuse and attachment disorders

Attachment disorders also reinforce people's sense of insecurity (Bite, 2002). Often they stem from experiences of childhood abuse or neglect. Abuse is detrimental to victims' sense of self-esteem, sense of personal integrity and views regarding relationships. Partner relationships are a primary focus of attachment in adulthood. People who have experienced abuse are more likely to enter into abusive or other dysfunctional partner relationships, thus continuing the cycle of abuse. Men who reported being abusive towards their partners also have higher ratings of insecure attachment styles (see definitions in Box 4.4 of Chapter 4).

Anger and intolerance

Similarly, childhood experiences of abuse can result in anger and intolerance, mainly against the abusive parent, as well as a lack of self-esteem. Often, the victim's feelings of repressed anger are

redirected toward seemingly weaker individuals, who have nothing to do with the abuse that the victim has endured. Thus the victim can become a victimizer of others.

Manifestations of anger and intolerance are also related to an individual's socio-cultural and socio-historical context. People are affected by the political climate in which they have lived and by the politically motivated abuse that they may have experienced. Nevertheless, research in Latvia shows that anger and intolerance are much more closely linked to abuse within one's family, than with abuse that one may have experienced as a result of politically motivated persecution (Sebre, 2000). Many people in Latvia have suffered from politically provoked acts of violence during the Nazi and Soviet occupations, but not all display signs of anger and intolerance. These are manifested most often by those who have experienced additional trauma and abuse within the family.

Suicide

Extreme forms of insecurity can lead to increasingly intense feelings of anxiety and depression, and ultimately, to the attempt to take one's own life. Psychiatrist Elmārs Rancāns has studied suicide statistics in Latvia from 1980 to 1998 and analyzed the factors that might be responsible for marked changes or fluctuations in the indices of male and female suicides. The lowest rate of male suicides was in 1988, at 35 per 100,000 inhabitants. It then experienced a marked increase in 1990 and culminated in 1993 at 72 suicides per 100,000 inhabitants. Since 1995 this number has been gradually decreasing. Rural males aged 45 to 64 were the most likely to commit suicide during the period. The number of female suicides during the entire period of study was stable at 12 to 14 per 100,000 inhabitants.

Rancāns' research suggests that the increased numbers of male suicides from 1990 to 1993 coincide with a sharp decline in Latvia's economy and GNP, along with a corresponding rise in unemployment. At the beginning of the 1990s many collective farms and industries ceased functioning. Many people lost their

jobs and source of income, which had a negative effect on their social relations and status. The study concludes that Latvia's rapid political and economic changes caused great stress for many. Those who felt unable to cope with these changes resorted to the extreme measure of suicide. The fact that the number of suicides in recent years has been decreasing is a positive sign that coincides with an overall improvement of the economic situation in the country, and with the increasing ability of people to accept, adapt to and successfully deal with new conditions.

Summary

The **Survey** measurement of anxiety levels indicates that those who have suffered or are currently suffering from emotional and/or physical abuse, those not in the workforce (such as the disabled, the unemployed and senior citizens), those suffering a grievous loss (such as the end of a close relationship or job loss), those with relatives who suffer from addiction and those with relatives who have attempted to commit suicide – all are among those with the highest anxiety levels.

This Chapter also discusses the interrelated issue of abuse, which is further analyzed in Chapter 4. An understanding of the implications of abuse is essential for finding solutions to this insidious problem, which is kept secret by many of its victims. Abuse has a negative impact on all aspects of human security.

Perceptions of threats to human security are not distributed uniformly across social and demographic groups. High insecurity levels are exhibited by economically disadvantaged people, those in poor health, women, those who say they are dissatisfied with life, and those who lack the ability to establish a close personal rapport with others. Residents of Latgale show a higher degree of insecurity than residents of other geographic regions, mostly likely due to issues connected with economic security. Children from economically disadvantaged and/or dysfunctional families also risk experiencing a high degree of insecurity, as do other individuals who experience multiple insecurity factors. These are the people whose *securitability* must be enhanced as rapidly as possible.