

The Individual and Positive Close Relationships as *Securitability* Factors

Individuals with a strong sense of security feel sheltered and protected, and capable of maintaining and developing their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. As described in previous chapters, any sense of security depends upon both objective and subjective factors. People's sense of security is influenced first and foremost by their actual objective situation – in other words, the extent to which they are protected from real threats to their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. It is also influenced by how they perceive their immediate environment, and by the significance that they attribute to favourable or adverse circumstances. Last, but not least, a sense of security can be negatively influenced by irrational fears that are related to non-existent threats or insignificant issues.

This Chapter will focus upon the individual and his or her closest relationships. It will analyse how these reciprocal relationships, together with the individual's own personal characteristics, influence his or her sense of security, and their significance in ensuring a high degree of *securitability*. Interviews will appear throughout this Chapter as illustrative examples of the importance of individual *securitability* factors.

This Chapter will also address the following issues:

- Factors that enhance people's sense of security: family, friends (also considered as informal networks in Chapter 5), self-reliance, religious faith, sense of ethnic belonging, and other factors such as life satisfaction, confidence in one's ability to effect change or take initiative, self-esteem and health. Several recent studies in Latvia have shown that people's sense of security is to a large extent associated with positive close relationships within their families. Consistent parental love and care fosters feelings of security, which in turn encourage feelings of positive self-esteem and trust in others throughout one's lifetime.
- Possibilities and opportunities for overcoming or minimizing feelings of insecurity and anxiety.

Positive close relationships – at the core of individual *securitability*

When asked to cite three factors that most enhanced their sense of security, respondents of the **UNDP Latvia Survey on Human Security 2002** most frequently mentioned their families, relatives and friends. In answer to the closed question: "Which of the following increases or decreases your sense of security?" – the family ranked first as the most significant *securitability* factor for both women and men, and among both Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents. "Friends" ranked second, while "one's own actions" placed third.

Regarding the significance of the family in enhancing his own sense of security, psychologist Alexander Kolyosov answered the question: "What creates a sense of security for you?" as follows:

"I have experienced various social systems, and I am truly glad that throughout these changes our family has remained central. I feel that family ties and family support are also important for my son and that they create a sense of security for him."

Psychologist Jānis Grants expressed similar views regarding the role of the family in developing and enhancing his sense of security.

"In childhood I always felt that my parents would help me if I needed them. Even if they did not always answer my questions immediately, I knew that they would be there for me. I never felt unloved or neglected. That was very important for me."

According to leading psychologists, the family is a primary factor in enhancing people's sense of security. Erik Erikson emphasizes that young children who receive consistent parental love and care during their first year of life will develop feelings of trust and reliance toward their parents. Such infants develop the feeling that their parents are reliable, and that they will be present when their support and care is needed. This initial reliance upon parental care and responsiveness is the most meaningful basis for a sense of security – and the basis for the child's ability to trust other people later on in life.

The role of parent-child attachment in human security

The subjective sense of security of each individual is related to biological, psychological and social aspects. It may change during the individual's lifetime, impacted by changes regarding any of these dimensions, and influenced by the attitude he or she assumes in regard to these changes. Nevertheless, most psychologists agree that the basis for the individual's sense of security is formed in childhood (see Box 4.2).

Close adult relationships show similar attachment tendencies to those experienced in childhood. In both cases there is a strong need for an attachment figure in situations of stress. There is comfort and security in the presence of the attachment figure, in contrast to discomfort and anxiety when separated from this person. Close, mutually trusting relationships minimize stress for people in all age groups.

Box 4.1

Jānis Stradiņš
Professor, President of the Latvian Academy of Sciences

On enhancing human security

What should be done to reduce people's sense of insecurity and to enhance an overall sense of security in Latvia today?

We need to establish a psychologically more stable society. Latvia is a society in transition, a nervous society. Part of the problem lies in the fact that too many families in Latvia are unstable. Couples need to feel sufficiently close to want to have children.

Which values should be emphasized in particular?

Diligence and enterprise. I think that Latvians are perhaps lacking in enterprise, maybe also in self-confidence – that is important as well. One of our most important priorities is an educated society. We need educated, enterprising people and strong families. I think that we speak too infrequently about the family. We need more tolerant attitudes towards elderly people. We have a great deal of elderly, cultured people with very high moral standards. It is important for them to go to a concert or to read a book or newspaper from time to time. In other words, it is important to guarantee a decent standard of living for them.

The results of a recent international study showed that Latvians are less satisfied with their lives than people from other countries with lower levels of economic development. What is your opinion about this?

Latvians have rather high demands. The economic progress that was made after the wars was very fast – both during the first period of Latvian independence and after the Second World War, for example, in Brezhnev's time. We achieved a state of economic well-being quite quickly. Thus, people's expectations today are fairly high. This dissatisfaction may be something positive, if it is coupled with positive attempts to look for solutions. On the other hand (and I do not know if it can be called a general characteristic), there is a widespread feeling of envy toward those who are better off, particularly those who have become rich very quickly, and maybe undeservedly so. Latvians also have a perception of social injustice.

What is the role of the family in relation to your own personal sense of security?

I am truly grateful to my father and my mother. They supported me and never imposed their will upon me, but calmly directed me onto my course. In a certain sense they also accepted my mistakes and failings. My father, with his superhuman work capacity, provided a decent living for us in very difficult times – there were four children in our family. Our family unity provided us with a sense of protection and security, especially during our childhood. I am very grateful to my parents for this. There is even a kind of spiritual bond – sometimes I feel as if my parents are still close by me.

UNDP Latvia, 2003

Attachment styles in Latvia

In recent years several studies of attachment styles have been carried out in Latvia (see Box 4.4 for a description of different attachment styles). A study of people belonging to various professions in the 25 to 50-year age group (office workers, doctors, police officers, etc.) showed that only about 40% of the respondents reported a secure attachment style, while 60% reported an insecure attachment style (Bite, 2002, see Box 4.3). A similar study carried out in the U.S.A., using the same research methodology, found that 47% of respondents reported a secure style of attachment. Latvian women exhibit attachment styles that involve more negative self-perception than do men. Latvian men more frequently report a dismissive attachment style, which implies pseudo self-confidence and a lack of trust in other people. They do not feel that others can be relied upon, and thus avoid close relationships.

The formation of attachment styles is first of all related to how secure people have felt in their relationship with their parents during childhood (see Box 4.4). The loss of a parent and/or insufficient parental care and abuse are the two factors that contribute most to a sense of childhood insecurity that may con-

tinue through adulthood. Insecure attachment is also directly influenced by the experience of abuse and traumatic experiences (such as war, terrorism, etc.), both within and outside the family.

Support of the family and self-reliance

A content analysis of the interviews of 56 respondents from various age groups (Box 4.5) shows that respondents from younger age groups are more likely to mention “family” as a security-enhancing factor that helps them to overcome difficulties. The younger the individual in Latvia, the greater the significance of family, friends and close relations in regard to a sense of security. Respondents aged 40 and older have an increasing tendency to mention reliance on themselves as the major factor that helps them to overcome difficulties. The ability of the younger respondents to enlist the support of family and friends is a positive indication and implies that they have a greater ability to trust other people. This would also indicate more positive self-esteem. Those with more positive self-esteem are secure enough about themselves to enlist the help of others when appropriate.

Box 4.2

Attachment theory

Attachment theory has been developed during the past several decades by British psychotherapist John Bowlby and his colleagues. It became better known in Latvia following the 1998 release of the Latvian translation of his book *Secure Base* (“Drošais pamats”).

Attachment theory is based on the view that human infants seek to create a bond with their parents, who serve as a source of security. This type of bond-seeking is inborn and has evolutionary significance – the preservation of the infant’s life. Therefore, attachment is defined as a biologically determined urge to establish strong emotional links with one’s primary care givers, usually the child’s parents. Attachment behaviour – which includes crying when one yearns for one’s mother and smiling when she is present – is a means by which the infant maintains this bond. This system of attachment helps to ensure closeness between the child and the care provider, especially under dangerous and threatening conditions. The sense of security provided by this attachment system will be determined by the parents’ reactions and responsiveness to the child’s signals. The quality of the infant’s early attachment relationship determines the degree to which the child will rely upon his or her parents as a source of security.

Children who know that their parents will be accessible when they need protection will feel confident in new situations and will develop a healthy degree of independence, as well as trust in others. In the opposite case, they will exhibit general uneasiness, or will develop a posture of pseudo-confidence in an attempt to hide feelings of inner insecurity and/or anxious attachment behaviour.

Bowlby, 1988

Box 4.3

Prevalence of attachment styles for Latvian women and men (%)

	Women (n=103)	Men (n=89)
Secure style	40	43
Fearful style	20	12
Preoccupied style	23	14
Dismissive style	17	31

n = number of respondents

Bite, 2002

"What has helped you to overcome difficulties in life?"

The following answers are excerpts from **Report** interviews with 56 people from different walks of life, different regions in Latvia, and between 20 and 80 years of age.

20 to 29-year age group:

43% of the answers are related to "family/friends/ people close to me"

"Help comes from people who are close to me. My family provides moral support."

"Well, I might say friends."

43% of the answers are related to "self-reliance/optimism/ life experience"

"I have an optimistic attitude towards life. I am an easy-going person, an optimist. My principle of life is: 'the storm will blow over.'"

"After the accident I was afraid to drive a car, especially at high speeds. Then gradually I started driving more often, and so eventually I overcame even this fear."

30 to 39-year age group:

35% of the answers are related to "family/friends/ people close to me"

"Thoughts of those people near me, who love me and will always help me."

46% of the answers are related to "self-reliance/ life experience"

"Life experience. If you are ready for any situation, then you are no longer afraid. This is also taught in the martial arts. One has to think two steps ahead about what the adversary might do. You have to divert the negative, you should not allow anything to frighten you."

"You must be able to focus, to mobilize yourself. You have to be confident and assured, you have to engage in self-development."

"My parents taught me not to be afraid in my childhood. They explained the essence of many things so as not to be afraid of them."

40 to 49-year age group:

18% of the answers are related to "family/friends/ people close to me"

"My wife. We both live one life. In general, my family means a lot to me."

63% of the answers are related to "self-reliance/ life experience"

"Most of all I like working with my hands. When I go into my garden and start tending the soil, all of my negative thoughts disappear. The freshness that comes from the soil is so very comforting."

"When I analyse my fears, I understand that in fact there is nothing to be afraid of. I look my fear straight in the eye. I saw my parents overcoming their fear and insecurity, so I understood that I have to cope with my own fears."

50 to 64-year age group:

21% of the answers are related to “family/ friends/ people close to me”

“My close relationships help me a lot. I find comfort and help in advice given by other people. It helps if I can talk to someone. Half of the problem is solved by sharing it with someone.”

52% of the answers are related to “self-reliance/ life experience”

“In our family people do not impose their problems upon others – everyone has to cope with his or her own problems. When I have difficult times I read books.”

“I help myself to overcome difficulties, comfort myself by saying that in the end everything will be all right. I have always envied those who believe in God.”

65 to 80-year age group:

11% of the answers are related to “family/ friends/ people close to me”

“I have always had people around me whom I can meet and talk to. It makes the situation easier – we support one another. I know that I shall never be alone.”

66% of the answers are related to “self-reliance/ life experience”

“Self-reliance, nothing else! Determination helps! And perhaps a little stubbornness.”

“I have always relied only upon myself. I am strong and in difficult situations I always push forward like a tank.”

As individuals grow older, support from their family, friends and close relations may lessen, particularly among people aged 65 to 80. They have the most limited possibilities in this respect, as many of their relatives and friends are already deceased or may be in ill health. They themselves may also have impaired health and restricted financial means, which limit the possibilities of social encounters. People aged 50 to 56 might also encounter some of these limitations, but to a lesser degree.

Why do respondents between the ages of 40 and 49 rely on the support of “family/ friends/ close relations” less frequently than others? The older the individual, the more failures in social contacts he or she

Box 4.4

Basic styles of attachment

Secure attachment

Adults and children with a secure attachment style are confident, autonomous and independent. They feel worthy and valuable as human beings, and are able to defend their views and opinions. It is easy for them to form close relationships and if necessary, to seek support and assistance. In general they trust other people and can deal with negative emotions. They exhibit the individual *securitability factors* of “confidence in one’s ability to effect change/Initiative,” “positive self-esteem,” and “sense of belonging to a group or community.”

Insecure attachment

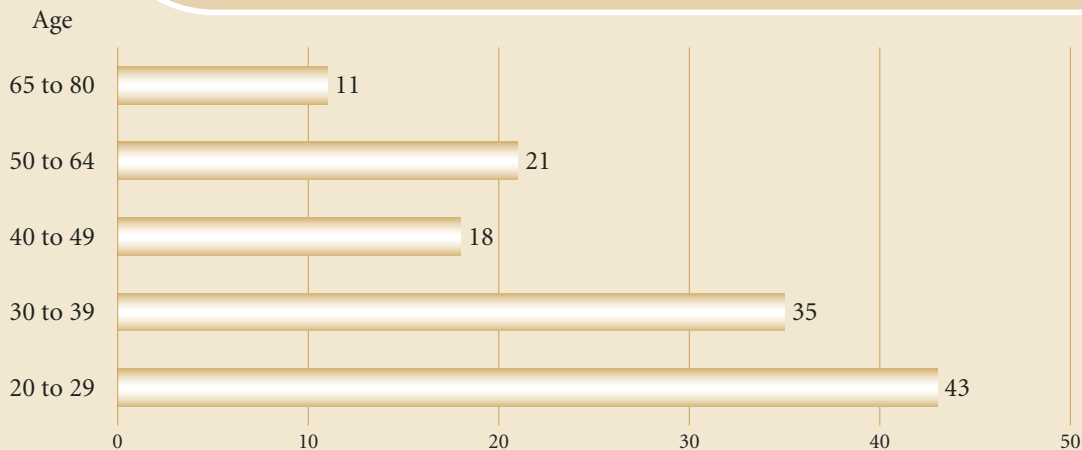
Insecure attachment is characterized by a general feeling of insecurity and high anxiety. The following three styles of insecure attachment erode individual *securitability*:

- Fearful style – An inner sense of unworthiness (the sense of being unloved) accompanied by negative perceptions of others. These individuals long for relationships, yet at the same time are afraid of them. Fearing rejection, they usually avoid close relationships with others.
- Preoccupied style – These people are confused, anxious, overly dependent, jealous and overly expressive emotionally. They demand increased attention from others. They have a negative self-perception, but perceive others in a positive (often idealized) manner. They seek acceptance and recognition in the hope that others will provide them with the love that they do not feel towards themselves.
- Dismissive style – Pseudo self-confidence in combination with a negative attitude towards others. These people develop a pseudo-positive self-perception to counter their inner sense of insecurity. By avoiding close relationships and creating an image of independence and invulnerability, these people seek to defend themselves from potential disillusionment.

Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991

Box 4.5

Family, friends or other close relations as a source of security (%)



UNDP Latvia Interview Analysis on Human Security, 2002

may have experienced. Such negative experiences may render one cautious and less prone to openness. However, childhood experiences within one's own family, coupled with the socio-cultural conditions that reigned during one's childhood, also play a role.

During the Soviet occupation of Latvia, Moscow's family policy was inconsistent. This inconsistency was at times related to political changes in ideology, while at other times it had no apparent motivation. Changes in ideology regarding the family seem to be connected to changing views on the role of the mother and the role of women. Lenin emphasized the equality of women and men, as well as the importance of women working outside of the home. Stalin, however, placed greater emphasis on the woman's role as mother, sometimes even fostering a so-called "cult of motherhood" to increase the population of the Soviet Union. After Stalin's death, the emphasis on motherhood underwent continuous transformations until Gorbachev urged women to return back home to the family hearth. This was in contrast with previous periods when women took care of the family and also worked outside of the home as doctors, teachers, tractor drivers, etc.

It is generally considered that before Gorbachev, the role of emotional bonds within the family was not emphasized. Young women were urged "to work for the building of a communist future," rather than to provide emotional warmth for their children. The mother provided food and clothing, but was not encouraged to be emotionally expressive toward her

children. It was not the tradition to remind one's child "I love you." The family itself was not necessary as an "oasis of security," because security was to be guaranteed by the government.

Individual characteristics as securitability factors

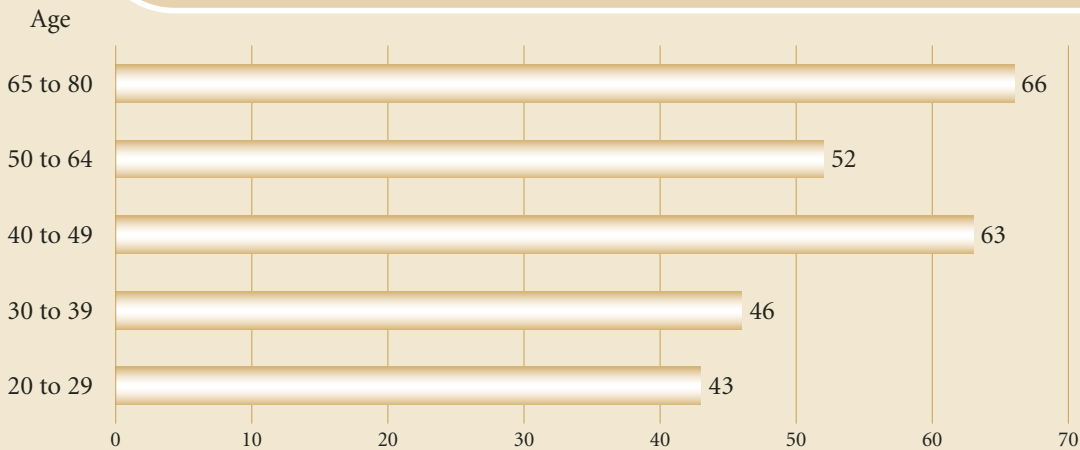
Self-reliance

The UNDP interview analysis reveals that respondents from the age of 40 increasingly rely on themselves as a main source of security (see Box 4.6). This is most notable for the oldest group of respondents (aged 65 to 80), although in fact they would warrant receiving the most assistance from both their family and friends. Unfortunately, many of the elderly have become socially isolated and compelled to fend for themselves.

The emphasis on self-reliance is also striking in the 40 to 49-year age group. Specific interview answers indicate a firm belief that one should be able to cope on one's own. "I think to myself – if others can do it themselves, then why can't I? I do not want to be inferior to others." This belief seems to echo the once prevalent prescription – "a Soviet woman can accomplish anything!" In any analysis of the situation of Latvian women, the beliefs that were formed in the pre-Soviet times within the context of Latvian cultural traditions should also be taken into

Box 4.6

Self-reliance as a source of security (%)



UNDP Latvia Interview Analysis on Human Security, 2002

consideration. Literary works concerning the pre-war period and Latvian folk songs often emphasize the primacy of diligence and industriousness, rather than communal work or support by the family or other close relations.

The “self reliance/life experience” described above is just one of the many individual characteristics singled out in interviews and surveys of the **Report** as significant to *securitability*. Some of these characteristics are directly linked to childhood and socio-historic experience, but there are other influences as well. For example, a person’s sense of life satisfaction is often associated with his or her economic situation. Below is a compilation of the main characteristics that the authors encountered repeatedly and singled out as significant in a person’s ability to be self-reliant.

Life satisfaction

Since 1990 Latvia has been included in an annual international study of “life satisfaction” in the *European Values Survey*. Respondents from each country indicate how they evaluate their satisfaction with life. The study concluded that satisfaction with life is largely related to the average income within each country, but only up to a certain point. In those countries that have reached a “critical,” favourable average level of income so that people in general can live “comfortably” (for example, afford to buy the books they want), people’s life satisfaction rating cannot be directly correlated with average income. How-

ever, in those countries that have not yet reached this “critical” level, financial considerations are very important for life satisfaction.

The international study noted that in the former republics of the Soviet Union, satisfaction with life was much lower than in other low-income countries such as Brazil, India or China. The authors suggest that the sudden transition from a Communist system to a market economy and the disappearance of the centralized system’s social security blanket has resulted in heightened dissatisfaction on a wide scale. On a positive note, the average rate of life satisfaction for Latvian respondents had risen from 4.8 out of 10 in 1996 to 5.5 in 1999 (Baltic Data House, 1999). This might be explained by the slow but gradual improvement of the economic situation in Latvia, and by the increasing ability of people to better adapt to political and social changes.

Confidence in one’s ability to effect change/Initiative

Confidence in one’s ability to control one’s life, to take initiative and to see results is important not only for one’s self-esteem, but also for strengthening one’s sense of security.

The **Survey** asked respondents to rate how much control they have over their lives on a scale from 1 to 10. The mean score was 6.6 points. Forty-one percent rated their ability to control their lives as high, while 48% gave a medium rating, and 11% rated



their ability to control their lives as low. These are positive indications, especially in comparison to the results of the *European Values Survey* of 1999.

People who have lost the capacity to work, are disabled or already unemployed have fewer possibilities to exercise control over their lives – at least over their professional lives. However, the ability to be in control is not related exclusively to external conditions. Many people who are disabled, for example, successfully adapt to their physical limitations and continue to develop their talents and skills.

Finding aspects of life that one can influence and control is essential for persons subject to physical or other limitations. This helps to foster a sense of security and inner strength and provides additional sense and meaning to people's lives.

Entrepreneurial spirit

Entrepreneurs exhibited the lowest levels of anxiety in the **Survey**. This led the **Survey's** authors to question whether these individuals' incentive to start their own businesses was due to a reduced predisposition to anxiety, and whether they received the childhood care and parental attention that is required for the development of a stable sense of security. It is possible that entrepreneurs experience less anxiety than others because they derive satisfaction from their entrepreneurial social status, are generally confident of their ability to control situations in their professional life, or simply have higher average incomes. Their lower anxiety rates are probably reinforced by the principle of reciprocity. In other words, entrepreneurs may have a greater initial sense of personal security and a lowered predisposition towards anxiety than others from the very outset.

Box 4.7

Ieva Plaude
Entrepreneur

On a personal sense of security

How would you rate your present sense of security on a scale from 0 to 10?

My personal rating of security is 8. That means that in principle I feel secure and self-confident. The remaining 2 points I keep in reserve, with the admission that things could always be better and with the hope that my individual sense of security will increase once Latvia joins NATO and the EU.

Which objective and subjective factors enhance your sense of security?

I think that any sense of security is an absolutely subjective phenomenon. I personally do not relate it to material possessions. It is very closely related to one's level of education and to one's practical and emotional life experiences. Of course, it is influenced by objective factors, the most important among them being the political stability of the government.

Undeniably, the re-establishment of Latvia's independence twelve years ago was the strongest factor for enhancing our sense of security and freedom, both in the subjective and objective sense – the opportunity to travel without restrictions, to obtain an education in any country of the world, to exchange information and to read uncensored press. These benefits, which raise one's level of self-confidence and open up a wide range of possibilities for the development of one's personality, have now become ordinary aspects of daily life.

Which factors generate a sense of insecurity?

In the context of society I would first of all mention a lack of education. An understanding of the cycles of history and global processes in general strengthens the sense of security for all individuals.

What has helped you personally develop a sense of security?

The most important resources are the people around me. In this regard I fully agree with the old proverb: a shared grief is half the grief, a shared joy is double the joy.

UNDP Latvia, 2003

The success that they experience in their entrepreneurial activities serves to further enhance these positive feelings.

Psychologist Jānis Grants, in an interview for this **Report**, explains the manner in which such reciprocity has manifested itself in his personal experience:

“My entrepreneurial activities have enhanced my sense of security. I know that no one will dismiss me from my job. I could lose my job only if I did not perform it well and the results were bad. That realization induces me to do more.” Grants compares the positive feeling of being in control of one’s professional activities to the results from research with airplane pilots. During simulated flights, the pilot who sits at the controls feels less anxiety when the plane comes under the threat of an accident than the co-pilot who is sitting beside him and cannot influence the situation.

Religious faith

For more than a decade, people in Latvia have experienced unrestricted religious freedom, but the consequences of the anti-religious atheism of the Soviet era are still in evidence. Only 7% of those interviewed by the UNDP cited “faith in God” as a factor that helps them to overcome difficulties. When asked to mention the three main factors that enhance their feelings of security, only 2.7% of **Survey** respondents mentioned religious faith or the church as a primary factor.

However, when asked to note which factors listed in the UNDP **Survey** enhance or decrease their sense of security, “faith in God” placed fourth as a security-enhancing feature, albeit not a primary one (chosen by nearly 53% of respondents). Faith in God was cited most often by women, and particularly by Russian-speaking women. Psychologist Nataliya Bahmachova explained this connection with the church and with God as follows:

“Both men and women attend church, but maybe for women it is more meaningful. Perhaps men attend church not because of their firm religious beliefs, but because of some social obligation: ‘On religious holidays everyone goes to church, how can I not go?’ I think that women attend church to follow the needs of their heart. I go to church because this is the place where I can worship and feel a kind of energy. Of course, there are also men who truly believe. Perhaps women have a greater ability to value something intangible such as religious faith. Men have a greater need for something tangible, something concrete.”

Nevertheless, as the following interview with Lutheran pastor Juris Rubenis reveals, the option to seek and find a sense of security in religious faith and the church is now available to all (see Box 4.8).

Sense of belonging to a group or community

A sense of belonging and skills in belonging are important in any society. The **Survey’s** ethnic Latvians assessed “belonging to my ethnic group” as a very important aspect of life that enhances their sense of security. Latvian men ranked ethnic belonging as the fourth most important security-enhancing factor. Ethnic belonging was less important for Russians in enhancing their feelings of security. Russian respondents placed greater emphasis upon religion, the church and commercial security services (an analysis of the latter is not within the scope of this **Report**).

The answers by Latvian respondents in regard to their sense of ethnic belonging as a security-enhancing factor is not surprising, considering the strong ethnic and folkloric traditions that have been cultivated through various historical periods under various political regimes. The psychological strength provided by the sense of a Latvian ethnic identity has been previously addressed by the President of Latvia, Dr. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, in her speeches and writings as a professor of psychology in Canada. According to Dr. Vīķe-Freiberga, ethnic identity provides a sense of continuity with the past and has the psychological benefit of generating a sense of stability and security. For Latvians, it also provides an enduring strength of spirit that has been passed on through successive generations, and that is “inscribed in our entire culture,” most prominently in Latvian folksongs.

During the Soviet occupation, ethnic belonging was of particular significance in Latvia as a means of inner resistance against a foreign regime. In other parts of the world, the Latvian ethnic identity provided a sense of security and psychological balance for hundreds of thousands of exiled Latvians living as émigrés in foreign countries.

Ethnic belonging is still relevant among young people in Latvia today, despite the spread of fast food chains and Western pop culture. According to one 24-year old female student: “My sense of Latvian belonging is a means by which I become aware of myself through my language and culture. I cannot imagine myself without it.”



Juris Zalāns, a member of a folk dance club, stated that his connection with Latvian folk traditions is to a large extent determined by the social benefits: “I meet really fine people at these events. There is a feeling of solidarity and unity.”

Lauma Garkalne, a member of a Latvian folk music ensemble, states that while ethnic belonging does enhance her sense of security, these feelings are rooted mostly in her love for the Latvian land and landscape: “My sense of security comes from living here on this land. It conveys its own, unique type of information, which is manifest in the Latvian culture. We receive our spiritual heritage through this land.”

Within Latvian culture (both traditionally in folk songs and in contemporary art), the land and various natural phenomena are attributed special symbolic and sometimes even mythical significance. This serves to strengthen the link between Latvians’ sense of belonging to their ethnic group and culture, and their love of the land and nature. Most young Latvians do not associate feelings of ethnic pride and belonging with ethnic conflict. According to one Latvian youth, “feelings of ethnic belonging must not become fanatical, and must not lead to dislike of people from other ethnic groups.”

Box 4.8

Juris Rubenis
Theologian and Lutheran pastor

On internal stability

This period of transition makes the issues of “inner security” and “inner stability” more timely. In an established political system, an individual can more or less rely upon stable external factors. Only when the visible signs of security collapse, does the existence or lack of stability within a person become apparent.

I think that the Soviet period encouraged certain traits of infantilism in people. Many decisions came from above. One could feel resentment against the government, but it certainly was convenient to have someone else making the decisions for you.

One significant problem for people in Latvia today is learning how to make decisions and taking responsibility for them. Making choices demands a certain level of competence, as well as advanced ethical criteria. The lack of such criteria creates confusion. People say that everything is bad, but do not know what to do in order to improve the situation.

This is a period when it is possible to help people by stimulating the development of their personality, identity and values. By helping people to get to know the Bible we urge them to look creatively for solid foundations in their lives.

I have observed that a positive, friendly and tolerant Christian environment helps people to find a course in life, to establish clear values and goals. Soviet ideology formerly took the place of religion in society. In order to see a genuine renouncement of this ideology, which was crippling to the people, firm values need to replace it.

Insecurity is an existential condition, therefore it cannot be overcome by economic or social means alone. One has to address human existence as a whole. People with a very stable system of values can feel safe and secure also under extremely adverse conditions.

I think that a stable society may grow out of the internal stability of individuals, and not *vice versa*. The more people there are with well-ordered internal lives even in a disorganized society, the sooner social changes will take place.

UNDP Latvia, 2003

Increasing the *securitability* of the individual

In order to enhance people's sense of security and reduce their sense of insecurity, both their risk factors and their *securitability factors* (including protective factors, external resources and internal resources) should be considered. Risk factors are all of the previously mentioned conditions that give rise to a sense of insecurity – financial difficulties, irregular employment, abusive relationships, health problems, the threat of terrorism, etc.

Protective *securitability factors* enhance the opposite – an increased sense of security. Positive relationships within the family and with friends, one's own positive actions, faith in God, and especially for Latvians – a sense of ethnic belonging, are among the

most important protective factors to figure in the studies for this **Report**. Internal resources come from the people themselves – their abilities, talents, actions, behaviours, and positive thinking. External resources surround the individual, – people and institutions that offer help, as well as financial resources. By identifying and evaluating the potential positive resources one has at one's disposal, one can develop a security strategy.

An active, positive attitude is essential. First, one must be aware of one's insecurities, which at times are inevitable. It is important not to pretend to be unfailingly secure and calm, or to deny difficulties with the cliché that “everything will be all right.” One must find answers to such questions as: What am I afraid of? How real is the threat? What are my resources? Who can help me?

Ieva Stokenberga
Psychologist

Box 4.9

On humour and human security

Why is humour important according to psychologists?

Freud wrote that humour is a self-defence mechanism. This is a very old idea. More recent theories identify three main reasons why using humour increases one's sense of security. The first aspect is cognitive and related to the ways in which thought processes occur. On encountering a problematic situation we usually feel stress. The perspective of humour, on the condition that we are able to find something funny in the situation, helps us to withdraw our focus from the negative, and to look at things from a completely different perspective. It helps us to cope. The other aspect could be called emotional. It is related to physiological studies about the way the whole process of humour – the perception of what is funny and laughing itself – helps to create positive emotions. Under stress and fear levels of tension are higher, but these are negative emotions. Whatever we gain by laughing is positive. It is another way of creating a sense of security. The third aspect is social. People in shared situations of stress and insecurity help each other to cope through humour.

To what extent do people in Latvia use humour in this positive sense?

The studies that have been carried out in Latvia show that the Latvian sense of humour is not entirely different from the Scandinavian or North American sense of humour. Latvians have a good ability to notice things and to use the comical to create good feelings and to solve problems.

There is a new trend in the world – therapeutic humour. Humour is used a lot when working with people who have serious health problems – particularly when working with terminally ill patients and hospitalized children. Medical nurses in other countries now have programmes for using humour in interactions with their patients. Studies show that laughter improves the condition of the human immune system and helps it to deal with illness. It activates our physiological self-defence systems. At present we lack such programmes here in Latvia for those who really need it. Humour is not so much an inborn quality. It can be developed. Much is related to one's attitude.

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By pretending not to see real risks or attempting to deny situations from which one has suffered, feelings of insecurity may remain in spite of the denial. Often this results in various psychological symptoms (neuroses, depression, anger etc.) and somatic symptoms (stomach and intestinal dysfunction, coronary diseases, psychosomatic pain) or destructive behaviour (abuse, excessive alcohol consumption, etc.). Becoming aware of one's insecurities is the first step in finding constructive solutions for taking care of oneself, avoiding potential threats, becoming aware of one's future possibilities and seeking assistance when necessary.

Certain measures can be taken to increase *securitability* at the **individual level**:

Breaking the intergenerational cycle of abuse

The intergenerational continuation of abuse is not unequivocally determined. A recent study reveals that among those mothers who had experienced childhood abuse, 37 to 39% had been able to develop more constructive and positive ways of relating to their children (Sebre, 2002).

Often the ability to break the cycle of abuse, to form new perceptions and to develop new behavioural models is encouraged by positive relationships with other people in childhood or later in adult life. A current relationship with an adult who has had a positive childhood experience may provide positive support for those who have been abused. Close friends or community groups may also do the same. Parenting literature (such as *A Secure Base* by J. Bowlby) and information from the mass media may help the parent to develop a more positive relationship with his or her child. As in the resolution of any problem, the first step is to identify it. Another effective way of breaking the cycle of intergenerational abuse is to seek the advice of professionals – psychologists or psychotherapists specialising in these issues.

Developing positive self-esteem and awareness of one's own worth

Quite often people get carried away by criticising themselves and their actions. Becoming aware of one's positive aspects and abilities can do wonders for enhancing one's feelings of self-worth. This helps one to become stronger; to develop positive, close relationships and to put one's talents to good use, thus providing for an increased sense of security regarding the future.

Taking responsibility for one's own life

The awareness that each individual is responsible for shaping his or her own life is a major *securitability factor*. Blaming others for one's troubles and allowing others to dominate the course of one's life is ultimate-

ly unproductive. Irrespective of what has happened in the past, the chances to shape the present and the future will increase if one bears a positive and proactive attitude. Taking responsibility for one's own actions, thoughts and feelings is as important as allowing others to take responsibility for themselves. Once one assumes personal responsibility, one can better engage in time and resource planning.

Taking care of one's physical health

Even though many people associate a sense of insecurity with threats to their physical well-being, many do not always take sufficient care of their health. Both an objective and subjective sense of security can be enhanced by regular health check-ups and disease prevention measures such as immunizations. Healthy nutrition, physical activity, as well as the reduced consumption of alcohol, caffeine and other addictive substances are important means for enhancing one's physical well-being and security.

Taking care of one's mental and psychological health

Taking care of one's psychological health involves an awareness and understanding of one's thoughts, feelings and actions; the ability to share one's emotional experiences with others; and seeking professional help when needed. Since the re-establishment of Latvia's independence, psychological and psychotherapeutic help services have become increasingly accessible. Many are financed by the State or by municipalities.

Developing stable relationships built on mutual trust and respect

Secure relationships based on trust and respect are a source of security. They allow the sharing of feelings, thoughts and experiences. This applies to relationships within the family (partner, parent-child) and among friends. Positive, close relationships offer protection against stress and depression. They have a beneficial impact upon one's physical and mental health regardless of age, and can help victims to overcome serious traumas such as that of abuse.

Developing spiritual values and engaging in creative activities

People are not only biological and social creatures. Each must be able to manifest their spiritual beliefs and be creative. The values of art and culture help to make life more meaningful for many, as does faith in God and the practice of religion.

Other measures can be taken to increase *securitability* at the **government level**:

While feelings of insecurity are experienced at the individual level, the government could contribute greatly to reducing various aspects of insecurity for wide segments of the population. A closer analysis of the principal factors that generate a sense of insecurity among the so-called risk groups of society might provide government decision-makers with a clearer picture of State-wide measures that could be taken to increase people's overall sense of security.

Distribution of information and co-ordination of activities with various aid-providing services.

People in Latvia require substantive, multi-faceted, opportunity-oriented information that focuses not only on the identification of problems, but also on their solutions. Although different services providing aid and assistance are being implemented in Latvia, people

often lack information regarding these services. The public's access to such information must be increased through informative materials and advertising in the mass media. A comprehensive network of social, medical, psychological and legal help must be developed to simplify the procedures for receiving assistance.

Educating society about psychological, social and medical problems and their prevention

The public also requires more information about such *securitability*-related issues as the link between alcohol consumption and abuse, the consequences of abuse, etc. In recent years several NGOs have developed materials on the problem of abuse, and the government has partially funded the distribution of such materials. This work should continue in a more systematic manner and on a wider scale. The most widespread problem of addic-

Box 4.10

Governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) currently addressing abuse

During the past several years, several important measures have been taken by the national and local governments, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations in Latvia. These have been designed to encourage positive relationships within the family, to uphold the rights of children, and to work towards the prevention of abuse and the rehabilitation of the abused.

One of the first prevention and rehabilitation programmes was developed in 1997 by a local NGO, the *Centre Against Abuse: Support for Children and Families*. This programme provided training seminars for professionals from various disciplines (psychologists, social workers, medical personnel, teachers, police officers, court officials) and from various regions of Latvia. It sought to provide a better understanding about abuse and the means for preventing and treating it.

That same year the *Riga Crisis Telephone* hot-line became the first in Latvia to provide 24-hour crisis intervention services. Other examples of such supportive programmes and services include the *Crisis Centre for Children and Women* in Talsi (established in 1998); the *Skalbes Crisis Centre* in Riga (opened in 1999 on the basis of *Riga Crisis Telephone* and providing both in-walk and telephone consultations); and the *Dardedze Centre Against Abuse* in Riga (since 2001). These programmes have been financed by the national as well as local governments, international grant programmes, various foreign embassies in Latvia, and private enterprises.

Since 1999 the national government has been funding the rehabilitation of children who have suffered from abuse. Since 2000 it has also provided funds to train groups of psychologists, psychotherapists and social workers in specialized approaches for working with abused children. In addition, the government has supported training programmes for care workers who work with institutionalized children. Local governments are supporting the rehabilitation of abused children, and providing specialized training for care workers in orphanages and other institutions. NGOs have recently developed and implemented various support groups for parents, women and children who have suffered from sexual abuse, women who are suffering from domestic violence, and men.

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tion in Latvia has traditionally been alcoholism, but many people have limited knowledge about its manifestations and the opportunities available for treating it. Similarly, the education and screening of employees of the police and justice systems must continue in order to eliminate negative attitudes displayed by police officers, judges, lawyers and prosecutors towards victims of abuse. Presently this work is being carried out mainly by NGOs with the support of various foundations. The government should assume a more active role in this regard.

Development of family-support policies

The government has recognized the significance of the role of positive, close relationships and has created a Ministry of Family and Children's Affairs, which is preparing a new State Family Policy. The policy document addresses such issues as improving the quality of family life and supporting parenting. It also seeks to provide relief for families in crisis situations and for families living under conditions of risk (poverty, long-term illness or disability of a family member, abuse in the family or alcohol or drug dependency in the family).

The policy document is being developed with the active participation of non-governmental organizations and is a positive example of a coordinated security strategy. For more on family policy, see the section on community security and family policy in Chapter 6.

Improving the system of education

Along with the important issue of teacher remuneration are the issues of teacher-pupil relations and teaching methodology. The educational process, together with positive personal relations at school, should facilitate the development of children's self-esteem and self-confidence. Schools should help pupils develop such security skills as the ability to cooperate with others, health consciousness, the ability to find opportunities in complicated situations, and the ability to develop strategies for dealing with life's difficulties.

Violence among children at schools also deserves serious attention. Cooperation between schools, children, parents, social assistance services and psychological assistance centres is of crucial importance for the prevention of violence among schoolchildren.

Summary

The family lays the principal foundation upon which all other aspects of *securitability* are built. Consistent parental love, care and support engender feelings of security that encourage positive self-esteem

and the ability to trust other people throughout one's lifetime. Self-esteem and the ability to trust others, together with other positive individual traits, are the building blocks for further improving *securitability* at the societal, national and global levels.

The basis for individual security is formed in childhood through relationships of mutual trust with close attachment figures. Less than half of the people studied in Latvia exhibit secure attachment styles. This indicates that many people's sense of security could be increased if they experienced better relations within their family and elsewhere during their childhood, such as in their schools. Individuals must be encouraged to improve their relationships and to break the continuation of abuse if it exists in their families. If they cannot do this on their own, then they should be informed about the professional help that is now available.

Self-esteem is also closely related to other individual characteristics that give persons the required skills to ensure their own security. An analysis of 56 respondents in Latvia reveals that people above the age of 40 tend to rely more on themselves than on others. Individuals who are satisfied with life have a more optimistic view of themselves as agents of change. Their numbers are steadily increasing, and suicide rates have been falling since 1995. People who feel that they can effect change also have the initiative to act alone or with others to improve their situation.

Entrepreneurship has been on the rise in the past twelve years, and there are indications that people who run their own businesses are among those with the highest sense of security in Latvia. Further studies should be made on whether the encouragement of entrepreneurial activity would serve to strengthen the *securitability factors* of people with low levels of *securitability*. Religious faith also helps many people to feel more secure in changing circumstances.

The sense of ethnic belonging that was so important for the Latvian people during the Soviet occupation has not lost its significance to young Latvian people today. The role of ethnic belonging as a *securitability factor* might increase in light of the upcoming changes that will follow Latvia's accession to the EU and NATO. Finally, healthy persons are usually better able to influence their own security. Encouraging people to lead a healthy lifestyle is an investment in all aspects of security.