

What does risk aversion tell us about the adoption of good health behaviours?

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Abstract

Adopting good health behaviours seems to play a significant part in the prevention of the most frequent chronic diseases like cancers or cardiovascular diseases. Literature shows that such adoption is positively linked to some individual factors such as the educational or socioeconomic levels.

Here, we aim to explore in particular the link between the individual's risk appetite and the adoption of such habits.

We analyse survey data collected by phone among 2,666 individuals selected at random in a population of French health insurees. Besides socio-economic factors, we specifically analyse the role of the individual's risk score measured by the 30-item self-report DOSPERT scale using five dimensions (ethical, social, health/security, financial and recreational). Each good health behaviour (i.e., being sporty, not smoking or having a normal BMI – Body Mass Index –) is modelled separately using a logistic regression.

Among the 2,666 respondents, 58.0% declare to do sport regularly, 71.6% not to smoke and 61.8% a weight and height that correspond to a normal BMI. Logistic models show that there is a very strong significant association ($p < 0.001$) between the respondent's risk score and his/her health habits; the sign of which, however, depends on the behaviour considered. Indeed, while risk-averse individuals seem to have more chance of either not smoking or having a normal BMI, it appears that the more risk-taking persons are the more likely to be sporty.

Our results may be useful for awareness campaigns as they show that the message should be different according to the good health habit to promote.