Risk attitudes and mitigation among gold miners and others in the Suriname rainforest
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Abstract:

This article analyses the question: do attitudes towards risk influence participation in small-scale gold mining, a hazardous activity that generates uncertain income? This question is examined by measuring and comparing the risk attitudes of gold miners and non-mining community members in the rainforest of Suriname, South America. The author presents a multivariate model to predict the duration of work in mining areas as a function of risk tolerance, age, education, and household demographics.

The results suggest that a greater tolerance to risk increases the duration of a person's mining career. However, attitudes explain only a fraction of the variation in occupational choices. Qualitative data suggest that these choices are primarily shaped by local barriers to human capital development and by national economic volatility. Given their marginal position in society and the multitude of mining risk mitigation strategies, it is questionable whether gold mining exposes Suriname forest peoples to greater risks than other subsistence alternatives. The author argues that sensitivity to local historical and cultural conditions would improve the efficiency of policies aimed at developing a more sustainable mining industry. By zooming in on the daily lives of miners, anthropology can complement macro-scale analyses and contribute to policy interventions in the small-scale mining sector.