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mail: consuelo.prado@uam.es

- Corina Bistriceanu Pantelimon, "Spiru Haret" University, Romania; E-mail: corinabistriceanu@yahoo.com
- Cornelia Rada, "Francisc I. Rainer" Anthropology Institute of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, Romania; E-mail: corneliarada@yahoo.com
- Cristina Bianca Pocol, The University of Agricultural Sciences, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Department of Animal Production and Food Safety, Cluj-Napoca, Romania; E-mail: cristina.pocol@usamvcluj.ro
- Cristina Faludi, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, "Babeș-Bolyai" University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania; E-mail: cristina.faludi@gmail.com
- Elena Doldor, Queen Mary University of London, School of Business and Management, United Kingdom; E-mail: e.r.doldor@qmul.ac.uk
- Emma Surman, Keele Management School, Keele University and Research Institute for Social Sciences, United Kingdom; E-mail: e.l.surman@keele.ac.uk
- Ergyl Tair, Institute for Population and Human Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria; E-mail: ergyul_tair@yahoo.com
- Eugen Tarța-Arsene, "Carol Davila" University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Bucharest, Romania; E-mail: eugentarta@yahoo.com
- Françoise Rovillé-Sausse, Muséum national d'histoire naturelle, Paris, France; E-mail: sausse@mnhn.fr
- Gabriel Ionuț Stoiciu, "Francisc I. Rainer" Anthropology Institute of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, Romania; E-mail: gabriel.stoiciu@gmail.com
- Ilaria Buonomo, Lumsa University, Rome, Italy; E-mail: i.buonomo1@lumsa.it
- Konstantin S. Khroutski, Institute of Medical Education, Novgorod State University after Yaroslav-the-Wise, Novgorod the Great, Russia; E-mail: hrucki@mail.ru; hks@novsu.ac.ru
- Laura-Oana Stroică, "Carol Davila" University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Bucharest, Romania; E-mail: joannadean78@yahoo.com
- Luminita Bejenaru, Faculty of Biology, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, Romania; E-mail: lumib@uaic.ro
- Martin Frisher, School of Pharmacy, Keele University, Staffordshire, UK; E-mail: m.frisher@keele.ac.uk
- Mihaela Kelemen, Keele Management School, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, United Kingdom; E-mail: m.i.kelemen@keele.ac.uk
- Mihaela-Camelia Popa, "Constantin Rădulescu-Motru" Institute of Philosophy and Psychology, Department of Psychology, Romanian Academy, Bucharest, Romania; E-mail: popa_zaizon@yahoo.com
- Mirko Spiroski, Department of Hematology University Medical Center Skopje, Faculty of Medicine, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia; E-mail: mspirosky@yahoo.com
- Monica Tarcea, University of Medicine and Pharmacy Targu-Mures, Faculty of Medicine, Romania; E-mail: monaumf2001@yahoo.com; monica.tarcea@umftgm.ro
- Rodney J Reynolds, University College London's Institute for Global Health (IGH), England; E-mail: Rodney.reynolds@ucl.ac.uk
- Serghei Suman, State University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Nicolae Testemitanu", Chișinau, Republic of Moldova; E-mail: sumanser@yahoo.com; serghei.suman@usmf.md
- Svetoslav Handjiev, Bulgarian Association for the Study of Obesity and Related Diseases

(BASORD); Bulgarian Society for the Healthy Foods and Nutrition, Bulgaria; E-mail: svhandjiev@gmail.com

- Tatjana Pavlica, Faculty for Sciences Department for Biology and Ecology, Novi Sad, Serbia; E-mail: tatjana.pavlica@dbe.uns.ac.rs
- Tsvetelina Panchelieva, Institute for Population and Human Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria; E-mail: tsvetelina.p@iphs.eu
- Tudor B. Marinescu, "Carol Davila" University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Bucharest, Romania; E-mail: tudorm77@gmail.com
- Valentina Marinescu, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, University of Bucharest, Romania; E-mail: vmarinescu9@yahoo.com
- Vaska Stancheva-Popkostadinova, Department of Medical Social Sciences, Faculty of Public Health, Health Care and Sports, South-West University "Neofit Rilski", Blagoevgrad. Bulgaria; E-mail: v_stancheva@abv.bg
- Zofia Dworakowska, Institute of Polish Culture, Warsaw University, Poland; E-mail: dworakowska@gmail.com

Table of Contents

SELF-EFFICACY AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH COMPUTER-BASED MULTIMEDIA LEARNING IN ONLINE LEARNING IN PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS

Diego-Oswaldo CAMACHO-VEGA (1), María Guadalupe DELGADILLO-RAMOS (1)

(1) Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, Faculty of Medicine and Psychology
Address correspondence to: Diego-Oswaldo Camacho-Vega, Faculty of Medicine and Psychology, Calzada Universidad 14418, UABC, Parque Internacional Industrial Tijuana, 22390 Tijuana, B.C. E-mail: (1) diego.camacho@uabc.edu.mx (2) mayra.marquez@uabc.edu.mx

Abstract

Objectives. Based on the general hypothesis of a growing interest in using computer-based multimedia learning (CBML) in education, the objective of this study was to identify if students perceive CBML positively as an instructional tool in their online courses. A second objective was to determine if CBML is associated with self-efficacy in online courses. Finally, a third objective was to determine if higher levels of self-efficacy are associated with a positive perception of CBML.
Material and methods. Based on a cross-sectional research design, n = 98 undergraduate students enrolled in the first year of Psychology in the Faculty of Medicine and Psychology were evaluated ending their academic year about their level of self-efficacy and the perception of multimedia after taking their online courses during the Covid-19 pandemic. Sociodemographic and what's the preferred device used during their courses also were asked.
Results. Results indicated a positive perception of CBML as an instructional tool. Also, results indicated a positive correlation between CBML and online self-efficacy. Finally, higher levels of self-efficacy were associated with a positive perception of CBML as an instructional tool.
Conclusions. According to the results, CBML is a valuable resource in learning processes (particularly online), highlighting the importance of greater self-efficacy for a positive perception of using CBML.

Keywords: computer-based multimedia learning, self-efficacy, online learning.

Introduction

From around the 70s, multimedia emerged as a relevant technology used in diverse environments such as learning. In the past years, other technologies (i.e., virtual, mixed reality, internet applications, etc.) have taken more relevance in the research field. Multimedia has recovered special attention and the new generations of students appear to accept it well (Andovita & Wahyuni, 2020). Currently, the interest in multimedia has grown because of the popularity of platforms like YouTube and other online-based platforms (Wandago, Mwangi, Bozo, MianoKihu, & Mwabonje, 2020). Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic conducted to use online applications to deliver educational courses and to incorporate multimedia as an instructional tool. However the perception of multimedia as an instructional tool in online courses on the part of the students, and the factors which promote their use remains still unclear, reason why some of these factors were explored in this research.

Computer-based Multimedia Learning

Multimedia learning refers to learning from words and pictures. Multimedia instruction refers to the presentation of material using both words and images, with the intention of promoting learning. The case for multimedia learning is based on the idea that instructional messages should be designed in light of how the human mind works, that is, presenting material in words and pictures by taking advantage of the full capacity of humans to process information (Mayer, 2009). In summary, multimedia learning involves presenting pictures and words where animation usually are presented as animations and the words are presented as narration (Mayer, Heiser, & Lonn, 2001).

According to Mayer & Moreno (2022) when multimedia learning is delivered using computers is considered Computer-based multimedia learning (CBML), and has increasingly popular use in many fields of learning and training because it stimulates new ways of delivering information with attention to accessibility, repeated use, and individualization, meeting the needs of various types of students (Krismadinata, Kurnia, Mulya, & Verawardina, 2022). The multimedia principle has been shown to be particularly effective when there is a clear and logical relationship between visual and verbal information, leading students to report higher satisfaction (Dawson et al., 2021). This hypothesis is derived from dual coding theory (Paivio, 1986) which proposes that information is processed in two different channels: a verbal and a visual channel, implicating that people learn better from a combined presentation of words and pictures (i.e., visual illustrations of what is presented verbally) than from words alone, this effect is known as the multimedia effect (as cited in Jägerskog, Jönsson, Selander, & Jonsson, 2019).

The application of digital technologies in education, especially multimedia network technologies, has brought about major changes in the content and methods of instruction. It has replaced the conventional teacher-centered, textbook-centered, and classroom-centered perspectives. Therefore, teachers are no longer the authority of knowledge. Multimedia learning materials, particularly those presented on computers, are different from more traditional learning materials on paper. In a dynamic multimedia context, students could be presented with more opportunities to engage in deep learning (Lawson & Mayer, 2021). Thus, CBML is an effective cognitive tool for students to explore freely, visualize procedures, and provide learners with a more convenient, comfortable, and effective learning environment (Zhao, He, Jin, & Wang, 2022), simulating the subjective initiative of learners, guiding learners to actively learn and construct knowledge systems promoting effective learning outcomes (Ye, Su, Zhao, & Hang, 2021).

Perceptions and utilization of CBML as a pedagogical tool

Miner and Stefaniak (2018) suggested that the use of CBML is a viable teaching resource for courses and the adoption of CBML by students depends on diverse factors such as the perceived usefulness and the ease of use of multimedia in computer-based learning. The perceived usefulness of CBML in online learning as a teaching method has shown a stronger influence on the intention than lectures and paper-based tutorials. One factor that explains this influence is the perceived ease of use of multimedia (Laosethakul & Leingpibul, 2021).

Additionally, Krause, Portolese, and Bonner (2017) found that the use of CBML as an instructional tool by teachers and students is related to engagement and some positive emotions such as enjoyment. Similarly, Hernández-Domínguez & Pérez-Cortés (2020) applying the

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) with university students concluded that most of them reported being satisfied with the use of technological tools and consider that it positively influences their learning and performance.

Moreover, the perception of the usefulness of multimedia also has been related to another individual factor such as self-efficacy, but more research is needed to support this hypothesis.

Self-efficacy and online learning

According to Bandura (1977) self-efficacy occurs when an individual belief in his/her ability to succeed. So, they try to do what they believe they can do, choosing activities according to their efficacy beliefs and putting efforts into activities, persisting when faced obstacles (Hong, Liu, Cao, Tai, & Zhao, 2022).

Concerning self-efficacy, students who assess the efficacy of their learning and academic performance skills have an increase in their likelihood of using critical thinking skills as well as critical thinking disposition, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and self-identity, factors that are involved in preparing students for success in an online learning environment (Robinson, 2021). Particularly, Internet self-efficacy (ISE) refers to users' self-efficacy when interacting with a website, the system itself, and interactive content designed for users. ISE has been defined as an individual's belief in his/her ability to successfully use the Internet and is considered an important antecedent of the effects of e-learning (Jokisch, Schmidt, Doh, Marquard, & Wahl, 2020).

Previous findings confirm that online learning is positively related to the interactions between students and instructors, teaching presence, self-management of learning, and academic self-efficacy. In addition, student satisfaction with online learning positively predicts their intention to continue using online learning (Um & Jang, 2021). Technology can be used to deliver content but can also be strategically used to yield more opportunities for hands-on or mastery experiences and immediate feedback to improve students' self-efficacy. While planning future coursework, educators should reflect on the content being taught, course sequencing in the program, requirements for hours, and students' technological skills when determining which course delivery (Fukunaga & Kasamatsu, 2022).

It has been suggested that self-efficacy when using technology, strengthens the positive relationship between the online learning environment and student engagement, as much as the positive relationship between instructional resources and student engagement (Owusu-Agyeman, 2021).

Regarding the attitude and opinion of smart devices used by higher education students and their self-efficacy when they participate in online classes, students' perceptions of device usage, connectivity, and time duration, had a statistically significant effect on cloud-based online learning. Thus, smart devices play a vital role in extending learning outside of the classroom anywhere, anytime (Arul & Ananthi, 2021).

This research aimed at investigating if students have a positive perception of the usefulness of CBML in their online courses. Also, this research aimed to determine if there exists a correlation between self-efficacy and CBML and if a higher level of self-efficacy is associated with a better perception of the usefulness of CBML as an instructional tool in psychology students.

The hypothesis for this study was that currently, students have a positive perception of the use of CBML in their online courses (H1), being this positive perception associated with self-efficacy (H2). Finally, an additional hypothesis was that higher levels of self-efficacy are associated with a positive perception of CBML as an instructional tool (H3).

Material and Methods

This research was designed as a quantitative study using a cross-sectional design.

Participants

Data was collected from students enrolled in the first year of Psychology in the Faculty of Medicine and Psychology of one of the biggest universities in Mexico. $N = 98$ higher education students (age average = 19.66; 78% females) participated voluntarily after signing the informed consent. They were assured of the confidentiality of the data.

Instruments

Online Learning Self-Efficacy Scale (OLSES)

To evaluate the level of self-efficacy in online courses the OLSES scales developed by Zimmerman and Kulikowich (2016) and adapted by Yavuzalp & Bachcivan (2020) was administered. This version is a 21-item scale that includes three factors (learning in the online environment, time management, and technology use 21 items. The 6-point Likert scale of the original version instead of the 5-Likert point proposed by Yavuzalp & Bachcivan (2020) (1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree) was conserved in the administration of the scale (i.e., *complete all assignments on time*) because this kind of scale avoid ambiguous response.

Learning via video questionnaire

Miner and Stefaniak (2018) elaborated the learning via video questionnaire to evaluate the usefulness of multimedia videos in online courses. It is a 27-item questionnaire dealing with perceptions regarding various types of videos (i.e. *Video instruction can be an effective replacement for face-to-face instruction for some classes*). Participants ranked on a 5-point Likert scale how strongly they agree with each sentence (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

Demographics and devices

Additionally, basic socio-demographic questions of name, age, and sex were asked, as well one question to know the main device used for watching the videos during the course.

Procedures

First, students enrolled in their first year of Psychology bachelors were invited to participate in the study. Due to the pandemic situation, all courses of the faculty were administrated completely online through the Blackboard Learn platform following the instructional design template provided by the Center for the Open and Online Education of the university. The study was conducted fully online at the end of the academic year during the Covid-19 pandemic.

After signing the informed consent, participants were asked to respond to the *Learning via video questionnaire* and the *OLSES questionnaire* as well some demographic questions. The

same questionnaires were administrated at the end of the course but in a posttest version. Finally, one question asking what the main device was used to take the course and watch the videos was asked.

Data analysis

To analyze data and verify the research hypothesis the JASP 0.16.2 software was used. The analysis was conducted in four stages. First, the normality of data was evaluated, determining feasible the use of parametric statistics. Second, the *r* Pearson coefficient was calculated to identify the existence of a correlation between CBML and self-efficacy. Third, the median of self-efficacy was calculated from the OLSES results to classify students with higher and low level of self-efficacy (median = 4.95), all values below the median were considered as low self-efficacy. Finally, a logistic regression was calculated to identify the association between the level of self-efficacy and perception of CBML usefulness.

Results

Determining the perception of CBML as a positive instructional tool in online learning in psychology students, results indicated that most students considered the use of CBML as a useful tool ($\bar{x} = 3.600$, SD = 0.496). According to the median calculated for devices, results showed that student used mainly a PC o Laptop for their online courses ($\tilde{x} = 2.000$). Descriptive statistics for all studied variables are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive

	Age	Self-efficacy	CBML	Device
Median	19	4.950	3.63	2.000[a]
Mean	19.663	4.715	3.600	1.918
Std. Deviation	1.406	0.871	0.496	0.371

Note.
[a] PC or Laptop

Checking if CBML is associated with self-efficacy in online courses, the results suggested a positive correlation between self-efficacy and CBML ($r = .569$: $p < .001$) (see Table 2)

Table 2

Correlations between variables

Variable	Self-efficacy	Multimedia	Device
Self-efficacy	—		
Multimedia	0.569***	—	
Device	0.035	0.012	—
Self-efficacy level	0.711***	0.461***	-0.023

Note. *** $p < .001$

Then, to determine if a higher level of self-efficacy is associated with CBML, a logistic regression was calculated. As is shown in Table 2, the logistic regression model was statistically significant $\chi2(96) = 22.903$, $p < .001$, indicating that the model explains 28% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in CBML. The odds of perceiving the positive use of CBML are 9.851 times for participants with higher levels of self-efficacy (odds ratio, $p < .001$). In other words, the positive perception of the use of CBML is associated with higher levels of self-efficacy (see Table 3).

Table 3

Logistic regression

Model	Deviance	AIC	BIC	df	X²	P	McFadden R²	Nagelkerke R²	Tjur R²	Cox & Snell R²
H$_0$	134.835	136.835	139.42	97						
H$_1$	111.932	115.932	121.102	96	22.9	< .001	0.17	0.279	0.212	0.208

Coefficients

	Estimate	Standard Error	Standardized⁺	Odds Ratio	z	Wald Statistic	p
CBML	2.288	0.55	1.135	9.851	4.159	17.297	< .001

Discussion

In line with the first hypothesis, students appear to have a positive perception of the use of CBML in online courses, in agreement with Miner and Stefaniak (2018), who suggested that the use of CBML is a viable teaching resource to communicate course content, albeit it is worth mentioning that not so hard as expected for this study. With regard to the second hypothesis, this positive perception is associated with self-efficacy (H2) supporting the findings provided by Cheung, Li, and Yee (2003). Regarding the third hypothesis, higher levels of self-efficacy were associated with a positive perception of the usefulness of CBML, in line with Zheng, Mcalack, Wilmes, Kohler-Evans, and Williamson (2009).

The use of CBML as a potentially valuable instructional tool has been reported various years ago (Mayer et al., 2001), being an important resource due to the capacity to work with the visual and auditive processes which are the basis for the dual-channel theory. Over time, the use of CBML was supplied by novel tools such as virtual and mixed reality (Miranda & Vieira, 2019), intelligent agents (Trevors, Reza, Azevedo, & Bouchet, 2016), etc. Nonetheless, through the emergence of online platforms such as YouTube, the interest in CBML started to grow again and the use of CBML recover its importance as a pedagogical tool (Wandago, et al., 2020) which is consistent with the H1. However, the use of videos as an instructional tool by the new generation of students appears to be different compared with previous generations. Recent research has shown that now, students prefer short content when they access multimedia in their courses (Zhang, 2020) which implies an update in the understanding of this phenomenon.

But the growing use of CBML as an instructional tool in recent years has not been analyzed enough. There are several factors involved in the perception of the usefulness of CBML (Andovita & Wahyuni, 2020). Hypotheses H2 and H3 add theoretical information to consider self-efficacy as an important factor that helps students to have a better perception of the use of CBML. Some studies have evidenced that a better perception of multimedia resources is related to engagement in online courses (Chakraborty, 2019). However, further studies should analyze the importance of the characteristics of the CBML content (i.e., quality of audio and image, quality of explanation by the professor) which are some of the limitations of this study.

An additional finding showed that students use PC or Laptops as the main device to take their online courses and watch the videos which correspond to the course, opposite to the general hypothesis of the use of smartphones as the main device to access to CBML.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this research provided evidence of the importance of considering the development of self-efficacy in psychology students. Self-efficacy has demonstrated several benefits in the learning field (Vongkulluksn et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2022), and this study provided evidence of its importance in CBML use as a process of self-regulated learning (Moghadari, et al., 2020; Huang Y, Chan H, Wang Y, et al, 2023). This study also evidences the need to research other important factors for understanding the use of CBML in online courses such as e-learning motivation and task value in online environments (Keskin & Yurdugül, 2020; Nguyen &Tang, 2022).

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INTRA AND INTERPARENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING POST-DIVORCE CO-PARENTING

Claudia Gabriela DUMITRIU (1), Narcisa Gabriela PRODAN (2), Ana Maria TOMA (3)

(1) Spiru Haret University, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, E-mail: gabrielacdumitriu@yahoo.com (corresponding author)
(2) Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Department of Psychology; E-mail: narcisaprodan@psychology.ro
(3) University of Bucharest, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences; E-mail: ana-maria.toma.20@drd.unibuc.ro
Address correspondence to: Claudia Gabriela DUMITRIU, Spiru Haret University, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Bucharest, 050711, Romania. Ph.: +40-726-231-833; E-mail: gabrielacdumitriu@yahoo.com

Abstract

Objectives. The objective of this study was to determine how intraparental (i.e., cognitive schemas, parental competence, cognitive-emotional coping style) and interparental variables (i.e., family conflict, unfavorable conditions of divorce) influence post-divorce co-parenting through the relationship between parents after separation.
Materials and methods. The study was conducted on a sample of 169 divorced or divorcing participants (84% females and 16% males), aged 24 to 61 years ($M = 42.71$, $SD = 6.15$). The following instruments were used to measure the research variables: the Divorce Adjustment Inventory Scale, the Young Schema Questionnaire - Version 3, the Parental Competence Questionnaire, the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire, the Coparenting Relationships Scale, and the reasons for divorce were assessed in an exploratory manner.
Results. Dysfunctional cognitive schemas were positively associated with dysfunctional co-parenting behaviors and negatively associated with functional co-parenting behaviors. Participants who reported violence as a cause for divorce had significantly higher scores (M = 22.22) on the undermining (M = 22.22 vs. M = 10.17) and exposure (M = 21.66 vs. M = 10.20) dimensions of the dysfunctional co-parenting relationship compared to those who identified infidelity as a cause for divorce (M = 10.17).
Conclusions. The quality of co-parental relationships may be influenced by maladaptive cognitive schemas and poorly developed parenting skills. Also, pre-divorce family interaction experiences and poor adjustment to divorce are associated with dysfunctional aspects of co-parental relationships that impact children post-divorce. Exploratory analyses indicate that training healthy, functional cognitive-emotional coping strategies and addressing maladaptive cognitive schemas can prevent engaging in abusive relationships.

Keywords: divorce, co-parenting, cognitive schemas, conflict, coping.

Introduction

Co-parenting relationships are of major importance both for the healthy development of children and for the relationship between the two parents (Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). In order to properly inform interventions aimed at improving co-parenting relationships and the way they impact the couple and child functioning; it is necessary to identify the factors they are associated with and should make the object of such interventions.

According to the theory formulated by Johnston (1994), the interaction of three categories of factors determines conflictual relationships after divorce: individual factors, external factors and interaction factors.

Of these factors, the current study will focus on individual characteristics that may influence the quality of co-parenting relationships after divorce (such as cognitive schemas, parenting skills), but also on interaction factors such as reasons for divorce, experience of divorce and pre-divorce relationships.

Maladaptive cognitive schemas

Cognitive schemas are patterns of thinking about oneself and others that are formed and reinforced throughout life as a result of the interaction between life experiences and the individual's temperamental predispositions. Maladaptive cognitive schemas tend to manifest during situations perceived by the person as being difficult or even challenging such as certain chronic conditions (Rada, Gheonea, Țieranu, & Popa, 2022).

A first argument in support of the role maladaptive cognitive schemas might play in parenting relationships is that, considering the taxonomy proposed by Young (1999; Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2006), eleven of the eighteen schemas refer to maladaptive beliefs related to social relationships (Shorey, Anderson, & Stuart, 2013). Numerous studies have indeed shown that early maladaptive schemas increase the risk of developing disorders that directly impact social functioning and emotional regulation in social contexts. For example, schemas of Emotional Inhibition, Approval-Seeking, Abandonment, Failure, and Other-Directedness were positively associated with social anxiety symptoms, whereas schemas of Grandiosity and Punitiveness were negatively associated with them (Calvete, Orue, & Hankin, 2013; González-Díez, Calvete, Riskind, & Orue, 2015). Associations have also been identified between several maladaptive cognitive schemas and hostile behaviors, anger (Santos, Vagos, & Rijo, 2018), negative consequences of alcohol use (including relational ones; Simons, Sistad, Simons, & Hansen, 2018), and sexual assault offences (Richardson, 2005). Other schemas, such as Mistrust/Abuse, Self-Sacrifice, and Emotional Inhibition appear to be more salient in victims of intimate relationship abuse (Calvete, Fernández-González, Orue, & Little, 2018), while Disconnection/Rejection schemas, Emotional Inhibition, and Insufficient Self-Control predict intimate partner aggression (Crawford & Wright, 2007).

The Emotional Deprivation schema, which involves a person's belief that their emotional needs will not be met by others, has been associated with abusive behaviors in couple dynamics such as cyber abuse (exerting control, limiting freedom, threatening, denigrating, soliciting or experiencing sexual pressure via social media and phone (Caridade, Braga, & Borrajo, 2019) or domestic violence (McKee, Roring, Winterowd, & Porras, 2012).

McKee et al. (2012) showed that all the schemas belonging to the *Disconnection and Rejection* domain were strongly internalized in a group of men from domestic violence treatment

centers. Schemas from the *Impaired Limits* domain (such as Disrespecting Others' Rights, Insufficient Self-Control, Entitlement) were also prevalent among them, suggesting the need to investigate schemas from other domains as potential predictors of conflict between partners.

The results of a meta-analysis generally indicate moderate effect sizes for the association between the majority of the maladaptive cognitive schemas and interpersonal difficulties, with the exception of Unrelenting Standards, Approval-Seeking, and Punitiveness schemas (Janovsky, Rock, Thorsteinsson, Clark, & Murray, 2020). However, these results may also be influenced by the fact that several studies only considered certain schema domains (such as Disconnection and Rejection). In addition, the Approval-Seeking and Punitiveness schemas have only recently been included in the taxonomy of maladaptive cognitive schemas, so most studies concerned by the meta-analysis did not report considerable effect sizes for their association with interpersonal difficulties (Janovsky et al., 2020). Contradictory results may also be due to the heterogeneity of the interpersonal difficulties investigated, with few studies focusing exclusively on partner conflict and even fewer on parenting dynamics or co-parenting relationships after divorce.

The present study aims to address these limitations by investigating the role that all eighteen maladaptive cognitive schemas play in influencing co-parenting relationships after divorce.

Parental competence

After divorce, parental competence involves the parent's ability to stay actively involved in the child's upbringing, to create a climate that is responsive to the child's emotional needs, and to be open to the child's manifestations of grief and their perception of the separation (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). Studies show that the child's post-divorce adjustment and transition to the new lifestyle will be eased by the consistent and active parental involvement in the child's life through discipline, rules, and healthy boundaries, as well as through emotionally nurturing attitudes (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Kelly & Emery, 2003).

Despite the importance of this warm and consistent environment, the literature suggests that after divorce, both parents show lower levels of parental competence, probably as a result of the stress associated with the separation (Kelly & Emery, 2003). Moreover, the child's close contact to both parents after divorce does not always appear to be beneficial. Amato and Rezac (1994) have shown that when separation occurs under conditions of increased interparental conflict, closeness to the non-custodial father is more likely to be associated with poorer post-divorce adjustment of the child. Other studies show that, even in situations of high interparental conflict, children face greater adjustment difficulties if the relationship with both parents is weak. This can be compensated by having a healthy relationship with only one parent. In other words, the high level of parenting skills of one parent can protect the child from negative effects even in the case of a high-conflict separation (Sandler, Miles, Cookston, & Braver, 2008).

In a scientific literature review investigating the effectiveness of parenting programs in improving post-divorce adjustment for both children and parents, Sigal, Sandler, Wolchik and Braver (2011) identified a number of studies which showed that improving parenting skills through educational programs can lead to reduced interparental conflict. However, the authors highlight that the interventions have revealed mixed results; moreover, few of them have focused on co-parenting relationships, the main point of interest being the children's post-divorce adjustment (Sigal et al., 2011).

In order to test if investing in such interventions to improve co-parenting relationships is justified, it is necessary to assess to what extent parental competence is indeed correlated with the quality of co-parenting relationships.

The present study will therefore also investigate the relationship between parental competence and the post-divorce co-parenting relationship.

Family conflict and unfavorable pre-divorce conditions

In order to enrich the explanations concerning divorce and its aftermath, Cao, Fine and Zhou (2022) proposed the Divorce Process and Child Adaptation Trajectory Typology Model, which considers the family context (family conflict, its frequency and intensity, its overt or implicit/hidden nature, the child's extended support network, etc.) both before and after divorce. Indeed, longitudinal studies show that children's adjustment process is deeply dependent on the pre-divorce relationship between parents. Thus, it is the dysfunctionality of the family environment, and not the divorce itself, that often leads to internalizing and externalizing disorders among children (for a review of the literature, see Harold & Sellers, 2018). However, even in the absence of a high level of conflict prior to divorce, the whole process may entail new grounds for interparental conflict, such as issues of custody, child support, the unilateral decision to divorce, etc. This suggests that families that eventually separate have a different configuration in terms of conflict before and after divorce, which may also generate different consequences for the child.

According to Cao et al. (2022), four configurations of family contexts can be distinguished: 1) a low pre-divorce and post-divorce level of conflict, 2) a high pre-divorce and low post-divorce level of conflict, 3) a low pre-divorce and high post-divorce level of conflict, and 4) a high pre-divorce and post-divorce level of conflict. Based on the premise that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior (Ouellette & Wood, 1998), it is justified to assume that the first and last configurations are the most common. Taking into account the cumulative effect of negative experiences, the latter configuration is probably the most detrimental to a good post-divorce adjustment of the child, and one of the important factors explaining this link could be the dysfunctional co-parenting relationships. However, few studies have directly investigated the extent to which pre-divorce conflict between parents is associated with higher post-divorce levels of conflict.

Additionally, the model Johnston (1994) proposed suggests that external factors concerning the relational experience with the partner prior to divorce are reflected in how the partners manage the separation from a parenting perspective. Also, according to the model, the conditions under which the divorce happens, including financial disagreements between the parents and the economic difficulties they face as a result of the divorce, have their own contribution to the quality of co-parenting relationships after divorce. It is highly likely that all of these factors amplify the stress associated with divorce and are mirrored in parenting dynamics after separation (Johnston, 1994). The present study therefore aims to investigate the relationship between pre-divorce family conflict/dysfunctionality and the unfavorable conditions of divorce on one hand and the quality of post-divorce co-parental relationships on the other.

Cognitive-emotional coping

Cognitive-emotional coping refers to the complex ability to regulate emotions (both positive and negative) through cognitive thinking/processes. Regulation can be done either through

dysfunctional cognitive processes (such as self-blaming, blaming others), which have been frequently associated with negative outcomes (mood disorders, impaired interpersonal relationships; Garnefski et al., 2002) or through functional cognitive processes (acceptance, putting into perspective, positive refocusing). Many interventions have used the restructuring of coping strategies to increase couple satisfaction, optimise communication with others or even help individuals overcome major interpersonal obstacles such as their partner's infidelity (Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2008).

In terms of co-parenting relationships, cognitive-affective coping strategies can influence the quality of co-parenting relationships both negatively and positively. For example, the use of dysfunctional strategies such as catastrophizing or blaming others prevents effective conflict resolution, rather facilitating conflict escalation. Consistent with these assumptions, Bonach and Sales (2002) have shown that the tendency to put the responsibility on the other partner after divorce is associated with a lower quality of co-parenting relationships. Also, according to Rusu, Bodenmann and Kayser (2019), a low level of cognitive-emotional coping skills is associated with lower levels of couple satisfaction, which might also spill over into co-parenting management. However, up to the present time, studies have not investigated the relationship between adaptive and maladaptive cognitive-affective coping strategies and functional and dysfunctional components of the co-parenting relationship. Therefore, no prior expectations will be formulated regarding these associations, so they will be investigated in an exploratory manner in the current study.

Reasons for divorce

The reasons preceding the divorce (such as infidelity or violence) can influence the whole course of the divorce process, the quality of the co-parenting relationship and the psychological functioning of the people involved. Studies show that people who report infidelity, conflict and domestic abuse as causes of divorce experience higher levels of psychological distress compared to people who report other types of reasons (Chang, 2004). Results obtained by Porjorat (2016) show that certain maladaptive cognitive schemas (such as Emotional Deprivation, Mistrust-Abuse) are more noticeable among people who have been cheated on compared to those who have not been cheated on, suggesting both a possible effect of infidelity and divorce (i.e., activation of maladaptive relational schemas) and pre-existing characteristics of people facing different reasons for divorce.

Most interventions for couples affected by infidelity use various strategies (cognitive, experiential) to improve emotional regulation skills (Gordon et al., 2008; Teymouri, Mojtabaei, & Rezazadeh, 2020), suggesting the importance of the way the experience is managed from a cognitive-affective perspective. Cognitive coping strategies (i.e. cognitive responses to life experiences) can be both dysfunctional (such as self-blame, catastrophizing, rumination or blaming others) and functional (including positive reappraisal, putting into perspective or refocusing on planning; Garnefski & Kraaij, 2007). Some reasons for divorce might also influence interpersonal aspects, such as parenting skills and co-parenting relationships (e.g. it is justified to anticipate that exposure to conflict - a component of co-parenting relationships - is higher in the case of violence as the reason for divorce).

However, few studies (mostly published more than twenty years ago) have considered investigating the contextual, interpersonal and intrapersonal factors that might display differences in the various reasons for divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003; Gigy & Kelly, 1993; Ponzetti et al.,

1992). Given the limited results, the present study will explore the differences in maladaptive cognitive schemas, parental competence, co-parenting relationship, cognitive-emotional coping strategies, conflict and adverse pre-divorce conditions depending on the reasons for divorce.

Current study. Objectives and research questions

The way in which post-divorce conflict and parental alienation affect children's development and functioning in general has been extensively investigated in the literature. Far fewer studies, however, focus on factors that influence how parents manage post-divorce relationships, and those that do are largely qualitative, with little methodological robustness. It is essential to identify the variables that predispose separated partners to dysfunctional behaviors in order to determine the main categories of parents that should be targeted by interventions aimed at mitigating the effects of high-conflict divorce on both the parents themselves and the children as indirect victims.

According to the theoretical model elaborated by Johnston (1994) concerning variables that influence post-separation partner relationships, both intraparental and interparental contribute to post-divorce adjustment. Building on findings suggesting that intraparental and interparental factors are associated with dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors after separation, the present study aims to investigate the extent to which factors within each of these two categories generate dysfunctional co-parenting patterns. The intraparental variables analysed in the current paper are: cognitive schemas, parental competence, and cognitive-emotional coping, while the interparental variables include family conflict and unfavorable conditions of divorce.

Research questions

Given the scarcity of existing results on these associations, we exploratorily investigated the aforementioned relationships. In this respect, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: Are dysfunctional cognitive schemas negatively associated with the functional components of the co-parenting relationship (agreement, closeness, support, approval) and positively associated with the dysfunctional components of the co-parenting relationship (undermining, exposure)?

RQ2: Is parental competence positively associated with the functional components of the co-parenting relationship and negatively associated with the dysfunctional components of the co-parenting relationship?

RQ3: Are family conflict and adverse pre-divorce conditions positively associated with dysfunctional components of the co-parenting relationship and negatively associated with functional components of the co-parenting relationship?

RQ4. To what extent are there statistically significant differences in family conflict, unfavorable pre-divorce conditions, functional and dysfunctional co-parenting behaviors, parental competence, maladaptive cognitive schemas and cognitive-emotional coping strategies between individuals who reported different causes of divorce?

RQ5. To what extent are cognitive-affective coping strategies associated with functional and dysfunctional components of co-parenting relationships?

Material and methods

Participants

The sample of this study consisted of 169 participants, 84% female and 16% male, aged 24 to 61 years ($M = 42.71$, $SD = 6.15$). Of these, 91.7% lived in urban areas and 8.3% lived in rural areas. In order to be included in the study, participants had to be divorced or in the divorce process and have at least one child with the partner they divorced/were divorcing. Thus, 94.1% of parents were divorced or separated and 5.9% were in the divorce process.

Procedure

The data for the present study were collected online by disseminating the form in virtual communities (social media groups) of divorced or divorcing parents and through a website dedicated to divorced parents.

Participants gave their consent for participation and were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. In addition to completing the instruments, they also provided a range of demographic information (age, gender, background).

Instruments

Family conflict and unfavorable pre-divorce conditions

The Divorce Adjustment Inventory - Revised (DAI-R), developed by Portes, Smith and Brown (2000), was used to measure family conflict and adverse pre-divorce conditions. DAI-R consists of five factors that assess family functioning patterns and children's pre- and post-divorce reactions. For the specific measurement of family conflict and unfavorable pre-divorce conditions, three of the factors were selected and analysed: Family conflict and dysfunction, Favorable divorce conditions and child's coping ability and Positive divorce resolution. The first factor, *Family conflict and dysfunction*, assesses the level of conflict between the former partners and the family's ability to cope with the current situation. The factor *Favorable divorce conditions and child's coping ability*, investigates pre-divorce protective variables for the child: the absence of financial difficulties and the frequency of arguments and shouting in the presence of the child. The *Positive divorce resolution* measures the family's level of healthy adjustment.

Dysfunctional cognitive schemas

Dysfunctional cognitive schemas were assessed using the Young Schema Questionnaire - Version 3 (Young Schema Questionnaire - Short Form; YSQ - S3; Young & Brown, 2005). In Romania, the questionnaire has been adapted and distributed by Cognitrom. YSQ-S3 consists of 114 items measuring 18 dysfunctional schemas: Emotional Deprivation, Abandonment/Instability, Mistrust/Abuse, Social Isolation/Alienation, Defectiveness/Shame, Failure, Dependence/Incompetence, Vulnerability to harm and Illness, Enmeshment/Undeveloped Self, Subjugation, Self-Sacrifice, Emotional Inhibition, Unrelenting Standards, Entitlement/Grandiosity, Insufficient Self-Control, Approval-Seeking, Negativity and Punitiveness.

Parental competence

Parental competence was measured using the Parental Competence Questionnaire (PCQ), developed by Glăveanu (2012). It includes 81 items assessing five types of parenting skills

(Knowledge of the specifics of the child, Affective support and stress management, Disciplining, Time management and Crisis management), providing both an individual score per dimension as well as an overall score regarding the parental competence.

Cognitive-emotional coping

Cognitive-emotional coping was measured using the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ), developed by Garnefski and Kraaij (2007), adapted to the Romanian population and distributed by Cognitrom. CERQ is a questionnaire designed to assess the coping strategies a person uses after undergoing a negative experience, distinguishing between what the individual does and what he or she thinks. Responses are given on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always), and their sum represents the score for each of the nine dimensions, which describe different coping strategies: Self-blame, Acceptance, Rumination, Positive refocusing, Refocusing on planning, Positive reappraisal, Putting into perspective, Catastrophizing, and Blaming others.

Quality of co-parenting relationships

Co-parenting relationships were assessed with the *Coparenting Relationship* Scale (*CRS;* Feinberg, Brown, & Kan, 2012), adapted to the Romanian population by Dumitriu, Dudu and Butac, (2022). The scale contains 28 items, which measure the quality of six distinct dimensions of co-parenting relationships: Coparenting agreement, Coparenting closeness, Coparenting support, Endorse partner parenting/Approval, Coparenting undermining, and Exposure of the child to conflict. The scores for each dimension are obtained by summing responses rated on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 ("Not true of us") to 6 ("Very true of us").

Reasons for divorce

The relationship between the reasons for divorce and the rest of the variables was assessed in an exploratory manner. Questions with dichotomous (Yes/No) answers to the most common reasons were asked in order to measure the reasons for divorce and to divide participants into groups. The reasons included in the instrument administered to the participants were as follows: the infidelity of the respondent (score 1), the partner's infidelity (score 2), financial reasons (score 3), family-related reasons (score 4), domestic violence (score 5), alcoholism (score 6), other causes (score 7) and multiple causes (score 8). Depending on the answer, each participant was assigned to one of the eight categories.

Statistical analysis

The IBM.SPSS.24 software was used for the statistical analysis of the data in this study. The following statistical operations were performed: correlation analyses for the variables assessed, independent sample t-tests in order to observe differences between groups depending on the reported cause for divorce, and analysis of variance (ANOVA), using the Boferroni Dunn post-hoc test to determine whether there were specific and statistically significant differences between the various categories of causes for divorce at the sample level.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum values) for the scales used in this study are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for maladaptive cognitive schemas, parental competence, co-parenting relationships, pre-divorce conditions, and cognitive-emotional coping strategies

	Min.	Max.	M	SD
YSQ_Emotional Deprivation	5	30	16.60	7.11
YSQ_Abandonment Instability	5	30	13.20	7.20
YSQ_Mistrust Abuse	5	30	15.08	6.16
YSQ_Social Isolation	5	29	13.00	6.51
YSQ_Defectiveness Shame	5	28	9.75	5.92
YSQ_Failure	5	29	10.17	6.12
YSQ_Dependence	5	29	10.79	5.42
YSQ_Vulnerability	5	30	9.86	5.39
YSQ_Enmeshment	5	30	11.27	5.47
YSQ_Entitlement	5	30	16.92	4.79
YSQ_Self-Control	5	29	13.39	5.00
YSQ_Subjugation	5	30	12.40	5.67
YSQ_Self-sacrifice	5	30	20.19	5.92
YSQ_Approval-Seeking	14	82	40.45	15.68
YSQ_Negativity	11	63	26.86	13.78
YSQ_Inhibition	5	28	13.50	5.53
YSQ_Unrelenting Standards	5	28	17.15	4.72
YSQ_Punitiveness	14	74	37.90	13.51
PCQ_Knowledge	43	79	60.49	7.24
PCQ_Affective support	49	76	62.52	5.76
PCQ_Disciplining	54	87	73.87	6.50
PCQ_Time management	34	67	50.98	6.65

	Min.	Max.	M	SD
PCQ_Crisis management	42	70	55.80	5.48
CRS_Agreement	0	18	6.76	4.90
CRS_Closeness	0	24	8.301	6.55
CRS_Support	0	36	11.66	10.19
CRS_Approval	0	36	17.05	10.01
CRS_Undermining	0	30	12.72	8.84
DAIR_Conflict	14	70	26.82	9.99
DAIR_Divorce conditions	9	45	23.56	7.88
DAIR_Positive resolution	10	40	25.40	6.78
CERQ_Self-blame	4	20	10.32	3.66
CERQ_Acceptance	4	20	16.03	3.67
CERQ_Rumination	4	20	14.05	4.58
CERQ_Positive refocusing	4	20	15.36	3.98
CERQ_Refocusing on planning	4	20	16.33	2.68
CERQ_Positive reappraisal	4	20	17.68	3.02
CERQ_Putting into perspective	4	20	14.00	2.78
CERQ_Catastrophizing	4	20	9.37	3.78
CERQ_Blaming others	4	20	8.47	4.02

Note: YSQ = Young Schema Questionnaire; PCQ = Parental Competence Questionnaire; CRS = Coparenting Relationship Scale; DAIR = Divorce Adjustment Inventory - Revised; CERQ = Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire.

Inferential statistics

In order to test the hypotheses, correlation analysis was first used (Table 2). The strongest associations were observed between dysfunctional cognitive schemas and dysfunctional co-parenting behaviors (undermining, exposing the child to tal conflict). In contrast, dysfunctional cognitive schemas were associated to a much lesser extent with functional co-parenting behaviors. In terms of parental competence, affective support appears to be the most relevant skill for co-

parenting relationships, being positively associated with functional dimensions of the co-parenting relationship (agreement, closeness, support and approval between parents) and negatively associated with the dysfunctional ones (undermining, exposure to conflict). Significant negative correlations were also observed between the overall score of parental competence and the dysfunctional dimensions of the co-parenting relationship. On the other hand, the global score for parental competence was not significantly associated with the functional dimensions of the co-parenting relationship.

Family conflict and pre-divorce conditions showed the strongest association with co-parenting relationships. Healthy adjustment to divorce (including pre-divorce functional behaviors of the family such as communicating and discussing family difficulties, spending time together, etc.) was strongly associated with all dimensions of co-parenting relationships. Also, conflict both before and after divorce was significantly negatively associated with functional components of coparental relationships and positively associated with dysfunctional ones.

Table 2

Correlations of cognitive schemas, parental competence, cognitive-emotional coping strategies and pre-divorce conditions with co-parenting relationships

	CRS_ Agreement	CRS_ Closeness	CRS_ Support	CRS_ Approval	CRS_ Undermining	CRS_ Exposure
YSQ_Emotional Deprivation	-.073	-.062	-.112	-.115	.110	.200**
YSQ_Abandonment Instability	-.072	-.002	-.002	.046	.173*	.239**
YSQ_Mistrust Abuse	-.206**	-.133	-.180*	-.084	.190*	.324**
YSQ_Social Isolation	-.176*	-.028	-.068	.041	.196*	.305**
YSQ_Defectiveness Shame	-.106	-.044	-.028	.037	.216**	.285**
YSQ_Failure	-.052	.054	.090	.093	.250**	.182*
YSQ_Dependence	-.104	-.032	.030	.047	.175*	.223**
YSQ_Vulnerability	-.083	-.104	-.057	.000	.265**	.209**
YSQ_Enmeshment	-.069	-.039	.017	.036	.164*	.180*
YSQ_Entitlement	-.186*	-.005	-.057	-.037	.186*	.203**
YSQ_Self-Control	-.153*	-.044	-.025	-.014	.240**	.183*
YSQ_Subjugation	-.108	-.094	-.065	-.026	.236**	.240**
YSQ_Self-sacrifice	-.166*	-.072	-.181*	-.138	.165*	.114
YSQ_Approval-Seeking	-.059	-.049	-.005	.040	.184*	.181*

	CRS_ Agreement	CRS_ Closeness	CRS_ Support	CRS_ Approval	CRS_ Undermining	CRS_ Exposure
YSQ_Negativity	-.119	-.093	-.084	-.002	.186*	.248**
YSQ_Inhibition	.026	.038	-.006	.041	.096	.064
YSQ_Unrelenting Standards	-.093	-.115	-.106	-.094	.163*	.138
YSQ_Punitiveness	-.096	-.063	-.064	-.042	.173*	.273**
PCQ_Knowledge	-.063	.118	.079	.012	.032	-.148
PCQ_Affective support	.198**	.114	.175*	.140	-.292**	-.307**
PCQ_Disciplining	-.021	.043	.046	.019	-.106	-.241**
PCQ_Time management	-.018	-.010	.010	-.114	-.062	-.137
PCQ_Crisis management	-.007	.061	.023	.030	-.177*	-.138
DAIR_Conflict	-.277**	-.143	-.193*	-.141	.517**	.513**
DAIR_Divorce conditions	-.381**	-.387**	-.431**	-.435**	.500**	.534**
DAIR_Positive resolution	.337**	.583**	.607**	.628**	-.288**	-.385**
CERQ_Self-blame	-.036	.073	.044	.115	.048	.047
CERQ_Acceptance	-.129	-.026	-.024	-.046	.067	-.032
CERQ_Rumination	-.150	.047	.009	.029	.160*	.140
CERQ_Positive refocusing	.056	.063	.059	-.085	-.048	-.100
CERQ_Refocusing on planning	.019	-.004	.008	-.073	.032	.090
CERQ_Positive reappraisal	.089	.030	.077	-.058	-.124	-.213**
CERQ_Putting into perspective	-.084	-.090	-.061	-.120	.104	.070
CERQ_Catastrophizing	-.248**	-.170*	-.202**	-.166*	.362**	.335*
CERQ_Blaming others	-.160*	-.088	-.124	-.028	.363**	.195*

Note: CRS = Coparenting Relationship Scale; YSQ = Young Schema Questionnaire; PCQ = Parental Competence Questionnaire; DAIR = Divorce Adjustment Inventory - Revised; CERQ = Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire.
*p < .05; **p < .01

Independent sample t-tests were applied to verify for differences in the cause for divorce reported by participants. Thus, it was investigated the extent to which there were statistically significant differences between those who reported infidelity as the cause for separation from their partner and those who did not, between those who reported violence as a cause vs. those who did not, and between those who reported family causes for divorce vs. those who did not. Tables 3, 4 and 5 show the statistically significant results for the subscales of the questionnaires used.

Table 3

Family conflict and unfavorable post-divorce conditions, maladaptive cognitive schemas, cognitive -emotional coping strategies, and co-parenting behaviors by cause for divorce (partner infidelity vs. lack of partner infidelity)

Variable	Partner infidelity (n = 74)		No partner infidelity (n = 95)			
	M	SD	M	SD	t	p
YSQ_Abandonment Instability	14.54	7.54	12.15	6.78	2.157	.032
YSQ_Defectiveness Shame	10.82	6.21	8.92	5.58	2.085	.039
YSQ_Enmeshment	12.29	5.64	10.47	5.22	2.172	.031
YSQ_Subjugation	13.67	5.89	11.42	5.32	2.605	.010
YSQ_Approval-Seeking	44.17	15.96	37.55	14.90	2.776	.006
YSQ_Negativity	29.28	14.38	24.97	13.06	2.033	.044
CERQ_Putting into perspective	14.66	2.19	13.48	3.08	2.786	.006
CERQ_Catastrophizing	10.18	3.59	8.73	3.82	2.513	.013

Note: CRS = Coparenting Relationship Scale; YSQ = Young Schema Questionnaire; PCQ = Parental Competence Questionnaire; DAIR = Divorce Adjustment Inventory - Revised; CERQ = Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire.

Table 4

Family conflict and unfavorable post-divorce conditions, maladaptive cognitive schemas, and co-parenting behaviors by cause for divorce (violent vs. non-violent)

Variable	With violence (n = 37)		No violence (n = 132)			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
DAIR_Conflict	30.45	10.66	25.80	9.59	2.545	.012
DAIR_Divorce conditions	28.59	7.15	22.15	7.51	4.652	.000
DAIR_Positive resolution	22.21	7.35	26.30	6.48	-3.288	.001
CRS_Support	8.08	9.63	12.66	10.15	-2.453	.015
CRS_Approval	13.05	9.17	18.18	9.98	-2.808	.006
CRS_Undermining	17.27	8.83	11.45	8.44	3.664	.000
CRS_Exposure	17.54	9.71	11.60	8.72	3.565	.000
CERQ_Positive refocusing	16.73	3.02	14.97	4.14	2.395	.018
CERQ_Putting into perspective	14.94	2.02	13.73	2.91	2.373	.019

Note: CRS = Coparenting Relationship Scale; YSQ = Young Schema Questionnaire; PCQ = Parental Competence Questionnaire; DAIR = Divorce Adjustment Inventory - Revised; CERQ = Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire.

Table 5

Family conflict and unfavorable post-divorce conditions, maladaptive cognitive schemas and co-parenting behaviors by cause for divorce (family vs. non-family causes)

Variable	Family causes (n = 32)		No family causes (n = 137)			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
YSQ_Subjugation	14.28	6.67	11.97	5.35	2.093	.038
YSQ_Punitiveness	42.21	13.24	36.89	13.41	2.024	.045
DAIR_Conflict	30.50	11.94	25.96	9.32	2.343	.020

Variable	Family causes (n = 32)		No family causes (n = 137)			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
DAIR_Divorce conditions	26.53	7.62	22.87	7.80	2.396	.018
DAIR_Positive resolution	22.28	5.50	26.13	6.97	-2.921	.004
CRS_Undermining	15.50	9.02	12.08	8.70	1.987	.049
CERQ_Catastrophizing	12.28	3.34	8.69	3.56	5.186	.000
CERQ_Blaming others	11.87	3.81	7.68	3.65	5.793	.000

Note: CRS = Coparenting Relationship Scale; YSQ = Young Schema Questionnaire; PCQ = Parental Competence Questionnaire; DAIR = Divorce Adjustment Inventory - Revised; CERQ = Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire.

Scores on family conflict and unfavorable post-divorce conditions, cognitive-emotional coping strategies, parental competence, maladaptive cognitive schemas, and co-parenting behaviors were also compared across different categories of divorce causes (e.g., partner infidelity, financial problems, violence, family-related causes, alcoholism, other causes, or multiple causes).

Results on the ANOVA test showed that there were significant differences between participants regarding the dysfunctional components of the co-parenting relationship: undermining, $F(6, 162) = 3.152$, $p = .006$ and exposure, $F(6, 162) = 2.974$, $p = .009$. Specifically, there were statistically significant differences between participants who reported violence as a cause for divorce and those who reported partner infidelity. In terms of undermining ($M = 22.22$ vs. $M = 10.17$) and exposure ($M = 21.66$ vs. $M = 10.20$) behaviors within co-parenting relationships, those who reported violence as the cause for divorce had significantly higher scores ($M = 22.22$) compared to those who reported partner infidelity as the cause for partner separation ($M = 10.17$).

Discussions

The present study investigated the relationships between a number of individual parental differences (maladaptive cognitive schemas, parental competence) and aspects of family context (family conflict, divorce resolution, pre-divorce favourable aspects) on one hand and co-parenting relationships on the other.

Consistent with the hypotheses, the results showed that all three categories of factors were significantly associated with post-divorce co-parenting relationships. Bellow, explanations for each of the three categories will be presented in detail.

Dysfunctional cognitive schemas and post-divorce co-parenting

Regarding dysfunctional cognitive schemas, the results partially support the hypotheses. Specifically, although most schemas are significantly positively associated with dysfunctional aspects of coparental relationships, only some of them (Mistrust/Abuse, Isolation and Self-Sacrifice) are negatively associated with functional aspects of co-parental relationships. However, the negative correlations are relatively small and significant only in relation to certain components of the co-parenting relationship, which calls into question the extent to which they are indeed associated. This tendency may be explained by the fact that the cognitive schemas in Young's taxonomy describe dysfunctional relational attitudes, emotions, and behaviors, which may be directly or proximally associated with other dysfunctional behaviors rather than healthy behaviors.

Consistent with other studies exploring the relationship between dysfunctional cognitive schemas and relational behaviors, the results of the present study also highlight that cognitive schemas belonging to the *Disconnection and Rejection* category are to a greater extent associated with negative co-parenting attitudes and behaviors, such as undermining the partner or exposing the child to conflict (e.g., Calvete et al., 2018; Messman-Moore & Coates, 2007; for a meta-analysis, see Janovsky et al., 2020). The context of divorce predominantly activates separation-related schemas (such as Abandonment, Mistrust, Emotional Deprivation, Shame or Isolation), which generate unhealthy behavioral responses. For example, fear of abandonment, loneliness, mistrust of partners and emotional deprivation are easily triggered by separation experiences, and may increase the level of conflict between partners as a way of protecting themselves from negative emotional states. Moreover, as these schemas have been associated with reduced emotional regulation skills (Mc Donnell, Hevey, McCauley, & Ducray, 2018; Nicol, Kavanagh, Murray, & Mak, 2022), parents who experience them more severely may have difficulty managing frustration and tension brought on by divorce and may resort to dysfunctional ways of emotional regulation, such as undermining their partner. This strategy could also serve to prevent child abandonment or rejection, situations commonly anticipated in Abandonment or Rejection schemas (Young et al., 2006).

Schemas belonging to other categories also showed significant associations with dysfunctional aspects of co-parenting, although these correlations were relatively small. These included schemas of Punitiveness, Negativity, Subjugation, and Vulnerability, thus highlighting the frailty that dysfunctional schemas can create in difficult relational contexts such as divorce and their potentially negative impact on others, particularly children (through exposure to interparental conflict).

Parental competence and post-divorce co-parenting

When analysed separately, the results indicate that emotional support is the parental competence which holds the most relevance to the quality of co-parenting relationships, having low and medium significant correlations with most facets of co-parenting, including agreement between parents, support of the other parent, avoidance of undermining the other parent, and lack of exposure of the child to interparental conflict. This may happen because in emotionally difficult contexts such as divorce, emotional support is more relevant and useful than any other parental competence which may be more commonly used in other parenting situations (disciplining, time management, etc.). Indeed, studies have repeatedly shown that a parenting style characterized by empathy, understanding and responsiveness to children's emotional needs has numerous benefits

for children's functioning, increasing their well-being and protecting them in situations of family stress (Bastaits & Mortelmans, 2016; Cowen, Pedro-Carroll, & Alpert-Gillis, 1990; van Dijk, van der Valk, Deković, & Branje, 2020). Since paying attention to children's needs entails being aware of the importance of interparental relationships, the association between parental emotional support and the quality of the co-parenting relationship is justified. Surprisingly, however, crisis management, which involves the parent's ability to facilitate the resolution of difficult problems for the child, is significantly and negatively associated only with the variable of undermining the other parent, but the correlation is not very strong. Although divorce is often perceived as a crisis for the child, the lack of significant association between the dimension of crisis management and co-parenting relationships may be due to the fact that the focus of co-parenting relationships (and the instruments that measure their quality) is on the interaction with the other partner rather than the child. Even if this interaction most likely impacts the child as well, the effect is indirect and represents a distal antecedent, thus diminishing the association between the two.

Overall scores for parental competence were also significantly and negatively associated only with dysfunctional components of co-parenting. This could be due to parents' tendency to over-report desirable behaviors (such as parental competence), while under-reporting less desirable behaviors (such as undermining their partner and exposing their child to interparental conflict).

Family conflict and unfavorable pre-divorce conditions

Of the three categories of factors, family conflict and family context before and after divorce show the strongest associations with co-parental relationships. For example, pre-divorce family conflict is significantly and negatively associated with partner agreement and co-parenting relationship support, and positively associated with partner undermining and child exposure to intra-family conflict. Likewise, unfavorable conditions both before (tense atmosphere, poor financial situation) and after divorce (conflict, level of impact on economic status, etc.) were strongly and negatively associated with post-divorce partner agreement, approval, closeness and support, and positively associated with partner undermining and child exposure to conflict. In contrast, healthy adjustment to divorce is positively associated with functional aspects of co-parenting relationships and negatively associated with dysfunctional ones. The strong association with co-parental relationships is in line with expectations and is most likely due to the fact that they describe behaviors and characteristics which are specific to family relationships, representing proximal antecedents of co-parental relationships, as opposed to the individual differences investigated above, which are distal antecedents. The fact that conflict attitudes before divorce predict conflict and hostile attitudes after divorce is consistent with a hypothesis frequently supported by data in the behavioral sciences that prior actions are the best predictor of future behavior (Ouellette & Wood, 1998).

Exploratory results

In terms of research questions, a series of significant results were highlighted. The majority of maladaptive schemas were more pronounced in people who divorced as a result of infidelity compared to those who divorced for other reasons. Significant differences between the two groups were identified for the following schemas: Abandonment/Instability, Defectiveness/Shame, Enmeshment, Subjugation, Approval-Seeking and Negativity, with those

who divorced as a result of infidelity reporting higher scores on these dimensions. These results can be explained by the fact that infidelity as a potentially traumatic interpersonal experience is itself a source of instability and can fuel thoughts regarding self-worth, dependence on others and the need for approval as a result of perceived rejection. Most likely, these patterns are pre-existing to some extent, but are activated or accentuated by the experience of infidelity. Subjugation and Punitiveness schemas were also more pronounced in people who reported family-related causes as reasons for divorce compared to people who did not report them as an antecedent.

In terms of cognitive-affective regulation strategies, the most relevant were: catastrophizing (especially in cases of infidelity and family-related causes such as influence of the extended family), putting into perspective (noticeable for infidelity and domestic violence), blaming others (for family causes), and positive refocusing (for domestic violence). In terms of family causes as a diffusely manifesting stressor, the presence of dysfunctional cognitive-emotional coping strategies in particular (catastrophizing and blaming others) might indicate certain relational patterns that are constantly manifesting, affecting all areas of family functioning and eventually leading to divorce. In contrast, domestic violence and infidelity are acute stressors with a very intense emotional impact, thus requiring the mobilisation of functional coping strategies (putting into perspective and positive refocusing) in order to increase the tolerance to the traumatic experience, which has a major destabilising potential. Unsurprisingly, conflict and unfavorable pre-divorce conditions are higher in people who have divorced as a result of domestic violence, which is associated with a pervasive and extremely high level of family conflict.

The functional and dysfunctional components within co-parenting relationships seem to differ particularly in people who have divorced as a result of domestic violence. Thus, dysfunctional competencies such as exposure to conflict and undermining manifest to a greater extent in the case of domestic violence as a reason for divorce, while support and approval are present to a lesser extent. These findings are consistent with the high prevalence of conflict exposure reported by children and adolescents (Selic, Pesjak, & Kersnik, 2011) and indicate the existence of dysfunctional relational patterns also generalized to emotional abuse (in the form of undermining). These results are in line with those obtained in studies showing that physical and emotional violence frequently coexist (Dutton, Kaltman, Goodman, Weinfurt, & Vankos, 2005).

Considering that divorce is handled differently by parents and felt differently by children, it is important to identify those factors preceding divorce (such as parental characteristics and family conditions) that can be addressed in interventions designed to lessen the impact of separation on both children and parents.

Practical and theoretical implications

From a theoretical point of view, the present study contributes to the model proposed by Johnston (1994), according to which three categories of factors contribute to conflictual co-parental relationships after divorce: individual, interaction and external factors.

From a practical point of view, these results highlight a number of factors on which interventions aimed at improving post-divorce co-parenting relationships and thus reducing the negative impact of divorce on both partners and children should focus. In the case of strong maladaptive cognitive schemas, more complex psychological interventions are recommended, while counselling programmes may target behavioral aspects related to the development of parental competence, facilitating healthy adjustment to divorce and reducing conflict in relation to both the child and the partner.

Limitations and future directions

In addition to the implications the results of this study have, there are a number of limitations. First, the data are correlational. Therefore, a causal relationship between maladaptive cognitive schemas, parental competence, pre-divorce conditions and divorce resolution on one hand and the quality of co-parenting relationships on the other cannot be established. Longitudinal and experimental studies are needed to identify the extent to which improving parental competence, reducing maladaptive schemas and facilitating positive divorce resolution improve co-parenting relationships.

Secondly, the present study does not capture the way in which cognitive schemas, parental competence, and conditions of divorce influence children's functioning and adjustment to divorce through co-parenting relationships. Future studies could investigate whether intervening on these factors with the aim of improving co-parenting relationships also positively impacts children.

Conclusions

This study highlights the importance of individual and relational characteristics for the quality of co-parental relationships. Results provide further evidence that maladaptive cognitive schemas and undeveloped parental competence (as individual factors) and experiences of family interaction prior to divorce, as well as poor adjustment to divorce (as interactional factors) are particularly associated with dysfunctional aspects of co-parental relationships, such as undermining the other parent and exposing the child to interparental conflict.

The results of the exploratory analyses also highlight the importance of training healthy, functional cognitive-affective coping strategies and addressing maladaptive cognitive schemas to prevent engaging into abusive relationships.

This points to the need for and importance of personal development (to restructure the mechanisms underlying maladaptive cognitive schemas and strengthen healthy coping), in parallel with improving parental competence. In this way, the variables mentioned can become important resources both for alleviating conflict before divorce and for optimal post-divorce adaptation of parents, ensuring a favourable environment for the child in the context of instability caused by separation. Given that associations can be interpreted bidirectionally, these results also point to potential areas of intervention tailored to the reason for divorce. Taking into account the differences between groups, the results suggest that it is necessary to consider the family context preceded by divorce (in the case of violence or infidelity) and the specific consequences (through undermining and exposing behaviors) this might have on co-parenting. Depending on these criteria, partners can learn self-regulation and assertive communication strategies adapted to their own situation as a part of therapy programmes.

Thus, some of the factors that should make the object of psychological assessment and intervention in order to lessen the negative impact of divorce and improve parental relationships are: the maladaptive cognitive schemas of the parents, their parental competence, the healthy adjustment to divorce, the alleviation of conflict before and after divorce, and the ability to provide favorable divorce conditions.

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THE ROLE OF COGNITIVE RESERVE IN PREDICTING COGNITIVE EFFICIENCY

Cătălina BUZDUGAN (1), Margareta DINCĂ (2)

(1) ReBrain, Vademecum Medical Center, Bucharest, Romania
(2) Titu Maiorescu University, Faculty of Psychology, Bucharest; "Constantin Rădulescu - Motru" Institute of Philosophy and Psychology, Department of Psychology; E-mail: margaretadinca@yahoo.fr

Address correspondence to: Cătălina Buzdugan, Vademecum Medical Center (ReBrain project), Masina de Paine street, No. 47, Sector 2, Bucharest, Romania. Ph.: +40-729-095-199; E-mail: catalina.buzdugan@gmail.com

Abstract

Objectives. The objective of the study is to assess cognitive reserve and to investigate the role of age and educational instruction level in cognitive efficiency.
Material and methods. All 146 participants, 105 women (72%), 41 men (28%), aged 60-96 years ($M = 74.61$, $SD = 7.12$), with primary to postgraduate studies ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.54$) completed the following test battery: questionnaire "Cognitive Reserve Index" (R-IRCq), Minimal Assessment of Cognitive Status-2 (MMSE-2) and Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MoCA).
Results. The educational level as well as the total cognitive reserve index are significant predictors of cognitive efficiency measures. Age and total R-IRCq score cover 32% of MoCA variance. Age and educational level cover 36% of the MoCA variance (adjusted $R^2 = 0.36$, $F(2.143) = 42.05$, $p < .001$), age (B = - 0.08, β = - 0.27, t = - 3.77) and educational level (B = 0.62, β = 0.43, t = 5.90).
Conclusions. An inverse correlation between age and cognitive efficiency has been identified: the older the age of participants, the lower the cognitive efficiency, the stronger the correlation when evaluated by MoCA. Both educational levels and total R-IRCq index partially mediated the effect of age on cognitive performance (MoCA). The assessment of cognitive reserve in older people could be a useful additional measure to integrate existing protocols for the neuropsychological assessment of cognitive decline. Cognitive reserve should also be recognized as a factor, which will influence the rate of cognitive decline after diagnosis.

Keywords: MMSE-2, MoCA, cognitive reserve, education, cognitive decline.

Introduction

It is estimated that the number of people with dementia will rise to 152.8 million cases in 2050 (Nichols et al., 2022), being among the major public health problems.

Age-related dementia and normal cognitive decline can be explained by several theories, all of which have alternative but interrelated etiological hypotheses.

Over time, accumulation of predisposing factors may increase the risk of developing dementia, making longitudinal studies, as well as studies analyzing protective factors, necessary to fully understand the models of dementia analysis (Kivipelto et al., 2006).

Qiu and Fratiglioni (2011) consider that a model of dementia analysis throughout life can be a stronger method of studying this chronic disorder, often characterized by long latency periods.

The brain reserve hypothesis has been discussed in detail by Christensen et al. (2007, pp. 82-83), explaining that "the high level of pre-morbid intelligence, education, active lifestyle, or brain volume provides a spare capacity that protects the individual from the negative effects of aging and disease on brain function".

Many researchers proposed **passive models**, including Katzman (1993; brain reserve) and Mortimer, Schuman and French (1981; neural reserve, pp. 3-23). This type of model has also long **been implicitly adopted by most clinicians.** In passive models, reserve is defined in terms **of the sum of the damage** that may be incurred before reaching a threshold for clinical expression of the disease and refers to the positive correlation between brain size and the ability to resist pathological processes without showing clinical signs.

Passive models postulate the presence of a neuropathological threshold that is higher for high reserve people, and only beyond which cognitive impairment begins to take place. Therefore, they predict that the *rate of cognitive decline* will be slower, or delayed, for high reserve individuals who have not yet reached their neuropathological threshold, even if their *rate of neurobiological degradation* is comparable to that of low reserve individuals. However, this view is problematic for examining normal age-associated declines because it is very clear that age-related effects on cognitive performance begin in early adulthood and are continuous rather than abrupt (Salthouse, 2004). A continuum-based passive model might instead predict that high reserve individuals respond to neurobiological degradation to a lesser extent than do lower reserve individuals (i.e., differential preservation), although some passive models (Stern, 2002), are difficult to distinguish from functional threshold models.

The threshold model, revised critically by Satz (1993), is one of the best argued passive models of "brain reserve" (BR). There are many reasons why the threshold model can be considered a passive model. First, this type of model assumes that there is a fixed limit or threshold from which functional impairment will occur. In the case of Alzheimer's disease, this threshold could be the exhaustion of synapses until a minimum number is reached. Second, the threshold models are essentially quantitative models. Although the model recognizes that there are individual differences in the brain reserve, it does not consider them and how the brain processes cognitively or functionally tasks in the conditions of disruption caused by damage. It also does not address potential qualitative differences between different types of brain lesions.

In active models, the reserve is constituted by differentiating the modes of load processing (Stern, 2009). In **active** backup **models** the emphasis is on the ability of the brain to compensate brain damage. Thus, at least two concepts are described: **cognitive reserve** and **compensation.**

The first is **cognitive reserve (CR)**. Stern (2002) proposes that this type of reserve should be considered a normal process, used by healthy people when coping with daily cognitive tasks. The second concept is **compensation**: it involves the use of brain structures or networks that are not normally used by people without brain changes to compensate for the occurrence of damage.

The concept of cognitive reserve is parallel to the concept of cerebral reserve, being a potential mechanism of resilience to brain damage.

Passive models, the brain reserve, take anatomical brain differences into account to determine who has more or less brain reserve.

Therefore, there is no explanation of these models for how the educational level, the professional achievement level, or the intelligence quotient, influences the reserve, other than to

assume that these experiences must somehow alter the anatomy of the brain. Instead, in active models, it's not based on gross differences in the anatomy of the brain.

Cognitive reserve is defined as the residual variation in cognitive performance between individuals that is not explained by brain volume and does not manifest by any directly measured cognitive or cerebral performance (Nillson & Lövdén, 2018). An example would be that, of two individuals with the same level of structural capacity of the brain, the one with a higher level of CR can tolerate a larger brain lesion and thus maintain a better cognitive level than the other (Nillson & Lövdén, 2018).

One of the most remarkable discoveries regarding the cognitive reserve hypotheses was that of Snowdon et al. (1996), a study in which he demonstrated that the level of language proficiency among nuns at the mean age of 22 was a predictor of their cognitive performance and the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease around 58 years later. A similar study of Whalley et al. (2000) found that, compared with the control group, people with dementia above the age of 72 had significantly lower performance when tested for cognitive ability at 11 years of age.

Brain reserve and cognitive reserve are not mutually exclusive, in that the brain reserve does not protect against the accumulation of pathology but protects against its negative effects (Stern et al. 2020). Instead, they influence each other - life experiences and involvement in stimulating cognitive activities can alter brain anatomy (i.e., neurogenesis, angiogenesis and apoptosis resistance) and positively regulate compounds that promote neural plasticity (Stern, 2009).

The concept of cognitive reserve has progressively evolved so that it occupies a central place in the literature on normal and pathological aging, despite the theoretical pitfalls and the methodological controversy generated by years of studies and concepts associated with reserves.

Several studies have shown that CR indicators (proxies) can reduce the rate of conversion to dementia in subjects with identical rates of pathological burden of Alzheimer's disease (Stern et al., 1995; Brayne et al., 2010) and even have a protective role against cognitive deterioration associated with changes in the white matter of the brain or changes in the ventricles of the brain (their enlargement) (Brickman, Muraskin, & Zimmerman, 2022; Schmidt et al., 2011), delay in the occurrence of clinical symptoms (Sunderman, et al., 2016). Understanding the role of these indicators in predicting cognitive trajectories serves a twofold goal, either through prevention or by diagnosing the disease.

Different indicators of cognitive reserve have been identified (Farina, Paloski, de Oliveira, de Lima Argimon, & Irigaray, 2018), but recent systematic reviews indicate that education, work, leisure activities and social involvement are the most common and most often used in research (Chapko, McCormack, Black, Staff, & Murray, 2018; Chen et al., 2019; Harrison, Maas, Baker, & August, 2018). Education appears to have a profound, protective effect on long-term cognition and is one of the most widely studied factors (Qiu, Bäckman, Winblad, Agüero-Torres, & Fratiglioni, 2001).

The number of years of formal education is the most constantly used in studies. A protective effect of education for age-related cognitive decline appears to lead to higher levels of CR (Pavão Martins et al., 2020; Boots et al., 2015).

Moreover, it should be borne in mind that the educational experience is not the same for all individuals, which can influence its potential impact as a proxy of the cognitive reserve.

The protective effect of education not only mediates the transition between normal and pathological aging, but also between stages of cognitive deterioration.

Different trades and leisure activities can also have protective effects on cognitive decline and dementia (Serra et al., 2017). In fact, it is known that involvement in lifelong mental stimulation activities can promote brain neuroplasticity (Then et al., 2014). In terms of work, cognitively demanding working conditions are associated with a low risk of cognitive decline in older adults (Dekhtyar et al., 2015).

Middle-aged individuals at risk of developing Alzheimer's disease (decreased volume of the hippocampus and increased cerebral atrophy) who had occupations requiring complex cognitive activity maintained a similar level of cognitive performance as those with lower pathology (Karp et al., 2009; Baldivia, Andrade, & Bueno, 2008). However, since higher levels of education are usually associated with jobs that are more cognitively demanding, there is still controversy surrounding the hypothesis that the protective effect of education is or is not independent of the levels of complexity of work at middle age (Dekhtyar et al., 2015; Karp et al., 2009). Furthermore, a synergistic effect of education and work on the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease has been described by Stern et al. (1994), when combined with cognitively demanding work in adulthood.

As regards involvement in leisure activities, it was also associated with a low risk of developing Alzheimer's disease (Scarmeas, Levy, Tang, Manly, & Stern, 2001; Verghese et al., 2003) and protective effects against cognitive decline (Ribeiro, Monteiro, & Pereira, 2017; Wang et al., 2013). At the same time, studies show that elderly with aims in social and cultural life have a better cognitive and emotional status (Rada, 2018, 2020).

As a result of the above, it becomes important to identify the set of factors, which differentiate some individuals from others because promoting lifelong protection factors can help to combat the negative consequences of pathology through resilience mechanisms, such as brain and cognitive reserve.

This study aims to evaluate cognitive reserve in normal elderly people, to examine and assess the impact of the education on building cognitive reserve and to investigate the role of age and educational instruction level in cognitive efficiency.

Based on the model proposed by Nucci, Mapelli, and Mondini (2011) using as parameters of the cognitive reserve: education, the level of professional achievement and involvement in social and leisure activities, the literature review and foregoing discussion, the following hypotheses, stated in formal fashion, are proposed:

H1: there is a positive relationship between CR and education;

H2: cognitive reserve and high level of education are predictors of cognitive efficiency, with a slowing effect on cognitive decline.

Material and Methods

Tools

In this study, the CRI-q questionnaire was used to assess cognitive reserve used in most research studies, Mini-Mental State Examination, 2nd Edition™ (MMSE-2) and Cognitive Assessment-Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MoCA) as cognitive efficiency tests.

A. The **CRI-q questionnaire** includes some demographic data (date and place of birth, sex, place of residence, nationality, marital status) and 20 items grouped in three sections: education, work and leisure, each of which creates a sub-score (Nucci, Mapelli & Mondini, 2012).

The fidelity of the R-IRCq questionnaire was assessed in an earlier study from the two previous perspectives: the internal consistency, calculated by the fidelity coefficient Cronbach alfa (0.78), and stability of the results over time, assessed through test-retest on a panel of 40 subjects, was 0.87[0.78% IC: 0.74-0.93].

B. **MMSE-2** (Mini-Mental State Examination, 2nd Edition™) - MMSE-2® is a standardized clinical examination for cognitive impairment (Test Central, 2013).

C. **Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MoCA)** was validated as a highly sensitive instrument for early detection of mild cognitive disorder (MCI) in 2000. MoCA has subsequently been adopted in clinical settings around the world and is widely used in academic and non-academic research. MoCA sensitivity for MCI detection is 90% compared to 18% for MMSE (Nasreddine et al., 2005).

MoCA accurately and rapidly evaluates: short-duration memory, visual spatial skills, executive functions, attention, concentration and working memory, language, and language,

D. **Clinical Dementia Rating (CDR) scale**

It distinguishes five stages of disease severity: CDR. = 0: Healthy Subject, CDR. = 0,5: Uncertain Dementia, CDR. = 1: Mild Dementia, CDR. = 2: Moderate Dementia, CDR. = 3: Severe Dementia. The information is obtained through a semi-structured interview with the patient and a caregiver. Six areas are evaluated: memory; orientation; judgment and problem solving; social behavior; socio-professional behavior and personal care (Hughes, Berg, Danziger, Coben, & Martin, 1982, as cited in Psychology Monitor, n.d.).

Participants and procedure

A sample of 208 participants, from Bucharest, recruited with the help of two specialized clinics (neurology and psychiatry) and the White-Yellow Cross Foundation, took part in the study on a voluntary basis, from October 2018 to December 2018.
The criteria for selecting participants were:

(a) the absence of a diagnosis of dementia

(b) the absence of psychiatric illnesses which could impair cognitive functioning,

(c) the absence of pharmacologically uncompensated systemic neurological or chronic disorders that could impair cognitive function,

(d) without a history of stroke, brain injury or head trauma

(e) autonomy in everyday life.

The study excluded 62 participants because: 14 participants assessed by the psychiatrist had scores on clinical evaluation of dementia possibly indicating mild to moderate cognitive deterioration, 26 participants were diagnosed with major depressive disorder, and 22 participants had a history of stroke.

All participants recruited for the study received the above-mentioned tests and also conducted a semi-structured interview (performed by the neurologist): to examine and exclude the following pathologies with possible negative impact on cognition: known neurodegenerative diseases other than dementia, psychiatric, neurological and chronic syndromes, systemic disorders not compensated by pharmacological treatment, strokes, brain lesions and head trauma.

Each psychological evaluation for every participant took approximately 90 minutes, with breaks offered at the request of the participants.

The Clinical Dementia Rating Scale (CDR.) was used to distinguish between healthy participants, with no evidence of cognitive impairment (CDR. = 0), and those with mild cognitive impairment (CDR. = 0.5) or Alzheimer's disease (CDR. = 1)

This measure was preferred to be used as a classification criterion because MMSE-2 and MoCA scores were used in the statistical model as result variables.

Ethical considerations

To ensure that human rights are respected among all participants in all phases of research, the study followed the Helsinki Declaration. All participants signed a consent form declaring their voluntary participation in the research and were fully informed about the confidentiality, content and aim of the study.

Statistical analysis

The study involves the use of a package based on descriptive, inferential and correlation statistics. The use of specialized statistical packages was called for in this regard: JASP 0.16.2 and IBM SPSS 21. To analyze the data and verify the research hypothesis the following statistical procedures were performed: correlation analysis, regression analysis and mediation analysis. The normality condition of the data was verified by graphical analysis of histograms and calculation of asymmetry and bolting indicators. Their compliance was verified against the values set out in the literature (Brown & Greene, 2006; Blanca, Arnau, López-Montiel, Bono, & Bendayan, 2013).

Results

Of the remaining 146 participants, 105 were women (72%), 41 men (28%) aged 60-96 years ($M = 74.61$, $SD = 7.12$) and with primary to postgraduate studies ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.54$)

Educational attainment was reported according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED): Primary (0-4) - Level 1, Secondary (5-8) - Level 2, Secondary (9-12) - Level 3, Post-secondary - Level 4, High Short-Term - Level 5, Bachelor's or equivalent - Level 6, Master's or equivalent - Level 7, Doctorate or equivalent - Level 8

The total scores obtained with the R-IRC-q questionnaire ranged from 67 (low cognitive reserve) to 161 (high cognitive reserve). Lowest scores were obtained on the leisure time sub score, even in those whose composite score indicated high cognitive reserve.

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of the R-IRCq questionnaire scores and the neuropsychological tests in the sample.

Table 1

Mean, Standard Deviations of R-IRCq Questionnaire and Neuropsychological Tests

	Age	Level of studies	Total R-IRCq	MMSE-2	MoCA
M	74.61	3.08	105.96	27.85	24.36
SD	7.12	1.54	21.03	1.87	2.21

Note. 146. R-IRCq - Cognitive Reserve Index Questionnaire, MMSE-2 - Cognitive Status Minimal Assessment 2. MoCA - Montreal Assessment Cognitive Assessment

All correlations between predictors and the two cognitive efficiency measures were significant with p <.001. Table 2 shows the correlations between the score obtained on the R-IRCq questionnaire and the MMSE-2 and MoCA neuropsychological test scores.

Table 2

Cognitive reserve correlations, MMSE-2, MoCA, age and studies

Variables	R-IRCq total	Level of studies	Age/years	MMSE-2	MoCA
1. Total R-IRCq	—				
2. Level of studies	.75***	—			
3. Age/years	- .42***	- .43***	—		
4. MMSE-2	.28***	.31***	.20*	—	
5. MOCA	.49***	.55***	- .46***	.72***	—

*Note. ***p< .001, * p = 0.013*

Significant inter-predictor correlations were demonstrated across the sample: both total R-IRCq score and educational level are negative with age. Significant ($p < 0.001$) was covariance between age and educational level. This study also confirmed a significant positive correlation between total R-IRCq score and educational level ($r = .75$, $p < .001$).

Correlation between MMSE-2 and MoCA scores was also significant ($r = .72$, $p < .001$).

As expected, age-related cognitive decline is more evident by MoCA score ($r = -.46$, $p < .001$) than by MMSE-2 score ($r = - .20$, $p = 0.013$).

The first linear regression analysis investigated the correlation between age and dependent variables of the two cognitive efficiency measures (MMSE-2 and MoCA) (see Appendix A)

1. the regression equation was significant for MMSE-2 (adjusted $R^2 = 0.035$, $F (1.144) = 6.31$, B = - 0.05, β = - 0.20, $t = -2.512$, $p < 0.05$).

2. in relation to MoCA, the regression equation was significant (adjusted $R^2 = 0.21$, $F (1.144) = 39.83$, B = - 1.49, β = - 0.46, $t = - 6.311$, $p < .001$) (figure 1).

Figure 1

Age dependence of MoCA across the sample

y = -0,1448x + 35,164
R² = 0,2167
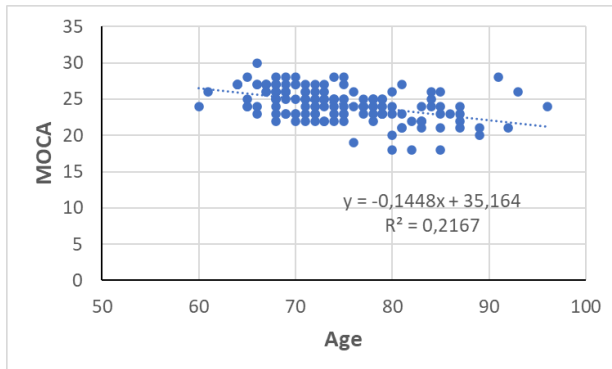
The predictive significance of the level of studies on the same measures of cognitive efficiency was evaluated in the second sandstone analysis.

1. the regression equation was significant for MMSE-2 (adjusted $R^2 = 0.094$, $F (1.144) = 15.98$, B $= 0.38$, $\beta = 0.31$, $t = 3.999$, $p < .001$).

2. the regression equation was significant for MoCA (adjusted $R^2 = 0.30$, $F (1.144) = 63.97$, B $= 0.79$, $\beta = 0.55$, $t = 7.999$, $p < .001$) (figure 2).

Figure 2

Educational level dependence of MoCA

y = 0,7943x + 21,915
R² = 0,3076
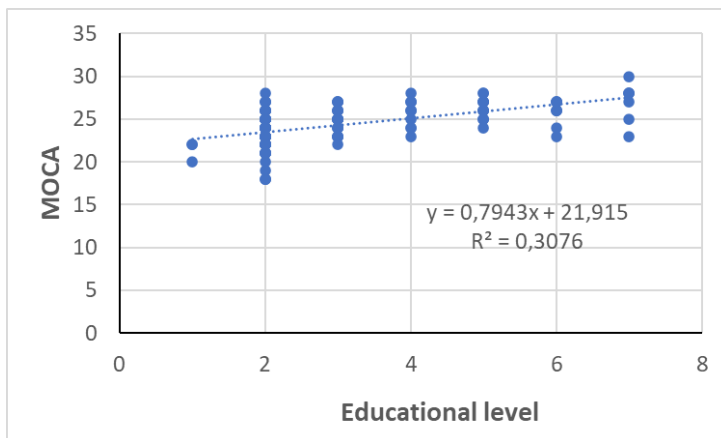
In the third s analysis, the predictive character of the total R-IRCq score on the same variables was assessed.

1. relative to MMSE-2, the regression equation was significant (adjusted $R^2 = 0.073$, $F (1.144) = 12.37$, B $= 0.025$, $\beta = 0.28$, $t = 3.518$, $p < .001$).

2. the regression equation was significant for MoCA (adjusted $R^2 = 0.24$, $F (1.144) = 47.75$, B $= 0.053$, $\beta = 0.49$, $t = 6.911$, $p < .001$) (figure 3).

Figure 3

Total R-IRCq (cognitive reserve) score dependence of MoCA scores in study sample
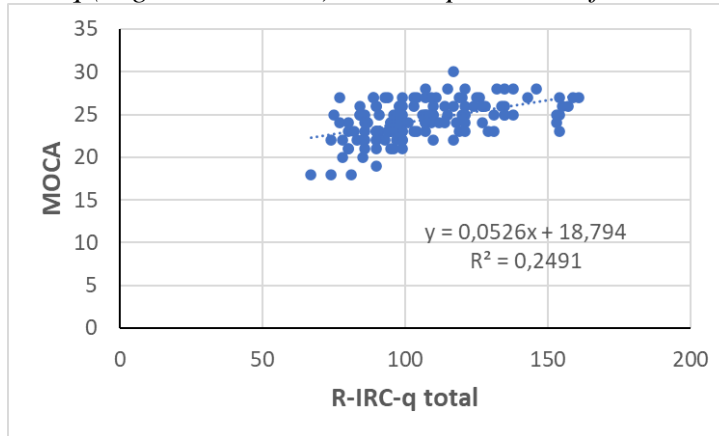
It is noted that the most significant predictor of MMSE-2 and MoCA scores is educational level.

The fourth regression analysis evaluated the combined predictive character of predictors (age and total R-IRCq score) associated with the dependent variable (MoCA scores), regression equation was significant. The two predictors account for 32% of the MoCA variance - model one, cognitive reserve (adjusted $R^2 = 0.24$, $F (2.143) = 47.75$, B = 0.039, $\beta = 0.36$, $t = 4.874$, $p < .001$) and model two, age (adjusted $R^2 = 0.31$, $F (2.143) = 34.94$, B = - 0.097, $\beta = - 0.31$, $t = - 4.107$, $p < .001$) (see Appendix B).

In the fifth regression analysis, the combined predictive character of predictors (age and educational level) associated with the dependent variable (MoCA scores) was evaluated, the regression equation was significant. The two predictors account for 36% of the MoCA variance (adjusted $R^2 = 0.36$, $F (2.143) = 42.05$, $p < .001$), age (B = - 0.08, $\beta = - 0.27$, $t = - 3.77$), and educational level (B = 0.62, $\beta = 0.43$, $t = 5.90$) (see Appendix B).

Two mediation analyzes were conducted: with cognitive reserve as mediator of age effect on cognitive MoCA performance and level of education as mediator of age effect on cognitive performance (MoCA scores).

The mediation analysis investigates whether and to what extent the effect of an X variable on the Y variable is explained by the M variable. The theoretical mediation model is shown in Figure 4. The arrows indicate effects: τ is a direct effect of X on Y and α · β is called an indirect effect. The total effect is the sum of the direct and indirect effect: analysis of mediation breaks down an existing effect in these two terms.

Figure 4

Theoretical Mediation Model
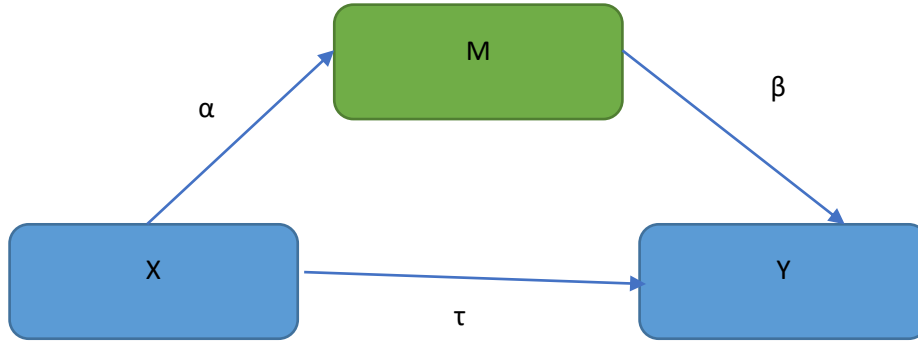
Note: X, Y, M – variable; τ – direct effect; α · β – indirect effect

Results of the analysis (see tables 3 and 4) showed that there was a total effect of age on the MoCA score. Both educational levels and total R-IRCq index partially mediate the effect of age on cognitive performance (MoCA). The model of the mediation analysis in both cases is shown in Figure 5 and 6.

Table 3

Mediation analysis: direct, indirect and total effects Age-IRC-MoCA

	β	Z	*p*	95% CI for β
Direct effect				
Age - MoCA	0.044	4.15	<.001	-0.06, -0.02
Indirect Effect				
Age-R-IRCq-MoCA	0.022	3.70	<.001	-0.03, -0.01
Total effect				
Age - MoCA	0.065	6.33	<.001	0.08, 0.04

Note. MoCA - Montreal Assessment; R-IRCq - Cognitive Reserve Index; CI - confidence interval. β - standardized regression coefficient, z - Sobel test (Sobel, 1982)

Figure 5

Median Age Analysis Model - R-IRCq (CRI) - MoCA

MOC: MOCA
CRt: CRI total
V/a: age/ yrs
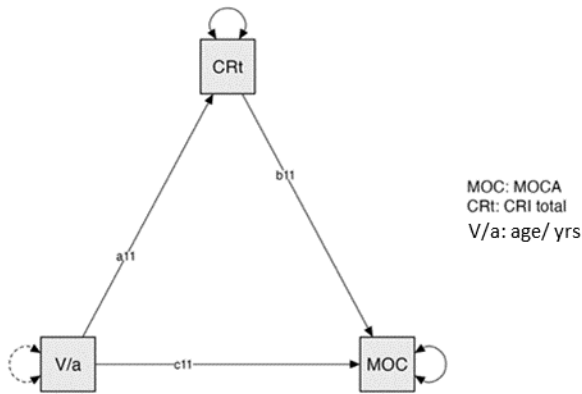
Table 4

Mediation Analysis: Direct, Indirect and Total Effects Age-MoCA Educational Level

	β	z	*p*	95% CI for β
Direct effect				
Age - MoCA	-0.039	3.81	<.001	-0.05, -0.01
Indirect Effect				
Age-educational level -MoCA	-0.026	4.15	<.001	-0.03, -0.01
Total effect				
Age - MoCA	-0.065	6:35	<.001	0.08, 0.04

Note. MoCA - Montreal Assessment; CI - confidence interval, β - standardized regression coefficient, z - Sobel test (Sobel, 1982).

Figure 6

Mediation Age Analysis Model - Educational Level - MoCA
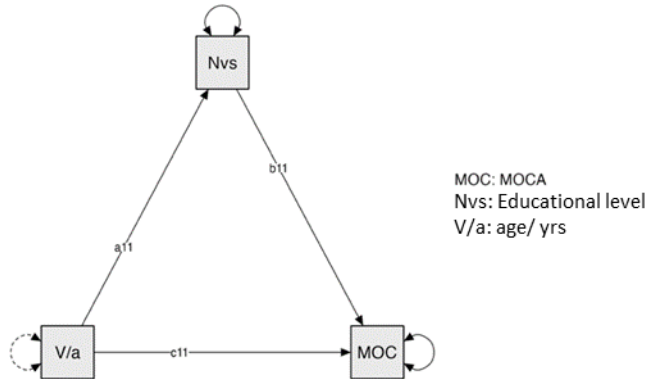
The mediating effect of the educational level is caused by the correlation with the age.

Discussions

This study analyzed the relationship between education and cognitive reserve recorded as a total R-IRCq score (education, occupational complexity, and leisure and social activities indicator).

The results confirmed a significant correlation between educational level and cognitive efficiency measures, both educational level and total cognitive reserve index (R-IRCq) are significant predictors of cognitive efficiency measures. This was also observed by Perneckzy et al. (2006) in a neuroimaging study, in which a higher level of education was associated with a more depleted flux in the parietotemporal area, the location of PET changes in Alzheimer's disease. Perneckzy et al. (2006) found that education altered the association between the pathology of the disease and the levels of cognitive function measured before death. For each additional year of education, the relationship between pathology and cognition was reduced by 0.088 standard units. "Notably, early cognitive function is a major predictor of cognitive function and its rate of change in midlife and beyond as well as of educational and occupational attainment" (McCall, 1979 as cited in Kreitler, Weissler, & Barak, 2013, pp. 238–269).

The covariance between the age and the educational level can be attributed to the specific socio-historical conditions of Romania (the increase in the general level of education during the life of the participants in the study and the specific features of everyday life of the third age). This has also been observed by Nucci et al. (2011) at the time of the construction and validation of the questionnaire. Many older Italians did not have more than five years of study, due to social and/or historical reasons.

The older the age of the participants, the lower their cognitive efficiency. Higher levels of education lead to a greater accumulation of resources older adults can use to cope with cognitive decline, which in turn leads to better cognitive efficiency.

The results of this study are consistent with other literature data and the results of the study, Moglan, Boscaiu and Tudose (2021, pp. 159-187), for the analysis of cognitive reserve and

cerebral atrophy in patients with neurodegenerative disorders, who observed that cognitive reserve acted as a moderator of the relationship between brain changes and the clinical profile of neurodegenerative pathology.

Conclusions

Scientists describe the phenomenon of brain resistance and its function in connection with age-related diseases. Some authors indicate that a person's susceptibility to the development of brain pathology is the result of the interaction of multidirectional processes: damage to brain tissue and the ability of the brain to maintain high functional activity due to "brain reserve". Cognitive reserve parallels the concept of brain reserve in that it is a potential mechanism for coping with brain damage (Stern, 2002). Active cognitive reserve is formed in the process of educational and cognitive activity of the subject. Higher educational attainment is associated with later onset of cognitive decline.

Results from this study demonstrated that cognitive efficacy was predicted by age (as expected), educational level, and total R-IRCq score. An inverse correlation between age and cognitive efficiency has been confirmed: the older the age of participants, the lower the cognitive efficiency, the more significant the correlation when cognitive efficiency is measured using the MoCA cognitive assessment test.

Age and total R-IRCq score cover more than a quarter of the MoCA variance, and educational levels further cover this variance. Both educational levels and total R-IRCq index partially mediated the effect of age on cognitive performance (MoCA). The assessment of cognitive reserve in older people could be a useful additional measure to integrate existing protocols for the neuropsychological assessment of cognitive decline. It is important to assess this 'threshold effect' where people with a higher level of education may resist the effects of neurodegeneration for a longer period.

Cognitive reserve should also be recognized as a factor that will influence the rate of cognitive decline after diagnosis.

Limitations

The main limit of this study is the small sample, the non-homogeneous structure on socio-demographic variables, as well as the fact that it did not include in the assessment of cognitive efficiency other parameters such as occupation, leisure activities.

Acknowledgements

Appendix A.
Results of Linear Regression Analysis

			95% CI			
Variable	Beta	SE	LL	UL	β	p
MMSE-2						
Age	-0.05	0.02	−0.096	−0.011	−0.20	0.013
Education	0.38	0.09	0.193	0.572	0.31	< .001
R-IRCq	0.02	0.007	0.011	0.039	0.28	< .001
MoCA						
Age	−0.14	0.02	−0.190	−0.099	−0.46	< .001
Education	0.79	0.09	0.598	0.991	0.55	< .001
R-IRCq	0.05	0.008	0.038	0.068	0.49	< .001

Appendix B.

Results of Linear Regression Analysis (combined predictors)

			95% CI			
Variable	Beta	SE	LL	UL	β	p
MoCA						
Age *	-0.08	0.02	-0.132	-0.041	-0.27	
						< .001
Education	0.62	0.10	0.414	0.831	0.43	
Education*	0.59	0.14	0.296	0.885	0.41	
						< .001
R-IRCq	0.02	0.01	-0.002	0.042	0.19	

Note. Age * Education, Education * R-IRCq as combined predictors to evaluate the combined predictive character associated with the dependent variable MoCA

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PERSONALITY, FAMILY ENVIRONMENT IN THE FAMILY OF ORIGIN, AS WELL AS THE EXISTING CLIMATE WITHIN THE EDUCATIONAL CENTER IN ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH CONVICTED OF VIOLENT CRIMES. PILOT STUDY

Flavia-Elena CIURBEA

Address correspondence to: Flavia-Elena Ciurbea, National Correctional Officers Training School Târgu Ocna, Department of Law, Social Sciences and Humanities, Tiseşti street, No. 137, Târgu Ocna, Bacău county, Romania. Ph.: +40-746-692-576; E-mail: ciurbeaflavia@gmail.com

Abstract

Objectives. This pilot study aimed to explore the personality of young people convicted of violent crimes, in relation to a series of variables, such as: family characteristics, the criminogenic potential of the group of friends, the situations of conflict and support experienced by them as a result of interaction with colleagues and employees in the educational center.

Material and methods. The sample was made up of 21 boys interned in Buziaş and Târgu Ocna educational centers. The data collection was carried out by the survey method based on questionnaires. For this study, the responses to the 5-Factor Personality Questionnaire were retained. The data analysis was carried out through Little's MCAR test, Chi-Square, T-test, Hedges' g index.

Results. Depending on the relationship with the primary caregivers, differences were identified in terms of the variables investigating the level of conscientiousness, amiability and desirability. At the level of the variable investigating autonomy, differences were recorded depending on the criminogenic potential of the group of friends. Regarding the period of deprivation of liberty, participants who came into conflict with colleagues in the educational center showed a lower level of desirability, and those who reported conflicts with employees scored higher for extraversion. At the same time, those who reported moral support from the cadres scored higher on the amiability and desirability scales.

Conclusions. The social reintegration steps in the educational centers targeting young people who have committed violent crimes can be adapted depending on the particularities of the family, the group of friends and the young person's relationship with colleagues and employees in the center. The partnership between the staff of the educational centres and the adults with whom the young internees have a close relationship becomes essential.

Keywords: personality, delinquency, violence, educational center, social reintegration.

Introduction

Juvenile delinquency gained momentum with the Second World War, an aspect supported by the increase in the number of convictions among young people in certain countries (The Encyclopedia of World Problems & Human Potential, 2019, para. 3). Currently, Western Europe, the USA and Japan are registering high levels of this phenomenon, and one of the explanations could be that juvenile delinquency develops with the technological and economic advance, but also with the changes occurred at the social level (The Encyclopedia of World Problems & Human Potential, 2019, para. 3). However, compared to the presence of young people under the age of 18 in the prison population worldwide, the highest percentages are found in some states on the African continent (World Prison Brief, n.d.).

The percentage of persons under the age of 18 who are in the custody of prison systems belonging to different countries of the world is graphically illustrated in Figure 1, built on the basis of information provided by the World Prison Brief (n.d.) for the period between 2000 and 2021. However, a dose of caution is recommended in the interpretation of the map, as the data under which it was made are indicative, in the case of many countries the percentage being an estimated one.

Figure 1

Countries of the world according to the percentage of minors under the age of 18 in the total prison population, period 2000 – 2021
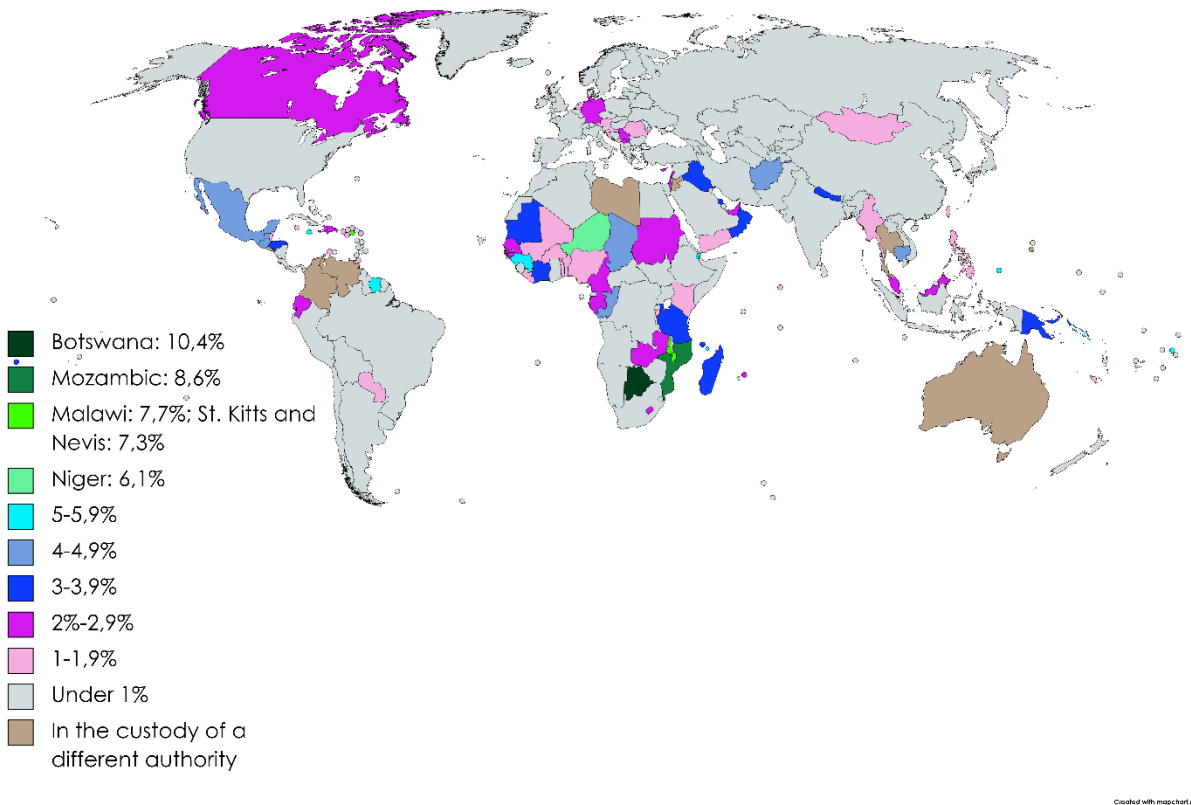
Looking at gender differences, it was observed that boys have a higher proportion of under-18s in the total prison population, with a ratio of 10:1 compared to girls. Regarding the criminal specifics, theft seems to be characteristic of young criminals, being followed by crimes committed with violence (crimes against the person, sexual and trafficking crimes) (The Encyclopedia of World Problems & Human Potential, 2019, para. 3).

Regarding the evolution of juvenile delinquency in Europe, between the years 2010-2013, Scotland represented the country with the highest share of juvenile offenders on the record of the justice system per 100,000 inhabitants, having annually between 82.55% and 54.61 % young people who came into formal contact with the police, prosecutor's office, courts or prisons (Eurostat, 2021a). Starting from 2014, however, a fluctuation in percentages was noted, the share of juvenile detainees or those who were in formal contact with the police in Poland exceeding that of Scotland for four years (between 2014-2015 and 2018-2019).

In 2019, Romania ranked 13th in terms of the percentage of young people in formal contact with the police and detained in the penitentiary administration system (Eurostat, 2021b). However, it is important to note that such a position in the ranking was occupied by Romania in the absence of information about young people on the record of the criminal justice system in Scotland, who were ahead of Romania in the years in which these data were available.

In November 2021, of the total number of young people between 18-21 years of age in the custody of the Romanian penitentiary system (779 boys and 23 girls), the majority (approximately 471) were convicted of crimes committed with violence (robbery, murder, rape , destruction) (National Administration of Penitentiaries [ANP], 2021). Of the 802 young people deprived of their liberty, 396 were interned in detention centers, and 213 were in the custody of educational centers.

The literature indicates that there are numerous factors that predict violent behavior: previous violence (violent behavior previously adopted makes subsequent violent manifestation more likely); emotions such as fear and feelings such as humiliation, boredom, helplessness; physical factors (lack of sleep, physical exhaustion, alcohol or drug use, etc.); situational factors (access to weapons, abuse suffered in childhood or the presence of aggression in the house) etc. (N.C. Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program, 1998). Since among the main predictors of violence among young people are family difficulties and criminogenic neighborhood (Ciurbea, Rada, & Crînguș, 2021), the present paper aims to address these factors in relation to the five main personality dimensions in the Big Five paradigm, the main objective being to streamline the process of social reintegration carried out in educational centers. Finally, the identification of personality differences between young people deprived of liberty in terms of their relationship with the centre's employees is intended to highlight the obstacles that prevent the strengthening of a collaborative relationship between detainees and cadres in order to re-educate. The usefulness of this research approach will be materialized in the formulation of some recommendations to guide the efforts of the specialists from the penitentiary administration in order to prevent the risk of recidivism, through the harmonious restructuring of the personality in formation of the young internees.

Defining the concepts

Within the Big Five paradigm, personality is evaluated following five main dimensions: extraversion, agreeability, conscientiousness, emotional stability and autonomy. The extraversion variable indicates the extent to which the person tends to relate to others (Nedelcea, 2015, p. 204,

as cited in Ciurbea, Dina, & Rada, 2022, p. 245; VandenBos, 2013/2020a, p. 219, as cited in Ciurbea, Dina, & Rada, 2022, p. 245). Agreeableness or amiability (according to Albu & Porumb, 2009, pp.148-149) refers to the degree of social adaptability of the person, referring to the person's willingness to act cooperatively (Nedelcea, 2015, p. 205, as cited in Ciurbea et al., 2022, p. 245; VandenBos, 2013/2020b, p. 29, as cited in Ciurbea et al., 2022, p. 245). Conscientiousness is related to self-control, being rather understood as a process by which the person gets from planning tasks to completing them (Nedelcea, 2015, p. 205). Emotional stability is the dimension that provides information about the ability to control strong emotions, in other words, to manifest emotional balance in tense situations (Butucescu & Vercellino, 2015, p. 283). Autonomy is a term used by Albu (2008) to indicate mental openness (Butucescu & Vercellino, 2015, p. 283) or openness to experience (Nedelcea, 2015, p. 204; VandenBos, 2013/2020c, p. 160), the authors defining it as a predisposition of the person towards intellectual, aesthetic or cultural activities.

According to Jean Pinatel, when traits such as aggressiveness, emotional lability, affective indifference or egocentrism are taken individually, they do not represent specific characteristics of the offender. The personality of the young delinquent is therefore the result of a constellation of factors (Stănoiu, 2002, as cited in Liiceanu, Săucan, & Micle, 2008, p. 74; Stănoiu, 1997, as cited in Liiceanu, Săucan, & Micle, 2009, p. 194).

Regarding the family, this study refers to the participants' family of origin, that is, to those adults who raised them. To avoid confusion, the specific items were formulated as follows: "your parents (or those who cared for you)".

In order to list the items related to the group of friends, the definition offered by Renna, Grafova, and Thakur (2008) was taken into account: the close circle of friends to which the respondent relates.

The educational center, being subordinate to the ANP, was defined on the basis of Law 254/2013, article 141, paragraph 1 and represents "the institution specialized in the social recovery of interned persons, in which they follow school training programs and professional training, according to their abilities, as well as other activities and programs aimed at social reintegration" (Parliament of Romania, 2013).

Research methodology

Research purpose and objectives

The purpose of the present investigation was to explore five major personality traits in relation to family characteristics, the criminogenic potential of the group of friends and the conflict and support situations experienced during the execution of the educational measure of deprivation of liberty, in young people in the custody of educational centers subordinated to the ANP for crimes committed with violence. This scientific approach aims to adjust the process of reintegration into society of young people convicted of acts of a violent nature, depending on personal, family, and social peculiarities.

The objectives that guided this investigation were the following:
O1: Shaping the personality differences between young people convicted of violent crimes, depending on the family characteristics, the group of friends, and according to the relationship with colleagues and employees in the educational center.
O2: Formulating some recommendations for the efficiency of the social reintegration process of young people convicted of violent acts.

Research methods and instruments

The data were collected through the survey method, using a set of questionnaires, as follows:

- an omnibus questionnaire with 58 simple or compound questions (summing up several items). This questionnaire included questions intended to capture some general socio-demographic data, such as age, gender, marital status, place of origin, etc., but also questions specific to the purpose of the research, such as those related to situations within the family in which the participant grew up, within the group of friends, within the educational or detention center, a section dedicated to alcohol consumption, one for drug use, another section for sexuality and a final section for risky behaviors;

- The 5-Factor Personality Questionnaire (CP5F), with 130 items grouped into six scales, validated by Albu (2008, as cited in Albu & Porumb, 2009) on the Romanian population;

- The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) (Robu, 2013);

- The Affective Distress Profile (PDA) (Opriș & Macavei, 2007);

- a final question on the description of the commission of the deed in about 200 words.

In order to achieve the research objectives of this paper, the answers collected through the following instruments were used: CP5F, items from the section related to situations within the family where the participant grew up, items related to situations within the group of friends and those who referred to situations encountered within the educational center.

The CP5F assesses through five scales the five big dimensions of personality – extraversion, conscientiousness, amiability, emotional stability and autonomy – the last three factors being the equivalent of agreeableness, neuroticism and openness within the Big Five paradigm. The sixth scale of the questionnaire is intended to measure the level of desirability of the respondent. The answer options vary from 1 - "it suits me very little" to 5 - "it suits me a lot" (Albu & Porumb, 2009). The scoring is done both directly and indirectly, and the total score for each scale is obtained by summing the scores related to the answer variants selected by the participant for each item of the scale separately.

Participants

The questionnaires were applied to 21 boys interned in the two educational centers subordinated to the ANP - the Buziaș Educational Center and the Târgu Ocna Educational Center.

Procedure

From the Buziaș Educational Center, the contact person (psychology officer) selected those interned persons whose levels of cognitive development allowed participation in the research without great difficulties. At the Târgu Ocna Educational Center, the selection procedure involved the announcement on the section of the youth interned about the possibility of participating in the study, following that all those who wanted to register to be involved in the research.

The data from the youth interned in the Buziaș Educational Center were collected between 15-19 and 22-26 November 2021. In their case, the application of the questionnaire was carried out online, through the Skype platform.

At the Târgu Ocna Educational Center, the data were collected on February 24-25, 2022. The questionnaires were applied physically, by the investigator and by one of the center's employed psychologists; those with limited comprehension skills were assisted in the completion.

Ethical aspects of research

The study was carried out based on the approval of the Ethics Commission of the "Constantin Rădulescu-Motru" Institute of Philosophy and Psychology of the Romanian Academy no. 80 of 19.03.2021 and based on the principle agreement of ANP no. 7786 of 29.04.2021. In order to carry out the activity at the Buziaș Educational Center, a collaboration protocol was necessary, concluded between the center (no. 36381/02.12.2021) and the "Francisc I. Rainer" Anthropology Institute of the Romanian Academy (775/19.11.2021).

The effective involvement of the youth in the two educational centers was achieved only after informing them about the purpose of the research, possible risks, possible rewards, the possibility of withdrawal and after their prior signing of the informed consent, respectively of the acceptance form, which accompanies the research carried out within the units subordinated to the ANP.

For the CP5F instrument, the approval of its application for research purposes was obtained from COGNITROM organization.

Research hypotheses

H1: The average scores obtained on the CP5F scales by youth with difficult family situations differ significantly from the average scores obtained by youth who did not report such difficulties.

H2: There is a difference between the scores obtained on CP5F scales depending on the criminogenic potential of the group of friends.

H3: Youth employed in conflict situations within the educational center obtain significantly higher scores on the extraversion and autonomy scales and lower scores on the conscientiousness, amiability, and emotional stability scales.

H4: Youth who receive moral support from their peers and from the cadres in the educational center, obtain significantly higher scores on the extraversion, conscientiousness, amiability, emotional stability, and autonomy scales.

Data analysis

The processing of the obtained data was carried out in the SPSS Statistics 17.0 program (SPSS 17.0 Statistical analysis for social science, 2022).

Since some participants either failed to respond to some CP5F items or circled multiple responses to a single item, little's MCAR test was performed to check if the data was missing in a completely random way. Following the results of the test, the null hypothesis was not rejected (Chi-Square = 0,00; $DF = 1154$; $p = 1,00$), and the missing data were replaced by the expectation-maximization algorithm. To increase the accuracy of the predicted data, the algorithm was applied separately to each of the six subscales of the CP5F. The resulting datasets were later merged into a single spreadsheet.

For hypothesis testing, the T-test for independent samples was used. In addition, since the SPSS variant used did not automatically generate the estimates for the effect sizes, they were

calculated separately via the online calculator available at Social Science Statistics (n.d.). Because the number of participants in the groups compared was different, the Hedges' *g* index was chosen.

Results

The participants were aged between 18 and 22 years ($M = 18,81$; $Mdn = 18,00$; $SD = 1,20$) and were serving the educational measure of deprivation of liberty for crimes committed with violence: attempted aggravated robbery, qualified robbery, complicity in robbery, robbery, attempted rape, rape, trafficking in minors, beatings or other violence, destruction, outrage. The one who entered the center most recently was serving the educational measure of one month and 22 days, and the one with a longer experience in the center had completed approximately two years and two months until the time of completing the questionnaire.

Of the total participants, 20 considered themselves to be clinically healthy, and only one replied that he was recorded with a chronic/psychiatric condition. The latter, aged 21, stated that he has health problems, but without mentioning them.

The basic structure of the sample is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Sample structure

Variable	N	%
Holding place		
Buziaș Educational Center	4	19.0
Târgu Ocna Educational Center	17	81.0
Criminal history		
Imprisoned for execution on the first conviction	16	76.2
Recidivists	5	23.8
Environment of origin		
Urban	13	61.9
Rural	8	38.1
Marital status		
Single	10	47.6
In an undocumented relationship	11	52.4

Variable	N	%
Last school attended		
No school, primary school (4 classes)	6	28.6
General school (grades 5-10), vocational, apprentices	14	66.7
High school	1	4.8
Continuing school courses at the time of data collection		
No	6	28.6
Primary school (4 classes)	4	19.0
General school (grades 5-10), vocational, apprentices	11	52.4

Table 2 presents characteristics of the families in which the participants grew up. More than half of them reported long-term problems in the relationship between parents or primary caregivers, and more than 60% answered that their parents divorced before they arrived at the educational center. Over 40% of the young people surveyed had at least one of their parents or primary caregivers from the family of origin sentenced to custodial sentences, for crimes such as: outrage with serious violence and attempted murder, qualified murder, scandal (committed at the age of 18), aggravated theft, deception, and theft. Four of the respondents mentioned that the father was the one incarcerated, and four stated that they did not know the crime for which their primary caregivers were convicted. Also, more than 40% of the young people included in the study were separated from at least one of the primary caregivers before committing the crime for which they were serving the educational measure of deprivation of liberty. The reasons cited were the parents leaving to work abroad, divorce, the young man's admission to a foster care center, arguments between the young man and his parents, the death of one of the parents, respectively the criminal acts committed by the young man previously. The same percentage of respondents stated that there was a major event in the family that had a strong negative emotional impact on them. Six young people were emotionally impacted by the death of one of the family members (uncle, grandfather, grandmother, brother, mother), two cited the separation between their parents, and among the other reasons were arguments, conflicts, sexual abuse, the mother's diagnosis with a incurable disease, the father's hospitalization as a result of a stabbing, and the young man's drug use.

At the same time, more than 70% of participants said they had never experienced harsh discipline from their primary caregivers, such as physical punishment, and just over half agreed that their parents or caregivers "raised them in the fluff" , giving them everything they needed. Also, most of the respondents considered that they benefited from supervision from at least one of the caregivers, in the form of the interest shown in the school activity of the young person, in his friends, etc., and many stated that they used to respect the rules imposed by the main caregivers.

Table 2

Distribution of participants according to certain family situations

Situations within the family in which the participants grew up	No		Yes	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*
Family difficulties (quarrels, disputes, aggressiveness; severe discipline applied by parents; the existence of an event in the family with a strong negative emotional impact for the young person)	36	57.1	27	42.9
Satisfaction of all needs by the main caregivers ("raised in fluff")	10	47.6	11	52.4
Disciplining the child (supervision by at least one of the primary caregivers; compliance with the rules imposed by the primary caregivers)	10	23.8	32	76.2
Separation from the main caregiver before committing the crime (through divorce, sentencing the caregiver to custodial sentences or other circumstances)	36	57.1	27	42.9

Most of the participants (19) were part of a teenage or youth gang. Table 3 summarizes the criminogenic characteristics of the group of friends. Most of them stated that they were involved in conflicts within the group of friends (quarrels, disputes, aggressive actions, etc.). Most of the participants had at least one friend in the group sentenced to custodial sentences. Nine of them declared that they had friends convicted of crimes committed with violence (robbery, murder, attempted murder, destruction). Other crimes committed by the friends included running away (with Interpol tracking), theft, bank fraud and drug trafficking. More than 40% of the young people surveyed said that they had been involved in activities with the group of friends where the police intervened, but only slightly more than 30% of them said that they had done some things against their will, being motivated by the fear of being excluded or rejected by the group. Among the actions taken under the pressure of the group of friends were mentioned thefts and other crimes, involvement in beatings, self-affirmation (through screams) and tobacco consumption.

Table 3

Distribution of participants according to the criminogenic potential of the group of friends

Situations within the group of friends	No		Yes	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*
Involvement in conflict situations in the group of friends	4	19.0	17	81.0

Situations within the group of friends	No		Yes	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*
Carrying out activities with the group that resulted in police intervention	11	52.4	10	47.6
One or more members of the group sentenced to custodial sentences	8	38.1	13	61.9
Undertaking some activities as a result of pressure exerted by the group	14	66.7	7	33.3

Table 4 presents situations encountered in the educational center by the interned youth. Most of the participants had conflicts with their colleagues in the center, but less than 30% were involved in conflict situations with the center's employees. At the same time, most of the young convicts received moral support both from fellow detainees and from the cadres (supervisor, educator, psychologist).

Table 4

Distribution of participants according to conflict situations and moral support received within the educational center

Situations within the educational center	No		Yes	
	N	%	N	%
Involvement in conflict situations with colleagues	6	28.6	15	71.4
Moral support from colleagues in difficult situations	5	23.8	16	76.2
Involvement in conflict situations with the cadres	15	71.4	6	28.6
Moral support from the cadres in difficult situations	3	14.3	18	85.7

The means of the groups obtained on the CP5F scales were significantly different only in the case of six of the investigated variables and only for four of the five dimensions of personality, respectively for the scale that measures the level of desirability. Thus, interned youth who considered that they were not raised "in fluff" had a higher mean score on the conscientiousness and amiability scales than those who appreciated that the main caregivers provided them with everything they needed. Those who were separated from a primary caregiver before committing the crime scored higher on the conscientiousness and desirability scales.

Regarding the situations in the group of friends, the participants who carried out activities with the group that resulted in police intervention obtained a higher mean score on the autonomy scale.

Regarding the situations encountered by the participants in the educational center, those who answered that they were not involved in conflicts with colleagues presented a higher average score on the desirability scale. Regarding the relationship with the employees of the center, the young people who had quarrels or disputes with the cadres obtained a higher average score on the extraversion scale, unlike those who were not involved in conflict situations with the employees of the center. At the same time, the young internees who stated that they received moral support from the center's employees when they had difficulties obtained a higher average score on the amiability and desirability scales compared to their colleagues who answered that they did not receive such support.

For all identified differences, an effect size of over 0.90 resulted (Table 5).

Table 5

Significant differences obtained by participants on the CP5F scales depending on the investigated variables

Logistic parameter	CP5F scale	No		Yes		$t(19)$	p	Hedges' g
		M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
Satisfaction of all needs by primary caregivers	Conscientiousness	98.12	11.38	87.44	11.67	2.11	0.04	0.92
	Ammiability	91.06	10.21	77.91	13.07	2.55	0.02	1.11
Separation from the primary caregiver	Conscientiousness	86.55	11.49	99.10	10.44	-2.61	0.01	1.14
	Desirability	53.36	5.51	60.60	8.03	-2.42	0.02	1.06
Activities with the group that resulted in police intervention	Autonomy	71.10	8.41	79.85	9.67	-2.20	0.04	0.96
Situații conflictuale cu colegii	Desirability	62.50	7.39	54.53	6.62	2.41	0.02	1.16
Conflict situations with the cadres	Extraversion	68.33	7.23	78.41	10.29	-2.55	0.01	1.23

Logistic parameter	CP5F scale	No		Yes		$t(19)$	p	Hedges' g
		M	SD	M	SD			
Moral support received from the cadres	Amiability	69.67	6.02	86.59	12.70	-2.22	0.03	1.39
	Desirability	48.33	4.72	58.22	7.12	-2.29	0.03	1.43

Discussions

In the case of the comparison between the sub-samples made up of young incarcerated people, significant differences were noted in terms of kindness and conscientiousness, these being revealed in two situations each. Mean scores for autonomy and extraversion also differed significantly in only one situation each. In contrast, in none of the investigated situations, the sub-samples did not differ from the perspective of emotional stability. This result could be explained by reference to the developmental period in which the participants were at the time of the research. Veroude, Jolles, Croiset, and Krabbendam (2013) showed that the development of cognitive control for both emotional and non-emotional stimuli continues beyond the age of 18 years. Since most of the participants in this study are 18 years old, it can be assumed that emotional balance is age-specific and evolves as such, its development not depending on the family or social context, but on the level of brain development.

However, the most differences between subsamples emerged in the case of desirability, which may indicate different needs of the participants in terms of self-image. Even this result can be explained by the average age. As teenagers, one of their concerns may be related to the image they want to portray in society. According to Harwood (2010, as cited in Dobrescu, 2016, p. 68), adolescents are able to display even a hidden behavior, taking into account the specifics of the situation in which they are.

Consequences of pampering on adolescent personality development

A lower average score on the conscientiousness and amiability scales obtained by youth convicted of violent crimes who believe they were raised "in the fluff" seems to support Alfred Adler's theory of parental influence on children's personality formation. He pointed out the negative consequences of pampering children, suggesting the importance of adequate dosage of parental tenderness on the harmonious development of sons (Alba, 2017). In this sense, the study carried out by Capron (2004) on a sample of 200 students (half of the participants being male) identified positive correlations between certain types of pampering and narcissistic personality traits. The overindulgent type was associated with entitlement and exhibitionism, and the overdominant type correlated with exploitativeness.

Given the differences in personality between teenagers raised "in the fluff" and those who did not benefit from this type of approach from the primary caregivers, the emphasis falls on the role that parents have in the formation of children's personality. Thus, satisfying all the child's

wishes in the absence of rules for him to respect (e.g. being orderly, being polite to others), can have negative consequences on the development of certain areas of the personality.

Effects of separation from primary caregiver on adolescent personality development

The situation is more complex in terms of the difference in scores obtained on the conscientiousness scale by young people who have been separated from one or both parents compared to those who have not faced separation from parental figures. An investigation of data from the first four waves of a longitudinal study involving 18,000 British participants highlighted the negative effects of family disruption on children's personality development (Prevoo & ter Weel, 2014). The parents' divorce had the strongest negative effect on the development of the child's personality. However, the boys' personality was more affected by the death of one of the parents. The findings of the study also showed that the severity of the effect of separation from a parent depends on the age the child had when it occurred, the consequences being less severe at an older age. However, it should be noted that Prevoo and ter Weel (2014) investigated personality traits such as self-esteem, locus of control and behavioral problems, which are different from those pursued in the present research.

Lamb (1978) explained based on the studies analyzed in a review of the literature on this topic that the divorce of the parents can also have positive effects on the development of the child's personality, when it is followed by the cessation of hostilities, uncertainties and hatred.

Strictly related to the results obtained in the present study, the explanation of the lower level of conscientiousness registered by the young people who were not separated from their parents could start from the assumption that the parents were concerned with satisfying all their needs. Thus, the child may no longer have to or be motivated to plan his own actions to get what he wants, to no longer strive as much as a child who, in the absence of one or both parental figures, is forced to fight to get what he needs.

A dose of caution is, however, necessary in interpreting the higher level of conscientiousness shown by convicted adolescents who were separated from parental figures, as they scored significantly higher on the social desirability scale than their counterparts who did not experience separation from primary caregivers. It is therefore possible that the participants' answers were influenced, to a more or less conscious extent, by the prestige reaction: even if they were informed that their name would not be associated with the completed questionnaire, offering socially accepted answers about oneself can act as a psychological shield, designed to protect the young person's self-image.

Group power and autonomy in adolescence

A fundamental concept in the discussion of adolescence is that of individuation, defined as "adolescents' struggle for autonomy and personal identity" (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 1978/2010, p. 407). Adolescence represents that period of development in which the child begins to want more independence from the family. But there is a fragile line between the acquisition of a healthy autonomy and a total freedom. Then, it should also be taken into account that an extreme control exercised by the parent over the child, motivated by the intention to prevent the latter from making immature decisions, is as harmful as a high level of autonomy offered to the child in the absence of guidance from the adult (Davis & McQuillin, 2021, as cited in Bohnsack, 2021, para. 2). The results obtained by Goldstein, Davis-Kean, and Eccles (2005, as cited in Papalia et al.,

1978/2010, p. 407) following repeated interviews of 1,357 European American and African American adolescents between the summer before they enter high school and the 11th grade, are edifying. They showed that young people who benefited from a greater degree of autonomy spent more time with those of the same age, in the absence of parental supervision, being exposed to the emergence of problematic behaviors. An excessive involvement of parents in the lives of teenagers was also found to be problematic, young people who perceived their parents as too intrusive tending to be influenced in a negative way by the group of friends, thus reaching the manifestation of risky behaviors together with them.

This paper draws attention to the risks associated with a higher level of autonomy at this age period. Whereas young people who stated that they had been involved in activities with the group of friends that resulted in police intervention obtained a significantly higher mean score on the autonomy scale than those who did not have such an experience, there is the question of the degree of parental supervision they benefited from. Also, an important aspect is the quality of the guidance received from the adult, which consists in finding a balance between the autonomy offered to the adolescent and the control exercised over him.

The role of the personality traits of young convicts in relation to the cadres and colleagues in the educational center

The present work shows that young convicts who had fights or disputes with cadres scored significantly higher on extraversion. This result indicates that a higher level of expansiveness and participation in relationships with others does not always have beneficial effects. Previous research has shown that argumentativeness is associated with extraversion, while verbal aggression is characteristic of introverts (Hample, 2008, p. 5255).

What is noteworthy, however, is the significantly higher level of social desirability shown by the youth who answered that they did not engage in arguments, disputes, aggressive actions or other conflictual behaviors with fellow detainees. It is possible that the fear of the consequences of the cazon environment in which they find themselves, governed by strict rules, as well as the desire to avoid the exercise of additional control by the cadres, had some influence on the answers given by the participants to this question.

Another result that must be taken into account is the average score obtained on the amiability scale, which was significantly higher for young people who stated that they received moral support from the employees of the educational center in contrast to those who considered that they did not receive support. An explanation in this sense can be offered through the prism of the results previously obtained by Branje, van Lieshout, and van Aken (2004) in the longitudinal investigation of 285 Dutch two-parent families that had at least two children at the age of adolescence. They observed that participants who were more agreeable perceived that they received more support from other family members. In addition, longitudinal research conducted by Udayar, Urbanaviciute, and Rossier (n.d.), involving 1,309 adults (48.1% male), showed that people who perceived that they received more support from those around them showed a higher level of agreeableness after four years.

However, in the case of young people interned in the penitentiary system, the affirmative answers in relation to the support received from the cadres may also be driven by the desire to avoid possible sanctions, given the higher average of the scores obtained by them on the social desirability scale.

Conclusions

Adolescence is an age when the personality is not yet crystallized, and young people interned in the educational centers of the penitentiary system for crimes committed with violence need support from adults so that the transition to the next stage of development is carried out in a healthy way. The data obtained within this research approach partially confirm the formulated hypotheses, indicating the existence of personality differences between young people convicted of violent crimes according to family history, the criminogenic potential of the group of friends and the conflict and support situations experienced within the educational center. At the same time, they show the need to pay special attention to four of the big five personality dimensions: conscientiousness, amiability, autonomy, and extraversion. The role that falls, therefore, to the staff specialized in working with young people interned in educational centers is to ensure a balanced development of the adolescent's personality, taking into account their family situation, the situations within the group of friends and at the same time paying attention to the way they interact with colleagues and center employees.

The results of this study indicate the need to develop the level of conscientiousness, by involving violent youth in activities that require self-discipline, planning, perseverance, depending on the interests of each one (strategy games, sports competitions, creative contests, etc.). The purpose of carrying out such activities, however, also consists in reducing the level of violence, since they can contribute to the balancing of neurotransmitters, a fact that determines the maintenance of behavioral control (Lungu, 2022). Attention must also be directed to how adolescents who have committed violent crimes understand the concept of autonomy. In this sense, it is necessary to train them on the importance of respecting the rules of coexistence in society, and positive cognitive reframing can be an optimal technique: young people in institutions can be taught to see social rules as something that gives them the protection they need and not as an instrument of coercion. This technique could also be useful in reorienting more extroverted youth. They can be taught how to use the ease with which they make themselves seen in the community to establish healthy relationships with those around them, based on trust and mutual help. At the same time, they can be trained to invest this energy in the direction of dialogues based on arguments, at the expense of using it in quarrels, disputes or violent actions. In this sense, organizing some workshops on the topic of effective management of conflict situations, which include working in small groups and role-playing, could represent an agreed activity, especially by extroverted teenagers. The framework plan of activities elaborated by Ciurbea et al. (2022) can serve as a benchmark.

Finally, since there are evidences regarding the fact that kindness is determined by the level of perceived social support, it is recommended to train the staff from the educational centers who are in direct contact with the interned youth, in order to acquire some skills that facilitate their interaction with them. Organizing some training sessions on the topic of communication, the importance of identifying the difficulties faced by interned persons and coming to meet them, could represent an important step in increasing the efficiency of the social reintegration process of young people sentenced to custodial educational measures.
However, it is important to continue the efforts during the execution of the custodial educational measure even after release. Therefore, reinforcing the statements made by Oancea and Micle

(2015), the involvement of the probation services and the adults with whom the interned youth have a close relationship becomes essential.

Limits

Although the effect sizes exceeded the threshold of 0.80, beyond which the effect is considered to be strong (Sava, 2011, p. 37), the small sample size is an important limitation. Given the number of participants, the sample could be considered unrepresentative even in the case of a pilot study.

Then, in the case of the groups of participants formed based on the answers given to the items related to the situations in the educational center, the major difference between the number of participants distributed in each group can influence the results obtained. Therefore, a dose of caution is necessary in generalizing the results obtained to the general population of young people convicted of crimes committed with violence.

Another limitation may be the low level of schooling in relation to the chronological age of the participants. Such a situation can affect the degree of comprehension of the items, which leads to an increased risk of giving random answers.

Finally, significant differences between means on the desirability scale suggest greater care in interpreting the results. For various reasons related to the person of the participants, it is possible that some answers do not comply with the requirement of representing reality as faithfully as possible.

Acknowledgments

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A LINK TO RECIDIVISM: EXCLUDING FEMALE OFFENDERS SERVING SHORT SENTENCES FROM REHABILITATION PROGRAMMES

Jessica Leigh THORNTON

Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria;
E-mail: jessleighthornton@gmail.com, Telephone: +27 84 246 6995

Address correspondence to: Jessica Leigh Thornton, E-mail: jessleighthornton@gmail.com

Abstract

Objective. This study discusses the issue of rehabilitation and the lived reality of female offenders serving short-term sentences who are excluded from rehabilitation programmes. This exclusion ill-equips the women from reforming their criminal behaviours leading to a life of recidivism. It also examines Bourdieu's theory of habitus to identify a suitably unifying theoretical framework to analyse female criminality and the link between short-term sentences and recidivism.
Material and methods. The explorative and ethnographic lens gives voice to social realities of the offender's punishment, rehabilitation (or lack thereof), reintegration, and recidivism. As female offenders only constitute 3% of the correctional population in South Africa, the sample was limited to ten female offenders.
Results. While research on female criminality has just starting to receive attention in South Africa, rehabilitation programmes are still mostly geared toward the reform of criminal behaviour amongst male offenders and a gender-sensitive correctional programme has been overlooked. Ironically by default, female offenders serving short-term sentences are further overlooked as they are excluded from rehabilitation programmes.
Conclusion. The study makes a case that a gender-sensitive rehabilitation programme (with a focus on empowering women as decision makers capable of acquiring competence in areas such as motherhood, education, and skills development) needs to be available to all females entering the penal and corrective system. Without being equipped to deal with a variety of challenges which may affect adjustment to life outside the correctional facility and maintain their reformative behaviours, a great risk of recidivism for female offenders arises.

Keywords: rehabilitation, recidivism, female offenders, short-term sentences, exclusion.

Introduction

        While some studies within the South African context have explored pathways of female offending, minimal studies have been conducted on the gendered experience of rehabilitation (Dastile, 2017). Although there are rehabilitation facilities for female offenders, these programmes are based on theories stemming from research conducted with male offenders (Heyns, 2012; Qhogwana, 2017). That is, the experience of female offenders has been excluded in the larger debate and a gender-sensitive correctional programme responding to the specific needs of women

has been overlooked (Nathoo, 1997; Pillay, 2005; Haffejee, Vetten & Greyling, 2006), not only in terms of service delivery to this minority group but also from a research perspective (Luyt & du Preez, 2010). Further, with rehabilitation being noted as a factor to successful reintegration into the family and society thus reducing rates of recidivism, (Arditti and Few-Demo, 2006), a major challenge is to ensure that all offenders are positively developed and supported whilst they are incarcerated (Murhula & Singh, 2019). This challenge is further played out as short-term sentence offenders are often excluded from rehabilitation programmes that assist in reforming criminal behaviour. This is mainly because their length of stay within the correctional facility is less than the duration needed to complete a programme, the conditions of their sentence do not obligate them to fulfil such programmes, and the pressures felt by an overstretched support staff. The reality is seemingly harsher for female offenders serving short-term sentences, firstly because of the lack of a gendered orientated rehabilitative programmes and they are by default excluded from rehabilitation programmes (a habitus for reforming behaviour). These women are excluded from rehabilitation programmes as their conditions of their sentence do not timely allow for, nor legally necessitate these reform treatments.

In the context of South Africa, rehabilitation should not be viewed as a sole strategy in preventing crime, but rather as a holistic strategy that encourages responsibility; justice; participation; and empowerment with life-skills. This exclusion may result in the female offenders not being properly equipped in reforming their criminal behaviours leading to a life of recidivism. Thus, one needs to question if this exclusion from rehabilitation programmes hinders a successful reintegration into society or if the effects of incarceration are felt long after release which may constitute a pathway to re-offending (Cherukuri, Britton & Subramaniam, 2009; Agboola, 2017; Lotter, 2018). As such, the objective of the research was to critically explore whether a link exists between being excluded from rehabilitative programmes and reoffending. This was achieved by examining the nature of rehabilitation, recidivism and the experiences of female repeat offenders who were now serving new short-term sentences and not engaging in rehabilitation regimes. The article argues that gender-sensitive rehabilitations programmes are vital and should be a requisite for female offenders regardless of their sentence.

With support from the National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, this study explores the lived experiences of female offenders serving short-term sentences to understand their possible links to recidivism due to their exclusion from rehabilitation programmes. Firstly, the paper further outlines the methodological approach adopted in the investigation. The ethnographic study, conducted in 2021 and 2022, made use of an embedded approach (observations and interviews) to explore and examine the lived experiences of punishment, rehabilitation and reintegration amongst ten female offenders serving short-term sentences. Secondly, the results reveal these exclusion experiences and their potential impact on their reform and reintegration into society by using Bourdieu's theory of habitus. Their stories, both told and performed, were captured to give depth and meaning to how being excluded from a rehabilitation programme impacts their reform and successful reintegration into society. Rather, without this success, a cycle of recidivism is lived.

Material and methods

The study offered an explorative and ethnographic lens to highlight the socially embedded experiences of ten female offenders regarding their experiences of punishment, rehabilitation (or lack thereof), reintegration, and recidivism. This approach aided in garnering first-hand knowledge

of their experiences and allowed for the meaning and sense-making of the narrative ethnography to add their experiences to the larger debate on rehabilitation and recidivism. The ten females were chosen purposively as they had to have committed a crime prior to their current sentence and were not engaging in rehabilitative programmes. As female offers only constitute three percent of the correctional center population in South Africa and even less in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan, the sample was already limited (Department of Correctional Services, 2015). A sample of fourteen female offenders were given to the researcher by the Department of Correctional Services, however only ten from that sample were suited to the criteria.

The ethnographic study was conducted between 2021 and 2022 and made use of an embedded approach to explore and examine the female perception of punishment, rehabilitation and reintegration. The study made use of a semi-structured interview schedule to initiate the conversation. From here, follow-up questions were asked to garner additional information and reflections. These included:

1. What was your first encounter with crime?
2. Why do you think you committed the offence?
3. Why do you think you have committed a crime again?
4. What has your experience been like in the correctional facility?
5. What was it like when you were released back into your community?
6. What do your family think/feel about your criminal history?
7. What do you think may help reform your behaviour?

The thematic and inductive analysis focused on identifying key themes in each narrative and as such, sections of verbatim text were extracted from their original context and regrouped accordingly. During the data collection process, open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews, triaging observation, and conversations were used to build a comprehensive understanding, thus giving voice across the layers of social realities faced by the women. By taking on this approach, successful corrective patterns and reformative collaborations to encompass on a co-learning journey of multiple approaches may be achieved to gain a better understanding of the female offender. The themes that emerged from the preliminary data were:

1. Psychological wellbeing and spiritual care
2. Social work and care
3. Skills development

The study, making use of standard ethical considerations, was approved by both the Research Ethics Committee of University of Pretoria and the Department of Correctional Services in South Africa. A contract of consent was established with the participants which detailed issues of anonymity (pseudonyms have been used throughout the article to protect the identity of the participants), confidentiality, and the right to withdraw. This was established to further protect the participant from any form of re-victimisation or punishment.

Results

In South Africa, the Department of Correctional Services is responsible for offering and implementing needs-based programs to offenders, such as psychological services, social work services, health services, skills development, and spiritual care. However, these are not offered consistently, and most are offered by external professionals, volunteers or agencies dependent on external funding and support (Artz, Hoffman-Wanderer & Moult, 2012, p. 59). Further, the rehabilitative programmes are designed with men as their primary users, which ignores the

understanding that women have different needs compared to men. the fact that similar needs operate differently for men and women (Cann, 2006). Artz et al. (2012, p. 61) suggest "programmes need to be properly adapted – or designed from scratch – for women, using language and case studies that resonate with women's life experiences".

A major issue in the correctional facility is how to sustain any little to no rehabilitation efforts after the offender has been discharged as the female offenders' servings a short-term sentence do not have a Correctional Sentence Plan. Once released, offenders face multiple obstacles such as the need for employment, food, shelter, and psychological effects. This results in them having to 'invent' new ways of meeting these needs, which in turn may result in recidivism (Samuels, 2010, p. 3). The general findings suggested that these are the main obstacles to a successful reintegration into society. However, the challenge is further complicated by not having any tools to overcome the challenges, tools which may have been developed in a rehabilitation programme. One needs to ask whether this exclusion from rehabilitation programmes is hindering successful reintegration? The study hypothesizes that by being excluded from rehabilitation programmes female offenders are more likely to reoffend as they have been poorly equipped to deal with the unique challenges of their imprisonment statuses.

The ethnography followed the specific life stories of the ten female offenders who were excluded from rehabilitation programmes. This section explores the nature of rehabilitation and recidivism. In particular, it provides information on the female offenders' demographic profile, the nature of their offences, and narratives concerning their criminality and their lives. The women, all previous offenders who did not engage in rehabilitation programmes, were now currently serving a new short-term sentence at the North End Correctional Facility in Nelson Mandela Bay, South Africa. The discussion to follow speaks to their exclusion from rehabilitation and a possible link to their recidivism. Extracts from the interviews are used as a part of the ethnography and as a means of analysis. The analysis of these narratives allowed for the possible discerning variances and nuances of their own motivations regarding their reoffending. Framed this way, the article seeks understand the link between rehabilitation and recidivism, while similarly making a case that gender-sensitive rehabilitations matter and should be offered to all female offenders no matter the length of their sentence.

Psychological, social work, care, skills development and spiritual care

Shelly, a woman in her twenties from a township in Nelson Mandela Bay, has three children and lives with her extended relatives. As a repeat offender, Shelly has been convicted of theft, possession of drugs and solicitation since 2018. Shelly shared that her children suffer because she is never at home her convictions. She said it is stressful for her family, but there is no choice sometimes as her family needs the money and there is no way else to get an income. Shelly added,

I don't like coming back, because I know the community already shames me for what I do and now I will be condemned again. But all the time, I do my sentence and still I am hated. There is no help for us who go in and out of the prison. It is always a hard lesson and still I do not know how to change. Maybe, if they put me through one of those programmes, I can help my family better. I can help me better.

The participants suggested that is often feels like they are always on trial when they are released from their sentence. A trial of public opinion, becoming a target of stigma, discrimination and ridicule. The concept of rejection comes through as the community had already dismissed the participants before their life of crime, and now the participants continue to respond in a

dehumanising, non-empathetic way by withdrawing into themselves and reoffending. The offenders have not been equipped with a set of tools to effectively and lovingly deal with questions and concerns that they might have in relation to their reintroduction into society. This introduction is often described as a harsh reality with glaring community eyes and both a physical and emotional re-trial occurring daily, through being second guessed, continuous questioning, low levels of trust, possible exclusion from social groups, and other negative behaviour displayed from loved ones and the broader community. The sense of displacement is heightened creating a new normal in an old and familiar environment leading to confusion and unresolved emotions and behaviours i.e.: a fish out of water. Conversely, a psychosocial programme, opening an opportunity to consider themselves in relation to their previous crimes, their new status as a released criminal in the context of society they would have been, at the very least, might expose tools that will allow them to deal with these challenges, being able to self-regulate a form of containment, or get help. However, the female offenders experience a sense of loss and unknowing in how to be back at home and not reoffend. The women have no one to talk about their problems and experiences.

Another participant, Michelle, is a mid-forties woman from the Northern Suburbs (known gang area) in Nelson Mandela Bay. She currently lives with her grandmother and has not seen her children in six months which has been "traumatizing" for her. Michelle said she oftens takes drugs back and forth between the houses on her street. This is her fifth offense. Michelle expressed that being back home is "self-destructive", and that

My family and my children are the real victims of my crimes. Over the years, I have lost so much of my life and the lives of my children. Soon my sentence will be over, and I still feel like I cannot move forward. I will be forced to do these things again and I don't know how to change it. It's stressful coming in her but it is even more stressful out there, I am out on my own. Who else will look after my family. Sometimes you just don't have any other option. The gangsters sometimes support us more than the government.

A deep sense of detachment is felt by the participants. The emotion used to express time and activity lost is displayed in the inability to regain moments with loved ones, with their children. There is an examination of the conscience and a possible family breakdown through abandonment. The process of resocialisation cannot be disregarded in a number of social strata within the offenders' holistic ecosystem of life. With this, how to mother an older child with the world view that the parent is a criminal and a challenge for society will require some form of therapy for the child and the former offender. Offenders are removed from societal structures leaving behind many consequences, the same when the offender is placed back into those structural groups. A new set of consequences with historical complexities will need to be unpacked and worked through by all involved, particularly those who have been impacted. Although the participant expresses pain over not being there for their children, their need for survival is greater and without having the knowledge of how to overcome the challenges, the learnt criminal behaviours may re-present themselves.

There is no support for us now out here. We get left alone. You must know in there we are a bubble. And the minute we out nothing is guaranteed. And then we find ourselves here again. My community is dangerous and now I am a criminal. How do I move forward? How do I forgive myself? How can anyone forgive me? What if I fail and steal again? And then it just spirals out of control.

The participants highlighted the reality of living without financial, medical, and physical support where day to day life is a struggle. There are new risks and elements that may force the women to test their willpower or reoffend. This scenario might not play out if the women were

included in supportive rehabilitative measures. When the offender is incarcerated, many self-regulating tools are taken away, their thinking is therefore outsourced. When the offender is released back into society she is required to automatically 'switch on' her self-regulating tools of both personal and public interfaces. The psychological impact that this has on the offender is vast and will be deepened if there is no hand holding process towards re-introduction into society. Basic needs are often questioned as if it is the first time this adult is experiencing it. This coupled with the responsibilities of other needs in society compound the psychological depth of the unknown and despair. A resocialisation process underpinned by a personal mastery approach through a mindfulness lens could assist the offender to consider the multiple complexities that she will face when going back home. The unblocking of expecting the past and the ability to forgive oneself has to be facilitated by professionals or can both guide and contain the reactional outpouring of emotion and possible downward spiralling. This cathartic moment is a pivotal breakthrough moment that can act as a catalyst for personal transformation and change. Transformation at multiple levels within a head to heart connection.

The next participant, Ellie, is a female in her twenties. Her father is deceased, and her mother could not financially support the family. Ellie has committed multiple crimes such as robbery and hijacking in the past 2 years. She states that now,

I'm trying to find work now but it's right there on my CV. I have a criminal record. Doors are closed and how can I change that? But I need stability.

The habitus ecosystem socialises the female offender to focus one getting back on track. This situates the women with a difficult task of transitioning into an expanded ecosystem with other stakeholders as a breadwinner. A resocialisation programme leading towards a change mindset will allow the offender to think of positive sets of skills to enable financial, spiritual, and emotional growth. The absence of a new set of skills will automatically allow the offender to revert to the previous negative skill set, entrenching it as the default. The habit of continuing with new skills becomes common place and the norm and with repetition will create meaning making and positive behaviour traits, to successfully reintegrate back into society. The above discuss alludes to the fact that rehabilitation needs to be available to all females entering the penal and corrective system and that it needs to focus on empowering women as decision makers capable of acquiring competence in areas such as motherhood, education, and skills development. These could be some enabling conditions that might successful reintegration one the sentence is serves and provides measures to avoid risk-taking criminal behaviours.

Discussion

Given the vast amount of literature on crime, criminal behaviour and related discussions on the role of anger and psychological trauma, as well as the role of psychological anthropology in analyses of crime and deviant behaviour, it has been challenging to identify a suitably unifying theoretical framework to analyse female criminality and the link between short-term sentences and recidivism. However, Bourdieu's (2005; 2008; 2014) theory of habitus, though wide in frame, offers a sufficiently inclusive but also meaningful analytical tool. Bourdieu draws attention to the nature of social relations, the role of domination and the skillfulness of 'agents' (perpetrators who attempt to avoid detection and possible deception). Bourdieu's theory of habitus allows a lens to analyse more deeply and to socially situate criminality and recidivism (Caputo-Levine, 2013; Dandoy, 2015; Deering, 2011; Fleetwood, 2014; Fraser & Atkinson, 2014; Ilan, 2013; McNeill, Burns & Halliday, 2009).

Bourdieu's theory of habitus often used in criminology to explicate subcultures, but up to now has not really been utilized to analyse the complex lived experience of female criminality. Bourdieu proposes that the concepts of habitus, field theory and methods (multiple correspondence analysis, discursive interviewing and participant observation) are important in the preoccupation of social phenomena related to the immediate concerns of criminology, such as inequality, the state, embodiment and social domination (Shammas, 2017). He further argues that to understand interactions between individuals or to explain a social phenomenon, it is necessary to examine the social space in which interactions, transactions and events occurred (Bourdieu 2005, p. 148). This theory suggests that the social world is comprised of a series of autonomous fields of action (immanent, internal logic) which are interconnected with agents moving between the fields and competing for positions and prizes (All human beings have multiple, constituted habitus and respond either as agents or subjects in the contexts in which they find themselves). Accordingly, he views the fields as contested and influenced by ever-evolving cultural behaviour in any given space (Shammas & Sandberg, 2015). The fields influence agents, shaping and modifying their character as they pass through the fields.

Central to Bourdieu's theory is the concept of habitus, which is a learnt system of preferences based on strong cognitive structures that are produced by historical and social conditions (Shammas & Sandberg, 2015). The habitus helps to refine the homogenizing frame of earlier adherents to the school of culture and personality. It provides space for individuality, indicating the shifting context for social contestation, social prestige and sense of belonging once one's skills have been homed in the context. Individuals are transformed and rendered sociable by the habitus which they occupy, and which informs their identity. Given the frame of 'habitus', it is possible then to argue (and thereby make space for both Freudian and constructivist theories) that female offenders have at one point, or another had their habitus disrupted.

The correctional environment in South Africa is also socially and historically constructed (under apartheid and post-apartheid) by the politics and the economics of class and race. The ethnographic research in the context amongst the female offenders reveals that there is a habitus there, one that is hierarchical, systematised and aligned with the duration of the sentence. This system is replete with linguistic discourses and discursive actions. This was especially found in the rehabilitation programmes, yet the female offenders who were serving short-term sentence were excluded from this habitus that emphasises and demands demonstration of control, power and will, without which may lead back to the cycle of crime. Therefore, it is important to understand this culturally influenced habitus and how it can contribute to understanding the link between short-term sentences and recidivism (Hall & Amaya, 2010). This is in line with the views of Bourdieu and the habitus, as female offenders who have been released from a short-term sentence and as a result did not engage in any rehabilitative programme may re-engage in criminal activities for the sake of their survival. Bourdieu establishes an indirect causal link between positions in social space and practices (engaging with rehabilitative systems) by means of the socially constituted correctional and penal system. Honour and dignity are challenged every day in the lives of these female offenders and that the few opportunities available to them often lead them back to a life of crime (Jensen, 2008:9).

The concept of habitus considers how cultural and socioeconomic factors such as poverty, unemployment, class and gender interact at the individual level and group level to shape behaviours (Coomber & Moyle, 2014). The habitus of the rehabilitative strategy is aimed at influencing motives and behaviour. Sampson and Laub (2003) have indicated that rehabilitation is only successful if combined with personal agency and the will to desist, yet Du Toit (2004) states

that as far as rehabilitation is concerned, exclusion impacts negatively on the ability of offenders to resist crime and engage critically within society. Additionally, Lauger (2014, p. 182) indicates, without these rehabilitative strategies further personal encounters with violence creates a street culture (habitus culture) that can reproduce common cultural interpretations of survival to organised crime (Ilan, 2015) as the experiences of the female offenders back into society communicate needs over societal norm. The theory attempts to highlight that female offenders (agents) create strategies suited to their needs and as a result, the habitus becomes a means to objectifying social structure at individual subjective levels. This is the "…silent modes, almost unconscious, of cultural/social domination occurring in the daily social habits, maintained over the conscious subjects in order to reveal the dynamics of power relations in social life" (Nicolaescu, 2010). Here, a symbolic violence imposes on the categories of thought and perception (which might be gained from a rehabilitation programme) perpetuates the conscious strategies to accumulate wealth or power. Yet, due to the exclusion from rehabilitation programmes, the female offenders encounter symbolic violence as the non-recognition of the control of consciousness and will in the habitus (ie: survival over moral good). That is, an actor (the female offender who has not engaged in any rehabilitative programme) moving in a non-social habitus may reoffend and violate social definitions because of the lack of self-control and the incapacity to hold personal impulses in check.

Ultimately, Bourdieu allows for an original conceptual understanding of female criminality anchored in the concepts of habitus and field. These concepts designate the durable yet transposable dispositions of female offenders who, although they judge and act in the field, are exposed to social conditioning (internalized by reformative measures). This means that the female offenders share experiences with others in their habitus (common matrix in the correctional facility). the concept of habitus, Bourdieu sees the fields as places of tough and infinite competition, where the specific differences of social power and domination can come into play. On one hand, female offenders who have engaged in reformative programmes may re-experience these similar realities as now controlled in creating, maintaining and altering their taxonomies through practice (Henrich, 2011). The benefit of rehabilitative programmes, considering a habitus lens, sees those who engage sharing similar values, visions, norms, working language, systems, symbols, beliefs and habits. They have collective behaviours and assumptions that are continuously expressed (but also sometimes contested) by new members (Mkhize, 2016, p. 13). This expresses a way of life with shared beliefs and expectations within the programme. Bourdieu's concept of habitus has provided new interpretations of socialisation once a female offender has been released from the correctional facility, as on the other hand, being excluded from a rehabilitation programme has made this tougher for the female offenders as they are still ill-equipped to successfully re-integrate into their fields and may turn back to crime as a supportive measure.

Conclusion

Although female offenders represent a small proportion of offenders, not only within South Africa but also globally, little is known about their experiences in a correctional centre and rehabilitation programmes as policy has to date been based on the male offender experience. The study confirms that there is a link that exists between exclusionary reform practises and recidivism and suggests that gender-sensitive rehabilitations programmes are necessary and imperative for female offenders and desistance. That is, by investigating female offenders' unique standing and

the implications for a gendered rehabilitation policy and practice, the study makes a point for a reformed policy respond to not only a gender sensitive system, but one that is also inclusive and available to all female offenders. This is because, reintegration is difficult and challenging for many female offenders because they simultaneously face a variety of challenges which may affect their adjustment to life outside the correctional facility and maintain their reformative behaviours. Without being equipped to deal with these challenges, a great risk of recidivism for female offenders arises.

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ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, STRESS, AND COPING STRATEGIES, IN ROMANIAN STUDENTS AFTER THE OUTBREAK OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Mihaela LUNGU (1), Cornelia RADA (2), Dorina NIJLOVEANU (3), Albert VAMANU (4)

(1) Argeș County Centre for Educational Resources and Assistance, Romania. E-mail: maylla_lungu@yahoo.com
(2) "Francisc I. Rainer" Institute of Anthropology, Romanian Academy. E-mail: corneliarada@yahoo.com
(3) Department of Applied Psychology and Psychotherapy, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest, Romania, E-mail: ndorinam@yahoo.com
(4) Social, Genetic & Developmental Psychiatry Centre, Department of Basic and Clinical Neuroscience at King's College London, Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience. Neurodegenerative Diseases Research. E-mail: albert.vamanu@kcl.ac.uk

Address correspondence to: Mihaela LUNGU, Camil Petrescu, No. 5, Ap. 1, Pitești, 110318, Romania. Ph.: +40-751-072-206; E-mail: maylla_lungu@yahoo.com

Abstract

Objectives. The outbreak of the SarsCov-2 virus pandemic in March 2020, produced essential changes in the way of life for students in different countries. Each person has developed their own personal coping systems to adapt to the times. The purpose was to assess the magnitude of impact produced in behavioral and emotional life dimensions at the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown.
Material and methods. Collecting data was based on a comprehensive online questionnaire, addressed to 19-25 years old, master's, and bachelor's students in Romania. The questionnaire includes standard psychological evaluation tools such as Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scales, DASS – 21R, Cognitive-Emotional Coping Assessment Questionnaire (CERQ), and Strategic Approaches to Coping Scale (SACS), but also a series of demographic indicators. Statistic analyse was based on ANOVA, Levene Test, T-Test, and Pearson Correlations.
Results. The results revealed some differences between coping strategies male participants would choose, and those preferred by female participants, and small variances between age groups. The most commonly found coping strategy was social support. Maladaptive and passive coping strategies positively correlated to all mental health indicators. Self-blame (p<.001), rumination, catastrophizing (p<.001), and blaming others correlate positively with all DASS-21R subscales, depression, anxiety, and stress as well. Positive refocus negatively correlated to depression (p=.020), anxiety (p=.009), and stress (p=.004).
Conclusions. At the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown most of the participants have chosen pro-social coping strategies. The impact of the pandemic on Romanian students was rather mild. Active coping strategies predict more adaptive behavior and feelings. The findings of the current study can be expanded (to some extent) to non-pandemic situations also.

Keywords: SarsCov2 pandemic, coping, depression, anxiety, stress.

Introduction

The use of coping mechanisms by young people is a current research topic, which already gathers several dozen studies in the last ten years. Various university centers have felt the need to identify ways to increase academic performance and perceived student well-being. High academic performance, in relation to a directly proportional state of well-being is considered a predictor of professional, academic, and personal success in later adulthood. A few studies that have addressed the variability of coping mechanisms in various situations of depression, anxiety, and stress are in the following.

Studying the prevalence of stress and anxiety among students aged 18-25 using 25 questions, Sarbeen and Jayaraj (2017) collected about 100 responses, based on which they concluded that the contemporary young population was more exposed to stress and anxiety due to competitiveness social. They identified as generating factors of depression, anxiety, and stress, several emotional components such as the feeling of incompetence, the lack of motivation to learn, or the difficulty of academic tasks. In another study, suicidal ideation was also identified in some of the students (Pawlaczyk, et.al. 2020).

In 2012 (Mahmoud, et. al.) published a study on the relationship between depression, anxiety, and stress on the one hand and coping mechanisms in students on the other. 508 students at a university in the United States of America responded by e-mail, assuming implicit (passive) consent, after 1700 requests to complete a questionnaire, accompanied by explanations of consent to participate, were sent. Based on the application of the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scales (DASS-21), the authors found that at least a quarter of the students was experiencing symptoms of depression, anxiety, or stress. Patias and colleagues (2021), applying to a group of 503 students the Inventory of Coping Strategies adapted for Brazil and the DASS-21, concluded that at younger ages acceptance of responsibility and escape are used more as coping strategies. Suggesting the existence of a cognitive growth effect associated with age, which allows the emergence of strategies considered adaptive, such as accepting responsibility.

Using the same instrument in a comparative study conducted on first-year medical students, 204 Polish and 101 English (127 male, 176 female), Pawlaczyk et al. (2020) found that in the case of Polish students, the intensity of depression, anxiety, and stress was significantly higher during the exam period compared to study periods, which was not noted in the English group. This was related to the age and life experience of the students, with the English reporting completion of various stages of university studies before enrolling in medicine and an average age of 24, while the Poles enrolled immediately after high school and the average age of the batch was 20 years.

Following research conducted between September 14 and October 19, 2020, on a sample of 1224 Brazilian students aged at least 18 years, to analyze the relationships between depression, anxiety, stress, and coping strategies, mental well-being, and satisfaction with life, Lopes and Nihei (2021) noted the high prevalence of symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. The authors also concluded that the mental health of Brazilian students was affected by the epidemiological evolution, but also the possibility that adaptive coping mechanisms had protective effects during the pandemic.

After a recent study on coping strategies with stress during the COVID-19 virus pandemic, carried out in Poland, on 577 students from 17 universities, the authors suggest the need to introduce mandatory courses in the university curriculum to develop students' coping skills to thus improving their skills, well-being, but also their resilience (Babicka-Wirkus, et. al., 2021). However, recommendations regarding the implementation of programs and strategies for student

support were made even in the 2000s (Apud. Mahmoud, et. al., 2012). Also in 2021, Cohen-Scali and Erby found, following a critical analysis of specialized literature, that "Job losses, social isolation, the inability to engage in normal social relations, and massive uncertainty about the future can challenge feelings of continuity and coherence, but also the feeling of self-worth" (pp. 5).

Analyzing 24 articles from 14 countries to identify effective coping strategies used by medical students, Sattar et al (2022) found that the coping strategies most used by respondents were: seeking support (both social and emotional), active coping (assertive action), acceptance, avoidance, substance abuse, religious coping, and involvement in sports activities.

Considering the above and the difficult situation generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the present study aimed to identify the relationships between the values of symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress recorded by Romanian students and the coping strategies preferred by them to cope the situation.

Subject to this goal, the established research objectives were aimed at: identifying the coping strategies preferred by students; exploring the relationships between behavioral coping strategies and the types of cognitive-emotional coping adopted by students; exploring the relationships between anxiety, depression, stress, and preferred coping mechanisms.

Material and methods

Sample and tools used

The research target group was represented by 210 students and master's students enrolled in Romanian universities in the academic year 2019-2020, aged between 18 and 25 years of age.

The data were collected in May - July 2020, after the triggering of the restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, through the establishment of the state of emergency in Romania on March 11, 2020. During that period, university studies were carried out online. Students learned online, starting with the Decree of the President of Romania, number 195 of March 16, 2020 (Decree, 2020, a), followed by the Decree of the President of Romania, number 240 of April 14, 2020 (Decree, 2020, b) and a series of legislative acts.

The study was carried out based on a set of questionnaires composed of an omnibus questionnaire with 4 sections: demographic information, information on sexual activity, information on alcohol consumption, and a section on information on physical movement, an international standardized survey test of alcohol consumption. At the same time, 4 psychological assessment tools licensed and validated on the Romanian population were used.

To achieve the objectives of this work, the data obtained from the following tools will be analyzed.

Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scales (Lovibond, and Lovibond, 1995), DASS – 21R validated on the Romanian population (Perțe, coord. Albu, 2011). The instrument is a compact one, containing 21 items, equally structured for each of the undesirable psychological factors depression, anxiety, and stress.

Cognitive-Emotional Coping Evaluation Questionnaire (CERQ), an instrument that is validated on the Romanian population (Garnefski, et.al., 2002). The questionnaire is composed of 9 scales, of which 5 designate types of emotional coping considered adaptive: acceptance, positive refocusing, refocusing on planning, positive reappraisal, and putting into perspective. The other 4

scales include items referring to types of cognitive-emotional coping considered maladaptive (Bandadi, et. al., 2019).

The strategic coping approach scale (SACS), was also validated on the Romanian population (Budău and Albu, 2010). The scale contains nine subscales, one considered specific to the active attitude, assertive action, one specific to the passive avoidance attitude; three considered prosocial, social relating, seeking social support and cautious action, and two antisocial, antisocial action and aggressive action.

Collection procedure

To ensure a more balanced representation of the socio-geographical areas of Romania, collaboration agreements were made with several institutions of higher education in Romania. Through student connections, the research instrument and the informed consent form also reached students at universities other than those with which specific agreements were signed in this regard. Answers were collected from students enrolled in specializations in the fields of Education Sciences, Psychology, Sociology, Theology and Social Work, Economics, Physical Education and Sports, Letters, Geography, History, Biology, Media, Engineering, Art, Order and Defense, Political Science, and International Relations. Answers from students in Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Sibiu, Brașov, Pitesti, Iași, Constanța, and Targoviste were processed. The data processed in this study were collected between May 10, 2020, and June 11, 2020.

The set of questionnaires was sent to the students through the coordinating teachers using an editable .pdf format. After completion, the participants sent them to coordinators involved in the collection. To preserve complete anonymity, each questionnaire received a code.

Ethical standards

The study complies with European and national standards for informing participants and processing data in each of the research stages. This fact is confirmed by certificate No. 136/ 11.11.2020, which certifies the approval of the Ethics Committee of the "Constantin Rădulescu-Motru" Institute of Philosophy and Psychology, within the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, Romania, on 03.12.2019. The consent was issued based on the research documents, the collection instrument, and the informed consent form. The informed consent form was assumed by each of the research participants by voluntarily submitting the answers.

Statistical methods

Data were entered manually using the statistical analysis software SPSS 27 (IBM Corp. 2020). Initial processing generated a range of descriptive data about the study sample and participant response. Comparative analyses were then run for the response categories of each variable. Subsequently, analyses were carried out regarding the significance of the variance between the response categories (ANOVA, Levene's Test, and T-Test) on the coping scales according to the socio-demographic items. In the last step, bivariate Pearson correlation analyses were run.

Hypotheses

The following working hypotheses were issued:
1. during the period of restrictions, the choice of maladaptive and passive coping strategies prevails.
2. there are statistically significant relationships between the preferred coping methods and the values of the psychological factors: stress, anxiety, and depression.
3. there are statistically significant relationships between the types of emotional coping and those of behavioral coping adopted.

The verification of the proposed hypotheses was achieved by addressing some research questions such as: What is the statistical significance of the homogeneity of the variance between the response groups to the socio-demographic items, for each subscale of the coping assessment scales (CERQ and SACS)? What is the relationship between the coping methods preferred by students in Romania and the stress perceived by them? How does declared anxiety correlate with the types of coping preferred by Romanian students? How do the categories of emotional coping relate to those of cognitive-behavioral coping in Romanian students?

Results

Internal consistency of collection instruments

A good and very good internal consistency of over 0.70 was found for all subscales of the Cognitive Emotional Coping Questionnaire (CERQ), four of the nine having coefficients even above 0.80. The resulting values are very close to those calculated in the tool's validation study on the Romanian population, rumination even surpassing them. The only subscale whose Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated below the value of 0.70 is catastrophizing, but its value of 0.68 is also very close to the standard. The internal consistency of the subscales of the Strategic Approach to Coping Scale (SACS) turned out to be very good, for five of the nine scales, the coefficient calculated is higher than the coefficient calculated in the validation study of the scale on the Romanian population. Only one scale obtained a coefficient below 0.70, Aggressive action. All the others have a coefficient above 0.73, two of them even above 0.80.

To find out if the effect size is statistically significant, the Levene's test and the t-test were run. Most of the results were not statistically significant. However, values of the p coefficient were recorded, below the significance threshold of 0.05 for the self-blame subscale (CERQ) depending on the environment of origin, for the prudent action and social relations subscale (SACS) depending on the level of education. Table 1 shows the significant results obtained from Levene's tests and the t-test.

Table 1

Statistically significant results following analysis of variance

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
										Lower	Upper
CERQ_ Self-blame	Equal variances assumed	10,24	,002	-2,41	208	,017	-,27	,11		-,50	-,05
(environment of origin)	Equal variances not assumed			-2,21	110,46	,029	-,27	,12		-,52	-,02
SACS_Cautious_action (study level)	Equal variances assumed	4,49	,03	-1,45	208	,14	-,25	,17		-,60	,09
	Equal variances not assumed			-1,96	26,24	,06	-,25	,13		-,52	,01
SACS_Social_networking (study level)	Equal variances assumed	4,29	,03	-1,35	208	,17	-,24	,17		-,59	,10
	Equal variances not assumed			-1,91	27,30	,06	-,24	,12		-,50	,01

Running an ANOVA analysis of variance yielded only two statistically significant values. These represent the importance of variation in responses between religious affiliation groups in relation to the self-blame subscale (CERQ) and the Aggressive Action subscale (SACS).

For the scores obtained on all other subscales of the coping strategies assessment tools, depending on the socio-demographic variables, the analysis of the variance of the scores showed rather a homogeneity.

The basic structure of the sample

210 participants aged between 18-25 years were registered, the average being 21.07 years, with a standard deviation of 1.633. The usefulness of constructing age categories was found, in table 2 the distribution of respondents according to several demographic variables is briefly described.

Table 2

Distribution of participants by age, gender, marital status, residence, and level of education

Socio-demographic variables	N	%
Age groups		
18-21	146	69.5
22-25	64	30.5
Gender groups		
Male	48	22.9
Female	162	77.1
Marital status		
Married	6	2.9
Not married	183	87.1
Consensual union and cohabitation for over a year	21	10
Residence		
Urban	136	64.8
Rural	67	31.9
Study level (evolving at the time of data collection)		
Bachelor	190	90.5
Masters	17	8.1
Bachelor & Masters	2	1

Having into consideration the geographical area of the university where the respondents studied: 54 (25.71%) were enrolled in the Central Zone of the country (Brașov, Mediaș, Tg Mureș, Sibiu), in Bucharest and Ilfov there were 35 (16.66%), in the East (Iași, Neamț, Galati, Brăila) 6 (2.85%), in the South (Pitești, Târgoviște, Călărași) 11 (5.23%) respondents, and in the West (Cluj-Napoca, Oradea, Bistrita) 104 (49.52%).

Most of the study participants were enrolled in socio-humanities faculties (N=124; 59%), followed by those from engineering sciences (N=20; 9.5%), economic sciences (N=13; 6, 2%),

biological or biomedical sciences (N=12; 5.7%), sport and physical education science (N=9; 4.3%), etc.

Descriptive statistics revealed, in addition to the demographic data of the sample, presented above, information regarding the structure of the responses for each of the coping methods preferred by the respondents.

Identifying the coping strategies preferred by students during the restrictions imposed by the state of emergency.

Seeking to identify the most used coping strategies in the period immediately following the triggering of the state of emergency, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was found that the highest average scores were recorded in the positive reappraisal and refocusing on planning subscales of the Assessment Questionnaire Cognitive-Emotional Coping (CERQ) and assertive action within the Strategic Coping Approach Scale (SACS).

Exploring the relationships between age, gender, background, and preferred coping mechanisms, varied results emerged, some of them with high statistical significance.

Age

For most of the subscales of the coping questionnaires, the results did not reveal differences between the age groups, neither in terms of the minimum or maximum value nor in terms of the mean of the recorded scores. In the subscales of behavioral coping, however, responses with a lower minimum score were observed for Social Networking and Seeking Social Support, where the minimum value was registered in the 18-21 age category, with a significant difference compared to the minimum value registered in the category aged 22-25 years. In the subscales: Self-blame, Rumination, and Putting into perspective, in the case of cognitive-emotional coping, Cautious action, and Aggressive action as behavioral modalities, the participants in the 18-21 age category recorded significantly lower minimum scores than the older age category. For more details, see table 3.

Table 3

Mean scores on coping mechanisms by age

	Descriptive CERQ					95% Average confidence interval			
	Age	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Err.	Low Bound	Upper Bound	Min	Max
Self-blame	19-21	146	11.16	3.175	,263	10.64	11.68	4	20
	22-25	64	10,92	3.238	,405	10.11	11.73	5	18
Acceptance	19-21	146	13.77	3.229	,267	13.25	14.30	7	20

Descriptive CERQ					95% Average confidence interval				
	22-25	64	13,34	3.414	,427	12.49	14.20	6	20
Rumination	19-21	146	13,99	3.834	,317	13.37	14.62	5	20
	22-25	64	13,20	4.339	,542	12.12	14.29	6	20
Pozitive refocus	19-21	146	11,60	3.830	,317	10.97	12.22	4	20
	22-25	64	11,73	3.776	,472	10.79	12.68	4	20
Refocus on planning	19-21	146	14,76	3.314	,274	14.22	15.30	6	20
	22-25	64	14,67	3.682	,460	13.75	15.59	6	20
Pozitive reevaluation	19-21	146	14,72	3.612	,299	14.13	15.31	6	20
	22-25	64	14,88	3.566	,446	13.98	15.77	6	20
Putting into perspective	19-21	146	13,01	3.666	,303	12.41	13.61	4	20
	22-25	64	13,41	3.702	,463	12.48	14.33	6	20
Catastrophizing	19-21	146	8,79	3.274	,271	8.25	9.32	4	19
	22-25	64	8,31	2.624	,328	7.66	8.97	4	15
Blaming others	19-21	146	8,23	2.811	,233	7.77	8.69	4	19
	22-25	64	7,95	3.278	,410	7.13	8.77	4	20
Assertive action	19-21	146	29.79	4.279	.354	29.09	30.49	20	41
	22-25	64	29.72	4.829	.604	28.51	30.92	19	41
Social networking	19-21	146	16.36	3.776	.313	15.75	16.98	6	25
	22-25	64	16.05	3.596	.450	15.15	16.95	9	25
Seeking social support	19-21	146	22.83	5.756	.476	21.89	23.77	7	35
	22-25	64	22.80	5.381	.673	21.45	24.14	13	35

Descriptive CERQ					95% Average confidence interval			
Cautious action	19-21	146	17.02	3.765	.312	16.40	17.64	7	25
	22-25	64	16.56	3.518	.440	15.68	17.44	9	25
Instinctive action	19-21	146	18.79	4.165	.344	18.11	19.47	8	30
	22-25	64	19.75	4.371	.546	18.65	20.84	8	28
Avoidance	19-21	146	14.39	4.291	.355	13.69	15.09	6	26
	22-25	64	14.54	4.305	.538	13.47	15.62	6	27
Indirect action	19-21	146	10.31	3.785	.313	9.69	10.93	4	20
	22-25	64	9.67	3.386	.423	8.83	10.52	4	20
Antisocial action	19-21	146	11.30	4.050	.335	10.63	11.96	5	23
	22-25	64	11.07	4.284	.535	10.00	12.14	5	25
Aggressive action	19-21	146	11.66	3.223	.267	11.14	12.19	5	22
	22-25	64	12.14	3.290	.411	11.32	12.96	6	19

Compared to the results used by the authors of the SACS calibration study, for the 18-40 age group, the means obtained by the respondents of the present study were very similar. They exceeded the difference of two points less than the benchmark scores: Assertive Action, Antisocial Action, and Aggressive Action, with a lower average in both age groups.

Gender - Male participants scored higher on self-blame, acceptance, planning re-focus, positive reappraisal, and other-blame, and girls scored higher on rumination, positive refocus, putting into perspective, and catastrophizing. As can be seen in Table 4, the results of the Cognitive-Emotional Coping Questionnaire (CERQ) show that male participants activated more coping mechanisms than female participants.

Table 4

Mean scores obtained on cognitive-emotional coping mechanisms according to gender

	Gender:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Self-blame	M	48	2.79	.76	.11
	F	162	2.76	.80	.06
Acceptance	M	48	3.42	.70	.10
	F	162	3.40	.85	.06
Rumination	M	48	3.25	.98	.14
	F	162	3.49	1.00	.07
Pozitive refocus	M	48	2.90	.77	.11
	F	162	2.91	.99	.07
Refocus on planning	M	48	3.73	.88	.12
	F	162	3.66	.84	.06
Pozitive reevaluation	M	48	3.77	.78	.11
	F	162	3.66	.92	.07
Putting into perspective	M	48	3.19	.78	.11
	F	162	3.30	.95	.07
Catastrophizing	M	48	2.10	.66	.09
	F	162	2.17	.80	.06
Blaming others	M	48	2.04	.67	.09
	F	162	2.03	.75	.05

Correlation of depression, stress anxiety and coping mechanisms

The relationships between the types of emotional coping and the mentioned psychological factors revealed that self-blame, rumination, catastrophizing, and blaming others correlate positively with all DASS-21R subscales. Depression correlated positively with self-blame, rumination, catastrophizing, and blaming others and negatively with positive refocusing. Stress correlated positively with self-blame, rumination, catastrophizing, and blaming others, and negatively with positive refocusing. Anxiety also correlated positively with self-blame, rumination, catastrophizing, and blaming others, and negatively with positive refocusing. Table 5 shows the results of the bivariate Pearson correlation analysis.

Table 5

Bivariate Correlations of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress with Preferred Ways of Emotional Coping (CERQ)

		DASS Depression	DASS Stress	DASS Anxiety
Self-blame	Pearson Correlation	,25**	,26**	,28**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000
Acceptance	Pearson Correlation	,07	-,00	,06
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,296	,943	,377
Rumination	Pearson Correlation	,23**	,19**	,24**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,001	,005	,000
Pozitive refocus	Pearson Correlation	-,16*	-,19**	-,18**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,020	,004	,009
Refocus on planning	Pearson Correlation	-,04	-,07	,00
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,516	,287	,974
Pozitive reevaluation	Pearson Correlation	-,07	-,11	-,08
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,280	,107	,238
Putting into perspective	Pearson Correlation	-,03	-,07	-,03
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,638	,257	,633
Catastrophizing	Pearson Correlation	,28**	,26**	,27**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000
Blaming others	Pearson Correlation	,14*	,14*	,14*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,033	,032	,040

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Analysis of behavioral coping preferences also revealed several results. Assertive action correlates negatively with depression and stress. Indirect action correlates positively with anxiety. Antisocial action correlates positively with stress and anxiety. Avoidance correlates positively with depression, stress, and anxiety. Table 6 numerically presents the bivariate correlations between psychological factors of depression, anxiety, and stress with the types of behavioral coping.

Table 6

Bivariate correlations of depression, stress, and anxiety with preferred behavioral coping modalities

SACS		DASS Depression	DASS Stress	DASS Anxiety
Assertive action	Pearson Correlation	-,15*	-,14*	-,11
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,024	,032	,100
Cautious action	Pearson Correlation	-,03	-,057	-,08
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,644	,410	,235
Indirect action	Pearson Correlation	,09	,13	,13*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,166	,057	,045
Social networking	Pearson Correlation	,06	,02	,06
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,345	,778	,359
Instinctive action	Pearson Correlation	,03	,03	,07
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,573	,638	,301
Antisocial action	Pearson Correlation	,12	,14*	,15*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,076	,041	,027
Seeking social support	Pearson Correlation	,06	-,00	,03
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,368	,963	,570
Evitare	Pearson Correlation	,22**	,19**	,21**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,001	,005	,002
Aggressive action	Pearson Correlation	-,01	,01	,05
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,863	,811	,438

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

For the interpretation of causal relationships, from the analysis of mediations, it was observed how maladaptive cognitive-emotional coping mediates the relationship between behavioral coping and undesirable psychological factors. The maladaptive coping subscales self-blame, rumination, and blaming others, on the one hand, mediate the relationships between anxiety, depression, and stress, on the other. Students with higher assertiveness scores experience

lower levels of depression and stress. The significant results of the mediation analysis reflecting the direct effects can be seen in table 7.

Table 7

Direct (unmediated) effects of SACS and DASS subscales on CERQ subscales

	Effect	se	T	p	Lower LCI	Upper LCI	c_ps	c_cs
Catastrophizing subscale								
Total effect of SACS_Ac of DASS_dep	-,1557	,0685	-2,2743	,0240	-,2906	-,0207	-,640	-,1558
Direct effect of SACS_Ac on DASS_dep	-,0969	,0680	-1,4246	,1558	-,2310	,0372	-,1643	-,0970
Rumination subscale								
Total effect of SACS_Ac of DASS_stress	-,1513	,0702	-2,1555	,0323	-,2897	-,0129	-,2505	-,1478
Direct effect of SACS_Ac on DASS_stress	-,2014	,0700	-2,8773	,0044	-,3394	,0634	-,3334	-,1967

Statistically significant indirect effects were also found in the subscales of the Cognitive-Emotional Coping Evaluation Questionnaire following the mediation analysis. The effect of assertive action through the mediation of depression on catastrophizing and through the mediation of stress on rumination generated statistically significant negative results. Students with higher assertiveness scores who also report higher levels of depression and stress report lower levels of maladaptive coping through catastrophizing and rumination. Table 8 reveals the statistically significant indirect effects.

Table 8

Mediated/indirect effects of SACS and DASS subscales on CERQ subscales

	Effect	BootSE	BootLowLCI	BootUppLCI
Catastrophizing subscale				
Indirect effect(s) of SACS_Ac on DASS_dep	-,0588	,0255	-,1145	-,0159
Partially standardized indirect effect(s) of SACS_Ac on DASS_dep	-,0997	,0413	-,1887	-,0279
Completely standardized indirect effect(s) of SACS_Ac on DASS_dep	-,0588	,0247	-,1112	-,0162

	Effect	BootSE	BootLowLCI	BootUppLCI
Rumination subscale				
Indirect effect(s) of SACS_Ac on DASS_stress	,0501	,0226	,0119	,0996
Partially standardized indirect effect(s) of SACS_Ac on DASS_stress	,0829	,0376	,0199	,1665
Completely standardized indirect effect(s) of SACS_Ac on DASS_stress	-,0489	,0216	,0118	,0958

Both SACS and CERQ coping strategies evaluation tools generated Cronbach coefficients with good and very good internal consistency, like the results obtained by Perțe (2010) and Budău and Albu (2010) when validating the tools.

Discussions
Three research objectives were established for the present study, which were achieved with specific results.

Sociodemographic

From the analysis of the data of the studied Romanian sample, according to age, there were few differences between the 18-21 years old category and the 22-25 years old category, contrary to the results found by Sheroun et al. (2020). The scores recorded in the types of coping are similar between the two age categories, as Freire and his collaborators (2016) found, in a sample of more than 1000 students in universities in Spain. In the Romanian sample, the exceptions are: Social relations and seeking social support, where younger respondents also recorded lower minimum scores. This shows the tendency towards autonomy and independence of young people upon entering university studies and perhaps increasing collaboration skills, and socialization in the next age stage.

A slight tendency of the respondents in the younger age category to choose less of a type of coping was also found in the present study for Self-blame, Rumination, and Putting into perspective, in the case of cognitive-emotional coping, Cautious action and Aggressive action as behavioral ways. The influence of age or the level of maturation can be explained by the fact that "autonomous, independent, self-confident people (…) most frequently resort to active coping strategies" (Budău & Albu, 2010, pp. 9). Another explanation could be the larger number of female respondents, it is known that men resort more often to active strategies, often doubled by aggression (Budău & Albu).

The analysis of the data by gender variable, of the sample of students from Romania, revealed that the male participants activated more types of coping, often from the sphere of adaptive and action coping, while the female participants activated fewer coping strategies, often maladaptive and passive. These results are different compared to those of the study conducted in India with students of the same age, in the same period (Sheroune, 2020).

As suggested by Höhne and his collaborators (2022), in the conclusions of the study on perceived stress and coping methods carried out on a group of students from Germany, similar in age and level of education to the one in Romania, the results become all the more valuable the

testing is repeated at time intervals, thus making it possible to compare the experiences of the subjects at different stages of the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Relationships between preferred coping methods and the values of psychological factors: stress, anxiety, and depression

      In the graphic representation in figure 1, the influences of maladaptive coping strategies on the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, in a positive sense, of growth were highlighted. Only statistically significant positive correlations are represented in the figure.

Figure 1.

Positive correlations between psychological factors anxiety, depression, stress, and preferred coping strategies
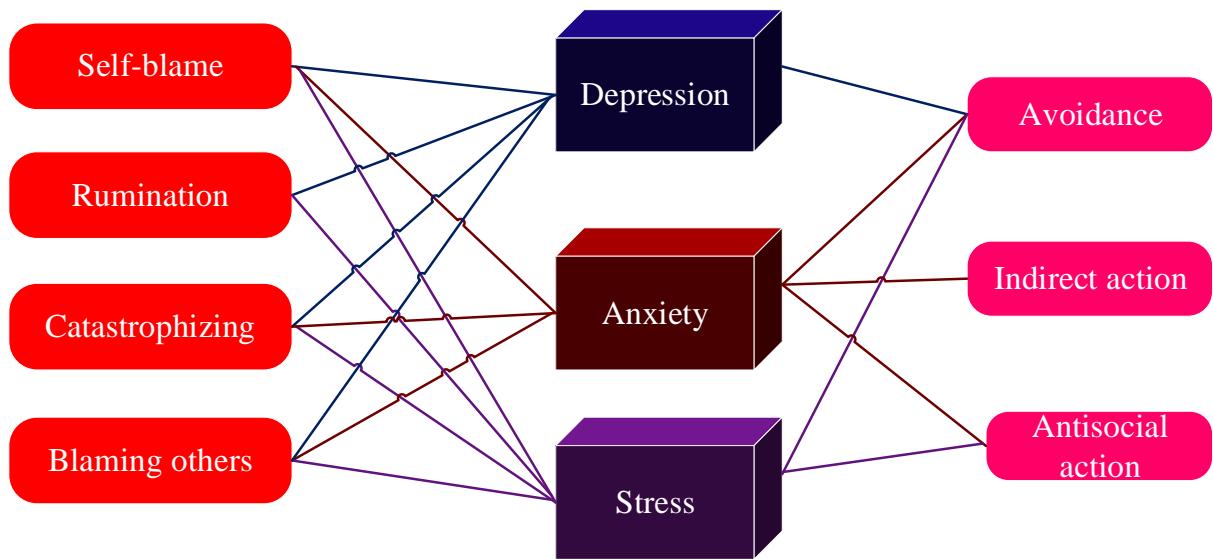
      Resulting from the same statistical analyses: depression and stress correlated negatively with Positive Refocusing and Assertive Action, while Anxiety correlated negatively with Positive Refocusing, but also with Rumination.

      By way of comparison, negative influences of preferred adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies on symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression are represented in Figure 2.

Figure 2.

Negative correlations between the psychological factors of anxiety, depression, stress, and coping strategies.

Similar to the results found by Xu and Huang (2022), the present study found mediations of coping types on stress, anxiety, and depression symptoms. Assertive action, even by mediating depression, is a significant negative predictor of catas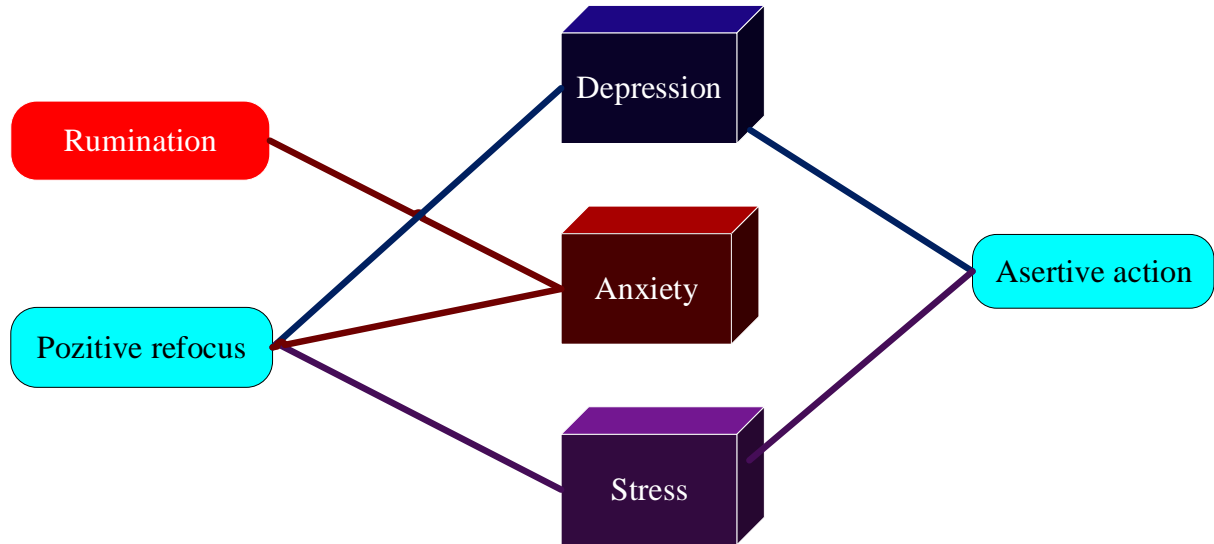trophizing. Likewise, assertive action, through stress, is a significant negative predictor of rumination. In the study conducted by Hussong and colleagues (2021), they found that adolescents with higher self-efficacy and active problem-focused coping reported moderate increases in mental health symptoms, while youth with passive and experience-focused coping reported exacerbated increases in symptoms of mental health conditions. Similar results were presented by Hsieh and colleagues (2021). Similarly, in the present study, it was found that to reduce the symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression, it is necessary to develop cognitive coping skills in the sphere of positive refocusing, and assertive actions, such as volunteering, playing sports, are suitable, etc., actions that also have an effect on educational performance, as noted by Rada (2017).

Exploring the relationships between anxiety, depression, stress, and preferred coping mechanisms in college students (19-25 years) also generated statistically relevant information. As in the study conducted by Patias et al (2021) the present research revealed positive but small correlations between some coping strategies and symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress, suggesting that they were not always the best choice. Self-blame, rumination, catastrophizing and blaming others correlated positively with depression, anxiety, and stress. This fact suggests, on the one hand, that students who presented high values regarding the mentioned psychological factors, also showed a tendency towards maladaptive types of emotional coping. On the other hand, changing the types of coping used could influence/reduce the values of perceived depression, anxiety, and stress.

As Schwander-Maire et al. (2022) also concluded from a parallel study in Portugal and Switzerland, the present study also revealed that the pandemic had a "minor-medium impact" on students' mental health.

Looking at behavioral coping strategies, it was found that there are positive correlations at least between two undesirable psychological factors, anxiety, and stress on the one hand, and antisocial and passive strategies on the other. At the same time, negative correlations also suggest the possibility that changing coping strategies with rather pro-social and active ones can generate effective adaptive effects.

Relationships between behavioral coping strategies and types of cognitive-emotional coping

Like the results obtained by Hu and his collaborators (2016) and in the sample studied, it was found that students used more often ways of cognitive adaptation such as refocusing on planning, but not positive refocusing or catastrophizing. Catastrophizing was among the least chosen coping methods in the present study. The result is like those of the study by Sattar and his colleagues (2022), with the specification that the coping strategies considered by them were not assessed with the same instruments, but with similar ones.

The highest average scores were recorded for the emotional coping subscales positive reappraisal and refocusing on planning, both subscales being classified as forms of adaptive coping within the Cognitive-Emotional Coping Evaluation Questionnaire (CERQ). The highest scores were also recorded for assertive action, the subscale representative of active behavioral coping within the strategic coping approach scale (SACS). Higher scores were recorded in all pro-social behavioral subscales, this result being like other studies that revealed for example that the well-being of students was obviously supported during the pandemic by the support of social connections, "only endorsement of social connection predicted important well-being outcomes" (Logel et. all, 2021, pp.19).

The results of the present study differ from the results reported for the Chinese student population, where mental engagement strategies were used rather than those based on social support (Nurunnabi, et. all, 2020). This difference in results can of course be due to both the cultural specificity and the different measures applied to combat the pandemic in each country.

Regarding the relationships between the types of emotional coping and those of strategic coping adopted by Romanian students, it was found that regardless of the types of cognitive-emotional coping manifested, the respondents sought social support, this variable correlating with all 9 subscales of the CERQ. The results are like those found by Zsido et al (2022). This fact can be explained by the fact that the responses were obtained at the beginning of the declaration of a state of emergency due to the epidemiological situation of the CORONAVIRUS-19 pandemic, one of the essential measures imposed was the restriction to interact socially directly.

The hypothesis according to which there are statistically significant relationships between the types of emotional coping and those of behavioral coping adopted, was confirmed. The results are a partial confirmation of the theory of the circumplex coping model proposed by Stanisławski (2019). Except for rumination, all maladaptive cognitive-emotional coping strategies (self-blame, catastrophizing, and other-blame) correlated positively with avoidance, suggesting that these types of reasoning rather generate passive behavioural tendencies. Students whose judgments show the presence of adaptive cognitive-emotional coping strategies rather display balanced (socially desirable) and constructive behavioural coping strategies. The results suggest that the sample of students from Romania most often chose social relations, the search for social support, prudent action, instinctive action, and aggressive action (considered also as spontaneous, reactive, dominant behaviour, with obvious tendencies to impose), but less often the action assertive, very rarely avoidance and indirect action, and almost never antisocial action.

Conclusions

The analysis of the data according to the age variable, generated similar results comparing the two categories 18-21 years and 22-25 years. The gender variable revealed noticeable differences, with girls sometimes preferring passive and maladaptive coping strategies, thus partially confirming the first working hypothesis, unlike boys who rather choose adaptive and active coping strategies, but even more numerically. This fact suggests the need for offers of varied activities for students, but also the possibility of directing therapeutic approaches and psychological counseling, in similar situations, relative to gender.

Regardless of the types of cognitive-emotional coping shown, the respondents sought social support. Except for rumination, all maladaptive cognitive-emotional coping strategies (self-blame, catastrophizing, and other-blame) correlated positively with avoidance, suggesting that these types of reasoning rather generate passive behavioral tendencies. The results lead to the idea that the social isolation imposed by the pandemic has affected young people's fundamental need for communication and interaction with peers. Stimulating social, group activities could create a healthier psychological environment for students, implicitly a better reaction to unforeseen events.

The stress perceived by students in Romania, in the initial stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, correlated positively with all the maladaptive cognitive-emotional coping subscales, thus highlighting the increase in the level of stress depending on the increase in the activation of maladaptive reasoning. The same phenomenon has been observed with anxiety and depression. The effect of a new and overwhelmingly impactful situation, such as the SarsCov-2 virus pandemic, could be prevented to a certain extent by introducing life skills development programs into the educational systems, which would develop social interaction skills, communication, awareness, and expression of emotions.

Among the behavioral coping strategies, avoidance correlated significantly positively with depression, anxiety, and stress, suggesting that passivity is not a constructive way of responding to stressors, and adopting it only increases the values of undesirable psychological factors. Antisocial action was also significantly positively correlated with anxiety and stress, showing a reciprocal influence in the sense of growth.

Correlating the results of the two coping questionnaires, it was found that most of the maladaptive cognitive-emotional coping strategies (with one exception) correlated positively with avoidance. Behavioral passivity is therefore closely related to maladaptive reasoning. Activation, but especially behavioral self-activation, developed as a life skill, could positively influence the development of future coping strategies.

Compared to other studies consulted as documentation, Romanian students chose effective coping methods at the beginning of the pandemic to keep their levels of stress, anxiety, and depression at slightly elevated levels. The results of the present research recommend the development of programs to reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress in students. Analyzing the results of the other mentioned studies, it can be stated that deeper and long-term effects could be obtained by introducing self-activation skills training programs into the personal development curriculum, starting from younger ages (puberty, adolescence) behavioral.

In the context of the beginning of the isolation imposed by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Romanian students mainly chose generally good coping mechanisms, but the effects of the increase in exposure to COVID-19 and the duration of isolation are to be considered in a future analysis.

Limitation

The main limitations of the study are represented by the small sample included in the study and the unbalanced representation of the participants in the structure by age, gender, marital status, residence, and level of education.

Acknowledgments

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CRIMINOGENIC THINKING AND PERSONALITY AT INMATES FROM ROMANIA

Maria - Miana DINA (1), Jose Manuel Rodriguez GOMEZ (2), Cornelia RADA (3)
All authors of article have contributed equally.

(1) National Administration of Penitentiaries, Directorate of Social Reintegration, E-mail: grebenar.miana@yahoo.com
(2) Guardia Civil de Madrid, Ministerio Del Interior, Espania, E-mail: pinodeloro@hotmail.com
(3)"Francisc I. Rainer" Anthropology Institute of the Romanian Academy, E-mail: corneliarada@yahoo.com

Address correspondence to: Maria - Miana Dina, National Administration of Penitentiaries, Directorate of Social Reintegration, Calea Floreasca, No.39, 1th Distinct, Bucharest, 023761, Romania, E-mail: grebenar.miana@yahoo.com

Abstract

Objective. The objective was to identify and analyze how criminogenic thinking and personality are involved in delinquency and crime in order to prevent criminal behavior.
Material and methods. Data were collected from 300 male inmates, with ages between 21 and 65, definitively sentenced and in custody in seven Romanian penitentiaries. An omnibus questionnaire and two psychological questionnaires were used: the Criminogenic Cognitions Scale and the CP5F Personality Questionnaire.
Results. Compared to the control group, the group of people deprived of liberty convicted of murder obtained a statistically significantly higher mean for the short-term planning subscale and lower for the extraversion, conscientiousness and emotional stability subscales. The variability of the score for the thinking pattern specific to short-term planning is due to 59% of the low conscientiousness score $F(148,149) = 9.32$, $p < .05$, and in turn the conscientiousness score is explained in proportion to 38% of the negative cognitive pattern score against authority $F(148, 149) = 5.79$, $p < .05$ and 33% of that of insensitivity to impact $F(148, 149) = 5.02$, $p < .05$. At the same time, the conscientiousness score explains 35% of the emotional stability score $F(148, 149) = 81.69$, $p < .01$.
Conclusions. The specialized intervention regarding social reintegration intended for this category of people requires a careful orientation towards assuming social norms, emotional balancing, adaptation in society, previewing the consequences and developing the ability to make long-term plans.

Keywords: murder, criminogenic cognition, personality traits, specific intervention.

Introduction

The situation of murders committed with intent in the last 20 years in Europe shows numerous fluctuations, a fact that determines that criminal justice and crime are topics of constant interest with the aim of developing and implementing strategic plans, regarding the reduction of these crimes.

If during the period 2008-2014, the data for murder committed with intent showed a considerable decrease, in 2015 there was a return. The total number registered in the European Union (excluding the Netherlands, the United Kingdom - England and Wales and the United Kingdom - Scotland) in 2015 was 4,528, 19.6% less than in 2008 (5,634), but with 4.3% higher than in 2014 (4,340). In 2018, there were approximately 3,993 intentional homicides recorded by the police in the European Union, which represents a 30% decrease compared to 2008. By reporting the data per 100,000 inhabitants, the highest figures were recorded in Latvia (5.2), Lithuania (3.5) and Estonia (1.9). With regard to intentional homicide, at the level of the European Union, a decrease in the average number of homicides can be observed in the period 2019-2020, compared to 2018, with the most significant decreases being recorded by countries such as the Czech Republic, Greece, Austria (Eurostat, 2018, 2020).

Also, in Romania, the situation in recent years has shown a slight decrease in terms of convictions for crimes of murder, qualified murder, especially serious murder, beatings or injuries causing death. Thus, if in 2019 the total number of final convictions for the aforementioned acts was 4,743, in 2020 were recorded 4,544 convictions and 4,519 in 2021 (Ministry of Justice, 2023). The same pattern was followed in 2022 as well, according to the information provided by the National Penitentiary Administration (2022).

The degree of social danger presented by murder is particularly high, because the deed affects the most important attribute of the person, life. The impact and consequences of a crime are always devastating, as it not only stimulates public fear but also causes pain to the victim's family (Van Gelder & De Vries, 2012). Through research on the phenomenology of the criminal act, specialized literature has identified several causal criminogenic factors, including: social environment of belonging, family climate, genetic basis, psychological characteristics (Farrington, 2020; Witt, Lichtenstein, & Fazel, 2015; Farrington, 2015; Portnoy, Chen, & Raine, 2013; Ward et al., 2010).

The study of criminology attests that personality traits are at least as important a factor as the environmental factor (Kamaluddin, Shariff, Othman, Ismail, & Saat, 2015), personality profiles becoming a very useful tool in the process of understanding and preventing criminal behavior. Personality inventories such as the Big Five model (Clark, Boccaccini, Caillouet, & Chaplin, 2007), the Eynseck three-factor model (Boduszek, Shevlin, Adamson, & Hyland, 2013) describe both the general personality traits of individuals without criminal manifestations and and those with criminal behavior.

The correlation between personality and criminal behavior has been widely analyzed in the specialized literature (Eysenck, 1977; Preston, Watts, Anestis, & Lilienfeld, 2018) and there is evidence that the identification of characteristic features contributes considerably both to the identification of predispositions for criminality and to the prevention of criminal behavior (Van Gelder & De Vries, 2012). At the same time, theorists suggest that personality influences the decision-making process in committing the criminal act, so that in situations of criminal risk, depending on the personality of each person, there may be rational choices of deterrence or irrational choices of cost-benefit (Becker, 1968; Hirtenlehner, Pauwels, & Mesko, 2014).

Skeem, Winter, Kennealy, Louden, and Tatar (2014) suggest that in addition to personality variables, criminogenic cognition is a risk factor in current criminology theory. Criminal thinking used to justify and rationalize one's behavior is often found in criminal behavior. Walters (2012) after conducting a meta-analysis on criminal thinking concluded that it is closely related to criminal identity and also influences the risk of criminal recidivism. Starting from the hypothesis that the inclusion of a measure of knowledge of criminal thinking can increase the prediction of criminal recidivism, various criminogenic cognitive styles have been identified, which can explain the individual's involvement in criminal behavior. It is about certain cognitive errors, the inability to be aware of the effects of the act, an unrealistic self-image, a poor ability to differentiate between needs and desires and a decision-making process based more on emotion than on reason (Walters, 2020).

A possible explanation in this sense can be the fact that the criminal invokes various aspects to motivate his deed, including stating that he was forced by certain unfavorable circumstances to commit it (Walters, 2002). Another explanation can be the erroneous interpretation of the surrounding situations in which the individual finds himself, most of the time considering that everything is a threat to his safety (Walters, 2020). Lipsey, Landenberger and Wilson (2007) talk about the position of victim in which the aggressor transposes himself, arguing his act through an attitude of injustice, feelings of social inequality and discrimination. Another unproductive coping strategy observed in incarcerated women who killed their husband or partner is the use of primitive and ineffective coping strategies when faced with negative situations (Saucan, Micle, Liiceanu, & Oancea, 2011).

Salakhova et al. (2016) believe that in order to understand in depth the phenomenology of the criminal act, a complex analysis is necessary, an integrative model that allows the description of criminal decisions, by identifying the mechanisms underlying them.

Therefore, an analysis of the criminogenic thinking pattern and personality traits of people convicted of murder represents an opportunity to deepen the knowledge of the phenomenon, for the purpose of prevention.

Material and methods

This is a quantitative cross-sectional study, in which information on the populations of two groups was analyzed and compared, without manipulating the variables in the study environment. The data collection was carried out between August 2021 and July 2022. The questionnaires were applied in seven penitentiary units subordinated to the National Administration of Penitentiaries in Romania, as follows: Arad Penitentiary (55 questionnaires), Bistrița Penitentiary (30 questionnaires), Botoșani Penitentiary (28 questionnaires), Craiova Penitentiary (42 questionnaires), Mărgineni Penitentiary (41 questionnaires), Ploiești Penitentiary (57 questionnaires), Vaslui Penitentiary (47 questionnaires). Considering the dynamics specific to the penitentiary environment, there were temporal intervals in which the instruments were applied at the same time, in several penitentiary units.

The enforcement activity was carried out with the help of psychologists employed at the level of penitentiary units because, taking into account the epidemiological situation, namely the measures taken at national and international level for the prevention and control of SARS-COV-2 infection in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Administration The National Board of Penitentiaries restricted the physical presence within the subordinate units. Therefore, the

necessary materials were sent in physical format and the telephone dialogue was maintained with the specialists designated for the application of questionnaires within the penitentiary units.

Participants

The data from 300 male prisoners, aged between 21 and 65 years, definitively sentenced between 1 and 35 years were used.

The 300 participants represented two distinct groups, as follows: group A consisted of 150 subjects convicted of murder (attempted murder, murder, serious murder, particularly serious murder, aggravated murder, aggravated murder alleged perpetrator, complicity to murder qualified, qualified murder and robbery, blows causing death), aged between 21 and 65 years and batch B consisting of 150 subjects convicted for acts that are not part of the category of crimes against the person (theft, complicity in fraud, smuggling, driving without a license, driving with a suspended license, driving a vehicle under the influence of alcoholic beverages, refusal to collect biological samples, crimes related to the customs regime, crimes related to the forestry regime), aged between 22 and 65 years.

Objective

The study aimed to identify and analyze how criminogenic thinking and personality are involved in the production of the crime of murder.

Hypotheses

H.1 The cognitive pattern of persons deprived of liberty convicted of murder is oriented towards obtaining immediate satisfaction.

H.2 Persons deprived of liberty convicted of murder have difficulties in assuming social norms and therefore show insensitivity to the impact of the crime.

H.3 In the case of criminals convicted of murder, there are associations between the criminogenic thought pattern and some personality traits.

Instruments

The picture of criminogenic cognitions was analyzed by means of the Criminogenic Cognitions Scale, being considered a predictor of criminal behavior. The Criminogenic Cognitions Scale [SCC] was developed following research that examined the link between moral thinking and criminal recidivism in the case of the prison population, and is made up of five subscales: notions of entitlement (When I want something, I expect people to give it to me) ; not taking responsibility (Unpleasant experiences from my childhood are partly to blame for my current situation); short-term planning (the future is unpredictable, there's no point in planning it); insensitivity to the impact of the crime (A theft is acceptable as long as the victim is not physically harmed); negative attitudes towards authority (People in positions of authority generally take advantage of others) (Tangney et al., 2012). The particularity of this instrument lies in the fact that it incorporates the theory of restorative justice, through the dimensions of insensitivity to the impact of the crime and not assuming responsibility. Completing the answers for the SCC was done on the basis of a Likert scale from 1-4, where: 1 = completely untrue as far as I am concerned; 2 = mostly untrue about me; 3 = mostly true about me; 4 = perfectly true as far as I'm concerned.

To analyze personality traits, the CP5F Personality Questionnaire was used, which evaluates the five factors of the Big Five Model - extraversion, emotional stability, conscientiousness, kindness and autonomy. The instrument was created by Monica Albu (2008) according to the model of the FFPI (Five-Factor Personality Inventory) questionnaire (Hendriks, Hofstee, & De Raad, 1999). The CP5F questionnaire contains 130 items, grouped into six scales, with the addition of the Social Desirability scale, the answer method being on the Likert scale, where: 1 = suits me very little; 2 = suits me a little; 3 = fits me about halfway; 4 = suits me a lot; 5 = suits me very well. The use of this questionnaire was carried out exclusively for research purposes, within the doctoral training - Dimensions of personality, emotions and cognitions in persons deprived of liberty, with the consent of the author.

Through the Omnibus Questionnaire, socio-demographic data and aspects related to health status, drug and alcohol consumption were collected.

To evaluate the data from a statistical point of view, techniques were used that focused on descriptive analysis, the T-test for two independent samples, the Pearson correlation test and linear regression analysis (Popa, 2011). The calculations were performed with a specialized software, namely the program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 26.0 (Softonic, n.d.).

Ethics and consent

The present study was designed in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki (2000) and the national laws in Romania regarding ethical conduct in scientific research, being authorized in this sense by the Ethics Commission of the Romanian Academy, for the conduct of studies that part of the doctoral training.

Cultural, individual and role differences were respected, including those of age, gender, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language and socio-economic status (Regulation no. 679/2016 of the Parliament European and Council of the European Union, 2016).

All data were used anonymously, exclusively for scientific purposes, in accordance with the provisions of Regulation no. 679/2016 of the European Parliament and of the Council of the European Union on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data (GDPR) in force from May 25, 2018, Law no. 129/2018 for the amendment and completion of Law no. 102/2005 regarding the establishment, organization and operation of the National Supervisory Authority for the Processing of Personal Data, as well as for the repeal of Law no. 677/2001 for the protection of individuals regarding the processing of personal data and the free movement of such data (European Commission, n.d.).
The research respected the following ethical principles:

Protecting participants - protecting the personal, social, financial, organizational status of research participants and ensuring all rights.

Promoting the well-being of the participants - it worked for the benefit of the participants, respecting the standards of professional conduct.

Promoting accuracy, honesty and truth - the data has not been and will not be used for the purpose of deception or fraud, and the facts will not be intentionally misrepresented.

Correctness and recognition of the limits of competence - the limits of competence were not exceeded and no tools or methods were used that lead to unfair practices.

Respect for the dignity and value of people, the right to privacy, confidentiality and self-determination.

Each subject gave written consent to participate by signing the *informed consent*, through which the following were presented:
a) the purpose and objectives of the study;
b) the estimated time period for conducting the study;
c) description of procedures;
d) the consequences of participating in the study;
e) description of the risks to which it is subject or the level of discomfort that could be expected;
f) description of possible inconveniences;
g) description of potential benefits for the subject;
h) information regarding the confidentiality of identity and personal data and specifying the persons who will have access to this data;
i) the possibility of withdrawing from the study at any time, without suffering repercussions.
It should be noted that, regarding batch B, there were 25 refusals to participate, without recording withdrawals during the course of the research for the two groups.

Results

According to the data analysis, drug use prior to incarceration varies by age category. If the highest consumption was recorded in the 31 - 40 years interval (16.82%), the lowest was for the 61 - 65 years category (8.57%).
In the case of the *short-term planning subscale* – the criminogenic cognitions scale, the T-test for two independent samples $t(291.35) = -3.44$, $p < .01$ revealed that group A, represented by persons deprived of liberty convicted of murder, obtained a statistically significantly higher mean score ($M = 2.21$; $SD = 0.62$) in contrast to group B represented by persons deprived of liberty who did not commit the crime of murder ($M = 1.88$; $SD = 0.54$). The results can be seen in *table 1 and table 2*.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Criminogenic Cognitions Scale Scores (N=300)

Scale	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
feelings of entitlement	A	2.391	.6789	.0554
	B	2.271	.6975	.0570
not assuming responsibility	A	1.753	.5850	.0478
	B	1.803	.6178	.0504

Scale	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
short term planning	A	2.121	.6290	.0514
	B	1.888	.5402	.0441
insensitivity to the impact of the act	A	2.295	.6540	.0534
	B	2.340	.6577	.0537
negative attitude towards authority	A	2.292	.6263	.0511
	B	2.269	.6273	.0512

Table 2

Independent Samples T-Test Results - Criminogenic Cognitions Scale

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. 2-tailed	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
feelings of entitlement	Equal variances assumed	.126	.722	1.51	298	.132	.1200	.0795	-.0364	.2764
	Equal variances not assumed			1.51	297.78	.132	.1200	.0795	-.0364	.2764
not assuming responsibility	Equal variances assumed	.003	.958	-.710	298	.478	-.0493	.0695	-.1861	.0874
	Equal variances not assumed			-.710	297.11	.478	-.0493	.0695	-.1861	.0874
short term planning	Equal variances assumed	1.26	.261	3.44	298	.001	.2333	.0677	.1001	.3666
	Equal variances not assumed			3.44	291.35	.001	.2333	.0677	.1001	.3666
insensitivity to the	Equal variances assumed	.038	.846	-.599	298	.550	-.0453	.0757	-.1944	.1037

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. 2-tailed	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
impact of the act	Equal variances not assumed			-.599	297.99	.550	-.0453	.0757	-.1944	.1037
negative attitude towards authority	Equal variances assumed	.047	.829	.313	298	.754	.0227	.0724	-.1198	.1651
	Equal variances not assumed			.313	297.999	.754	.0227	.0724	-.1198	.1651

For the *extraversion subscales* (M =70.75, SD = 8.60; M = 73.31, SD = 12.43), t(298) = -2.07, p < .05., *conscientiousness* (M = 99.99, SD = 12.92; M = 104.30, SD = 12.91)), t(298) = -2.89, p < .05 and *emotional stability* (M = 78.15, SD = 10.30; M = 81.91, SD = 11.61), t(298) = -2.96, p < .05 , the T-test for independent samples revealed that inmates who had committed an act of homicide (group A) had statistically significantly lower mean scores than the control group (group B). The results can be seen in *table 3 and table 4.*

Table 3

Means and standard deviations for the CP5F Personality Questionnaire (N=300)

Scale	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
desirability	A	63.07	7.799	.637
	B	64.67	7.629	.623
extraversion	A	70.75	8.607	.703
	B	73.31	12.439	1.016
conscientiousness	A	99.99	12.925	1.055
	B	104.30	12.919	1.055
Courtesy	A	93.73	12.708	1.038
	B	96.58	13.408	1.095

Scale	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
emotional stability	A	78.15	10.302	.841
	B	81.91	11.611	.948
autonomy	A	70.91	7.785	.636
	B	72.45	10.002	.817

Table 4

Independent Samples T-Test Results - CP5F Personality Questionnaire

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
desirability	Equal variances assumed	.428	.514	-1.804	298	.072	-1.607	.891	-3.360	.146
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.804	297.856	.072	-1.607	.891	-3.360	.146
extraversion	Equal variances assumed	12.265	.001	-2.073	298	.039	-2.560	1.235	-4.991	-.129
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.073	265.069	.039	-2.560	1.235	-4.992	-.128
conscientiousness	Equal variances assumed	.001	.973	-2.891	298	.004	-4.313	1.492	-7.250	-1.377
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.891	298.000	.004	-4.313	1.492	-7.250	-1.377
courtesy	Equal variances assumed	.033	.855	-1.887	298	.060	-2.847	1.508	-5.815	.122
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.887	297.148	.060	-2.847	1.508	-5.815	.122

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
emotional stability	Equal variances assumed	3.391	.067	-2.967	298	.003	-3.760	1.267	-6.254	-1.266
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.967	293.840	.003	-3.760	1.267	-6.254	-1.266
autonomy	Equal variances assumed	7.921	.005	-1.495	298	.136	-1.547	1.035	-3.583	.490
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.495	281.070	.136	-1.547	1.035	-3.584	.490

Regarding group A (persons convicted of murder) it was observed that the score *for short-term planning* type thinking has an acceptable level of association with the *conscientiousness* score R = .343, and yet the value of R2 indicates that the variability 59% of the score of the respective thinking pattern is due to the conscientiousness score $F(148,149) = 9.32$, $p < .05$. In turn, the score for conscientiousness is explained in proportion to 38% by the score of the negative cognitive pattern towards authority $F(148, 149) = 5.79$, $p < .05$ and by 33% by that of insensitivity to impact $F(148, 149) = 5.02$, $p < .05$. At the same time, the conscientiousness score explains 35% of the *emotional stability* score $F(148, 149) = 81.69$, $p < .01$. The score for emotional stability is explained in proportion of 15% by *the extraversion* score $F(148, 149) = 26.11$, $p < .01$. The results can be seen in *table 5*.

Table 5

Linear regression analysis scores - conscientiousness, short-term planning, negative attitude towards authority, insensitivity to the impact of the act, emotional stability and extraversion

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
conscientiousness	.343[a]	.059	.053	.6121
negative attitude towards authority	.194[a]	.038	.031	12.721

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
insensitivity to the impact of the act	.181[a]	.033	.026	12.754
emotional stability	.596[a]	.356	.351	8.298
extraversion	.387[a]	.150	.144	9.531

Regarding the use of drugs and alcohol, no statistically significant differences were identified between the scores obtained by the two groups.

Discussions

The present study agrees with the results found by Van Gelder and De Vries (2012), who concluded that a low conscientiousness score is correlated with criminal behavior. In turn, McCrae, Costa, Del Pilar, Rolland and Parker (1998) attribute to the low level of conscientiousness an important role in committing the crime, considering that it has a major role in the management of impulses and the manifestation of self-control. The authors see conscientiousness as responsible for the tendency to think carefully before acting, to be willing to exert considerable effort to achieve a goal. Also, De Vries, De Vries, de Hoogh and Feij (2009) believe that people with a lower level of conscientiousness are disinhibited in risky situations and have a lower probability of considering potentially negative consequences.

The lower levels for conscientiousness, extraversion and emotional stability obtained in the present study on Romanian prisoners convicted of murder are also supported by Khalili et al. (2017), who in their study on three groups of people from Tehran, found that those who committed crimes show significant differences regarding personality traits, the most significant difference being recorded for the level of conscientiousness and extraversion. At the same time, the meta-analysis by the authors Feltz and Cokely (2019) provides additional evidence that the level of extraversion is closely related to judgments of free will, especially in cases of murder, this feature being important in identifying boundary conditions. Also analyzing the results obtained by 75 Indians convicted of murder, Singh (1980) concluded that they obtained higher scores for extraversion than the control group. The same result was found by Popoola, Faworaja, Oyeleke, Fagbamila and Opayemi, (2017).

Regarding emotional stability, the present study complements the information discovered by Pratt and Cullen (2000), namely that the low level of emotional stability is one of the strongest correlates of crime. Similar conclusions were also identified by Malouf et al. (2014) in a number of 48 empirical studies that examined the link between the level of emotional stability and criminal behavior. Furthermore, Heatherton and Tice (1994) asserted that people vary in their willingness and ability to exercise self-control and that these individual differences have implications for many aspects of emotional, social, and behavioral adjustment. Likewise, Hirschi and Gottfredson (1990) believe that lack of self-control is key to understanding and predicting many behavioral problems, including serious antisocial behavior.

From the point of view of the short-term planning thinking pattern, it is considered a characteristic of people convicted of murder, including by Pratt and Cullen (2000). They see it as a consequence of the low level of emotional stability. The individual does not have the necessary patience to wait to satisfy his own needs, therefore he does not make plans that require waiting. Criminogenic cognition is also supported by Boduszek and Hyland (2012), who point out that one of the most important characteristics that can explain criminal behavior is criminal thinking, because it drives the whole system, which includes attitudes and beliefs, and uses it exclusively to rationalize and justify criminal behavior.

However, Megargee (1984) in one of the most cited studies on a group of people deprived of liberty found that a large proportion of convicted people have normal psychological profiles. At the same time, the authors believe that it is not always useful to differentiate between groups of people who have committed acts of violence and those who have not, or depending on the victim, in the case of sexual abuse.

Therefore, more studies are needed to clarify the psychological profile of criminals because not all convicted persons present specific pathology, the criminological picture being much more complex. Balica (2008) emphasized in this regard the importance of taking into account both macro-social factors, as well as micro-social and individual ones, thus emphasizing the potential impact of the family environment, the group of friends, the work group, the state of health.

Therefore, "researchers are more and more interested in addressing topics that are part of a macro-criminological perspective, a perspective that tries to relate the criminal act to factors that manifest themselves at the level of society" (Balica, 2008, p. 61).

According to the results of the present study, from a psychological point of view committing a murder is a process that in certain situations could be explained as follows:

1) *the person seeks immediate gratification and does not have the ability to foresee the possible consequences*;

2) *the person is emotionally vulnerable, loses control in stressful situations, therefore, to obtain satisfaction, she may kill the victim, even if she did not initially plan this aspect*;

3) *the crime may represent an act of impulse at the moment or of experiencing a psychological state obtained only through the crime*;

4) *due to the fact that he fails to understand the usefulness and social character of the norms and rules imposed by society, he does not show remorse when he breaks a rule, commits a crime*;

5) *shows regret for the situation in which he is, because not having the ability to plan in the long term, he did not think about these consequences, but he has no remorse for the victim*.

At the same time, the results indicate that there are also situations where, at a cognitive level, the criminal does not set his goal to take the life of another person, but to get what he wants from that person – a material good, sexual relations, a psychological state etc., in a very short time and with certainty, without having the ability to preview, to think about the consequences of the act. In this context, murder becomes a result of the situation in which the person satisfies a need, against the background of a reduced level of emotional control. This perspective may explain the many statements like "I didn't mean to do that" "If she hadn't said she was reporting me I wouldn't have killed her" "If she hadn't screamed, I wouldn't have killed her. I just wanted to have sexual relations with her" (according to field experience - psychological assistance provided to persons deprived of liberty).

Conclusions

All three hypotheses of the study were confirmed.

It is obvious that criminal thinking is negative, considering the impact it has on a social, moral and psychological level. However, according to the results of the present study on inmates from Romania, convicted of murder, from the point of view of criminogenic thinking, the only statistically significant difference between the scores obtained on the two lots was recorded on the short-term planning subscale. This aspect reveals that among the psychological peculiarities of these people is *the guidance of behavior to obtain immediate satisfaction*.

Regarding the second hypothesis - persons deprived of liberty convicted of murder have difficulties in assuming social norms and therefore show insensitivity to the impact of the crime, statistically significantly lower scores for extraversion, conscientiousness and emotional stability indicate that they have a tendency to spend time alone rather than in the company of other people, difficulties in learning social norms, as well as in controlling one's emotions and inner states. The association of the low conscientiousness score with the negative attitude towards authority supports pathological rebellious behavior, thus, due to the fact that the *individual has a negative attitude towards authority, he does not acquire pro-social values. Insensitivity to the impact of crime becomes a consequence of this process of not assuming socially accepted values, therefore, in the absence of moral dilemmas, social norms can be completely ignored at the personality level.*

For the third hypothesis - *in the case of criminals convicted of murder there are associations between the criminogenic thinking pattern and personality traits*, the correlation between the low level of conscientiousness and short-term planning describes the fact that the person in question starts the actions without he thinks about what they are for and how they will end, therefore he does not have the ability to think about the consequences of the act.

Considering that no statistically significant differences were identified between the scores of the two groups regarding drug and alcohol consumption, although many crimes were committed on the background *of alcohol or drug consumption, it can be appreciated that this is not a determining factor in committing a murder, but rather a factor that allows the manifestation of certain personality traits and thought patterns, which until then were not expressed at the behavioral level.*

In the light of the above, specialized intervention in the case of persons deprived of liberty convicted of murder requires a careful orientation towards the assumption of social norms, emotional balancing, adaptation in society, previewing the consequences and developing the ability to make long-term plans.

Limits

Even if all the legal measures imposed by the National Administration of Penitentiaries regarding the conduct of scientific research in the penitentiary environment were respected, the method of application is one of the limits of this, because the training of the participants could not be carried out by the researcher. The tools were applied exclusively by the staff assigned within the penitentiary units.

Another limitation is represented by the significance that the participants gave to the institutional context in which the tools were applied and therefore providing desirable responses.

Acknowledgments

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A PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE OF PRISONERS IN ROMANIAN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Costin-Marian CRÎNGUȘ (1), Thi Kim Dung LE (2)

(1) "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, Department of Psychology, Victoriei Boulevard, No. 5-7, 550201, Sibiu, Romania.
(2) University of Sciences, Hue University, Vietnam. E-mail: kimdungkls@gmail.com.

Corresponding author: Costin-Marian Crînguș, School of Advanced Studies of the Romanian Academy, Institute of Philosophy and Psychology "Constantin Rădulescu-Motru", Romanian Academy, Bucharest, Romania, 13 Septembrie Avenue, No. 13, 050711. Phone: 0728009990; E-mail: costin_cringus@yahoo.co.uk.

Abstract

Objectives. The aim of the study is to create a psychological profile of inmates by assessing personality dimensions based on the duration of their sentences, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of incarceration on individuals' psychological aspects.
Material and methods. The data used were collected between July 2021 and August 2022. A total of 857 participants were selected from prisons. The data were stored in the EXCEL 2019 program and processed in the SPSS 26.0 statistical program. All data were analyzed at the group level. The instruments used in the study were: the Freiburg Personality Inventory revised form (FPI-R) that contains 12 dimensions and an item from the Omnibus questionnaire (duration of sentence).
Results. In order to compare the effect of the duration of incarceration on personality, a statistical ANOVA analysis was performed. The 857 participants were divided into three groups based on the duration of their sentence. According to the results, inmates with a sentence duration of less than 3 years indicated significantly higher levels of life satisfaction and social orientation scales, compared to respondents with a sentence duration over 3 years ($F_{(2,844)} = 13.460$, $p = .000$). Regarding the dimension of solicitation, inmates with a sentence duration of less than 3 years scored significantly higher than those with a sentence duration over 3 years ($p = .000$).
Conclusions. The research results show that support and rehabilitation interventions should take into account the relationship between personality dimensions and the duration of sentence.

Keywords: personality, inmates, incarceration, prison.

Introduction

According to Homel and Thomson (2005), the prison represents one of the most complex social organizations. This place has its own history and specificity, being designed to be a punishment space. The inmates transferred here often have a long history of violence and are brought into a closed environment against their will. A study by Howell (2022) show that contact with the criminal justice system has significant effects on individual health, with a strong association between imprisonment and poor health.

As the prison environment plays an important role in individual development, it is essential to take into account the personality of the inmates according to the length of their sentence (Friestad and Hansen, 2005). The study aims to create a psychological profile of inmates based on the dimensions of their personality, according to the length of their sentence. The concept of personality is one of the most intensively studied and theorized approaches globally. According to Bergner (2020), personality is defined as a set of durable styles and traits that reflect an individual's uniqueness. For a behavior or emotion to be considered characteristic of personality, it must manifest over an extended period, and if it occurs episodically, it is considered a disposition (McAdams, 2009).

One of the elements frequently addressed in connection with criminality is aggression as a trait or behavior. One of the questionnaires that evaluate aggression as a trait is the Freiburg Questionnaire. Statistics conducted in various countries reveal a worrying increase in violent acts. Leblond and colleagues (2015) conducted statistics on violent acts in the United States, which showed that a rape occurred every 6 minutes, a person became a victim of an attack every minute, a theft occurred every 23 seconds, and a murder occurred every 26 minutes.

A relevant study in the field of inmate personality was conducted by Vize and Williams (2020), which examined the relationship between inmate personality and recidivism. Their research showed that personality traits such as impulsivity, lack of conscientiousness, and neuroticism were associated with a high level of recidivism. Additionally, another study conducted by Goldweber and colleagues (2019) examined the personality traits of inmates and showed that they presented significantly higher levels of narcissism, psychopathy, and machiavellianism compared to the general population. These results have significant implications for the development of rehabilitation and reintegration programs for inmates into society.

The personality of criminals has attracted the attention of researchers and has been studied from multiple perspectives. Recent research has focused on exploring the relationship between personality traits and criminal behavior. A study conducted in Poland (Leszko, Iwanski & Jarzebinska, 2020) found that certain personality traits are associated with specific styles of adaptation to stress among incarcerated individuals.

Another study (Martin et al., 2019) aimed to investigate the relationships between impulsivity, aggression, and recidivism in inmates with or without Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD). The study found that impulsive aggression and attentional impulsivity were only related to recidivism in inmates with ASPD. In addition, psychopathy was associated with recidivism, while impulsivity and aggression were central to recidivism in these individuals.

A systematic review (Tharshini et al., 2021) also explored the link between personality traits and criminal behavior. The authors found that personality traits that contribute to criminal behavior are psychopathy, reduced self-control, and difficult temperament. They suggest that greater attention should be given to personality dimensions as a notable risk factor for criminal behavior.

The results showed that neuroticism predicts emotion-oriented adaptation, while conscientiousness predicts task-oriented adaptation strategies. This information can help in the development of targeted psychological interventions to improve the stress adaptation capacity of inmates.

In light of this findings, it can be appreciated that the study of the personality of inmates is particularly important for understanding criminal behavior and developing appropriate rehabilitation and reintegration programs.

Objectives

The objective of the study was to identify the relationships between personality dimensions and the length of time that inmates spend in prison, and to create a profile of the participants based on their personality dimensions.

Instruments

To achieve the objectives, the Revised Freiburg Personality Inventory (FPI-R) (Fahrenberg, Hampel and Selg, 2001) was used, as well as an item about the length of the sentence from an Omnibus questionnaire.

The Revised Freiburg Personality Inventory (FPI-R), created by Fahrenberg, Hampel and Selg (2001), is a validated instrument in the Romanian population by Pitariu and Iliescu (2007), which contains 138 items scored on a 5-point scale. FPI-R evaluates 12 scales: life satisfaction, social orientation, achievement orientation, inhibition, excitability, aggressiveness, solicitation, somatic complaints, health worries, sincerity, extraversion, emotionality. Although the Freiburg Questionnaire is mainly used in health psychology and clinical psychology (Rada et al., 2023), it can also be useful in other areas such as therapy, development, educational psychology, and human resources.

Research hypotheses:

H1: There are significant differences in the personality dimensions of life satisfaction and social orientation between inmates with a sentence length of less than 3 years and inmates with a sentence length greater than 3 years and over 5 years;
H2: The mean responses to the inhibition dimension are higher for inmates with a sentence length greater than 3 years in prison;
H3: There is a significant difference in the solicitation dimension between individuals with a sentence length of less than 3 years and inmates whose sentence length is greater.

Procedure

Within each penitentiary unit, work was done on detention sectors. The regimes for executing custodial sentences are maximum security, closed regime, semi-open regime, and open regime. The application program was designed based on the schedule of each sector. Participants were invited, in each detention section room, to participate voluntarily in the testing sessions.

Registration for the study was based on volunteerism, and before participating, each person signed a consent form. Participants were informed about the possibility of withdrawing from the research at any time without any repercussions on them.

The data was stored in the EXCEL 2019 program and processed in the SPSS 26.0 statistical program.

To compare the impact that the duration of incarceration has on the twelve personality dimensions, one-way between groups ANOVA statistical analysis was applied. Participants were divided into three groups using the criterion of the duration of the sentence (Group 1: 0-3 years; Group 2: 3-5 years; Group 3: over 5 years). The criteria in the Penal Code were considered to determine these three categories based on the severity of the offense: small sentences (traffic offenses, theft, computer fraud, incitement to abuse of office) are up to 3 years, medium sentences (qualified theft, fraud, usurpation of official qualities, bribery, drug trafficking) are between 3 and 5 years in prison, and large sentences (murder, robbery, blackmail, attempted murder, deprivation of liberty, minor trafficking, human trafficking, pimping) are considered any sentence with over 5 years of imprisonment.

To test the hypotheses and research objectives, the following statistical analyses were consecutively applied:

    I.Levene's test - to test the homogeneity of the variance of the tested dimensions;

    II.One-way between groups ANOVA test - to identify significant differences between the means of the three groups;

    III.Scheffe's post-hoc analysis - when a difference between the means was observed, the identification of which groups have this difference was performed.

Results

Of the subjects, 42% (360) were not visited by friends and 9.8% (84) were not visited by family members. Approximately 80% (690) of the participants are not recorded with a chronic or psychiatric illness, and 22.5% (193) take medication for the respective medical condition. Over 30% (281) of them witnessed arguments between parents or witnessed aggressive behavior between them, and 77.5% (664) reported that their parents did not consume alcohol.

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the study participants.

Table 1

General characteristics of study participants

	N	%
Residence		
Urban	562	65,5
Rural	295	34,4
Marital status		

	N	%
Married	218	25,4
Married without papers	243	28,4
Divorced	119	13,8
Widowed	37	4,3
Single	230	26,8
Education level		
No education, primary school (four grades)	29	3,4
Secondary school, professionals, apprentices	479	55,9
High school	252	29,4
Post-secondary education, skilled trades	18	2,1
Higher education, postgraduate	79	9,2
Medication consumption		
No	653	76,2
Yes	193	22,5
Don't want to declare	11	1,3
Incarcerated relatives		
No	593	69,2
Yes	256	29,9
Don't want to declare	8	0,9
Family reputation has been affected		
No	408	47,6
Yes	396	46,2
Don't want to declare	53	6,2

The distribution among the three analyzed groups is as follows: 20.4% have a sentence of up to three years, 23.3% have a detention between three and five years, and 53.4% have a sentence of over five years of execution.

Hypothesis 1: *There are significant differences at the level of personality dimensions, life satisfaction, and social orientation between prisoners with a sentence duration of less than 3 years and prisoners with a sentence duration greater than 3 years and over 5 years.*

The means, standard deviations, and number of respondents per group are presented in Table 2. The Levene test $(F(2,850) = 3.406, p = .034)$ showed that the dimensions of life satisfaction and social orientation $F (2,844) = 13.460, p = .000$ have statistically significant variance.

Table 2

Mean, standard deviation, and number of respondents by sentence length

Groups by sentence length	M	SD	N
Gr.1 (0-3 years)	31.28	5.463	175
Gr.2 (3-5 years)	32.24	6.148	200
Gr.3 (>5 years)	30.69	7.022	482
Total	31.17	6.554	857

By using the ANOVA test (Table 3), a statistically significant difference was identified between the means of the groups. The significance value is 0.019 $(p = .019)$, which is below 0.05, and therefore there is a statistically significant difference between the three punishments.

Table 3

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for life satisfaction, social orientation, and length of sentence

	df	F	*p*
Life satisfaction between groups	2	15.647	.000
	850		
Life satisfaction between	2	8.327	.000
	844		

*Note. N = 857

The table below shows a significant difference between group 1 and group 3, and between group 2 and group 3, in terms of the dimension of life satisfaction.

Table 4

Scheffe's test on the three groups for the life satisfaction dimension

(I) Groups based on sentence length	(J) Groups based on sentence length	M difference (I-J)	Standard error	*p*
Gr.1 (0-3 years)	Gr.2 (3-5 years)	-.08	.179	.887
	Gr.3 (>5 years)	.61*	.153	.000
Gr.2 (3-5 years)	Gr.1 (0-3 years)	.08	.179	.887
	Gr.3 (>5 years)	.70*	.145	.000
Gr.3 (>5 years)	Gr.1 (0-3 years)	-.61*	.153	.000
	Gr.2 (3-5 years)	-.70*	.145	.000

*0.05

The Scheffe test on the three groups for the social orientation dimension is presented in the table below. There is a difference between group 1 and group 2 and between group 1 and group 3 at the level of social orientation dimension.

Table 5

Scheffe test on the three groups for the social orientation dimension

(I) Groups based on the length of the sentence	(J) Groups based on the length of the sentence	M difference (I-J)	Standard error	*p*
Gr.1 (0-3 years)	Gr.2 (3-5 years)	-.83*	.204	.000
	Gr.3 (>5 years)	-.47*	.175	.024
Gr.2 (3-5 years)	Gr.1 (0-3 years)	.83*	.204	.000
	Gr.3 (>5 years)	.35	.167	.105
Gr.3 (>5 years)	Gr.1 (0-3 years)	.47*	.175	.024
	Gr.2 (3-5 years)	-.35	.167	.105

Hypothesis 2. *The mean of the responses for the inhibition dimension is higher for inmates with a sentence of more than 3 years in prison.*

At the level of the Levene homogeneity of variance test ($F(2,854) = 2.289$, $p = .102$), no statistically significant difference was identified, $p = .102$. The ANOVA test identified a significant difference in the inhibition dimension of the FPI-R questionnaire. The significance value is below 0.05 ($p = .002$).

The Scheffe test identified between which groups there is a statistical difference. Post hoc analysis showed a statistically significant result at the level of group 1 and 2 ($p = .019$) and at the level of group 1 and 3 ($p = .004$). The result in table 6 confirmed hypothesis 2 and showed that there were statistically significant differences in the inhibition dimension of the FPI-R questionnaire among the groups of participants. The other results are shown in the table below.

Table 6

Analysis of variance on the personality dimension of inhibition and duration of punishment

	(I) Groups based on duration of punishment	(J) Groups based on duration of punishment	M difference (I-J)	Standard error	*p*
Inhibition	Gr.1 (0-3 years)	Gr.2 (3-5 years)	.745*	.264	.019
		Gr.3 (>5 years)	.755*	.225	.004
	Gr.2 (3-5 years)	Gr.1 (0-3 years)	-.745*	.264	.019

	Gr.3 (>5 years)	.010	.214	.999
Gr.3 (>5 years)	Gr.1 (0-3 years)	-.755*	.225	.004
	Gr.2 (3-5 years)	-.010	.214	.999

Hypothesis 3. *There is a significant difference in the level of the solicitation dimension between individuals with a sentence duration of less than 3 years and inmates whose sentence duration is greater.*

The Levene's homogeneity of variance test showed that there is no difference between groups $(F_{(2,850)} = .996, p = .370)$. ANOVA analysis identified a significance value of p = .000, which is lower than 0.05, and therefore a post hoc analysis was necessary to examine between which of the three groups this difference existed.

As the three groups were not balanced in structure, the Scheffe test was applied, and Table 7 shows a statistically significant difference. A statistically significant difference was observed between group 1 and group 2, as well as between group 3 and group 2 in the solicitation dimension at the p = .000 level. There was no statistically significant difference between group 1 and group 3 (p = .339). Thus, hypothesis 3 is confirmed.

Table 7

Analysis of variance on the personality dimension of solicitation and duration of sentence

	(I) Groups based on sentence duration	(J) Groups based on sentence duration	Mean difference (I-J)	Standard error	*p*
Solicitation	Gr.1 (0-3 years)	Gr.2 (3-5 years)	1.435*	.311	.000
		Gr.3 (>5 years)	.389	.264	.339
	Gr.2 (3-5 years)	Gr.1 (0-3 years)	-1.435*	.311	.000
		Gr.3 (>5 years)	-1.045	.254	.000
	Gr.3 (>5 years)	Gr.1 (0-3 years)	-.389	.264	.339
		Gr.2 (3-5 years)	1.045*	.254	.000

*p<0.05

Discussions

The research results reveal the complexity of the connections between the duration of the sentence and personality dimensions. The subjects in the analyzed sample, who were in a situation of deprivation of liberty, largely experienced a conflicted family climate, even delinquent, in their family of origin. A problematic history (disorganized family) combined with alcohol abuse in the family of origin, witnessing physical or verbal aggressive episodes, represent predisposing factors for delinquency (Rocheleau, 2015). Several studies (Ille et al., 2004; Roff, 1992; Brook, Whiteman and Finch, 1992; Brook, Whiteman and Finch, 1996) show that childhood aggressiveness is a predictor of adult criminality.

One of the major results is the fact that, in hypothesis 1, a significant difference was identified at the level of personality dimensions of *life satisfaction* and *social orientation*. These results confirm the research conducted by Sroka, Isemann and Walther (2017) on juvenile inmates and thus confirm the formulated hypothesis. Inmates with long-term incarceration periods (over 5 years) are more dissatisfied with their lives, more pessimistic, and have a darker vision of their lives and future compared to those with medium and short sentences, but more socially responsible, altruistic, and friendly towards others. According to Sigler and Robertson's research (2015), inmates with longer periods of incarceration may have lower life satisfaction and less positive social orientation, while inmates with shorter sentences may be more optimistic and socially oriented. Probably, the experience in the prison environment provides them with the informational baggage necessary to be a support for other inmates. Inmates with sentences between 3 and 5 years and with short sentences (up to 3 years) may be dissatisfied with present or past living conditions. In another study, conducted by Hoeve and colleagues (2014), it was found that inmates with shorter sentences may have more regrets about their past and missed opportunities, while inmates with longer sentences may have a darker perspective on their lives in general. They believe that they did not have the opportunity to demonstrate what they are capable of and relive past events evaluating what they could have done better. In general, this attitude is optimistic, but given the inmates' criminal past, this process could be an explanation for the development of experience behind bars and for future recidivism.

The results confirm the second hypothesis (*the mean response score for the inhibition dimension is higher for inmates serving sentences longer than 3 years in prison*) and show significant differences in personality dimensions between the group with sentences up to 3 years and the group with sentences over 5 years, and between respondents with sentences between 3 and 5 years and those from the group with sentences over 5 years. This shows that inmates with smaller sentences (up to 5 years) are more satisfied with their lives, have a good time, and are optimistic about their future, unlike offenders with longer sentences. The results highlight a potential difference between inmates with small and large sentences. Age may also influence respondents (Macabo et al., 2020). High scores on the *inhibition* scale correlate with low values on the *life satisfaction* and *achievement orientation* scales, which means that more inhibited individuals have a lower desire to generate personal achievements with lower life satisfaction. According to Huta and Ryan's study (2010), individuals with an achievement orientation (eudaimonic motives) tend to have greater life satisfaction than those with a pleasure orientation (hedonic motives), and this is partly associated with their low level of inhibition. At the same time, according to the studies by Corr (2017) and Kim and Cheon (2018), individuals with high scores on the inhibition scale tend to have more avoidance orientation than approach orientation and greater sensitivity to punishment than reward, which can lead to lower life satisfaction.

No differences were identified between groups in terms of aggressiveness, regardless of the sentence received or the violence of the crime, a result that differs from others (Toch and Tupers, 2007; Einat and Suliman, 2021). It is possible that impulsivity and aggressiveness are a transgenerational trait that underlies both childhood abuse and the manifestation of adult impulsivity traits (Sargentanis et al., 2014), exacerbated by experiences in the prison environment. Despite some positive correlations between sentence and childhood maltreatment (Mandelli et al., 2011), the results of this study indicated null associations between these factors and sentence duration.

The results confirm the third hypothesis (*there is a significant difference in the level of solicitation between individuals with a sentence duration of less than 3 years and inmates whose sentence duration is longer*) and show that the stress experienced by inmates is much higher for those with shorter sentences and does not decrease with the duration of the sentence. There is a statistically significant difference for inmates with a sentence duration between 3 and 5 years compared to the other two groups. Luke and colleagues (2020) identified several factors that were associated with high levels of stress, including a history of childhood abuse, low education level, financial problems, and pre-existing mental health issues. One possible explanation for the results could be that the impact of the prison environment raises the level of insecurity for inmates with shorter sentences, and the long duration they have to spend there overwhelms and increases the stress level for inmates in the group with sentences over 5 years. An argument for this explanation could be the study conducted by Lambert and colleagues (2020), which shows that organizational support is negatively associated with high levels of stress. Respondents who have to serve long sentences face the stress of difficult demands from the prison environment and personal life. Additionally, interactions with correctional staff and health services can help eliminate stress factors and inherent risks in prisons for inmates (Canada et al., 2022).

The psychological tension that characterizes them can lead to symptoms such as lack of energy, stress, exhaustion, or nervousness. Subsequent problems that may arise must be addressed in psychosocial programs in the prison environment. There are studies (Lambert et al., 2018; Lambert et al., 2022; Lambert et al., 2018) that address the concept of life satisfaction from the perspective of employees in the prison environment, but not from the perspective of inmates, and this aspect is a plus of the present research.

Conclusions

According to the study conducted in the Romanian prison environment, it can be observed that inmates with short and long sentences exhibit different behaviors regarding their abilities to relate to other inmates. Inmates with short sentences are characterized by active interaction with others and a more relaxed approach, while inmates with sentences over 5 years are described as withdrawn and shy individuals who prefer solitary activities and avoid interpersonal relationships.

From these findings, it can be deduced that inmates with sentences over 5 years need to be encouraged to develop their social skills and seek interactions with other inmates, in order to avoid uncontrolled behaviors that can lead to social conflicts. Therefore, the use of psychotherapy can be recommended to help develop the inmates' relationship and adaptation skills to life in the prison environment. This research can be considered innovative not only in terms of approaching personality dimensions based on the duration of sentences in the prison environment, but also in combining these concepts to identify the issues of individual adaptation to the prison environment.

However, the study has some limitations, such as the low educational level of the participants, which may influence their understanding of the items and increase the risk of erroneous responses. Despite these limitations, the study represents a starting point for future research in the Romanian prison environment and offers an interesting perspective on addressing the problem of individual adaptation to life in prison.

Awknowledgement

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PARENTAL PURPOSES FOR USING THE INTERNET AND THEIR INFLUENCES ON PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION IN THE VIETNAMESE FAMILY

Valentina MARINESCU (1), Thi Kim Dung LE (2), Thi Mai NGUYEN (3)

(1) Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, University of Bucharest, Romania, E-mail: vmarinescu9@yahoo.com
(2) Hue University Vietnam, E-mail: kimdungkls@gmail.com
(3) Hong Duc University, Vietnam, E-mail: mai.ktqt@gmail.com

Address correspondence to: Thi Kim Dung LE, Hue University Vietnam, E-mail: kimdungkls@gmail.com

Abstract

Objective. The Internet is increasingly confirming its role in all areas of social life, including communication in the family. The influence of the Internet on family communication has been studied in many countries around the world, but research on this issue in the Vietnamese family has not received much attention. This study aims to explore the relationship between parents' Internet usage purposes and parent-child communication activities.
Material and methods. The study was conducted in 2021, based on a survey of 113 parents aged 35-50 in Hanoi city. Three purposes of parents' Internet use are considered to explore the relationship with parent-child communication activities including contact, looking for information, and relationship establishment and maintenance.
Results. The research results pointed out that the purpose for which parents use the Internet is related to the positive and negative influences of the Internet on communication activities between parents and children. Parents use the Internet to make contact, look up information, and build and maintain relationships with their children, increasing the amount of communication time and diversifying the topics they discuss. However, the ability to share with and understand children in parent-child communication seems to decline; at the same time, parents using the Internet to look for information and build relationships create increased disruption and decreased interest in communication with their children.
Conclusions. These results suggest solutions and services that support effective communication between parents and children by promoting healthy Internet use.

Keywords: Internet, Internet usage purpose, communication, family, Vietnam.

Introduction

Griffith (2002) defines the Internet as a global network made up of smaller networks that connect millions of computers around the world via telecommunications infrastructure. The Internet is a global network of computers that allows computers to communicate directly with one another (Doan, 1998). Because it provides users with so many practical utilities, the Internet is a perfect example of innovation. The more people use the Net, the more they appreciate its benefits (Ruzgar, 2005).

Hoffman, Novak, & Venkatesh (2004) declare that the Internet has reached the point of indispensability. This indispensability idea is that the Internet has become attached to people's daily lives, and people cannot live without it. Research by Rahmah and Becker (2001) draws a suitable conclusion with these controversial statements. In today's world, the Internet is a vital source of information and a means of communication, and the absence of the Internet renders one obsolete (Nguyen, 2015). Besides that, the suitability and satisfaction derived from the Internet have the potential to provide the foundation for sustained and long-lasting Internet use. In addition, the benefits that the Internet brings to users make them maintain the behavior of using the Internet. Thus, indispensability, suitability, and satisfaction, as well as the advantages, are variables of sustainability in Internet use behavior (Ruzgar, 2005). Many researchers have confirmed the addictiveness of the Internet due to its effects on the brain system and ability to lead to dependence (Kandell, 1998; Chou, Chou, & Tyan, 1999; Griffiths, 1998). However, the Internet not only has addictive characteristics, but it also provides many benefits to users (Stewart, 2003). This is also confirmed by Young's study (2004), which found that the Internet has two opposing effects on people: on the one hand, it can lead to addiction and time wastage that negatively impacts both their material and spiritual lives while, on the other hand, it can be useful to them. The Internet's inherent advantages include offering users low-cost, easy-to-use global connectivity, multimedia, and other conveniences (Laudon & Laudon, 1995; Stewart, 2003; Semertzaki, 2008; Nasmith & Parkinson, 2008).

The Internet affects every aspect of its users' lives. Increased connectivity has changed the lives of millions of people who go online daily at home, school, work, and other locations such as Internet cafes. In all areas of social life, personal communication has the most influence.. The study by Williams and Rice (1983) supports this finding that no area is more impacted by the Internet than interpersonal communication.

In addition to the pre-existing electronic mail system, the Internet has developed over time by incorporating numerous other features and services to support interpersonal communication. These include individual or group messaging and calling, as well as free video-sharing via social networks and online communities. The Internet is fundamentally changing human communication (Shim, 2007), including communication within the family. Family communication receives positive effects such as providing a new communication tool (Hughes & Hans, 2001), increasing mediated interaction (Pénard, Poussing, & Suire, 2013), and bringing more happiness to the family due to video calls (Shen et al., 2017). However, besides those positive aspects, the accompanying side effects are also worrying. According to Reisberg (2000) and Anderson (2001) the Internet has a detrimental impact on socialization and reduces personal interaction with friends or family members. Numerous studies have demonstrated that using the Internet makes people less likely to communicate, even with family members (Kraut et al., 1998; McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002). As a result, the more people participate in social networks, the more lonely they feel (Turkle, 2017).

In Vietnam, the rate of Internet use is pretty high. Vietnam is ranked in the group of 20 countries with the highest Internet usage rate in the world (Lan, 2020). In the family, parents and children are both Internet users, but children tend to use it more. The study by the Center for Research in Culture, Education and Social Life in 2014 shows that up to 19% of children under three years old and 59% of children 3-5 years old are using digital devices for an average time of 30- 60 minutes per day, while many parents see this as a method of babysitting (Le, Nguyen, Nguyen, & Pham, 2017). The UNICEF 2016 Annual Report (2017) states that up to 72% of Vietnamese youth between 15 and 24 years old use the Internet, 94% of Internet users in Vietnam use it daily, and they log on for an average of 6 hours and 42 minutes per day (Lan, 2020).

Many studies in Vietnam have been interested in the topic of the Internet's influence on communication in the family. Technology-enabled Internet access is a powerful agent capable of profoundly dominating family communication (Le et al., 2017). According to the survey findings "Characteristics of using technology devices in Hanoi families and influencing factors" (Nguyen, 2017), the Internet has been shown to decrease the interaction time between parents and children.

Internet use is associated with time spent in face-to-face interaction between parents and children and increases the distance between family relationships (Nguyen & Le, 2021). The question of how the Internet affects Vietnamese families and family communication has been more or less clarified by previous studies. However, no study has explored the relationship between parents' Internet usage purposes and how these affect communication with their children. Does a parent's use of the Internet to communicate with their children serve to enhance or restrict that communication? This study aims to address that question and fill the gap left by previous research.

Material and methods

Research hypothesis

The way people use the Internet has significance when considering the role and influence of the Internet on communication between parents and children in the family. Kraut, Mukhopadhyay, Szczypula, Kiesler and Scherlis (1999) warned that we could predict the social impact of the Internet only if we understood how people used it. Therefore, considering user needs, it is also crucial to pay attention to the purpose of Internet use. December (1996) identified satisfaction in communication, interaction, and information as the three main aspects that explain why people use the Internet. The present study focuses on the three goals for which parents use the Internet: to get in touch, look up information, and build and maintain relationships. On that basis, it investigates the relationship between parents' Internet use purposes and its effects on their communication with their children in the family.

Research question 1: How is the relationship between parents' purposes for the Internet use and the Internet's positive effects on communication between parents and children?

Hypothesis 1A: The more parents use the Internet to contact their children, the more diversity in communication with them increases.

Hypothesis 1B. The more parents use the Internet to look for information, the richer the content of communication between them and their children becomes.

Hypothesis 1C. The more parents use the Internet to build and maintain relationships, the more communication time between parents and children increases.

Research question 2: How is the relationship between parents' purposes for the Internet use and the Internet's negative effects on communication between parents and children?

Hypothesis 2A. The more parents use the Internet to contact their children, the less time they spend communicating face-to-face.

Hypothesis 2B. The more parents use the Internet to look for information, the more interruption and reduced interest in face-to-face communication with their children result.

Hypothesis 2C. The more parents use the Internet to establish and maintain relationships, the more their ability to share and understand each other in parent-child communication is reduced.

Research sample

When analyzing the EFA exploratory factor, there are 19 observed variables used. So, the minimum sample size required is 19 x 5 = 95 observations. The author surveyed 113 parent-child pairs to ensure the size of the sample.

A survey of 113 parents with children in junior high school and high school in Hanoi was conducted from June to July 2021. Parents participating in the study ranged in age from 35 to 50 and were active in all professions. Of the 113 parents, 79.9% are female, 22.1% are male with a pretty high level of education, 67.3% graduated from university and graduate school. Parents participating in the study belonged to two family groups: two-generation families (63.7%), and three-generation families (36.3%).

Surveying

The questionnaire draws on the existing literature of many research experts on Internet use and communication in Vietnamese families. The scales are built by the authors after determining the research object and purposes. The results presented in this study are part of the thesis "Internet and communication between parents and children in urban Vietnamese families" authored by Thi Kim Dung Le and was improved by a group of experts from Vietnam.

The sample's selection proceeds as follows: First, the authors identify the subjects participating in the study. They were children and their parents. Children are junior high school and high school age, from junior high school and high schools in Hanoi. From the list of grades 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12, the homeroom teacher selects students in step 4 until the list is full for each class. From the list of students, the classroom teacher contacted them to invite their parents to participate in the survey.

From the list of selected students in junior high school and high school in Hanoi city, the authors continued with contacting and inviting their parents to participate in the research. The researcher provided information about the purpose, content, and manner of conducting the study to each participant before responding to the survey. All parents voluntarily consented to participate in the study. Parents were invited to their children's school, where they answered the questionnaire under the guidance of the researcher. After data cleansing, the questionnaire was processed using SPSS 20 software to serve as the basis for research analysis.

The scale

The study focused on three purposes of parents' Internet use: contact, looking for information, and establishing and maintaining relationships. The study aims to explore the relationship between parents' Internet use purpose and communication activities between parents and children, so three scales are built to measure observed variables:

The scale of positive effects of the Internet on communication between parents and children. This scale includes four aspects of observation rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5): (i) diverse forms of communication, (ii) more communication time, (iii) flexible communication moment, (iv) rich communication content, (v) easy to reach consensus. The variables assigned to the positive aspects of the Internet on parent-child communication are PE1 to PE5, respectively. The Alpha Cronbach coefficient for this scale is 0.889.

The scale of negative effects of the Internet on communication between parents and children. This scale consists of four aspects of observation, which are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) (i) heavy use of the Internet reduces the time of face-to-face communication; (ii) heavy use of the Internet reduces the effectiveness of face-to-face communication; (iii) heavy Internet use disrupts and reduces interest in face-to-face communication, (iv) heavy Internet use reduces sharing and understanding in communication. The variables assigned to the negative aspects of the Internet on parent-child communication are NE1 to NE5, respectively. Alpha Cronbach coefficient for the scale is 0.868.

The scale of satisfaction in communication between parents and children. This scale includes 11 measurement aspects rated on a Likert scale of 5 from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5): total communication time, face-to-face communication time, communication moment, communication method, communication content, listening ability in communication, expressing emotion ability in communicating, ability to share views and understand each other, effective communication. The variables assigned to the level of satisfaction in communication between parents and children are from S1 to S11, respectively. The alpha Cronbach coefficient for the scale is 0.955.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table 1

Time spent by parents on the Internet (n=113)

Internet usage time	N	%
1-<3hours	49	43.4
3-5 hours	35	31
> 6 hours	29	25.6
Total	113	100

The Internet usage time of parents in the family is pretty high. Parents' Internet usage time a day is at least 1 hour and, at most, over 6 hours. The amount of time spent online by parents in the survey is relatively consistent with the national average of 6 hours and 42 minutes per day for Internet use (Lan, 2020). Most parents use the Internet for 1-3 hours a day (43.4%), 31% of parents use the Internet for 3-5 hours/day, and 25.6% of parents use the Internet for more than 6 hours/day (Table 1).

Table 2

Devices used by parents for online activity (N = 113)

Internet usage device	N	%
Computer	43	38.1
Laptop	65	57.5
Tablet	22	19.5
Mobile phone	103	91.2
Video game console	3	2.7
Television	48	41.5
Smartwatch	7	6.2

Due to their convenience, fast speed, and high mobility, mobile phones are the dominant means of accessing the Internet. Therefore, up to 91.2% of parents use mobile phones to access the Internet. Second-ranked, with an Internet access rate of 57.5%, is the laptop - a means of accessing the Internet that is quite fast and relatively flexible, allowing users to work and access the Internet simultaneously. Game consoles are the devices least used by parents to access the Internet, with a very modest rate of 2.7% (Table 2).

The means of accessing the Internet have a relationship with the purpose of using the Internet by the parents and with the communication behavior between parents and children. Survey results show that 91.2% of parents use smartphones to access the Internet, while smartphones are a very convenient means of accessing the Internet anytime, anywhere. Therefore, the use of smartphones as the prime means of accessing the Internet will contribute to supporting communication through the Internet between parents and children.

Table 3

Internet application usage among parents

Internet usage application	N	%
Social networks (Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Tinder, etc.)	81	71.7
Zalo	90	79.6
Youtube	49	43.4
Website	52	46
Game online	1	0.9
Other	17	15

Descriptive data shows that parental Internet access rates in apps are related to the purposes for which parents go online. Every day, 79.6% of parents access the Zalo application. Zalo is the largest domestic social network in Vietnam, with 60 million users in 2020 (Trong, 2020). Zalo social network is convenient for communication with video calling and messaging functions. Other social networks such as (Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and Tinder) ranked second with a parental access rate of 71.7%. Youtube and other various websites are also used by parents when accessing the Internet, with relatively high percentages of 43.4% and 46%, respectively (Table 3).

The means of going online are related to the purpose for which parents use the Internet and the communication behavior between parents and children. Survey results show that 91.2% of parents use smartphones for their online activity because smartphones are a very convenient means of accessing the Internet anytime, anywhere. As a result, using smartphones as the primary Internet access method will support parent-child online communication.

The applications through which parents access the Internet are related to their intentions and parent-child communication behavior. Table 3 shows that most parents use social networks (71.7%) and Zalo (79.6%). These social networks play a crucial role in supporting parent-child communication.

Table 4

Purposes for which parents access the Internet

Purpose of using Internet	N	%
Communication	102	90.3
Finding information	102	90.3
Entertainment	85	75.2
Buy and sell goods	74	65.5
Working	89	78.8
Learning	41	36.3
Establish and maintain relationships	71	62.8
Express your personality and opinion	20	17.7
Finding help	25	22.1

The purposes for which parents access the Internet cover a wide variety. 90.3% of parents use the Internet to contact and find information. The use of the Internet for establishing and maintaining parental relationships is also pretty high (62.8%). Most parents are less interested in using the Internet to express their personalities and viewpoints (17.7%) or to find help (22.1%).

Hypothesis testing

All hypotheses are checked by Pearson's correlation ($p < 0.05$).
The first research question examined the relationship between the purpose for which parents use the Internet and the Internet's positive effects on parent-child communication.
Hypothesis 1A predicts that the more parents use the Internet to contact their children, the more varied the ways they communicate with them. Hypothesis 1A is supported because there is a moderate positive correlation between the parents' use of the Internet to contact the children and the variety of communication forms with them ($r = .306$; $p < 0.05$). That means the more parents use the Internet to contact their children, the more diverse the forms of communication between parents and their children will be (Table 5).
Descriptive statistics show that 56.6% of parents agree and 15.93 % strongly agree that the Internet increases the variety of forms of parent-child communication. The average score for the statement that the Internet increases the diversity of communication forms between parents and children is pretty high (3,796) (Table 6).

Table 5

Relationship between parental Internet usage intent and positive Internet influences on parent-child communication

	Rating coefficient	The form of communication is more diverse	The communication time is more	Moment of communication is more flexible	The content of the communication is richer	Consensus in communication is easier to achieve
Contact	Pearson Correlation	.306**	.125	.209*	.067	.251**
	Sig.	.001	.187	.026	.482	.007
Find information	Pearson Correlation	.306**	.292**	.356**	.269**	.382**
	Sig.	.001	.002	.000	.004	.000
Establish and maintain relationships	Pearson Correlation	.332**	.204*	.228*	.196*	.313**
	Sig.	.000	.031	.015	.037	.001

Hypothesis 1B predicts that the more parents use the Internet to find information, the richer the communication content between parents and children will be. This hypothesis is supported because there is a low-level positive correlation between the parent's use of the Internet to find information and the communication content between parents and children ($r = .269$, $p < 0.05$). It means the more information parents find on the internet, the richer the content of their communication with their children becomes (Table 5). 53.10% of parents surveyed agree that the Internet makes parent-child communication richer, while the percentage that strongly agrees is 15.04%. The average score for the statement "The Internet enriches parent-child communication content" is 3.726 (Table 6).

Hypothesis 1C predicts that the more parents use the Internet to establish and maintain relationships, the more communication time between parents and children increases. Hypothesis 1C is supported because there is a low positive correlation between the parent's use of the Internet to establish and maintain the relationship and communication time between parents and children ($r = .204$; $p < 0.05$) (Table 5). That means the more parents use the Internet to maintain and establish relationships, the more time they spend communicating with their children.

Descriptive statistics show that 48.67% of parents agree and 8.85% strongly agree that the Internet helps increase communication time between parents and children. The average score for the statement "The Internet helps to spend more time communicating between parents and children" is 3.522 (Table 6).

Table 6

Parents' assessment of the positive influence of Internet use on communication with their children

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Average	Standard deviation
The form of communication is more diverse	3.54	1.77	22.12	56.64	15.93	3.796	0.857
The communication time is extended / increased	4.42	5.31	32.74	48.67	8.85	3.522	0.897
The moment of communication is more flexible	2.65	3.54	13.27	63.72	16,81	3.885	0.821
The content of the communication is richer	3.54	3.54	24.78	53.10	15.04	3.726	0.889
Consensus in communication is easier to achieve	3.54	5.31	31.86	45.13	14.16	3.611	0.920

The second research question examined the relationship between the purpose for which parents use the Internet and the Internet's side effects on parent-child communication.

Hypothesis 2A predicts that the more parents use the Internet to contact their children, the less time they spend communicating face-to-face. Hypothesis 2A is not supported because there is no correlation between the parent's purpose of using the Internet to get in touch with the children and face-to-face communication time between parents and children ($p > 0.05$). That means that parents who use the Internet a lot to contact their children do not reduce the time spent in face-to-face communication (Table 7).

Table 7

Relationship between parental Internet usage intent and negative Internet influences on parent-child communication

	Rating coefficient	Reduce face-to-face communication time	Reduce the effectiveness of face-to-face communication	Increased disruption and decreased interest in face-to-face communication	Reduced ability to share and understand each other in communication	Increasing conflicts due to misunderstandings
Contact	Pearson Correlation	-.014	-.030	.146	.139	.051
	Sig.	.884	.751	.123	.142	.589
Find information	Pearson Correlation	.050	.003	.189*	.329**	.106
	Sig.	.596	.978	.045	.000	.263
Establish and maintain relationships	Pearson Correlation	.132	.137	.261**	.276**	.090
	Sig.	.163	.146	.005	.003	.344

Hypothesis 2B predicts that the more parents use the Internet to find information, the more interruption and reduced interest in face-to-face communication with their children will be reported. Hypothesis 2B is supported because there is a low positive correlation between parents' use of the Internet to find information and the ability to interrupt and reduce interest in face-to-face communication between parents and children (r = .189; p > 0.05) (Table 7). That means parents use the Internet to a great extent to find information that interrupts and reduces interest in face-to-face communication with their children. 38.05% of parents agree, and 15.04% strongly agree that Internet usage disrupts and reduces interest in communication between them and their children. The average score for the statement "The Internet disrupts and reduces interest in face-to-face communication between parents and children" is 3.398 (Table 8).

Hypothesis 2C predicts that parents use the Internet too much to establish and maintain relationships with their children, reducing their ability to share and understand each other in parent-child communication. This hypothesis is supported because there is a low positive correlation between parents' use of Internet to establish and maintain relationships and their ability to share and understand each other in parent-child communication (r = .276; p > 0.05) (Table 7). 42.48% of parents agree, and 14.16% strongly agree that using the Internet too much reduces the ability to share and understand each other in interpersonal communication. The average score for the statement "The Internet reduces the ability to share and understand each other in communication between parents and children" is 3.478 (Table 8).

Table 8

Parents' assessment of the negative influence of the Internet on communication between parent and children

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Average	Standard deviation
Reduce face-to-face communication time	7.08	19.47	51.33	19.47	7.08	3.779	0.933
Reduce the effectiveness of face-to-face communication	2.65	7.08	19.47	51.33	19.47	3.735	0.916
Increased disruption and decreased interest in face-to-face communication	5.31	17.70	23.89	38.05	15.04	3.398	1.106
Increasing conflicts due to misunderstandings	6.19	27.43	28.32	28.32	9.73	3.080	1.095
Reduced ability to share and understand each other in communication	4.42	14.16	24.78	42.48	14.16	3.478	1.045

Discussion

The survey results show that five of the six initial hypotheses are supported (1A, 1B, 1C, 2B, and 2C). So, there is a correlation between the three purposes for which parents use the Internet and its influences on communication between parents and children in families in Hanoi. Parents use the Internet to make contact, increasing the variety of communication forms between parents and children, but this does not reduce the face-to-face communication time between parents and children. Parents using the Internet to find information contribute to a richer content of communication with their children while also increasing the disruption and reducing the interest in face-to-face communication between parents and children. Parents' use of the Internet to maintain and establish relationships with their children increases total communication time with them but decreases their ability to share and understand each other through communication.

The Internet not only helps people connect quickly, but it also adds new communication tools for them, as noted by Hughes and Hans (2001).

The Internet not only helps people connect quickly, but it also adds new communication tools for them, as noted by Hughes and Hans (2001). Therefore, the communication activities between parents and children are supplemented with many new communication channels. Forms of communication are not limited to face-to-face chat but can be extended through texting or calling (with or without video), even parent-child interactions on social media. Social media accounts are also a new way of communicating nowadays. When parents use the Internet, there is also a variation in the existing forms of communication with their children. Interestingly, parents using the Internet to make contact increase the variety of communication forms but do not reduce

the face-to-face communication time between parents and children. That is quite different from previous studies that found that using the Internet (for whatever purpose) also reduces the time spent by individuals in face-to-face communication with others, including family members, such as research by Kraut et al. (1998), McKenna et al. (2002), Shim (2007), Gapsiso and Wilson (2015). The specific cultural characteristics and social context of the research object should be considered in explaining this difference. One of the inherent cultural characteristics of Vietnamese society is placing a strong emphasis on maintaining good relationships with others, and communication is a key-factor for good social relations (Tran, 1999). Besides, the social context in Vietnam creates conditions for parents and children to have a lot of space and time to communicate with each other. Every day, each family usually has two to three meals together. Furthermore, Vietnamese people have the habit of drinking tea after each meal, sitting and chatting with family in one place. Therefore, direct communication between parents and children always seems to have a lot of space and time conditions to take place.

The emergence of the Internet does not reduce the face-to-face communication time between parents and children; on the contrary, the communication between them is also enriched in content when parents use the Internet to find information. This finding shows that the Internet provides a diverse source of information to enhance parent-child conversations. In fact, with just one click, the whole world seems to be within our reach. The Internet provides an information source for communication between parents and children. However, being too focused on finding information on the Internet increased disruption and decreased interest in face-to-face communication between parents and children. Disruptions and reduced interest in face-to-face communication could be the cause of a decrease in the quality of face-to-face communication between parents and children. Therefore, this should be kept in mind when building solutions or services that promote effective communication in the family.

Besides that, the use of the Internet by parents to maintain and establish relationships increased total communication time between parents and children. Therefore, parents who use the Internet to connect, establish and maintain relationships will increase the positive influence of the Internet on communication between parents and children. However, further research is needed on the relationships parents build and maintain online because the parent's motivation for doing so also hinders parent-child communication by making it harder for them to share and understand one another. Thus, more communication time does not mean parents and children can share and understand each other better during communication.

Conclusion

The findings of the research indicate that the use of the Internet by parents for contact, information seeking, and relationship establishment and maintenance increases the positive effects of the Internet on parent-child communication. These findings support the hypothesis that the purposes for which parents use the Internet influence parent-child communication. Inside, the positive effects are fundamental. Making online contact with children broadens the range of the available communication forms; searching for online information can enrich communication content with them; and establishing and maintaining relationships with children via the Internet increases parent-child communication time. However, both searching for information and building relationships in the virtual environment have side effects: these practices contribute to the disruption and reduction of interest in face-to-face parent-child communication and the decline of the ability to share and understand each other.

It can be considered that the three purposes of using the Internet – to contact, find information, establish and maintain relationships – are healthy usage purposes. It is undeniable that the Internet would improve parent-child communication if it were used for constructive purposes. This finding consolidates the view that the real problem of using the Internet belongs to the users themselves (Shim, 2007). The benefits of the Internet for communication activities will increase if people are encouraged to use it for health purposes. It could be an interesting suggestion to build a system of family support services and solutions to direct individuals to use the Internet effectively and promote more effective communication among family members.

Acknowledgements

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ROSES, TOMATO CHUTNEY AND RISING SUN: ON VISIBILITY OF THREE FESTIVALS IN BULGARIA

Svetlana D. HRISTOVA-VLADI

"Communities and Identities" Department, Institute for Philosophy and Sociology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Address correspondence to: 4, Serdika str. 1000 Sofia. Phone: +359 884 281 391. E-mail: svetlana_hristova@hotmail.com

Abstract

Objectives. This study focuses on the visibility of three local festivals in Bulgaria: Rose Festival in Kazanlak, July Morning at Kamen bryag and the Festival of Peppers, Tomatoes, Traditional Foods, and Crafts in Kurtovo Konare. The research on festive visibility has been deconstructed to three components of analysis: story, local imagery and photogenicity (colors, photographic visuals).

Material and methods. These include participant observations, in-depth interviews, analysis of visuals (both website and media ones as well as photographs, taken by the researcher), and desktop research of scientific literature and online media outlets.

Results. The researcher conducted fieldwork as participant observer, interviewer, photographer, and visual analyst of festive events. It was discovered that the Rose Festival promotes pink symbols as prevalent elements of the cultural-historical branding, encompassing Thracian heritage and rose farming. July Morning has been commodified towards fragmented celebrations happening in the peripheral moment of 30th June and 1st July. This has obscured the sense of community and the sense of place affiliated with the initial phenomenon. Local farmers' aesthetics and diligence play a central role in the publicity of Kurtovo Konare Fest: their agrarian knowledge and willpower to actively participate in social life, upskill and exchange know-how with fellow famers.

Conclusions. The three local celebrations represent collections of sensations, colors, imagined experiences, memories, visitor's expectations, sense of community and awoken sense of place. The optics of the Rose Festival in Kazanlak comprises of contrasting messages: the pink aesthetics is representing the beauty and the traditional means of local livelihood; however, the flashy pink ambience somewhat mutes the demands of the rose farmers, seen in the pieces of critical journalism. July Morning Festival has been largely deterritorialized from its original place to dispersed celebrations which do not recur the initial code of conduct. In the locality of Kamen bryag, however, the scent of wild nature and sea salt still reunites a few generations of like-minded people, mostly admirers of rock music and camping. The heart of the optics of Kurtovo Konare Fest are the village producers, eager to raise voices in defense of their production and generate a distinctive local ethos.

Keywords: local festivals, story, visibility, local imagery, photogenicity.

Introduction

Local festivals are "themed and inclusive" events within local communities which celebrate the specific way of life in the community in a certain space and time (Jepson & Clarke, 2014, p. 3). This study draws upon the visibility of three festivals in Bulgaria: Rose Festival in Kazanlak (Central Bulgaria), July Morning at Kamen Bryag (Eastern Bulgaria) and the Festival of Peppers, Tomatoes, Traditional Foods and Crafts in Kurtovo Konare (also known as Kurtovo Konare Fest, Southern Bulgaria). Exploring visibility of the festivals from the researcher's point of view means analyzing the character, distinctiveness, public image, and the extent of recognizability of these events. The visibility review has been decomposed into three components: stories, local imagery, and photogenicity.

Story

Local celebrations capitalize on the symbolic weight of the narratives and myths surrounding the festive localities. These narratives are not as much about history as they are about the way local people construct their identity and sense of place (Bird, 2002 as cited in McClinchey, 2014, p. 141). Indigenous narratives, whether relying on historical fact or legend, are largely imagined to fit a desired local identity. Festivals are also viewed as "place image boosters" (McClinchey, 2011, p. 2). Festivising places (cities) is a global process related to the so-called "creative economy" (Howkins, 2002). Keliyan (2022) assumes that while in economic theories festivals serve the "creative branding" of cities, a sociological view might call the process "artwork" (or "designing images"), which is a creative thing, however − in some cases, the result might be quite made up (in other words, manufactured, invented) (p. 64).

Petkova (2022) lists both "visible" and "invisible" benefits for local communities of launching a popular holiday. Among the "visible" ones are the economic benefits and enabled cultural expression of the residents. The "invisible" paybacks, on the other hand, encompass fostering community pride; strengthening relationships within the community; building a sense of social cohesion; assisting in overcoming prejudices and stigmatization towards certain social groups; helping to overcome social alienation; giving rise to hope (pp. 82-103). Creating local history could be added to the invisible benefits as well.

Local imagery

Local imagery involves the human factor (the people), the physical scene, the sense of place and the connectivity of all these. The image of a concrete locality could be either cognitive-perceptual (refers to knowledge and beliefs about a place) or emotional-affective (refers to emotions induced by a place) (Freire, 2009, p. 421). Scholarly literature recognizes the existence of identity based on the sense of place. The illusion of social and cultural homogeneity and integrity is an inseparable feature of attachment to a place. Rodaway (1994) calls such meaningful emotional and cognitive conceptions and representations of physical space "sensual geographies" and divides them into perceptions as feeling and perceptions as cognition. Although scientific literature pays substantial tribute to the static image of a place, dynamic image is also worth studying, especially since local people are part of it (Freire, 2009, p. 422). Therefore, quality

photographic and video footage of local people would, by any means, boost the place as a geographical domain (Freire, 2009, p. 420).

Photogenicity

With the aim to examine the visuals of the local celebrations, on the one hand, the author traces the differences between official festival photography/ media photos, and, on the other hand, pictures taken for research purposes during the participatory observations. For the purposes of the study the American informal term "optics" is utilized, as it means "the public opinion and understanding of a given phenomenon as shown by the public sphere and the media and the possible political effects of this coverage" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

The art of photography is developing in parallel with tourism, as photographic images help us "master spaces in which we otherwise feel uncertain" (Sontag, 2013, pp. 14-15). Photography is by nature "an act of intervention", as the camera can "penetrate, distort, exploit, and, at the extreme end of the metaphor, kill" (Sontag, 2013, pp. 18, 20). With the industrialization of this art craft, photographs do not remain mere art or touristic images, but are "implemented" by the controlling institutions as a symbol of documentary truth, albeit simplified; hence, an event becomes significant if the ruling ideology gives it a name and classifies it, and then determines whether it deserves to be photographed (Sontag, 2013, p. 26, 30). The latter statement could be viewed as a trend in the "official" selection of photos: what deserves to be photographed by the authorities is the beauty, not the mundane.

When interpreting the images, it is essential to consider their context, as well as the relationship between the image and the outside world (Burke, 2010, pp. 435-441; Goleshevska, 2020). An essential thing, as spoken above, is who is the contracting authority of the images, who endorses the pictures. It makes sense to examine photographs and other visual products in the social context of their production and consumption, as Ruby proposed (1981, p. 4). To comprehend a photograph is not a simple act, says Burgin (1982) – it construes a "visual language" which denotes objects into codes of connotations, overlaps texts, and is situated within a concrete cultural or historical conjuncture (pp. 143-144). For these reasons, dedicated paragraphs in the paper inquire how the photo images have been beheld by the municipally recruited professional cameraperson, and which way scenes, colors and social actions have been grasped and deciphered by the researcher.

Material and methods

The article is based on in-depth interviews and participatory observations, conducted in 2021 in three festive localities in Bulgaria: Kazanlak, Kamen bryag and Kurtovo Konare. Other methods include desk research of scholarly literature, online media articles, and analyses of two sets of photographs –taken by the researcher and photographs from online media and official sources, such as municipal websites. Photo shooting of people and objects was allowed within the context of the three events by the organizers (which are the municipality in Kazanlak, volunteers' group at Kamen bryag and the community center in Kurtovo Konare) for research and media purposes, as well as for the photo archives, social media channels and the webpages of the organizers. The pictured people were informed what the pictures will be used for. The photos currently belong to a research project, funded by the National Scientific Fund of Bulgaria (see **Acknowledgements**).

The in-depth interviews were conducted as follows: three in Kazanlak (with municipal representatives and a local journalist: respondents K1, K2, K3); four in Kamen bryag (with volunteering organizers and with a local NGO leader: respondents JM1, JM2, JM3, JM4) and three in Kurtovo Konare (with the community and cultural center's organizers and with an active citizen: respondents KF1, KF2, KF3).

Results and Discussions

Rose Festival in Kazanlak

Story

Kazanlak, the largest non-regional city in Bulgaria, is the center of a rose-producing region with centuries-old traditions in the extraction of rose oil and other essential oils. The town of Kazanlak and the neighboring Karlovo have been proverbial in the dispute over whose rose festival has been more long-standing. Often, the identity of a locality is asserted through confrontation with another locality, on issues such as who pioneered what. Research by the Historical Museum in Kazanlak found that the Rose Festival was organized for the first time in Kazanlak in 1903 as a celebration of charity and kindness. Funds were collected for poor families, elderly people, orphans, and disabled. With a decision of the Council of Ministers in 1971 the Rose Festival in Kazanlak was declared a national holiday. To date, it is celebrated from mid-May to June 6, promptly when the rose picking takes place.

Local imagery

The traditional events in the cultural program include the annual election of a Rose Queen, reenactment of rose picking, and the city-wide march called "The Parade of Aroma and Beauty". The annual ritual of crowning the Rose Queen is a patent owned by the City of Kazanlak and may only take place in this municipality, and only during the Rose Festival. The criterion for selection is the most beautiful female high school graduate from Kazanlak. The jury of the competition consists of active citizens, former Rose Queens, representatives of cities twinned with Kazanlak, etc. The Rose Queen typically becomes Kazanlak ambassador for yearlong and travels with municipal delegations to twin cities. "*Being a Rose Queen is a big responsibility in a small, provincial town*," says respondent K3 and claims that all the "queens" have fulfilled their higher education studies by simultaneously being committed to their duties as Rose Queens.

Kazanlak has been "packed" as a single, integrated cultural and tourist product (in municipal organizers' opinion). The purpose of the newly built tourism infrastructure is to deliver a multi-sensory experience, including aroma, taste, visual aesthetics, sports, leisure, history of the Bulgarian Enlightenment, culture, local lifestyle. The idea is to keep the visitors in the city and its surroundings for a longer period. As an adjunct, the municipality of Kazanlak invested in a comprehensive branding of the city: streets were renovated, inter-block spaces were restored, sidewalks were widened, exteriors were renovated, and landscaping was renewed in parks and gardens. The benefits of the city's revitalization are tangible: increased tourist flow and promotion of the brand "Kazanlak" by tour operators and foreign media.

Although the branding symbols of the Rose Festival are credited to Kazanlak municipality, they would not be effective forms of communication if the media of the message were not the citizens themselves (Aronczyk, 2008, p. 54). Photographic footage of local people dynamizes the perception and boosts the locality as a geographical brand (Freire, 2009, pp. 420-

422). "*All, absolutely all citizens*" are on the streets of the town during the festive period (respondents K1, K2). Sunday's culminating march – "*this spectacular, lavish parade*" (respondent K1) is the most tangible expression of active citizenship. "*Did you notice which way people of Kazanlak congratulate each other? Instead of "Greets on the Rose Festival", they say "Happy Holiday*" (respondent K3). The Rose Festival has been internalized as a holiday of a distinguished local identity, of being *kazanlachanin* (born, living, associated with Kazanlak).

The most vivid and photogenic embodiment of the human factor is the Sunday Rose Parade, with the diversity of marching citizens: both young and adult, varying by ethnicity and professions, either locals, or guests. The walking performance, as it should be called, is inclusive: there are marching actors with masks of animated characters, kindergarten and school-age children, local factories' employees, members of interest clubs, Kazanlak artistic and creative intelligentsia, and so on. "*And towards the end of the procession you might not have expected that the employees of the Municipal Hygiene City Service have also marched with their brooms*" (respondent K3). The Rose Festival leads to a public, city-wide unification of citizens, cultural institutes, and authorities. This is the period "*when people forget their political affiliations*" (respondent K3).

The researcher has revised 77 media articles to reveal certain trends in festival messaging (all Bulgarian festive events are concerned). It was discovered that building publicity of local festivals through unique finds (e.g., creations, local products) appears as a message in ¾ of the texts. In journalist's perception, such unique and innovative novelties, related to the Roses celebration in particular, are:

- "Upgraded" products, e.g., "Kazanlak rose ice cream" − a combination of roses and strawberries, prepared on the public square by the prominent TV star and chef Uti Bachvarov.
- Rose-related "know-how": the one-of-a-kind rose-related scientific conference, held during the festival.
- DO-IT-YOURSELF fragrance workshop where people can combine aromas and produce their own perfume.
- In 2011, dogs from a local shelter for homeless animals marched with the poster *"If I sit down for you, and would you stand up for me?"* As a result of this mini campaign, initiated by the then-Rose Queen Simona Petkova, six of the homeless dogs have been adopted. As a follow-up, the same Rose Queen managed to raise BGN 6,500 through a social media charity platform, named "Give a paw – donate a heart" (e.g., books and clothes for dogs).

Yet another trend in media coverage recounts the role of the holiday package and agenda in attracting tourists (53.2%): for instance, the City of Kazanlak combined two brands, that of the Valley of Thracian Kings and that of the City of Roses and endorses a joint regional cultural-historical branding.

Photogenicy

When constructing the public image of Kazanlak celebration, two dominating metaphors occur: that of the tender prettiness of the rose and that of the beauty of Bulgarian women. It seems that the entire celebration "optics" is subordinated to the pink aesthetics: roses, real flowers or in a stylized image, the pink head wreaths, the rose color dressed Rose Queen and her runners-up, the reenacting rose pickers, and the whole pink ambience, including decoration, commercial rose

products, merchandize. What could be noticed within the official photography of the Rose Festival (photo collage 1), is:

- Manipulation of space by layering 2-3 symbols of Kazanlak in one integrated image (the Rose Queens photographed against the background of rose massifs; folk dances next to rose brewing).
- A nod towards the anti-discrimination/ inclusion principle (photo shooting of various marching entities, with a focus on the most vibrant groups),
- A hint of intergenerational visibility (at the rose bars, both younger and elderly women are taken picture of),
- "Everyday life" reenactments as a marketing tool: local actresses and folk dancers are representing the ritual of rose picking, all dressed in the costumes of a "temporary celebration" (Stoilova, 2021, p. 82),
- Shots of award ceremonies, official speeches, concert moments, etc.

Photo collage 1. Stylized rose as a patent of the City of Kazanlak. The Rose Queen and her runners-up in a rose field. Reenactment of an old times family heading to rose picking. Credits to: https://www.kazanlak.bg, the City of Kazanlak's website

It is easy to assume that the researcher's photo selection is different (photo collage 2), as it is based on the specific viewing angle of the observer and on findings from the in-depth interviews. A local journalist voiced an opinion that the City of Kazanlak does not have an advertising strategy regarding tourism. The critique of the media person was related to the fact that the Municipality of Kazanlak requires establishing a municipal enterprise to produce merchandise

for Kazanlak festivity. (A few celebration "pillars" have been formed in the cultural events calendar of the municipality, such as literature events, folklore and other music fests, venerations, related to Thracian legacy, etc.) A remark was made by respondent K3 that street merchants sell wreaths made of artificial roses, while it is easy to make wreaths of locally produced dried roses and offer them to buyers throughout the street stalls. A few photos of women and girls with rose wreaths on the top of their heads were taken by the researcher as a reference to the journalist's statement.

Another theme in the researcher's selection is the abandoned rose fields. Kazanlak Rose Festival is euphoric: festivity has been invented through drafting an abundant program, filled with positive self-presentations, in which the intended criterion is exuberance and rose symbols. Nevertheless, an unbiased observer could notice that a piece of social reality has been subtlety erased from the over-branded imagery: i.e., the problems of the small farmers, the seasonally recruited rose pickers, etc. who somewhat do not match the institutionalized picture of the event. It seems that during the feast of the senses, the inconvenient "rose' rhetoric seemed to be muted in a "political and social silence" (Adams, Hoelscher, & Till, 2001, p. xxiv). According to observations, the "optics" of the festival does not address logical and up-to-date messaging, such as appeals to preserve the rose as a national treasure; to prevent the illegal export of rose plantations outside the country borders; to upgrade the existing national law on rose oil; to restore the old glory and stabilize the price of the Bulgarian rose oil; to counter-measure the rising gas price which has implications on rose oil extraction (Vateva's media article, 2021); to take decisions for the abandoned rose massifs and the eradication of the rose fields; to start monitoring, assessment and sanction regarding the deterioration of the quality of Bulgarian rose oil; to plan subsidies for rose farming, as well as for export of the processed products, etc. A similar issue has been observed during a festive event in Shumen, Bulgaria, by a fellow researcher: the festival's focus on "cohesion" and "tradition" failed to address current social issues at local and national level (Marinov, 2022, p. 49). Yet, the researcher, with an inexperienced eye of an external observer, captured unpopular moments and counterintuitive characters (e.g., a foreign male tourist with a rose wreath over his head); visual intertextuality (photo of a photographer while taking photos); a woman picking roses with a baby in her arms; selfies of young girls among the rose fields, etc.

Photo collage 2. (top left to right) Reenactment of rose picking, Ovoshtnik village. Folklore children's ensemble at the Complex Damascena celebration, 6th June 2021. A foreign visitor with a surprised face at a stand with souvenirs. Foreign girls with rose wreaths attending the rose picking reenactment in Ovoshtnik village. Photos: the author

July Morning Fest, Kamen bryag

Story

The big myth surrounding the July Morning (also referred to as July) phenomenon is where it originates from. Could it be referred to as a cultural dissidence, a manifestation of resistance of the Eastern Bloc's youth against socialist regime, an alternative public sphere or an "invented tradition" (according to the term of Eric Hobsbawm)? The paragraph will draw upon Robert Levi's "autoethnographic" text, "July Morning as a National Phenomenon", published on ResearchGate. The author is one of the first "July people", who observed and participated in the making of the original July Morning – a wild, informal summit of hippies (Levi, n.d., p. 7).

According to a reliable version of how the phenomenon has begun, the pioneer of July Morning is a famous Varna hippy man named Stoyan (Tyanata), who has been on army duty in mid-1980s in the night of June 30th against July 1st. He would welcome the first rays of sun and would vow to himself that not a single person should greet the first of July morning on one's own. In a media article Boncheva (2011) tells a story that in 1986, 10-12 Varna citizens gathered on the "Rock meadow" in the Sea Garden. The following year, on June 30th, Varna hippies invited like-minded peers from all around the country in the Sea Garden. If using Gladwell's terminology – the "stickiness" factor may be distinguished in this case, which is the presence of a specific message with a memorable impact. From the following year onwards, the July community grew into a geometric progression: a local party has turned into a nation-wide phenomenon.

Berger's concept (1999) of the "counter-communities" comes to help in describing July's community: this is indeed a subculture, "subworld", which communicates in its own language and

constructs a semantic universe, distant from that of the fellow citizens (p. 137-138). July pioneers had an own "subworld" which honored the Beat Generation as cultural code, accessories, and literature; they were intellectuals in dissidence, free to live out secession from the norms of the Day as previously consented within the borders of the "subworld".

A sense of community thrives when individual members are willing to invest time and energy into the group (McMillan & Chavis, 1996, p. 856). Identity myths are experienced and shared through ritual action (Holt, 2004, pp. 65, 189). The ritualized practices of July associates included: having "a long-haired" soul; having Robert Pirsig's book "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values" in one's backpack; hitchhiking to the festival location, so on. The tentative landscape: tents and sleeping bags situated across the rock meadow in Varna's Sea Garden. Groups by interest were formed on a non-territorial basis, discussing books, music, plays; new songs were being composed. In the morning, everyone would wake up before sunrise and all eyes would be focused on the horizon towards the East. There would be "one beer" reward for whoever sees the first ray of sunshine. As the first ray of sunshine appears, Uriah Heep's "July Morning" would play (Levi, n.d., p. 55).

Local imagery

The following chapter attempts at guessing why Varna became July's Location. First, it is a "seaport with numerous salesmen returning from capitalist countries" (Levi, n.d., p. 36). Second, in terms of music, "the largest collection of gramophone records is in Varna" (Levi, n.d., p. 36). Third, there is a connecting personality, a legendary "hippie" character who "spreads information about music, books, movies and lifestyle" (Levi, n.d., p. 32) from outside the borders of the Eastern Bloc. The "stickiness" factor is also present (according to Gladwell's concept): "heterogeneous youth groups ready to accept the proposed style" (Levi, n.d., pp. 36, 37). Finally, there is a "sensual geography" (Rodaway, 1994): the sunrise over the sea horizon cannot be rivaled by any sunrise observed from other points within the inner country.

From 2005 onwards a few mayors along the Black Sea coast happen to initiate July Morning celebrations with municipal funds. The most popular among those "institutionalized" July's is Kavarna Rock Fest. It has taken place at Kamen bryag (a locality near the town of Kavarna) thanks to the former mayor of Kavarna, Tsonko Tsonev, a self-proclaimed "kmetal" (a neologism merging the words "mayor", or *kmet* and "heavy *metal* music fan"). Both media and respondents claim that the Rock Fest has inscribed Kavarna on the rock map of Europe.

"*We started doing [July Morning] on a larger scale in 2004, in my first year as a mayor. In 2006 John Lawton, the second original vocalist of Uriah Heep, was invited to perform at Kavarna Rock and since then until 2015 he kept on performing every year. People started to come, huge things happened, events; we gathered 10,000 people at Kamen bryag.*" (respondent JM1)

Today, with zero municipal funds at hand, Tsonev continues to organize Kavarna Rock Fest as an informal July Morning at the "Bonfire" in Kamen bryag with a group of "friends-enthusiasts" and "volunteers":

"*One German guy, B., provided a stage truck [for free], Y.Ch., the photographer, who has a villa nearby, offered an electric generator. K., a former municipal employee currently running a bar in Kavarna, delivered and operated the sound system. The performing rock band is from Russe, and they came to the fest at their own expenses. Many people helped with manual, porters' work, and these are friends of mine for whom July Morning has been a mission*" (respondent JM1).

Engaging isolated countryside setting for festival locations is "a geographical marginality", an escapade into an idealized peripheral world; the reconnection to the simple living, the interconnectedness between the attendees makes everyone "reset, recharged, renewed, refreshed, ready for the mundane again" (O'Grady, 2015, pp. 76-96). With the years following 2005, the festive geography has gradually altered, as it has spread from Varna southwards along the Black Sea coast and inside the country into locations such as Tutrakan (on the Danube), Burgas (at the Black Sea), Zhrebchevo dam (in the inner country), Shipka peak (in the inner country). The initial eastmost iconic scene has been dislocated over time, reshaped and customized depending on which point the audiences would be heading to at the liminal moment of June 30th versus July 1st. If, previously, a person would travel to the festive place (since the context of the event is to experience a journey), now the July Fest reaches out to the audiences upon demand. Clubs and municipal administrations started to capitalize on July's publicity. July-before consisted of "atomized" (Levi's term) hippie groups from different parts of Bulgaria, sharing a "subworld" that was built on musical preferences, literature, ideology and lifestyle. With the expansion of the festival geography and the number of worshipers of the rising sun, July has become decentralized and fragmented. Rock music has transitioned into bagpipes folklore, hip-hop, pop and pop folk (Hristova, 2022, pp. 119-120). And July celebration has been longer free of charge.

And yet, against the background of the scattered and particularized celebration, July Morning at Kamen bryag managed to cohere a community of like-minded people, drawn by good music and wild nature, belonging to the age "40 + to 60 +" (respondent JM2). Nevertheless, this is not the counter-society of the 1980s; yet, it is a preserved rock society, which continues to cultivate "musical preferences, attitude to nature, and the word freedom" among next generations (respondent JM3).

Holt (2004) assumes that myths in branding originate and are fueled by autonomous, often non-elitist, subcultural worlds. Brands demonstrate "literacy and fidelity" when manifest understanding of these codes; when the brand "sacrifices its broad popularity" to uphold the specific ethos they have derived from (Holt, 2004, pp. 65, 189). The commodification of July has begun with its gradual alienation from the group which has created it. An attempt to translate the above-mentioned thesis into the language of Holt (2004): with the massification of the celebration, the narrative of July has gone beyond the limits of its original subworld and inherent cultural codes. The realm of values and ethos, to which the Fest had belonged, are no longer professed or have been reformulated; the organics of July's habitat have been modified. The-then guitar sounds and playback from battery-powered tape recorders have been updated to concert performances sponsored by municipalities and promotion companies. The freedom of sleeping bags on the rock meadow has been replaced by wild camping in posh campers; the semantics of the original July have been remodeled – from an alternative public sphere to a piece of mass culture. The protest connotation and dissidence have turned to echoes from the past. The vibration is different − the old hippie "nomads" do not identify themselves in the renewed context: the events would address entertainment, marketing, economic benefits rather than sense of community (Hristova, 2022, p. 118-119).

When reading the July Morning phenomenon through Gladwell's view (2000) on the emergence of social epidemics (or, what becomes "viral"), one discovers Gladwell's idea that the success of a social epidemic is highly dependent on the participation of rarely gifted people and calls this phenomenon "the law of the few". These are the July equivalents of "the few", below.

"Connectors" have the gift of bringing people together and attracting friends – they have the habit of introducing people from different social circles to each other. According to

ethnographers, the inception of July Morning happened thanks to Tyanata − a charismatic communicator, maintaining an active network of acquaintances and friendships, with access to what has been called back then Western music and clothes, a stylish and long-haired man, a worshipper of the Beat generation and a hippie legend.

In Gladwell's vision, "knowers" or information brokers are the people who spread messages and ideas as the latter two would have the potential to go viral. Those ideas tend to "boil" to the extent of a social epidemic. Knowers serve as an encyclopedia for news and may start "epidemics by word of mouth". Such an information broker could be the July theorist and ethnographer Robert Levi, who has gathered and cherished pieces of information, memories, photos about the original July phenomenon.

The next category of creators of "viral" phenomena or social epidemics are the "salespersons", i.e., persuasive individuals with powerful negotiation skills. A July example of such a person is the former mayor of Kavarna, who has had the zeal for heavy metal, a network of contacts to bring together rock dinosaurs to a small-town fest, and – finally, municipal resources to launch grandiose concerts.

Photogenicity

July Morning festival is best communicated through television due to the capacity of the medium to engage more than one sense (McLuhan, 1964). It would be senseless to convey the atmosphere of July without the combination of both sounds and picture: the sound of rock and heavy metal music, the view of the sunrise, the visuals of people who had not enough sleep, so on.

The on-site participatory observation, on the other hand, allows involvement of other senses to the exposure: the researcher scented the smell of wild nature; rocks, washed in salty water; burnt weeds; campers; fire; the smell of yesterday's alcohol and of unbathed human bodies. While Levi (n.d.) similarly witnessed (p. 79): "Crowd. Noise. Dim eyes. Tons of trash and plastic bottles. The smell of exhausted people".

How the camera pictured the event though, is a different side of the visual story. Studies on the photos propagated by media (online sites, local newspapers, TV broadcasts, videos), reveal the following predominant imagery: festival attendees sitting around bonfires at the coastal area, people photo shooting the sunrise with their cell phones, rock bands performing before the event of the sunrise. Two finds are worth mentioning regarding media visuals (photo collage 3):

- Images of the upholstery of Kavarna mayoral automobile. The municipal car of Tsonev, a mayor of Kavarna between 2003-2015, was sealed with signatures of music celebrities, collected directly on the upholstery of the car. Alice Cooper put the first signature in 2008, followed by Glenn Hughes, Tarja Turunen, John Lynn Turner, Joey DiMaio, and on the back door - the entire latest line-up of Deep Purple. "Stars' autographs damaged the car of the municipality of Kavarna" says a press headline. An auction for the purchase of the automobile has been announced by Tsonev's successor, with the expectation that a "connoisseur" would probably buy it.
- Images of graves located at the very edge of the rocky shore at Kamen bryag: those are of festival attendees who have ended their lives by falling down the rocks. There are stories about the magnetic scenery and death as intermingling elements of the sense of place. The dazzling power of the edgy rocks, interacting with the mystery of the sea and the skyline – this is how a witness depicts one's sense of place (it differs from the narrative, provided by media outlets, which tend to explain the incidents with excessive alcohol consumption).

"*Have you ever felt it… when you step right at the edge of the rocks…. some people feel like they want to fly... It's a magnetic place and for this reason we [as organizers] put a focus on safeguarding the event area with lightening balloons. Let there be no more accidents*" (respondent JM2).

The magnetism and the death by the rocks of Kamen bryag is an act of July's optics in opposition to the rising day. Death, the attempt to fly, or the desire to take off is an extraordinary way to represent the exceptionality and whimsicality of the sense of place. The first ray of light in Bulgaria appears in Kamen bryag (and Shabla to the north), hence the fest organizers praise the chance to be "the pioneers of the Black Sea coast to welcome the first rays of sun".

Photo collage 3. Grave at Kamen bryag. The "Kmetal" Tsonev with John Lawton and B.T.R. rock band. Kavarna municipal car's upholstery. Credits: http://razhodka.com, https://www.spomen.bg, www.mediapool.bg

The researcher's selection accentuates on personalities and characters, e.g., teenagers and younger children singing together with the rock bands ("*we raised several generations with this music*" – respondent JM1), the trash can (implying environmental care), kmetal's rock guitar, the "ever-lasting" bonfire as an iconic hangout location ("Ogancheto"), the rock truck stage, a tireless sound engineer, and the sunrise in series mode (see photo collage 4).

Apparently, wild nature and heavy metal culture interact, team up. The truck stage, the campers, the mobile draught beer stands, etc. – they all have adapted to the outdoor situation and endured this unadulterated, thorny terrain. The elements of local geography: remoteness, wild

nature, pastoral milieu, burnt mid-summer weeds, edgy rocks, disobedient sea and endless sky horizon, to an extent contrast, to an extent team up with the aesthetic record of the human factor (here it is meant that big part of festival attendees wear long hair and emblematic clothes showcasing affiliation to heavy metal music culture). In portraying alternative music festivals in the UK through cultural geography's perspective, O'Grady notices (2015) that by accepting the aesthetic record of different era, the festival underlines "the DO IT YOURSELF ethic and spirit of communality" and emphasizes collective action, equality, justice, and democracy (pp. 76-96).

Photo collage 4. A girl picturing the sunrise on 1ˢᵗ July 2021. At "Ogancheto" (at the Bonfire). The truck stage with a youth band from Russe performing on it. Photos: the author

Kurtovo Konare Fest

The Festival of Peppers, Tomatoes, Traditional Foods and Crafts (known also as Kurtovo Konare Fest) dates to 2009. The festival demonstrates the agricultural traditions which derived from the village of Kurtovo Konare, in the region of Plovdiv. The event consists of art workshops, photography, music performances, folklore dances, theatre spectacles, and educational seminars. It is held on the second weekend of September, when "*tomatoes and peppers have already been picked. Lutenitsa (tomato chutney) is brewed live, which is a long and labor-intensive process, and tomato disco soup is prepared on the square*" (respondent KF2). "The experience economy",

a theoretical construct by Sundbo and Darmer (2008), contributes to the analysis of the public image of Kurtovo Konare Fest: in today's consumer society, people would like to experience new aspects of life and new places (pp. 4, 8). Experiences seem to satisfy this need, and their creation involves designing, managing, sales, marketing, customer feedback (Sundbo & Darmer, 2008, pp. 4, 8). Kurtovo Konare Fest is a typical example of "the experience creation" as the hosting community allows visitors to take a glimpse into local families, cuisine, and daily life in general. The Fest can also be described as a combination of gastro-, culinary and cultural tourism, as it offers participation in the culture and lifestyle of a community with a strong sense of local identity. With such an approach, tourists are convinced of the credibility of what they have learned – they are promised profundity of experience and immersion in layers of real life (Derrett, 2003, p. 52). Festivals as experiences tend to create consumer anticipation – foretasting pure pleasure of what is expected to as a quality of their exposure (Johansson & Toraldo, 2015, pp. 223-224). Constructing hedonistic imagery, as well as "fantasies, feelings and fun" adds to the unquestionable value of a cultural product (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Addis & Holbrook 2011, quoted by Johansson & Toraldo, 2015, pp. 223-224).

Story

Authentic heritage, leaning on historical facts and memories, and the feeling of pioneering ("*only here", "for the first time")* was sought to construct meanings for Kurtovo Konare Fest. According to Stoilova (2021) a food celebration needs validations, presented in the shape of mythologized historical facts, recalling of a past glory, and connecting the community of Kurtovo to legendary figures from the village (p. 113):

"*Alexander Dimitrov was born in Kurtovo Konare, we call him Grandfather Alexander, who brought the tomato seed, and this is how the first early tomatoes appeared in K. Konare. Grandfather Alexander has many merits: he built the first red pepper factory in Bulgaria. It was his idea to launch "Konop" enterprise, where hemp products were created, again for the first time in the country. The first peanuts in Bulgaria also grew in K. Konare, thanks to the Krichim Palace nearby... We discovered an interesting bean which grows only here and became a sensation at the festival − people cultivate it in their gardens. In K. Konare is one of the first agricultural schools in Bulgaria....*" (respondents KF1 and KF2).

Through the heroization of Grandfather Alexander, the true interaction between specific agrarian knowledge, territory (Kurtovo Konare) and heirs (Kurtovo citizens) has been confirmed, for which Stoilova (2021) invented the term "gastrolocalism" (p. 144). A belief contributes to the imagery of Kurtovo Konare as an agricultural paradise – that the place is unique in respect to terroir and climate and the most proper one for cultivating tomatoes, peppers, apples (the vegetables which are in the core of the celebration). Finally, the local community possesses distinct knowledge on food and food technology, and shares an attentive memory which remembers, nourishes, and revives culinary traditions, crafts, prominent personalities, and regional milestones.

In the 13 years of its existence, Kurtovo Konare Fest became a recognizable festive location as its public charisma is based on (1) specificity of the territory (the fertile soils of Central Bulgaria); (2) sense of community (strong local identity and recollected history); (3) citizens' determination to associate and network (with donors, artists, experts, scientific institutes), and (4) the willpower of local people for upskilling and dialogue outside the community borders. The cultural and community center "Lyuben Karavelov" – Kurtovo Konare serves as a focal point for collaboration, building trust and partnering among local farmers and external stakeholders.

Sustainable agriculture and restoring the old glory of Kurtovo Konare as an agronomic region is a frequent topic for discussion among citizens and the mayor. A local resident for 13 years (respondent KF3) reiterates that: "*What the team at the community center tries to do with the pink tomato is similar to … just think about champagne in France or cheddar in England. The other villages have tomatoes imported from Poland or Romania. We have a trademark here – the pink tomato. When I lived in the UK, I had never tasted a tomato. It was the most disgusting thing in the world. Tomatoes are industrial there. I would throw them to the animals. When I tried a tomato in Bulgaria – it was a new taste, completely unknown.*"

Local imagery

To explore the subject of Kurtovo Konare further, the researcher consulted White's (2015) article on branding related to community farming (pp. 45–62). At the heart of the branding lies an alluring mythology which portrays community farming as ecologically and economically sustainable, often as a magical space in which superior food is produced, farmers are being praised, and an engaged community of farm consumers is being constructed. Giving meaning and authentic value to a food is what Stoilova (2021) calls the process of "valorization" (p. 61).

Community farming provides a fruitful opportunity for growers to exchange products (to barter), to volunteer, share, donate, self-provide, initiate exhibitions and competitions, and unite to defend their rights (White, 2015, p. 48). Indeed, the people of Kurtovo reveal the potential to promote their production through capacity building and association at local level, as well as to attract attention of media, cultural actors, donors, and researchers.

In 2013, the cultural and community center "L. Karavelov" began to cooperate with the international "Slow Food" movement (Italy) and in particular with "Slow Food Bulgaria". Kurtovo farmers were motivated to associate in "Convivium Kurtovo Konare" and start working towards preservation of old planting varieties and authentic local foods. When products are given a name, they seem to be "humanized", i.e., they acquire character, strength, merit, fall into interrelationships and dependencies, and expectations are directed towards them. In a short while the following local varieties – Kurtovo Konare Pink Tomato, named "Big, Babin", the Kurtovska Kapia Pepper and the Kurtovka Apple, were added into the "Ark of Tastes" of Foundation "Slow Food" (see the reference about La Fondazione Slow Food). In 2016 "Presidium Kurtovo Konare" has been established, a non-profit association that unites farming producers, the mayor of the village, and active citizens (Hristova, 2022, p. 124). In 2021 Kurtovo Konare became the only Bulgarian village on the map of smart European villages, in competition involving 734 European villages, and its "smart growth" strategy is to be funded by the EU.

Through the eyes of the public, community-based agriculture tends to offer fresh, carefully grown organic produce which is distributed directly from farms or through a network of supporting local businesses (e.g., local grocery stores), via Facebook or through non-commercial locations such as farmers' homes, the community center, the village square, schools, museums and tourist centers. The charm of being connected to the land and seasonality has become part of Kurtovo Konare Fest. There are ethical and emotional rules regarding the admissibility of local production to the festival: for example, tomato sellers standing on the main thoroughfare, have not been allowed to participate in the farmers' fair. "*These are resellers of imported veggies, as there are no more tomatoes in our gardens in mid-September*," the farmers note. And unlike such consumption practices, small farmers would hope rather than count on abundance of tomatoes in late summer.

The sales of the farmers in the village do not always go smoothly – Kurtovo people have their clashes with the imperfect legal framework. One of the problems farmers in the area faced is

the lack of regulation for "sale in jars". Unlike other European countries, in Bulgaria small producers are not allowed to sell either jam or lutenitsa which are packed in jars. Only the citizens who have guesthouses can sell products in jars. "*During a short-term exhibition, however, our farmers' production could be on sale for the purpose of promoting local foods, and the farmers from K. Konare benefit from such permission*" (respondent KF1). Before agricultural fairs small farmers claim certificates from laboratories to assert that their products are appropriate for sale. Kurtovo citizens are in hope and anticipation of a tolerable ordinance with an easier regime for small agricultural producers concerning sales.

A local community thrives when it is viable and sustainable – activism, social justice, and social capital let residents create attachment to the place (Derrett, 2003, p. 53). For the purposes of economic and social well-being, citizens feel the necessity to mobilize and associate to assess needs, priorities and resources; hence, to take optimal decisions for long-term changes, especially in response to crises (Duncan & Duncan, 2001; Derrett, 2003; Irshad, 2011; Linnell, 2013; Walters & Insch, 2018). The Pepper, Tomato and Traditional Crafts Festival follows an anti-discrimination path in respect to age, gender and ethnicity and fully addresses the notion of community mobilization across divisions. Empowerment processes within the local community were triggered through provision of opportunities, volunteering, promoting equality, and minimizing social differences. An example for this is the inclusion of elderly farmers into the fair: "*We are all volunteers here when the festival comes. Everyone gets involved with a hammer, …while elderly women cook. This year we are working on the MOST project targeting elderly citizens with Bcause foundation. Their main activity is to prepare lutenitsa, the prominent tomato soup on Day II, and pies. This year they also had a food stall... [Some of the elderly farmers] perform good sales and manage to buy firewood and survive the winter with the proceed*" (respondent KF1).

Kurtovo Konare Fest brings positive messages also due to one more community trait: the will for dialogue of the local citizens. The forty foreign nationals, residing in Konare, have been successfully integrated as residents and have been given the opportunity to demonstrate their culinary traditions during fairs. During the Fest, locals and visitors jointly cook a "disco soup", the prominent soup of Day II of the event, modeled after Germany's "slow food" team which showcased how to make a tasty soup from wilted vegetables or such in a "non-commercial" shape.

Photogenicity

Local producers contribute to the tangible character of the Pepper and Tomato Fest and towards awakening of senses (e.g., aromas, colors, tastes) – the farmers are the focal point, the highlight, the core in the event optics. They are dressed in branded aprons with the logo of Kurtovo Konare Fest, with branded jars of lutenitsa and chutney on their stands. Hand-made posters with anecdotal rhymes and catchphrases are placed above the stands. Kurtovo Konare Fest's logo is in the red-orange color range with images of vegetables, typical of the region. Nevertheless, tomatoes and peppers would not count if not synchronized with the powerful human presence of Queen Lutenitsa 2020-2022, the bold and dynamic Kunka Dimova, a small farmer. What is adding up to the visibility of the event are the guests, who are not mere visitors but could easily turn into participants in cooking "disco soup" or preparing lutenitsa. Photo collage 5 is grounded on pictures taken from a representative of the community center, while photo collage 6 is based on researcher's visuals. The similarity of the two selections illustrates horizontality, simplicity, and unbiased accents on colorful locals and products.

Photo collage 5. Preparation of disco soup. Branded locally produced chutney jars. Community center's trainees prepare tomato chutney. Credits: https://www.facebook.com/KurtovoKonareFest

Photo collage 6. A local resident of British origin selling apple cider. Kunka Dimova, Queen Lutenisa 2020-2022. Small farmers of elderly age selling local products. Photos: the author

Conclusions

Local festivals share certain features in common: they strive for publicity, for bettering the reputation of the regions, for seeking media attention, for expanding tourism opportunities and not the least – for acceleration of community bonds for civil participation. In regard to the *story* factor, all three festive events have an intriguing narrative embedded in their raison d'être. These narratives serve as boosters of the place image (McClinchey, 2014), also – as creators of local history which further attracts – whatever they may be named – tourists, experts, media, scientists, affiliates or worshippers. Pioneering history has been in the heart of the Rose Festival. The story behind July Morning Fest in Kamen bryag roams between urban folklore, dissident phenomenon and an "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2012). Generally, the narrative refers to building sense of community and a sense of place, which, in combination, have aggregated a "subworld" (Berger, 1999), constructing a unique semantic universe. Kurtovo Konare Fest broadly leans on an enriched historical narrative, coined by a few components: the heroic figure of a regional agronomist, the fertile land of the locality and the Kurtovo citizens, knowledgeable on food and specific food technology.

In relation to *local imagery* element, it could be concluded that the visuality of the Rose festival and Kurtovo Konare Fest is of cognitive-perceptual kind (in Freire's view, 2009), as it is relying on knowledge and beliefs about posited artefacts, exposed to public and converted into a whole-packaged narrative. In contrast, July Morning fest belongs to the emotional-affective kind (Freire, 2009), since it induces sentiments and touches upon the bond between past and present, between urban myth and commercial reality, between nature and men. The local images succumb to and intertwine into a multi-sensory experience, involving scent, flavor, visual aesthetics, history of different eras, handicrafts, reenacted rituals and daily life. The Sunday Rose march is the most evident expression of community belonging and human diversity in action. In the case of July Morning a few characters, landscapes and depictions play central roles: a renowned "hippie" character who - it is believed, to have initiated the phenomenon, the self-declared "kmetal" and his entourage, the "sensual geography" encompassing sunrise over a sea horizon (Rodaway, 1994), a remote coastal setting as an escapade into a marginal realm. The power dynamics of associating, relying on appropriate funding and partners and constant promotion of equality turned Kurtovo Konare into the only one Bulgarian village on the map of smart European villages in 2021. Local images range from village farmers, live-cooked dishes with prevailing red products such as apples, peppers and tomatoes, and daily life in its vivid mixture of co-existing ethnic and ethnographic groups, ages, nationals and foreign nationals.

Freire's (2009) notion of strengthening the dynamic image of a place has been largely deployed in studying the *photogenicity* element of the local celebrations through utilizing two approaches: showcasing photos, collected through the festival organizers' official sites, at one hand, and scrutinizing visuals of scenes, colors and social actions grasped by the researcher, on another. The researcher's photo selection is based on the unburdened eye of an external observer, who captures counterintuitive everyday instants and characters. Whereas the "official festival photography" tends to unfold the beautiful as contrasting to the "routine" presentations, allowing for re-creating and retouching the mundane to respond to the guidelines of so-to-say, authorized publicity. In Kazanlak Rose celebrations the most vibrant and lavish incarnation of the rose optics is the Sunday Rose Parade. The organic atmosphere of July Morning's habitat is best conveyed by sounds and picture together, through video-shooting or TV, because the ambience touches upon more than one sense. Yet, the ultimate sensation could be achieved through participation in the event since it employs scents of wilderness, sea, salty water, burnt mid-summer grass and human bodies. Local farmers have been shaping the intrinsic character of the Pepper and Tomato Fest – they feature as camera focus, the highlight, and the core of the event optics.

Acknowledgements

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THE RACIST HISTORY OF THE UK AND THE 2016 EUROPEAN UNION (EU) REFERENDUM

Ian FITZGERALD (1), Rafał SMOCZYNSKI (2)

(1) University of Northumbria, Newcastle Business School, e-mail: ian.fitzgerald@northumbria.ac.uk
(2) Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, e-mail: rsmoczyn@ifispan.edu.pl

Address correspondence to: Rafał Smoczynski, E-mail: rsmoczyn@ifispan.edu.pl

Abstract.

Objectives. This piece argues that Britain has a long history of racism, much of it emanating from its colonial past. It maintains that this has been not only ingrained in the upper and middle classes but also culturally embedded into the working class. Due to this, trade unions and indeed children's education have consistently not highlighted, or indeed dispelled the myths and lies regarding the 'non-exploitative' nature of colonialism.
Material and methods. As evidence of the above three main studies are detailed. The first two are of North of England Polish migrant data. The first a 2012 study and the second a post EU Referendum study. The third study is a post EU Referendum study involving UK trade union leaders and senior officers is utilised.
Results. Regarding Central and Eastern European (CEE) migration to the UK. There is initial discussion of the negative response of a UK Conservative party followed by a more positive response of UK trade unions and the Labour Government. However, it was also found that both groups were negative at times. As well as there being prominent prior and post Brexit racism. Due to a mainly regulated labour market, 'blame' was attached to UK migrants by politicians and political parties, this grew both during and post Referendum.
Conclusions. As noted, racism exists due to the UKs free market, exploitation, neoliberalism, and the financial crisis which has ignited a long-standing colonialism and empire. Although, there is some positive anti-racist training and work being undertaken by trade unions and other bodies with Show Racism the Red Card central to this work.

Keywords: Racism, Polish migrants, trade unions, UK EU Referendum.

Introduction

An argument can be made that to understand the UKs move away from the EU and some of the Leave campaign arguments, a path needs to be taken starting from the UKs imperial past. Cole (2015), amongst others, has recently detailed the UK's imperial past and the racist consequences for those coming to the UK. He notes the UK's colonial empire was legitimised not only by politicians, but also by scientists and scientific communities. Thus, in 1864, James Hunt (President of the "Royal Anthropological Institute"), addressing a meeting of the Institute stated

that "*...the brain of the Negro had been proved to be smaller than the European...*(p. xv) [concluding amongst other things] *...that the Negro is inferior, intellectually, to the European*" (p. xvi). His colleagues did not disagree and spoke instead about his "excellent paper" (Hunt, 1864). The point here is that during this period and into the next Century a "framework" was created termed "social imperialism" (see Semmel, 1960). An example was leafleting millions of working-class people and creating pro-empire organisations to make clear the inferiority of those living in British colonies and the superiority of the British race (see Cole, 2015: p.30). Ultimately, this underpinned the racism that met those who came to the UK from these former colonies. Now given time, engagement with ethic groups and new anti-racist policies, surely the worst racism excesses were likely to fade? However, Sivanandan (2008), for one, recently detailed the intersectionality of the UK's colonial past, its need for labour, the racism that faced new entrants and indeed the anti-racist resistance shown by some. Moreover, Haydn (2012) confirms the social imperialism framework when he discusses the longevity of non-critical discussion in school curriculum of UK Empire and colonial history, whilst Nayak (1999) provides an important study detailing Northeast of England youth agreeing with the principles of anti-racism but retaining a number of "white" grievances, in relation to anti-racist policies that were seen as elitist and anti-white. He notes evidence of a "white backlash" to existing anti-racist legislation.

Now, turning to the three data sources, it is important to explore the way in which this longevity and grievance relate to Brexit. Flemmen and Savage (2017) argue that "imperial racism" is more likely to be expressed by the "elite" rather than those who are disenfranchised, although of course, the work of Nayak (1999) and indeed El-Enany (2017) identify several academic, news media and politician linkages between Brexit and Empire. The next section seeks to develop this argument by discussing recent racism in the main UK political parties and trade unions and during membership of the European Economic Community (EEC) and the EU.

Material and methods

British Racism before and during EEC and EU membership

Some racism and discrimination is in many ways linked to the UK's lost empire and the ongoing tensions between labour market needs and immigration. In 1960 Pitchford (2011) reminds the reader of the "*...confused relationship Britain had with Europe and the USA, both of which were inherently associated with lost Empire...*" (p. 75). He discusses the Conservative party (in office 1979 to 1997) and its association with the extreme right, with Britain's fading empire and its ongoing racism. Tensions in the party often came from those stating more had to be done regarding immigration, with ex-colonies being a central issue, but also with regard to the growth in the right-wing anti-EEC Monday Club (see Pitchford, 2011), a group which was until recently endorsed by the party. The fascist National Front (NF) and the Monday Club had associations and not surprisingly had an anti-immigration stance. Due to both the growing prominence of this group in the party and the fear of losing members to the NF, the Conservative government policy often moved to the right with an anti-immigration stance. Interesting here were the Monday Club's earlier links with the infamous Enoch Powell. Powell was an anti-immigration Conservative politician who had stature in both the party and country as whole. In 1968, prior to entry into the EEC, he made his now infamous "Rivers of Blood" speech, where he "*...predicted that violence would explode if the number of immigrants continued rising*". Powell is cited as noting "*As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding ...: Like the Roman, I seem to see 'the River Tiber' foaming with much blood*" (Whipple, 2009, p. 717). Although he was dismissed from his Shadow ministerial

position due to this speech, it galvanised a number of trade unionists. For example, both the London dockers and Smithfield Market meat packers marched in his support. Powell's anti-immigration stance had significant public support, see Sandbrook (2018) who discusses this. Also in the case of Saltaire (a Yorkshire village in 1974) when approximately 2,000 people arrived for an Enoch Powell speech (Wellings, 2013). Although, Powell was not a stance supporter of slowing down de-colonisation, much of this anti-immigration debate and the engagement of Conservative politicians involved references to the UK's former empire. However, the UK joined the EEC on the 1st January 1973 under a Conservative government, followed by an EEC Referendum some two years later. Although, this did not mean that there was a more relaxed stance regarding immigration, Pitchford (2011) argues that when Margaret Thatcher led the party, she moved it more to the right. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising to hear that in the 1978 election campaign she commented "*...people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture*" (Thatcher, 1978, as also cited in Pitchford, 2011, p. 226). This type of rhetoric also continued during the Conservative Party election campaign of 2001, when the Conservative leader, William Hague, stated his speech during an election as follows "*...elect a Conservative government and we will give you back your country*" (BBC, 2001: our emphasis).

  Turning now to the Labour Party, who aim to politically support workers, it is perhaps surprising to learn that they have a long history of support for the British Empire and indeed many of its racist consequences (see Davis et al., 2003). Indeed, Joshi and Carter (1984, p. 55) make clear that there was **no ongoing policy of decolonisation**, the point being that following the Second World War, labour market shortages were being met by newly arriving black workers and there was little protection for these workers due to the colonial racist framework. It was not uncommon to see landlords display "no Blacks, no dogs, no Irish" signs on their properties when renting, which was perfectly legal. Significant then were the racist incidents and framework that existed whilst a Labour Government was in power. Joshi and Carter (1984) conclude that even though black workers were involved in the labour movement: "*The Labour Party... steeped in traditions of colonialism and its accompanying racism, saw only 'problems' caused by the importation of numbers of 'uncivilised', culturally 'backward' 'coloured Colonials''* (ibid, p. 69).

  In the mid-1960s and 1970s, there was some government recognition of racial discrimination, which meant that in 1965 Labour introduced the first Race Relations Act. However, this did not outlaw many racist issues, including the "no Blacks, no dogs, no Irish" signs (see Runnymede Trust, 2015). Although a new Labour Government in 1976 did pass a "comprehensive" anti-discrimination act (see Davis et al., 2003, p. 13), Cole (2015), argues that twenty-years later Tony Blair's' 1997 New Labour government's "*racism... arguably exceeded that of the Thatcher years and laid the foundations for the ConDem government of 2010*" (p. 38). Interestingly, Fielding and Geddes (1998) also discuss issues in the Labour Party regarding the acceptance of new ethnic members. They conclude that some ethnic groups "*...found the channels of the formal political process blocked. This could be construed as evidence of Labour racism...*" (p. 69). On the other side, Gillborn (2008, p. 75) argues that race equality in education under New Labour was more rhetoric than action. Paramount here in New Labour's education policy was an "*...aggressive majoritarian 'common sense' assimilationism – the constant assumption* [is] *the interests, feelings and fears of White people must always be kept centre stage...*" (ibid., p. 88). Further, Kundnani (2007), whilst discussing anti-Muslim racism, highlights how entering the Central and Eastern European (CEE) May 2004 accession, the politics of cultural diversity had been all but replaced by integration. He argues that this meant "*...individual and institutional racisms, ...the principal barriers to the creation of a genuinely cohesive society, received little*

attention…" (p. 27). Interestingly, Cole (2015, p. 38) argues that the Conservative Party leader Margret Thatcher described "*…'New Labour' as her greatest achievement*". Therefore, prior to the May 2004 CEE accession, both main political parties and their governments had not only displayed racism, but supported policy that maintained a racist UK. However, before turning to the CEE ascension, the position of the UK trade unions will now be considered.

Trade unions are the other main workers support at a workplace level and given the present discussion, the reader may find it heartening to learn that during the 1960s "*…in Britain, anti-imperial and anti-colonial sentiment was a persistent presence within the trade union and labour movement*" (Breitenbach, 2019, p.238). However, Davis et al. (2003) provide an alternative view, arguing that due to social imperialism the "*…attitude of the mainstream labour movement leadership to the empire was at best silent on the issue and at worst aggressively pro-imperialist*" (p. 6). They discuss the colonial policy of the Trade Union Congress (TUC), including establishing a Colonial Advisory Committee, concluding that it was never anti-imperialist. This is supported by others, for example when de-colonisation begun and Asian and black workers came to the UK "*…the common reaction of white trade unionists to black migrant workers was to see them as a 'cheap labour' threat, and potential strike breakers*"(Wrench, 1986, p. 5). Although Wrench does highlight some positive trade union anti-racist initiatives, as with the Labour Party, he notes the "white" exclusion of these workers from trade union membership and engagement. This is also discussed by Sivanandan (2008) who provides a number of examples of both "trade union racism", but also Asian and black resistance. Davis et al. (2003), though, highlight that finally in the mid and late 1980s two large unions (the National Union of Public Employees [later merged to form Unison] and Transport and General Workers' Union [later merged to form Unite]) appointed officers "*…responsible for race equality issues…*" (p.108). By the mid 1990s, two-thirds of TUC affiliates had taken some form of positive action to tackle discrimination and black participation in unions (Wrench, 2004, p. 37). However, Wrench (2004, p. 121) concludes that many British activists were "*…rooted in a politicised "race relations" tradition… …suspicious of a consensual diversity management approach.   …* [With a negative approach to] *ethnic equality mainstream*[ing]". Whilst Davis et al. (2003) accept that the trade union movement had moved from racist exclusion, through acceptance of ethnic minority workers, to an active defence of these members' interests, due to economic, political and media approaches this 'good' practice became ever more difficult to implement, including transferring national strategies into local practices. Thus, the argument so far has been that British imperialism has to some extent become ingrained politically and socially. Given this coming into the accession of CEE workers what type of welcome might they expect from government, opposition parties and trade unions?

Results

The 2004 Central and Eastern European Accession: A new dawn for the UK?
The Conservative Party and their general election campaigns provide an initial answer to this question. The 2005 campaign had echoes of the 2001 campaign, as one of its main strategies was billboards and arguments around the theme of '*"are you thinking what we're thinking" it's time to put a limit on immigration*'. This would seem to confirm that Britain would continue with its colonial racist framework. In addition, the main challenges of CEE free movement were that at an early stage it led to the largest ever single in-migration to the UK, with Poles by far the largest group (Salt and Miller, 2006). However, with the re-election of the Labour Government in May 2005, there was generally a positive response to new CEE workers at national, regional and local

levels. Briefly, the government issued several "positive" migration reports (see Dench et al., 2006; Gilpin et al., 2006; Home Office, 2007), but more importantly, they supported regions and local government with extra resources and funding to support local migration initiatives and distributed good practice guides (see CRC, 2006; I&DeA, 2007). For example, local information delivered packs to new CEE workers and other support for non-government organisations (NGOs) (see Crewe and Nantwich, n.d.; East Riding Council, n.d.) and the creation of local websites with information on local areas and the provision of 'information' sessions in local community centres (see Fitzgerald, 2008; Hunt and Wicks, 2008). However, Hunt and Wicks (2008, section 5.4 p. 5.17), amongst others, did note the "urgent need" to work more closely with the indigenous population, as perhaps these ongoing engagements with CEE migrants would re-kindle the types of indigenous 'grievances' noted by Nayak (1999), or worse direct hate crime.

Turning to the identification of these more negative responses to CEE migration, trade union approaches to CEE workers should be considered. To begin with, trade unions were positive in their approaches to new CEE migrants (see TUC, 2004; SWTUC, 2005; NTUC, 2006; Carby-Hall, 2007; Fitzgerald, 2008) and not only tried to deal with abusive employers, but also worked in local communities with NGOs, for example. Significantly, organisationally they were inclusive creating migrant and Polish only democratic structures (Fitzgerald and Hardy, 2010):

Among trade union strategists and policy makers in leading positions in the TUC and affiliate unions, there was a recognition of past failures regarding their approaches to migrant workers, which have been replaced by an unequivocal commitment to freedom of movement, anti-discrimination and anti-racism, at the level of rhetoric at least (p. 145).

Generally, then both Labour Government and trade unions were positive towards new CEE migrants, although the Conservative party less so. However, as highlighted, there were tensions at both a union workplace (Fitzgerald, 2007; Mustchin, 2012) and community level (BRO, 2007; Cook et al., 2008). Firstly, Fitzgerald (2007, p. 16) notes that in the northern food sector, wages and conditions had been reduced following the introduction of low-wage CEE workers, causing a number of workplace incidents. Whilst in research undertaken by Mustchin (2012, p. 964) he states that "*...numerous interviewees indicated that some union members expressed resentment that resources were being ... directed towards newly recruited migrant workers as opposed to more established members*". At a wider community level an "Expanding Communities" conference had taken place in the West Sussex area. The conference had followed the same positive lines as noted above and its central aim was to identify and help rectify any issues for new Polish and other CEE communities. During the conference a presentation by Lincolnshire Police identified hate crime incidents against CEE workers. They noted that this was often due to the "myths and lies" spread by individuals and political groups (Lincolnshire Police, 2007). Following the conference, a local mainstream newspaper ("The Bognor Regis Observer") allowed an extreme right wing British National Party parliamentary candidate (Dr Emerson) to write a hate-filled piece. The piece began with strong criticism of the "Expanding Communities" conference asking why the local council had not organised an "*invasion of Eastern Europeans*" conference for indigenous residents. What then followed were the types of myths and lies discussed by the police. These included the supposed economic and social benefits that Poles received compared to local whites (BRO, 2007), as well as the issue of CEE migrants taking local resident's jobs and lowering their wages overall. In the north of England in Leeds (Yorkshire and the Humber region), Cook et al. (2008) also identified both positive community engagements with new CEE migrants but also, as with Bognor Regis', resentment that CEE migrants were getting more support. Thus "*...Poles are very often put in predominantly white areas... where the white*

people are unemployed. [They] *see a Pole working hard… buying a house* [and] *feel jealous*" (p.27 – Polish community worker respondent). Hate crime and resentment towards new CEE migrant workers has conceptually begun to be termed xenoracism. Xenoracism has been discussed and developed by Fekete (see 2001, 2009) with regard to refugees and Sivanandan (2001, 2009) who specifies that it impoverished white immigrants. In particular, Sivanandan (2009) argues that "…*East European immigrants…*[face] *a compelling economics of discrimination, akin to racial discrimination, effectively racism under a different colour, xeno-racism*' (p. viii). Cole (2015) develops this directly linking it to a UK neoliberal environment and the employment abuse that many CEE workers faced due to poor employer practices.

Xenoracism itself has in fact intensified following the banking financial crisis in late 2007 due to a direct link between this crisis and central government austerity measures. Amongst other things, these austerity measures led to an almost sudden withdrawal of all NGO and regional and local government funding for the types of local initiatives described earlier for CEE migrants. This situation occurred because the government transferred £1,162 billion of public money to the baking sector, still owed £22 billion (National Audit Office, 2022). This then meant budget reductions in all UK public services such that by 2018 local councils had lost 60p out of every £1 of government funding (LGA, 2018). Then of course there was a change in government in 2010 who fully implemented austerity and, in many ways, supported a more unwelcoming environment for CEE workers. Evidence of this new unwelcoming environment is provided by Burnett (2016) who details some of the racist comments and actions of the new Conservative Government, in particular its Prime Minister (David Cameron), Foreign Secretary (Phillip Hammond) and Home Secretary (Theresa May). It was of course the Home Secretary who introduced a supposedly "hostile environment" for only so called "illegal" immigrants. However, this "hostile environment" has affected all migrant workers, including CEE migrants (Cole, 2020). Burnett (2016, further argues that "*…if a hostile environment is embedded politically, why should we be surprised when it takes root culturally?*" (p. 4). The worst most public display of this was the Windrush scandal, which led to black UK residents who had lived in the UK all their lives, by either being deported back to the West Indies or threatened with deportation. A later government 'review' led to government apologies and compensation offered (UK Government, 2020), however there has been criticism of the slow rate of compensation payments (BBC News, 2021). The overall point here being that government had moved back to an anti-immigration stance. It should also be highlighted though that in 2007 in his Labour Party leader maiden speech the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown had talked about 'British Jobs for British workers' (BBC News, 2007). There were also elements of the Labour party, who in many ways followed this line (see for example Sandbrook, 2011). Thus, Labour Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper in 2014 stated that "*…it is not racist to be worried about immigration or to want stronger controls…*" (Travis, 2014: p. 3). Further, Bush (2015) provides the example of a racist Labour Party mug! Overall then xenoracist Government rhetoric and indeed elements of the Labour party opposition, energised an anti-immigrant culture. This was then applied to economically poor CEE communities who in a number of cases were suffering not only abuse at work but also in the community. The next section discusses the situation for local northern Polish respondents and how senior trade union officials responded to immigration pre–EU Referendum.

Primary data

The Plight of Polish Workers following the Financial Crisis

The initial Polish community study began in 2012 and involved a Polish language questionnaire (response rate 125) uploaded to five Polish language, Polish administered, community websites in the north of England (Q denotes responses). Then, in 2013, forty-six semi-structured interviews were undertaken with Polish respondents in the north of England (Int. denotes responses). To provide a wider context also relevant are first round pre-EU Referendum interviews with 11 trade union senior officers, assistant general secretaries and general secretaries from the separate research project indicated.

To begin with it is worth stating that Cole (2015) notes the large-scale introduction of CEE workers means that these workers have suffered xenoracism been "*...racialised* [as well as] *exploited, oppressed and vilified...*" (p. 53). This "exploitation" and its link to indigenous workers was directly commented on by our trade union interviewees when asked about accession migration:

...I think exploitation is rife with little regulation and enforcement... [CEE workers] have been used by big employers to cut wages... ...Something has to blow and it pits indigenous against migrants (Yorkshire and the Humber TUC Regional Secretary).

Employers say they can't do without migrant labour but people can't survive on the pitiful levels of pay. So you have this problem of somebody earning four times what they would have in their home country on the minimum wage and ...based in inferior accommodation. (Unite Assistant General Secretary)

There are pockets in our membership that are wary about the EU because the migration issue has been whipped-up by the media. One or two branches in the film industry are moaning that they never get time to do anything because they finish one project and then start another. But then they are also moaning about East Europeans coming over and stealing their jobs. There is a contradiction there. (BECTU Senior Officer and ex-President)

We have a lot of concern and questions about migrant workers taking our jobs... At a shop floor level there are members who have lost their jobs and seen cheaper workers bought in. (USDAW Senior Officer)

Turning now to the 171 questionnaire and semi-structured interviewee Polish respondents 89 (52%) identified some form of 'racial' slur. With slurs concerning their nationality taking place in the community, at work and with children being bullied at school. As commented on above comments mainly related to Poles "taking British Jobs" and a need for them to "go home":

... Poles do not speak well English but they do understand 'f*cking Polish' and it leads sometimes to clashes, conflicts... (Int.29 – worked in construction – Hull)

Often it happens in poor districts of Manchester ... usually ... 'you take our jobs' and 'you live like rats'. (Q59 – transport worker – Manchester)

The crisis has changed everything and old good time has vanished... [Now it is] 'go home', 'taking our jobs', 'we don't want you here' (Int.3 – cleaner – Newcastle)

...often racist comments from passengers... we 'take British jobs' and we 'should go home'. (Q46 – public transport worker – Sunderland)

Perhaps not surprisingly also evident were a number of comments related to the types of "myths and lies" noted earlier that have been consistently detailed by media and right-wing political parties (e.g. BRO, 2007):

[Have you suffered British bias/dislike?] *Yes when it comes down to opinions that Poles abuse British tax and benefit system.* (Q34 – HMRC civil servant – Middlesbrough)

They ask when I go back to Poland or ask 'why you immigrants get council homes'! (Q42 – works in education – Gateshead)

English people mostly concentrated on examples how we abuse their benefits, no one want to hear that many of us have a whole family here [all of whom] ...work here and ... pay taxes. (Q82 – factory worker – Hull)

It seems then that the divisive approach of the state to race, as detailed by Burnett (2016), had indeed taken "root culturally" and in our case was directed at Polish workers. In fact one of our interviewees (Int.37 – Newcastle) who worked for the police as an interpreter noted a number of comments by police officers such as "*...there must be a hardship in Poland and all rats have been eaten...".* More prevalent though were the many other racial slurs in the community, at work and in schools with a number of respondents also stating that neighbours and others had damaged cars and property. These led to the unfortunate situation of some female and male respondents stating that, due to xeno-racism, they now did not venture out-at-night, as afraid of violent incidents. In fact, in some cases respondents were afraid to reveal their Polish identity. So, when in public they did not speak in Polish and/or concealed ethnic identity in some other way. In response to this a Polish community activist in Newcastle had "campaigned" to organise a "fest of Polish flags". These would be flown from people's dwellings, not surprisingly 'almost nobody agreed'. Poles then were present in not only a "hostile state environment" from 2013 (Cole, 2020) onwards, but also since free movement in May 2004, had entered a loosely regulated UK labour market. Overall then they were very much in a xenoracist framework, which Fekete (2009, p. 20) argues the new Labour Government of 1998 had incorporated for asylum seekers. But as argued this was also applicable to CEE workers as witnessed by respondents (Sivanandan, 2009; Cole, 2015, 2020). In fact of the 171 respondents 68 (40%) had suffered some form of labour market exploitation. Forty-seven of these (69%) had also suffered racial slurs:

I have had forced labour and overtime...[Also] delayed payments...I feel like a second-class human being. (Q77 – warehouse operative – Hull)

[There has been] *delayed payments and leave, you have to fight literally for everything. ...In the workplace Poles are forced to work harder than Englishmen.* (Q81 – operative food industry – Hull)

[There has been] *...not paying for overtime and constant control... [Also] some Englishman complain that we are taking their jobs and abusing benefits... [There is] verbal abuse, pointing a finger at Poles, spitting at us when Englishmen heard Polish language.* (Q86 – works in education – Hull)

[With the employer there has been] *...ill-treatment on grounds of ethnicity [and] forcing longer working. British workers say we are taking British jobs... There is a big bias against us.* [Q98 – construction worker – Leeds]

Permanent blaming for taking British jobs, worse treatment by employees and management team. (Q32 – employed in outsourcing – Newcastle)

A colleague from my firm once said that I should leave the country because other Englishmen cannot get a job (Q4 – maintenance technician – Newcastle)

Overall, when you consider those who have been exploited and others who did not state this but noted racist incidents, we find that 109 respondents (64%) experienced these types of issues. So moving into the EU Referendum sixty-four per cent of our respondents had found the

UK a difficult place to work and live. Therefore, what was the situation likely to be following the Referendum?

Discussions

Polish Workers following the UK 2016 European Union Referendum
        The Polish community project following Brexit began in October 2016, with a Polish language questionnaire uploaded to the same Polish language and administered community websites used for our first project (response rate 110). Followed by 35 semi-structured interviews. As before intersecting these are the second round of interviews undertaken with the same trade union senior officers, assistant general secretaries and general secretaries in late 2016 and early 2017. In 2021 the third round of the project started featuring interviews undertaken with Polish labour migrants based in the north of England. The focus was on the self-reported British reactions towards Poles after Brexit.
        The EU Referendum campaign had been deeply concerning with regard to immigration. As Levy et al. (2016: p. 4) note "...*Europe was not a particularly salient issue for most voters in the period until 2010 and only became so after it was linked together with immigration*". They analysed 3,403 press articles that discussed the Referendum. With sovereignty and migration one of the main features, Moore and Ramsay (2017) in fact also identify 4,383 articles that referred to the effects of immigration in an 'overwhelmingly negative' way (p.9). They also highlight the leading government figures supporting this negative framing (p.165). Our argument is of course that a xenoracist framework was already in place and the Leave campaign built on it. In fact recent research has indicated how this can be identified in Leave voters narratives (see Patel and Connelly, 2019).
        As before concentrating on trade union respondents, not surprisingly, post Referendum all trade unions, including the Leave unions (ASLEF, BFAWU and RMT) were critical of the negative immigration discourse of newsmedia, politicians and political groups. As the Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Secretary stated:
        ...we have a much more unsupervised, unregulated employment market ... Unite and GMB have said openly that the campaigning they did with members in factories they were openly racist... [As the Leave campaign] ...was no more immigrants...
        I have no doubt that people's views of migration are nurtured by circumstance, they find themselves in communities where we have had 30 years of austerity... [This has] undermined wage rates and of course the free market has led to a freedom to exploit for unscrupulous employers... They have used migrant labour from Europe and ...flood[ed] the market with cheap labour... [Therefore] in bars, workplaces, cafes, houses, wherever, people were meeting. With terms being [mainly] set by a right-wing media and UKIP... if not fascist groups... Every day we are picking up stories about people being abused... We had a manager walking into a place of work, the day after the Referendum, saying 'I have a coach outside for yer, who's on yer way?' (Unite Assistant General Secretary)
        We are reacting strongly to the 'school census', there is a real worrying turn from the government as there is I guess a flirtation with racism. ... They are now asking schools to ask parents the nationality of their children. This is a new question that was not asked previously, the Department for Education has said they want it to gain statistics so that they can target support. But we know the Home Office is getting that information and we are

worried that schools are being turned into mini-immigration offices checking up on people's immigration papers. (National Union of Teachers General Secretary)

These quotes echo xenoracist research (Cole, 2015; Sivanandan, 2009) and provide a framework to understand our data, which prompts to turning now to Polish respondents to see again how this xenoracist framework affected them. Significantly, the second round of research was conducted some 4-6 months into the Brexit period and then 6 years after the Referendum. With a number of respondents actually stating that the situation was now calmer. Perhaps due to this an overall lower proportion of the 145 questionnaire and interview respondents identified some form of racial slur (61 – 42%). Although, an interviewee did state "…*Englishmen who have always been xenophobic got more confident and have become more openly, explicit...*" (Int.24 – Newcastle). Others were clear when detailing these racial slurs and again these were mostly regarding Poles needing to "go home" and to stop "taking British jobs":

[There are] *insults like 'go back to your country' or 'if you visit Poland during your holiday, stay there forever'… They say constantly 'we have regained our country. You will go back to Poland very soon'* (Q26 – fork-lift operator – Hull)

I was in the big mall where one man came to us. He told me I should go back to my country. He said I had no right to chat with my son in English. (Q105 – account – Leeds)

There is so much hate, aggression and intolerance in the same country, which popularises rules about equality, freedom, respect for the law. The Equality Act 2001 is a fiction, a piece of paper… (Q62 – works in HR department – Newcastle)

But also evident were horrific physical assaults such as an awful case identified by an interviewee of '...*a colleague who works at the store has a daughter, ...she was attacked and her hair set on fire...*' (Int.33 – Newcastle).

Questionnaire respondents and several interviewees also spoke about the "myths and lies" as discussed and that their children were bullied/or suffered racial slurs at school. For example, "...*they laugh at him* (son) *that he is Polish ... I am trying to explain to him that maybe that is because these children have different problems at home...*" (Int.7 – Newcastle). Also evident was the "hostile reaction" that respondents now felt, and a belief that Polish workers were now unwanted. The recent research of Teodorowski et al. (2019) investigated the affects of Brexit on Scottish EU citizens, with Poles prominent. They found amongst other things that EU citizens had "...*been left feeling unwanted, unwelcome, marked out as different and treated as inferior*" (p.4). Our respondents expressed this in the following way:

…there is a very negative attitude to people from Eastern Europe… They do not want us here… (Q17 – packer – Hull)

I see we are not welcome here. (Q110 – driver – Gateshead)

I have a neighbour who welcomed us very warmly until the Referendum then relations deteriorated. Her children began to be very rude to my children, me and my husband. She began to attack us verbally. (Int.14 – Gateshead)

I see that some neighbours have changed their attitude. They looked with envy at our diligence. We are able to work very hard to have what we want. The English aren't. (Q38 – cleaner – Leeds)

Overall then it seems that the policy of "integration", which had been introduced due to a concern about Muslim ghettos (Kundnani, 2007) is no longer relevant and was being replaced with an unwelcoming xenoracist framework with all its consequences. An element of this framework is of course employment issues, but as with xenoracism overall, the proportion of respondents experiencing issues had gone down. Thus interviewees spoke mainly in broad terms

about issues but nobody identified actual specific issues. Whilst 36 (24%) of our 110 questionnaire respondents noted issues but this again was lower than the proportion in our first project in 2012-2013. Although, this is still nearly a quarter of all respondents and there was a rise in racial slurs (30 – 83%), which overall is simply unacceptable:

[An employer] deceived me, I lost my money… I was [also] offended on the street because of my Polish roots… The British feel like Lords after Brexit. We are only temporary workers… we should go back to our countries...* (Q19 – Hull)

I had to fight over my money with employers. …I am also insulted by some people because of my roots… Insults and calls of 'go back to your country'. (Q23 – schoolteacher – Leeds)

Agencies treat people in a terrible way [also] I was insulted by Englishman who don't like foreigners… (Q63 – quality Inspector – Newcastle)

My salary is below average… work[ing] at a school… students often repeat the anti-immigration slogans … 'immigrants take away jobs', 'there are too many immigrants', 'they will go back to countries of origin'… [Following Brexit] I am afraid of bad social atmosphere… in a pub with my colleague we were insulted by a drunk couple, because we chatted in Polish… (Q72 – substitute teacher – Gateshead)

Overall, those who experienced exploitation and those who did not but noted racist slurs we have 68 respondents (47%) who had issues combined with those who expressed forms of anxiety it is not surprising that Polish activists reported to us that many individuals, families and Polish businesses were seeking to move, and indeed had moved, to over EU countries. This post-Brexit movement out of Britain was particularly noticeable in the third round of research project (2021-2022). The interview data confirm that respondents noted greater numbers of Poles returning to Poland due to post-Brexit circumstances (e.g. deterioration of British economic conditions, the rise of racism), but also family issues and pandemic impacted their decisions.

Conclusions

The Resurgence of a Lost Empire?

Evidence has been provided that racism is a persistent feature of UK political structures and a feature of UK culture. This of course involves empire as the imperial name United Kingdom hints at. Whilst discussing the EU Leave campaign, those who voted Leave and Brexit. Virdee and McGeever (2017) also note the importance of the British Empire and racism:

The relationship between race and nation in England is intimately bound up with Empire. The colonization of a quarter of the world fostered a long lasting, expansionist worldview among the ruling elites in Britain. This had its own "blowback" at home through the consolidation of a colonial racism that came to define British politics. Crucially, this racism was further secured through working class incorporation into the imperial nation through the representative structures of the British state, including the Labour Party (p. 1809).

Central to this are the free market, exploitation, neoliberalism, and the financial crisis. These are also elements of a xenoracism that includes not only CEE workers but also refugees. All of whom were evident in the Leave campaign. Importantly just four weeks after the EU Referendum the National Police Chiefs' Council stated that 6,000 hate crimes were reported

(NPCC, 2016). Importantly, though these included crimes against long established ethnic communities, as well as newer CEE migrants. Central to these crimes were the two main themes ('go home' and 'taking our jobs') identified by our respondents. What should also be made clear is it was not working-class people, those who have really felt the pain of austerity, but the middle class who were the main Leave voters. As Dorling (2016, p. 1) notes two thirds of the Leave vote was middle class. Perhaps to some extent supporting Flemmen and Savage (2017) who argue that the "elite" are more likely to express "imperial racism". This though highlights two important points. The first is the ongoing link between British colonialism and education. As noted, Haydn (2012) highlights a lack of critical discussion in children's education to this past. Whilst Dorling and Tomlinson (2019: pp. 306-307) state:

Primary and secondary education… needs to incorporate more truths about imperialism… We cannot continue teaching the story of industrialisation as if it involved no African slaves, no destruction of the Indian textile industry.

Although not stated earlier it is worth highlighting that recently it has been well publicised that the UK police and in particular the London metropolitan police are 'institutionally racist' (see for example the Evening Standard, 2022; Guardian, 2022; Metro, 2022; The Times, 2022). This has also been noted academically for many years (Akram, 2022; Wight, 2003; Waddington, 1999). This then leads one to considering how those affected by race hate crimes are supported. In fact, Inquest, a charity, investigated this in depth arguing that Black people who died at the hands of the police had no accountability (Inquest, 2023). Their report involved interviews with human rights lawyers. It argues that between 2011 – 2021 52 black people died '*…in or following police custody and contact…*'. Concluding that Black people were '*…four times more likely to die…*'. Harris et al. (2022) also note that during the pandemic in the UK Black and Minority Ethnic communities (BME) were likely to be more harshly treated.

There is of course also the research of Nayak (1999) who amongst other things discusses post-imperialism and white "grievances" in the Northeast of England. As detailed a number of our respondents noted children being bullied or racially abused. Perhaps then an extension of "grievances" to include the newer CEE communities that have begun to settle in the north of England. This then brings the discussion to the second main point concerning the collected data. The two Polish data sources are not of course directly comparable as even though access to respondents was gained through the same websites and activists these were not the same respondents. But what emerges is that a higher proportion of Poles in the north in 2013 had experienced racial slurs than those following the EU Referendum. There was also a lower proportion that had experienced employment issues post EU Referendum. Although, when you consider racial slurs as well this was still in 2013 109 of our 171 respondents (64%) and following the EU Referendum 68 of our 145 respondents (47%). This is entirely unacceptable and is a strong indication of ongoing xenoracism and the UKs racist culture.

But closing on a more positive note, as stated many UK trade unions have started Brexit anti-racism campaigns. With the USDAW respondent noting that native British members were asking for anti-racist resources and in fact drove their campaign. Also important is a recent north of England based initiative co-ordinated mainly by the Northern TUC but it has also involved Unison. This initiative involves Show Racism the Red Card training workplace anti-racist ambassadors (see SRtRC, 2019). These ambassadors are workplace activists who will then engage with members and their communities to dispel immigration myths and lies. So let us hope these are early signs of a move to an acceptance and understanding of multi-cultural Britain. Nayak (1999), though, is right that there is a need to include white students but also as he details there is

a need to recognise the ever-changing ethic geography of the UK. A UK that has not been constructed by an imperial "elite' but instead by a multi-ethnic mainly working-class population.

Acknowledgements

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LOOKING FOR ONE'S PLACE IN THE WORLD-YOUTH AT RISK OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION OUTSIDE THE MAINSTREAM EDUCATION SYSTEM

Malgorzata POKOSZ (1), Danuta SADOWNIK (2)

All authors of the article contributed equally.
(1) Correctional and social pedagogy – Karkonoska Akademia Nauk Stosowanych in Jelenia Góra, Jeleniogórska Akademia III Wieku in Jelenia Góra, Poland, E-mail: m.pokosz@gmail.com
(2) Pedagogy of culture – Wyższa Szkoła Zarządzania i Przedsiębiorczości in Wałbrzych, Jeleniogórska Akademia III Wieku in Jelenia Góra, "Aktywni XXI" Foundation in Jelenia Góra, Poland, E-mail: dansad3@wp.pl

Address correspondence to: Danuta SADOWNIK, Poland, 58-560 Jelenia Góra, Okrzei 12/2a, (3) +48 604497709, E-mail: dansad3@wp.pl

Abstract

Objectives. This article describes the situation of young people aged 15-18 who, for various reasons, have found themselves outside the educational system and do not attend day schools. For the most part, these are people from backgrounds at risk of social exclusion due to deprivation of not only economic, but also psychological and social and culturally conditioned needs. The main reasons that these young people found themselves outside the basic education system were the lack of fulfillment of compulsory schooling (truancy, failure to be promoted to the next grade several times) and the threat of demoralization or criminal acts confirmed by the Family Court. The leading objectives were: to recognize the behavioral style of adolescents dropping out of the education system; the ways in which adolescents at risk of social exclusion respond to the surrounding reality and make life choices.

Material and methods. During the period 2020-2022, the authors conducted 47 interviews with young people to observe and assess the threat of risky behaviors, motivations and changes in attitudes of individuals. The authors' used a qualitative method of data acquisition.

Results. The social isolation during Covid 19 reinforced numerous negative effects on the behaviour of young people

Conclusions. The primary findings from the in-depth interviews pointed at many areas for educational and therapeutic work. The most common were: experiencing deprivation of emotional needs from one's care and upbringing environment (including experience of violence); use of immature coping mechanisms (self-aggressive behavior, projection of guilt onto the environment, denial, avoidance).

Keywords: risk of social exclusion, adolescence, risky behavior, education system.

Introduction

This article describes the situation of young people aged 15-18 who, for various reasons, have found themselves outside the educational system and do not attend day schools. For the most part, these are people from backgrounds at risk of social exclusion due to deprivation of not only economic, but also psychological and social and culturally conditioned needs.

The main reasons that these young people found themselves outside the basic education system were the lack of fulfillment of compulsory schooling (truancy, failure to be promoted to the next grade several times) and the threat of demoralization or criminal acts confirmed by the Family Court. In Poland, in accordance with the Education Act of Republic of Poland (Prawo Oświatowe Rzeczpospolitej Polski, 2016) there is compulsory schooling, which young people must fulfill by the age of 18, while compulsory school is primary school (8 years of education). Unfortunately, not all children are able to stay in compliance with the law and drop out of their education. Although this is not a huge percentage of the population, it is steadily increasing. Poland's compulsory school completion rat, Statistical Yearbook (Rocznik Statystyczny, 2022) shows that was 92.9 in 2008/09, and only 72.8 in 2020/21). The time of the pandemic has highlighted the problem and even though the official data for this period has not yet been published, messages from many schools are alarming.

During the COVID19 pandemic, day schools mostly operated remotely (online), while adolescents residing in institutions such as the Rehabilitation Center or the Youth Training and Education Center remained under the care and supervision of educators in boarding schools, where they also pursued vocational training and online lessons in general subjects. This typical situation facilitated a series of interviews with respondents rehabilitated in correctional centers, while, on the other hand, it closed the way to meetings with several individuals, breaking the research cycle. Nevertheless, the 47-person group of respondents gave a fairly clear picture of the educational situation of young people who have fallen out of the day school system and constitute a group of people at risk of social exclusion. The COVID19 pandemic has resulted in a growing number of students not completing compulsory schooling for reasons stemming from the unusual situation in which a student is left by a parent in front of a computer screen without special supervision from the family or a teacher. Many times young people did not have the right quality of electronic equipment or the right home conditions for focusing on online activities. Families, in which learning is not a high priority, not only did not support teenagers in motivating them to study, but actually hindered them by not trying to adjust their habits to the new reality. Acording to Patterson, Reid and Dishion (1992) parental risk factors such as lack of maternal involvement and inconsistent discipline are thought to be linked to childhood aggression and the development of antisocial behaviour in youth.

Noises occurring in the background, uncensorious remarks, clutter or apparent inadequacy caused children and teenagers to choose not to join classes rather than reveal the behind-the-scenes of family life. Repeatedly, while sitting in front of a screen students simultaneously were playing games or browsing social media, slowly falling into the trap of the Internet addiction.

The temporary nature of the pandemic situation also resulted, in many cases, in parents, teachers, educators or pedagogues not discovering early enough the dysfunctional implementation of compulsory schooling, or the total or partial failure to implement it. Nevertheless, when the situation lasted too long, legal guardians or probation officers referred socially neglected, non-compliant adolescents to School and Educational Centers. These adolescents usually attend two

types of schools: elementary school and vocational school. Education also includes practical vocational training and apprenticeships for professions, such as gardeners, construction workers, cooks. Studying in this type of institution is the last chance for them to continue their education and improve their start in life already disrupted at the very beginning.

Material and methods

During the period 2020 - 2022, the authors conducted 47 interviews with young people, which allowed them to identify and assess the threats of developing risky behaviors, motivations and changing attitudes of individuals. The authors' long experience shows that questionnaires are not a good tool for studying this target group. The choice of research method was not accidental because, as Babbie (2003, p. 49) notes: "Both qualitative and quantitative methods are useful in and legitimate in social research. Some research questions and situations lend themselves better to quantitative methods, others to qualitative methods". Young people communicate directly that they do not like to fill out surveys, and the answers are not always relevant to the situation and the facts. This target group presents a very low level of trust in adults and is reluctant to provide information about their lives that adults would like to obtain, but social research is an attempt to understand social life(...) Babbie (2003, p. 538) said: "We want to understand the world and we want to be at least somewhat able to predict future events. Ultimately, we would like to have some idea of the consequences of our various possible decisions".

A young person functioning on the edge of the law will almost never answer completely honestly, because they do not know who will read it and whether the police will show up if they discover too much. For them, the rule "nothing about us to the police and adults" is one of the basic rules of functioning in the environment. Paradoxically, the situation resulting from the restrictions arising from the COVID19 pandemic favored the research.

During this period, day schools mostly operated remotely (online), while young people residing in institutions such as the Educational Center or the Youth Training and Education Center remained under the care and supervision of teachers in boarding schools, where they also pursued vocational training and attended online lessons in general subjects. This unusual situation facilitated a series of interviews with respondents, while, on the other hand, it closed the way to meetings with several people, breaking the research cycle. Several of the Center's wards, explaining the epidemiological threat, did not participate in many activities or even gave up coming to the boarding school, waiting to enter the adulthood and thus legally leave the educational system. In accordance with the principle of non-interference of the researcher in the trajectory of the respondent's life, the authors could not complete the data collection in the case of three respondents. Nevertheless, the 47-person group of respondents gave a fairly clear picture of the educational situation of young people who have dropped out of the day school system and constitute a group of people at risk of social exclusion. "Although there may be differences in detail depending on what the research object is, in any research scheme you will face two main tasks. Firstly, you need to identify as precisely as possible what you want to find out. Secondly, you need to determine how best to do it." It is this indication by Babbie (2003, p. 110) that has made it possible to explore the essence of the problem investigated in this publication.

Youth at risk of social exclusion

Growing up adolescents usually take actions when something interests them. Some adolescents were more willing to speak up in interviews, speaking out on specific issues that are important to them. Adolescents also flagged the biased nature of the questions in various surveys addressed to them by many institutions and the focus of their content only on addiction. They also note that it is only through this prism that they are viewed by society, and each successive survey affirms this in them.

A big difficulty is always questions about family, especially for young people who are in foster care, raised in single-parent or reconstituted families, or whose family situation is complicated. Questions about parents' or guardians' education and whether guardians talk to them or spend time with them arouse their irritation.

The situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and isolation from peers has meant that adolescents' communicative and social competencies have been significantly diminished, which is now most often reflected in respondents' reluctance to talk to therapists, crisis interveners or investigators. They often treat individual consultations with great reserve and try to "test" the researcher through provocative behavior or remarks. Using active methods and building an atmosphere of trust often allows young people to break the ice and actively participate in the research. Choosing qualitative methods is the right decision to achieve the goals and collect research material. Interviews and observations allow to capture all the important aspects of human functioning that often cannot be recorded in surveys. Nothing can replace the researcher, who personally talks and observes the behavior of the respondents. This is of vital importance, since adolescents are a group that can ostentatiously manifest their attitude towards their surroundings, adults, educators, etc., and any study is valuable information about them in the context of the observed behavior. Znaniecki (2001, p. 303) said "We must always remember, however, that the environment is a passive, not an active, condition of development and that its boundaries are fluid: for on the one hand, it is gradually incorporated into the growing sphere of action of the individual, although not completely, since not all developmental possibilities are currently being realised; on the other hand, it expands, since further developmental possibilities increase as development has already taken place".

The most valuable thing is that the young people opened up to contact with an adult. Working with their own emotions and discussions with the researchers made young people themselves eager to talk about their experiences, school, teachers, difficult relationships with family and peers. They brought up topics that they rarely talk about with adults on a daily basis, discussed them freely and without restraint.

Observation of the emotional and social development of adolescents provided a lot of relevant information in the area of risky behavior.

According to the Ostaszewski (2003) definition, risky behaviors are various activities of a person that carry a high risk of negative consequences both for his physical and mental health, as well as for his social environment.

Risky behavior is included in the broad area of social risks, which can include the following forms:
- crime (theft, burglary, murder) and economic crimes;
- pathological behavior and social conflicts;
- aggressive and self-aggressive behavior (alcoholism, drug addiction, self-harm, suicide);

- other social activities that exacerbate social conflicts.

Kazdin's (2000) observations are also worth taking into account. He is of the opinion that risky and criminal acts overlap with mental disorders and problem behaviours. Indeed, it is also not always possible to draw a clear line between criminality and individuals can easily meet the criteria for both on the basis of the same behaviours (e.g. conduct disorder symptoms).

Considering the group of the teens surveyed, the highest risk rate was for smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol and using psychoactive drugs. This is still a way of coping with stress and forms of addiction that respondents were not afraid to talk about. Their environment of their origin accepts the above addictions, and it is extremely rare for parents, grandparents and friends to point out the harmfulness of these addictions to their health and environment. Habits developed by successive generations (smoking tobacco, drinking alcohol) are supplemented by available marijuana, the smoking of which is relatively common among young people. According to Loeber (1990, pp. 1 - 42), poor child-rearing practices contribute to the development of child aggression, and then established behavioural patterns lead to the development of substance abuse and conduct disorders.

During the interviews, many respondents do not separate tobacco and marijuana smoking. In their view, both are equally harmless in their consequences, which the teens completely fail to foresee as they seem to be so distant in time.

The researchers also observed during the interviews cognitive deficits affecting young people: a lack of understanding of the world around them, a lack of readiness to change, low levels of motivation to learn and set goals, and a false picture of understanding the threats of risky behavior. Their world is dominated by virtual reality and detachment from reality, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and remote (online) learning.

In individual interviews, young people often brought up "difficult" topics, asking questions that, on the one hand, showed their knowledge in this area drawn mainly from the Internet and their peers, and, on the other hand, showed a picture of ambivalent behavior towards potential threats. The interview indicates that young people do not want to learn about the consequences of such behavior and the real dangers it entails. They also do not accept information about the real consequences of these dangers, downplaying them and citing false information found on the Internet. All this happens when most of them come from dysfunctional families or are at risk of social exclusion due to psychoactive substance abuse. Perhaps "conjuring up reality" is one of their defense mechanisms.

The cognitive deficits affecting young people stem from a lack of understanding of the world around them, a lack of readiness for changes, low levels of motivation to learn (not only the school one, but also "life in general") and set goals, and a misunderstanding of the dangers of risky behavior. Their world is dominated by virtual reality and disconnected from reality, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and remote learning. A huge influence on young people today is social media. However, already Znaniecki (2001, p. 140), in his sociological analysis of the influence of the media on the development of this age group at the beginning of the 21st century, noted that: "...the social upbringing of the younger generation implements unreflectively, often even reflexively and plannedly, their participation in social life and in social opinion, not allowing them to seclude themselves and condemning their lack of interest in what constitutes the subject of opinion, unless it is a matter considered illicit".

The pandemic has also increased aggression and self-aggression behavior.

The lack of support in a remote teaching situation has increased young people's emotional problems significantly. The lack of direct contact with peers and teachers has disrupted feelings of security and loosened interpersonal relationships.

Young people feel relegated to the margins of life, many have lost their self-confidence, and no longer find enough strength and motivation to take on the challenges of education and vocational training in particular. The role of the school, which was not fully prepared for the pandemic situation, plays a big role here. Remote learning exposed the weakness of the system and acted as a demotivator for young people. In the remote mode of learning, it was not possible to fully prepare and carry out preventive measures in the vulnerable groups. Kazdin and Weisz (2006) reached similar conclusions. In their view, 1. Children and adolescents face many different types of problems, 2. They often experience many different problems simultaneously (e.g. co-occurring disorders, multiple problem behaviours, school and learning problems). 3. these problems may manifest themselves at different stages of development.

The young people, in the course of their conversations, drew conclusions that in overcoming various problems they often need the help of others, but do not know how to ask for it. They pointed out that it is often difficult for them to work in a group and they do not always succeed. Lack of teamwork skills can result in the fact that even the best-planned individual goals will not be realized, and the young person will lose their opportunity. In today's labor market, the ability to communicate, make decisions, resolve conflicts and other competences, related to group work, are as important as the substantive preparation for the job.

Young people do not feel the need to recognize their own interests, abilities and limitations, to acquire various practical skills that build their sense of self-confidence and acceptance. They don't know how to do this, or they are embarrassed to ask adults, especially in the presence of peers. The family environment of these young people most often does not pay attention to their abilities and predispositions, and their interests are treated as frills rather than potential that is worth developing and supporting.

Young people lack good role models, they grow out of an atmosphere of frustration of their parents. Unemployment, failures in life, criminal acts, alcohol problems, educational inefficiency and low education are often the cause of exclusion of young people and often the entire families. Patterson et al. (1992) hypothesised that aggressive behaviour in children is caused by early, contextual experiences of parents using harsh and annoying discipline, poor problem solving, unclear instructions and poor monitoring of children's antisocial behaviour. Unfortunately, all difficulties are blamed on politicians, socio-political situations, other people and now the COVID-19 pandemic. Stereotypes present in families,where the division of social roles is based on a patriarchal style, make the concept of gender equality a completely abstract notion in these families. Alcohol, drugs or other addictions of parents, guardians and older siblings frame the behavior of young people growing up in dysfunctional families. The rhythm of life resulting from addictions, which is often chaos, becomes the norm in their future lives and results in the perpetuation of negative habits and patterns of behavior and problem-solving that are not conducive to harmonious development.

Unfortunately, young people are often victims of violence, but also perpetrators. They learn that only force and aggression give them an advantage in life. They do not feel the need to take responsibility for their behavior, and the argument of force prevails in situations where conflicts and difficulties arise. Communication in families is mainly based on brief exchanges of information, without maintaining stable family relationships. According to Lohman, Barry and Pardini (2006, p. 297) the early display of hostility has received considerable attention also because

the most persistent, challenging and violent antisocial behaviour found in adolescents most often begins in childhood rather than adolescence. In fact, childhood aggression is recognised as a much broader syndrome, manifesting itself in various forms of norm violation. Although there is no single, universally accepted definition of aggressive behaviour, different theories include gossiping, rejecting others, arguing, violence against the weak, using strong-arm tactics, giving in anger and getting into fights.

The weak link here is the cooperation of probation officers with educators and educators from childcare centers and legal guardians. Social welfare supports minors in their basic needs, but on the other hand, many times it teaches a passive attitude to life and a demanding attitude towards others. It gives the feeling that the outside world is responsible for everything that befalls a person in life. The registered lack of motivation has strong roots in this. The wards of the Educational Centers are offered a wide range of opportunities to develop their own interests, but many times it is treated as just another duty to be fulfilled. This may mean that a wide range of social and cultural needs were not born during childhood. It happens to be satisfied at a low level, most often offered by social media, supported by habits that lead to Internet addiction.

Jealousy is often the beginning of aggressive behavior toward others who are better off. Young people feel less valuable than their better-off peers, which adds to their frustration and paradoxically reinforces them in the mistaken belief that their parents are right, because the world is to blame for their problems. They often commit criminal acts (e.g., theft, robbery, burglary) in order to get funds for their dream phone, clothes, gadgets. Such behavior often leads to conflicts with the law, which end in family court rulings and the assignment of a probation officer until the age of 18.

The lack of specific interests and life plans results in a perception of the future in a small time frame, limited to the next vacation or the moment of obtaining the document of adulthood, after which "everything will be fine". They often say that they are perceived as "inferior people". Unfortunately, in many situations, by behaving inconsistently with social rules, they perpetuate this image of themselves in the environment (school, center). Adolescents build their self-image on the basis of façade external attributes, such as clothes, phone, strong peer group, use of psychoactive drugs, while rarely working on themselves in terms of personal potential, abilities, skills and stable self-esteem. The environment has taught them to develop negative potential at the expense of positive resources. It takes a lot of work to build self-esteem in them and to encourage their positive behavior, but it is possible.

Results

Findings from the in-depth interviews identified many areas for educational and therapeutic work. The most common were: 1) experiences of deprivation of emotional needs on the part of one's care and upbringing environment (including experience of violence), which results in seeking satisfaction of these needs through available means, and is expressed in a high tendency to draw attention to oneself, aggressive behavior, impulsiveness, difficulty taking into account the opinion and needs of others, accepting help; 2) the use of immature coping mechanisms to deal with situations perceived as subjectively difficult (self-injurious behavior, projection of guilt onto the environment, denial, denial, avoidance, escape from challenges and responsibility); 3) little interest in other people, their emotions and needs. Establishing peer relationships, but without closer friendships, preferring to spend time alone (resulting from repeated rejections by loved ones); 4) little insight into the causes of experienced irritation and anger in relationships with

people and the possibilities of dealing with experienced feelings in a safe way; 5) psychomotor agitation, chaotic manner of speech; 6) negativism in thinking, an expressed sense of the meaninglessness of the world, passivity and lack of a sense of agency, and little insight into the reasons for one's behavior; 7) in relationships lack of ability to set boundaries, a failure to isolate or overlook one's own needs, and an inability to ask for help (which may be conditioned by the experience of family and peer violence and the resulting low self-esteem); 8) sensitivity to social approval, a tendency to make one's opinions and views conform to what others think, and consequently an inability to communicate one's own needs and opinions; 9) little awareness and ability to express anger in a safe manner; 10) anxious affect, high irritability. Low or exaggerated levels of criticism of one's behavior; 11) trouble expressing anger, setting limits, confrontation, as well as difficulty focusing attention; 12) lack of special interests and life plans.

The lists of risk factors are sometimes quite long and varied. Their hierarchy of "importance" also varies. These factors are subject to dynamics, depending on human decisions. If there is a lack of good decisions, risk factors begin to act "automatically." Preventive practitioners have observed that the effects of these factors are cumulative. In addition, the likelihood of risky behavior is greater the more risk factors there are and the more harmful they are and the longer they last. The role of factors also depends on the child's age, developmental stage, environmental and situational conditions. Research on risk and protective factors shows that the goal of prevention should be to affect both at the same time.

When working with young people, it is worth using a variety of strategies recommended by specialists in the field of prevention in the broadest sense.

Educational strategies to help develop important psychological and social skills (ability to relate to people, deal with stress, resolve conflicts, resist pressure

from the environment, etc.). Underlying these strategies is the belief that people, even with adequate knowledge, engage in risky behavior because they lack many of the skills necessary for social life. These deficits prevent them from building deeper, satisfying relationships with people, from being successful, e.g. professionally. So they look for chemical, substitute ways to cope with their difficulties.

Alternative activity strategies that aim to help people meet important needs (e.g., success, belonging) and achieve life satisfaction by providing opportunities to engage in positive activities (artistic, social, sports, etc.). Underlying these strategies is the assumption that many people do not have the opportunity to realize their need to be active, to raise their self-esteem through success, or to develop their interests. This is especially true for educationally neglected children and adolescents.

Intervention strategies that aim to help people with difficulties identify and solve their problems and support them in crisis situations. Intervention involves accompanying people at critical moments in their lives. Basic intervention techniques include counseling, helplines, intervention sessions, and counseling. Informational, educational and alternative strategies are used at all three levels of prevention. Intervention strategies, as deeper and more individualized activities, are basically reserved for levels two and three.

The most important thing for a young person who is lost in reality and sometimes even marginalized is to strive for identity, to promote his own "I", that "I am someone". If a person does not have his own sense of identity, they will never become socially mature, and it will be difficult for them to find themselves in a society that requires readiness, flexibility and constant development. It is important in educational work to support and strengthen the self-esteem of

mentees and through the search for strengths to foster a sense of agency, which builds stable self-esteem.

Discussions

The problem described by the researchers in this publication has been pointed out repeatedly in research carried out by universities and research centres in EU countries and in international projects carried out under European programmes such as ERASMUS +.

The research was carried out using qualitative research methodology with the FGI (Focus Group Interviews) technique, i.e. a focus group interview. The research involved 3 focus groups of representatives of social inclusion institutions and 3 focus groups of young people at risk of social exclusion in the project partners' countries: Poland, Spain and Germany.

The Research Report (2016) covered the research group (15-25 years old) by age group. In the 15-18 age group, the findings are consistent with the villages presented by the researchers of this article. In the chapter entitled: Problems, the authors of the report write:

"The problems of young people at risk of social exclusion are derived from their experiences of functioning in family, school and peer environments. In addition, there are also reasons inherent in the social environment and individual personality traits of young people. Problems identified by survey participants include the use of psychoactive substances (alcohol, tobacco, drugs, substitute drugs, e.g. legal highs), the incidence of domestic violence against young people, aggression and peer violence, unequal access to medical care, developmental deficits, environmental neglect, adaptation difficulties due to cultural differences, learning difficulties and early school leaving. A new problem identified especially by German respondents is the problem of addiction to computer games and gambling..."

"...As reasons for the vulnerability of young people at risk of social exclusion, respondents of international surveys pointed to causes in the family environment, the school environment, the peer environment, the society and support system and in the sphere of personal functioning."

Conclusions

The COVID19 pandemic uncovered a number of phenomena that had hitherto been under the cover of routine behavior by both the Ministries of Education and all sorts of educational institutions. Teachers, caregivers, professional skills trainers, as well as parents followed the beaten path expecting proven, often enforced, ways of doing things from teenagers. Online learning, social isolation and educational neglect have shown that many ways of functioning have already become obsolete. They were already so before 2020, which "closed" the entire world to computer screens. However, it did not see an evolutionary process bringing even revolutionary changes in the way young people act and perceive the world. Values that lasted for hundreds of years have collapsed exchanging places with new ones. After a period of strong social activity and a focus on the success of the individual, there is a move toward individualizing learning and educating young people with respect for their differences. Depressive episodes, silent addictions, dysfunctions of the neuronal or personality system lead to changing methods of educational work. Never before has so much been said about the loneliness of children and adolescents. This has always been the most sociable age group, today much has changed due to the forced isolation. Nothing will be the same anymore, the world has changed and we have changed by being part of it. It would be foolish to overlook this phenomenon and pretend that it is just 2 years ripped from

the resume. Nothing could be further from the truth. Suicide attempts and self-harm are a topic and phenomenon that is becoming more and more common among teenagers. Seeking a way out with the help of psychoactive substances and adrenaline is the path not only of students raised in dysfunctional families. Increasingly, young people from schools and environments where the educational process is at a more conscious level are reaching for these solutions. The increasing number of children with special educational needs evaluations each year indicates that it will be increasingly difficult to look for patterns where they once were. The time for big changes in education has taken off, but are we ready for them?

The conducted research indicates that the problem of students who may be at risk of dropping out of the education system is becoming more and more serious, and the phenomena and mechanisms that emerge and operate in this group spread more widely on adolescents in the broader sense.

Acknowledgements

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STUDY CASE OF DEVELOPMENTS IN ROMANIA'S ADVERTISING INDUSTRY TRIGGERED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Dan-Niculae PODARU

Address correspondence to: Dan-Niculae PODARU, PhD, Department of Anthropology and Communication, Faculty of Journalism and Communication Sciences, University of Bucharest, 1-3 Iuliu Maniu Boulevard, Leu Complex, building A, 6th Floor, 6th District, Bucharest; E-mail: dan.podaru@fjsc.ro

Abstract

Objectives. This study emerged as a result of interactions with advertising professionals. Thus, it was found that the contemporary crises, especially the one generated by the COVID-19 pandemic - have brought some radical changes in the economic and creative environment of the advertising industry in Romania.

Material and methods. This study is based on several dialogues that can be considered interviews focused on the structural changes observed behind the scenes of the advertising industry by the professionals met and who are actual witnesses of the negative and positive transformations that this industry has undergone in recent times.

Results. The pandemic was not only a health and economic crisis, but also an identity crisis, in which advertisers and companies had to not only build brand communication, but reposition their own identity as well. While old jobs were lost, new ones were created. And while off-line channels were lost, new channels emerged, such as Bolt and Glovo delivery. Furthermore, cultural events, such as theatre plays and concerts, stepped beyond the traditional stage and became part of the streaming platforms, thus being relaunched with the help of digital strategy and marketing.

Conclusions. The transformations impact not only advertising agencies, but clients as well. The off-line communication "ban" has not only forced the communication to be moved into the digital realm, but also rushed agencies and companies to create new departments and specializations, in order to cope with these digital requirements. The conclusions that can be drawn from the study can become useful to both professional advertisers and local teachers trying to train future communicators with professionalism.

Keywords: advertising, COVID-19, advertising transformation, semiotics, fashion, communication during the pandemic.

Introduction

Even though, apparently, the ways in which the economic or medical crises are perceived have a strictly negative connotation, the reality encountered throughout Romania's publicity environment seems to somehow contradict such initial perception. The crisis that the COVID-19 pandemic inflicted upon Romania's advertising industry seems to have redefined the economic relationships and creative advertising strategies, adapting them to the new working conditions imposed by the social distancing that the pandemic brought in the spotlight. The hypothesis that was the basis of this deductive research is that the current economic and medical crises have not only generated negative effects and economic damage to the advertising industry, but also some possibly positive effects that could not be observed at the start of the research.

Since the effects of these crises - and especially the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic - brought about a number of structural changes with economic and human implications (Tharanga, 2022), since most agencies were obliged to lay off some of their staff or cut their benefits along 2020-2021 (Sengupta & Dhir, 2023), it can be considered that the topic approached here is a matter worth researching in its own right, but - at the same time - it is also an actual social issue, considering the social, human and economic implications that could be seen in contemporary society (Chaurasia & Ghose, 2023; Silverman, 2004, pp. 20-21).

Apparently, the crisis that was generated by COVID-19 and that came along with a host of restrictions impacting human interactions, but not in the circumstances of a major economic crisis such as the one we had over 2007-2008, generated new communication dimensions and we were all supposed to look for strategic solutions that were adequate to promoting products in the digital and television environments.

Periodically, the humankind goes through radical transformations in all areas of activity. The COVID-19 pandemic might have been that radical turning point when contemporary advertising started to transform itself. Messages started to travel around more quickly, once new publicity channels became available, but also after the target public became more professional (the public's capacity to decode messages improved as messages started to become more complex). The printed media built a certain type of speed for the propagation of messages, television marked another phase of how messages were disseminated and how viewers would send their feedback, whereas the digital era which is based on complete interactivity came up with a host of new facilities: higher communication speeds and more efficient reception of advertising campaigns. According to the analysis made by Delia Balaban, the interest that the young public takes in the printed media and television dropped, and the focus is now placed on using the Internet on a frequent basis (Balaban & Szambolics, 2021, p. 20). Under these circumstances, the COVID-19 crisis came up and pushed the entire business of the advertisers into the online environment.

Material and methods

It was useful to enter in a dialogue, in a manner that focused strictly on the changes that occurred in the advertising industry, with two advertising experts who are shareholders or top managers of certain agencies.

The first interlocutor is a shareholder in a Romanian advertising company, with an experience of over 23 years in marketing and advertising, whom will be code-named *I1* for purposes of this article, and my second interviewee is a top management lady working for another advertiser, with a track-record of about 14 years, whom I will name *I2*. It must be mentioned here

that these interviews were made over March-December 2022. These interviews were made both in person and via telephone, lasting from 30 to 47 minutes.

The interviewees were only available as time allowed, as they were involved in various activities and campaigns, which influenced their willingness to speak freely about the topics of interest to this study.

The specialty literature highlights the idea of authenticity of the qualitative research and specifies that qualitative interviews are mostly done with a narrow sample of people (Silverman, 2004, p. 29).

Considering that advertisers are not too numerous in Romania, basically there are a few dozens of them that are significant for Romania's advertising industry, having two interviews with two insiders is a starting point relevant for an analysis of the topic which is of interest. Moreover, has to be stressed out that the two experts represent two agencies that are quite relevant for Romania's advertising industry.

The research method used is the one defined by the specialty literature as "theme-centred interview" that deals solely with only one matter of interest (Marinescu, 2009, p. 53). Moreover, the questions asked to the two interviewees followed the same topics and the same structural order specified in the interview guide.

Case presentation

In the upcoming pages the main opinions of the two specialists which came out in the dialogues will be reviewed.

Expert I1 – "*The Covid crisis is actually an identity crisis of the communication industry*".

The starts will highlight the most important elements that expert I1 mentioned, since he drew an interesting parallel between the economic crisis in 2007-2008 and the medical crisis generated by COVID-19, considering that he had participated as an insider in meetings of certain communication groups, in both crises. In his view, there is a noticeable difference in how the advertising industry worked out during these two different crises. "*The 2007 crisis was a financial crisis*", "*the market shrunk*", and from his point of view, as an experienced advertising manager and entrepreneur, "*the crisis may be an opportunity*", while he is convinced that such a crisis never affects all players in the same way.

From his angle, as a businessman, I1 believes that a crisis may bring you an "opportunity *to reinvent yourself, to take new paths*". The crisis of 2007-2008 rearranged the global market by "*re-targeting the budgets*". One of the main relevant conclusions which I noted during my interview with I1 is that - while the global economic crisis was in full swing - "*players shifted their focus aiming for something more profitable*". In order to detail and explain his understanding of profitability, he was asked to give an example illustrating how this economic and professional goal could be achieved. And he explained that - over 2008-2010 - clients "*skipped all intermediate communication elements and they would only communicate through the selling point or through the TV*".

Given that the crisis of 2007-2008 was generated by a plummeting purchasing power, advertising agency clients became interested in saving and, therefore, "*the client felt that the public is either influenced while they are at home, and they go shopping already knowing what they want to buy, or they are massively influenced to make this or that purchasing decision when they are in*

front of the shelf". I1 believes that the 2007-2008 crisis brought under the spotlight a "*reduction of the budgets*" of the large players that operate on the world advertising market.

The main difference which I1 noted when analyzing the pre-2010 economic crisis vs. the health crisis generated by COVID-19 is that "*money was not the issue for the second crisis*", *i.e.,* during the health crisis money stayed there, while the big players and agencies would look for solutions to strategically use the funds effectively. All of these efforts, and all that quest for new solutions have generated together and have speculated on, I1 believes, any sort of opportunity and that is why the "*streaming market - Netflix, Hulu, Amazon, Disney*" *inter alia* took off exponentially.

Considering that I1 had some interested customers operating in the area of streaming, he was also capable of seeing a sort of niche pattern that defines this digital service. I1 talked about other new "*streaming platforms that provide access to niche art, like theatre performances, documentaries and concerts*", which actually existed before the crisis but which the pandemic boosted significantly. The I1 interviewee, was asked to provide even more examples, and explained and detailed the way in which - as far as he was concerned - new technologies were used specifically. He also said that „*the aim of streaming is to replace culturally the live experience. A play you are streaming may be viewed by 10 times more viewers than a hall can hold*".

In terms of time sequence, I1 took stock of the phases in the evolution of the COVID-19 medical crisis and their impact on the Romanian advertising industry. He explained that when this sort of medical crisis first occurred, players were all stupefied and perplexed and that "*people did not really know how to spend their budgets*". It has to be clarified that - at the time when the lockdown was declared - all events that were scheduled to take place outdoors, on stadia, etc. all OOH promotional campaigns, the mesh boards, etc. were discontinued and all budgets that had been earmarked to finance these types of communication remained partially available to cover for other purposes.

I1 believes that "*most industries did not shrink, but grew*". Advertisers handled the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in different and complex ways and the way in which the interviewee explains it makes me think that the topic that had been chosen for this paper and the assiduous quest for details of interest that can be explained and understood by interviewing experts was actually a great idea.

I1 explains his earlier point about the growth potential of certain industries that thrived during the COVID-19 pandemic and said that "*the growth of food delivery platforms, coupled with the fear of a direct social contact during the pandemic came out as a boost to restaurants that were closed to the public, but were able to continue their business through home deliveries*".

Comparing advertising to fashion and to how evanescence and volatility are the adjectives of contemporary fashion, I1 recalled that he had observed during the pandemic "*fashion-like short-lived peekaboo trends in the advertising industry*", for example, certain forms of digital communication related to the pandemic context.

However, apart from the short-lived phenomena that came alive in the imagination of advertisers back in those days, it should be noted that the global crisis also generated some long-term effects, structurally altering the universe of the advertising agencies, and I1 explained that some effects were there to stay in the long term too: "*people will no longer work exclusively in their physical offices*". The expert anticipates that "*office spaces will become hubs hosting project teams*", this was already been confirmed just a few months after my interview with I1 with news coming out of a company that provided a space with desks and facilities which employees could share in turns, depending on their ongoing projects, therefore the idea of having a personal office

is water under the bridge. I1 also said that "*remote working arrangements exist and will exist as a wish of the employees*", even though in reality employers want to check and supervise the work of employees, and would therefore like employees to return to the in-person work.

The central idea that came out from the interview with expert I1 is also the one that gave the title of this chapter of the research, namely that the COVID-19 crisis, for the advertising agencies, for the entire industry "*is an identity crisis of the communication industry*". It is also worth mentioning that during the interview which took place in the agency office, one important observation was the fact that less than 10% of the staffers where actually there; what also was relevant to notice was that I1's approach was always marked by this ambivalence of him being both an advertising professional and an entrepreneur.

The expert I1 took an interesting angle on how the world economy might evolve in the aftermath of a general medical crisis. The expert believes that COVID-19 *"will put an end to globalization"*, since "*every country will try to protect itself, its own economy and citizens"*.

Strictly speaking of the advertising industry, one first economic and professional effect that I1 noticed after the pandemic is associated to the dynamics of the videos. The interviewee told he had seen a "*freeze effect in the videos"*, and that this sort of halt was caused by the "*difficulty to come up with some proper messages in the context of the pandemic*". This difficulty to adapt messages to the overall pandemic circumstances may be a central element, and may be the essence of what the expert said during the interview: "*the Covid crisis is actually an identity crisis of the communication industry"*.

In fact, as consumers, we have noticed this tendency to create stereotypical advertising messages and many of them actually being repetitive.

Moreover, many of the new productions revolved around the pandemic, which created an unprecedented similarity amongst the campaigns of different, even competing, brands. Moreover, quite originally, the expert stated that "*brands continued to communicate out of inertia, but they just did not know what to say anymore*".

This difficult situation that is generated by the dramatic context of the pandemic required a swift adaptation of the production houses and advertising agencies, because, expert I1 said, "*some pre-existing campaigns were built on a cheerful narrative and no longer reflected the social realities*".

The I1 expert also explained the general context in which the advertising industry was caught somehow off-guard by the pandemic; I1 explained that moment was a tough one since a lot of the advertising campaigns were "*focusing on Bellow The Line (BTL) actions*" and the agencies and their strategic campaigns had to adapt themselves quickly and go exclusively digital.

An important transformation that I1 highlighted refers to the new dynamics of commercials, which, given the new context of progressively accelerating digitals, managed to take over a lot of the commercials that were previously meant to run on television; my interlocutor explained that "*many commercials that are no longer on TV stay in the digital environment*". I1 continued his reasoning and explained what the building blocks of this type of mutation were, stating that "*it is easier to reach your target audience more frequently in the digital environment*". He also believes that neither agencies nor clients were able to save on their money by transferring videos from one broadcasting environment to another, as this does not guarantee that "*budgets shifted from TV to digital have been reduced*". Another important aspect that came out during these interviews refers to the benefits of the digital world whereby the target audience can be more easily and precisely targeted, achieving the so-called "micro-targeting".

Expert I1 also noted a cultural peculiarity which he considers specific to Romania and which blocked the massive transfer of material from the TV area to the digital area: the preference of Romanians to watch TV rather than interact in the online environment, and considered that this national peculiarity would ultimately encourage "*advertising campaigns to return to the television, at the expense of the digital environment*". The reasons for this cultural preference for TV programmes, which is specific to the Romanian society, derives - according to the interviewed expert - from the fact that "*television provides the cheapest entertainment*". So, Romania's characteristic of TV programmes being preferred over internet materials might just work as a barrier or a mitigant of the massive and global impacts that COVID-19 has inflicted upon the advertising industry and the media.

The expert noted that we are witnessing a post-pandemic return to the BTL universe and that due *inter alia* to the absence of in-person events, "*enthusiasm for BTL is higher now than in the pre-pandemic period*".

As a remark of a general importance, the expert noted a relevant strategic change in the advertising business in general and considers that, although such effect may not be triggered exclusively by the pandemic and the changes deriving from it, "*advertising slides towards a show-like product, the Internet has increased the attention span towards attractive messages*". The expert is convinced that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the trend according to which "*brands need to take on the role of entertainers*". I1 explains that when talking about this phenomenon *advertainment* is the catchword, which he defines simply as a new form of advertising in which "*people must enjoy watching ads*". According to Merriam Webster's dictionary, the term refers to "a form of entertainment that is created primarily to advertise something: advertisement presented in the form of entertainment" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2023).

I1 mentioned two of the examples of TV productions in which brands become actual entertainers: *Chefi fără limite (Chefs without borders)*, a show produced by Lidl and broadcast by Antena 1; and in terms of advertising videos, one of the brands that has created an entire animated universe and animation characters dedicated to its own promotion is Vlad Casino that the brand used to "*clearly stand out against any other casino*", I1 explained.

In conclusion, I1 believes that traditional advertising agencies are significantly different from those specialising in digital campaigns, which emerged mainly during the pandemics, and explained that "*digital agencies do not know how to work on a concept*". Moreover, he says that the shortcoming faced by digital agencies is that digital specialists are predominantly "*technicians*" rather than creators, strategists and communicators.

The second expert, I2 - "*Home delivery services like Glovo or Bolt Food have been turned into promotional channels for different brands, with dedicated sections, ads and promotions*".

In the following pages are extracts and highlights with the 2nd interviewer, the interview with the I2 specialist. One important takeaway from this interview is that I2 - a top manager for one of Romania's leader advertisers - was able to see both the positives and the negatives generated by the pandemic. In the following pages, we will review and exemplify the highlights of the discussion with expert I2.

Regarding the main element that I2 considers positive (it should be specified that this expert is an employee of the advertising agency, unlike the previous interlocutor who owns his own agency), it is worth remembering what she said about remote work: "*it involves helping employees use their time more efficiently, but also encouraging agencies to use more part-timers*

/ project-based contributors, while the advertising workforce itself has moved from being employed in one agency to collaborating with several agencies or clients".

On a positive post-pandemic note, according to I2, both Romanian and foreign "*employees find it easier to work internationally without having to relocate*".

The I2 interlocutor considers that the development of the digital environment during the global crisis generated another benefit: "*clients were supposed to find ways of coping with the lack of offline projects and switch to online communication, and even develop dedicated digital departments if none had existed before, and hire the specialised workforce*".

Also, when it comes to the uber-specialisation generated by the digital universe, I2 also noted that a new form of advertising graphics, dedicated to the online environment, had emerged, stating that "*advertising graphics had to adapt itself to the online environment, complying with the UX/UI (user experience and user interface) requirements when creating content. Print designers acknowledged the requirements of the online environment, moving to tabular, responsive graphics with internet-friendly fonts and different rules for structuring information so that the most relevant information can be captured in the first part of the layout.*".

The new developments in digital departments have also impacted the jobs or, rather, the specialisations of the employees working for advertising agencies, generating their need to upskill and live up to the new requirements of the digital environment or, even more so, generating new positions and niche jobs which placed unprecedented challenges on the hands of HR departments that had to start looking for talents endowed with these new skills. About this matter, I2 said: "*events have moved online, through Minecraft-type platforms. New specialised jobs have appeared, such as online event manager*". For players of certain types of games working in the virtual environment, such as Minecraft, virtual covering concrete facts or other events that have been transferred from the real world to the virtual one; this is how the sponsors or partners of those events were also attracted into the virtual environment, and their graphic and identity elements are now displayed in the new universe.

Another peculiarity observed by the specialist, who analysed the changes to be found in the advertising industry, at a structural level, from a technical point of view, is that the *"3D resources have been exploited much more in the digital world, by creating virtual realities and environments that are able to reproduce the offline inasmuch as possible. Under such circumstances, digital products were developed and sold as NFTs or digital avatars (fashion collections, paintings, etc.)".*

The specialist also noted another structural change on the market where consumer goods are sold, but also a structural change in the expectations and services that brands have from advertising agencies, namely "*the development of new online platforms or the adjustment of the existing ones to support advertising activities. We're also talking about brands that did not have an online shop before the pandemic, but have invested in this method in order to sell directly to consumers, such as Napolact."*

After all, there are areas of the production sector or of the large producers that would only sell their products through large distribution networks and that, in the absence of the communication and sales channels that could have enabled them to contact the final client directly, were facing an imminent bankruptcy or, in any case, a possible major economic crisis. Regarding the online distribution networks that started to play the role of offline hypermarkets, the I2 expert notes a significant detail, stating that "*Home delivery services like Glovo or Bolt Food have been turned into promotional channels for different brands, with dedicated sections, ads and promotions*".

Also as elements considered to be beneficial and introduced in the everyday business of the advertising industry by the 2020-2021 COVID-19 crisis, the I2 specialist also identified the particularities generated by the need of the streaming networks to develop more and by the particularities of the video productions, adapted to the new digital conditions, about which she stated that *"online streaming services are evermore increasingly present, and so does their advertising, since these services have even started to be advertised on traditional TV stations"*. As far as video productions are concerned, what I2 told confirmed, to a certain extent, the issues mentioned in the interview with I1: "*brands have focused on social media communications, targeting the video content*".

Concerning the possible negative effects, expert I2 tried to speak objectively and summarise the following elements. First of all, the expert believed that the main negative matter is that certain departments have been overcrowded to the detriment of others; moreover, certain communication channels have been overcrowded, generating a certain type of inflation of the advertising messages. *Along this line, the I2 interviewee said that "the massive shift of the advertising communications to the online environment has overcrowded an area that was already crowded with ads, and brands find it increasingly difficult to stand out against each other".*

As a manager of largely-staffed departments, the I2 specialist noted a peculiarity of remote working, stating that "*educating juniors is more difficult when done remotely, it involves a larger workload on the side of the seniors who have to spend more time managing their projects while handling trainees as well*".

While expert I1 noted that some of the messages and materials created to be televised have started to run mostly in the digital environment, expert I2 considers that a possible negative side of using digital channels in a massive and uniform manner is the lower quality of the advertising messages, and explained: "*communicating cheaply in the digital realm often pushes brands into offering quantitative communication at the expense of quality. The focus is on the number of daily/weekly posts and often more posts come with lower quality.*"

We could say that the new digital campaigns generated and deployed in the online environment somehow reignite that sort of aggressiveness of the messages which the generalized advertising had gradually lost during the historical evolution of the advertising phenomenon. As Roland Barthes stated, the meaning of advertising, after all, is to be visible, even marked by a shocking aggressiveness (Codeluppi, 2003, p. 82, author's translation).

Discussion, conclusion

Putting the interview takeaways together generated a number of conclusions about the evolution of the advertising industry and the impact of economic or medical crises upon this universe.

The first conclusion is that the difference between the 2007-2008 crisis and the COVID-19 crisis is fundamental. The economic crisis of 2007-2008 contracted the market and shrank the corporate advertising budgets substantially. This conclusion is complemented by another significant detail: the COVID-19 crisis did not generate a contraction of the budgets, but rather a strategic shift in the communication channels (Amirul, Ahmad, & Nasip, 2023). It also brought about a contraction of the contract-based staffers, and both of my interviewees confessed that their advertising agencies had seen massive layoffs of about 20-30%.

Another relevant conclusion may be that agencies with departments predominantly working on BTL were affected by the COVID-19 crisis in greater ways, as a large part of their

projects eventually became digital campaigns. It is obvious that another negative effect, apart from the disappearance of the BTL campaigns, was the moment of a halt or absence of the general advertising communication, triggered by the inability of clients and agencies to adapt themselves quickly to new communication requirements, which were not even known at the time. One could say, metaphorically speaking, that creative industries felt baffled for a short while, and found themselves unable to communicate in a dramatic global situation.

The streaming market boomed significantly during the pandemic, ignited by both the investments in alternative productions dedicated to this field and the increased numbers of film viewers on Netflix, Hulu, Amazon, Disney etc. that were all encouraged by the global lockdown policies. Consequently, the development of this type of business and its advertising universe is based on economic and anthropological dynamics.

The new opportunities that have been available once streaming platforms started to thrive will reduce or enhance, depending on how each consumer sees that, the current humanitarian and cultural phenomenon, brokering and transforming contemporary cultural consumption in a radical manner.

The new digital experiences have altered the behaviour of consumers, we could say that – to a certain extent – they actually depleted the cultural act in itself: watching a play in the digital environment lost the magic that viewers would have felt in an authentic art temple, the theatre. This is how - tapping the possibilities to edit and manipulate the broadcast – new ways of expression and opportunities for content creators and advertisers are generated.

However, it seems that the effects of maximising the use of digital opportunities tend to fade or will fade in the coming period, since they will not keep up the accelerated growth speed that they have now. In this respect, both interviewees noted a somehow aggressive return of the BTL events into the everyday life.

Other conclusions that are relevant and useful to the future development of the advertising industry (if such opinions will ever be studied and considered) refer to how difficult it is to train junior advertisers who work remotely, which implies the absence of in-person interaction and, consequently, makes it rather impossible to properly teach the trainees who are just learning the ropes. Therefore, we can anticipate that if working remotely is used for too much time, the professionalisation and upskilling of the specialised staff will face new hardships.

Moreover, after discussing with these specialists, one of the takeaways is that product distribution networks such as Glovo, Tazz, Bolt Food, etc. have become real communication and promotion channels for various brands, becoming, in a hybrid form, a new media and product distribution channel, because through these food or non-food delivery networks that were massively used during the pandemic and post-pandemic years, brands and advertising agencies were able to run extensive campaigns.

Moreso, even the technological elements and the gadgets have been and must be adapted to the new digital requirements; for example, communication platforms, such as Zoom, Google Meet and the like, have become widespread and started to be used by the general public. Advertising agencies used all these types of platforms to meet and pitch during the pandemic period, as the existing literature pointed out for other societies (Jankhoteli, 2023).

The research topic presented and showcased a number of exploratory opportunities that might have never been expected, and its academic potential could be further scouted in future research.

To a certain extent, making an analogy with what Filippo Tommaso Marinetti wrote about speed and how it massively started influencing humanity and Italian society since the beginning

of the 20th century (Marinetti, 2009, pp. 155-157), It could be said that nowadays the speed of internet is structurally altering the evolution of contemporary advertising, its effects on society and, why not, even the future dynamics of human professions that will develop and diversify in unsuspected directions under the influence of digital communication.

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FEMICIDE IN ROMANIA. SOCIAL REALITIES AND MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS CASE STUDY: A FEMICIDE FROM AUGUST 2021 PRESENTED BY THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA

Daniela ROVENȚA-FRUMUȘANI (1), Diana STOICA (2)

(1) (2) Faculty of Journalism and Communication Sciences, University of Bucharest; E-mail: (1) daniela.frumusani@fjsc.ro; (2) stoica.diana@fjsc.ro

Address correspondence to: Daniela ROVENȚA-FRUMUȘANI, Faculty of Journalism and Communication Sciences, University of Bucharest, 1-3, Iuliu Maniu Boulevard, Bucharest, 061071, Romania, Ph +4021) 305. 97.89, E-mail: daniela.frumusani@fjsc.ro

Abstract

Objectives. Femicide and violence against women (VAW) represent two phenomena with a major impact concerning the public health, women rights and the freedom of speech. This article aims to capture the manner in which a Romanian femicide case is framed in news reporting, the depictions of the victim and the abuser and the context, sources, language used in media news reporting on femicide.
Material and methods. The analysis emphasizes media patterns (frames, portrayals, linguistic structures), which represent an important instrument in shaping public opinion and awareness. For this study, there were selected 20 articles which present a Romanian femicide case - August 2021. In order to get specific results, there were used two qualitative methods - critical discourse analysis and frame analysis.
Results. Media news were analyzed from several points of view: the general context, the representation of the victim and of the perpetrator, the narrative of the event, the management of voices which appear during the description of the event and the language used by the journalist. The key findings show that femicide articles published in Romanian print media actualize the negative sensationalistic news tendency, detrimental to civic mobilization and public agenda change.
Conclusions. The denunciation of violence committed by men against women has been and continues to be one of the major issues of the contemporary society, which needs an appropriate mediatization and framing; violence against women and femicide were accentuated by the pandemic context as well as by the race, class, age of the abused women.

Keywords: violence against women, femicide, media discourse, COVID-19 crisis.

Introduction

Violence against women represents a social problem that - during the last decades - drew the attention of the researchers from many fields: sociology, communication, linguistics, psychology, etc. This variety of perspectives shows that violence against women represents an important subject which needs to be present in the public debates because "it is inextricably tied to issues of power and control" (Weil, 2020, p.112).

The denunciation of violence committed by men against women has been and continues to be one of the major issues of the contemporary society, polarized on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, class. Raised by the feminist movement of the 1970s and based on a questioning of the opposition between public space and private space, between public questions with which society must be concerned and private questions kept in silence, feminist reflections have highlighted the "banality" of the different forms of violence committed by men against women - harassment in the street or at work, domestic violence, sexual violence, but also verbal and psychological violence.

Elizabeth Stanko's book first published in 1985, "Intimate intrusions Women's experience of male violence" presents the victimization of women, focusing on the four main areas of incest, rape, physical violence, and sexual harassment. Based on participant observation and interviews with police forces, victims and others involved, the research examines women's experiences of male violence and the reactions of those to whom women complain, including police officers, judges and union officials. The book highlights the errors or indifference of the criminal justice system and administrative personnel institutions carrying *the male point of view.*

Three decades later, things haven't much changed, women are reluctant to fill a complaint against their violent partner, media representations are individualized events and not thematic approaches -deep analysis of social dramatic issues, the blame the victim frame continues to work. Jewkes and Linneman (2018) argue that "No one who lives in today's media-saturated society is immune to the winner–loser/self– other/insider–outsider culture - little wonder, then, that to many U.S. citizens, the police and criminal justice system are viewed as, at best, ineffective and, at worst, threatening".

Femicide – theoretical aspects

The first paradigmatic change appears with the designation of the phenomenon by introducing the name created to fill the gap in sociological and feminist research violence against women, domestic violence, intimate partner violence against women (late in the 70's members of the "women's movement" convinced the public to recognize the condition of "wife abuse" as a social problem).

The word "femicide" appeared for the first time in 1976, in Diana Russell`s discourse in front of the International Tribunal for Crimes against Women (Lujan Pinelo, 2018, p.42). This word raised awareness among professionals from various fields that "the violent death of women was a crime per se, not to be confused with the gender-neutral term homicide" (Corradi & Stockl, 2014, p. 976). For hundreds of years, "the abuse of women, particularly by the male partners, was condoned socially as an acceptable way for husbands to discipline their wives" (Gillespie, Richards, & Givens, 2013, p.222). Feminist research emphasized the "internalized oppression" (Kanbur et al., 2021, p.444) of patriarchal ideology and the paradoxical relationship attacker/victim "women are most likely to be killed in a context of a continuing, physically abusive

relationship, whereas men are most likely to be killed by strangers or acquaintances" (Sela-Shayovitz, 2018, p.13).

Many researchers have also tried to find out why the aggressor ends up killing his partner: some pointed out that during their childhood they were abused, others pointed out that low levels of education would be one of the causes, and others indicated that mental problems and drugs abuse would be linked to the existence of such behavior (Dobash et al., 2004; Campbell, 2003; Belfrage & Rying, 2004; Aldrige & Browne, 2003 as cited in Balica, 2018, p.16). Although the number of women killed because of their gender is very high all over the world, other catastrophic events such as hurricanes, epidemics, pandemics, tsunamis, increase more the statistics and show the importance of rules and laws that should be implemented in this regard. Violence against women remains a *shadow pandemic* as it was designed by the UN secretary Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka.

Femicide and domestic violence during COVID-19 pandemics

There are many similarities that could be seen when comparing coronavirus with femicide. Weil stated that "femicide, like the coronavirus, occurs in every society indiscriminately and spreads at an incalculable rate". Moreover, both phenomena are lethal and should be eradicated. There are also differences: while coronavirus is a disease that appeared suddenly, the femicide is a predictable matter, that coexists with the world`s population since forever (Weil, 2021, p. 110).

During pandemics, the number of victims who suffered because of their intimate partner`s violent behavior increased all over the world (Campbell, 2020; Kofman & Garfin, 2020; Peterman et al., 2020).

"Economic strains, confined quarantine conditions, increased time and tensions at home, closed schools, and limited access to an overwhelmed health system increased vulnerability and risks for different types of abuse" (Kanbur et al., 2021, p. 444). During the state of emergency, when the state authorities imposed numerous restrictive measures in order to reduce the number of coronavirus cases, the aggressors managed to control their victims much more easily. They "restricted their ability to ask for help and used various misinformation tactics, limiting their access to the media" (Campbell, 2020, p. 29). At the same time, during the pandemic, it was observed an increase in alcohol consumption (Usher, Bhullar, Durkin, Gyamfi, & Jackson, 2020, p.550). This finding was associated with the stress caused by the virus, with the insecure situation at work, with the routine at home, in the family.

In the whole world, during COVID-19 pandemics, it was perceived an increase in what concerns the cases of domestic violence and femicide. "It was estimated that domestic violence has increased with 30% in France and 18% in Spain" (Sharifi, Larki, & Roudsari, 2020, p.2377). Also, "in Brazil, the state hotline Ligue 180 reported an increase of 18% in calls in one week in March alone" (Weil, 2021, p.111). In Mexico, "the highest number of domestic violence cases was registered in March and comparing the first six months of 2020 with those of 2019, it can be observed a 25% increase during the pandemic" (Vasquez Correa, 2020, p.135). Countries such as Argentina, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom insisted that since the beginning of the pandemic there was a higher rate of femicides. In Romania, during the pandemic, the press drew attention to the very large number of cases of femicide and cases of domestic violence. Approximately 4860 protection orders were issued, 72 Romanian women died as a result of abuse suffered by their partners, and approximately 10,000 women suffered trauma due to physical violence throughout 2020 (Cojan, 2021).

Femicide in media

Nowadays, media has a significant role in our society, because it decides what kind of news are worthy of publicity or not. "A media organization prefers to cover crime events since this type of coverage is convenient, newsworthy and contributes to sales, while the public requires these reports in order to gain a view about this problem" (Sela-Shayovitz, 2018, p.16). Generally speaking, the violent issues are preferred by the audience due to the fact that they evoke fear and curiosity in the same time.

When presenting a killing of a woman, mass media tends to use specific tools, vocabulary, methods, in order to draw attention to that article. There was observed that sometimes the femicides in media are described as "crimes of passion", sustaining that "both members of the couple are equally considered victims of the situation, and responsible for its dramatic consequences" (Gius & Lali, 2014, p. 57), which is not always true. Over time, researchers have shown that articles published by the media, which approach issues related to domestic or domestic violence have often focused on "severe forms of violence, fatal incidents, acts of violence committed by women, or accidental situations of violence" (Carlyle, Slater, & Chakroff, 2008; Marhia, 2008; Mason & Monckton-Smith, 2008; Morgan, Politoff, 2012; Sims, 2008 as cited in Sutherland, McCormack, Easteal, Holland, & Pirkis, 2016, pp.6-7). Moreover, they also showed that the language used by the authors of the articles is used to shock, fascinate or entertain, as well as to undermine the true nature of the crime, to compromise the real impact of the crime.

Regarding the violence and femicides, journalists focus in particular on some issues in order to draw the public's attention: "blaming the victim, perpetuating the myths of domestic violence, (...) transforming the facts to fit the values and style building a news story" (Easteal, Holland, Dunne Breen, Vaughan, & Sutherland, 2018, p. 2). The absence of a presentation of the social context highlights the fact that incidents are treated discreetly, from an individual perspective, without taking into account social responsibility. In some articles it has been noted that victims are presented as accomplices to their own killing, and other episodes of domestic violence in their past are silenced (Saroca, 2013, as cited in Easteal et al., 2018, p. 2).

When speaking about blaming the victim, it was envisaged a dichotomy between direct and indirect victim blaming. The indirect victim blaming strategies used in the articles published in the media refer to the development of excuses for the perpetrator, portraying them as victims themselves by presenting the case in such a manner as to bring sympathy to the killer (Taylor, 2009, p.25; Richards, Gillespie, & Smith, 2011, p.182). In addition, the aggressor is described as a person who loved the victim so much that he could not live without her after a divorce, a separation, etc. The direct victim blaming strategies include a negative characterization of the victim – suspicion of infidelity, her general behavior, her love affairs, etc. (Taylor, 2009, p.25; Richards et al., 2011, p. 182).

If previous research (Morgan & Politoff, 2012) found out that media coverage presented VAW incidents as isolated, event based rather than as a pervasive social issue with gendered political drivers, some recently published empirical study (Sutherland et al., 2016) also confirm a new trend. In that study of print, broadcast and online news published in 2015, the proportion of newspaper articles that were events based only was 38.7 per cent, with the reminder either partially or wholly thematic (Sutherland et al., 2016, p.15).

Simons and Morgan (2017) define the journalism devoted to social change as "useful journalism" (other researchers label it alternative journalism). This kind of journalism "focuses on a particular cause or issue with the objective of achieving societal change and where the media

platform transparently declares its objective" (Simons & Morgan, 2017). Such a media campaign usually includes informing the public, investigation, analysis and perhaps most relevantly here, social empathy — the method of using individual stories to create collective yearnings for social change (Schudson, 2008).

Material and methods

At the social level, naming a problem may lead to the formulation of a solution (Mehrotra, 1999, as cited in Simons & Morgan, 2017). "That is why the ways in which the news media choose to frame domestic violence influences the public's perception of the phenomenon as well as solutions, and public responsibility".

Despite socio-cultural and statistical differences men's violence against women is normalized, tolerated and justified, and there is a lack of truly proactive and state initiatives to protect women's right to life (Garcia-Moreno & Stockl, 2013; Ingala Smith, 2018).

Femicide, like any other form of men's violence, reflects macro-level socio-political and economic institutions and formal and informal beliefs and stereotypes, which are disseminated normalized or challenged in the *deep mediatization society* (Hepp, 2020).

The current analysis emphasizes media patterns (frames, portrayals, linguistic structures), which represents an important instrument in shaping public opinion and awareness.

The media was identified as all but ignoring the misogynistic motivations of men who killed women, therefore overlooking the sexual politics of femicide and contributing to the maintenance of patriarchy and simultaneously that of men's violence against women (Ingala Smith, 2018, p.162). For Radford and Russell (1992) naming and defining femicide was crucial in order to promote awareness and generate resistance.

For this analysis, there were selected 20 articles which present a femicide that took place at the middle of August 2021. When the corpus was established, it was observed that many online journals or publications treated this issue, which was considered an important event, that received, apparently, a high level of attention from the journalists across the country. Taking into consideration that this analysis represents an exploratory study, there were included the first 20 articles, which appeared on Google, using a specific phrase: "teacher killed by her husband 2021", considering that after the first results, the research will be expanded. Moreover, it must be emphasized the distinction between the quality press vs. tabloid press. Out of these 20 articles, 4 were published on websites representing the tabloid press, such as Click, Cancan, Spynews, Wowbiz and the other 16 were published online, on websites representing the quality press.

In order to analyse this specific case, first of all, the critical discourse analysis will be used. This method offers the possibility to "explore unclear causal and deterministic relationships between discursive practices, events and texts, but also between cultural structures, relationships and processes to investigate how these practices, events or texts appear and are modeled. ideological view through power relations" (Fairclough & Holes, 1995, p.32 as cited in Mardhyarini & Ariyanti, 2015, p. 66). On the other hand, through discourse analysis, it will be possible to identify the strategies and enunciation marks used by journalists in transmitting information to the general public. At the same time, using this method, it can be emphasized that discourse is "an instrument of control and social action, which works to support a particular institution, organization or ideology" (Fernandez Martinez & Trujillo Gonzalez, 2012, p.206).

In media and communication studies, framing is included as a strategic action involving the conscious choice of words and indicators supposed to produce certain effects, namely the

highlighting of certain aspects of a theme (De Vreese, 2005; Entman, 1993). Frame analysis, the second method that will be used, distinguishes between generic frameworks (human interest, economic consequences, conflict, responsibility, morality detectable in all categories of news) and specific ones (Rovența-Frumușani & Ștefănel, 2017). It will be significant to emphasize the interplay between generic frames and specific ones in the area of VAW.

In addition, Bullock and Cubert (2002) identified four media frames that were mainly used used in presenting VAW news. These frames were (1) a police frame or "just the facts" (2) a frame indicating that the current event involved people that are different from "us" (3) a frame that blamed the victim and/or excused the perpetrator, and (4) a frame that implied shock at the identification of the perpetrator because of his normalcy.

Focusing specifically on femicide, Taylor (2009) examined 6 years (1995-2000) of newspaper coverage in the Orlando Sentinel resulting in an analysis of 292 articles representing 168 cases. Taylor observed whether or not cases of femicide were presented as domestic violence. She found that violence was mentioned ambiguously in 42 articles (usually through a vague description of the event as "some type of domestic incident") and in an equal-blame or neutral manner in 57 articles.

The entire analysis will follow a well-established path, determined by the five frames elaborated by Gillespie et al. (2013). As such, the main areas of interest will be the following: (1) focus on the behavior of the victim, including the indirect or direct victim blaming; (2) on observing if normalizing the event as commonplace could be discussed; (3) about suggesting the incident was an isolated event; (4) about indicating the victim and/or perpetrator are somehow different from the norm; and (5) about asserting that domestic violence perpetrators are "disordered" and should be easily identifiable (Gillespie et al., 2013, p. 227).

Previous research indicates two distinct presentations of intimate partner homicide in the news: a majority of articles portrays intimate partner homicide as general homicide and a minority of articles portrays intimate partner homicide as domestic violence.

One of the most underutilized sources regarding domestic violence is those with an educated opinion and informed background in the problem, such as victim advocates or academic researchers (Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Byerly, 1994; Meyers, 1997; Taylor, 2009).

The linguistic choices and discourse strategies are also relevant. For example, it was often the case that headlines failed to include linguistic indicators that distinguished an intimate partner homicide from a homicide between strangers (Bullock & Cubert, 2002).

Because media are able to legitimize some views and to marginalize others, the news media are an important part of this framing process. Surette (2007) suggests that the media function as a filter in this capacity.

Moreover, it will be observed if there can be envisaged some marks of sensationalism, since journalists focus, in particular, on several aspects to attract the public's attention, such as: "blaming the victim, perpetuating the myths of domestic violence, the absence of the social context in which the violent episode takes place, sensationalism through the language used, transforming the facts and the style used to build a news story" (Easteal et al., 2018, p.2). Other researchers showed that the language used by the authors of the articles is used to shock, fascinate or entertain, as well as to undermine the true nature of the crime, to compromise the real impact of the crime (Carlyle, Slater, & Chakroff, 2008; Marhia, 2008; Mason & Monckton-Smith, 2008; Morgan & Politoff, 2012; Sims, 2008 as cited in Sutherland et al., 2016, pp. 6-7).

It was observed, that in press articles, the sources which are mostly mentioned or quoted are the police, the politicians, the perpetrator or the judge (Sutherland, Easteal, Holland, &

Vaughan, 2019, p. 5). As a matter of fact, it could be perceived as a disproportion, because the voices of the victim or of a domestic violence advocate are not paraphrased or included to such an extent in the media articles (Sutherland et al, 2019, p. 6).

Each article was read for content specifically relating to the three components of domestic violence frames, sources of information, language (e.g., word choice in titles, characteristics of the victim and perpetrator), and context (e.g., couple's history, perpetrator's history of violence).

Research questions
1. How are Romanian femicide cases framed in news reporting?
2. How are the victim and the abuser presented in femicide cases?
3. What is the context, the sources, the language used when presenting a femicide?

Results

The femicide which will be analyzed in this section presents a couple who had two girls and was getting a divorce, because they were no longer getting along. They lived in Bucharest, the woman worked as a kindergarten teacher and the man was previously jurist and, in some articles, it stated that actually he worked as taxi driver and in others that he was unemployed. In order to follow the aspects mentioned in the methodological part, the actors, the events, the language used, the experts and the presence or absence of sensationalism will be taken into consideration.

The type of article

When speaking of the type of article, the reference is mainly made to the category in which each article is included when entering on the website. It was observed that only one article was included in the "social" section; the other ones were uploaded on the "actuality", "events", "news", "national", "internal news" or "trending" sections. The "national" category appeared on the websites that published mainly events that happened in a specific county. The most frequent category was "actuality" and explanation for this could be the fact that the publication wants to draw attention on something that happened recently and that needs to be known by the whole audience.

The representation of victim and perpetrator. Linguistic strategies, labels

It was observed that both, the victim and the aggressor, were described in different ways by using different kind of nouns (Table 1). It can be seen that the journalists insist mainly on the profession of both persons, on their spousal relation, on the existence of the children and finally on the fatal incident, which led to a relation "victim" vs. "perpetrator". At the same time, it could be mentioned the fact that the name of the victim appeared more frequently than the name of the aggressor and also that there can be envisaged three kinds of articles: those where it can be found both names, those where we cannot find any name and those where it is present the victim`s name. Moreover, the journalists published also photographs with the victim and with the aggressor in order to offer a complete image of the couple, without taking into consideration the negative consequences of posting publicly this kind of content for the children or for the rest of the family.

Table 1

The representation of victim and perpetrator

Victim	Perpetrator
"mother"	"husband"
"woman"	"ex-husband"
"victim"	"suspect"
"Kindergarten teacher"	"criminal"
"ex-wife"	"perpetrator"
"Liliana"	"killer"
"Liliana Faur"	"man"
"devil"	"father"
	"Valentin Nicușor Faur"
	"taxi driver"
	"executioner"
	"devil"

All articles attach big importance to the professions practiced by the couple. While the victim was a kindergarten teacher, the aggressor graduated from the Law School, practiced for a short period of time in this field as jurist and then he became taxi driver. Related to his decline, in some articles, it can be underlined some indirect victim-blaming strategies that try to justify the inappropriate behavior of the perpetrator: "because he was jealous", "he was very jealous", "few years ago, he killed their two-year-old boy in a car accident and after this, he was locked up in a hospital for therapy, since then he had never recovered", etc. The journalists try to find the reasons which pushed the man to kill his ex-wife, even though the couple was very known for the frequent misunderstandings they had.

On the other side, the victim is regarded as a woman who worked a lot for her children, who suffered a lot because of her ex-husband, but in some articles we can find the fact that "she wanted to start a new life with another man". In a specific article, it can be underlined the fact that the victim must respect some rules imposed by the perpetrator: she should wear only dark clothes which should fully cover her legs and arms. In each article it is mentioned the fact that the woman

had many protection orders on the name of the aggressor and also the fact that the eldest daughter had one order because her father beat her once.

The perpetrator describes in one article the victim, saying that she was "a devil with an angel`s face, she did not accept under any circumstances the reconciliation, she was capable of unspeakable evil". At the same time, he stated that the victim beat him - he showed some scratches in order to prove the truth - and that he was affected because she demanded so many protection orders. Although the victim is dead, the perpetrator does not regret what he had done and even worse, he tries to accuse her. On the other side, any article does not present the statements of the victim from the moments she was alive.

In sum, it can be envisaged that the journalists emphasize certain aspects in describing the victim and the aggressor, such as: the gender, the profession, their spousal relationship, regarding the perpetrator mostly as an individual, as a separate instance, whereas the victim is part of a group (relatives, neighbors, authorities), who defend her and understand her terrible pain and sorrow.

The representation of the event

The relation between time and space is very important when presenting any kind of news. In this situation, the two axes are significant, because they can offer more details concerning the event: the crime took place in the second district of Bucharest in broad daylight. Even though the couple was getting divorce, the aggressor entered sometimes in the house where lived his wife and daughters in order to take a shower or change his clothes, aspect that can be perceived as an indirect victim-blaming strategy. The day when the crime occurred, he entered the house, talked with the victim, a new scandal began and he killed her. In some articles, the journalists mention that she was stabbed four times and the fatal coup was in her heart. This event is not described as an isolated one; many times, the relatives and the neighbors mentioned that the couple had always disagreements and that the perpetrator was known for having a violent behavior.

The voice of experts – primary source definers of violence - is being heard in five articles. The most frequently are quoted the statements of the police and of the courts, which mentioned that the investigations in this case had begun and also that the aggressor had over 10 criminal cases on his name for aspects related to domestic violence. Mentioning the high number of criminal cases and of protection orders, appears as normalized or predictable: the perpetrator was violent, he has already proved this to the police, victim, relatives, neighbors, etc. and the fatal incident was just the result of this big list of accusations. On the other side, a criminologist and a psychologist presented their opinions in this matter. The criminologist mentioned in the article published by *Observator News* underlined the frustration of the man, due to the fact that his wife proved her power by beginning the divorce procedures. In return, the psychologist whose opinion appears in the article published by *DC News* mentioned the illness of the whole system: even though the victim wants to get divorced, in the court, during the hearings, the couple is encouraged not to end the relationship, but to reconcile. In addition, the psychologist insists on the culpability of the police officers who should have taken action more rapidly in order to protect the victim.

Apart from the experts` voices, there are present the voices of relatives and neighbors, who are afraid of the perpetrator. The statement of the victim`s brother reveals the violent behavior of the aggressor towards the victim. The neighbors and relatives insist on the jealousy towards the victim and towards other relatives of hers. The opinions of the neighbors and relatives are presented in eight articles. It should be mentioned the fact that the articles, which do not present

the views of the authorities or neighbors, have retrieved information from the other news, without mentioning explicitly the sources (institutions, psychologists or relatives).

In all the news that were analyzed, the description of the murder, does not refer to the tragedy as a "gender-violence case", a "femicide", "a masculine violence against the women".

Sensationalism

In order to draw attention of the public regarding the news, the journalists indicated certain myths of domestic violence (Molek-Kozakowska, 2013). The criminal was a father who lost his main job, being unemployed for a certain period of time and then becoming a taxi driver. He suffered from a mental breakdown following the accident in which he killed his two-year-old son. At the same time, he was a jealous person who did not agree that his ex-wife could begin a new life with another man. Those aspects reveal one of the myths of domestic violence, which is concentrated on the idea that usually domestic violence perpetrators have some mental problems or do not have the possibility to support their family.

On the other side, the sensationalism throughout the titles and the catchphrases used in order to make the reader more curious are also obvious. In some articles there are some expressions which indicate the opinion of the journalists, who evaluate the gravity of the incident, such as: "heinous crime", "the main suspect is the husband of the victim", "horrible crime", "shattering murder", "killed brutally", "died in terrible pain", "stabbed in heart", "he was the devil", "murdered in cold blood". This language is used in order to fascinate and stimulate the curiosity of the public towards the cruelty of the event. In many titles, it is mentioned the place where the crime happened – Bucharest –, feeling the necessity to underline the fact even if in the capital of the country this kind of incidents can happen.

Throughout the whole analysis, there were found some indirect victim-blaming strategies in order to excuse the behavior of the perpetrator, but there was not felt any kind of shock when identifying the aggressor, because the authorities, the victim, the relatives and the neighbors knew his violent attitude. It can be observed also that there were not presented just the facts, there were included the experts` opinions and the statements of victim`s relatives. In one article, it can be detected the aggressor allegations concerning his attitude towards the victim. Moreover, the perpetrator and the victim were described as normal people, who did not have a good marital relationship like many other persons, but who ended up this relationship in a tragic way.

Discussions

Dorfman, Woodruff, Chavez and Wallack (1997, pp. 1311–1316) analyzed whether violence stories included a public health perspective and found that episodic coverage of violence was more than five times more frequent than thematic coverage with its links to broader social factors. The same focus of episodic frames (isolated event like in the syntagms of the police officers) continues, and the deep picture (thematic coverage) of the shadow pandemic is underrepresented.

The purpose of the study was to capture the manner in which the lethal acts of violence against women - femicides - are presented to the public. Following Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1991) an emphasis was also placed on the fact that news organizations still have a tendency to focus on what is wrong in the society, which explains the heavy emphasis on deviance and law violations. Such events draw public attention, shape public's opinion, and awareness concerning

societal phenomena, but actualize the negative sensationalistic news tendency detrimental to civic and governmental agenda change. Previous research has noted that it is the repetitiveness with which the frames are presented to the public that slowly shapes the way an issue is seen. The more frequently an issue is framed in a particular way, the more likely it is for people to adopt media's frame for it.

In the analyzed articles, both the victims and the aggressors are portrayed in the same way: gender, age, education, professional status, family status. The dissimilarity appears in the persons involved in the dramatic event description: the perpetrator acts alone, the victim and her relatives suffer as a group (heavily injured, threatened, battered). Furthermore, it was not identified any difference between the articles published in the quality press websites and tabloid press webpages: the facts are presented in a chronological order and the description of the characters is complex. Surprisingly, even in sensationalistic online press, expert voices are also present, not only the non-institutional voices, such as relatives and neighbors.

Conclusions

The articles were analyzed from various perspectives, such as: the general context of the tragic event, the representation of the victim and perpetrator, the representation of the event, the management of voices which appear in the description of the event and the language used by the journalist. It is worth mentioning that the hypothesis elaborated by Bullock and Cubert in 2002 is validated in this study: the opinion of victim advocates or of academic researchers is not present in any article. Following the analysis, it can be underlined the fact that the "main definers of the situation" (Ericson et al., 1991; Fishman 1981; Surette 1998), which are the institutions of the justice system – police, judges or prosecutors (Marinescu & Marinache, 2018) are present in the articles, as experts or sources of information, but also, the voices of the non-institutional, less powerful side are present (relatives and neighbors).

Moreover, regarding the frames proposed by Bullock and Cubert (2002), it can be stated that there are present some indirect victim blaming strategies and some phrases that try to justify the inappropriate behavior of the perpetrator: "because he was jealous", "he was very jealous". It was not present any kind of shock when identifying the culprit and also the perpetrator and the victim are described as normal people, like "us".

Concerning the frames elaborated by Gillespie (2013), it can be observed that in most of the articles the journalists were focused on the behavior of the victim and on blaming indirectly her conduct. At the same time, the emphasis is on the disordered attitude of the perpetrator, who can be easily identifiable. This incident is not perceived as an isolated event in this couple – many times it was mentioned that the aggressor was violent against his wife and daughter.

Furthermore, at the beginning it was mentioned that this femicide case happened during a difficult period for all the mankind – COVID-19 pandemics. Contrary to the statements presented by Campbell (2020), Kofman (2020) or Peterman et al. (2020), COVID-19 effects have not been evoked in any article in order to explain the aggressor's behavior. There were presented a lot of other reasons, but not the hardships experienced during this health crisis. In line with previous international researches, our analysis discovered only the episodic and not the thematic framing: episodic framing presents violence against women as a series of random events, blaming individual actors, ignoring societal responsibility for this tragic broad social phenomenon.

Taking into consideration all these aspects, the study can be extended by adding new cases of tragic paradigmatic incidents presented in dozens of contextualizations (in print online

media) in order to change the coverage of violence – from an episodic sensationalistic framing to a thematic, social issue, based on different journalistic sources, discourses and practices.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1 - Articles that were the object of this research:

1. Bolocan, A., "O educatoare din București a fost ucisă de soțul ei. Criminalul, PRINS după 4 zile" [An educator from Bucharest was killed by her husband. Criminal, CAUGHT after 4 days], retrieved 20.11.2021, from https://www.stirilekanald.ro/foto-o-educatoare-din-bucuresti-a-fost-ucisa-de-sotul-ei-criminalul-prins-dupa-4-zile-20164706

2. Chivu, A., "Educatoarea ucisă de soț cu 6 ordine de restricție în mână. „Erau în divorț, era de o gelozie rară" [The educator killed by her husband with 6 restraining orders in hand. They were divorcing, it was a rare jealousy], retrieved 20.11.2021, from https://www.9am.ro/stiri/Social/349956/educatoarea-ucisa-de-sot-cu-6-ordine-de-restrictie-in-mana-erau-in-divort-era-de-o-gelozie-rara.html

3. Ciucă, R., "Ce a îndurat timp de 12 ani femeia ucisă de propriul soț. Fratele victimei: "Era diavolul în persoană" [What the woman killed by her own husband endured for 12 years. The victim's brother: He was the devil in person], retrieved 20.11.2021, from https://www.antena3.ro/emisiuni/news-hour-with-cnn/ce-a-indurat-timp-de-12-ani-femeia-ucisa-de-propriul-sot-611242.html

4. Dobre, C., "O femeie din București a fost ucisă de fostul soț, din gelozie. Bărbatul a fost găsit după 4 zile" [A woman from Bucharest was killed by her ex-husband out of jealousy. The man was found after 4 days], retrieved 20.11.2021, from https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/o-femeie-din-bucuresti-a-fost-atacata-si-ucisa-de-fostul-sot-barbatul-este-cautat-in-toata-tara.html

5. Dumitrescu, A., "Liliana, o educatoare din București, a fost ucisă de soțul taximetrist, cu mai multe lovituri de cuțit. Bărbatul, surprins de camerele de supraveghere, este de negăsit de patru zile" [Liliana, an educator from Bucharest, was killed by her taxi driver husband, with several stab wounds. The man, caught on surveillance cameras, has been missing for four days], retrieved 20.11.2021, from https://www.gandul.ro/actualitate/liliana-o-educatoare-din-bucuresti-a-fost-ucisa-de-sotul-taximetrist-cu-mai-multe-lovituri-de-cutit-barbatul-surprins-de-camerele-de-supraveghere-este-de-negasit-de-patru-zile-19675490

6. Hendrik, A., "Educatoarea ucisă de fostul soț a murit în chinuri groaznice. Taximetristul a tăiat-o cu o lamă zimțată. Ce au descoperit legiștii pe trupul ei" [The teacher killed by her ex-husband died in terrible agony. The taxi driver cut it with a serrated blade. What the coroners found on her body], retrieved 20.11.2021, from https://evz.ro/noi-detalii-despre-crima-facuta-de-taximetrist-si-a-macelarit-sotia-cu-o-lama-zimtata-ce-au-descoperit-pe-trupul-victimei.html

7. Iacob, B., "Crima odioasă care a îngrozit Bucureștiul: o educatoare a fost ucisă, iar de 3 zile criminalul se plimbă liber. Principalul suspect e chiar soțul femeii" [The heinous crime that horrified Bucharest: an educator was killed, and the criminal has been walking free for

3 days. The main suspect is the woman's husband], retrieved 20.11.2021, from https://observatornews.ro/eveniment/crima-odioasa-care-a-ingrozit-bucurestiul-o-educatoare-a-fost-ucisa-iar-de-3-zile-criminalul-se-plimba-liber-principalul-suspect-e-chiar-sotul-femeii-433086.html

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WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND CONSUMER PERCEPTION ON RESOLVING PRODUCT WARRANTIES ONLINE

Cristina – Marina GHIȚĂ (1), Denisa Cristina Alina BERCEANU (2), Filip POPOVICI (3), Georgeta PÂNIȘOARĂ (4)

(1) Department of Teacher Training, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest; E-mail: cristina.sandu@fpse.unibuc.ro
(2) Doctoral School of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest; E-mail: denisa.berceanu@gmail.com
(3) Psychology Department of Psychotherapy and Applied Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest; E-mail: filip.popovici@unibuc.ro
(4) Psychology Department of Psychotherapy and Applied Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest;
    E-mail: georgeta.panisoara@fpse.unibuc.ro

Address correspondence to:
Denisa Berceanu, Email: denisa.berceanu@gmail.com, 0752919054
Georgeta Pânișoară, Email: georgeta.panisoara@fpse.unibuc.ro

Abstract

Objective. The objective of this study was to examine the relationship between the intention to use a new warranty application and the ease of warranty management, on the one side, and work-life balance, on the other side on a sample of Romanian consumers.
Material and methods. Work-Life Balance Questionnaire (WLB) was used to assess the work-life balance concept. The intention to use a new warranty application and the ease of warranty management were tested using one single Likert question for each concept, assessing the degree of warranty management easiness and warranty application intention to use respectively. Consumer behavior was also assessed with self-developed descriptive items. In total, 448 respondents were included in this research. The data were statistically analyzed using Pearson correlation and descriptive statistics.
Results. Results have shown a positive correlation between the intention to use a new warranty application and ease of warranty management ($r = .24$, $p < .01$), and between the intention to use a new application for warranty and life-work balance ($r = .10$, $p < .05$). Behavioral drivers explain the obtained results.
Conclusions. This study contributes to the understanding of the relationship that the work-life balance presents in relation to the consumer's perception regarding the resolution of product guarantees in the online system.

Keywords: work-life balance, online applications, consumer psychology, digitization.

Introduction

Work-life balance

The balance between professional life and personal life is one of the concepts widely studied in the field of consumer psychology. Work-life balance can also be defined in terms of job satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with minimal conflict of role. Most often, this term correlates with a person's perception of achieving harmony between several areas, such as personal time, family, and work (Ungerson & Yeandle, 2005). The balance between work and family highlights a strong orientation of a person in multiple roles that he fulfills in life, a construction between several roles (Marks & MacDermid, 2006), construction which can be imbalance in certain aspects of life.

When it comes to achieving this balance in some companies, this is a key issue in many areas of activity, as these high requirements for long working hours have become normal. It has become a necessity to involve organizations in helping employees to strike a balance between the demands of their work and their personal lives. Developing a real balance is possible only when a person is aware of the fulfillment of all roles honestly and feels personal satisfaction. Greenhaus (2000) argues that the occurrence of a conflict between work and family has very negative consequences significantly affecting the quality of family life, health, and the achievement of professional performance. Consequences may include serious constraints on career choices, limited career advancement opportunities, and difficulties in choosing between children and a happy family and a successful career.

Work-life balance is an important variable for achieving employee well-being, considering workplace requirements and family responsibilities (Karkoulian Srour, & Sinan, 2016). Research is growing in interest of analyzing the correlation between workplace demands and family pressures. The use of ever-changing technology makes achieving this balance a real challenge (McCloskey, 2018). Valcour (2007) highlights a strongly negative correlation between workplace requirements and work-family balance. In order to maintain a personal work-life balance, more and more organizations are already implementing organizational practices that give to employees' significant benefits, such as: efficient management of multiple responsibilities at home; a flexible way of working and earning an income that leads to the proper management of family life; programs of training for cultivating confidence in the potential of the individual, an organizational culture that puts the person in a central place.

Online applications

The use of online applications has become increasingly necessary in the practice of consumer behavior, being directly related to the development of computer-based technology applications in the context of marketing, for the individual with or without time. Specialized programs aim to meet the needs of consumers, offering a wide range of attractive and stimulating services as well as bonuses for the enrichment and development of a product (Warren, 2007).
New technologies are an important signal for the progress and improvement of quality of life and play a key role in educating and developing consumer behavior. Building digital applications that meet the needs of acquisition but also those of solving a guaranteed return, by offering a wide range of attractive and stimulating services is a necessity in the current context dominated by strong shortcomings in the area of time management (Valkenburg & Taylor, 2018). Online applications in consumer psychology are examples of good practice in the field and highlight the

effective role of the use of technology in purchasing and product management activities. Digital marketing policies have been based on the development of hardware related to information and communications technology, software, internet access in the field of consumer psychology. The most significant aspect of online applications for consumer behavior is that at all levels it manages to dissolve the artificial wall between its profile and the "virtual store". Consumers can find original information and collect quality products themselves. The second strong point is the provision of an easy return mechanism for products. Online shopping requires a high level of independence and motivation from the individual, but also from the perspective of employees, their energy is balanced and aimed at a high quality of work (Warren, 2007). The accelerated evolution of technology determines its infiltration on all levels of society, from the political or cultural to the economic or inter-relational. As a result, technology makes its presence felt in a multitude of daily activities, such as communicating with loved ones, scheduling a medical visit or supplying the necessary goods in the home (Rawashdeh, 2015). Online shopping sometimes involves a reduced time to purchase the desired products, but this facility has favored, especially in recent years, the development of online shopping addiction, which presents the same risks as any digital addiction (Baciu, 2019).

Consumer profile

The buyer is the person who offers, accepts, and pays a price for the purchase of a product / service that may or may not be used so the person named the consumer is the person who acquires, uses, or consumes various products or services. Consumers behave in a certain way when they are deeply involved in the buying process and aware of the significant differences between the products. Consumers are deeply involved if the product is expensive, not frequently purchased, and presents some risks (Perez, Puig, & Vicente, 2017). Usually, the consumer does not know much about the product category, needing more information about it. Customer satisfaction after purchasing the product and post-purchase behavior is influenced by the relationship between consumer expectations and actual product performance. Analyzing the positive impact on consumers requires an understanding of the nature of consumer knowledge about the effects that new technologies can have on consumer information and on how consumers can respond to certain information. The level of customer satisfaction is mainly determined by the optimal response to their requests and the speed of solving problems that arise in the process of purchasing goods. At the same time, the degree of employee satisfaction increases with the ease of performing duties and the existence of effective employee-customer communication (Prothero et al., 2011). Thus, a consumer's purchasing decisions are greatly influenced by several personal characteristics. On the other hand, when discussing such a purchase, the perception of consumers for a certain brand must also be considered, as studies show that people tend to equate their needs more with certain brands of products (Kim & Choi, 2005). This may be due to the fact that people prefer products that they perceive as having a personality and that are similar to theirs, this positive effect of personality-product congruence being different from the image-consumer effect congruence. Therefore, more than any other personality trait, the whole concept of personality impacts the buyer's behavior.

Material and methods

General objectives

The objective of this study was to examine if the ease of warranty management and work-life balance influence Romanian employees' decision to use a new warranty management application in the future.

Research questions

1. What is the correlation between ease of warranty management and the intention to use a new warranty application?
2. What is the correlation between work-life balance and the intention to use a new warranty application?
3. Which are the consumers' motivations regarding the usage of online applications?
4. What drive consumer behavior to the adoption of technology in their daily activities

Participants

The research data were obtained as part of a large-scale investigation of the Romanian consumers behavior regarding the online shopping applications usage, which is ongoing. The target population of the initial study was represented by students and employees living and working in Romania. The current study (November 2021 – March 2022) included a number of 448 respondents with ages between 18 and 55 years, with a higher percentage of women and more respondents with higher education (faculty, master studies or doctorate) than secondary education (high school or other supplementary studies) (frequencies are presented in Table 1). The questionnaires were built using Google Forms and were sent through Facebook or email to respondents. The study also included respondents chosen through the snowball technique. Participation in the present study was voluntary. All participants were informed about the objective, the procedure, and instructions of the study. They were also assured about the participation confidentiality and about the new data protection policy (GDPR) with the reminder that the participation in this research does not require their obligation to participate in another future stages. The included participants agreed with the informed consent before starting to complete the questionnaires.

Table 1

Sample structure used to analyse research data

Demographic characteristics	N%
Gender	
Females	81%
Males	18%
Other	1%
Age category	
< 20 years	34%
1. years	25%
31-40 years	15%
41-50 years	15%
51-60 years	10%
> 60 years	1%
Education	
Higher education	77%
Lower education	23%

N = 448

Instruments

The study focuses on two key dimensions - consumer perceptions and work-life balance. Based on an extensive analysis of the literature, the items for each dimension were self-developed or adapted from existing questionnaires.

Fourteen items from the Work-Life Balance Questionnaire (WLB) were used to measure work-life balance. The English version of the work-life balance scale was first translated into Romanian and then verified by professional translators to see if the meaning of the English questions has been preserved and will be correctly understood by respondents. A pilot study with 30 respondents was conducted to test the reliability characteristics and internal consistency. The

new data obtained on the sample presented also good reliability characteristics (α = .74). Work-life balance was measured using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always), with examples of items such as: "Do you feel that you cannot reach personal and professional life balance?", "How often do you think or worry about work?".

        Warranty management ease of use was measured by using a single self-developed Likert question: "How easy is it to manage the warranty of the purchased items?". The intention to use a new warranty application was also measured through a single Likert item: "How interested are you in using an application to manage the warranty of your purchased products instead of the papers you receive from the store?".

        The research also included the consumer profile analysis to gain evidence about the consumers perceptions on the online shopping and the criteria they consider while shopping.

        Consumer profile was measured directly by descriptive self-developed items referring at the way respondents gather information in general and the time spent to gather information about products, the most used way to purchase products, time spent at shopping, their motivation to shop online, the reasons employees choose the brand of the products they buy, the importance of the products to be well organized in a shop and the consumers 'attitude towards the usage of online applications. All these aspects regarding the consumer behavior and motivations were considered in the interpretation of the results.

Results

        Pearson correlation was used to analyse the relationship between the adoption of a warranty management application and the ease of warranty management and work-life balance. To test the consumers' perceptions and motivations regarding the use of online environment, frequencies of responses were calculated per each consumer profile item included in the study.

        From Table 2 it can be observed a positive and significant correlation in terms of the intention to use a new warranty app and ease of warranty management (r = .24, p < .01), which means that H1 is confirmed. This translates into the fact that those who want to use a warranty app find it easier to manage the warranty of purchased products online instead of on paper. This offers a number of benefits that stand out for their high efficiency in managing possible problems with the warranty of purchased products that have the potential to enhance the credibility of the brand from which the user bought (Alnawas & Aburub, 2016).

Table 2

Pearson correlation between the intention to use a warranty app and the warranty management easiness

Variables	Coefficients	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Intention to use an app for warranty &		
Ease of warranty management	r=.242**	<.01

Note: **p<.01

N=448

Also, from Table 3, a positive correlation between the intention to use a new application for warranty and life-work balance (r = .10, p < .05) can be observed, which means that H2 is also confirmed.

Table 3

Pearson correlation between intention to use and app for warranty and life-work balance

Variables	Coefficients	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Work-life balance & Intention to use an app for warranty	r=.108*	<.05

Note: *p<.05

N=448

Additionally, the consumer behavior analysis has also shown that a big percentage of the respondents (51%) prefer to gather information from specialized sources (specialty articles or videos with specialists from the domains of interest), with 32% respondents that choose social media or mass media as important sources of information. That means consumers search for (1) specialized sources to gain evidence-based information and (2) shortcuts to obtain information in a fast manner (videos, social media, or mass media). In this regard, this research's results also shows that consumers allocate the minimum of time to gather information about the products they want to buy (45% - less than 10 minutes and 35% - between 10 and 30 minutes) that strengths the previous argument.

Most of the respondents prefer to use both online and offline shopping (30%) or to go directly in the physical stores (52%) to purchase their preferred products, with 70% of them spending less than 2 hours at shopping. However, the attitude towards online applications is positive, with 77% of the respondents being totally open to use them in their daily activities. The motivation behind the online usage is predominantly related to time management (19%), comfort (19%), the diversity of products in the online environments (18%) or the easiness and rapidity of buying online (18%). More than that, most of respondents (88%) consider that if the products are well organized in a shop, that will help them save time while shopping.

In this regard, the current research results on the level of the work-life balance, shows that this equilibrium is not well satisfied (m = 3.60, SD = .47), explaining the consumers desires to have control over their daily activities in terms of time.

Regarding the reasons consumers choose the brands, the positive experience with brands' products is important for 29% of the respondents, the positive experience with the brand for 18% and the choice of the products that satisfy the immediate needs without taking the brand into consideration for 18% of them. In other words, the customer experience is an important factor in modeling purchasing behavior.

Discussions

The results highlighted above provoke a series of discussions on the subject of the consumer profile and on the implications that digital applications have on the personal-work life balance.

This can be attributed to the fact that the use of apps has several advantages that can help in better managing tasks in everyday life, with implications for the work-life balance. The guarantee offers the certainty that the products will last longer, which could imply that there will be no need for additional financial efforts to purchase a new product in a short time, which contributes to less pressure for extra work, affecting the time spent with family, for example. It is well known that a work-life balance involves experiencing multiple roles and depends on how efficiently time and effort are distributed between these roles (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Thus, an app used for the management of warranty can decrease the time spent in handling situations that would involve returning to the store and filling out paperwork. These results can be explained by the past research considering the attention span an important factor in how information is perceived by consumers in the online and offline environment through advertisements or multimedia. Since today the information overload is present in individuals' lives through the quantity and the speed it gets in their hands, the attention limitation tends to be increasing (Carstens, Doss, & Kies, 2018). Therefore, it is more than evident that people want to find the information they need in a faster and easier way.

The consumers motivation to choose online environment because of its easiness and rapidity strengths this research results that the ease of use is an important factor in the adoption of the online application in general and warranty applications in particular. Time management seems also to be an important factor in the buying process and shopping experience. With the challenges that arise in the modern context, the difficulties to keep an equilibrium between profession, family, and other domains of life (Khateeb, 2021), it is clear why time management is an important factor that drive consumer behaviors. More than that, past research shows that time management is one of the key strategies for keeping the balance between work and personal life (Uddin, 2021). Also, it shows the need to develop an app that offers a convenient and handy approach for every buyer, and which also incorporates aspects of warranty management. Moreover, having a branded app has a positive persuasive impact which increases the user interest in the brand (Bellman, Potter, Treleaven-Hassard, Robinson, & Varan, 2011)

Conclusions

The use of online applications has become a necessary condition in the context of how everyday life is conducted. The need for better time management also has implications for how warranties are managed, where the use of technology to develop digital applications for easier management would prove very useful. Applications can thus provide the necessary work-life balance.

Making consumers' lives easier will help brands enhance the consumers' relationship with the brand that will lead to a more positive experience for the first ones. As studies found, ease of use has a positive influence on repurchase intention (Febriani & Ardani, 2021), so the importance of studying this concept and considering it an important factor in the brand-customer relationship is more than evident. Regarding the current research, if customers perceive the warranty's management process as being easy, they will continue using the application and their

perception on the brand will be positively changed. As customer effort is negatively associated to customer happiness (Sugathan, Rossmann, & Ranjan, 2018) brands need to consider the consumers' perception of the time and effort spent in managing their products and services to increase the customers' satisfaction.

More than that, the increased number of applications and online services are mint to be important elements in the peoples' lives. With more and more people shopping or paying online, now it is clear that extending the online services in different life areas will help consumers to better manage their daily activities. Online services help them save time, make their life easier and have a significant impact on their work-life balance. In the case of the present research, upgrading to a new form of warranty management as part of the online behavior will contribute to this equilibrium.

The main conclusion that can be drawn from this study refers to the utility of an app for the management of warranties which is of interest in the context of work-life balance. The current results are in accordance with the past research that shows a positive relationship between the perceived ease of use and the intention to use online services. Similar studies were conducted and showed a positive relationship between the ease of use and the adoption of different online services as e-government systems (Almahamid, Mcadams, Al Kalaldeh, & Mo'Taz, 2010), e-commerce (Gefen & Straub, 2000) or online mapping service applications (Marzuki et al., 2016). Regarding the importance of technology on work-life balance, both positive and negative consequences have been researched. In this regard, past studies showed that Internet and mobile technologies influences the dimensions (flexibility and permeability), types (integration, autonomy, interference, and segmentation), and consequences (job satisfaction, job stress, and overwork) of work-life balance with technology use shaping the people perception of flexibility and permeability regarding the balance between work and life spheres (Nam, 2014). Other research also showed that technology was more related with the increase of productivity (Sarker, Sarker, Xiao, & Ahuja, 2012) and work efficiencies due to the flexibility (Fleck, Cox, & Robison, 2015) that comes in the technology usage process. Therefore, technology is considered as being an important resource in the work environment for employees.

These findings are also consistent with research showing that mobile applications are of interest among marketers but also consumers because of their positive impact and practicality (Alnawas & Aburub, 2016; Bellman et al., 2011; Sirgy & Lee, 2018).

Future research must be conducted to verify the relationship between technology and work-life balance on a longitudinal level or to examine the impact of other prominent factors in the relationship between the use of technology or electronic warranties and work-life balance. Also, further research can also concentrate on the customers' work-life balance and the brand loyalty or the continuous usage of the brands' online products.

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THE MODERATOR ROLE OF DIFFICULTIES OF EMOTIONAL REGULATION IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGE AND THE INTENSITY OF POSITIVE EMOTIONS

Dorina Maria NIJLOVEANU

Department of Applied Psychology and Psychotherapy, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest

Address correspondence to: Dorina Maria Nijloveanu, E-mail: dorina.nijloveanu@unibuc.ro

Abstract

Objectives. Identifying aspects of the difficulties of emotional regulation (awareness and understanding of emotions, acceptance of emotions, the ability to control impulsive behavior and be in line with the desired goals in terms of negative experiences and the ability to flexibly use emotional regulation strategies in similar situations to correctly modulate emotional responses) and the force with which positive emotional experiences are lived in adolescence.
Material and methods. The sample of this study was made up of 427 students aged between 15 and 18 years (M_{age} = 16.35, SD = .93), 136 male (M_{age} = 16.38, SD = .95), from which data have been collected by applying questionnaires aimed at self-reporting to different emotional situations using Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) and Revised Emotional Intensity Scale (EIS-R).
Results. The results shows the effect of the predictor (age) on the dependent variable (the intensity of positive emotions) at different levels of the moderator (average, low and high). Five of the six dimensions of emotional disorder have a moderator effect between age and the intensity of positive emotions (respectively: non-acceptance of emotional responses, difficulty in achieving objective-oriented behaviors, limited access to emotional regulation strategies, lack of emotional clarity and difficulty in controlling impulse). Poor emotional awareness is the difficulty of emotional regulation that does not moderate the relationship.
Conclusions. The results of the study emphasize those strategies of emotional regulation that specialists interested in developing in any programs or psychotherapeutic intervention techniques to consider with regard to adolescents.

Keywords: adolescence, emotion regulation, intensity of positive emotions, age.

Introduction

This article was carried out in order to identify aspects of emotionality during adolescence, based on the theory that the most common concept that describes emotional experience is affective intensity, defined as the stable difference in the strength with which individuals experience their emotions (Larsen & Diener, 1987).

In adolescence, which is a period marked by changes in cognitive, affective and social relationships, adverse experiences lived in relationships with the elderly are negatively associated with the processes of regulating emotions, behaviorally and neurally (Herd & Kim-Spoon, 2021).

Among other things, the regulation of emotions, is also our possibility to pre-encapsulate the emotional responses of others and contains strategies to increase, maintain or decrease the intensity, duration and direction of positive and negative emotions (Parsons et al., 2022). The intensity of positive events depends on factors such as emotional expressiveness and its contagion, the nuance that each strategy acquires and how different they are. This positive association is an adjunct for the context to become conducive to the effort and type of emotional regulation of young people (Hiekkaranta et al., 2021). Systematic changes in emotion dynamics across childhood and adolescence have been acknowledged although the specialized studies seem to be poor and fragmentary, being superimposed on heterogeneous concepts and methodologies (Reitsema, Jeronimus, van Dijk, & de Jonge, 2022).

Emotion regulation strategies can decrease the intensity of or modify the experience of emotions. It seems that there is a connection between occipital late positive potentials and emotional inhibition in adolescents that is influenced by individual differences in internal representations, an influence that is noted in the ability to regulate emotionally (Desatnik et al., 2021). Stressors are all the less intense as the intensity of emotional stimuli is higher and becomes a moderator in relation to emotion regulation strategies for five strategies for regulating emotions (reappraisal, reflection, acceptance, distraction and rumination). The results show that as stressors are more intense, most emotional regulation strategies (reappraisal, reflection, and acceptance) manifest less, while rumination manifests itself more (Blanke, Bellingtier, Riediger, & Brose, 2022).

Theories about the management of children's and adolescent emotions have been replicated to examine differences in emotional intensity, variability, instability, inertia, differentiation, and augmentation/blunting. Regarding the variability, it was found that the sadness increases in adolescents compared to children and in terms of intensity, there was a decrease from the beginning to the end of adolescence (Reitsema et al., 2022).

It seems that the high intensity and duration of positive emotions and the intensity of negative emotions lead to a better sleep, which in turn influences the experience and regulation of positive emotions in young people (Parsons et al., 2022).

Experimental studies have sought to understand and develop performance optimization programs in terms of emotional regulation strategies. First, analyzing the relationship between internet addiction and emotional intensity, were found than reappraisal is more specific to situations that cause low intensity of emotions than to situations that cause greater emotional intensity. More importantly, internet addicts use reappraisal less frequently than people who are not dependent on the internet, regardless of emotional intensity. Internet addiction, in addition to changing the habits of individuals to choose emotional regulation strategies, also affects frontal activities, causing difficulties in regulating emotions (Yan et al., 2022).

Both intense anxiety and the high variability of sadness correlate with mental health problems (Reitsema et al., 2022). These kinds of results are essential for the creation of intervention and prevention programmes (e.g. violence prevention and social-emotional learning programmes at school, parenting practices) in order to improve the situations of young people who have problems in experiencing and regulating emotionally (Herd & Kim-Spoon, 2021). Experimental studies have proven to be effective in developing programs to increase the intensity of positive emotions and at the same time decrease the level of anxiety (Kwok, Gu, & Tam, 2022).

Adolescents during COVID-19, has undergone social and emotional changes that have caused the increase of symptoms of depression, anxiety and have led to increased loneliness, although adolescents have been aware since the first months of what are the vulnerabilities (changes in the dynamics of friendship) and what would be the resiliences (supportive family contexts) (Rogers et al., 2021). During the school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, cyber-victimization was associated with lower well-being as self-efficacy decreased for better management of negative emotions. as strategies of emotional regulation it has been proven that the most significant is rumination, as a maladaptive strategy. Cybervictims typically believe less in emotional self-efficacy (Schunk, Zeh, & Trommsdorff, 2022).

Material and methods

General objectives

The problem of the research is configured by the need to integrate the information existing in the specialized literature regarding the two spectra of the functioning in the affective plan (the difficulties of emotional regulation and the intensity of the positive and negative emotions) most frequently approached separately or with various psychopathology problems such as anxiety or depression and with aspects regarding the interaction, the questioning was tried regarding this phenomenon.

Research questions

Do difficulties in emotional regulation have a moderating effect on the relationship between age and the intensity of positive emotions?

Participants and procedure

The present research included 427 students aged between 15 and 18 years (M_{age} = 16.35, SD = .93), 136 males (M_{age} = 16.38, SD = .95) and 291 females (M_{age} = 16.33, SD = .93) from 5 schools in Bucharest. Thus, the research group was composed of 84 students aged 15 years, of which 24 are male and 60 are female; 164 pupils aged 16, of which 57 are male and 107 female; 125 pupils aged 17, of which 34 are male and are 91 female; 54 pupils aged 18, of which 21 are male and 33 are female. Data collection was done by applying questionnaires aimed at self-reporting to different emotional situations. Before the participants responded to the questionnaires, parental consent was obtained; both they and their parents were informed about the objectives of the study. To allay any concerns about the reliability of the responses, questionnaires were applied in the classrooms under close supervision. The subjects received further information when they asked for clarification and had the right to withdraw their consent and stop filling out the survey at any point. For statistical data analysis, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24 was used (IBM SPSS, Armonk, NY, 2016). The moderator effect of the emotional regulation difficulties (DERS) in the relationship between age and the intensity of positive emotions has been investigated using the med-mod procedure in the Jamovi program.

Measures

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS). In 2004, Gratz and Roemer developed the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) which contains 36 items with 5 response variants from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always), of which 11 items are with a changed sign. The scale comprises 6 subscales: not accepting emotional responses with 6 items (e.g. item: "*When I'm angry, I'm angry at myself because I feel that way.*"), α = .80; the difficulty engaging in goal-directed behaviour with 5 items (e.g. item: "*When I am angry, I find it difficult to do my job.*"), α = .81; difficulties in controlling the impulse containing 6 items (e.g. item: "*I experience my emotions as overwhelming and out of my control.*"), α = .83; lack of emotional awareness, also with 6 items (e.g. item: "*I pay attention to how I feel.*"), α = .69; limited access to emotional regulation strategies assessed by 8 items (e.g. item: "*When I am angry, I think I will remain in that state for a long time.*"), α = .87; and the lack of emotional clarity that contains 5 items (e.g. item: "*My feelings are very clear to me.*"), α = .81.

Revised Emotional Intensity Scale (EIS-R) (Bachorowski & Braaten, 1993; Geuens & De Pelsmacker, 2002) contains 17 items that indicate two factorial directions, namely: positive emotions (e.g. item: "*Someone gives me a compliment. I feel:*"), α = .71 and negative emotions (e.g. of the item: "*Something frustrates me. I feel*:"), α = 77. the intensity of positive and negative emotional states without being confused with the frequency with which these states are experienced. The scale refers to the emotional experiences that the authors considered common in most people. Item 7 of the scale of positive emotions "*The person with whom I have a relationship prepares me a romantic dinner with candles. I feel*:" was changed to "*The person I have a relationship with is preparing me for a surprise date, in the city. I feel*:" to adapt it for the teen participants.

Results

Descriptive analysis

The analysis of the normality of the participant's score distribution using the aforementioned tools demonstrates that the use of parametric statistical tests is permitted.

The analysis of the normality of the participant's score distribution using the aforementioned tools shows that the use of parametric statistical tests is allowed. Thus, the values of the indicators of symmetry (skewness scores do not exceed the value of 3) and flattening (Kurtosis scores do not exceed the value of 8) are within the normal range. Table 1 shows the central trend of scores on the scales of emotional regulation difficulties. It can be seen that the highest score was recorded on the scale of "difficulty to achieve objective-oriented behaviors" (*M* = 2.88; *SD* = 1.01), and the lowest score was in the subscale "not accepting emotional responses" (*M* = 2.06; *SD* = .91) which means that the investigated students tend to have difficulty supporting goals through behaviors and are more willing to accept their emotional responses. Table 1 shows the central tendency of the scores of the variables of the intensity of positive and negative emotions. It can be seen that the highest score was recorded on the scale of "intensity of positive emotions" (*M* = 3.56; *SD* = .51) and the lowest score in the subscale "intensity of negative emotions" (*M* = 2.92; *SD* = .73) which means that the students investigated tend to feel the positive emotions more intensely than the negative ones.

Table 1

The central tendency of the scores of the difficulties of emotional regulation variables (N = 427)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Std. Error	Kurtosis	Std. Error
Not accepting emotional responses	2.08	.90	1.07	.11	.71	.23
Difficulty in achieving goal-oriented behaviors	2.89	1.00	.27	.11	-.67	.23
Difficulties in controlling impuls	2.50	.99	.49	.11	-.43	.23
Poor emotional awareness	2.50	.80	.47	.11	-.05	.23
Limited access to emotional regulation strategies	2.31	.97	.75	.11	-.22	.23
Lack of emotional clarity	2.51	.94	.56	.11	-.13	.23
The intensity of positive emotions	3.56	.51	-.59	.11	1.55	.23
The intensity of negative emotions	2.92	.73	.26	.11	-.20	.23

Inferential analysis

To test the hypothesis of the study (the difficulties of emotional regulation have a moderating effect in the relationship between age and the intensity of positive and negative emotions) the moderator role of each dimension of DERS in the relationship of age – the intensity of positive emotions was examined. To test the hypothesis, annoying repetition the moderation procedure in Jamovi was used. For the analysis of the moderation relationship, two models were tested: in step 1, the age and one DERS dimension were included as independent variables, and in step 2, the interaction (product) between the age and the respective dimension.

The results showed five situations in which the moderation effect occurs, respectively in the case of non-acceptance of emotional responses, the difficulty to achieve behaviors directed by objectives, the difficulty in controlling the impulse, the limited access to emotional regulation strategies, the lack of emotional clarity. In the table below it can be seen that age (z = 2.21, *p* < .05), has a statistically significant effect on the intensity of positive emotions. The effect of the preacher (age) on the dependent variable (intensity of positive emotions) is statistically significant only at the medium level (z = 2.21, *p* < .05) and low (z = 2.14, *p* < .05) of not accepting emotional responses. Both age (z = 2.13, *p* < .05), difficulty the difficulty engaging in goal-directed behavior (z = 2.20, *p* < .05), and the interaction between age and the difficulty engaging in goal-directed behavior (z = -2.17, *p* < .05) have a statistically significant effect on the intensity of positive emotions (Table 2). The effect of the preacher (age) on the dependent variable (intensity of positive emotions) is statistically significant only at the medium (z = 2.11, *p* < .05) and low (z = 2.78, *p* < .05) level of the difficulty the difficulty engaging in goal-directed behavior. Only age (z = 1.97, *p*

< .05) has a statistically significant effect on the intensity of positive emotions (Table 3). The effect of the preacher (age) on the dependent variable (intensity of positive emotions) is statistically significant only at the medium level (z = 1.96, p = .05) and low (z = 2.21, p < .05) of the difficulty in controlling impulse. Age (z = 2.00, p < .05) and the combination of age and limited access to emotional regulation strategies (z = -1.85, p < .05) have a statistically significant effect on the intensity of positive emotions (Table 2). The effect of the preacher (age) on the dependent variable (intensity of positive emotions) is statistically significant only at the medium (z = 1.99, p < .05) and low (z = 2.76, p < .05) level of limited access to emotional regulation strategies. Age (z = 2.09, p < .05) and lack of emotional clarity (z = -2.82, p < .05) have a statistically significant effect on the intensity of positive emotions (Table 3). The effect of the preacher (age) on the dependent variable (intensity of positive emotions) is statistically significant only at the medium level (z = 2.09, p < .05) of the lack of emotional clarity.

Table 2

Estimation of the moderation in relationship between age and the intensity of positive emotions by not accepting emotional responses

	Estimate	Std. Error	Lower	Upper	Z	p
Age	0.06	0.03	0.01	0.11	2.21	0.027
Not accepting emotional responses	0.03	0.03	-0.02	0.09	1.05	0.292
Age∗Not accepting emotional responses	-0.03	0.03	-0.09	0.02	-1.16	0.247
Age	0.05	0.02	0.00	0.11	2.13	0.033
Difficulty in achieving goal-oriented behaviors	0.06	0.03	0.01	0.11	2.20	0.028
Age∗Difficulty in achieving goal-oriented behaviors	-0.06	0.03	-0.12	-0.01	-2.17	0.030
Age	0.05	0.03	-2.47e−4	0.10	1.97	0.049
Difficulties in controlling impuls	0.05	0.03	-0.01	0.10	1.70	0.089
Age∗Difficulties in controlling impuls	-0.03	0.03	-0.09	0.02	-1.25	0.213
Age	0.05	0.03	0.00	0.10	2.00	0.046
Limited access to emotional regulation strategies	0.02	0.03	-0.03	0.07	0.64	0.522

	Estimate	Std. Error	Lower	Upper	Z	*p*
Age∗Limited access to emotional regulation strategies	-0.05	0.03	-0.11	8.59e-4	-1.85	0.044
Age	0.05	0.03	0.00	0.10	2.09	0.037
Lack of emotional clarity	-0.09	0.03	-0.16	-0.03	-2.82	0.005
Age∗Lack of emotional clarity	0.02	0.03	-0.05	0.08	0.59	0.554

Table 3

Estimation of the simple regression slope

	Estimate	Std. Error	Lower	Upper	Z	*p*
Not accepting emotional responses						
Average	0.06	0.03	0.01	0.11	2.21	0.027
Low (-1SD)	0.09	0.04	0.01	0.17	2.14	0.032
High (+1SD)	0.03	0.03	-0.03	0.09	0.88	0.381
Difficulty in achieving goal-oriented behaviors						
Average	0.05	0.02	0.00	0.11	2.11	0.035
Low (-1SD)	0.11	0.04	0.03	0.20	2.78	0.005
High (+1SD)	-0.01	0.03	-0.07	0.06	-0.26	0.797
Difficulties in impulse control						
Average	0.05	0.03	2.07e-4	0.10	1.96	0.050
Low (-1SD)	0.09	0.04	0.02	0.17	2.21	0.027
High (+1SD)	0.02	0.04	-0.05	0.09	0.46	0.645
Limited access to emotional regulation strategies						
Average	0.05	0.03	6.26e-4	0.10	1.99	0.047

	Estimate	Std. Error	Lower	Upper	Z	*p*
Low (-1SD)	0.10	0.04	0.03	0.17	2.76	0.006
High (+1SD)	0.00	0.04	-0.07	0.08	0.08	0.939
Lack of emotional clarity						
Average	0.05	0.03	5.22e-4	0.10	2.09	0.037
Low (-1SD)	0.03	0.04	-0.03	0.11	0.94	0.348
High (+1SD)	0.07	0.04	-0.02	0.16	1.62	0.105

Note. shows the effect of the predictor (age) on the dependent variable (EIS pozitiv) at different levels of the moderator (Not accepting emotional responses, Difficulty in achieving goal-oriented behaviors, Difficulties in impulse control, Limited access to emotional regulation strategies, Lack of emotional clarity)

So, the hypothesis: "It is assumed that the difficulties of emotional regulation moderate the relationship between age and the intensity of positive emotions in the sense that in the case of increased use of emotional regulation difficulties, the intensity of positive emotions diminishes as they age." it is claimed, five of the six dimensions of emotional disorder have a moderator effect between age and the intensity of positive emotions, namely: non-acceptance of emotional responses, difficulty in achieving objective-oriented behaviors, limited access to emotional regulation strategies, lack of emotional clarity and difficulty in controlling impulse.

Discussions

The results of the study highlighted that emotional regulation has a moderator effect on the relationship between age and the intensity of positive emotions. These results are important because they contradict the results of other studies that tell us that the intensity of positivity at young ages influences the evolution of positive emotional reactivity at older ages, thus, age 5 high-intensity positivity was associated with lower age 7 emotion control and more adolescent risk-taking; age 5 low-intensity positivity was associated with better age 7 emotion control and adolescent cardiovascular health, providing evidence for the heterogeneity of positive emotional reactivity and age 5 anger reactivity, low-, and high-intensity positivity were associated with adolescent adjustment via age 7 emotion control (Dollar et al., 2022). Age is an important factor in the evolution of emotions, all the more so as there are studies that have shown that differences in the amplitudes and time courses of late positive potential during emotion regulation between adolescents and adults suggested that age-related changes in emotion regulation may occur during adolescence (Deng et al., 2019). Other studies that discussed the same variables showed converging results. For example, in a research, participants tended to use up-regulation when they experienced positive emotion and habitually regulated their negative emotion by down-regulation. Also, adolescents who utilized down-regulation in a certain sampling moment reported higher

positive emotion at the subsequent sampling moment; adolescents who utilized down-regulation more frequently reported higher positive emotion at the subsequent sampling moment (Deng, Sang, & Luan, 2013). In another research, the research findings showed that the mediation role of internal-functional emotion regulation, internal-dysfunctional emotion regulation, and external-functional emotion regulation in the relationship between adolescents' loneliness and positivity was statistically significant (Yıldız, 2016).

Conclusions

The moderator role of difficulties of emotional regulation in the relationship between age and the intensity of positive emotions was the central hypothesis of this research tested to constitute a basis from which to develop intervention programs for the development of emotional regulation strategies during adolescence. Adolescents have the greatest difficulties in manifesting goal-oriented behaviors and the smallest emotional responses of non-acceptance. Poor emotional awareness is the difficulty of emotional regulation that does not moderate the relationship between age and the intensity of positive emotions, which makes us conclude that it is very important how much teenagers manage to become aware of emotions in order to be able to regulate and feel them intensely.

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REFLECTIONS OF INCARCERATED YOUNG ADULTS IN A ROMANIAN DETENTION CENTER

Sergiu-Lucian RAIU

Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, Faculty of History and Geography, Department of Humanities and Social-Political Sciences, 13 University Street, 720229 Suceava, Romania, e-mail: sergiu.raiu@atlas.usv.ro

Abstract

Objective. Young people deprived of their freedom in the custody of education centres or detention centres are aged between 18 and 21, according to the criminal law. The aim of the study is to examine, through structured interviews with young people in a detention centre, how they experience incarceration.
Method. The data collection is based on face-to-face structured interviewing. The study includes a group of 22 young people, all males aged 18-22 years, from a detention centre in Romania. They answered about their perception of the activities/programmes they are involved in, their relationship with colleagues and staff and what they would like to improve in the youth detention system.
Results. Young people experience the period of incarceration as a challenge they have to face because of the daily routine. Phone communication with loved ones and work and sports activities are what most ease their longing for home and family. They feel betrayed by their friends in the free world and no longer want to be part of the entourage that causes them problems. They long for freedom and family and would like to have the possibility to work, and, and benefit of outings in the community.
Conclusions. Intervention programmes for young offenders should focus on promoting healthy lifestyles, positive behavioural change and education programmes aimed at explaining prison policies and practices regarding young offenders' rights and teaching them how to follow up on abuse allegations.

Keywords: youth, incarceration, detention centre, experience of freedom deprivation, resources, resilience.

Introduction

This analysis aims at contributing to the understanding of how young people in detention perceive the prison environment both in terms of their relationship with their peer group and with experts and supervisors, as well as their opinion on the conditions in the detention centre and their motivation to be released. From the perspective of executive-penal legislation, 'young people' are the prisoners aged 18-21 (Art. 42 (1) Law 254/2013). The juvenile is criminally sanctioned as an adult and there is no leniency given to the minor in terms of criminal liability. The custodial sentence is served either in a detention centre for minors and young people, an educational centre or an adult prison. Romania has 4 detention centres exclusively for young people, including 2 re-

education centres in Buziaș and Târgu Ocna and 2 detention centres for minors and young people, one in Craiova and one in Tichilești-Brăila (NAP, 2022). Young offenders sentenced to prison must be given more attention, an intervention focused on their real needs and the aim must be to prevent them from acquiring elements specific to the prison environment. Their activities should focus on maintaining a permanent bond with the outside social environment and on developing desirable social skills. Prison stress, tension, lack of coping mechanisms and behavioural disengagement can lead incarcerated young people to commit extreme acts, even taking their own lives. Between 2010 and 2014, 502 inmates died in prison, 85% of whom died of various illnesses, and 73 committed suicide, 40 of whom were aged 18-25 (Crînguș & Ciurbea, 2022, p. 169). Moreover, a 2019 World Health Organisation (WHO) report also draws attention to the increased risk of suicide and self-harm among the prison population. In the absence of unified measurement of health indicators of the prison population across the EU, the health status of the incarcerated population is unknown. The WHO report 2019, p. 46 points out that the prison population must not be forgotten or left behind, and prison health must be seen as part of broader public health policies and 'creating a health-promoting environment in prisons in which individuals receive high-quality health care that is of an equivalent standard to that in the community' is needed.

Based on a meta-analysis of the scientific literature to investigate the characteristics of adolescents who adhere to social structures such as cliques and gangs, Ciurbea, Cavanna, and Rada (2021) show that the most common predictor is the criminogenic neighbourhood, which may encourage adolescents to take up the antisocial behaviour model, and join a gang.

Young people in educational or detention centres need special attention. If in the case of a multi-offender adult the chances of cognitive restructuring are low, in the case of a young person sanctioned for the first time one can hope for a 'new start' (Toma, 2020, p. 92). Although in recent years the National Administration of Penitentiaries has continued to diversify the standardised offer of educational, psychological and social assistance programmes and activities, the number of programmes focused exclusively on youth issues is small. At the end of 2021, 89 programs were included in the offer: education (55 programs, out of which 10 for minors, 2 for youth, 4 for women), those of psychological assistance (13 on specific assistance, 5 on general assistance and 4 on therapeutic communities), and of social assistance programs (7 programs and 5 types of social treatment groups) (NAP, 2022, p. 26). Young people deprived of their freedom feel the negative effects of incarceration (Foster & Gifford, 2005). Compared to those incarcerated later, youth involved in the justice system are more likely to experience difficulties finding employment (Apel & Sweeten, 2010). For youth who have been through the juvenile justice system, the number of entries into the system is associated with the risk of engaging in risky behaviours, increased substance use, and risky sexual behaviours (Voisin, Kim, Takahashi, Morotta, & Bocanegra, 2017). In the case of young people deprived of their liberty, the longer period of incarceration has effects on health status in adulthood, which can be precarious and manifested by depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation and functional limitations (Barnert et al., 2017). Youth who have been incarcerated are less likely to continue their education after release and more likely to reoffend or be supervised in the community compared to youth who have no involvement with the law (Aizer & Doyle, 2015). Placing youth in detention instead of probation can increase the likelihood of recidivism (Loughran et al., 2009) and hinder healthy psychosocial development (Dmitrieva, Monahan, Cauffman, & Steinberg, 2012). Youth who have passed through the detention system face difficulties in successfully transitioning from adolescence to adulthood (Abram et al., 2017). They are unlikely to complete their educations (Aizer & Doyle, 2015; Hjalmarsson, 2008), more

likely to have long-term health problems and psychiatric disorders (Foster & Gifford, 2005), and to have limited social support (Zwecker, Harrison, Welty, & Abram, 2018).

Material and methods

Purpose and methods of research

The purpose of the study is to examine, based on structured interviews how young people in detention centres experience and manage to go through the period of incarceration.
The research question is to find out how young people in detention centres perceive the period of deprivation of liberty. The research aims to determine what are the difficulties that young people experience in detention centres and what are the resources and factors which help them be resilient and overcome the stage of deprivation of freedom.
In this respect, the following objectives were proposed:
(1) Describing a day in detention as perceived by young people in custody in a detention centre;
(2) Revealing the pleasant and useful aspects, but also the less pleasant activities carried out in the detention centre;
(3) Understanding the reason why youngsters consider some people as their resources and others as difficulties during the detention period;
(4) Revealing the hardships and the difficulties experienced by young people in custody;
(5) Identifying the changes they would make in the detention system and their perception of the staff in the system;
(6) Exploring their motivation to be released from prison and their perception of how society could support them in their social reintegration.

Data collection instruments

The research method used in this study is the sociological interview-based survey. The research tool is the structured interview guide that includes 12 questions.
The questions refer to:
(1) What does a day in the detention centre look like for you? (2) What things/activities do you enjoy the most? (3) What are the things/activities you don't like? (4) Who are the people you particularly like to talk to? (5) Who are the people you try to avoid? (6) Is there a certain time of day that you enjoy? (7) What kind of activities do you think are helpful for you? (8) What do you find most difficult in the detention centre? (9) If you had to change something at the centre/your program, what proposals would you have? (10) What do you think the staff here should do more for you? (11) What do you think society should do more for young people who have been deprived of their freedom? (12) What motivates you to get out of here?

Samples

The sample of the study is one of convenience, with 22 interviewed young men, aged between 18 and 22 years, with the average age being 19.09 years. The interviews took place in a detention centre for young people, spread over two days, in one of the rooms intended for socio-educational activities. Depending on their availability, incarcerated young adults were asked if they wanted to participate in a study and were accompanied to the interview place by a supervisor.

The interviews were recorded with a tape recorder and later were transcribed, the average duration being 16 min. The young people were informed about the study by being presented the purpose and importance of the research and received an information sheet and a consent agreement for participation in the study.

Results

A day in a detention centre for young people in custody is a problematic day, as they mentioned and can be read below, with difficulties, irregularities, an ugly, horrible day, it is also a challenge, it can be both a good day or a not a good one, a day which passes very quickly or very slowly, boring, but also fun, a habit, some got used to days like these and they became a routine for most of them.

Beyond the fixed timetable and strictly planned activities on time intervals such as the morning or evening call, the three daily meals, the two time intervals for going out in the morning and in the afternoon, the hours of socio-educational activities from the first part of the day and the three hours of work activities, the young people in the detention centres also talk about the sports activities they do with great pleasure, the daily moments when they can talk on the phone with their loved ones or those they spend in rooms socializing, playing or watching TV.

The young people say that it is difficult for them, that they are locked up, they have no freedom and they miss their family back home. They talk about stress, thoughts, and some people are bothered that they ended up being locked up. "*Sometimes it passes very quickly, sometimes it passes very slowly*," says (G. I. C., 20 years old). "*It seems like a horrible day to me. A day away from my loved ones, my mother, my family, a hard day*" (M. C., 19 years old). "*I hate that I'm locked up, I can't see my family (...)*" (M. V., 19 years old).

Some say that at first it was difficult for them, but over time they began to forget about the family, about everything outside: "*I got used. I have created a routine, I have a circle of people I get along with.*" (D. A., 19 years old).

Others say they have created a daily routine to make time pass more quickly. Most of them talk about work, that they go out to clean, in the hallways, in the garden, to dig, to sweep, some work in the laundry, in the kitchen or serve their colleagues' meals. "*It has become a habit for me. (...) I got used, I learned the things here, I work outside. I stay outside from morning to evening.*," says (R.V., 22 years old). They have the right to talk on the fixed telephones installed in the corridors of the detention centre or in the outer yards, where they talk to their loved ones, family or relatives. They go out to different programs, to socio-educational activities, to sports activities.

They walk outside in the yard where they socialize with other inmates. "*It's ok. We have a lot of activities. They take us out for activities, we have sports activities. Time passes slowly and it is difficult, we think about our homes, our families*" is the opinion of (H. I., 19 years old).

They are talking about strict rules that must be followed, prohibitions and that they feel that somebody has power over them. "*I made a daily schedule, a routine that I try to do every day, not to feel the time (...) with sports activities, with getting some fresh air, with shopping*" says (A. D., 18 years old) and (B. V., 18 years old), says that: "*I made a daily routine, which I can... I got used as if I were at home (...) I calculate my time and the activities I distribute each of them during the day and let my time pass as quickly as possible*".

Young people spend their time in the company of roommates with whom they socialize and do playful activities together. "*It's a day, it can be good, it can be less good, it happens how*

you make it. (...) We play a game of rummy, a game of chess, we talk," says (P. I. A., 18 years old). "*It can be boring sometimes, but it can also be fun. We have activities, we go out to work. We work, our day goes by. We still play with each other, another card, another backgammon, another rummy and that's how the day goes by"* is the opinion of (D. A., 19 years old). Another young man, (A. P., 18 years old), says that: "(...) *I rest in the room and I watch TV, I look at the ceiling (...) in the evening we watch the news*".

Some young people consider that the period of detention represents a challenge for them, in which they have to change, to realize the mistake they made: "*A day here is like a challenge for us to change, for the mistake we made, it's very hard here. (...) You realize the consequences of the deeds you did".* (U. E. F., 20 years).

Asked how they spend their time in the detention centre, some find the period boring due to the daily repetitiveness of the same activities.

"*I try to go out everywhere, but you don't really have anywhere to go because you just get bored of the same routine every day. That you have nothing to do. You go outside, you come from outside, you stay, you eat, you come, you dine, you go to bed. Then again outside, stay in the room until the evening, then until the morning you only see nothing*" says (M. I., 19 years old)**.**

Those on the open detention say that they spend their time in the rooms of other colleagues where they engage in board games.

"*I sleep more, I wake up, I go to other guys in the room. I drink coffee with them, play a game of backgammon. We're playing craps (...) It's a bit boring, honestly, but that's the situation, we have to comply...*" (D. A., 19 years old)**.**

"*I play cards, a game of rummy. (...) I have friends from other 2 cells that I talk to (...) we sit there, we tell each other our stories*". (M.V., 19 years old)**.**

When they are released from their cells, for most of the young people, the main concern is to communicate with their loved ones at home. "*You check with your family at home. That's in the first place*", testifies (T. B., 19 years old), and (A. V, 18 years old), says that: "*I talk on the phone (...) we sit, we talk, they sometimes take us out for activities, we go out to the yard for a walk (...), we call home to talk to the family, we talk to each other*".

During the warm season, it is a habit for many of the youths in the detention centre to socialize with their peers through the exterior windows of the buildings. The windows are always open and full of young people who communicate with each other from the windows, sometimes all day long. (C. A. M., 19 years old), says: *You go to the window, sit in the window, put the table in the window, make a 3 in 1 if you have a coffee and smoke a cigarette (...)*". And (O. P. G., 18 years old), says that he also spends the day of detention with: "*sports... activities, I stay, I talk to the people on the window, to the guardian, after that we watch TV (...) we write, we take a book, a notebook, we write whatever comes to mind*".

But what makes young people feel useful and spend their days with a purpose is their work activities and their desire to get involved in as many activities as possible.

"*Different activities, I try as much as possible to communicate with people who understand me or who are with me. I try to do all kinds of activities as much as possible. (...) not to feel that I'm here, that I'm closed and I can't do... being young, I have a lot of energy. And I try to kill my energy through different activities*" says (A. D., 18 years old).

"*I have two jobs (...) I still go out in the yard, I read a book, I watch a movie, some news, I play a game*". (B.V., 18 years old)**.**

"When I go to work, time goes by faster" (G. I. C., 20 years old).

"*As much work as possible. Looking for as much work as possible...cleaning, tidying my things. I organize my things, I wash my clothes*" (U. E. F., 20 years old).

The days are monotonous, the routine gives the young people the feeling of boredom. *"Every day is the same monotony. We do the same things. There are more beautiful days, more ugly days*" is the opinion of (N. M. R., 19 years old). Another young man, (P. I. A., 18 years old), says that: "*Every day here is the same. I mean, whatever you do, it's the same thing,*" or "*for me, every day I spend here is the same. It's a wasted day. It's a day of my lost life*" says (M. C., 19 years old). Others consider that "*here one day two, three are good, the rest are bad*" (D. A., 19 years old)**.**

Young people look forward to the days when they do certain activities, sports for example, which they do three times a week, or the days when they receive visits from family. For example, (U. E. F., 20 years old), says that he enjoys a certain day of the week, namely "*Tuesday, when they take us out to football, it's the easiest day for us because we have many activities*", and another young man has the same opinion: "*Tuesday, today... Wednesday and Thursday. Because we have sports, we go out for sports, we play football, tennis, we socialize (...) I still like the days when my family comes to me. That's it.*"

If some people like the morning "*in the morning, after the call when I participate in activities, sports activities, when I go out*" as (M. C., 19 years old), says, for others the most appreciated periods of the day are those moments that bring them peace and these are usually afternoons and evenings. "*In the afternoon you can sit more quietly. There aren't many people around here anymore, it's just the hustle and bustle from the beginning of the day*" says (A. V, 18 years old. D). (A., 19 years old) says that "*I am happy when I arrive in the evening and another day has passed. There are days that are more difficult.* And (G. I. C., 20 years old), believes that "*I like the evening better, because I know it goes by faster. I go to sleep, I watch another movie, it passes, so I have nothing to do during the day*". Or (A. D., 18 years old) says the same thing: "*in the evening. That the evening is the quietest here. It is not the groups that are smaller, of minors*".

Others dislike weekends because they are the only days of the week when they are not involved in activities. Several young people referred to this aspect. "*I don't really like weekends, because it's boring, everyone sleeps. That there are no activities, there is nothing (...) it gets harder because there is boredom. If I can't sleep, I do sports*" says (M. V., 19 years old). Another young man, (B**.** V., 18 years old) says the same thing: "*The weekend is the hardest as it were, the weekend is the hardest because there is no activity, there is nothing, only air and telephone*".

For those on a closed detention, the pleasant moments of the day are those when the door to their room opens and they can go outside. "*I like it when the door is open. (...) when I can go on the phone, on the computer and go to the rooms of other colleagues (...) the evening call comes and opens it again and, in the evening, then you can go out to the hallway*" confesses (A. P., 18 years old). Another young man states that: "*In the evening, when I open the doors in the evening. then... I go out into the hall, I walk in the hall, we go from room to room, I meet other colleagues... I go into their room, we drink a coffee, a juice, we laugh at each other, that's how we are (...)*" (P. L. C., 19 years old)**.**

Work activities that make time pass faster or moments when they can talk on the phone with loved ones is what comforts young inmates. Communicating on the phone with loved ones gives them a sense of peace. They say they are taken out for gardening activities, a space in the inner yard with flowers and lawn and where they dig, rake, mow, do some kind of farming. Some mentioned socio-educational activities where they learn how to behave, how to speak, learn to write, read, are explained and improve their vocabulary.

"When I go to the speaker, on the phone and talk to my family (...) I talk to my parents most often, to my mother and father and to my girlfriend. (...) when I talk to my loved ones, these are the moments that calm me down, because from all the tension and all this madness here, I go to the phone, in a place where it's quiet and talk", confesses (C. A., 19 years old), and (M. I., 19 years old) says: *"when I go on the phone. I'm happiest only when I get on the phone or when I hear that my wife has come to visit, otherwise..."*.

Some have discovered that they have skills for cooking or for construction work and have even come to enjoy it. *"I've learned new things. I didn't know how to cook food. I didn't know, now I know. I'm an expert at cooking. Anything. I know how to make soup, I know how to make beans, I know how to make peas (...) now if I knew there was no one at home, I wouldn't die of hunger, I wouldn't wait for them to make it for me. I would cook it myself*. (T. B., 19 years old) or (R.V., 22 years old) says that: *"I renovate the rooms that are damaged by other colleagues (...) I like doing this thing. And after I finish my work, I like to play football"*.

Those who are in closed detention appreciate the fact that they are not only kept in rooms, that they are taken out to work, some wishing to be able to go out to work even more: *"on the one hand we are glad that we have more activities to go out from the room, we are also taken out to the garden, to work (...) to pass the time."* (A. V, 18 years old). C. A. M., 19 years old, says: "*I'm trying to do something, to achieve something (...) I feed the inmates, we clean the hallway, when there's a room to renovate, I don't renovate it by myself and I clean it*." And M. V., 19 years old, says he likes to: " *go to work (...) at the service, on duty, collect garbage, plaster, paint, work at the gate, at the food block, as hairdresser... I painted the walls*". Another young man in custody in the detention centre, (P.I.A., 18 years old), says: "*going out in the yard, to pass your time, don't just sit in a cell, because your time passes very slowly when you only sit in the cell. When you leave the yard, you walk around, you go to a room, you talk to another inmate*".

Some like reading or doing sports, especially football, table tennis or foosball, and say this motivates them. "*I read. We have a library right here near you (...) I've read, I've read, since I've been here, I've read.* (P. L. C., 19 years old). (B. V., 18 years old) "*certain activities, group communication (...) some activities are really nice and educational and we can learn something from here*" or (U. E. F., 20 years old) says: "*Sports, for example football because it helps me sometimes forget that I'm here. It helps me very much*".

For some it is important that they have a place to pray: "*The fact that I participate in the activities helps me a lot. There are communication activities, creative activities, the fact that I have a place where I can go out and pray, for myself and for what I need*" (M.C., 19 years old).
The socio-educational activities carried out by the staff from the social reintegration department, by educators, psychologists and social workers are the activities that young people consider to be the resources for their rehabilitation and development.

"*Social activities. It teaches you to reintegrate, to find a job* (...)" (A. V, 18 years old).

"*It teaches you about reintegration into society, how to rehabilitate, it teaches you how to have an income. From my point of view, it gives me pleasure, I do it with pleasure because I want to learn new things*" (T.B., 19 years old).

"*a program and we have to say what we choose from our life, what we want to do with our future... I'm in a program where they teach us how to go to get hired, to go to an interview, not to have criminal records*" (O. P. G., 18 years old)

"*Psychological, group activities... They give us a control sheet; they explain to us... we had a workshop about anti-violence... for an hour and there are programs of 12 or 24 sessions.*

You are allowed a minimum of 4 excused absences. At the end, you receive 30 credits for the 24-session program. The meetings are twice a week" (A.P., 18 years old).

The things that some incarcerated young people mentioned as their dislikes are the boring topics of some activities and mainly being locked up.

"*I don't like prison, because I'm locked up here*" (T. P., 21 years old). "*We spend more time in the cell. And it's better when they take us outside. It not so monotonous.*" (N. M. R., 19 years old).

Some people don't like anything "*it's a closed environment, it doesn't favour me, this closed environment, I don't like the people around me, some are perverted (...) it provokes me to fight with him, to report me, so that I can take my postponement longer...*" (C. A., 19 years old).

The environment is another inhibitory factor for incarcerated youth. Sometimes the people in whose company they have to spend the period of detention makes them cautious:

"*…that I'm surrounded by people with whom I wouldn't have had a chance outside, I wouldn't have looked for friends... that I can't be myself and I can't be open and surrounded by friends. (...) that everyone is seeking their own interest* (...) (N. E. V., 20 years old).

"*I try to avoid the companions because there are quite a lot of them, I try to avoid conflicts and all those that could certainly harm me in the future*" (A. D., 18 years old).

"*To avoid the prisoners (...) there are many who challenge me.*" (M.V., 19 years old).

"*Entourage. I mean, I don't like to have friends like that... because I didn't know when to say stop to people like these, I ended up here (...) now I avoid having so much contact with certain people who I know would influence me*" (M.C., 19 years old).

Some feel they have been treated unfairly, that they are provoked by their colleagues and this makes them have a permanent state of discomfort "*everyone should be equal (...) as I am your equal, so I want those around me to be as well (...) to stop arguing, to stop swearing, to mind their own business, to stop making reports*" (O. P. G., 18 years old)

Some complain about degraded and unsanitary accommodation conditions:

"*The windows are not ok (...) the rooms are dirty (...) all the rooms are not whitewashed well, the wall swells, dampness on walls (...) we have bed bugs (...) they gave us itchy blankets that are made of rough wool*" (C. A. M., 19 years old).

"*In this penitentiary we die faster than we can live. That is, we get sick much faster. There are bedbugs in the room (...), there are also cockroaches*" (C. A. M., 19 years old).
The attitude. (...) they don't really give us good food (...) there aren't many activities, they don't put us to work, they don't make us work (...) (P. L.C., 19 years old).

The fact that they are locked up makes him homesick and remorseful:

"*You miss home the most. That there are no possibilities to see them daily (...) The thoughts of what you did torture you more*" (M. I., 19 years old).

"*…that I can't communicate with other people as I would like and that you are very far away from your family and that you realize the mistakes that you have made and then you feel very guilty*" (U. E. F., 20 years old).

Others are satisfied with what they live in the detention centre" I *like all the activities and I always go out with joy; I give my best to every activity I am called to***" (P. I. A., 18 **years** old) or *"I don't know. I didn't see anything I didn't like here*" (**R.V., 22 years old).

The resource people for youngsters in the detention centres are mainly staff: educators, psychologists, social workers, nurses and doctors from the medical office or supervisors. Because often these are the ones who understand them, with whom they can communicate whenever they have something on their mind. Inmates learn from them. For some of the young people and their

roommates, other detainees who have experience in such centres or the older ones represent their support, those who still support them, and for others it is just the family, the people who are outside and who are not near them in that environment.

"*I have family members, relatives with whom I keep in touch and visit me*" (A.P., 18 years old).

"*I made myself say a friendship correspondence with some people, other people have a different character and I found myself talking and chatting with some people who match me and my character*" (P.I.A., 18 years old).

People with a negative influence on youngsters are identified to be the other young people around them, those who serve their sentence alongside them. They prefer to talk to those who have experience in the detention system compared to newcomers. They prefer not to communicate with those who challenge them and test their character.

"*I try to avoid all the inmates here (...) the surroundings here are not good (...) they are even more dangerous and it is not good. Many times, I try not to get into too many discussions, too many friendships, after that it comes to others*" (A.V., 18 years old).

"*Here it is better to avoid people than to talk to them (...) I try to avoid the entourage*" (M. I., 19 years old).

"*(...) they are, they are department heads, I don't really talk to them like that. It sometimes annoys me a little*" (R.V., 22 years old).

"*I don't create my own entourage (...) Some call me, but I don't want to, I don't join their entourage*" (T.P., 21 years old).

Difficulties in the detention centre

The changes they want are aimed at socio-educational and work activities. The youngsters mentioned that these can be more diverse and they can be more often involved in activities. The motivation behind this spirit of activism is that the time passes much faster when they do something. In order for this, they want more activities. They have a predisposition towards knowledge and want to learn as much as possible.

"*…to go out to more activities. To do more activities in a room like here. To let me write, to make notes from these, to tell me more things, which I don't know, to find out*" (G. I. C., 20 years old).

"*…they should put everyone to work (...) many would like that. Many beg to be taken out, but there aren't enough supervisors to guard them all the time, all of them. There are enough programs*" (M. I., 19 years old).

"*I would implement as many activities as possible. I would have as much work done as possible*" (U. E. F., 20 years).

They also mention the fact that the phone calls should be free of charge because many of the young detainees are from deprived families who do not have the opportunity to support financially young people in the detention centre. The changes desired by the young people also target the staff members and fellow inmates who are expected to behave better, to be responsible, non-aggressive, not to get involved in conflicts with each other, to respect each other, and that there should be justice and a fair system of punishments and rewards.

There are also some young people who are satisfied and say that they wouldn't change anything: '*I can say that this detention centre is a good one. (...) Here you have a different kind of freedom, you can go out to work, it's completely different from what I've seen in other places. I*

mean, I wouldn't want anything else that is new here" (P.I.A., 18 years old) or "*everything is good here like this. They have any conditions, they have good food, you have nothing to change here like this (...) if I know how to do my punishment here, it's much easier for me (...)"* (R.V., 22 years old).

Staff

Young people need to be understood by staff. They need to be listened to and helped. They want dedicated supervisors and staff members who can teach them more, talk to them more; to understand them, listen to them and help them.

"*… to be more understanding, to take into account the fact that we are children, we came here as children, we are still children, no matter what age we are, as long as we have parents, we are still children and we did not come for pleasure*" (N.E.V., 20 years old).

"*To respect us (...) not to mock prisoners, to talk to us as if they were talking to their own children*" (C. A. M., 19 years old).

Some young inmates believe the supervisors favour some detainees:

"*They are 'in partnership' with some prisoners. I don't like that either. Do justice to all. Not only to some. To do justice to all prisoners, not only to some*" (M. V., 19 years old).

"*To get more involved (...) in our development, I say that it wouldn't be as they say on television that we are the scum of society (...) I say that good people can come out of prison"* (P. L. C., 19 years old).

Young people also have words of praise and appreciation for the staff. Some believe that they are taught well, that the staff puts good words about them at release commissions. They feel helped, supported, they consider the supervisors wise people who do their profession within the limits of the law.

The relation between incarcerated young people and the society

Society judges them. This is the opinion of the young people in custody in the detention centre and they want people to be nicer, understand them and stop labelling them, that not all people who have been in prison are bad people:

"*To get involved, to teach us... to look at us like people (...) to think that they could be in our place, by chance*" (A. V, 18 years old).

And (C. A. M., 19 years old), believes that society should:

"*... stop judging us. Because they judge a book by its cover. Perhaps many of us have been judged unfairly. Maybe some of us didn't do anything. Maybe some of us made a mistake. Most who are here, didn't do it because they wanted to. It was a mistake. It happened (...) Some of us may have had a difficult problem in the family, we didn't have it any money (...) some urge us to steal, others to kill, but we don't kill for pleasure or because we want to. By mistake*".

"*Society should be more understanding (...) that we deserve a second chance. It should be easier for us to get hired somewhere, to be better seen than we are, only that our country judges us a lot*" (A. D., 18 years old).

M. I., 19 years old, who faced a humiliating experience, confesses:

"*I would like only one thing. To shut their mouth somehow, to stop judging me because I went to prison. That's it. Stop judging me. (...) Many avoided me, they gossiped about me, many from the entourage, that you were in prison... many... there were some who shouted to me, on the*

street *<You, criminal>. But I kept walking... I put my head down and walked away, because I didn't have any other choice*".

Young people talk about the detention centre as a harsh, tensed, stressful environment where people often get angry and don't think about the consequences. I'm talking about the groups inside the centres that are not always trustworthy and where everyone has their own interest.

They regret what they did, value freedom more, and feel the years spent in the detention centre as a waste.

"*I give them a piece of advice. Don't do anything stupid because you are going to waste your days, your years in here. I lost 3 years of my life, so I'm sorry*" (T.B., 19 years old).

"*(...) And decided to be good, to take care of my family. And I only want this time here to end and to buy a house in the countryside...*" (M. V., 19 years old).

"*I regret what I did. Now I will appreciate the freedom more*" (A.P., 18 years old).

There are also young people with strong character, young people with an activism in them that makes them look at the years of rehabilitation spent in the detention centre as a stage that strengthened them:

"*If I were to take it now from the beginning, I would change a lot in my life. I'm preparing for society, I'm reading, I'm learning... It's going to be a while until we settle in, until we find a job, it's going to be the matter of signing, let's sign, it's going to be a little more difficult*" (C.A., 19 years old).

"*It doesn't disadvantage me at all that I did what I did, that I got here, because I know how to handle the situation and to integrate into society. That depends on the person.*" (D.A., 19 years old).

The motivation to leave the detention centre

Their main motivation to leave the detention centre is to be with their family, both the family of origin and the families that some of them started.

"*For the family. Nothing else. And I have to make up for the time that I lost here. A lot of promises I made outside, especially to my family (...) I'm waiting to be free to fulfil them all*" (B. V., 18 years old).

M. I., 19 years old says that "*(...) I have a child at home. My wife is pregnant*", and H. I., 19 years old, states: "*The family and that I had a girl outside and I have a child with her and I haven't spoken to her anymore and I want to go back to her*".

There are young people who want to build a future for themselves, who consider finding a job, forming a family and a home a priority for their achievement in life:

"*You live in vain if you are not free. To go out, to have fun, to start a family, to have a house, to get my card, to get a car*" (N.E.V., 20 years old).

"*I really want to go out, look for a job. To be like young men today: to have a car, a house of mine, not to live with my parents*" (R.V., 22 years old).

T. P., 21 years old wants "*to do my time, to go home faster. I want to rebuild my life, start a family. I want to work, make an animal farm and mind my own business, help my family*".

For some young people, the period of detention changed their character. They say that they managed to rehabilitate themselves, using their willpower and the strength of their minds and now they are able to succeed in life:

"*I changed my behavoiur because outside I was different from how I am here. Here I am calmer, more patient...*" (D. A., 19 years old).

Discussions

In the scientific literature and in the analysis of the social control policy, the prison has been the target of much criticism over the years and its importance has begun to decline. Even one of the most important authors who has written about the role and functions of prison, Michael Foucault, considers prison as an "institution of death", although he has never contested its role in providing safe and continuous detention and rehabilitation function for convicted people (Foucault, 2022, p. 62). However, nowadays societies are considering the rehabilitation of offenders by using alternatives to the prison system, such as probation services. In Romania there are 4 centres for minors and young people sentenced to custodial measures, 2 education centres and 2 detention centres for minors and young people where they are isolated from the outside world. One of the insights from this study is that young people deprived of their liberty feel the need to have as much contact with the outside world as possible. They are at the age where they have energy, they want to know, to learn, to develop, and deprivation of freedom makes them regress, as one of the young respondents of this study said: *here we dry. We dry up emotionally, physically and mentally, we have to be strong!* Permission to go out should be granted more frequently and not just as rewards for good behaviour but as means of social reintegration. These educational centres and detention centres for minors and young people could be transitional and vocational training units, social and therapeutic centres, farms and rural placement centres for young offenders. (Foucault, 2022, p. 17). Another insight from the study is that young people want to work more. Work itself has a key function in the transformation of the inmate. Work should be the real social compensation for crime, work being the essential, fundamental replica to crime (Foucault, 2022, p. 18). In order to make the detention a meaningful one for young people and to make them want to be more involved, it would be appropriate for young people to be consulted in the development of their monthly programme, so that there is a participatory element in the decision-making that concerns them and they feel that they are directly involved in their own rehabilitation and social reintegration process. Involving the inmate in a participatory way in the elaboration of the penal programme will make the detention easier to bear, they will accept it while feeling that they are the managers of their own punishment (Foucault, 2022, p. 21).

Conclusions

In this study we wanted to find out how young people perceive their detention. While some describe their detention days in negative terms, as difficult, flawed, boring and even unpleasant, other young people included in the study look at things resignedly and describe them in a less negative tone, as being good, not so good, or even entertaining. While some find difficult not having freedom and missing their loved ones from home, others have created a daily routine, engaging in work activities which make time pass quickly and help them forget where they are. The disciplinary regime and following the strict rules are challenges for some of the young prisoners, but they realise that they need rigorous discipline in order to change. They also complain about the physical and moral chaos. On the one hand, they complain about the degrading and unsanitary housing conditions (broken windows, damp, bedbugs), and on the other hand, they speak of preferential treatment for some prisoners, feeling the need to be treated fairly. The resource people for the incarcerated young adults are the specialists from the social reintegration service, psychologists, social workers and educators, who provide them counselling, educational activities and support groups. They feel betrayed by the friends they used to have when they were free and they are more cautious about the friends they make in the detention centre, especially

because some of the other inmates challenge them, bully them and they do not want to get back into groups that might prolong their detention. They would like more diverse and more frequent socio-educational activities and programmes. The interviews also revealed that young people would like to be involved in as many working activities as possible, and if possible, outside the detention centre. They say they would be willing to work anything. Their reasons for wanting to change and to be free as soon as possible are related to their sense of belonging to their family, with whom they want to be reunited as soon as possible. They have seen what it means to miss family and not be able to communicate with their loved ones at any time. Some are thinking about their future, planning to find a job and to start a family.

Acknowledgments

Funding

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ASSESSMENT OF THE FOOD HABITS OF A GROUP OF STUDENTS FROM TWO COUNTIES OF MOLDOVA

ALBU Adriana (1), CEBANU Serghei (2), GHICA Cătălin Dragoș (3)

(1) (3) "Grigore T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Iasi, e-mail:
(1) adrianaalbu@ymail.com ; (3) dragos.ghica@yahoo.ro   (corresponding author)
(2) "Nicolae Testemiteanu" State University of Medicine and Pharmacy Chisinau, Republic of Moldova, e-mail: serghei.cebanu@usmf.md

Abstract.

Introduction. eating habits run in the family and sometimes last a lifetime. For this reason, it is important to evaluate the nutrition of adolescents and create coherent nutritional educational programs.
Material and method. the study was carried out on a group of 139 high school students from two counties of Moldova. The young people filled out a questionnaire with questions about their weekly intake of cheese, chicken, eggs, bread, potatoes and sweets. The results were processed using the Pearson test.
Results. the dominant intake of cheeses is once a week (31.65%) or 2-3 times per week (30.93%). Chicken meat is mostly consumed 2-3 times per week (46.76%) and eggs 1 time (38.84%) or 2-3 times (32.37%) per week. The differences calculated by groups and according to the gender of the students are statistically insignificant. Bread appears in the daily menus of only one third of the surveyed students, and potatoes are consumed especially 2-3 times per week (41.00%). Sweets are consumed mostly 2-3 times per week, but the differences between communities are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).
Conclusions. the statistically insignificant differences obtained for most food products point to the existence of similar eating habits in the families of the students in the study group.

Keywords: eating habits, inappropriate consumption, high school students

Introduction

Nutrition is an external factor that makes a major contribution to maintaining the health of adults and to the proper growth/development of children and young people. The aspects related to the eating habits of the population must be carefully studied because in teenagers, food intake is influenced by a complex of factors represented by the family, the group of friends, the socioeconomic situation, school and the mass media/social platforms (Webster-Gandy, Madden, Holdsworth, 2006).

The family makes a major contribution, in the first years of life, to the formation of certain eating habits. In our country, in the area of Moldova, we witness a strong anchoring in traditions, so that food habits change very little from one generation to another. The studies carried out on teenagers allow the highlighting of statistically insignificant differences in collectives and in various localities, an aspect that must be known (Albu, Moraru, Hodorcă, 2015). There are studies

in which a correlation is made between parents' behavior and the risk of obesity. Special attention should be paid to cultures and families in which there is a strict hierarchy because deviations from family norms are not accepted there (Siah, Koe, Pang, Ng, Tan, 2018).

The group of friends becomes essential during adolescence. Young people go in groups to parties or to cake shops, in which context they focus on certain products agreed by all their friends. Teens in the US admit to turning to unhealthy foods at parties, but also during certain difficult times in their lives such as anger or stress. These are aspects that must be taken into account because the problem can be solved through adequate nutritional education (Abraham, Noriega Brook, Shin, 2018). Unfortunately, sometimes peer pressure becomes so strong that teenage girls turn to extreme weight loss diets that can lead to serious disorders such as anorexia. It's all about achieving a "proper" body image and the appreciation of friends (Al-sheyab, Gharaibeh, Kheirallah, 2018)

Another particular problem arises in the context where the socioeconomic situation of the family is precarious. In families where the educational level of the parents is modest, the concern for achieving a balanced diet is deficient. Also, in poor families, nutrition is mainly oriented towards the element of ensuring a quantitative intake (to satisfy hunger) and less on the qualitative one represented by the provision of all food groups (Luszczki, Sobek, Bartosiewicz, Baran, Weres, Deren, Mazur, 2019). In this context, the school's intervention is important through school canteens where they are present. Unfortunately, in our country there are no canteens in most schools, so school education can only be done theoretically and not practically through the example provided by the school menu.

Mass media/social platforms are preferred by young people to get the "information" they want. Unfortunately, sometimes this information is not adequate, so it is possible to turn to exaggerated weight loss treatments that have a negative impact on the health of adolescents (Arseniev-Koehler, Lee, McCormick, Moreno, 2016; Salam, Hooda, Das, Arshad, Lassi, Middleton, Bhutta, 2016).

Objectives of the study: assessment of adolescent nutrition; appreciation of the extent to which it is adapted to the norms of rational nutrition; knowing the differences that appear/do not appear in the nutrition of students from different counties; studying the nutrition of students starting from their gender, in the conditions where girls are very concerned about their body appearance; evaluating the situations in which a certain food does not appear in the students' menus.

Material and method

The study was carried out on a group of 139 9th grade students from high schools in two counties of Moldova. Thus, 60 students from the Laurian High School in Botoșani and 79 from the V. Alecsandri High School in Iași were surveyed. The study group includes 54 male students (38.84%) and 85 female students (61.15%).

A weekly food intake frequency questionnaire was applied to these young people. The assessment was oriented in two directions represented by the consumption of animal and vegetable products. In the category of products of animal origin, the consumption of cheeses, chicken meat and eggs was included. The intake of bread, potatoes and sweets was included in the vegetable products category. The answer options are: never, 1 time a week, 2/3 times a week, 4/6 times a week, daily. The processing of the results was done using the Pearson CHI Square test.

Results

The evaluation is oriented in two directions represented by the intake of products of animal origin (cheeses, chicken and eggs) and vegetables (bread, potatoes, sweets).
Cheeses appear in menus mostly once (31.65%) or 2-3 times (30.93%) per week (Table 1).

Table 1

Frequency of cheese intake in students' menus

Frequency of food intake	Never	Once a week	2-3 times a week	4-6 times a week	Once a day	Total
Distribution of results by high school						
Botoșani High School	11	23	19	5	2	60
Iași High School	12	21	24	13	9	79
Total (no.)	23	44	43	18	11	139
%	16.54	31.65	30.93	12.94	7.91	
Distribution of results by gender of students						
Male	11	14	15	9	5	54
Female	12	30	28	9	6	85

The 16.54% students who mark the "never" option, but also the 7.91% students who consume them daily (recommended intake) attract attention. The calculated differences are statistically insignificant both on the collectives ($p > 0.05$, $f = 4$, $\chi^2 = 6.560$), as well as depending on the gender of the students ($p > 0.05$, $f = 4$, $\chi^2 = 3.195$).
Chicken meat is present in menus mostly 2-3 times per week (46.76%), but it is noteworthy that 8.63% of students did not consume this food at all (Table 2).

Table 2

Consumption of chicken meat

Frequency of food intake	Never	Once a week	2-3 times a week	4-6 times a week	Once a day	Total
Distribution of results by high school						
Botoșani High School	5	10	30	12	3	60
Iași High School	7	11	35	19	7	79
Total (no.)	12	21	65	31	10	139
%	8.63	15.10	46.76	22.30	7.19	
Distribution of results by gender of students						
Male	4	6	29	11	4	54
Female	8	15	36	20	6	85

The calculated differences are statistically insignificant, both for groups (p> 0.05, $f = 4$, $\chi^2 = 1.668$), but also for boys and girls (p> 0.05, $f = 4$, $\chi^2 = 2.174$) pointing to the existence of similar eating habits.

Eggs are present in the students' diet mostly once (38.84%) or 2-3 times (32.37%) per week. 12.94% negative responses attract attention. At the opposite pole are placed 5.03% responses of daily intake, which corresponds to the norms of rational nutrition (Table 3).

Table 3

Weekly consumption of eggs by the surveyed students

Frequency of food intake	Never	Once a week	2-3 times a week	4-6 times a week	Once a day	Total
Distribution of results by high school						
Botoșani High School	7	23	19	8	3	60
Iași High School	11	31	26	7	4	79

Total (no.)	18	54	45	15	7	139
%	12.94	38.84	32.37	10.79	5.03	
Distribution of results by gender of students						
Male	6	20	19	5	4	54
Female	12	34	26	10	3	85

The calculated differences are statistically insignificant by the collectives (p> 0.05, $f = 4$, $\chi^2 = 0.773$) and by gender (p> 0.05, $f = 4$, $\chi^2 = 2.443$) which highlights the existence of a strong anchoring in traditions of the students' families in the study group.

Bread is present in the diet of young people especially daily (38.12%) or 4-6 times (24.46%) per week. It is noted that 4.31% of students do not consume bread at all, which is a worrying fact (Table 4). Also, the calculated differences are statistically insignificant, both by collectives (p> 0.05, $f = 4$, $\chi^2 = 0.466$) and by gender (p> 0.05, $f = 4$, $\chi^2 = 4.295$).

Table 4

The presence of bread in the diet of adolescents

Frequency of food intake	Never	Once a week	2-3 times a week	4-6 times a week	Once a day	Total
Distribution of results by high school						
Botoșani High School	2	8	13	15	22	60
Iași High School	4	9	16	19	31	79
Total (no.)	6	17	29	34	53	139
%	4.31	12.23	20.86	24.46	38.12	
Distribution of results by gender of students						
Male	1	5	9	14	25	54
Female	5	12	20	20	28	85

Potatoes are consumed mostly 2-3 times (41.00%) or 1 time (31.65%) per week. Attention is drawn to 7.19% negative responses, but also 2.87% families in which the potato is present daily in the diet (Table 5). The calculated differences are statistically insignificant by collectives (p> 0.05, $f = 4$, $\chi^2 = 9.396$) and by the gender of the students (p> 0.05, $f = 4$, $\chi^2 = 3.866$).

Table 5

Intake of potatoes in the study group

Frequency of food intake	Never	Once a week	2-3 times a week	4-6 times a week	Once a day	Total
Distribution of results by high school						
Botoșani High School	2	15	31	12	0	60
Iași High School	8	29	26	12	4	79
Total (no.)	10	44	57	24	4	139
%	7.19	31.65	41.00	17.26	2.87	
Distribution of results by gender of students						
Male	5	12	25	10	2	54
Female	5	32	32	14	2	85

Sweets are preferred by most young people, but their dominant intake is mostly 2-3 times (30.93%) per week or daily (25.89%). However, there are 7.91% "never" intake responses which are worrying because the nervous system and red blood cells work only on the basis of the energy provided by carbohydrates (Table 6).

Table 6

Frequency of sweets consumption

Frequency of food intake	Never	Once a week	2-3 times a week	4-6 times a week	Once a day	Total
Distribution of results by high school						
Botoșani High School	2	23	18	12	5	60
Iași High School	9	4	25	10	31	79
Total (no.)	11	27	43	22	36	139
%	7.91	19.42	30.93	15.82	25.89	100

Distribution of results by gender of students

Male	5	10	15	9	15	54
Female	6	17	28	13	21	85

On collectives, the calculated differences are statistically significant at a p <0.001 ($f = 4$, $\chi^2 = 35.998$) and point to an increased preference for sweets among students from the high school in Iași. The results obtained according to the gender of the students are similar, the calculated differences being statistically insignificant (p> 0.05, $f = 4$, $\chi^2 = 0.685$).

Discussions

The assessment of adolescents' nutrition is carried out with the help of the weekly food intake frequency questionnaire. It is a method that allows knowing the food habits of the population, a particularly important aspect in population studies (Choudhury, Omar, Arora, Rifai, Chagoury, Taheri, 2018).

A first element that attracts attention is the one related to the total lack of some foods in the teenagers' menu: cheeses (16.54% of students), chicken (8.63%), eggs (12.94%), bread (4.31%), potatoes (7.19%) and sweets (7.91 %). This aspect must be carefully studied because removing a category of food from the diet has negative effects on the health of young people. Some specialists launch the idea of "he doesn't like it" but it is a concept that needs to be carefully studied (Demirici, Toptaș Demirici, 2018). Maybe he doesn't like a certain type of cheese, but he doesn't exclude the category from the menus. He may not like certain sweets, but he does not completely eliminate them from his diet.

In the study group, the total elimination of a certain category of products from the menus appears which can be related to the eating habits of the family or the socioeconomic situation that does not allow their purchase. There are aspects that must be carefully studied in order to be able to intervene where needed.

In addressing the issues related to the absence of certain foods from the menus, another element represented by the mother's concern for ensuring a balanced diet must be addressed. There are situations in which the mother is concerned with the body appearance and the slimming treatment, so that she is not interested in the purchase of certain "fattening" foods, which explains their absence from the adolescent's diet. It is a very important element because numerous studies highlight the existence of a correlation between the value of the body mass index in the mother and in the girl, which points to slimming belts made in the family (Garcia Meraz, Guzmán Saldana, López-Rodriguez, Galván, 2019). Practically, it is necessary to create coherent educational programs that guide young people towards a balanced diet and that contribute to maintaining health (Baciu, 2013).

Cheeses are rich in quality proteins, lipids, minerals and vitamins. If there is a concern for the weight loss cure, there is the possibility of targeting an assortment with a reduced lipid content (Martin, Tarcea, 2015). Unfortunately, in our study group, the dominant intake is insufficient (1 time per week - 31.65% or 2-3 times - 30.93%). Studies carried out in other countries also draw attention to aspects related to poor consumption. Among young people in Sudan, the dominant intake is once (31.9%) or twice (38.6%) per week (Misaa, Somya, Siham, 2018).

Chicken meat offers a low caloric intake due to its low lipid content, but it contains an appreciable amount of animal protein (Martin, Tarcea, 2015). However, the consumption is quite low, being dominant 2-3 times a week (46.76%). The result is not worrying because other types of meat can be eaten. The same problem occurs with young people in Sudan because the intake is in most cases once a week (42.9%) (Misaa et al., 2018).

The norms of rational nutrition recommend for teenagers an intake of 6-7 eggs per week, but this response is present only in 5.03% of teenagers. Medical students from the Aga Khan University in Karachi, admit an intake of eggs 6 times a week and more in only 22.3% situations, with 19.9% negative answers. In practice, we also face problems regarding the nutrition of future doctors who will have to organize nutritional education programs (Fatima, Akhtar, Khan, Fatima, 2019).

Excessive consumption of bread will lead to obesity due to the high content of carbohydrates, which provides a high caloric intake. However, removing bread from the diet is not recommended because cereals are also rich in protein, so there is a risk of triggering protein imbalances (Martin, Tarcea, 2015). Unfortunately, the balanced intake is present only in 60% of the surveyed students. They admit a daily intake in 38.12% of cases or 4-6 times a week (24.46%).

Similar results are also obtained among young people in Austria where the average intake of bread is on average 3.3 days per week for girls and 3.1 days per week for boys (Drenowatz, Greier, Klein, 2018). Surprising results are also obtained for young people from Germany doing physical exercises of different intensities. In total, the high intake of bread is present in 38.1% of young people with variations from 39.5% in those who exert little physical effort, to 36.8% in those with an average level of physical effort, to reach 37.3% in those who practice intensive physical exercises. Practically, there is no adaptation of nutrition to the demands imposed by physical activity, which is a worrying aspect (Manz, Mensink, Finger, Haftenberger, Brettschneider, Barbosa, Krug, Schienkiewitz, 2019).

Potatoes are present in menus mostly 2-3 times (41.00%) per week, a result that does not raise particular problems because other types of vegetables are also consumed.

Special attention should be paid to sweets because they are rich in carbohydrates and provide a high caloric intake (Martin, Tarcea, 2015). The result obtained in our study is an interesting one because among the students from Botoșani there are few daily consumption responses, while among those from Iași they are dominant. There is no question of giving up sweets, even consumed daily, but one must insist on the quantities consumed that do not exceed the norms of rational nutrition. For young people in Austria, the intake is moderate, being on average 2.5 days per week for girls and 2.7 days per week for boys, a result similar to the one obtained for high school students from Botoșani (Drenowatz et al., 2018).

The results obtained are not the expected ones, and it is necessary to develop coherent educational programs that lead to the modification of the eating habits of young people and their adaptation to the real needs of the growing body.

Conclusions

The study was carried out on teenagers from two counties of Moldova by applying a weekly frequency of food intake questionnaire. The obtained results are worrying because for each food category zero intake responses were obtained, which indicates the absence of the product from the students' menus. Accurate assessment of the reasons why young people do not consume certain foods is essential. Also, the dominant intake of cheeses, chicken and eggs was far below the age-

specific nutritional recommendations. Bread is adequately present in the menus and sweets are present in the menus in varying amounts. It is necessary to create coherent nutritional educational programs that allow teenagers to be oriented towards the adaptation of consumption to the norms of rational nutrition.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical approval

Not the case.

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SOCIAL WORK SERVICES FOR AUTISM CHILDREN IN VIETNAM: STATUS QUO AND CHALLENGES

Anh Phuong NGUYEN (1) Lan Thi Thai NGUYEN (2)

(1) PhD student, VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hanoi, Vietnam; E-mail: phuonganh5115@gmail.com
(2) PhD, Faculty of Sociology, VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hanoi, Vietnam; E-mail: lanctxh@ussh.edu.vn

Address correspondence to: Lan Thi Thai NGUYEN, VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanity; E-mail: lanctxh@ussh.edu.vn

Abstract

Objectives. The study was designed to explore the current State of social service provision for Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) children and their families, analyze the existing problems in the process of providing services to children and their families from the perspective of facility managers and service providers. The research results serve as a basis for reviewing and providing recommendations to promote the effectiveness of social work services in this field.
Material and methods. This study applied both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. It employed the quantitative method with surveying of 133 front line social service providers from 15 public and private institutions, and qualitative with desk review and 30 in-depth interviews. Participants were voluntary participating in the study with informed consent.
Results. Vietnamese children with ASD and their families have faced many problems and risks, including the lack of opportunities and resources to access support and care services. However, social work services for children with ASD and their families in Vietnam were under-developed compared to special education field and faced many limitations, including a shortage of in-depth intervention and outreach programs, inequality of supportive policies between the public and private service providers.
Conclusions. Developing a holistic social work support services to meet the ADS children and families is key to address their current problems and contributing to improving the parents'/ caregivers' care and education for children with ASD. In addition, the Government plays an essential role in issuing guaranteed policies and social security programs.

Keywords: children with autism spectrum disorders, families, social work services, service providers.

Introduction

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is considered a prevalent syndrome worldwide. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention United States (CDC) announced that its rapid changes in prevalence from 1/150 in 2000 to 1/44 in 2018 (CDC, 2022). In Vietnam, ASD has only been known for more than ten years, but it has quickly become a significant problem for parents of

children with ASD, thus gaining increasing response from society. According to the General Statistics Office (GSO), Vietnam currently has about 6.2 million people with disabilities aged two years and older (accounting for about 6.5% of the population); including nearly 1 million cases of autistic disorders, with the rate of children with autism estimated to be 1% of children born (GSO, 2018). Other studies in Vietnam highlight problems that parents of children with ASD are facing. T. M. L. Nguyễn (2013) points out difficulties, such as difficulties in accessing medical care, including health care, examination and treatment for their children; difficulties in educating children; difficulties in facilitating children to play and communicate with normal children; difficulties in economic life and difficulties in relationships. Having similar views, (T. H. Y. Nguyễn, 2015) also pointed out those parents of children with ASD face economic burdens and psychological difficulties, such as a lack of knowledge related to autism, lack of skills to take care of them, difficulties accessing social services, and finding the right environment and form of learning for children with ASD.

In recent years, the Vietnamese Government and related stakeholders have been making efforts to support people with mental health illness by issuing many documents. On 25 November 2020, the Prime Minister signed the approval of program No. 1929/QD-TTG on "Social assistance and rehabilitation program for the mentally ill, autistic children and people with mental disorders based on the community in the period of 2021 – 2030". This Decision is a crucial legal guidance for the implementation of supportive programs for people with mental illness, including children with ASD. It aims to: i) mobilize the participation of society, especially families, and the community in enhancing material, spiritual, care and rehabilitation assistance for mentally illed people, autistic children and people with mental disorders to integrate into the community and stabilize their lives; and ii) conduct screening, detecting and supporting interventions and prevention for people with mental disorders, especially for children with severe mental illness, contributing to ensuring social security and improving the quality of social assistance services for people with mental illness and mental disorders. Notably, the document also mentioned solutions on the development of support facilities, with improving the quality of staff being the foundation for the development of ASD child support services in general and social services to support ASD children and families in particular. However, the questions are: how and to what extent is the current situation of providing social work services supporting ASD children and their families? What problems are present in the process of service delivery? Therefore, it highlights the urgent need to conduct further research to answer these questions. This study is designed to provide information on the current state of social service provision for ASD children and their families, and analyze the existing problems in the process of providing services to children and their families from the perspective of facility managers and service providers.

Literature review

Social work, with the implementation of its functions: prevention, intervention, support, and development, has performed different roles in the field of ASD by providing social work services to ASD children and their families. A number of studies worldwide, especially in developed countries, such as the US, Australia, and Canada, have been conducted on different roles of the social work profession in providing services for ASD children and their families. Dymond, Gilson, & Myran, (2007)'s study assessed the level of responsiveness and quality of services for ASD children and their families. The study documented the needs of ASD children and their families, including the need for therapeutic intervention services (medical, special

education), development services (special education, social work), and prevention and support services (health, social work). The study also suggested different areas that needed to be evaluated to consider the availability of services for ASD children and their families. Based on that information, it provided measures to limit the existing weaknesses and improve service effectiveness (Dymond, Gilson, & Myran, 2007). These suggested areas emphasized firstly on improving the quality, quantity, accessibility, and availability of services; secondly it focused on educating and training individuals to work effectively with ASD children; thirdly it advocated for an increase in funding for services; and finally, it recommended developing appropriate school placements and educational programs for ASD children. Hoagwood, Burns, Kiser, Ringeisen, and Schoenwald (2001)'s evidence-based research on social services for mental illness children, including children with ASD, also showed that comprehensive services, such as health care, essential services, psychological services and intensive social work services, needed to be closely coordinated to bring about the best efficiency in the delivery of services. A research in the United States also found that ASD children and their families had difficulty accessing services, more specifically services usage, accessibility, and lack of care resources. In addition, other factors like ineligibility for care, lack of shared decisions, failure to check in periodically and family effects (employment, finances, employment, and time) contributed to the existing challenge. ASD children's caregivers also experience difficulties in using services, lack of care, inadequate insurance, lack of shared decisions and coordination of care, and thus were adversely affected compared to caregivers of children with other developmental disabilities (Vohra, Madhavan, Sambamoorthi, & Peter, 2013).

Research on services for ASD children to improve social skills for both the children and their parents was discussed on the benefits of solving social interaction problems for ASD children. For example, Duncan and Klinger (2010) showed that ASD children faced many social difficulties when interacting with their peers and adults at school and in the community. Therefore, it was essential to introduce social skills interventions in health facilities, schools, and communities to increase their ability to learn, maintain and develop social skills. This will assist young people to successfully transition to other stages of development, including learning at higher levels, such as at high school and then finding jobs after. In Symon (2005)'s investigation to assess the influence of service providers, an extended model of ASD children's intervention that promoted the parent as their teacher was conducted and produced positive results in improving the child's social behaviors and communication with both parents and others.

In Vietnam, studies have raised the issue of the lack of an unsuitable quality intervention and treatment services for ASD children. Vu, Whittaker, Whittaker, and Rodger (2014) claimed that children with ASD in Vietnam are currently in a shortage of quality and low-cost supportive services. H. T. Nguyễn (2016)'s work on counselling services for ASD children's parents indicated that social workers' counselling skills depend on the following key factors: the personal factors, such as their passion, interest; professional knowledge and practical experience; and activeness at work. At the same time, it confirmed the feasibility of the measures to improve some social worker's specific counselling skills in serving ASD children's families, thus advocating for the use of counselling services for ASD children's families. Moreover, Trần, Welmond, & Trần (2017) conducted a study on the current state of training, standards and requirements for social workers to carry out inclusive education for ASD children. The study provided lessons and recommendations on training and granting a certificate for social workers working at schools, with families and children with ASD in Vietnam. These authors also analyzed the current state of operation of intervention facilities for children with ASD in Vietnam, and the results showed that

a majority of service facilities have inadequacies in ensuring the requirements of providing intervention services (Trần & Võ, 2018).

Material and methods

The study applied a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative. One hundred thirty-three service providers serving children with ASD and families were voluntarily selected to participate in the survey. These employees were specifically selected via a snowball approach by the introduction from managing officers from different service providers in 5 provinces/cities in Vietnam, including Yen Bai, Bac Giang, Bac Ninh, Hanoi and Vinh. There is one mountainous province: one midland and mountainous, one city directly under the province in the delta, one major the political and cultural-center city, and one directly under the coastal province. The centers selected for the survey include two public and 13 private institutions/centres. Among the surveyed participants, 30 service providers were invited to in-depth interviews. In addition, 15 leaders of service providers also joined in in-depth interviews. The data of the survey were processed by SPSS 22 software. Qualitative data from interviews were encoded and aggregated as a Microsoft Word document for thematic analysis. The participants in the study were informed about the research, including its content, objectives and confidentiality of the information and voluntarily agreed to participate.

The 133 research participants were employees who directly provide services for children and families with a wide range of working experience: from 1 year to 7 years (71.4%); 1 year (21.1%), over seven years was 7.5%. Of which, 12.8% was male and 87.2% female. The primary age of the group is from 20 to 40 years old (95.5%).

Results

Current situation of social work services for children with ASD and their families

Type of social work service

This study focused on three groups of services for ASD children, including primary intervention, intensive intervention, and inclusion and development. Two services for ASD children's families were prevention and intensive. The data collected from 133 service providers showed that the level of service participation from the grassroots staff for each type of service varies. Table 1 reveals that the level of implementation of three services for ASD children was quite often, with the mean within the sale of 3 to close to 4 out of 5 (1 was not performed and 5 was regularly performed). The initial care service group had a very high percentage of staff performance: 91% for preliminary assessment services, 85% for preparatory services and 78.9% for diagnostic services.

Similarly, the intensive intervention services also recorded a pretty high rate of performance, respectively RDI (Relationship Development Intervention)- 77.4%, ABA (Applied Behavioral Analysis) - 95.5%, TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children)- 79%, and PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)-80.5%. However, in the development of inclusive service groups, the level of performance was less. Vocational career support and building community-based support were at the mean of fewer than 3 points (2.73 and 2.98, respectively). For vocational support

services, up to 46.7% of employees answered that they did not perform or rarely perform. Community support network services was also recorded that 32.3% of employees did not perform or rarely performed.

Table 1

Level of service performance for ASD children

Types of services	Mean	Deviation
Primary intervention services for children with ASD		
Preliminary assessment	3.81	1.067
Screening	3.70	1.121
Diagnose	3.60	1.392
Intensive services for children with ASD		
RDI (Relationship Development Intervention)	3.20	1.357
ABA (Applied Behavioral Analysis)	3.84	0.912
TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children)	3.29	1.288
PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)	3.30	1.237
Inclusion and development services for children with ASD		
Supporting inclusive education at schools	3.62	1.035
Vocational career support	2.73	1.315
Build a community-based support network	2.98	1.357

In-depth interviews demonstrated in more detail the roles and duties of service providers. They focused on the intervention process, from making a diagnosis to treatment. One said:

My main job is to diagnose and assess the child's disease level and make interventions for the child. The center needs to develop more in this field for career guidance activities, mainly behavioral interventions for children. Implementing vocational orientations for these children is also challenging since teaching them how to communicate is already very difficult; vocational orientation is only possible for some children (In8, female, 26 years old, service providers, private center).

Another participant stressed her task in helping children in their integration process at school and also raised the challenge of fulfilling her job:

My primary task is to develop intervention plans and implement individual interventions for children. Besides, I will support and facilitate integration for children so that they can integrate into the school. These are activities that meet the needs of children and help to solve urgent problems of children. Currently, building a network in the community for this group of children is very necessary, but there are few favorable conditions to be able to do it. This needs a lot of different factors, of which the coordination between the grassroots and the current organizations, authorities and communities needs to be paid more attention. As far as I know, the center does not receive support to carry out these activities. (In16, male, 35 years old, service providers, private center)

Research results have shown that services provided to ASD children's families in the prevention group were relatively well provided, with a mean point around 3.5/5 (Table 2). An insignificant percentage of non-performance was found, ranging from 0% to 3%. For the intensive service, the level of performance was less, particularly with two services (advocacy and referrals) that gained only less than 3 mean points and the per cent of non-performance or rarely performed among study participants was close to 4 out of ten service providers (36.9% and 39.1% respectively).

Table 2

Level of service performance for ASD children's families

Types of services	Mean	Deviation
Prevention services for families		
Propaganda and communication with families	3.56	0.988
Propagating and communicating with the community	3.41	1.081
Propaganda and communication with the school	3.46	1.125
Family-intensive service		
Resource Mobilizing and coordinating	3.14	1.236
Making referrals	2.95	1.242
Advocacy	2.88	1.237
Counselling, psychological stress relief	3.28	1.251
Policy advisory	3.21	1.129
Education, provision of childcare knowledge	3.71	1.086

Studied participants also shared their essential job in supporting ASD children's families. A representative from a private institution stated:

I also regularly support parents by equipping them with knowledge and skills to help their children at home through counselling and education. These activities are considered our primary services because it meets the needs of ASD children and their parents. The parents are concerned about the outcome of the child's intervention. Nonetheless, most of their parents are very busy. When they are consulted that their involvement in supporting their children contributes to the success of the intervention, they are also a participant. However, our staff has to support a lot because the parents' knowledge and skills to care for the child as well as support the child is limited. (In15, female, 26 years old, service providers, private centre)

One participant stressed the importance of providing more detailed guidance for ASD parents, mainly when the family struggled.

For families, I often counsel families of children with ASD, discussing more the signs, manifestations, and child characteristics so that the family can have a better understanding of the situation. In addition, during the intervention, I regularly communicate with the family about the child's status and progress. It is also vital to promptly support the family if there are difficulties in incorporating homeschooling. The pressures and stresses parents face are also consulted to find ways to overcome them. (In13, female, 30 years old, manager, private center)

Staff from the center also acknowledged the current weaknesses in providing services at their center:

Currently, at the centre, many services are not feasible. Hence, they are not highly effective, and the frequency of provision to families could be higher. For example, for the advocacy and referral service, I rarely perform because the coordination structure to provide these services locally at the center and in collaboration with the relevant organizations could be more precise. I think no network helps to implement these services effectively. (In2, female, 27 years old, service providers, private centre)

In short, the study results shows that social work services are currently provided at both public and private social support facilities at different levels. The primary intervention services, intensive interventions and inclusion support at schools for children with ASD are conducted more regularly. In contrast, vocational support and community network building still have low participation levels with a low rate of service providers' performance. For ASD children's families, services related to communication, education, and counselling are well provided with high performance from the service providers. Other services, such as advocacy, referral and resource mobilization and coordination, have yet to be implemented regularly due to a lack of coordination.

How services to children with ASD and their families are delivered

The study also explored how the social support facilities provided social work services. The results showed that these services were delivered at the facilities as well as at ASD children's homes. In the social support facilities, three types of service provision were provided: by the hour, semi-boarding and boarding. At home, services were delivered by the hour and full day. However, a majority of the service providers were involved in providing full-time services at the facilities. Table 3 demonstrated that among 15 studied social support facilities, 15 out of 15 provided services for ASD children at their centres, while outreach service delivery was minimal. Only five institutions provided boarding services; 3 with hour-based services and none with full-day services at home.

Table 3

Methods of services provided at social support facilities

Social work services for children with ASD and their families	No of institutions providing services
On-site service delivery (Hourly)	15/15
On-site service delivery (Half-board)	15/15
On-site service delivery (Boarding)	5/15
Providing services at home (Hourly)	3/15
Providing services at home (All day)	0/15

The study has tried to examine the reason behind this statistic through in-depth interviews. Many participants responded that the parents and the children prefer to have services at institutions where the children could receive intervention and therapy services. Besides that, children also benefited from attending preschool or primary school. A leader from a social support institution explained further:

Currently, the most popular service attracts many children to participate in daycare services at the institution. The institution provides scheduled services like in other kindergarten or primary schools. Children are sent to the institution in the morning from 7:00-8:30, and the family will pick them up in the afternoon at 4:00-5.30. Children will eat and have a nap at the institution, participating in individual and group interventions. Furthermore, they will have fun activities with friends and participate in other activities suitable to the child's condition. This helps children improve their condition as well as reduce family anxiety because they are not in school or have no caregivers. (In7, female, 40 years old, director, private centre)

Another participant agreed that having on-site services at the institution was more convenient and relieved the parents' stress on how to adequately care for their children.

The fact that children come to use the services at the institution not only meets the needs of children for intervention and integration with their peers but also to meet the needs of their parents. For them, sending children to the institution reduces psychological pressure. Furthermore, they feel comforted that their children are still in school. Many families hope their child's attendance will improve the current situation. (In6, female, 43 years old, director, private centre)

Hour-based services were usually chosen by children receiving inclusive learning, who would only come to the institution to participate in individual intervention hours after their schooling. Each session for intervention lasted from 1 hour to 1 hour and a half, depending on the services available and what services will be suitable for the child's condition. Sharing about the situation of providing hourly services, a center leader said:

Currently, there are quite a few parents who choose hourly services for their children. This service is mainly provided to children with mild illness and those who still attend preschool or primary school. Therefore, the hourly service schedule is usually flexible and usually from 5 pm

to 9 pm. Therefore, it is also convenient to arrange for staff to provide services because, at this time, most of the children who use on-site or daycare services have returned home. This also contributes to increasing the income of the center's staff. (In9, male, 31 years old, vice director, private centre)

In addition, 5/out of 15 facilities (two public and three private) provided boarding services. Children were sent to the center from Monday to Saturday. The two public centers were under the social protection system, so they strictly followed the assigned functions and tasks that provide nurturing and caring functions for social protection groups. For the private facilities, despite not under the same mandate as the public ones, they provided boarding services in order to meet the ASD children and their family's needs. A leader from one of the three centers explained:

Some families have decided to send their children to boarding services at the center because the families do not have a caregiver for the child. Particularly with their difficulty living in mountainous areas, such as the distance from the kindergarten to the institution being quite far, transportation being difficult, and the parents being busy working to earn money to take care of the child. In addition, these parents do not have the knowledge and skills to take care of their children. (In4, female, 34 years old, director, private centre)

Moreover, another facility leader added that 50 km from home to the institution was a big challenge for the family to enjoy daycare services. Even though his staff knew that it was essential to have parents' participation in supporting their ASD children, with the family condition, they had no better choice than sending their children to the institution in the boarding program. Some explained that with families in difficulty, they were afraid that if the children were not in the boarding program, their interventions were at a high risk of being interrupted or ended.

For services provided at home, representatives from the study center shared that they have had many difficulties implementing these outreach programs. They mentioned many barriers, such as the shortage of personnel, work efficiency, work supervision and evaluation and long travel distance, that they could not make the services available. A public facility leader said:

Currently, we do not provide services for ASD children at home because we do not have adequate service providers, and some do not have much experience. Providing services at home requires more time to prepare human resources and other factors to ensure efficiency and service supervision and evaluation. (In8, male, 50 years old, director, public center)

This is added by another leader from a private center:

The current demand for home services is evident, but our capacity cannot meet it. There are many reasons. First, the families who want to use home services are usually far away from the institution. Therefore, travelling is a problem that needs more time and cost. Secondly, most families do not have the proper facilities for intervention, so it is also difficult for employees to support their children at home.

Moreover, the workforce in our institution is limited. Hypothetically, one staff can provide services to 5-7 children a day at the institution, but if he or she has to go to the family, this number is reduced to only 2-3 children per day, so that lower the performance efficiency. (In6, female, 43 years old, director, private centre)

The issue of monitoring and controlling the service delivery process also was identified as another difficulty for home-based services. Many leaders shared their concern about keeping the quality of their services while providing services for ASD children at home. This was admitted by a service provider with some experience providing services at home.

I provide services for children at home, but sometimes problems arise. For example, I had already booked a specific time for the child, but when I came to their home, the child needed more

time to be ready for intervention. That has created a problem for me as I need to keep the quality of the services, and if I have to stay longer than my schedule for adequate treatment time, I will be late for other activities. Moreover, travel is also problematic because the time spent on the road is also long, making me tired. And, of course, that can also affect my services with the children. (In27, female, 29 years old, service providers, private center)

Thus, participants prefer to provide services at their institutions because they can serve a higher number of children. Moreover, it also meets the needs of the children and their families. It also brings economical efficiency when saving family costs and service providers' time. Also, institutions can control the quality of service.

Service rates and facilities

Expenditure for ASD treatment is a significant concern for parents and institutions. The study results showed a wide range of fee depending on the location (whether in the city or rural area or a public or a private institution). There was a vast difference in service charges between regions. This study was conducted in 5 cities in 3 different geographical regions, namely the Northern Midlands and Mountains (Yen Bai, Bac Giang), the Red River Delta (Hanoi, Bac Ninh), and the North Central Coast and the Central Coast (Vinh). In addition, the research also revealed that service fees were higher compared to per capita income in Vietnam. (Table 4)

Table 4

Service rates by the region

Geography region	Per capita income in 2021 (monthly) VND	Charge rate in 2021 (by the hour) VND	Fees for one autistic child at the centre (monthly)	
			Semi-boarding VND	Boarding VND
Northern Midlands and Mountains (Yen Bai, Bac Giang)	2,837,000	100,000 -120,000	2,500,000- 4,000,000	6,000,000- 7,000,000
Red River Delta (Hanoi, Bac Ninh)	5,026,000	200,000- 250,000	6,000,000- 10,000,000	No service provided
North Central Coast and the Central Coast (Vinh)	3,493,000	120,000 -150,000	4,000,000- 7,000,000	No service provided

It can be seen that there is a unfavorable ratio between the level of income per capita compared to the cost of services provided. Service charges are high in geographical areas with

high per capita income and vice versa. There is a considerable difference between the hourly and monthly rates between the three studied regions. According to the announcement of the General Statistics of Vietnam in 2021, the per capita monthly income of the whole country is 4,205,000 VND. In the three geographical areas where the research was conducted, the level of income is recorded to be in the highest level in the country. The Red River Delta region is 1.8 times higher than the lowest income level in the Northern Midlands and Mountains (GSO, 2022). This presents a significant difficulty for both the service providers as well as the service users. For service providers, the high fee would make the service difficult to reach out to many children as it can be challenging to attract children to use the service at the institutions. For children and their families, a high fee compared to the family's income would prevent the child from using the service, or completing the whole course of the treatment.

A private social support institution leader shared his organization's challenge in keeping reasonable fee.

The center operates entirely on revenues from children's tuition fees and hourly intervention service fees. We have no funding from the State. Therefore, payments must cover expenses from renting a venue, investing in facilities, learning materials, and learning tools to paying salaries for staff. If the wage is low, keeping the employees is challenging because this job's pressure is tremendous. (In3, female, 33 years old, director, private centre)

Another leader explained why they could not reduce the free:

Currently, our rented venue locates in the city center, densely populated, and convenient for children to travel. However, the cost for us to maintain our services is relatively high. In addition, there are many things to invest in to ensure the provision of services and learning for children. Therefore, compared to other preschools' tuition fees, the center's tuition fee must be higher. (In9, male, 31 years old, vice director, private center)

The infrastructure and facilities also plays an essential role in providing quality services for ASD children. Intervention and service provision for autistic children requires a long and continuous timeframe, so meeting the facility's criteria is crucial. This lack of facilities will affect service delivery for the children and their families. However, the research demonstrated that the infrastructure of the studied institutions has not fully met the needs of children with ASD. There are noticeable differences between public and private institutions. For example, public institutions own large land areas; therefore, they could provide outdoor playing spaces for children. However, they have a limitation regarding adequate treatment and rehabilitation facilities. In contrast, private institutions have an advantage in having adequate facilities to meet the needs of care and education and provide different services for the children and their families. Yet, they have to rent the venue, so the area is often narrower. They have to make full use of the space to arrange the function rooms: classrooms, intervention rooms, and counselling rooms, therefore having less available space for outdoor and playing activities.

Discussions

The research has showed that social work services for children with ASD and their families in Vietnam had not developed much compared to other special education. This is consistent with previous research indicating that social workers need to be more involved in research, practice, education and advocacy to support individuals with ASD and their families (Bishop, Dababnah, Baker-Ericzén, Smith, & Magaña, 2018). Keegan (2016) firmly claimed that the social work

profession needs to engage and grow stronger in order to have a greater voice in the autistic community and to advocate for the needs of children with ASD's families.

While social work services in supporting children with ASD and their families are still at the level of being integrated and supplementary in the child's therapy and intervention, ASD children's parents mainly choose services for their children based on their understanding, consideration of the needs of the child and family, the availability of services, and the convenience of accessing services. This is mainly due to the need of the child's family to quickly improve the child's condition. They hope that in the hours of intervention therapy, children can adjust and improve. Parents also anticipate that treatment and early intervention can improve both brain and behavior development for ASD children (Jones, Dawson, Kelly, Estes, & Webb, 2017). Despite this, they do not have significant appreciation for the role of social work in supporting ASD children in integration and development services (support for integration at school, support for vocational training, and building a support network in the community) (Dawson et al., 2012). This study provides a clearer picture of the status of providing social work services for children with ASD and their families in Vietnam. Issues and challenges in the professional provision of services, particularly in-depth, as well as the variety, have been pointed out. Career guidance and networking services have yet been developed because of the inadequate capacity of the service providers. Moreover, it is more difficult for private institutions with their limitation in the venue, financial pressure, and lack of personnel to smoothly conduct these supporting activities. As stated by Vu et al. (2014), the network of social support services for children with ASD is poor and cannot meet the needs of the children with ASD and their families.

The study also reveals differences between private and public social work service-providing institutions. Private institutions are more advanced in investing facilities in providing services for children with ASD and their families. However, they have been facing the issues of having a suitable venue and maintaining the financial matter. Nonetheless, to bring long-term benefits to the group of children with ASD, it is also necessary to have supportive policies for private institutions. This helps to promote the private sector to provide quality services and contribute to improving the quality of services for ASD children and their families.

Conclusions

Children with ASD are gaining significant interest in modern society as a social issue that dramatically affects national social security policies. Facilitating the participation of public and non-public forces in the service delivery process will further promote and improve the quality of services for children and families. Each country and territory has different characteristics, and the problems children with ASD and their families faces vary with the location. In addition, family awareness plays a vital role in many interventions for children with ASD (Crowell, Keluskar, & Gorecki, 2019). Intervention and support services are still not meeting the current needs. Parents of children with autism have limited access to services for their children, being exacerbated with their financial issues, (Vu et al., 2014; Ying, Browne, Hutchinson, Cashin, & Binh, 2012). Moreover, the opportunity to access helpful information for parents of children with autism is limited (Vũ & Trần, 2017).

This study showcases the importance of support policies and professional social work services for ASD children and their families, particularly in the context of a low-middle income country in the south. It first advocates more policy support is needed to develop social work services for families and children with ASD. Then, importantly, the government should pay

adequate attention on the development of social work services at both public and private social support centers. Primarily, it requires more social work services to support ASD children's families to raise their awareness and strengthen their capacity. The services provided to children with autism, especially early intervention, are not available to all children for various reasons, including cost, availability of services, parents 'awareness and the sociocultural context in which the child lives (Tachibana et al., 2017). Therefore, children and families need support from the Government by providing guaranteed policies and social security programs. Through the existing services, social work will, together with medical, special education and psychology, help to solve problems and difficulties that ASD children and their families are facing towards achieving high goals for the optimal development of children with ASD.

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