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Conferința doctoranzilor, Ediția 1

ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ

Psychological perspectives on aggressive driving: challenges and opportunities for virtual reality interventions

Miloș Constantina-Alina (Ilie), Mihaela Rus

Introduction. Aggressive driving has increasingly been recognized as a major public health and social issue, being associated with traffic accidents, interpersonal conflicts, and elevated psychological stress. From a psychological perspective, aggressive driving behaviors are shaped by cognitive factors (such as perceptual and interpretative biases), difficulties in emotional regulation, and situational stressors specific to the driving environment. Traditional educational and therapeutic interventions have shown limited effectiveness, emphasizing the need for innovative and engaging methods aimed at behavior modification.

Methods. This paper presents a theoretical review of the literature on aggressive driving and explores the potential of Virtual Reality (VR) as a tool for optimizing aggressive driving behavior. VR makes it possible to design immersive and safe environments that realistically simulate traffic situations without exposing participants to real-world risks. Within these controlled contexts, drivers can practice emotional self-regulation, test alternative behavioral responses to challenging situations, and develop adaptive coping strategies.

Results. Findings from existing studies suggest that VR-based interventions can effectively reduce aggressive reactions and strengthen emotional self-regulation. Moreover, the flexibility and interactivity of VR highlight its potential to be integrated both into psychological practice - as a clinical and educational intervention tool - and into driver education programs.

Conclusions. This paper outlines a conceptual framework that connects psychological theories of aggressive driving with the advantages of emerging technologies. The use of VR in psychological interventions opens new avenues for research and practical applications, offering solutions with direct impact on road safety and the mitigation of psychosocial issues associated with driving aggression.

Keywords: driving aggression; social psychology; virtual reality; emotional self-regulation; driver education.

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The role of attachment styles as predictors of aggressive driving: theoretical foundations and clinical implications

Șerban Mihai, Mihaela Rus

Introduction. Aggressive driving is a critical road safety risk, contributing to accidents and social tensions in traffic. Attachment theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how internalized relational models shape drivers' perceptions and reactions under stress.

Methods. This paper critically reviewed the literature and four representative studies (Taubman-Ben-Ari & Yehiel, 2012; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Maalouf et al., 2022; Deffenbacher et al., 2002), integrating theoretical perspectives with validated psychometric instruments such as the Driving Anger Expression Inventory and the Adult Attachment Style Questionnaire.

Results. Convergent findings indicate that insecure attachment styles (anxious, avoidant, disorganized) are consistently associated with heightened levels of anger, hostility, and aggressive tendencies in driving contexts. By contrast, secure attachment is linked to adaptive emotional regulation and safer, more responsible driving. Assessment instruments demonstrate that attachment not only predicts susceptibility to aggression but also shapes the specific expression of driving anger (verbal, vehicular, or physical).

Conclusions. The evidence supports the view that attachment styles are significant psychological predictors of aggressive driving. Incorporating this dimension into clinical assessment, preventive training, and public policies on road safety may mitigate dysfunctional behaviors and foster emotionally regulated driving practices.

Keywords: attachment, aggressive driving, driving anger, emotional regulation, road safety

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Musical perspectives on ADHD

Tatiana Dănciulescu

Introduction. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by difficulties in attention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity, which significantly affect individual development. In recent years, interest in non-pharmacological interventions has increased, and music has proven to be a valuable tool for regulating attention and emotions. Piano Therapy, a method originally developed for children diagnosed with autism, combines principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) with active musical learning techniques. The aim of this paper is to explore the potential extension of the Piano Therapy method to children diagnosed with ADHD, considering certain similarities in symptomatology between the two conditions.

Methods. In the original pilot study, 60 children with autism participated in a 4-month program consisting of two individual weekly sessions, with evaluations conducted using the PEP-3 instrument. For ADHD, the protocol is proposed to be adapted through the inclusion of attention self-regulation and rhythmicity exercises, aiming to support executive functions and reduce impulsivity.

Results. The initial study demonstrated significant improvements in communication, motor skills, and adaptive behaviors in children with ASD. By analogy, it is estimated that applying this method to children with ADHD could enhance attention development and reduce impulsivity and hyperactivity.

Conclusions. Piano Therapy offers new musical perspectives in ADHD interventions by stimulating the affected functional areas. Adapting the method for ADHD may open a new interdisciplinary therapeutic framework, integrating music and psychology in support of harmonious development.

Keywords: Piano Therapy, ADHD, music, attention, self-regulation, impulsivity, hyperactivity.

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Personality and values in the dynamics of aggression. A systematic review of the literature

Iureși Cristina Roxana

Introduction

Considering aggression as a public health issue, this systematic review aims to identify the underlying mechanisms and integrate personal values into explanatory theoretical frameworks of aggressive behavior.

Methods

A total of 112 correlational and experimental studies published between 2000 and 2025 were analyzed. These studies were identified through searches conducted in the following databases: APA PsycNet, PubMed, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar. The searches utilized relevant keywords and combinations related to values, personality, and aggression. The included studies were selected based on criteria of relevance, methodological rigor, and sample characteristics, focusing on the non-clinical adult population.

Results

Data examination highlighted the role of personal values in understanding the dynamics of aggressive behavior. Strong moral and spiritual values were associated with a reduction in aggressive tendencies, while power-oriented values legitimized hostile behaviors. In Cloninger's model, traits such as Novelty Seeking and Harm Avoidance significantly correlated with aggression and impulsivity. Furthermore, "character maturity," defined by Self-Direction and Cooperation, was positively associated with prosocial values and negatively with aggression. Interventions based on value clarification and empathy development proved effective in reducing aggressive behaviors. Additionally, a notable deficit of studies examining the interaction between personality, values, and aggression was identified.

Conclusions

Overall, the results suggest that personal values and personality traits play a crucial role in modulating aggression. Integrating these factors into prevention and intervention strategies may enhance the effectiveness of reducing aggressive behaviors.

Keywords: aggression, personal values, personality, therapeutic interventions.

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Strategies for reducing risky behaviors caused by overconfidence: a systematic review of the Dunning-Kruger effect in rail transport

Bratei Aurelia Florina, Mihaela Rus

Introduction. Risky behaviors caused by overconfidence and cognitive biases such as the Dunning–Kruger effect are a critical factor in rail transport safety. In the context of increasing automation and operational complexity, human errors influenced by overestimating one's abilities can lead to suboptimal decisions, decreased vigilance, and compromised performance in critical situations. This research aims to identify and synthesize effective strategies for reducing risk behaviors associated with overconfidence in specific railway transport activities.

Methods. A systematic literature review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 recommendations, using searches in Web of Science, Scopus, and PsycInfo. The combination of the terms "Dunning-Kruger," "overconfidence," "cognitive bias," "railway safety," and "risk-taking behavior" generated 412 records, of which 29 articles were included in the final synthesis. Variables such as types of cognitive biases, psychological mechanisms involved in overconfidence, contextual factors in the work of locomotive engineers, and interventions used to reduce risk-taking behaviors were analyzed.

Results. The analysis highlights that overconfidence directly influences risk perception, error detection, and decision quality, both in the railway sector and in other transport contexts. The studies included indicate that calibrated feedback, metacognitive training, driving simulators, strategies to increase awareness of personal limitations, and the promotion of an organizational culture of safety significantly reduce risky behaviors associated with cognitive biases.

Conclusions. The results suggest that strategies aimed at developing self-monitoring, skill calibration, and informed decision-making are effective ways to reduce the impact of overconfidence in rail transport. Integrating these interventions into training, assessment, and risk management programs can contribute substantially to increasing operational safety.

Keywords: overconfidence, Dunning-Kruger effect, risk behavior, rail transport, operational safety, cognitive biases, prevention strategies

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Well-being and coping strategies among navigators in relation to occupational burnout – Systematic review of the literature

Botezatu Oana, Mihaela Rus

The maritime sector is a professional field with high exposure to psychosocial stress factors, which can significantly influence psychological well-being and can lead, over time, to the development of occupational burnout, both because of the isolated and unpredictable work environment and as a result of the complex responsibilities associated with operating maritime vessels (Carotenuto et al., 2022). Isolated working conditions, long hours, lack of social contact, especially with family, and the permanent risks associated with the maritime environment contribute to an increased risk of burnout among this professional group (Oldenburg et al., 2019). Given these issues, analyzing the relationship between the coping strategies adopted by seafarers, their level of burnout, and their well-being has become and continues to be an increasingly important topic in contemporary research, as it is associated with professional performance, workplace safety, and staff retention (Brooks et al., 2022).

In the literature, occupational burnout is recognized as a negative reaction to chronic professional stress, manifesting itself through emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). In maritime professional environments, this phenomenon is accentuated by factors such as distance from family, lack of privacy, and work–life conflict (Carotenuto et al., 2022).

The model proposed by Ryff (1989) reflects a set of characteristics that contribute to the optimal functioning of the individual, including: autonomy, positive relationships, purpose in life, and personal growth. In difficult occupational conditions, such as those in navigation, maintaining a state of well-being can be an essential protective factor for mental health (Diener et al., 2018).

In this sense, coping strategies-defined as cognitive and behavioral mechanisms used by individuals to deal with stressors-play an essential role in regulating the negative impact of occupational stress on well-being (Folkman, 2013).

Keywords: cognitive and behavioral mechanisms; emotional exhaustion; maritime environment; professional stress; state of well-being;

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The future seen from behind bars: a qualitative exploration of the reflections of young convicts

Flavia-Elena Ciurbea, Robert-Andrei Lunga, Maria-Miana Dina

Introduction. The study aimed to explore how young convicts interpret their criminal path and project their future after release, starting from the relationships in the entourage and their impact on behavior.

Methods. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 32 young people between 18 and 23 years old in the custody of the Târgu Ocna Educational Center. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data obtained.

Results. More interviewees (13) described their group of friends as dysfunctional or with deviant behaviors, 10 participants stated that they had neutral or mixed-influence friends, 8 respondents considered that they had opportunistic friends, and only one participant described their friends in positive terms. Regarding future plans, the following themes emerged: a) orientation towards family life and personal life, b) professional reintegration and c) continuing their studies and strengthening specialized training. In terms of profession and job, 11 saw themselves working in the construction field in the coming years, but areas such as food industry, agriculture, hairdressing, automotive industry and courier were also mentioned. Most of the young convicts (29) expressed their intention to emigrate after their release. Regarding the advice that participants would offer to teenagers in liberty, the following themes were highlighted: a) education and listening to parents, b) avoiding negative surroundings, c) critical thinking before action, and d) valuing freedom.

Conclusions. Awareness of criminogenic risk factors and the promotion of prosocial attitudes, as well as the desire to find a job, start a family and, in some cases, continue their studies, indicate the intention of young people to correct their delinquent behavior. It is important that these aspirations are explored within social reintegration activities, in order to ensure rehabilitation assistance tailored to the future-related interests of young people deprived of their liberty.

Keywords: entourage, deviance, reintegration, family, profession..

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From Philosophy to Psychology and Sociology: a review of the doctoral theses of Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920)

Vîrtop Sorin-Avram

The paper aims to present the Romanian students who studied under the guidance of Wilhelm Wundt at Leipzig, the lists of doctoral students being recently available due to recent research that attempts to bring to the fore the work of Wundt, which for reasons beyond his control fell into obscurity after his death. Wundt coordinated various themes that concerned philosophy, psychology, anthropology, pedagogy, ethics and others. Of the 186 (or 184 according to Anneros Meischner-Metge) coordinated theses, 7 belong to Romanian students: Dimitresco C. Constantin, Eduar Gruber, Constantin Rădulescu – Motru, Michael Săvescu, Demetrius Gusti, Florian Ștefăescu-Goangă, Trajan Topciu (the names according to the list of the University of Leipzig) to which Ion Petrovici must also be mentioned as an audience member. They continued their scientific activity in Romania, either founding the field of psychology or other fields such as sociology, such as Dimitrie Gusti. Their works, whether dealing with themes of philosophy, aesthetics, psychology, as well as scientific and journalistic activity, represented the core for placing research in these fields at a level compatible with that of the era and on the foundations of which it is continued today. The paper presents the doctoral students and the work developed by each of them in chronological order according to the lists (University of Leipzig and Anneros Meischner-Metge) with reference to how the experience acquired in the laboratory was then used in subsequent work in Romania.

Keywords. Philosophy, psychology, sociology

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Drug use as a coping strategy: a systematic review of the literature

Lunga Robert-Andrei

Introduction. Drug use is often perceived as a coping strategy and a way of managing emotional regulation difficulties. This systematic review of the literature aimed to identify recent theoretical models that explain drug use as a coping mechanism.

Methods. APRISMA recommendations were used to search for articles from 2015 to 2025 indexed in the APA Psycnet, Scopus and PubMed databases. The keywords used to identify relevant articles were ("coping strategy" OR "coping mechanism") AND ("substance use disorder" OR "addiction") AND ("theory" OR "model").

Results. The initial search yielded a total of 254 articles, of which 14 were selected based in inclusion and exclusion criteria. In the selected studies, the theoretical model of adverse childhood experiences was the most frequently mentioned. The social determinants model also described how family or financial stressors were associated with the onset of substance use behaviors. Another theoretical model mentioned is the substitution of one addictive behavior with another addictive behavior, found in the harmful use of substances co-occuring with pathological gambling. As for the use of multiple substances associated with heroin use, this can be explained by the poor quality of substances on the illegal market.

Conclusions. The use of drugs as a coping mechanism is associated with a history of potentially traumatic events, which are a risk factor for this behavior. In addition to the need for preventive interventions targeting these structural causes, it is necessary to explore in depth the causal trajectories and vulnerabilities determined by the types of potentially traumatic events in order to examine how different types and combinations affect the specific choice of substance or the severity of addiction.

Keywords: drug use, addiction, coping strategy, adverse childhood experiences.

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Treating death anxiety: current interventions and directions for future research

Stan Andrada-Elena

Introduction: Effective strategies to provide psychological support are currently needed given the disproportionate ratio between the population's demand, and the availability of psychological services. Therefore, mental health professionals are starting to direct their therapeutic focus towards treating transdiagnostic constructs, such as death anxiety.

Methods: The Google Scholar search engine was used to access the scientific literature centred on the development of psychotherapeutic interventions for death anxiety. The search was limited to those studies which tested the intervention methods, while any theoretical articles were excluded from the review.

Results: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) was shown to be the main line of treatment, because of its effectiveness. The results of the selected studies supported this effectiveness for both the classical CBT protocols, as well as for those of the recent directions under the CBT umbrella (such as the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy). Moreover, new CBT protocols specifically targeting death anxiety, are currently tested further. A lower number of studies were focused on using different techniques, such as art therapy or logotherapy, which could become complementary to CBT protocols.

Conclusions: While studies testing the theories of death anxiety are more readily available, psychotherapeutic protocols for treating it are scarce. Both classical CBT, as well as the third wave directions under the CBT umbrella offer general guidelines which are effective, but not sufficient, given that death anxiety is a more diffused construct than a specific phobia and it requires more complex intervention methods.

Keywords: death anxiety, psychotherapy, CBT.

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Psychological and environmental factors involved in violent behavior among persons deprived of liberty

Forțu Andreea - Cătălina

Introduction. Violence represents a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction of psychological, relational and environmental factors, and in the case of inmates, these mechanisms become even more pronounced. The specialized literature highlights that individual personality traits, childhood experiences, and family, community, and social contexts all contribute to the development of violent behavior. This presentation aims to analyze the psychological mechanisms involved in committing violent acts and the environmental vulnerabilities associated with such behavior among inmates.

Methods. A review of the specialized literature was conducted, based on 30 studies published between 1986 and 2024, identified in databases such as Oxford Journals, PsychInfo, Web of Science and Google Scholar. The selection process focused on identifying articles that examined psychological characteristics and environmental factors associated with violent behavior among incarcerated individuals. Both qualitative studies, based on semi-structured interviews and inmate self-reports, and quantitative studies employing statistical and correlational analyses were included. The keywords used referenced violence, aggression, violent offenders, and environmental vulnerabilities, with the final selection including only studies relevant to inmates convicted of violent crimes.

Results. The findings indicate that individuals who commit violent offenses frequently exhibit personality traits such as low agreeableness, reduced altruism, low compliance, heightened hostility, anger and impulsivity, as well as reduced sociability. Environmental factors-such as childhood abuse and neglect, harsh parental discipline, socio-economic disadvantage, family history of criminality, hyperactivity, and low verbal intelligence-also increase the likelihood of violent behavior. The literature further highlights a significant continuity between early aggression and violent behavior in adolescence and adulthood.

Conclusions. Violence results from the interaction between individual psychological characteristics and environmental vulnerabilities. In the penitentiary environment, personalized psychological intervention becomes essential, requiring detailed assessment of individual traits and contextual factors in order to develop effective programs for preventing criminal recidivism.

Keywords: personality traits, violent behavior, environmental factors, offending, inmates.

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Performance anxiety and its psychological and neurophysiological correlates

Vlădoiu Laura - Maria

Introduction. The doctoral research investigates performance anxiety and the individual and socio-relational factors that shape it, with an emphasis on integrating psychological and neuroscientific data. In this context, participation in the fMRI project The Role Playing Brain provides an empirical framework for examining the following objectives: identifying differences in performance anxiety between actors and non-actors, exploring its relationship with spontaneity in role-playing, and correlating psychometric indicators with neurophysiological data.

Methods. The protocol is conducted over three days for each participant. The first two days include training sessions (role-playing and preparatory fMRI simulation), during which the questionnaires used to investigate the study objectives are administered: the Performance Anxiety Questionnaire (PAQ; Cox & Kenardy, 1993) for cognitive and somatic manifestations of performance anxiety, the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory – Trait (STAI-T; Spielberger et al., 1983) for assessing trait anxiety, and the Short Scale of Creative Self (SSCS; Balgiu, 2023), along with a questionnaire adapted from the improvisational theatre literature to assess spontaneity. On the third day, the fMRI session takes place, providing additional data on neurophysiological correlates.

Results. To date, 24 participants have been tested (9 actors, 15 non-actors; 2 excluded), from an estimated final sample of approximately 60 participants. The dataset allows for examining group differences in performance anxiety, spontaneity, and their psychological and neurophysiological correlates.

Conclusions. The study is expected to highlight the relationships between performance anxiety, acting expertise, spontaneity, and psychological indicators (PAQ, STAI-T, SSCS), supporting the development of an integrated framework of psychological and neurophysiological correlates.

Keywords: performance anxiety, spontaneity, actors, non-actors, psychological correlates, neurophysiological correlates, fMRI.

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The role of emotional regulation in the relationship between personality and risky driving behavior

Badea-Revici Dorina, Mihaela Rus

This study examines the role of emotion regulation in the relationship between personality traits and risky driving behavior, starting from the premise that individual predispositions manifest differently in traffic depending on the effectiveness of emotional regulation strategies. Previous research consistently indicates that neuroticism, extraversion, low agreeableness, and reduced conscientiousness are linked to an increased likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors, yet the psychological mechanisms underlying these associations remain insufficiently clarified.

The present research employs validated instruments – NEO PI-R, CERQ, and the DDDI – to investigate whether patterns of emotion regulation can account for variations in driving behavior. Both adaptive strategies, such as positive reappraisal and planning, and maladaptive strategies, such as rumination, catastrophizing, and self-blame, are considered.

Preliminary tendencies suggest that maladaptive strategies intensify the association between neuroticism and risky driving, whereas adaptive strategies may mitigate the impact of vulnerable personality predispositions. These emerging patterns highlight the central function of emotion regulation as a psychological mechanism shaping individual differences in road safety.

Overall, the study provides an integrated perspective on how personality and emotional processes interact to influence driving behavior, emphasizing the need for psychological interventions tailored to drivers' emotional and personality profiles in order to enhance road safety.

Keywords: personality, emotion regulation, neuroticism, risky driving, emotional strategies, road safety.

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From Simulator to the Road: A Systematic Review of Skill Transfer and Real-World Driving Performance

Nae Elena-Cristina

Introduction: Driving simulators have become essential tools in research, driver training, and clinical assessment, offering safe environments for learning and performance evaluation. Yet, the degree to which simulator-based performance and training generalize to real-world driving remains uncertain.

This systematic review synthesize empirical evidence on the transfer of training and performance from driving simulators to real-world driving contexts, examining both behavioral and safety outcomes.

Methods: Following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, a comprehensive literature search was conducted across PsycNet, ScienceDirect, PubMed, ProQuest, and arXiv (September-October 2025). Eligibility was defined by a PECO framework, requiring human participants and at least one verified real-world outcome (e.g., on-road tests, naturalistic driving, or crash records). Twenty-four studies met all inclusion criteria. Data were extracted systematically and synthesized narratively due to methodological heterogeneity.

Results: Convergent evidence indicates that simulator-based interventions can improve real-world driving performance, particularly in hazard anticipation, visual scanning, headway management, and speed regulation. Transfer effects were strongest in studies using high-fidelity simulators, structured feedback, and multi-session training, whereas minimal-exposure or unguided designs showed limited or inconsistent transfer. Predictive validity studies further demonstrated that simulator-derived metrics correlate with on-road evaluations and licensing outcomes.

Conclusions: Driving simulators represent ecologically valid environments for developing and assessing driving skills, provided that instructional design and fidelity are carefully optimized. While overall evidence supports positive transfer to real-world performance, further longitudinal and large-scale studies are needed to confirm the durability and safety implications of simulator-based learning.

Keywords: driving simulator, skill transfer, training effectiveness, ecological validity, hazard anticipation, driving performance, systematic review.

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Drug use experiences and their impact on the social reintegration of prisoners: A qualitative approach

Dina Maria - Miana, Rada Cornelia

Introduction. This qualitative study aimed to explore in depth the reasons, circumstances, and personal experiences of individuals deprived of liberty regarding drug use prior to incarceration. The analysis sought to highlight the impact of drug use on their life trajectories, as well as to identify the individual, social, and contextual factors that may influence the process of social reintegration.

Methods. The sample consisted of 50 individuals held in custody at Bucharest-Rahova Penitentiary. The study employed a phenomenological-narrative approach, based on semi-structured interviews, to capture the opinions, beliefs, and experiences of inmates regarding drug use, periods of abstinence, and the impact of these factors on their lives.

Results. The analysis revealed that drug use began between the ages of 16 and 25, predominantly in recreational and group settings. Marijuana showed the highest prevalence, followed by heroin and cocaine, with consumption periods ranging from 1 to 10 years. Reported effects ranged from relaxation to hallucinations and aggression. Participants emphasized both personal responsibility and the influence of peers and family. Family support and legal constraints were major factors in cessation, while rebuilding relationships and restoring health were perceived as difficult processes. The desire to strengthen family ties and continue education was identified as a central element of post-detention rebalancing.

Conclusions. The consumption trajectories analyzed indicate a dynamic interaction between vulnerability factors-such as early exposure, peer-group influences, and family dysfunctions prior to incarceration-and affective self-regulation processes, which were often deficient. Public policies should focus on integrated treatments that include medical, educational, and social interventions to support sustainable recovery. The study also highlights the need for early educational interventions to prevent drug use among adolescents.

Keywords: detention, drugs, recidivism, social reintegration.

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Building digital citizenship through healthy family habits

Tața Anitha-Teodora

Abstract: This paper aims to outline essential theoretical aspects regarding the importance of parental involvement in building a balanced relationship between children and digital technologies, which underpins the development of sustainable digital citizenship. Healthy digital habits are explored beyond the mere limitation of screen time, including key elements such as the quality of interactions, the establishment of rules and routines, active mediation, co-use, and parental modeling of digital behaviors. Based on these fundamental elements, parental strategies for the use of digital technologies within the family are proposed. In conclusion, the family plays a central role in fostering a healthy relationship with technology, supporting cognitive and socio-emotional development, and shaping responsible digital citizenship.

Keywords: healthy digital habits, digital diet, digital citizenship, parental strategiese

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Assessing career indecision: structural validity and invariance of the Career Factors Inventory in the Romanian context

Stoica Roxana Elena, Ana-Maria Cazan

Introduction. Vocational indecision is an important predictor of academic difficulties, decreased motivation, and university dropout intention. Given the lack of culturally validated instruments in Romania, the present study aims to examine the structural validity and invariance of the Career Factors Inventory (CFI) among Romanian university students, as well as the relevance of reincluding the Self-Esteem dimension-initially proposed by the authors but removed from the final version of the instrument.

Methods. The sample consisted of 1,151 students who completed the adapted Romanian version of the CFI, along with measures of academic motivation and dropout intention. Confirmatory factor analyses were conducted using Maximum Likelihood with Bollen–Stine bootstrapping, and multi-group tests were applied to evaluate invariance across gender and academic profile. Convergent and criterion validity were examined through correlations and linear regressions.

Results. The analyses confirmed a five-factor model-Self-Esteem, Career Choice Anxiety, Generalized Indecisiveness, Need for Career Information, and Need for Self-Knowledge-all demonstrating adequate internal consistency. The model showed scalar invariance across gender and academic profile. Convergently, high levels of self-esteem and low levels of anxiety and indecisiveness were associated with adaptive academic motivations. Additionally, self-esteem negatively predicted dropout intention, whereas need for information, anxiety, and indecisiveness positively predicted it.

Conclusions. The findings validate the five-factor structure of the CFI in the Romanian context and support the reintegration of Self-Esteem as a distinct component of vocational indecision. The instrument proves useful for assessing career decision-making difficulties and for the early detection of dropout risk, with direct applicability in university counseling services.

Keywords: vocational indecision; Career Factors Inventory; self-esteem; decision-making anxiety; academic motivation; dropout intention.

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Predictors of academic adjustment in first-year students in higher technical education first year in higher technical education

Biris Gabriela Monica, Ana-Maria Cazan

The study aims to highlight the relationship between motivation for choosing a college, automatic beliefs about oneself, and academic adjustment in the first year. We hypothesize that motivation for college choice/study field and personality factors, such as positive self-beliefs, predict academic adjustment.

The study design is cross-sectional, involving first-year students from a technical university covering various engineering disciplines. Motivation for college choice was measured using a questionnaire containing five scales: Career/Materialism, Personal and Intellectual Development, Humanitarian, Expectations, and Lack of Alternatives/Inertia and automatic beliefs questionnaire ATQ (Steve Hollon & Phillip Kendall, 1980) . Academic adjustment was assessed with the Academic Adjustment Inventory (Clinciu & Cazan, 2014). A factual questionnaire was also utilized to collect data on demographic aspects (gender, age), socio-economic factors (living conditions, income per family member, family background, parental education), and current academic context (faculty, tuition fee, etc.). Intent to drop out was measured using a five-item questionnaire.

Linear regression analysis revealed that motivation for college choice encompassing pragmatism/materialism, career, personal/professional development, humanitarian expectations, and lack of alternatives, along with the presence of positive self-beliefs, are significant and strong predictors of academic adjustment for first-year students in higher technical education.

The results have important theoretical and practical implications, as studies investigating the relationships between motivation for college choice, automatic self-beliefs, and dimensions of academic adjustment in a Romanian academic context expand upon previous work in the field. Practically, determining the predictive role of motivation for college choice and automatic self-beliefs on current academic adjustment and dropout intentions could lead to the development of a psycho-pedagogical optimization program for at-risk students, promoting successful transition and reducing dropout rates.

Keywords: academic adjustment, motivation for college choice, automatic beliefs about oneself.

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Conferința doctoranzilor, Ediția 1

ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ

Assessment of driving behavior in drivers: validation of a brief tool for identifying traffic risk

Simionca Ionel, Mihaela Rus

The study presents the validation process of the Traffic Behavior Index (Rus & Simionca, 2025), a short self-report instrument designed to assess functional and dysfunctional driving behaviors in relation to risk factors in traffic. The index includes 15 items rated on a five-point Likert scale, measuring key dimensions such as compliance with traffic rules, speed regulation, hazard anticipation, emotional control, and safety-oriented decision-making. The validation was conducted on a heterogeneous sample of drivers, aiming to examine the instrument's reliability, internal structure, and capacity to discriminate between adaptive and maladaptive traffic behaviors.

Psychometric analyses indicate good internal consistency and a coherent factorial structure aligned with core domains of safe driving behavior. The index effectively differentiates between three behavioral profiles: strongly dysfunctional behavior (50–75 points), moderately dysfunctional behavior (30–50 points), and functional, safety-oriented behavior (15–30 points). Convergent validity is supported by the association between higher scores and self-reported risky practices such as speeding, aggressive driving, and rule violations, while lower scores correlate with preventive strategies, compliance with legal speed limits, and careful monitoring of traffic conditions.

The Traffic Behavior Index offers a rapid, accessible, and efficient screening tool suitable for research, driver education programs, and psychological assessment in traffic safety interventions. Its brevity and clarity facilitate administration in both clinical and applied contexts, contributing to the identification of risk-prone drivers and the development of targeted prevention strategies.

Keywords: driving behavior, traffic safety, risk factors, psychometric validation, adaptive and maladaptive driving.

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Negative affectivity in young people – the impact of the family context

Cristian Constantin, Camelia Popa

The study examines negative affectivity and the contextual factors influencing it in a sample of 407 students from small urban and rural settings – 238 preadolescents and 169 adolescents. The findings highlight the high prevalence of emotional difficulties among young people, particularly in contexts marked by family violence, conflict, parental separation, material deprivation, or health-related problems. Intrafamilial violence and violence within the extended family emerge as the strongest predictors of negative affectivity, being reported by more than one-third of participants in both age groups.

Preadolescents reported positive emotions in a proportion of 57.5%, yet 40.7% indicated negative emotions such as fatigue, sadness, guilt, loneliness, and hopelessness. Adolescents exhibited a more vulnerable emotional profile, with 63.68% reporting negative emotions, predominantly stress, fear, sadness, and disappointment. In both groups, tense family situations, conflict, and material hardship are associated with heightened negative affectivity and a decrease in overall well-being.

Nevertheless, many young people display adaptive coping strategies, including the desire to change, to become more confident, calmer, more efficient, and more focused on achieving personal goals. Access to psychological counseling remains limited—only 23.94% of preadolescents and 30.79% of adolescents have spoken with a counselor or psychologist. Analysis of the “Depressed Little Man” drawings confirms their ability to recognize depressive symptoms (sad facial expression, hunched posture, isolation), indicating good awareness of their own affective states. The study underscores the need for psychological and educational interventions in vulnerable environments to reduce negative affectivity and support the emotional well-being of young people.

Keywords: negative affectivity, emotional vulnerability, family dysfunction, parent-child relationships, mental health.

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The Impact of Pediatric Neoplastic Disease on the Quality of Life of Children/Adolescents and Their Caregivers – Challenges and Coping Strategies

Elisabeta Niță, Camelia Popa

The study highlights the magnitude of emotional distress among adolescents with cancer, describing the substantial impact of anxiety, depression, stress, and anger on quality of life, social functioning, academic performance, and treatment adherence. Medical, psychological, familial, and contextual factors significantly influence the level of distress, and its consequences extend to identity development, body image, social relationships, and school adjustment. Psychosocial interventions and multidisciplinary support can reduce emotional symptoms, but their effectiveness depends on early identification and continuous monitoring of the patient's needs.

The most important conclusion of the study is the need for a brief oncologic distress scale validated for the Romanian population. In clinical practice, lengthy instruments are difficult to administer, and the pediatric oncology context requires rapid, repeated, and easily integrated assessments. Short scales and visual tools such as the Emotion Thermometers facilitate systematic screening, and the pilot study by Niță et al. (2025) shows that Romanian adolescents readily accept these tools and that they effectively detect changes in domains such as depression and anger, even over short time intervals.

Validating such a scale in the Romanian language is essential for standardizing distress assessment in pediatric oncology, informing clinical decision-making, integrating results into the "educational passport," and monitoring the effects of psychosocial interventions. Moreover, a validated scale supports the integration of Romanian centers into international multicenter studies, enabling data comparability and improving the quality of care provided to adolescents with cancer.

Keywords: oncologic distress, emotional vulnerability, psychosocial functioning, treatment adherence, standardized assessment.

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Personal values and work–life balance: a systematic review with narrative synthesis

Teodor Tăbuș, Mihaela Rus

Work-life balance (WLB) is an important aspect of employee well-being, yet individuals differ in how they manage the relationship between their professional and personal lives, leading to a range of tensions and undesirable effects. One possible explanation for these differences lies in personal values, particularly as described in Shalom Schwartz's theory of fundamental human values. This systematic review aims to synthesize empirical studies examining how Schwartz's values are related to work-life balance outcomes in adult employees.

In accordance with PRISMA 2020 and the APA Journal Article Reporting Standards (JARS) for research syntheses in psychology, this review analyzes quantitative studies published between 2000 and 2025 that use Schwartz-based value assessment instruments (e.g., PVQ, SVS) and include at least one indicator of work-life balance, such as work-family conflict, family-work conflict, work-family enrichment, or overall WLB. Given the expected heterogeneity in design and methods used, results will be integrated using narrative synthesis.

The analysis will identify the value profiles associated with higher or lower levels of conflict and greater or lesser enrichment between professional and personal life, explore possible cultural patterns across countries, and highlight gaps relevant to my doctoral project entitled "HEXACO personality traits, personal values, and work-life balance -life balance among Romanians in the country and in the diaspora (Germany, France, Great Britain): forgiveness as a value and psychological mechanism in organizational well-being and mental health."

Keywords: work-life balance, work-family conflict, work-life enrichment, personal values, Schwartz's theory of values.

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