



Habilitation thesis

Stress, trauma, and well-being

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The Habilitation Thesis entitled “*Stress, trauma, and well-being*” encompasses in a synthesized manner my scientific, academic and professional endeavors and achievements after obtaining the PhD degree (Summa cum Laude), in 2006 at the Department of Psychology, “Babeș-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, with the thesis entitled “*Posttraumatic growth and meaning making*”, under the scientific supervision of prof. univ. dr. Mircea MICLEA.

The Habilitation Thesis is structured in five major parts: (i) *Introduction* – where I have highlighted the ongoing and imperative need of scientific investigations in the domain of stress and well-being, (ii) *Scientific, professional and academic achievements* structured in 7 sub-chapters, (iii) *Plan of professional, scientific, and academic evolution*, (iv) *Selected References*, and (v) *Appendix*. Also, the thesis is constructed to illustrate:

1. the way in which my research interests and achievements are reflected in the scientific literature in the form of publications, conference and workshop presentations, endeavors to disseminate the scientifically sound information to the general public, and

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2. the way in which these achievements mold to the two major objectives of my teaching activities, i.e.: (i) to offer my students a highly informed content in line with the latest and most rigorous scientific information, and (ii) to translate this information in practice in order to enhance both the learning and teaching environment. More specifically, based on my investigations I would like to offer students tools through which they can consolidate an intra-personal environment in which they can attain high academic achievements and well-being. Thus, I could say that my research has a practical mirroring in my teaching in the scientist-practitioner fashion.

The **first, introductory part** of the thesis introduces the concepts of **stress, trauma and well-being**, highlighting its importance in a social context that is characterized by constant and rapid social changes (increasing economic uncertainty, changes in basic value-systems (moral values, guidelines for what means a well-lived life), changes in work-style (advantages and disadvantages of telework, the psychological costs of temporary employments), frequent relocations, weakening of real social bonds, pressure for excellence, constant competition, etc.). All these changes represent considerable challenge for most individuals, and require the constant need of adaptation to the newly formed life-conditions. Unfortunately, the number of persons who cannot adapt appropriately is increasing, mirrored by the constantly growing number of individuals suffering of psychological malfunctioning, which further emphasizes the need of more complex, multi-level, multi-method approaches of investigation.

The **second part** of the thesis presents in a systematic way my ***Scientific, professional and academic achievements*** structured in 7 sub-chapters:

- (1). **Stress-related reactions and underlying mechanisms in physically affected populations:** a subchapter that concentrates my investigations conducted in the domain of posttraumatic reactions in oncological patients, victims of flood, etc.; stress-reactions in cancer-patients, and stress-related reactions in cardio-vascular/high blood pressure patients, patients suffering of chronic renal failure, and psoriasis.
- (2) **Stress-related reactions, well-being and underlying mechanisms in physically healthy populations,** more specifically in: university students, employees, and children/adolescents.

(3) **Stress-related reactions and underlying mechanisms in physically healthy populations during and *immediately* after the COVID-19 Pandemic,**

(4) **Interventions targeting to ameliorate stress-related psychological malfunctioning:**

Expressive writing, CBT/REBT, computer-mediated therapy, and Interventions based on horticultural practices. This sub-chapter presents several of my frequently cited publications in this domain (e.g., David, Szentagotai, **Kállay**, Macavei, 2005).

(5) Research related to the investigation of the psychometric properties of certain psychological Instruments, which also contains references to another well-cited publication (**Kállay & Rus**, 2014) concerning the psychometric properties of the Psychological Well-being Scale on Romanian population.

In all the above presented five subchapters I presented my major publications as first and co-author in books (3 as first author and 3 as co-author) and book-chapters published at national and international publishing houses (7 book-chapters published at International Publishing Houses, out of which: 3 as first author and 4 as co-author, and 25 book-chapters published at National Printing Houses, out of which 18 as first author, and 7 as co-author), 72 research articles, out of which 20 ISI (10 as first author, and 10 as co-author) and 52 BDI+ (37 first author, and 15 as co-author). I also mentioned in this section significant international and national conference and workshop participations, awards, and research grants related to my research endeavors. In this part I also presented my previous collaborations with the University of Medicine and Pharmacy „Iuliu Hatieganu” (UMFIH), University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca (USAMV), Faculty of Letters, as well as my involvement in the **STAR Society** (Stress, Trauma, Anxiety, and Resilience Society), the international research team of **HBSC** (Health Behavior in School-Children), Hungarian Academy of Sciences (**MTA**).

(6) **Teaching activities:** in this section I presented the way in which my research and teaching intertwine at several crucial points, by briefly describing the courses I teach intra- and inter-institutionally (collaborations), awards that reflect the quality of my teaching, coordinating, training and mentoring activities.

(7) The section of academic activities presents the way in which I am involved in courses delivered for the perfecting the knowledge of teachers and educators at undergraduate levels (**MAGISTER** and **DIE** Programs), one of the coordinators of the scientific student circle **UniMIND** on the interdisciplinary investigation of the effect of psychedelic substances, at UBB,

BA and MA dissertation coordinator both at UBB and UMFIH. Another important dimension of my academic activity refers to my being the Editor in Chief of the *Cognition Brain Behavior. An Interdisciplinary Journal*, as Executive Manager of the „*Journal of Cognitive and Behavioral Psychotherapies*” (2004 – 2007), and Guest Editor at *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*. (Impact Factor: 3.2 (2022); **Special Issue: Special Issue: Life Skills and Emotional Competencies in Adolescence: What Is the Role of Educational Settings?**).

The **third part** of my Habilitation Thesis refers to my *Plans of professional, scientific and academic evolution*, which has as major purpose to enhance understanding and interventions for stress management and well-being across various populations. More specifically, I would like to:

- (i) investigate adolescents/emerging adults and physically ill groups, with an emphasis on stress induced by various **pressure** (media, parental, educational, societal) in the Romanian context, including cultural differences among Romanians, Hungarians, immigrants, etc.
- (ii) investigate major stress forms, endogenous and exogenous protective/risk factors, and the impact of societal changes on new generations' adaptive mechanisms.
- (iii) use in research combination of quantitative methods (e.g., stress measurement scales, cognitive and biological objective measures), qualitative methods (content, narrative, thematic analyses), and mixed methods (e.g., Q-sort), and employ Experience Sampling Method to collect real-time data on participants' experiences in their environment, aiming for better ecological validity and understanding of adaptation dynamics.
- (iv) engage in collaborations for comprehensive studies on stress-disease relationships in dental medicine, student mental health, and the psychological effects of digital device use (UMFIH, USAMV, etc.).
- (v) integrate research findings into teaching health psychology and patient communication, focusing on improving student well-being and academic performance.

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- (vi) continue my work to disseminate knowledge through radio programs by discussing stress-related topics with experts, and educating the public on healthy stress management.

Summary

As a corollary of my habilitation thesis and future directions I would like to emphasize the critical importance of researching stress factors and well-being, particularly in the context of modern life changes. Based on these precepts, I would like to focus my future research and professional endeavors in investigations that would target the following major points: (i) ***investigation of stress factors***: research into the causes and major manifestations of stress is crucial, especially considering the evolving nature of life conditions and the necessity for more effective mechanisms to maintain human functioning (nature of stressors), (ii) ***research investigating in-depth different facets of Well-being***: the need for research in both subjective and psychological well-being, especially in relation to new forms of stressors (i.e., increasing uncertainty; frequent major stressors: pandemic, war; social pressure). This is particularly pertinent in situations when stress becomes chronic or when numerous minor stress events accumulate, (iii) ***increase of the access to professional health resources***: the fact that only a small fraction of those negatively impacted by maladaptive stress reactions have access to necessary resources (like finance, proximity to healthcare, knowledge, etc.) for professional help is a key concern and requires investigations oriented to the development of cost-effective, individually tailored interventions and broad prevention strategies is seen as essential. These strategies should target various population segments including children, adolescents, adults, the elderly, employees, the unemployed, individuals with acute/chronic diseases, caregivers, etc., (iv) ***psycho-education*** regarding the development of protective factors: increased emphasis should be placed on the importance of psycho-education about healthy vs. maladaptive reactions and the development of protective factors like social-emotional competences and resilience, and (v) ***in-depth investigation in a multimethod approach of newly formed risk factors***: research should also focus on emerging risk factors, such as challenges posed by the rapid growth of technology and the human mind's struggle to keep pace with these changes.