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# TRIOGENESIS OF EXTREME HETERO-AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR IN PSYCHIATRIC FORENSIC EXPERT PRACTICE

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**ABSTRACT** — An individual's behavior can be defined as a set of complex reactions of the body to internal and external stimuli.

**CASE DESCRIPTION:** We present a case of a young adult student who, under the circumstances of an anomic environment, causes a female person multiple stab wounds to the cervical region. The patient has an addiction to virtual reality, personal psychiatric history of a depressive disorder, emotional and anxious behavioral disorders, as he was a regular cannabis user. The young man was attending an event where he was consuming alcohol and banned substances (Ecstasy), whose effect combined with antidepressants creates a virtual reality in which the individual has a particular mental state, having the impression that bystanders want to hurt him. Under the impulse of this state, the individual uses a bladed weapon and causes multiple wounds to the victim. The patient is examined in the psychiatric forensic examination commission to determine the discernment at the time of the act of violence and for recommendations regarding safety measures.

**CONCLUSION:** The approach of hetero-aggression behaviour is based on three categories of causal factors, in a triune concept that implies the consequence of the interaction of the existential environment, with the personality structure of the young individual and with the circumstantial factors that precipitate the act.

**KEYWORDS** — hetero-aggressive behaviour, depressive disorder, psychoactive substances, virtual reality addiction.

## INTRODUCTION

Hetero-aggressiveness, defined as a set of complex reactions of the body towards internal and external stimuli, reactions driven and organized by innate or gained reflexes, which guide the adaptation and integration of the subject in environmental relations ensuring its existential continuity (Ciubara et al., 2015; Scripcaru & Astarastoae, 2003; Radulescu et al., 2020). Innate behavior is registered in the genome and ensures

adaptation to a stable environment (Scripcaru & Astarastoae, 2003, pp. 60–76). This type of behavior becomes deficient to an unstable environment, when the innate potential is influenced by external factors that disrupt the integrity of the personality.

In specialized literature (Cogian & Karner Huțuleac, 2020; Coppola et al., 2020; Damian et al., 2020; Rodideal, 2018), the aspects regarding triggers of hetero-aggressiveness were frequently analyzed separately, the particularity of our case being given by the coexistence of the three factors: depression, gaming addiction and psychoactive substances.

## CASE DESCRIPTION

20-year-old male patient, student, unmarried, belonging to a single-parent family, with a personal psychiatric history of one psychiatric examination performed 4 months before the crime, in the specialized ambulatory medical care, after which he got an antidepressants and anxiolytics treatment. He has also been investigated in the past for cardiac arrhythmias and anxiety disorders. The patient stated that he went for psychological counseling for both depressive episodes and behavioral and emotional disorders, which occurred during childhood and adolescence. Personal history of occasional consumption of multiple psychoactive substances, with chaotic consumption patterns, for experimental testing purposes. Average history of cannabis use, with a significant period of compulsive use, with a nearly daily frequency.

Brief history of the crime following the judicial investigation: “on day X, in his home in the city of Y, he consumed alcoholic beverages and drugs with other people. He stabbed the victim with a knife in the neck area, causing multiple stab wounds with interest in the pectoral muscles and latimus with a juxta-tracheal trajectory”.

The patient underwent a psychiatric forensic examination, which shows that the patient has an average level of intelligence, oriented to time and place, attention and memory within normal range, normal flow of ideas, coherent, without abnormalities of thought and form content; without productive perception disorders at the time of the examination, emotionally unstable and impulsive. The psychological examination records, after the investigation of the subject with

the Questionnaire of Psychoneurotic Tendencies Risk: self-censorship effort, adaptation difficulties, indeterminacy, indecision, insecurity, with an explosive spirit and hasty reactions; old or recent emotional conflicts (due to family climate); recent accentuated depressive tendencies; the desire to do good, to straighten out due to a sense of guilt. The psychoanalytical test (Szondi Test) highlights that the subject is afraid of not being believed of being capable of some things, he lives in fear of what people would say when they find out about his act of violence. Regarding the crime, he stated that after consuming alcohol, antidepressants and Ecstasy he had a particular mental state, "I was feeling like I was in virtual reality and I had the impression that those around me wanted to kill me, my girlfriend was holding the phone to her ear and I thought she wanted to kill me and then I hit her, then I ran down the street and called the police."

The conclusions of the psychiatric forensic expertise report are the following: the said N, presented behavioral manifestations of acute psychotic disorder with hallucinatory-delusional character, with multifactorial etiopathogenesis. In relation to the act for which he is investigated, he presented diminished discernment and medical safety measures were recommended pursuant to Art. 109 CP.

## DISCUSSION

We approach the case in a triune way, performing a comparative analysis with works from specialized literature. Next, I will present the three factors, depression, video games and psychoactive substances, individually. I must specify that I will not enlarge upon the topic of depression, as it is a well-known and studied pathology.

The World Health Organization defines depression as a common pathology that causes sadness and lack of interest; It affects about 350 million people worldwide, and the most severe forms can lead to suicide (Dias et al., 2018). Over the past decade, depression has, in many cases, been associated with Internet gambling disorder (IGD), but its epidemiological impact has not yet been systematically assessed (Ostinelli et al., 2021).

**Video games** — their popularity has grown heavily in the last decade. About half of America's population plays video games, and 10% of them consider themselves as *gamers*, meaning their daily activity is consistently marked by these games (DeCamp, 2017). A study of the positive effects of video games (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2010) reveals their positive characteristics such as the reduction of *flashbacks* in a post-traumatic syndrome, the reduction of chronic pain and even the formation and development of pro-

fessional skills (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2010). At the same time, the excess of video games can raise many problems. A 3-year study ran on teenagers in Sweden reveals that gaming problems are relatively consistent over a longer period of time (Vadlin et al., 2018). Many studies have shown that the characters chosen from video games are reflected over time on the real personality of the players, especially in adolescents. For example, RPG (role-playing games) whose character is violent, can develop a violent personality in real life (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013). Another Norwegian study on adolescents has shown that video game addiction is frequently associated with personality disorders, depression and relationship disorders (Quwaider et al., 2019). All these personality changes and subsequent degrading disorders are due to the fact that adolescents have not developed a permanent character yet (Ciobotea et al., 2016; Luca et al., 2020).

People's motivation to use video games includes a variety of explanations. Snodgrass conducted a qualitative study in which he discovered that excessive video games are a way of combatting everyday stress (Snodgrass et al., 2014). Precisely for this reason, many teenagers and young adults take refuge in this virtual reality, where the comfort zone is present, they can control their actions and no longer feel the pressure of the daily goals of real life. Another study conducted by Shi in 2019 on 16 people, 11 males and 5 females, reveals that the time spent per week falls within a range of 10-36 hours. Participants said that video games are significant and that they have an important place in their lives from a social point of view. For example, they make new friends, discuss various topics, and some of them want to work in the video game industry in the future, spending a lot of time thinking about how they could turn passion into a source of income (Shi et al., 2019).

Therefore, video games are located at two opposite poles, one that is associated with depression, isolation from the real world and one that combines passion, joy and future perspectives.

**Psychotropic substances.** Addiction is characterized by compulsive, uncontrolled behavior, exemplified by drug use, despite their side-effects, under the influence of genetic or environmental factors (Ciubara et al., 2016; Quwaider et al., 2019). Drug addiction has euphoric forms (opium, cocaine, heroin), fantasy (cannabis), drunkenness (alcohol) and excitants (coffee) (Chirita et al., 2012; Scripcaru & Astarastoe, 2003). Adolescents and young adults are more prone to changes in the neurotransmitter and hormonal system, following the use of alcohol or drugs, due to the immaturity of neuronal cells, which are more vulnerable to exposure to these substances (Winters

et al., 2012). Also, the uneven maturation of brain structures, for example the limbic system (region that involves emotions and behavioral rewards), develops faster than the cerebral cortex (the region that mainly deals with reasoning) which otherwise contributes to increased feelings of assumption (Steinberg, 2004; Zabetian, 2015), playing a role at the moment before an act, by creating a false impression of entertainment or even danger.

Scripcaru and Astarastoea (2003) concluded that the individual is naturally born neither good, nor bad, but with aggressive impulses that are counter-annihilated through culture and education. Depression issued on the background of coming from a single-parent family, isolation in virtual reality and the need for post-consumption endorphins of psychotropic substances, materialized hetero-aggression in the presented case.

Depression, depicting the basic pathology in this case, may explain some actions which aim to minimize symptoms, such as the consumption of psychotropic substances, which through their action on the central nervous system, create euphoric states. In an anomic society, psychotropic substances become a pseudo-necessity that is imposed as the main factor of resorting to the act, by forming a personality characterized by irritability, impulsivity. In conclusion, the three categories of causal factors focused on a triune concept reveal that deviance, and implicitly, delinquency are the consequence of the interaction between the existential environment of the individual in which the personality was shaped and the circumstantial factors that preceded the resorting to the act.

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