THE INFLUENCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS ON THE RISK OF TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS CAUSED BY USING MOBILE PHONES WHILE DRIVING[*]

Hajdana GLOMAZIĆ, PhD[*]
Andrijana MIKIĆ, MA[*]

In this study, we looked at the relationship between psychological traits including stress, anxiety, and depression and the probability of car accidents brought on by using mobile phones while driving. The purpose of the study is to ascertain whether there is a statistically significant relationship between these psychological characteristics and the likelihood of traffic accidents brought on by using a mobile device while driving. A total of 1550 people made up the sample of respondents, some of them experienced traffic accidents brought on by the usage of mobile phones while others did not. The results showed that stress is a statistically significant predictor of traffic accidents. The likelihood that a driver will cause a traffic collision rises as stress levels rise, but the likelihood falls as respondents age and gain more driving experience. The study also revealed that respondents who caused traffic accidents while using a mobile phone were, on average, younger, used medicine more frequently, had less experience behind the wheel, and used the mobile phones more frequently overall than respondents who did not cause accidents. The findings show how important psychological aspects are in determining the likelihood of traffic accidents brought on by using a mobile phone while driving.

KEY WORDS: stress / anxiety / depression / traffic accidents / mobile phones

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[*] Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research, Belgrade, hajdana.ng@gmail.com, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5716-1054
[*] College of Social Work, Belgrade, andrijana.mikic@asp.edu.rs

INTRODUCTION

One of the reasons for traffic accidents is using a cell phone while driving. Despite the numerous legal restrictions against using a mobile device while driving, many drivers continue to be oblivious of the risks associated with this behaviour. The article will examine how psychological elements, such as depression, anxiety, and stress, are associated to the likelihood of accidents caused by using mobile phones while driving in order to better understand the psychological nature of this activity.

Expectations, beliefs, and psychological states often play a significant part in shaping a person's conduct. Therefore, drivers' risk assessments may be skewed when they experience stress, anxiety, or depression. This may result in careless driving practices, such as using a phone while driving. Additionally, sustained exposure to stress may impair attention, which raises the danger of traffic accidents.

The relationship between psychological characteristics such as stress, anxiety, and depression and the usage of mobile phones while driving is the focus of the research in this paper.

The goal of the study is to ascertain whether psychological elements such as stress, anxiety, and depression are statistically significant predictors of the likelihood of traffic accidents brought on by using a mobile phone while driving.

In our study, a "traffic accident" is defined as an incident involving at least one car, one or more people were hurt, and there was property damage. It can also refer to an incident that originated in a site that is open to traffic (Lipovac, Jovanović & Nešić, 2019). We refer to the unsafe usage of mobile phones while driving as the use of mobile phones without Bluetooth.

Depression is a psychological condition marked by depressed moods, loss of interest and enjoyment, less energy, and disturbances to eating and sleep (Alonso et al. & WHO, 2018); Anxiety is a condition of worry, fear, and restlessness that can be brought on by various circumstances and frequently results in physical symptoms including sweating, shaking, and racing heart (Alonso et al. & WHO, 2018); and by "stress" we mean the body's physical and mental response to external pressures or challenges, which can cause emotional and physical diseases and symptoms (Simmons, Winsky, Zehr & Gordon, 2021).

The presence of a traffic accident brought on by the usage of a mobile phone while driving is the dependent variable in the study. Stress, anxiety, and other psychological problems are the independent variable. Gender, age, education, self-report of health status, years of driving experience, involvement in a prior traffic accident, use of medication, and frequency of using a mobile phone while operating a motor vehicle—including receiving calls, making calls, writing messages, and reading messages—were also used as control variables in the study.

We begin with the general hypothesis that psychological characteristics such as stress, anxiety, and depression are predictors of traffic accidents brought on by using a phone while driving.

A special hypothesis is that a higher level of stress increases the risk of traffic accidents caused by the use of mobile phones while driving.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK - PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS AND BEHAVIOR IN TRAFFIC

The use of mobile technologies has significantly increased during the past several years. Mobile phone use while driving has emerged as a unique issue, particularly among young people. Young drivers are especially at danger while using cell phones while driving due to inexperience and other factors, and this poses a serious risk to public safety. Some studies have shown that the use of mobile phones while driving is one of the main causes of fatal accidents (Hudecek et al., 2023). Two studies (Kuss et al., 2018; Bucsuházy et al., 2019) have explored the psychological factors that contribute to this problem and proposed strategies to prevent this risky behaviour.

Stress was a strong predictor of compulsive mobile phone use, according to Kuss et al.'s (2018) research. In contrast to expectations, it was discovered that depression and anxiety were not significant predictors of problematic cell phone use. A link between age group and anxiety was discovered as an indirect effect. Additionally, it was determined that different generations use mobile devices differently. So, for the younger generation, social networks and anxiety turned out to be important predictors.

On the other hand, Bucsuházy et al. (2019) discovered that age showed a significant association with mobile phone use while driving, while aggressiveness and inattention were predictors of more frequent use of a phone while driving. The authors also include sensation seeking, self-efficacy, and risk perception as contributing reasons to this behaviour.

Other studies (Hudecek et al., 2023; Cazzulino et al., 2014) have confirmed the prevalence of mobile phone use while driving among young drivers as well as the psychological factors (such as the fear of missing out, the "dark triad traits," and risk perception) that contribute to this behaviour. Additionally, these studies have demonstrated that psychological factors frequently play a significant role in determining young drivers' propensity to use mobile phones and drive.

It should be mentioned that these findings have some limitations even though they are crucial for understanding the connection between psychological elements like stress, anxiety, and the use of mobile phones while driving. In particular, because a sample of young drivers was included in the study, the findings cannot be applied to the total driving population. Also, the studies mainly focused on using mobile devices

while driving, leaving out substances like alcohol and medicine that can increase the risk of traffic accidents.

The use of mobile phones while driving can also be explained by bad habits. Habits are established, in accordance with habit theory (Lally et al., 2010), when a particular activity is repeated under circumstances that are similar. As a result, conduct becomes automated, requiring less thought, and, in the worst-case scenario, results in reckless behaviour. Learning linkages between a certain environmental stimulus and a response to that stimulus leads to the development of habits. Once a behaviour becomes habitual, it is carried out automatically and subconsciously.

Even when a person is aware that using a cell phone while driving is dangerous, it can nevertheless become a habit that is difficult to break (Lally et al., 2010). Drivers who routinely use their cell phones while driving may discover that the behaviour becomes automatic and ingrained in their routine, which can make it much harder for them to see potential hazards on the road and pay attention for long periods of time. Accident and traffic accident risk is increased as a result of this.

Breaking the links between external factors and behaviour is required to lower the likelihood of road accidents, which calls for awareness and effort. This might be accomplished by altering the surroundings or forming new routines.

On the other side, there is an additional explanation for unsafe traffic conduct. According to self-determination theory, people require a sense of freedom and control over their lives (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Stressful circumstances, however, can undermine this sense of control, which might result in reckless behaviour. This could have implications for the usage of mobile phones while driving since persons who are anxious, stressed out, or depressed may have a stronger urge to connect with others and may use their phones more frequently to feel more connected.

According to stress theory, when drivers are under stress from traffic, they may turn to their cell phones as a way to regulate their emotions. For instance, environmental stressors like demanding work environments may lead to cell phone use while driving (Ching-Fu Chen, 2023). One of the most well-known and extensively studied psychological theories, stress theory explains how people respond to stressful events and what occurs in the body at those moments (Selye, 1956). This theory is frequently used in studies on traffic behaviour.

However, this theory also suggests that using a phone while driving can make you more stressed. Drivers who use their phones may therefore feel unqualified (Ching-Fu Chen, 2023). Additionally, using a phone while driving diverts the focus and concentration that drivers should be putting into driving, raising the risk of collisions (Bucsuházy et al., 2019).

It is clear from these studies and hypotheses that using a phone while driving is a complex behaviour brought on by a variety of reasons, including psychological ones. Further study is required to better understand the psychological factors that influence

this behaviour and to develop successful methods of preventing the use of mobile phones while driving, given the high rate of traffic accidents caused by such behaviour.

2. METHODOLOGY

Sample: In the study, a random sample of 1552 participants was employed; 40.6% of that is made up of women. The respondents' average age is 41.0 (SD: 11.3). The respondents are of legal age and are licensed drivers. One part of the sample included drivers who had traffic accidents, while the other was composed of drivers who had no accidents.

Data collection instruments: The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21: Lovibond& Lovibond, 1995) was used to assess the mental health of the adult population in Serbia.

Data collection procedure: The study was conducted via Online Panel, where the participants anonymously filled out a questionnaire over a period of thirty days (14.03.2023 – 14.4.2023, 2023).

Statistical techniques:

Frequencies and percentages were calculated for sociodemographic variables. The normality of the distribution of numerical variables was examined by the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, and Skewness and Kurtosis were also presented. Cronbach's alpha was used to examine the internal consistency. As a descriptive indicator, Mean ± Standard Deviation (SD) was reported. Statistical analysis in the study included the analysis of the respondent's differences (Chi-square test, t-test). All tests set at significance level p <0.05. Logistic regression modelling (Odds Ratio – OR, and 95% Confidence Interval – CI) was used to identify a significant multivariate association between the outcome variable (traffic accidents caused by the use of mobile phones while driving: yes vs. no) and explanatory variables. All analysis was performed with IBM SPSS ver. 25.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

The overall traits of the respondents from the sample are shown in Table No. 1.

The study included N=1552 respondents with an average age of 41.0 (SD=11.3), 40.6% of whom were female. Six percent of the total number of respondents were responsible for traffic accidents brought on by cell phone use. The majority (75.0%) have a high school diploma. Self-reported health status is rated at 3.7 (SD=2.2) on a 5-Point Likert Scale, while 7.6% of respondents report using medicine. Younger respondents (38.4 [SD=9.6]) on average cause traffic accidents involving the use of mobile phones than older respondents (43.2 [SD=8.7]), with a p-value of 0.034. and subsequently cause an accident use medicine more frequently (9.7%) than other respondents (7.5%).

Table 1. General characteristics of the respondents

General characteristics of the respondents	Traffic accidents caused by the use of mobile phones while driving			Test
	[ALL] N=1552	Yes N=93	No N=1459	p
Gender:				0.186[a]
Male	921 (59.3%)	72 (77.4%)	849 (58.2%)	
Female	631 (40.6%)	21 (22.6%)	610 (41.8%)	
Age (years), Mean ± Std. Deviation (Min-Max)	41.0±11.3 (19-69)	38.4±9.6 (29-62)	43.2±8.7 (19-69)	0.034[b]
Education (years)				0.212[a]
≤ 8	141 (9.1%)	8 (8.6%)	133 (9.1%)	
8 – 12	1164 (75.0%)	71 (76.3%)	1093 (74.9%)	
≥12	247 (15.9%)	14 (15.1%)	233 (16.0%)	
Assessment of health status, Mean ± Std. Deviation (Min-Max)	3.7±2.2 (1-5)	3.4±1.3 (1-5)	2.6±2.0 (1-5)	0.067[b]
Use of medicines:				<0.00[a]
Yes	118 (7.6%)	9 (9.7%)	109 (7.5%)	
No	1434 (92.4%)	84 (90.3%)	1350 (92.5%)	

[a] Chi-square test. [b] T test.

The findings on respondents' behaviour in traffic are shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Behaviour in traffic

Behaviour in traffic	Traffic accidents caused by the use of mobile phones while driving			Test
	[ALL] N=1552	Yes N=93	No N=1459	p
Years of driving experience, Mean ± Std. Deviation (Min-Max)	15.3±11.4 (1- 44)	13.6±6.5 (1-28)	16.2±7.4 (7- 44)	<0.00[b]
Prior involvement in a traffic accident:				0.552[a]
Yes	512 (33.0%)	29 (31.3%)	483 (33.1%)	
No	1040 (67.0%)	64 (68.7%)	976 (66.9%)	
Using mobile phones while driving:				
Receiving calls while driving, Mean ± Std. Deviation (Min-Max)	3.2±1.6 (1-5)	3.9±2.4 (1-5)	2.8±1.1 (1-5)	<0.001[b]
Making calls while driving, Mean ± Std. Deviation (Min-Max)	2.6±1.8 (1-5)	3.3±1.2 (1-5)	2.1±2.0 (1-5)	<0.001[b]
Texting while driving, Mean ± Std. Deviation (Min-Max)	2.4±1.7 (1-5)	2.9±1.8 (1-5)	2.3±1.2 (1-5)	<0.001[b]
Reading messages while driving, Mean ± Std. Deviation (Min-Max)	3.6±2.3 (1-5)	4.3±3.7 (1-5)	3.2±2.8 (1-5)	<0.001[b]
Using mobile phones while driving, Total Score, Mean ± Std. Deviation (Min-Max)	2.9±2.1 (1-5)	3.7±2.6 (1-5)	2.4±2.1 (1-5)	<0.001[b]

[a] Chi-square test. [b] T test.

The average length of driving experience for those who caused an accident while texting or talking on their phones was 13.6 (SD=6.5). When compared to the first category, drivers who have not been in a traffic accident have a longer driving experience, that is, 16.2 (SD=7.43). A total of 33.0% of all respondents have a history of participating in traffic accidents. The frequency of using a cell phone while operating a vehicle was evaluated by respondents on a five-point scale (1 = never, 2 = extremely rarely, 3 = occasionally, 4 = frequently, and 5 = very frequently). The composite score indicates the overall frequency of mobile phone use while driving. Drivers who have caused a traffic accident while using a mobile phone use them more frequently overall. Frequent use of mobile phones was recorded among these respondents (3.7 [SD=2.6]), while those who did not commit a traffic violation using a mobile phone on average rarely use it while driving (2.47 [SD=2.1]), p<0.001. The data are shown in Table 2.

We presented the descriptive statistics for the stress, anxiety, and depression scales in table number 3

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21)

DASS-21 domains	Min–Max	Me	IQR	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	K-S	α
Stress	0 - 21	8.00	6.00	8.1	2.6	0.462	-2.611	0.962**	0.821
≠Yes				9.2	2.7				
□No				7.4	3.1				
P				<0.001					
Anxiety	0 - 21	4.00	6.00	4.9	2.3	0.978	0.502	0.905**	0.803
≠Yes				5.3	1.8				
□No				4.7	2.4				
P				0.043					
Depression	0 - 21	3.00	5.00	4.4	3.1	1.432	2.326	0.867**	0.798
≠Yes				4.8	3.6				
□No				3.7	3.0				
p				0.031					

Note. **p < .01. Me = Median. IQR = Inter-quartile range. M = Mean. SD = Std. Deviation. K-S = Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. α = Cronbach's alpha.
≠Yes=traffic accidents caused by the use of mobile phones while driving, □No=no traffic accidents caused by the use of mobile phones while driving.

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics for all measures, as well as Shapiro-Wilk test and Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The depression, anxiety and stress scale (DASS-21) was used to assess the mental health of the adult population in Serbia. In this study, the reliability of the stress, anxiety and depression subscales was 0.821, 0.803, and 0.798, respectively. The respondents' average attained score on the subscales of stress is (8.1 [SD=2.6]; anxiety is (4.9 [SD=2.3]); and depression is (4.4 [SD=3.1]).

Table 4. Psychological factors and general characteristics as determinants of traffic accidents caused by the use of mobile phones while driving

	Traffic accidents caused by the use of mobile phones while driving (yes=1, no=0)	
	Mental Health Model	Full model
	Odds Ratio (95% Confidence Interval)	Odds Ratio (95% Confidence Interval)
Stress (continuous)	1.136 (1.048-1.231) **	2.282 (0.495-1.231) **
Anxiety (continuous)	0.974 (0.918-1.034)	0.831 (0.801-1.055)
Depression (continuous)	0.935 (0.874-1.002)	0.904 (0.881-1.213)
Gender:		
Male		1.633 (0.891 – 2.993)
Female		reference
Age, years (continuous)		0.641 (0.417-0.985) *
Education:		
≤ 8		reference
8 – 12		1.281 (0.624 – 2.629)
≥12		0.865 (0.390 – 1.916)
Assessment of health status (continuous)		0.790 (0.577 - 1.082)
Use of medicines:		
Yes		1.012 (0.259-4.001)
No		reference
Years of driving experience (continuous)		0.760 (0.573-1.007)*
Prior involvement in a traffic accident:		
Yes		0.912 (0.509 – 1.634)
No		reference

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.
Note: Multivariate logistic regression analysis was performed. Reference category = 0.

The multivariate logistic regression models are shown in Table 4 with the presence of a traffic accident brought on by using a phone while driving serving as the dependent variable. In the Mental Health Model, stress is a statistically significant predictor of traffic accidents (OR= 1.136; 95% CI: 1.048-1.231; p < 0.01). In addition to stress, anxiety and depression, the full model also includes general data on the respondents, as well as data on behaviour in traffic. In this model, stress (OR= 2.282; 95% CI: 0.495-1.231; p < 0.01), age (OR= 0.641; 95% CI: 0.417-0.985; p < 0.05) and length of driving experience (OR= 0.760; 95% CI: 0.573-1.007; p < 0.05) were shown to be statistically significant predictors of traffic accidents caused by the use of mobile

phones. In conclusion, the likelihood that a driver will cause a traffic accident rises as stress levels rise, whereas the likelihood declines as respondents get older and accumulate more driving experience.

4. DISCUSSION

In this study, we looked at how using a mobile phone affects traffic accidents as well as how psychological characteristics like depression, anxiety, and stress affect the likelihood of these mishaps.

According to the findings, stress, age, and the amount of driving experience a person has are statistically significant predictors of traffic accidents (Przybylski, Weinstein, & Ryan, 2012; Sheldon & Kasser, 2008). The likelihood that a driver will cause a traffic collision rises as stress levels rise, but the likelihood falls as respondents age and gain more driving experience. However, there is no connection between the risk of traffic accidents brought on by using a phone while driving and depression or anxiety. Although the literature (Bener, Štetić and Vukelić, 2017, 2017) suggests a link between these two psychological factors and the risky use of a mobile device while driving, we were unable to determine this connection to be statistically significant in our study. It's likely that the subject's personal appraisal of their own health was somewhat more positive than the actual status.

However, the DASS-21 analysis revealed that respondents who caused traffic accidents while using a mobile phone had higher scores on anxiety and depression than those who did not. According to our general hypothesis, we may state that psychological elements (depression, anxiety, and stress) are related to the probability of traffic accidents brought on by using a phone while driving. However, only stress emerged as a significant predictor, while depression and anxiety did not. The results confirmed our hypotheses.

According to the study, younger respondents had traffic accidents due to the usage of mobile phones on average more frequently than respondents who did not experience traffic incidents. Therefore, younger generations who "grow up" with mobile phones and are accustomed to using them in everyday situations exhibit this type of behaviour in traffic as well. This is consistent with the habit theory (Lally et al., 2010), as younger people have developed potentially addictive routines with regard to mobile devices. The discovery that respondents who use mobile phones and subsequently cause an accident in driving take medicine more frequently than other respondents is noteworthy. As the subject of this research was not behaviour related to the use of medicine, we did not obtain more in-depth information. It is advised to investigate this question using additional, detailed, and more in-depth investigations on this occurrence.

The results also showed that drivers who have not had a traffic accident have a longer driving experience compared to drivers who have had a traffic accident.

Experience clearly matters in traffic behaviour. All modalities of using mobile phones are more frequent among drivers who caused a traffic accident using this device. In contrast to individuals who did not use a mobile phone to cause a traffic accident, these respondents reported using their phones frequently while driving. This has also been proven in some earlier studies (Bener, Štetić and Vukelić, 2017).

CONCLUSION

The study we conducted made clear how crucial it is to comprehend psychological aspects of driving, particularly in light of mobile phone use. Our findings indicate a connection between the probability of traffic accidents and the usage of mobile phones while driving as well as psychological elements including stress, depression, and anxiety.

This paper emphasizes the significance of being aware of the risks associated with using a phone while driving and the necessity of taking precautions to lower the likelihood of traffic accidents. Further research is required in order to identify the precise mechanisms causing this impact and develop strategies to reduce road traffic risk.

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Dr Hajdana GLOMAZIĆ
Institut za kriminološka i sociološka istraživanja, Beograd

MA Andrijana MIKIĆ
Visoka škola socijalnog rada, Beograd

UTICAJ PSIHOLOŠKIH FAKTORA NA RIZIK OD SAOBRAĆAJNIH NEZGODA UZROKOVANIH KORIŠĆENJEM MOBILNIH TELEFONA U VOŽNJI

U ovom istraživanju ispitivali smo povezanost psiholoških faktora (depresija, anksioznost i stres) sa rizikom od saobraćajnih nezgoda uzrokovanih korišćenjem mobilnih telefona u vožnji. Cilj istraživanja je da se utvrdi da li postoji statistički značajana povezanost ovih psiholoških faktora, i rizika od saobraćajnih nezgoda koje su uzrokovane korišćenjem mobilnih telefona u vožnji. Uzorak ispitanika sastojao se od 1550 osoba, od kojih su neki pretrpeli saobraćajne nezgode usled korišćenja mobilnog telefona, dok drugi nisu imali ovakve incidente. Rezultati su pokazali da je stres statistički značajan prediktor saobraćajnih nezgoda. Sa povećanjem stresa raste verovatnoća da vozač izazove saobraćajnu nezgodu, dok verovatnoća pada što je ispitanik stariji i što je duži vozački staž iza njega. Takođe, istraživanje je pokazalo da su ispitanici koji su izazvali saobraćajne nezgode usled korišćenja mobilnog telefona bili mlađi u proseku, koristili su lekove češće, imali su kraći vozački staž i češće koristili sve modalitete korišćenja mobilnog telefona tokom vožnje u poređenju sa onima koji nisu izazvali saobraćajnu nezgodu koristeći ovaj uređaj. Rezultati ukazuju na važnost psiholoških faktora u riziku od saobraćajnih nezgoda uzrokovanih korišćenjem mobilnih telefona u vožnji.

KLJUČNE REČI: stres / anksioznost / depresija / saobraćajne nezgode / mobilni telefoni