SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE OBSTACLES, AND EXPERIENCING ACTION CRISIS IN GOAL PURSUIT

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Abstract:

Background: For human beings, it is natural to set goals and work on their achievements. The process of creating, pursuing, and achieving goals in the form of self-regulation is an essential part of an individual's life, as it helps them to create and subsequently implement their life plan. However, even with individually set goals, one does not always achieve them, and some goals can turn out to be unattainable. Personal goals can therefore be a source of stress, especially if the person encounters serious obstacles or experiences major setbacks. The presence of obstacles makes it difficult to pursue the goal. Such obstacles are a natural part of the goal process, which can prevent one from fulfilling their intentions. There are several classifications of obstacles, based on hedonic (Shah & Kruglanski, 2008), time perspective (Leduc-Cummings et al., 2017), effect (Marguc et al., 2011) and the most common division based on subjectivity/objectivity (Marguc et al., 2011; Milyavskaya et al., 2015). When people confront obstacles in goal striving, action crises come into question (Ghassemi et al., 2017). A crisis occurs in a number of ways: when an individual experiences repeated failures or an increasing number of obstacles in achieving the goal; when they encounter situations in goal progress that they cannot solve; when they experience a conflict between whether to stay on the road to the goal or to give up the goal; and when they are constantly returning in their thoughts to how they failed to achieve the goal (Brandstätter & Schüler, 2013). It is surprising that we found only a small number of research findings that addressed the issue of the relationship between obstacles and action crisis, and no results about the relationship between obstacle characteristics and action crisis. Kreibich et al. (2020) found that participants with a higher tendency to identify obstacles regarding their personal goals reported higher action crises. Additionally, participants with higher action crisis reported more obstacles. Marion-Jetten et al. (2021) suggest that several obstacles can arise during an action crisis.

Aim: The main goal of the current research was to clarify the relationship between experiencing action crisis and the type of obstacle (subjective/ objective), to explain the connection between action crisis and selected obstacle characteristics as perceived frequency and intensity. An additional goal was to categorize obstacles according to content, based on the criterion of subjectivity and objectivity.

Method: The study was conducted on a sample of 542 young adults aged from 18 to 34 years (M_age = 22.2; SD = 1.96). The sample consisted of 73.25 % females (N = 379) and of 26.75% males (N = 145). Convenience and purposive sampling methods have been used. Socio-demographic data (gender, age, field of study, year, employment / student status), an open-ended question addressing the specific obstacles that respondents face or
expect to face in pursuing the specific goal they have set, perceived frequency and intensity of the obstacle measured on a 5-point Likert scale and Action Crisis Scale (ACRISS; Brandstätter & Schüler, 2013; Kačmár et al., 2021) were administered. ACRISS is represented by six items, each item rated on a scale ranging from 1 (no agreement) to 5 (very much agreement). All items reflect an internal decisional conflict between disengagement and further pursuit of a personal goal; specifically doubts, recurrent setbacks, implemental disorientation, ruminating, disengagement impulses and procrastinating. The internal reliability of the scale was acceptable (α = 0.623). The data were obtained in several partial studies, which concerned the setting of goals and the occurrence of obstacles in various areas of human life - weight loss, education, any personal goal, or one that the respondent wants to achieve by a certain age. T-test for independent samples, One-way ANOVA, Games-Howell post hoc test Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple linear regression were used. The statements of the respondents were analysed by content analysis (Miovský, 2006).

Results: Content analysis of obstacles based on the criterion of subjectivity and objectivity was conducted. Among the subjective obstacles, the most represented were those related to the current physical and mental condition (33.9%), then low self-control (29.5%), personality factors (21.4%) and the competitive goal (15.2%). For objective obstacles, the most represented were those of a situational nature (36.6%), resources (24.4%), and physical (8.9%). Overall, subjective obstacles accounted for 47.7% of all obstacles and objectives for 52.3%. There were no significant differences in the level of action crisis in the occurrence of subjective and objective obstacles in achieving the goal, although descriptive indicators suggest a higher probability of action crisis in objective obstacles. The results indicate (F(7/176) = 4.540; p < 0.001) the existence of difference between different subtypes of obstacles in the action crisis. The results of the Games-Howell post hoc test showed that in situational resources, concurrent goal and mental/physical state obstacles, the level of action crisis is significantly higher than in personality obstacles. The action crisis has a positive and significant relationship with the frequency of the obstacle (r = 0.392**, p < 0.01), perceived intensity of the obstacle (r = 0.253**, p < 0.01), which prevents respondents from goal achievement. The results of multiple regression analysis (F(3/1483) = 94.90; p < 0.001; R² = 0.623) were significant predictors of the action crisis, regardless of the type of obstacle (β = 0.327; t = 12.999; p < 0.001) were significant predictors of the action crisis, regardless of the type of obstacle (β = 0.237; t = 0.996; p = 0.319).

Conclusion: We perceive the benefit of the study to be in the enrichment of the existing classifications of obstacles by adding two more categories (physical/mental state and personality). It is also a beneficial finding that objective and subjective obstacles contribute to the experiencing of the action crisis to approximately the same extent, but with a more detailed look at specific types of obstacles, it is possible to notice differences. The results suggest that it is not the type of obstacle that is crucial, but rather the perceived intensity and frequency of the obstacle. These results support not only the importance of self-reflection, persistence training, self-control, but also mental resilience.

Keywords: Goal directed behavior. Self-regulation. Obstacles. Action crisis.

Introduction

Most human behavior is goal-oriented (Kruglanski, 1996). The process of creating, pursuing, and achieving goals in the form of self-regulation is an essential part of an individual's life, as it helps them to create and subsequently implement their life plan. However, even with individually set goals, one does not always achieve them, and some goals may turn out to be unattainable. Personal goals can therefore be a source of stress, especially if the person encounters serious obstacles or experiences major setbacks. The presence of obstacles makes it difficult to pursue the goal.

The issue of disruptive variables in the form of obstacles in self-regulation is an actual topic of research (Fishbach & Hoffman, 2015). Marguc et al. (2011) define obstacles in general, as certain interfering forces that limit a person from achieving a goal. Salanova et al. (2009) explain them as external or internal circumstances that make it difficult to reach the goal. Oettinger et al. (2010) add that they represent circumstances that stand in the way of the goal or variables that make it impossible to achieve the goal in a direct, originally intended way.
The literature offers several possibilities of classification and categorization of obstacles. For example, Shah and Kruglanski (2008) divide obstacles based on hedonic - into an attractive choice and an unfavorable barrier. Leduc-Cummings et al. (2017) consider the time perspective and talk about the past, current, and expected obstacles. Marguc, et al. (2011) categorize them according to their effect on direct and indirect obstacles. However, the most common division of obstacles is due to their cause into subjective and objective interfering variables (Marguc et al., 2011; Milyavskaya et al., 2015). The external environment can be a source of potential physical barriers, for example, in the form of disturbing sounds, light, or other external and difficult-to-influence phenomena; the social environment can be a source of objective distractors, mainly in the form of pressure to meet social or family expectations; specific situational distractors and lack of resources can be also in the form of objective obstacles (Altmann et al., 2014). Subjective obstacles can be defined as conditions perceived by individuals in the form of subjective difficulties, as opposed to the traditional understanding of obstacles as objective, external barriers (Marguc et al., 2011). Gollwitzer and Brandstätter (1997) specify that a subjective obstacle may have the character of a competitive goal, a forgetting of the goal, and low self-control (Gollwitzer & Brandstätter, 1997).

**Figure 1**

The most common division of the obstacles

Myrseth and Fishbach (2009) propose an approach that describes the two steps needed to overcome obstacles. The first step is uncovering and identification of the obstacle. In the second step, it is necessary to use specific strategies to overcome obstacles. In this context, especially when a goal is blocked or not worth pursuing anymore, the revision of goals is needed. The revision of the goal is preceded by an action crisis (Holding et al., 2017). It represents the result of a significant internal conflict to remain or abandon the pursuit of the goal. An action crisis is defined as a critical phase in pursuing a goal if the goal appears to be difficult to achieve or unattainable (Brandstätter & Schüler, 2013). A crisis occurs when an individual suffers repeated failures or an increasing number of obstacles in achieving the goal; they encounter situations in the goal progress that they cannot solve; experience a conflict between whether to stay on the road to the goal or to give up the goal; or constantly returning in their thoughts to how they failed to achieve the goal (Brandstätter & Schüler, 2013). The action crisis is accompanied by the decision whether to give up the goal or to continue achieving it (Brandstätter et al., 2013). The individual experiences ambiguity in the benefits of pursuing a goal (Brandstätter et al., 2013).
When people confront obstacles in goal striving, action crises come into question (Ghassemi et al., 2017). It is therefore surprising that we found only a minimum of research findings that addressed the issue of the relationship between obstacles and action crisis and no results about the relationship between obstacle characteristics and action crisis. Kreibich et al. (2020) found that participants with a higher tendency to identify obstacles regarding their personal goals reported higher action crises. Additionally, participants with higher action crisis reported more obstacles. Marion-Jetten et al. (2021) suggest that several obstacles can arise during an action crisis. Therefore, the main goal of the current research was to clarify the relationship between experiencing action crisis and the type of obstacle (subjective/objective), to explain the connection between action crisis and selected obstacle characteristics as perceived frequency and intensity. An additional goal was to categorize obstacles according to content, based on the criterion of subjectivity and objectivity.

In order to follow the objectives, several research questions were formulated:

**RQ1:** Is there a significant relationship between action crisis level and perceived frequency and intensity of the obstacle?

**RQ 2:** Are there significant differences in the action crisis level based on the type of the obstacle?

**RQ3:** What are the specific categories of the obstacles present in the sample?

**Methods**

**Sample**

Data were obtained from a sample of 542 young adults aged from 18 to 34 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 22.2$; $SD = 1.96$). The sample consisted of 73.25% females ($N = 379$) and of 26.75% males ($N = 145$). Convenience and purposive sampling methods have been used.

**Measures & Tools**

**Socio-demographic data** - gender, age, field of study, year, employment / student status.

**Obstacle** - an open-ended question addressing the specific obstacles that respondents face or expect to face in pursuing the specific goal they have set. The wording of the task instruction was as follows: “During their lifetime, people are not always able to achieve what they want and sometimes they are forced to end their efforts in achieving the goals they have set. Please indicate the obstacles you think you will encounter in achieving the goal.”

**Perceived frequency and intensity of the obstacle** - on a 5-point Likert scale, respondents expressed how often they perceive the effect of this obstacle on achieving their goal (1 = never; 5 = always) and how intensely the obstacle prevents them from achieving the goal (1 = not at all; 5 = a lot).

**Action Crisis Scale (ACRISS; Brandstätter & Schüler, 2013; for Slovak adaptation see Kačmár et al., 2021).** The scale is represented by six items, each item is to be rated on a scale ranging from 1 (no agreement) to 5 (very much agreement). All items reflect an internal decisional conflict between disengagement and further pursuit of a personal goal, specifically doubts (“I doubt whether I should continue striving for my goal or disengage from it.”); recurrent setbacks (“Striving for this goal goes without any problems.”); implemental disorientation (“When striving for this goal I repeatedly am confronted with situations where I do not know how to continue”); ruminating (“I repeatedly ruminate about my goal.”); disengagement impulses (“I
have thought of disengaging from my goal.”) and procrastinating (“I repeatedly haven’t done anything for my goal despite the intention to do so”). The internal reliability of the scale was acceptable (α = 0.623).

Procedure

The data were obtained in several partial studies, which concerned the setting of goals and the occurrence of obstacles in various areas of human life - weight loss, education, any personal goal, or one that the respondent wants to achieve by a certain age. Respondents answered the question either electronically or in the form of a pencil and paper. The obtained data were processed using Microsoft Excel 2016 and IBM SPSS 21 software. Socio-demographic data were processed using descriptive analysis (mean, standard deviation, median, minimum, maximum). The analysis of the respondents' answers to the open question was carried out with the participation of two experts who performed a content analysis with an effort to include the answers in the already existing classification. Subsequently, the frequency of occurrence of individual categories of obstacles expressed in relative abundance was determined.

The significance of difference testing in the level of action crisis was performed using a t-test for independent samples. A more detailed analysis of the level of obstacle subtypes was performed using a One-way ANOVA. The Games-Howell post hoc test was used to identify the differences found. We tested the relationships between the variables by the Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple linear regression. When analyzing the statements of the respondents (the description of the obstacles they encounter in achieving the current goal) content analysis was conducted. Content analysis is used to create a classification system containing all important elements of the analyzed material, which can be the answers of respondents to open questions in a questionnaire or interview (Lovaš, 2001). In the content analysis, we chose the procedure of analytical deduction, which represents a theoretical approach to content analysis (Plichtová, 1996). The source theory was the classification of obstacles on the subjective and objective (Gollwitzer & Brandstätter, 1997; Marguc et al., 2011) shown in Figure. 1. We also followed the recommendations made by Miovský (2006). The categories included all statements and did not overlap. At the same time, each unit belonged to only one specific category. Independent assessment by various experts was conducted. The experts agreed on the presented results after comparing their classifications and discussing differences or clarifying ambiguities.

Results

Firstly, content analysis of obstacles based on the criterion of subjectivity and objectivity was conducted. A total of 1,507 responses were analyzed, as respondents stated that they faced several obstacles in achieving the goal or were directly requested to list several obstacles (depending on the specific study). Naturally, many responses occurred repeatedly (e.g., laziness, procrastination, lack of time, stress, etc.). For this reason, 235 different obstacles were extracted, with which the respondents struggled in achieving the goal they set. In the content analysis and categorization of obstacles using the already existing scheme of objectivity and subjectivity, we encountered many obstacles that could not be included in any of the predetermined categories. Therefore, we proceeded to create two more subcategories within the subjective obstacles, which are the current state (mental and physical) and personality factors.

Among the subjective obstacles, the most represented were those related to the current physical and mental condition (33.9 %). We have included obstacles such as stress, sadness, nervousness, anxiety, menstruation, and hunger. The second most common type of subjective
Obstacles were those related to low self-control (29.5%). These include impatience, weak will, lack of motivation, low self-discipline, low perseverance, greed, and desires. Personality factors represented 21.4% of subjective obstacles. We have included laziness, comfort, low self-confidence, negativism, egoism, beliefs, shyness, and emotional instability. The competitive goal represented 15.2% of subjective obstacles, including obstacles such as food, school duties (credits, exams, high school diploma, state exam, writing a final thesis), work responsibilities, hobbies. We did not identify an obstacle that would fall into the subcategory of forgetting about the goal in the data we obtained.

As for objective obstacles, the most represented were those of a situational nature (36.6%), such as current stagnation, unexpected events, competition, bureaucracy, busyness. It was followed by obstacles of a social nature (30.1%), such as family pressure, people’s attitudes, cultural life, childcare, employer, social life, and roommates. Resources accounted for 24.4% of objective obstacles. We included here a lack of time, lack of energy, lack of information, lack of knowledge, lack of data, few opportunities to achieve the goal, and lack of funds. Obstacles of a physical nature were the least frequent (8.9%), such as distance, landscape, location, weather, noise, cold routes, transport, new environment, daily commuting, and accessibility.

Overall, subjective obstacles accounted for 47.7% of all obstacles and objectives for 52.3%. Thus, we state that in our dataset, the respondents perceived both subjective and objective obstacles to approximately the same extent. Within the complete set of obstacles, situational obstacles had the largest share (19.1%), followed by mental and physical condition (16.2%), social obstacles (15.7%), low self-control (14.1%), resources (12.8%), personality factors (10.2%), competitive goal (7.2%), physical obstacles (4.7%), forgetting the goal (0%). Table 1 presents the results of the content analysis, including two new subtypes of the obstacles.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacles categorization and frequency analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUBJECTIVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL subjective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBJECTIVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = number; f = frequency; * = new subtype
We move on to the main goal of the study. We wondered if there were differences in the experience of the action crisis due to the nature of the obstacle. Firstly, we tested the differences between the main types of obstacles – subjective and objective. The test results are shown in Table 2. We note that there are no significant differences in the level of action crisis in the occurrence of subjective and objective obstacles to achieving the goal, although descriptive indicators suggest a higher probability of action crisis in objective obstacles.

Table 2

*T-test for independent samples – the comparison of action crisis level based on the obstacle type*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>obstacle</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACTION CRISIS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>objective</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>1.652</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>0.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subjective</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = number; M = mean; SD = standard deviation; *p<0.05; d = Cohen’s d

Table 3 shows the descriptive indicators of the total mean scale score achieved by the respondents in ACRISS according to the subtype of obstacle that prevents them from achieving the goal. The average scale values indicate that the respondents experienced the crisis the most with physical obstacles, the least with personality obstacles. Out of all objective obstacles, respondents experienced the crisis the most with physical obstacles, the least with social obstacles. Out of all subjective obstacles, respondents experienced the crisis most intensely in concurrent goals and least in personality obstacles.

Table 3

*Descriptive analysis of the obstacle subtypes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PHYSICAL</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>5.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SITUATIONAL</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>5.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESOURCES</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCURRENT GOAL</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>5.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOW SELF-CONTROL</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MENTAL AND PHYSICAL STATE</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSONALITY</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = number; M = mean; SD = standard deviation; Me = median; Min = minimum; Max= maximum

Based on a descriptive analysis, we tested the significance of the differences between different subtypes of obstacles using a One-way ANOVA. The results indicate (F (7/176) = 4.540; p <0.001*; η² = 0.017) the existence of these differences. We consider this result to be very robust,
so we performed post hoc testing using the Games-Howell post hoc test. Its results showed that in situational resources, concurrent goal and mental/physical state obstacles, the level of action crisis is significantly higher than in personality obstacles. Detailed results are given in Table 3 (due to the amount of data, we present only significant results).

**Table 4**

*Post hoc test – the comparison of action crisis level based on the obstacle subtype*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>obstacle t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>situational personality 4.390</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001*</td>
<td>0.442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concurrent goal personality 4.530</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001*</td>
<td>0.401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mental and physical state personality 3.430</td>
<td>0.016*</td>
<td>0.368</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p<0.05; d = Cohen’s d

The last step of the analysis was to test the relationship between the frequency of the obstacle, its perceived intensity, and the action crisis. The values of the correlation coefficients indicate that the action crisis has a positive and significant relationship with the frequency of the obstacle ($r = 0.392^{**}; p < 0.01$), perceived intensity of the obstacle ($r = 0.253^{**}; p < 0.01$), which prevents respondents from goal achievement. It means that the more often the obstacle occurs and the more intensely perceived it is, the greater the action crisis the individual experiences.

Finally, we conducted multiple regression analysis to determine if the frequency and perceived intensity of the obstacles predict an action crisis. We used the type of obstacle (subjective / objective) as a control variable. The model was significant ($F (3/1483) = 94.90; p <0.001; R^2 = 0.161$), frequency ($β = 1.320; t = 12.999; p < 0.001$) and obstacle intensity ($β = 0.266; t = 3.475; p < 0.001$) were significant predictors of the action crisis, regardless of the type of obstacle ($β = 0.237; t = 0.237; p = 0.319$).

**Discussion**

One of the most natural tendencies of an individual is to set and achieve goals that are the driving force of their behavior (Carver & Scheier, 2001; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Perugini & Bagozzi, 2001) and are also a key element of self-regulation (Locke & Latham, 2006). In psychological research, there is a long tradition of goal-oriented action research in the form of goal-setting as a source of motivation and performance support (Locke & Latham, 2002). However, achieving goals is not always straightforward. A natural part of working on a goal is the occurrence of obstacles that can have a negative impact on the overall outcome, and whether the goal will be achieved or not. It is the occurrence of obstacles in achieving the goal that leads to the individual's experience of an *action crisis*, which can be defined as the internal conflict in persisting with the goal or giving it up. Surprisingly, the link between the type of obstacle
and the experiencing rate of action crisis has not yet been explored sufficiently. Therefore, answering this question has become the main goal of the presented research.

However, before we start its clarification, we present the results of the identification and categorization of the obstacles that our respondents encountered, based on the criterion of objectivity and subjectivity. The objective interfering variables were dominated by obstacles, which were mainly situational in nature, such as excessive bureaucracy, a type of diet, or a predetermined teaching model. They were followed by *distractors* in the form of social circumstances such as social pressure, family relationships, or lack of interest from the nearby or further away social environment. External physical circumstances, such as distance or location, were least reported.

In the case of subjective obstacles, those that reflected the current mental and physical condition of the individual were represented the most. It also represents the new subcategory created by us. Respondents mentioned mainly the circumstances of their current mental and emotional state, but also self-underestimation or doubts about the rightness or achievability of the goal. In this context, Marguc et al. (2011) clarify that an individual's doubts about their ability to achieve a goal may lead them to give up prematurely without creating a new, more achievable alternative. Conversely, if overcoming obstacles is seen by the individual as a challenge, it can be a good precondition for successful goal achievement. In addition, respondents reported subjective obstacles in the form of reduced self-control such as impatience or weakness. In this context, Baumeister and Alquist (2009) explain that strong-will is the basis of self-control as it is the ability to resist current temptations, which is a precondition for successful goal achievement. The second new subcategory of subjective obstacles in the character of personality factors - whether this is laziness, negativism, or irresponsibility, it has also proved to be interesting. We did not identify an obstacle that would fall into the subcategory of forgetting about the goal in the data we obtained. As mentioned before, there are several approaches that aim to describe how obstacles influence different levels of human functioning in the process of the goal attainment. Since there is no strict and uniform approach, we consider our results as an enrichment of the current state. The absence of the obstacle subtype “forgetting the goal” in our sample might be the consequence of a respondent’s perception – they might not consider the forgetting about a goal as the obstacle, that directly complicates the current goal attainment (Marguc et al., 2011). On the other hand, we considered three categories of subjective obstacles insufficient. Despite the theoretical approach in content analysis based on Gollwitzer and Brandstätter (1997) and Marguc et al. (2011) our respondents often found the source of their problems occurring in themselves during goal attainment. Then the need of the new sub-category “personality factors” arose. It reflects the stable pre-dispositions to experience the obstacles. From the processual point of view, we missed the category that would reflect what usually happens or what the individual experiences in the moment when the individual is not successful in their attempt at achievement. Clarification of the possible relationship between the action crisis experienced and the type of obstacle did not confirm a statistically significant difference in the experiencing of internal conflict in relation to the type of subjective or objective obstacles in goal achievement. However, differences were found in the subcategories of obstacles. Specifically, the highest rate of the experienced action crisis was in the presence of an objective physical obstacle. Nevertheless, the physical distractor appeared as an interfering variable in only 12 respondents. Therefore, we are careful in generalizing this result. In contrast, subjective personality obstacles led to a significantly lower experiencing of action crisis in comparison to one's dealing with other subtypes of obstacles. For comparison, perceived subjective characteristics of obstacles such as frequency and intensity were in a significant positive relationship with the action crisis. The increased intensity and frequency of the obstacle were even important predictors of the action crisis experienced, regardless of the
type of obstacle. This confirms the assertion of Milyavskaya et al. (2015) that what matters more is what the individual subjectively perceives and evaluates as an obstacle and cause of failure, not objective indicators or expectations. Heckhausen (1991) adds that it is the increased frequency and intensity of the obstacle that places increased demand on the amount of effort that an individual has to expend to overcome them. Klinger (1977) clarifies that an individual's primary endeavour is always to overcome an obstacle. However, if he faces a recurrence of an obstacle, the individual enters a phase of frustration or aggression. It is the increase in negative emotions, such as stress or frustration that are typical indicators that an individual is experiencing an action crisis (Brandstätter, 2003). In an action crisis (Brandstätter & Schüler, 2013), initial doubts have developed into a decisional conflict, in which the individual is torn between the opposing options of holding on to the goal and letting it go. Other resources suggest several possible factors that could become additional significant predictors of the action crisis level. For example, loss of goal attainability (Brandstätter & Schüler, 2013), intentional avoiding task fulfilment (Wrosch et al., 2013), depletion of self-regulation resources or sudden changes (Brandstätter et al., 2013). However, all of the appointed variables could be perceived as obstacles as well, due to the approach of Marguc et al. (2011) based on the effect of the obstacle on the goal attainment – direct and indirect.

The presented study has several limitations. The respondents did not have to speak only about the obstacles that currently prevent them from achieving their goal, but also had the opportunity to consider what obstacles they might still encounter in achieving the goal. This may have meant that the crisis is not experienced yet. Likewise, respondents did not have to be aware of the obstacles they had to face at the time of completing the questionnaire. It is likely that they remembered the most important ones, but the resulting perception of the crisis may have been influenced by the action of several obstacles of various types. It is important to note that in the action crisis scale, respondents scored in the first half of the scale, indicating that the rate of crisis experienced was not high. We are aware that distortion may also have occurred during the content analysis. Some obstacles were difficult to categorize because they were not sufficiently described by the respondents.

**Conclusion**

The present research aimed to clarify the relationship between experiencing action crisis and the type of obstacle identified according to the content based on the criteria of subjectivity and objectivity. Then the connection between action crisis and selected obstacle characteristics as perceived frequency and intensity was explained.

We perceive the benefit of the study to be in the enrichment of the existing classifications of obstacles by two more categories (physical / mental state and personality). It is also a beneficial finding that objective and subjective obstacles contribute to the experiencing of the action crisis to approximately the same extent, but with a more detailed look at specific types of obstacles, it is possible to notice differences. The results suggest that it is not the type of obstacle that is crucial, but rather the perceived intensity and frequency of the obstacle. These results support not only the importance of self-reflection, persistence training, self-control, but also mental resilience.

**Funding**

This research was supported by Slovak Research and Development Agency (VEGA) - VEGA (1/0748/19) Characteristics of decision - making and crisis in the process of achieving goals.
References


