

PHD THESIS REVIEW

By Assoc. Prof. Rositza Georgieva

Department of "Psychology" at IINCH - BAS

Subject: presented dissertation work on the topic "“Alexithymia and coping in a life-threatening situation. A sample of Bulgarian military and police special forces: psychological care and counseling "

Doctoral candidate: Tanya Nikolaeva Dimitrova

For acquiring a scientific and educational degree "doctor" for the award of the educational and scientific degree "PhD" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional direction 3.2. Psychology, "Counseling Psychology"; according to order No. RD-38-149 of 25.03.2024 – Sofia University

Tanya Nikolaeva Dimitrova's dissertation "Alexithymia and coping in a life-threatening situation. A sample of Bulgarian military and police special forces: psychological care and counseling" thematically refers to the field of counseling psychology. In its dynamic development and in its status as a scientific discipline closely related to psychological practice, counseling psychology is looking for its specific thematic fields, problem areas and fields of application. In this context, the subject of the dissertation is an ambitious request for a scientific study of the phenomena of alexithymia and coping in a life-threatening situation and, on this basis, to prepare a program for psychological assistance for military personnel and serving in special police units.

In terms of structure, content and volume, the dissertation meets the established requirements. It has a volume of 215 pages, including an introduction, three chapters and three appendices. The list of used literature contains 265 sources, including 18 in Bulgarian, most of them published in the last 10-15 years.

The relevance and significance of the stated topic are presented in the introductory part of the dissertation. Two constructs under investigation are quite researched separately, but not in their mutual relations. Moreover they are not researched sufficiently in the context of counseling psychological practice and with relation to the target group, selected for this research.

In the theoretical part, the phenomenon of "Alexithymia" is presented in detail. An attempt has been made to broaden the widespread clinical interpretation and to discover new positive connotations about choice of profession on the one hand, and on the other, with the coping strategies when dealing with occupational stress in life-threatening situations. In this part special attention is directed to the methods for measuring the studied constructs.

The second chapter of the dissertation presents the author's own empirical research and its results. The first part of this chapter is devoted to the adaptation of the questionnaires used in the study for Bulgarian conditions. A precise statistical procedure is carried out in order to verify psychometric characteristics of these instruments and their advantages compared to those used in our country until now were convincingly demonstrated. The research has been conducted in several stages starting with a pilot study and a main study with a total sample size of 1456 participants. Three working hypotheses have been raised - two of which to check the psychometric characteristics of the two questionnaires, and the third regarding the mutual relations between alexithymia and coping strategies in situation of existential threat. The obtained results generally confirm all three preliminary hypotheses. The assumptions are partially confirmed or rejected during the statistical analysis of the data are adequately explained in the description of the limitations of the study and recommendations are made for future research in the concluding part of the dissertation.

The third chapter of the dissertation is devoted to the application of the results and conclusions are presented for the psychological counseling practice. Specific proposals have been made for the diagnostic and therapeutic purposes. A new "integrative counseling approach" focused on coping with life-threatening stress is proposed for individuals with high levels of alexithymia. On the basis of the research, a comprehensive program for psychological care is developed, taking into account alexithymia as a personality trait of special employees in the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The autor suggests that the elaboration of psychological suporting programs for polis and military personel requires a good knowledge of the target group. In this contex we have to akknoledge the scientific value of the disertacion of Tanya Nikolaeva Dimitrova for enriching the diagnostic and research arsenal of the counseling psychologists in the sistem of Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Based on these considerations, as a member of the scientific committee, I propose that Tanya Nikolaeva Dimitrova be awarded the scientific degree "doctor" for the dissertation on the topic: "Alexithymia and coping in a life-threatening situation. A sample of Bulgarian military and police special forces: psychological care and counseling."

May 2024
Sofia

Prepared the review:
Associate Professor Rositsa Georgieva