

English translation

OPINION

under the procedure for acquisition of PhD degree
by **Mihaela Angelova Beloreshka**,
topic of the dissertation: **Adverse childhood experiences and health-related behaviour**
in professional field 3.2 Psychology,
Department of Psychology,
Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski,

By **Prof. Irina Zinovieva, Dr. Sc.**
Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Department of Psychology, professional field 3.2
Psychology in her capacity of Member of the Scientific Jury for awarding the scientific
degree "Doctor of Philosophy" (in Health Psychology) following
Order of the Rector of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski

General characteristics of the dissertation

The dissertation contains 254 pages, of which 213 pages are main text, tables and graphics. The literature includes 422 titles, of which 15 titles are in Bulgarian, the rest - in English. The research questionnaire is presented in an appendix. The work is illustrated with 66 tables and 34 graphs.

There is a plethora of data on the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and somatic diseases in adulthood, which show that as the number of early adversities increases, so does the risk of developing chronic and cardiovascular diseases, metabolic disorders and reduced immune function in later phases of life. These data show the need for a comprehensive approach to health care that includes psychological knowledge and interventions. The dissertation deals with the relationship of adverse experiences in childhood with nutrition and health behaviors in adulthood.

The first chapter examines different perspectives on difficult childhood experiences with eating behavior in adulthood - from biological and medical to psychological one. The psychological perspective is comprehensively presented, and the main theoretical approaches are analyzed in detail: childhood trauma, generalized safety, social safety, toxic stress, development of resilience. The venues for prevention and the legal framework are also analyzed. In the concluding part, a pyramid is presented, representing the development from adverse experiences in childhood to disorders of neurological development, to social, emotional and/or cognitive disorders with subsequent development of health-risk behaviors and social problems to the development of somatic diseases and early death.

In the second chapter, the methodological framework of the empirical study is presented, with a detailed statements of the purpose, tasks, hypotheses, theoretical model, instruments and characteristics of the sample.

The third part contains an analysis of the results of the empirical research conducted in two stages: qualitative research with interviews and quantitative research with questionnaires.

The dissertation ends with a summary of the analyzes and a conclusion, as well as recommendations to the consulting practice and references.

The research questionnaire is given in the appendix.

Literature overview and theoretical knowledge of the candidate

Having analyzed a significant number of studies in international scientific journals, the topic has been developed carefully and competently. The Bulgarian literature on the issue is also well reflected. The doctoral candidate presents a thoughtful analysis of the main aspects in the treatment of the selected scientific problem, she knows how to analyze complex content and draw adequate conclusions.

The presence of summaries at the end of each part, which synthesize and accurately highlight the main points leaves positive impression as well.

Methodology

The created integrative model has been verified through empirical research. The total number of participants in it is 735 people.

First, a pilot study was conducted with 13 respondents on healthy lifestyles and eating patterns, followed by a main study with 722 (87% women), testing an integrative theoretical model involving the following sets of variables: adverse childhood experiences, demographic and personality characteristics, dietary and health behaviors, current health status, and life satisfaction. Based on the theoretical model, 6 research hypotheses have been proposed.

Data analysis

To check the psychometric characteristics of the scales, exploratory factor analysis using the method of principal component analysis and the internal consistency of the scales with Cronbach's alpha were used. Whether the necessary conditions to apply factor analysis were met was tested by means of Bartlett's test of sphericity and the measure of sampling adequacy (KMO). The analysis of the relationships between the indicators included in the model is done with: a) a series of one-way ANOVA and t-tests to analyze the effects of demographic factors; b) correlation and regression analysis for the relationships and predictive capabilities of the selected psychosocial variables.

The doctoral student shows very good skills in choosing an adequate statistical method, applying and correct and precise interpretation of the obtained results.

In the discussions, the new data obtained and the confirmation of the existing data are discussed in detail with expertise.

This gives convincingness to the obtained results, and in-depth theoretical training contributes to the correctness of interpretations and conclusions.

Thesis abstract

The submitted abstract correctly reflects the main content and scientific contributions of the dissertation work, is developed very well and can be published for public defense.

Scientific contributions

I accept the scientific contributions formulated by the candidate.

The dissertation creates an original integrative theoretical model in which adverse childhood experiences are examined in relation to a wide range of personality and demographic characteristics, as well as in relation to dietary and health behaviours. On this basis, two empirical studies were conducted, the data of which show the importance of adversed childhood experiences for the choice of unhealthy eating behaviors and unhealthy lifestyles, as well as a lower health status. This is a complex study that has no analogue in the cited literature.

Recommendations to the consulting practice arising from the obtained results are substantiated.

Evaluation of the quality of the scientific works of the doctoral candidate, related to meeting the minimum national requirements for the scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.2 Psychology

Mihaela Beloreshka has 5 scientific publications one the subject of the dissertation - two with single authorship and three with coauthors. The first one carries 15 points due to its size. The second is a publication in a scientific journal of national importance - 10 points. One of the joint publications (with one co-author) is in a journal included in WoS (15 points). The last two publications have a total of 4 co-authors each and are in a scientific journal of national importance, giving 2.5 points each (5 points in total). Thus, the total number of points is 45. With this, the doctoral student significantly exceeds the minimum national requirements.

CONCLUSION

After having familiarized myself with the presented dissertation work, abstract and other materials, and based on the analysis of their significance and the scientific and scientific-applied contributions contained in them, I confirm that the scientific achievements meet the requirements of ZRASRB and the Regulations for its application and the relevant Regulations of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "doctor". In particular, the candidate satisfies the minimum national requirements in the

professional field and no plagiarism has been found in the submitted dissertation, abstract and scientific works.

I give my positive assessment of the dissertation work.

Based on the above, as a member of the scientific jury, I believe that there is every reason to award the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional direction 3.2 Psychology (Health Psychology) to Mihaela Angelova Beloreshka.

Sofia,
October 12, 2024

Prof. Irina Zinovieva, Dr. Sc.