

STATEMENT

from

Ass. Prof Krasimir Krastev Ivanov, Ph.D, M.D

Varna Free University

"Chernorizets Hrabar"

concerning

Awarding of the educational and scientific degree

"Doctor"

in scientific specialty: 3.2. Psychology (Health Psychology)

per PhD student

Mihaela Angelova Beloreshka

for a dissertation with a topic:

**"Difficult experiences in childhood and health behaviors in
adulthood"**

Supervisor:

Prof. Dr. Sonya Karabeleva

The dissertation proposed for an opinion is laid down in the field of health psychology and is focused on a problem related to the prerequisites: the development of serious psychosomatic correlates started in childhood and, unfortunately, giving unfavorable results at a later age.

The author Mihaela Beloreshka and her supervisor set themselves the difficult task of investigating the links between the most common health risk behaviors and difficult childhood experiences.

A serious scientific study is presented on the spread of this problem on a global and national scale. Two main and, unfortunately, unfavorable trends related to the growth of difficult childhood experiences and the impact of this unfavorable fact on modern society, family environment and social functioning are clearly indicated.

The effect of severe childhood experiences and their connection with a number of psycho-emotional disorders, as well as with the development of health-risk behaviors, which in turn are a prerequisite for various somatic diseases and pose a serious risk to mental and social functioning, is indicated.

Structurally, the dissertation research meets all academic requirements. It consists of an introduction, a theoretical chapter, two empirical chapters, a summary and a conclusion, a list of references, and an appendix with a total volume of 254 pages.

In the theoretical part of the dissertation, the basic concepts are presented and various research approaches to difficult childhood experiences are considered.

Modern theories of chronic stress and health are presented with skill, including the theory of generalized insafety, the theory of social safety and the theory of toxic stress, which is the main one related to research on early traumatic stress. All this speaks of a thorough knowledge of the matter and opportunities for good analysis.

Very important is the emphasis placed on the difficult experiences in childhood and their connection with risky health behaviors and health status. The relationship between difficult childhood experiences, eating behavior patterns and personality characteristics is professionally described.

The competence of the PhD student is evident in the theoretical framework of the research presented in Chapter Two, where the justification of the chosen model, hypotheses, purpose, tasks and psychological tools are described.

The empirical study is located and constructed within the eco-bio-developmental model of toxic stress and the pyramid of difficult experiences in childhood. An analysis of the research literature on the topic and the applied theoretical-research model are presented, including many factors (variables) that directly or indirectly have the ability to influence the psycho-emotional health of the individual, as well as on eating behavior and health status. The purpose of the study is skillfully defined, including the study of the relationships and degree of interaction between difficult childhood experiences, eating behaviors, other health behaviors and health status, taking into account the effects and psychoemotional correlates.

The hypotheses are a clear postulation and are relevant to the research objective, the tools are correctly selected and applied with research competence, the proof is the verification of the working hypotheses and the analysis of the results through a pilot study.

The results of the study are presented in great detail and show a relationship between the family environment and the way of eating in terms of eating habits, daily diet, building a healthy or unhealthy eating pattern, as well as creating an emotional connection with family members. It also partially confirms the assumptions made that people with a higher number of reported TLD will have higher levels of unhealthy eating behaviors, and that different types of TLD will have a differentiating effect on eating patterns. The analyses carried out show that these assumptions are relevant only for people with more than four TPDs, as well as survivors of harassment in relation to unhealthy eating. The severe experiences with the most common differentiating effect on the patterns of emotional, restricted eating, orthorexia nervosa and uncontrolled overeating are the different types of violence – emotional, physical, sexual, as well as domestic violence.

The proposed scientific contributions are substantial and include a methodological, empirical and practical level. In short, the following three can be designated:

- the first study in Bulgaria involving correlates from different levels of the pyramid of difficult experiences,

- An in-depth review of the specialized literature has been made three new questionnaires that operationalize current eating patterns (orthorexia nervosa, healthy orthorexia, uncontrolled binge eating), as well as two new questionnaires measuring respectively emotional regulation (cognitive reassessment and emotional repression) and attitudes towards the body (assessment of appearance and weight concern),

- deepens the empirical knowledge about the predictive role of developmental and psycho-emotional factors for each of the studied eating behaviors, life satisfaction and health status.

The attached abstract accurately reflects the dissertation research, the reference for the publications of the PhD student and the reference for participation in scientific forums correspond to the direction of the dissertation research.

In conclusion, I propose to the Honorable Scientific Jury to award the scientific and educational degree "Doctor" to Mihaela Angelova Beloreshka in the scientific specialty: 3.2. Psychology (Health Psychology)

01.10.2024

Varna

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Krasimir Ivanov