REVIEW

By **Prof. Rumiana Bozhinova, Ph.D.**
IPHS – BAS

Dissertation work for the award of the educational and scientific degree "doctor", in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional direction 3.2. Psychology, doctoral program "Counseling Psychology"

Author: **Maria Hristova Sokolova**

Topic "**Attachment style and parenting practices of mothers - victims of domestic violence**"

Research supervisor: **Assoc. Prof. Diana Bakalova, Ph.D.**

Relevance of the topic

Applied educational practices (both in the family and at school) is a problem that is characterized by unchanging relevance. This is a systematically commented question in a scientific and applied plan in connection with the process of formation of the individual, of his full development, construction of his potential for socialization. A series of theoretical and empirical studies in the field of psychology, over time, proved the need to apply a markedly positive approach in relation to the child, turning it into a norm with a corresponding reflection in practice. This has put on the agenda the study of the factors that limit or hinder such an attitude.

The dissertation work proposed by Maria Sokolova is focused on violence in the family (toward the child and between parents), a phenomenon that can negatively vary parenting practices and more precisely the attitude of the mother to the child. A special place is allocated to the individual attachment style formed at an early age. The study of the relevant process, the regularities to which it is subject, the possibility of its management, to which the dissertation is directed, give it a marked dissertability from both a scientific and an applied point of view.

Characterization and evaluation of the dissertation work

The dissertation covers 184 pages. The results are illustrated with 59 tables and 7 figures. 204 sources are cited, 41 of them are in Cyrillic and the rest in Latin. The work is structured according

to the usual empirical type of dissertation research, it includes three chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. This is related to a sufficiently complete presentation of the entire research process from the theoretical premises to the results with their contribution value.

Literary awareness and theoretical preparation

The first chapter of the dissertation is aimed at deriving the theoretical premises of the study. Accordingly, it follows a presentation strategy reflecting the justification of the relevance of the chosen dissertation topic, the applied theoretical approaches to parenting, attachment in the family and domestic violence, introduction of the starting points for the research.

The main characteristics of parenting that influence the parent-child relationship are traced. A distinction is made between parenting style and parenting practices. The main views on the attachment style and the dominant concept today are presented, as well as the study of the relationship between style and parenting practices. A significant place is devoted to aggression as a psychological phenomenon and the place of domestic violence in the framework of its treatment. Empirically, evidence of a relationship between domestic violence and attachment style and parenting practices has been traced.

It is impressive the ambition of Maria Sokolova to consistently and thoroughly present the individual phenomena in a historical plan, the dynamics in their treatment, and also to outline the problems arising in this connection and the possibility of their being studied.

It is very appropriate to structure the chapter as a whole, as well as each of the paragraphs included in it. Introductory outline is the plan to which they are subordinated, the goals they pursue, and their completion is related to conclusions to which specific theories and research lead from the point of view of the dissertation topic. The chapter ends with conclusions, which are the basis for the placement of the dissertation research.

In summary, the doctoral student shows a markedly broad awareness of the basic and modern views and research in the discussed subfields, a serious theoretical preparation.

Methodical approach

The second chapter of the dissertation is devoted to the presentation of the research. Accordingly, the research model is presented first. It is very well theoretically grounded and successfully illustrated with the diagram attached to it. It clearly shows that the planned research is aimed at uncovering basic regularities in the relationship «attachment style» - «domestic violence» - «parenting practices», and secondarily to environmental factors that can influence this

relationship - « support», «psychological counseling and therapy». In general, the developed research model implies, in addition to revealing basic dimensions of the studied phenomenon, and strengthening the practical value of the work. On this basis, the purpose, tasks and hypotheses of the research are legitimately formulated (more clearly and accurately stated in the introductory part). Obviously, the research is complex, multifaceted.

It is worth noting that the doctoral student is generally based on Belsky's understanding of the factors that influence parenting practices, related to the division of the ecological space into micro, exo, and macro systems, as well as his accepted concept of ontogenetic development - individual differences in parental history and personality.

Secondly, the research methodology is presented in the specific chapter. According to the following exposition, the implementation of the study is tied to the application of five methods and two types of additional questions. They are appropriately selected, they are agreed with the purpose and tasks of the research and they are specially subjected to procedures guaranteeing their good psychometric qualities in Bulgarian conditions, they are described in detail in the specific part (1. The Experiences in Close Relationships – Relationship Structures Questionnaire – ECR-RS, Fraley et al., 2011); 2. The Alabama Parenting Questionnaire – APQ, Frick, 1991) 3. Severity of Violence Against Women Scale (SVAWS; Marshall, 1992) 4. The Screen for Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms (SPTSS, 2012 & Brief Symptom Inventory); - BSI, Derogatis and Melisaratos, 1983); 5. Social Provisions Scale (SPS, Russell and Cutrona, 1987); 7) Questions about psychological help.

The research procedure, according to the attached description, also passed from the point of view of research quality (conduct and anonymity). The same applies to statistical procedures related to data processing.

The study sample as a whole appears to be adequate in size, but the breakdown applied raises certain questions. They refer mainly to the very few individuals in the group of women who have not experienced domestic violence (12) and who should be the basis for comparison. The groups of persons who sought counseling or therapeutic help are also relatively small. This calls into question the probative value of the results in the specific focus.

Results, interpretation and conclusions

The results of the empirical research are presented in the *third chapter* of the dissertation. It is well structured and includes four content-specific subsections. In the first subsection, the results of the research are traced. Within 19 paragraphs, the results of the individual aspects of the study are presented (domestic violence, intensity of the experience, psychological functioning, attachment

style, parenting practices of mothers who have experienced violence...). On the basis of frequency, correlation and regression statistical analyses, the main observed trends were assessed. It should be especially emphasized that the results are presented clearly, concisely, appropriately illustrated.

The second subsection is oriented to the interpretation of the obtained results in view of the previously raised hypotheses. The search for a connection with previous studies in the field, the delineation of similarity or difference is positive. In this way, Sokolova contributes to a more definite assessment of the effects of her research. The doctoral student's orientation towards step-by-step generalizations (conclusions) regarding proven regularities in each aspect of the research is also positive. I must note, however, that some of the results cannot be unambiguously interpreted and some of the applied explanations are not convincing enough. In many cases, the relationship between the variables that is revealed is weak and it suggests that other variables that are not controlled for in this case are probably involved.

The dissertation research concludes with general conclusions that detail the main findings on the relationship between attachment style and specific parenting patterns employed by mothers who are victims of domestic violence compared to mothers who are not victims of domestic violence, including variation in this relationship from social support, economic status, psychological counseling and therapy. It is extremely positive that all the conclusions drawn present the revealed regularities in an interpretive plan.

Within the conclusions, Sokolova also includes the four profiles of the mothers studied, according to their attachment style and combination of parenting practices. This makes it possible to get a more comprehensive picture of the studied phenomenon.

The conclusions made also refer to the applied potential of the specific research, as a basis for developing preventive programs and interventions.

A fitting end to the dissertation is the ***concluding section***. In it, the doctoral student successfully evaluates the specific work from the point of view of modern research trends in the field, emphasizes the originality of the idea of studying the relationship between attachment style and parenting practices.

In this part, Maria Sokolova notes the ***limitations of the work***. Their description testifies to her desire to see the research under more convincing conditions of its conduct (sample, experiment) and in a wider cultural context.

I think that the replication of the research that the PhD student has an attitude towards should be primarily aimed at increasing its reliability, and this requires the refinement of several points.

First of all, it is desirable that parental violence (the manifestations of aggression on the part of the parents towards the child) and the manifestations of aggression (violence) on the part of the partner in the couple should be tracked completely, independently of each other. The respective aggressive forms of behavior have a very different personal (subjective) meaning and it is not legitimate to be treated simply as "domestic violence", they are perceived, evaluated and experienced in a different way, first of all due to the different position of the victim and the perpetrator (the slap, which a child will receive from its father is something very different from the slap a woman will receive from her partner). These differences are essential for the interpretation of the results. It should not be forgotten, for example, that behavior patterns observed in childhood are automatically applied at a later age, which does not refer to the influence of the aggressive pattern of the partner, their influence or their relationship with the attachment style is also different. Secondly, the persuasiveness of the research results requires careful formation of the compared groups, also an essential prerequisite for greater adequacy in the interpretation of the results. This in this case refers to the frequency of the violence encountered and also to the form of violence. A single exposure to violence places the individual closer to individuals who have not experienced violence than to individuals who have frequently or repeatedly encountered it. Also, psychological abuse is not the same as sexual abuse. Last but not least, it is very important that the group of persons who have not encountered violence is approximately close in size to the one with violence. Otherwise, there is a risk of distorting the picture of observed parenting practices in the absence of violence. I must also observe myselfon the probative value of the results in the specific focus.

I especially want to point out that the notes I made during the course of the peer-reviewed work do not cast doubt on its qualities. Maria Sokolova presents a complete, fully constructed dissertation development. It testifies to a good awareness of the discussed problems, to the ability to plan and conduct a large-scale research, to the ability to systematize and present empirically derived results in an appropriate way. The good academic style and language of the presentation also add to the positive impression of the doctoral work.

Maria Sokolova adequately assesses the contributions of her work, and I accept her point of view.

The scientific contributions of the peer-reviewed dissertation can be found in the following guidelines**:**

- An ***empirical model*** is formulated, aimed at revealing basic regularities in the relationship attachment style - parenting practices in the context of domestic violence and the mediation of this

relationship by external factors such as support and counseling. The idea is original, supporting modern research on parenting practices;

- Empirically, four types of ***profiles of mothers-victims of domestic violence*** were derived, specifically reflecting the combination of attachment style - parenting practices. The result has an indisputable contribution in theoretical and applied terms;

- ***Adapted for Bulgarian conditions*** are the ***research tools*** with significant applied value:

1) A questionnaire for measuring attachment
2) Parenting Practices Research Questionnaire
3) Mental Functioning Research Scale
4) Questionnaire for measuring social support
5) Domestic Violence Measurement Scale

The abstract submitted by Maria Sokolova sufficiently fully and accurately reflects the dissertation work and meets the relevant requirements.

Maria Sokolova applies five **publications** related to her work on the dissertation research, two independent publications and three co-authored.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation proposed by **Maria Hristova Sokolova** on the topic ***"Attachment style and parenting practices of mothers - victims of domestic violence"*** presents the author as a highly competent specialist in the field of psychology, with excellent theoretical training and the ability to analyze and systematize scientific knowledge, with the ability to produce original ideas and also to set up and conduct serious empirical research. Its orientation towards significant scientific and applied problems in the field of psychology should be especially emphasized.

The dissertation fully complies with the requirements of the RSARB and the regulations for its implementation. The above gives me reason to vote with conviction for awarding **Maria Hristova Sokolova** the educational and scientific degree ***"Doctor" in the field of "Psychology***".

Prof. Rumiana Bozhinova Ph.D.

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