REVIEW

on the PhD thesis titled: „Attachment style and parenting practices of mothers-victims of domestic violence“

by Prof. Margarita Bakracheva, DSc, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", member of scientific jury according to Ordinance № РД-6-101 as of 19.03.2024 for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the area of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology, scientific specialty "Counselling Psychology"

Doctoral candidate: Maria Hristova Sokolova

Overall assessment of the dissertation

The PhD thesis is devoted to the fundamental problem of the quality of interaction between mother and child with regard to child well-being and development. The topic of domestic violence is undeniably relevant and significant and despite the large body of research, Maria Sokolova outlines the absence of a robust approach, encompassing the multidimensionality of the effect of experienced violence and the mediated effect on parenting practises of mothers-victims of domestic abuse. In this regard, the main focus is the mother's psychological functioning, her parenting style and practices and attachment style, which - depending on the individual situation - determine how she interacts with her child.

The work is clearly and systematically organized in the classic three chapters and is distinguished by precise formulations. Traditional and new research approaches to the constructs studied are presented and supported by relevant research. The research model is complex and points to the contributory nature of the dissertation - highlighting the attachment style and its impact on parenting practices of mothers-victims of domestic abuse with consideration of the type of abuse experienced, social support, counseling and psychological functioning of victims in order to prevent the risks of abuse and negative childrearing environments. The theoretical part covers parenting, parenting style and practices, attachment and aggression from different psychological perspectives, the ecological model and trauma theory and the dimensions of the problematic psychological functioning of mothers-victims of domestic abuse.

The PhD student identifies the intersections in psychological approaches, clearly focusing her research and reasonably outlining the subject, object and purpose of the dissertation. The scientific and applied value of the chosen topic covers an extremely broad field, which Maria Sokolova succeeds to systematize and analytically present the development of research in different fields. She competently exposes the comparative approaches to the investigation of the studied constructs. The dissertation is written in a very high academic style, with clear expression and coherent structure, making the work suitable for publication.

The abstract is 28 pages long and summarizes the main points of the dissertation research.

Significance and robustness of results, interpretations, conclusions, and scientific contributions

207 mothers have been administered an instrument containing 140 items, forming the scales, studying parenting practices, attachment style, domestic violence, psychological functioning, social support, and individual variables. The scales are appropriate and adapted in accordance with the established practice; results are processed with adequate and carefully described statistical analyses. Interpretations are precise, and the analysis covers in depth the constructs under study according to the objectives. Numerous implications for practice are drawn, and the weak to moderate relationships reported are confirmation of the complex interaction of multiple factors that determine parenting practices and outline a perspective for future research.

The PhD student demonstrates proficiency in processing and analysing the results and presenting them in a structured manner, with key points highlighted, which greatly facilitates the comprehension of the text.

I totally agree with the 4 contributions described for a complex model outlining the relationship between violence and attachment and the complex effect of violence, support, economic status and attachment on parenting practices. The contributions are both research and applied and focus on the place of social support, prevention, and intervention and provide tools and profiles that directly enable screening and implementation of tailored methods of work.

Assessment of the quality of the publications reflecting the PhD thesis

A list of 5 publications on the topic of the dissertation, 3 co-authored and 2 independent, 3 published and 2 accepted, is presented.

Conclusion

The dissertation contains results, which represent an original contribution and demonstrate the competence of the PhD student to conduct independent research. Due to the abovementioned advantages, I give my positive assessment and propose the scientific jury to award Maria Sokolova the educational and scientific degree ‘Doctor’ in the professional field: 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professional field: 3.2. Psychology.

11th April 2024

Jury member:
Prof. Margarita Bakracheva, DSc