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OPINION

By Assoc. Prof. Diana Ivanova Bakalova, Ph.D., Associate Professor in Professional Field 3.2. Psychology, Department of Psychology, Institute for Population and Human Studies - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (IPHS-BAS)

Subject: The scientific works submitted for the competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology (Counselling Psychology – Personality and Addictions) at "Social and Counselling Psychology" Unit, IPHS-BAS, announced in State Gazette issue 58 / 09.07.2024

Candidate: Rositsa Zhelyazkova Racheva, Ph.D. in Psychology, Assistant Professor at the "Social and Counselling Psychology" Unit, IPHS-BAS

I. Research Activity and Contributions

The documents submitted by the sole candidate, Dr. Rositsa Zhelyazkova Racheva, certifying her research activities and results, fully meet the requirements of the Bulgarian Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), its implementing regulations, and the rules of the IPHS-BAS for academic promotions for the position of "Associate Professor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology (Counselling Psychology – Personality and Addictions).

Dr. Racheva earned her PhD in Psychology at IPHS-BAS in 2014 with a dissertation titled "Personality Profile of Adolescents with Substance Use Disorders".

For the current competition, Dr. Racheva has submitted a total of 24 scientific publications in three thematic areas: (1) Counselling Psychology, focusing on a deep understanding of the processes of primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention of psychoactive substance (PAS) abuse and addictions, and planning evidence-based interventions; (2) Personality Psychology, with an emphasis on the systematization of personality traits in adolescents and adults with substance use disorders, and the construction and adaptation of methods for studying personality during adolescence and adulthood; (3) Traffic Psychology, concentrating on the role of cognitive and personality factors in driving and risky road behavior. These thematic areas clearly demonstrate Dr. Racheva's research orientation toward issues that are highly significant for both fundamental and applied psychology, as well as for counselling practice.

The candidate's publications include: 1 single-authored monograph (habilitation thesis) titled "Personality Characteristics of Addicts", published by the prestigious national academic publishing house of BAS ("Prof. Marin Drinov"); 1 single-authored book based on her dissertation work, titled " Substance Use Disorders in Adolescence. Specifics of the Personality Profile", published by the same publisher; 8 co-authored articles in peer-reviewed and indexed scientific journals in well-known global databases such as Behavioral Sciences, European Addiction Research, Bulgarian Journal of Public Health, with 6 of them in English; 4 co-authored studies published in non-indexed but peer-reviewed journals, with 2 of them in

English; and 10 articles/reports (either co-authored or single-authored) in non-indexed but peer-reviewed journals, with 1 of them in English. Additionally, 42 citations of 8 publications were presented, with a significant portion of them appearing in international journals such as Journal of Substance Use, Applied Neuropsychology: Adult, Heroin Addiction and Related Clinical Problems, European Addiction Research.

All of the above demonstrates that: 1. Dr. Racheva's research activity and interests have been consistently focused over time, predominantly dedicated to counselling psychology, including the study of personality, PAS use and addiction, which is in full alignment with the profile of this competition; 2. Her scientific output is entirely peer-reviewed, with much of it published and cited in scientific journals indexed in well-known global databases; 3. Her research results are visible and discussed by other researchers, both nationally and internationally.

Overall, I assess the candidate's submitted scientific works as original and significant, and I confirm that I have found no evidence of plagiarism. The presented monograph (habilitation work), as well as the other publications, fully meet the relevant national and international standards for scientific publications in terms of content and presentation, including a high academic style combined with clear, precise, and understandable language; a thorough, systematic, and well-structured literature review; precise description of the research methodology; accurate presentation of the data and research results, combining appropriate textual, graphical, and tabular descriptions; discussion of results, conclusions, and contributions in the light of existing theories and research in the field, as well as from the perspective of practice, limitations, and possibilities for future research.

The habilitation monograph is a natural continuation of the book based on Dr. Racheva’s dissertation, as well as the culmination of her professional journey and research endeavours to date. The work addresses a problem of exceptional societal importance – the personality profile and disorders related to PAS use, with the aim of developing and optimizing evidence-based prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation programs tailored to the needs of target groups. The focus of the work is on identifying the key personality traits of addicts and integrating them into a model that reflects the main forms of psychological functioning. The monograph is grounded in the widely popular bio-psycho-social model, summarizing the factors contributing to PAS (ab)use into three groups (physiological, environmental, and individual). A theoretical contribution of the work is the proposed model for systematizing the personality traits of individuals with problematic PAS use, which integrates behavioral, emotional, and social problems based on dysfunctions in psychopathology and the distinction between externalized, internalized, and atypical personality dispositions. The significant differences in the expression of personality traits in addicts, established through comparative analysis of externalized and internalized personality traits in individuals with PAS-related disorders (experimental group) and individuals from the general population (control group), have practical value for optimizing treatment processes and assessing outcomes in the rehabilitation of addicts. In terms of methodological contributions, scales for measuring externalized and internalized personality traits were developed, showing good psychometric properties and potential for application in future fundamental and applied research.

Together with E. Pencheva and N. Nikolov, Dr. Racheva is among the researchers involved in the Bulgarian adaptation of the widely used Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory for

Adolescents (MMPI-A), which is one of the key contributions in her book based on her dissertation.

In terms of content, I generally accept the basic and applied contributions of Dr. Racheva's habilitation work, the book based on her dissertation, and the other publications presented by the candidate, which are single-authored, and for which a division of contributions has been provided. However, I am unable to evaluate the contributions of the candidate for some co-authored publications (e.g., I.5) due to the absence of submitted authorship contribution statement.

II. Teaching and Training Activity

Although research, rather than teaching/training, is the primary criterion for occupying an academic position at IPHS-BAS, since February 2020, Dr. Rositsa Racheva has gained teaching experience as a part-time lecturer at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski," where she delivers a lecture course titled "Alcohol and Drug Use in Adolescence" in the Master's Program in Child and Adolescent Psychology. This course is in the field of clinical and counselling psychology concerning addictions and aligns fully with the profile of the competition.

III. Administrative and Public Activity

The candidate is distinguished for her extensive organizational activity and contributions to public welfare. Currently, Dr. Rositsa Racheva is a member of the Attestation Commission at IPHS-BAS, as well as the Chair of the Ethics Commission and the Scientific Seminar at the same institute. She is an active member of several professional organizations (Bulgarian Psychological Association and Bulgarian Association of Cognitive-Behavioural Psychotherapy) and state-public bodies (Council for Cooperation with the Scientific and Academic Community under the Chairperson of the State Agency Road Safety; State-Public Counselling Commission on Road Safety Issues). It is evident that her administrative and public activity is closely related to the competition's profile, and she acts as a bridge between governmental bodies and science, with the aim of promoting the development of evidence-based policies.

IV. Compliance with the Requirements for the Academic Position

The candidate's publications and citations not only meet but exceed:

1. The minimum national requirements under Art. 2b, paras. 2 and 3 of LDASRB for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology;

2. The minimum requirements set out in the Rules for the Terms and Conditions for Academic Appointments at IPHS-BAS in the specified field under group indicators G (230.58 points with a minimum of 220 points) and D (75 points with a minimum of 60 points).

The content of the submitted scientific work and the candidate's contributions fully correspond to the profile of the competition - counselling psychology, personality psychology and addictions.

V. Personal Impressions of the Candidate's Work

I have observed part of the candidate's extensive professional activity for over 20 years in relation to joint initiatives and projects that the National Center for Addictions, where Rositsa Racheva worked, organized together with the Bulgarian Association for Drug Prevention and "Family and Drugs" Foundation, where I collaborated with Prof. Stankushev, Assoc. Prof. Sonya Toteva, and other leading figures in the field of addictions and their prevention in Bulgaria.

Our professional contact and my positive impressions of Dr. Racheva's work continued to develop after she was appointed to the academic position of “Assistant Professor” in 2016 at the Department of Psychology, IPHS-BAS, where I was appointed as an Associate Professor at the time. Since then, we have worked as a team on two nationally significant research projects in the fields of counselling and traffic psychology, as well as on scientific publications, reports, organization of forums, and other activities.

Currently, Dr. R. Racheva is a member of the Social and Counselling Psychology Unit and of the Attestation Commission at IPHS-BAS, which I chair. Based on my long-term observations and daily professional contacts with her, I can confidently state that she is an ambitious, consistent, and thorough researcher, but also a practitioner with long-standing experience in the field of counselling psychology. She is a fully autonomous researcher and generator of ideas, and at the same time a responsible employee, a tolerant and cooperative colleague on whom one can rely. She is an excellent communicator, an initiator of activities, and a valued member of any research team; an attractive presenter and an author with an excellent academic style that is especially enjoyable to read. She is a professional with great potential for further growth not only in basic but also in applied science, as well as in translating her work into counselling practice.

VI. Recommendations and Notes on the Candidate's Activities and Achievements

My evaluation of the candidate's research, applied, organizational, teaching, and expert counselling activities and achievements is strongly positive.

My only note concerns the presentation format of some contributions with similar content, which I believe could have been summarized, though I do not question their substance.

VII. Conclusion

The candidate has extensive experience in combining theoretical and empirical research with practice in the fields of counselling psychology, personality psychology, and addiction studies. Based on my overall assessment of the candidate’s scientific and applied activities and contributions, the originality of the presented scientific works, and the fulfilment of the minimum requirements outlined in LDASRB and its Implementation Rules at BAS and IPHS-BAS, I confidently recommend that the esteemed members of the academic jury support the selection of Assistant Professor Dr. Rossitsa Zhelyazkova Racheva for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences, Professional Field 3.2. Psychology (Counselling Psychology – Personality and Addictions) at “Social and Counselling Psychology” Unit, IPHS-BAS.

14 September 2024 Assoc. Prof. Diana Ivanova Bakalova, Ph.D.

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