REVIEW

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Regarding: the dissertation "Positive Development of Adolescents in the Context of the School Environment in Public and Private Schools," prepared by Vanya Stanislavova Slavova—a full-time doctoral student at the Institute for Population and Human Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences for the award of the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" in Scientific Field 3.2. Psychology, Area of Higher Education 3. Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences, doctoral program "Educational and Developmental Psychology"

This review was prepared based on Order RD-6-187/ April 29, 2026, of the Director of the Institute of Social and Human Sciences at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in connection with my participation in the scientific jury for the defence of the dissertation by **Vanya Stanislavova Slavova** for the award of the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" on the topic: "Positive Development of Adolescents in the Context of the School Environment in Public and Private Schools" in Field 3.2. Psychology, doctoral program "Educational and Developmental Psychology."

The thesis submitted for review, "Positive Development of Adolescents in the Context of the School Environment in Public and Private Schools," is 192 pages long and is structured in accordance with the logic of the content into an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion. The list of references includes 277 (13 in Bulgarian and 264 in English) current and topic-related titles. The individual chapters are structured in detail, allowing for easy identification of the main content highlights.

The motivation for the dissertation and the relevance of the issue under investigation are justified by the doctoral candidate with the challenges that give rise to the need for education aimed at realizing the positive potential of adolescents. The focus of the dissertation research is on the question of how the main ideas of contemporary positive psychology can be applied in the

educational and upbringing process of adolescents so as to achieve a positive effect on their development.

The relevance and significance of the dissertation also stem from the selection of research participants, which was made by the doctoral candidate—adolescents attending public and private schools. This fact must be emphasized because, on the one hand, adolescence is a very significant age period for progressive personal development, and on the other hand, it can manifest as a risky stage in positive personality development.

Interest in the chosen research topic also stems from the: on the one hand, a lowering of the age at which mental, cognitive, and behavioural disorders emerge, and on the other hand, an increase in the age at which young people are ready to independently organize their lives.

Impaired mental health and, consequently, mental well-being affect not only the individual but also the social environment in which the individual functions, particularly the school environment. This is why the role of the school and contemporary positive educational approaches in regulating these processes is essential and should be studied and analysed so that they can be applied to overcome the negative trends.

The doctoral candidate correctly defines the object and subject of the study: the object of the study 793 adolescents in grades 8 through 12 attending 8 schools in the city of Sofia; the subject of the study: the relationships between the positive development of adolescents and the type of school environment. In this way, the doctoral student formulates the aim of the dissertation research as follows: within the framework of adolescent positive development as an approach in contemporary psychology and in the context of the school environment, to examine the social-emotional health of high school students in Bulgaria, their school engagement, their level of mental health and well-being, and their future expectations.

To achieve this goal, the doctoral student precisely formulates the research tasks and hypotheses. Tasks: To analyse the factors contributing to the emergence and establishment of positive psychology; To review established theories on the positive development of adolescents and systematize the key concepts; To examine the characteristics of the school environment and propose approaches for implementing the ideas of positive psychology; To select (and, if necessary, adapt) appropriate instruments for measuring the characteristics of the study participants; To

propose an analysis of the interrelationships between the measured variables. The study tests the following hypotheses: It is hypothesized that there are characteristics specific to the school environment in public and private schools that determine differences in the levels of adolescents' individual strengths and their overall social-emotional health;

It is assumed that the sociodemographic characteristics of adolescents are related to the characteristics of covitality; It is hypothesized that higher values of covitality among adolescents are associated with their subjective psychological functioning, etc.

The methodology of the empirical study is appropriate for the hypotheses to be tested and is presented accurately. It is based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative measurements—an approach that ensures an adequate and in-depth interpretation of the data.

I consider it necessary to emphasize that the doctoral candidate has designed the empirical study with exceptional precision and accuracy, which is evidence of the fruitful collaboration between the doctoral candidate and the academic advisor.

I believe that the reviewed dissertation can be classified as significant applied research that has a substantial impact on the educational sphere. I have no critical comments and recommend that the doctoral candidate, based on the dissertation research, develop a methodological guide for the practical application of the ideas defended in the dissertation.

After a thorough review of the dissertation research, I support the contributions identified by the doctoral candidate, emphasizing the following:

- A detailed analysis and systematization of the theoretical concepts of positive psychology have been conducted;
- A new approach to the positive development of young people, based on an in-depth review of leading theoretical models as well as evidence-based programs, is applied to the Bulgarian context;
- Methods for studying the covitality and future expectations of adolescents have been adapted to the Bulgarian context.

An analysis of the doctoral candidate's scholarly output leads me to conclude that Vanya Slavova can identify theoretically relevant and applied problems and investigating them in depth with the necessary precision and scientific rigor.

The abstract accurately reflects the dissertation research and its contributions. The list of publications on the topic of the dissertation demonstrates that the main results of the doctoral candidate's research have been sufficiently validated within the scientific community. The doctoral candidate's research output meets the Minimum National Requirements under Article 2b, paragraphs 2 and 3 of the ZRASRB, as well as the minimum requirements for the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" at the Institute of History and Philosophy of Science at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

I have not found any instances of plagiarism, and the doctoral candidate's statement in the declaration of originality gives me reason to believe that the dissertation is entirely the product of the doctoral candidate's own research and meets all regulatory requirements for such works.

Conclusion

Based on all the above, I am confident in giving my positive assessment of the submitted dissertation "Positive Development of Adolescents in the Context of the School Environment in Public and Private Schools" and propose to the esteemed members of the Academic Jury that the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" be awarded in PN 3.2. Psychology, doctoral program "Educational and Developmental Psychology," to **Vanya Stanislavova Slavova** for the defence of the dissertation "Positive Development of Adolescents in the Context of the School Environment in Public and Private Schools."

May 22, 2026 Reviewer: /Prof. Galya T. Gercheva-Nestorova, Ph.D. in Psychology/