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OPINION

by

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on the dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the professional field 3.2 Psychology on the topic: POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT IN STATE AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS

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Form of doctoral studies: full-time

Scientific organization: Institute for Population and Human Research - BAS, Department of Psychology

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1. General impression of the dissertation with an evaluative nature

The dissertation of doctoral student Vanya Slavova is dedicated to clarifying the effects of positive development during adolescence on academic (engagement with school and academic success) and subjective mental functioning (mental well-being and expectations for the future). The topic of the dissertation is extremely relevant due to the ongoing interest in recent years from a scientific and pragmatic point of view in positive development during adolescence as a successful alternative to programs for the prevention and promotion of mental health and well-being during this age period.

The structure of the dissertation meets the requirements and includes an introduction, three parts (theoretical, setting of the empirical study, results and discussion), literature and

appendices in a volume of 210 pages, of which 192 pages form the main text. The results are illustrated in 52 tables and 6 figures. The appendices (4 in number) present the research tools and tables with the results of the correlation analysis.

The first (theoretical) part of the dissertation demonstrates excellent knowledge of the scientific issues outlined by the topic of the dissertation work, while citing an impressive number of sources: 277 (13 in Bulgarian and 264 in English). Current scientific literature has been used – 18% (51) of the cited sources have been published in the last 5 years. The citations in the text and in the bibliography of the dissertation are fully consistent.

The theoretical and literary review is well systematized, logical and sufficiently focused to allow the main psychological variables to be outlined and a conceptual model of the empirical study to be created. The text is written in compliance with the high standards of academic writing, easily understandable and in a logical sequence from the broader theoretical context of positive psychology through the presentation of the concepts of positive development during adolescence (including school-based) to the effects of positive development in an academic and subjective aspect. Theories of positive adolescent development are presented in detail, in a comparative plan and analytically, in order to draw arguments for choosing the most appropriate concept for inclusion in the study. School-based programs for positive development of young people and their effectiveness are analysed in detail and fully. The lack of research data on the influence of public and private schools in Bulgaria as an environmental context that promotes positive development is indicated.

Psychological methodologies have been selected that allow the realization of the main goal of the dissertation work and the verification of the formulated hypotheses. Full information is provided on the psychometric characteristics of the research instruments used. The high levels of internal consistency of the questionnaires are impressive as a prerequisite for the validity of the obtained results and conclusions. It is important to emphasize the high degree of complexity of the research design, which includes the measurement of factors from the broader environmental context of adolescents such as family and school and their influence on indicators of Covitality, on the academic and subjective mental functioning of adolescents.

For the first time in Bulgaria, the methods for studying Covitality (Social-Emotional Health Survey-Secondary – SEHS) and the Future Expectations Scale for Adolescents (Future Expectations Scale for Adolescents – FESA) have been adapted. The factor structure and

reliability of the questionnaires were studied and the results obtained were completely satisfactory.

A pilot (143 students studied) and a main study (650 subjects studied) aged 13-19 from four public and three private schools were conducted. The main study has a mixed design, includes exploratory qualitative and quantitative (cross-sectional) research. All this shows that a complex psychological study was implemented in compliance with all scientific requirements for obtaining reliable results. The object, subject, goal, tasks and hypotheses of the study were correctly formulated. Appropriate statistical methods were used (descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, variance and regression analysis).

2. Opinion on the significance and persuasiveness of the obtained results, interpretations and conclusions and on the nature of the scientific contributions

The results of the qualitative study and the statistical processing of the empirical data are correctly presented and interpreted. The results allow conclusions to be drawn regarding the testing of all the hypotheses raised. The main conclusion from the qualitative study is that the school environment influences positive development during adolescence within the framework of the concept of Covitality, with the influence of private schools being more favorable compared to public schools. The results of the quantitative study show that in terms of subjective mental functioning (mental well-being and expectations for the future) there are no differences between students from public and private schools, in contrast to the measured indicators of academic functioning, which are higher in private schools (academic success and school engagement). The weaker influence of the school environment and socio-demographic factors on the level of covitality during adolescence is surprising. The results prove that the development of certain strengths in the character of young people, i.e. aspects of covitality, are positively associated with better academic and subjective mental functioning. The conclusions (theoretical, from the qualitative and quantitative research) convincingly show that the goal and objectives of the empirical research have been fully achieved.

Doctoral student Valya Slavova has defined 5 contributing moments of her dissertation work – 3 scientifically applied and 2 practically applied, which are significant and can be fully accepted. A particularly valuable theoretical contribution is the new theoretical model she applied for the analysis of the functioning of adolescents, which takes into account the determining factors acting together at different systemic levels, such as intra-individual factors (strengths in character), external supportive contexts (family, school, peers) and socio-

demographic factors. A significant practically applied contribution is also the adaptation for work in Bulgarian conditions of the psychological methodologies for the study of Covitality (Social-Emotional Health Survey-Secondary – SEHS) and the Future Expectations Scale for Adolescents (FESA).

The described contributions will encourage research on the positive development of young people, the implementation of school programs for positive development and the correct measurement of their effectiveness.

3. Assessment of the quality of scientific works reflecting the research on the dissertation

The dissertation has been published in 3 independent publications in proceedings of prestigious scientific forums such as the 10th Anniversary International Congress on Psychology and the National School for Doctoral Students and Young Researchers in the Social Sciences of the Department of Psychology at the Institute of Psychology-BAS. The published texts reflect the most essential points in the dissertation and are sufficient in number according to the minimum requirements for the educational and scientific degree "Doctor".

4. Motivated conclusion

In conclusion, it can be summarized that doctoral student Vanya Slavova has the theoretical preparation, an established style of academic writing, qualities and skills for independent planning and implementation of scientific research, and the dissertation work submitted for assessment has achieved results that represent an original scientific contribution in theoretical and practical aspects. Due to the above, I give my positive assessment of the dissertation work and I am convinced that its author - Vanya Slavova, fully deserves the awarding by the esteemed Scientific Jury of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the professional field 3.2 Psychology.

29.05. 2026 Member of the Scientific Jury: …….

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