Вх. № ЧР-03-285/12.10.2026 г.

REVIEW

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Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"
Professional Field 3.2. Psychology
Member of the Scientific Jury appointed by Order No. RD-6-541 / 16.09.2026 of the Director of the Institute for Population and Human Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (IPHS - BAS)

Regarding: The scientific works and materials submitted for participation in the competition for the academic position of "PROFESSOR" in the area of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology (Health and Developmental Psychology), announced in State Gazette No. 65 / 17.07.2026 for the needs of the Section "Developmental and Health Psychology" at the Institute for Population and Human Studies - BAS

One applicant has submitted documents for participation in the announced competition: Anna Alexandrova Alexandrova-Karamanova, PhD, Associate Professor at the Section "Developmental and Health Psychology", Department of Psychology at the Institute for Population and Human Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Information about the applicant

The academic and professional development of Assoc. Prof. Anna Alexandrova-Karamanova, PhD, demonstrates complete consistency, high research systematicity, and ascending dynamics in the scientific field. Starting from her secondary education at the First English Language School in Sofia (1992 - 1997), she earned a Master's degree in Psychology (a 5-year degree program) from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in 2002 with three specialized tracks: "Clinical and Counselling Psychology", "Developmental, Educational, and Cultural Psychology", and "Work and Organizational Psychology". During the period 2005 - 2009, she was a full-time doctoral student at the Institute for Population and Human Studies at BAS, where on 8 May 2013 she successfully defended her PhD dissertation titled "Media influence on body image and its personality moderation in adolescents" in the scientific specialty "General Psychology (Personality Psychology)".

Her professional career began in 2003 as a research psychologist and coordinator of international research projects at the "Psychology and Health" Research Centre Foundation. From 2013 to 2020, she held the academic position of "Chief Assistant Professor", and from June 2020 to the present, she has been an "Associate Professor" in Health Psychology and Developmental Psychology at IPHS - BAS, accumulating over 13 years of work experience within the Academy's system. Parallel to her research activities, the applicant demonstrates prominent institutional leadership and administrative responsibility: since September 2021, she has been Director of the National School for Doctoral Students and Young Researchers in Social Sciences; during 2020 - 2025, she headed the doctoral program "Developmental and Educational Psychology", and since 2025 she has developed and assumed the leadership of the

new doctoral program "Health Psychology". Since March 2023, she has been a member of the Scientific Council of IPHS - BAS, and in 2022 she participated as an expert in committees of the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA) for program accreditation. Her professional standing is further enhanced by her membership in a number of leading international and national scientific organizations: European Health Psychology Society (EHPS, since 2003), the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children network (HBSC, since 2004), the Union of Psychologists in Bulgaria (since 2008, where she serves as Scientific Secretary of the "Health and Counselling Psychology" Section), European Alliance Against Depression (EAAD, since 2013), European Society for Research on Internet Interventions (ESRII, since 2013), Association of European Qualitative Researchers in Psychology (EQUIP, since 2020), and European Network for Social and Emotional Competence (ENSEC, since 2022).

Research and Compliance with Minimum National and Institutional Requirements

The 21 scientific works submitted for participation in the competition fall entirely within the thematic scope of the announced competition, do not duplicate the publications from the procedures for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD) or for the position of "Associate Professor", and fully comply with regulatory requirements.

The theoretical and methodological framework in the research of Assoc. Prof. Alexandrova-Karamanova is situated entirely in the field of health psychology and follows the biopsychosocial model of development, prevention, and coping with risk factors. A key strength of her scientific approach is the implementation of a mixed quantitative-qualitative research design with a representative national character, which combines internationally established psychometric scales with precisely developed original tools for measuring subjective stress, family dynamics, academic motivation, and technology-mediated communication. This complex methodological apparatus allows for both the objective formulation of population-level patterns and an in-depth capture of adolescents' subjective experiences, as presented in the habilitation work, as well as the conducted representative quantitative studies with adolescents and a qualitative study in emerging adulthood within an international study.

The analytical scope of Assoc. Prof. Anna Alexandrova-Karamanova's work encompasses four basic domains of psychosocial functioning in adolescence: mental health, risk and health-promoting behaviours, social communication, and academic coping. The research maintains a balanced stance, taking into account both negative manifestations and vulnerability, as well as positive effects expressed in digital adaptation, preservation of self-efficacy, and activation of coping resources. Specific emphasis is placed on the influence of basic personality traits - especially Neuroticism as a risk factor and Agreeableness as a protective mechanism moderating coping during extraordinary environmental challenges - as well as adolescents' strengths and resources (the 5Cs model of Positive Youth Development, love, trust, empathy, etc.).

The age profile of the studies is precisely focused on the period of identity formation in adolescence and emerging adulthood, where the coincidence of normative developmental crises with global societal crises complicates adaptation processes. The scientific works reveal the role of the family environment and peers as key predictors of risk behaviour, while highlighting

the importance of physical activity, social connectedness, and personal resilience in mitigating anxiety and distress.

Among the publications submitted for the competition, research conducted with adults suffering from chronic health problems - long COVID/post-COVID syndrome and diabetes - should also be noted. A special place is held by the international qualitative study conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews on long COVID/post-COVID syndrome among 151 survivors of severe COVID-19 across 5 countries in Central and Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Slovakia, Croatia, Romania, and Poland), which focuses on long-term negative and positive consequences in severe survivors (post-COVID syndrome with impaired quality of life and posttraumatic growth) and their coping resources.

The scientific and applied value of the derived results lies in their immediate applicability for developing screening and prevention programs at the individual, family, and institutional levels. The proven effectiveness of digital communication and online-based support provides a rationale for implementing digital resources for psychological counselling, telepsychiatry, and mobile applications for monitoring well-being, which maintain universal relevance both during extraordinary crises and amid dynamic social changes.

The scientific work of Assoc. Prof. Anna Alexandrova-Karamanova, PhD, is characterized by a clear, precise, and strictly academic style that reflects high research culture and deep erudition in health and developmental psychology. Her works rest firmly on the fundamental theoretical concepts of the biopsychosocial model, demonstrating a systematic mastery of contemporary research methods in mental health, prevention, and risk behaviours among adolescents, youth, and adults. Her ability to integrate representative quantitative psychometric designs with in-depth qualitative analyses demonstrates high methodological culture and the skill to transform empirical data into academically reasoned conclusions.

In both the Bulgarian and international scientific contexts, the applicant emerges as a scholar with a clearly recognizable and defined research niche focused on health, subjective well-being, and protective resources in adolescence, emerging adulthood, and adulthood. Her research standing is established both nationally through her leadership of large-scale fundamental projects funded by the National Science Fund, and internationally through her role as co-principal investigator for Bulgaria in the global WHO HBSC study, national delegate to the European Health Psychology Society, and principal investigator of international scientific consortia under ANSO.

Her authority in the global academic community is confirmed by her participation in international evaluation panels in psychology for the Foundation for Science and Technology of Portugal (FCT) and the International Science Council, as well as her editorial and peer-review activities for prestigious journals ranked Q1 and Q2 in Scopus and Web of Science databases. All of this delineates the profile of a thorough and consistent researcher whose scientific contributions formulate lasting methodological and applied models in modern health psychology.

According to the submitted statement on compliance with the minimum national and institutional requirements of BAS for holding the academic position of "Professor" in Area 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology, the applicant Assoc. Prof. Anna Alexandrova-Karamanova, PhD, has accumulated 1168.75 points against the required threshold of 590 points (550 according to the Development of Academic Staff in the

Republic of Bulgaria Act - DASRBA). By individual indicator groups, the results are as follows: Group A (Dissertation for the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" / PhD): 50 points (as required); Group B (Habilitation work - monograph of 190 authored standard pages): 100 points (as required); Group G (Published monographs, studies, articles, and book chapters): 308.75 points against a minimum of 220 points, comprising 12 studies indexed in world databases, 1 chapter in a collective monograph, 5 studies, and 2 articles in peer-reviewed journals; Group D (Citations): 600 points against a minimum requirement of 120 points, including 28 citations in world-renowned databases, 12 citations in scientific monographs and peer-reviewed volumes, and 12 in peer-reviewed journals; Group E (Academic indicators, including successful supervision of a PhD student, leadership of a national project funded by the National Science Fund, and leadership of an international ANSO project): 110 points against the required 100 points.

Assoc. Prof. Alexandrova-Karamanova's scientometric profile is explicit evidence of real international impact. The total number of registered citations stands at 274 in Scopus and 635 in Google Scholar. Achieving an h-index = 6 simultaneously in Scopus and Web of Science (as well as an h-index = 8 in Google Scholar) is an exceptionally high achievement for the Social Sciences field and indisputable proof of a lasting presence and authority in the global scientific community. All indicators are fully satisfied, and the final point total nearly doubles the overall minimum threshold required for appointment to the position of "Professor".

Evaluation of the Monograph

The habilitation work - the monograph "COVID-19 and adolescents: growing up during a pandemic" (Prof. Marin Drinov Publishing House of BAS, 2026) - represents a fundamental, holistic, and exceptionally timely study situated in the field of health and developmental psychology. According to the presented co-authorship statement, the applicant authored 190 standard pages of the monograph (out of 380 total pages), covering the conceptual, methodological, and key empirical chapters, establishing her as the main driver and conceptual leader of the study.

The conceptual framework of the monograph is rooted in health and developmental psychology and is based on the biopsychosocial model of health. The work examines the intersection between the normative developmental crisis of adolescence (identity construction, autonomy, and social connectedness) and the extraordinary environmental crisis caused by the pandemic. The authors maintain a balanced research focus, capturing both specific risks and negative mental health manifestations, as well as adaptive resources, digital flexibility, personal maturation, and posttraumatic growth in the younger generation.

A major merit of the work is its methodological precision and representativeness. The study employs an embedded mixed-methods research design, combining a large-scale quantitative survey with an in-depth qualitative module. The quantitative sample is nationally representative and includes 3,326 students aged 11 to 17 from schools across all 28 administrative districts of Bulgaria, providing high statistical reliability and valid generalizability of findings to the entire adolescent population in the country. The qualitative component encompasses 3,001 adolescents whose open-ended text responses were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis according to the methodology of Braun and Clarke, ensuring an authentic capture of subjective experiences.

Methodological precision is further confirmed by rigorous psychometric evaluation of the measurement instruments used. The monograph integrates both internationally established psychometric scales and original scales developed by the authors.
The thematic scope of the monograph thoroughly analyses four main areas of psychosocial functioning: mental health (perceived stress, anxiety, loneliness, psychosomatic complaints, and self-efficacy), health risk behaviours (alcohol, tobacco, vaping, and cannabis use), social interactions (family dynamics, peer networks, romantic relationships, and digital communication), and online education. An impressive scientific contribution is the analysis of basic personality traits as moderators of pandemic impact, proving Neuroticism to be a key risk factor, while Agreeableness and Openness to Experience serve as stable protective mechanisms for preserving mental well-being.
The work concludes with specific, scientifically grounded guidelines for prevention and intervention aimed at school psychologists, educators, health professionals, and parents. These recommendations for stress coping, prevention of risk behaviour, and encouragement of academic motivation maintain universal relevance beyond the context of the pandemic.

Scientific and Applied Contributions

I fully accept the statement of original scientific and applied contributions presented by the candidate. They align with the candidate's core research profile, consolidating health psychology and prevention as a fundamental issue of global significance. The contributions can be categorized as fundamental-research, applied-preventive, and consultative-interdisciplinary:
Fundamental-research contributions encompass the systematization of factors determining mental health, health literacy, and subjective well-being in adolescents and youth, as well as revealing the complex effects of global crises (the COVID-19 pandemic) on the psyche, perceived stress, and perceptions of the younger generation.
Applied-preventive contributions pertain to identifying protective factors that serve to prevent risk behaviour - substance use, school bullying, cyberbullying, and early sexual initiation - and developing evidence-based guidelines for intervention and prevention in school and family environments directed at practicing psychologists, educators, and parents.
Consultative-interdisciplinary contributions relate to building biopsychosocial models for managing chronic conditions and positioning health psychology as an interdisciplinary bridge between psychological counselling, medical practice, and public health state policies.

Evaluation of Participation in Research Projects, International Activity, and PhD Supervision

Assoc. Prof. Anna Alexandrova-Karamanova demonstrates impressive research activity, having served as principal investigator and lead researcher on numerous national and international projects funded by the National Science Fund, BAS, Alliance of International Science Organizations (ANSO), WHO, EU, and UNICEF. Her international recognition is confirmed by her role as co-principal investigator for Bulgaria in the global WHO HBSC study, national delegate to the European Health Psychology Society, member of the International Evaluation Panel in Psychology for the Foundation for Science and Technology of Portugal (FCT), and reviewer for the International Science Council. Her active position as an editorial

board member and peer reviewer for leading international journals ranked Q1 and Q2 (such as Frontiers in Psychology, Internet Interventions, Societies, etc.) further enhances her academic authority. Assoc. Prof. Anna Alexandrova-Karamanova, PhD, has made a significant contribution to training young scientific cadres. Under her supervision, one full-time PhD student has successfully defended their dissertation, and her role as Director of the National School for Doctoral Students in Social Sciences establishes her as a dedicated mentor for the new generation of researchers.

Personal Impressions, Remarks, and Questions for the Candidate

I know the applicant as a precise and principled researcher with high academic culture, extraordinary work capacity, and strict adherence to scientific ethics. Her works are characterized by clear, precise, and strictly academic discourse. She enjoys indisputable authority among colleagues, doctoral students, and practicing specialists in Bulgaria and abroad, demonstrating high collegiality and openness to practice-based innovations.

I have no critical remarks regarding the materials submitted for the competition. The results achieved and the high quality of the scientific production give me reason only to recommend that the candidate continue developing with equal energy the new doctoral program in Health Psychology. In light of the high results achieved, a question of interest for scientific discussion is: What are the main prospective directions that Assoc. Prof. Alexandrova-Karamanova foresees for transferring empirical findings on adolescent health into concrete national public health and education policies?

CONCLUSION

The materials, scientific works, and statements submitted for the competition demonstrate that Assoc. Prof. Anna Alexandrova Alexandrova-Karamanova, PhD, is a fully formed and established scholar in health and developmental psychology with international visibility. Her scientific production reflects in-depth research activity with fundamental and applied contributions that exceed many times over the minimum national and institutional requirements of BAS and IPHS - BAS for holding the academic position of "Professor".

Based on my high evaluation of the candidate's overall scientific, research, project, and institutional activities, I confidently give my POSITIVE EVALUATION and unreservedly recommend to the esteemed Scientific Jury and to the Scientific Council of the Institute for Population and Human Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences to elect Assoc. Prof. Anna Alexandrova Alexandrova-Karamanova, PhD, to the academic position of "PROFESSOR" in the area of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology (Health and Developmental Psychology).

07.10.2026 Reviewer:

Prof. Margarita Bakracheva, DSc