Вх. № ЧР-03-300/28.10.2026 г.

OPINION

by

Assoc. Prof. Diana Ivanova Bakalova, PhD
Social and Counselling Psychology Unit, Department of Psychology,
Institute for Population and Human Studies - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (IPHS-BAS)
Chair of the Scientific Jury appointed by Order No. RD-6-541 of 16 September 2026
issued by the Director of IPHS-BAS

concerning:
the scientific publications and supporting materials
submitted by the candidate Assoc. Prof. Anna Alexandrova-Karamanova, PhD,
for participation in the competition for the academic position of Professor in higher education area 3: Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.2: Psychology (Health and Developmental Psychology), announced in the State Gazette (Issue 65, 17 July 2026), for the needs of Developmental and Health Psychology Unit, Department of Psychology, IPHS-BAS

1. Academic Career of the Candidate in Relation to the Subject Area of the Competition

Assoc. Prof. Anna Alexandrova-Karamanova holds a Master's degree in Psychology from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (2002) and a PhD in Psychology, awarded following the defence of her dissertation entitled "The Influence of the Media on Body Image and Its Moderation by Personality Traits in Adolescents" in May 2013. Her professional career includes research and project activities at the Research Centre "Psychology and Health", followed by academic advancement at the Department of Psychology, IPHS-BAS, where she served as Chief Assistant Professor from November 2013 and has held the academic position of Associate Professor in the Developmental and Health Psychology Unit since June 2020.

The materials submitted for the competition demonstrate that the candidate is an established researcher in health and developmental psychology, with extensive experience in conducting basic and applied research, including participation in international research networks and leadership of research projects. Her academic career is characterised by thematic continuity and a gradual broadening of research interests – from personality, body image and adolescent development to the comprehensive study of mental health, health behaviour and psychosocial well-being across different stages of the life course. Overall, I consider that Assoc. Prof. Alexandrova-Karamanova's academic record reflects a mature and consistently developed research profile that fully corresponds to the subject area of the competition and the research priorities of the Developmental and Health Psychology Unit at the Department of Psychology, IPHS-BAS.

2. Scientific Publications Submitted and Scientometric Indicators

A total of 21 scientific publications have been submitted for the competition: one co-authored monograph (habilitation work), one single-authored chapter in a collective monograph, 12 research papers in refereed and indexed scientific journals, and five research papers and two articles in peer-reviewed, non-indexed publications or edited volumes. According to the accompanying report and declaration, these publications are distinct from the works used to obtain the academic position of Associate Professor. Final procedural verification of the scientometric indicators falls within the remit of the National Centre for Information and Documentation (NACID). The candidate's research output combines co-authored studies and independent work, including publications in reputable international journals (e.g., Child &

Youth Care Forum, Journal of Adolescent Health, Addictive Behaviors, International Journal of Public Health, Children and Societies), indexed in Scopus/WoS, including journals ranked in quartiles Q1 and Q2.

The submitted report on compliance with the minimum requirements of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS) provides the following ratios of points earned to points required by indicator group: A – 50/50; B – 100/100; G – 308.75/220; D – 600/120; E – 110/100; a total of 1,168.75 points against a required minimum of 590. Thus, according to the documentation submitted, the minimum thresholds are not merely met both within each individual group and overall, but are exceeded in groups G, D and E, particularly in terms of citations and reviews, including those in publications indexed in Scopus/WoS.

The citation list submitted for the current competition includes 52 citations: 28 in indexed journals, 12 in peer-reviewed monographs and collective volumes, and 12 in other peer-reviewed publications. The publications and citations counted for this competition should not be confused with the overall bibliometric figures reported in the CV (87 publications, 274 citations in Scopus and 635 in Google Scholar).

The candidate's research interests and publications display clear thematic continuity and encompass mental health and well-being, health-related and risk behaviour, personal and social resources for adaptation, positive youth development, and the psychosocial determinants of health. A distinctive feature of her academic profile is the integration of personality development with the biopsychosocial approach to health, together with the combination of individual, family, school and societal levels of analysis. Her research has a pronounced international orientation and involves collaboration within interdisciplinary teams and networks.

3. Evaluation of the Habilitation Work

The candidate's principal habilitation work is the co-authored monograph "COVID-19 and Adolescents: Growing Up During a Pandemic" (Professor Marin Drinov Publishing House of BAS, 2026), written by six authors and comprising 296 printed pages, equivalent to 380 standard pages. The work was developed within a national research project led by the candidate, entitled "Health and Well-being of Adolescents During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Effects on Mental Health, Health Behaviour, Social Interactions, and Academic Motivation and Achievement, Moderated by Personality Characteristics", funded by the National Science Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science under the 2021 Competition for Funding Fundamental Scientific Research (Contract No. KP-06-N55/7). The submitted authorship allocation protocol certifies the candidate's contribution as 190 standard pages, demonstrating that the work may be regarded as a habilitation monograph for the candidate. As authorship of specific chapters or parts of the text is not identified in either the protocol or the monograph, I accept that the candidate's contribution corresponds, on the one hand, to the allocation recorded in the protocol and, on the other, to her key role as leader of the project under which the monograph was developed.

The monograph consists of ten chapters and a conclusion, structured around a biopsychosocial model of the pandemic's effects on mental health, substance use, social interactions and functioning at school, as well as the role of personality characteristics. I particularly appreciate the integration of quantitative analyses with a qualitative module, including thematic analysis of responses to open-ended questions, and the development of guidelines for prevention and intervention. From a methodological perspective, the substantial size of the main sample - 3,326 students aged 11-17 years – deserves emphasis (following the exclusion of incomplete questionnaires and respondents outside the target age range from a total of 3,523 online questionnaires received). It is also important to note that different

analytical samples were used in individual thematic analyses, as is accurately reported in the monograph.

An important contribution is the differentiated picture of the effects: more pronounced difficulties in mental health and school functioning; divergent changes across different forms of psychoactive substance use; adaptive strategies for maintaining social ties; and possible positive changes in family closeness and personal development. The moderating effects of gender, age and the Big Five personality traits are also analysed, moving beyond a purely descriptive finding of general vulnerability. The conclusions are of immediate relevance to psychologists, schools and institutions planning support during health crises.

4. Main Scientific and Applied Scientific Contributions

I accept the contributions presented by the candidate and regard them as significant for the advancement of scientific knowledge and consistent with the subject area of the competition. I would summarise them as follows:

1. *Research (theoretical and empirical) contributions* – The most significant among these, in my assessment, is the comprehensive investigation of the psychosocial consequences of the pandemic for adolescent development and the identification of differentiated changes in mental health, risk behaviour, social relationships and school functioning, including specific risk and protective factors. The findings concerning the relationships between health literacy, attitudes towards one's own body, family and school environments, and young people's well-being also constitute a substantial contribution. Particular attention should be given to studies of positive youth development through the lens of the 5Cs model, which reveal the importance of personal resources for mental health and risk behaviour and help establish a resource-oriented perspective in developmental research.

2. *Interdisciplinary methodological contributions* – The integration of biopsychosocial and developmental approaches, together with the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods for a comprehensive investigation of adolescent functioning, is likewise an important contribution. I would also include here the interdisciplinary biopsychosocial model of diabetes self-management and microvascular health developed by the candidate, which provides a promising framework for subsequent empirical testing.

3. *Applied scientific contributions* – The identified risk and protective factors provide an empirical basis for developing prevention and intervention approaches aimed at mental health, reducing risk behaviour, supporting school adjustment and promoting positive adolescent development.

I highly value the consistent integration of research on psychosocial risks with the study of personal and social resources for adaptation, resilience and well-being. It is precisely this integrative perspective that lends scientific coherence and clear contributory value to the candidate's submitted body of work.

5. Research Organisation and Training Activities

The candidate has experience as the leader of a national fundamental research project funded by the National Science Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science (Contract KP-06-N55/7, 2021-2025) and as principal investigator of an international project funded by ANSO (2022-2025); both projects fall within health and developmental psychology. Since 2020, she has been Co-Principal Investigator for Bulgaria in the international Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study, conducted in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO). In addition, Assoc. Prof. Alexandrova-Karamanova has demonstrated experience in developing academic communities, for example by leading the doctoral programme "Developmental and Educational Psychology" (2020-2025) and the National School for Doctoral Students and Young Researchers in the Social Sciences since 2021. It is important to

note that the School is the only forum of its kind for early-career social scientists in the country and has enjoyed growing popularity each year, with very high attendance by young researchers from across Bulgaria. As a doctoral supervisor, the candidate has supervised one doctoral student, who successfully defended her dissertation in 2026.

6. Comments on Limitations and Directions for Future Research

I have no critical comments or questions for the candidate. Rather, I would suggest possible directions for the further development of her productive research programme. The main empirical studies on the pandemic rely on cross-sectional, self-report data, and the inability to draw causal conclusions from the observed associations and moderating effects is appropriately acknowledged as a limitation. Retrospective assessments of the pandemic situation may be sensitive to the context of measurement and to recall bias. Future research should therefore incorporate approaches that allow causal relationships to be examined, for example through longitudinal or experimental designs.

7. Conclusion

On the basis of the scientific publications and materials submitted, I assess the research output of Assoc. Prof. Anna Alexandrova-Karamanova, PhD, as thematically coherent, methodologically diverse and making a significant contribution to health and developmental psychology, in full alignment with the subject area of the competition and the needs of the Developmental and Health Psychology Unit, IPHS-BAS. The submitted report demonstrates compliance with the minimum requirements of BAS across all groups of scientometric indicators. The candidate holds a doctoral degree and has completed six years of active research and research-organisational work as an Associate Professor; she has a high number of citations and international recognition, experience in leading research projects, a doctoral programme and a School for Young Researchers, as well as successful doctoral supervision. On these grounds, I confidently give a POSITIVE ASSESSMENT of the candidacy and recommend that the Scientific Jury support the appointment of Assoc. Prof. Anna Alexandrova-Karamanova, PhD, to the academic position of Professor in professional field 3.2: Psychology (Health and Developmental Psychology), for the needs of the Developmental and Health Psychology Unit, IPHS-BAS.

Date: October 23, 2026
Sofia

Chair of the Scientific Jury:
……
/Assoc. Prof. Diana Bakalova, PhD/