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REVIEW

by Prof. Sonya Karabeliova, DSc in Psychology

on the competition for the academic position of "Professor" in Area of Higher Education 3. Social, Economic and Low Sciences, Professional Field 3.2 Psychology (Health and Developmental Psychology), for the needs of the Department of Psychology at the Institute for Population and Human Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (IPHS-BAS), announced in State Gazette No. 65 of 17 July 2026

1. INFORMATION ABOUT THE CANDIDATE

There is one candidate in the competition: Assoc. Prof. Anna Aleksandrova-Karamanova, PhD, from the Developmental and Health Psychology Section at the Institute for Population and Human Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (IPHS-BAS).

Anna Aleksandrova-Karamanova graduated with honours in Psychology from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in 2002 and obtained a Master's degree in Psychology, with specialisations in Clinical and Counselling Psychology, Developmental, Educational and Cultural Psychology, and Work and Organisational Psychology. From 2005 to 2009, A. Karamanova was a full-time doctoral student at IPHS-BAS. In 2013, she defended her doctoral dissertation entitled "The Influence of the Media on Body Image and Its Personality Moderation in Adolescents" in Professional Field 3.2 Psychology (General Psychology – Personality Psychology) and was awarded the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD).

A. Aleksandrova-Karamanova joined IPHS-BAS in 2013 as a Chief Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology. In 2020, following a successfully completed competition procedure, Dr A. Aleksandrova-Karamanova was appointed Associate Professor, a position she currently holds.

Between 2003 and 2013, the candidate worked as a research psychologist and coordinator of research projects at the Psychology and Health Research Centre Foundation.

In addition, since 2007 A. Aleksandrova-Karamanova has served as Bulgaria's national delegate to the European Health Psychology Society (EHPS). Since 2016, she has also been the National Editor for Bulgaria of the European Health Psychology Society publication Practical Health Psychology.

Between 2013 and 2016, Dr Karamanova was a part-time assistant lecturer at the Vasil Levski National Sports Academy, where she taught seminars in General Psychology.

The submitted record of professional experience clearly demonstrates that the candidate possesses the required length of service and relevant experience in the field of the announced competition.

2. HABILITATION WORK

For participation in the competition, Assoc. Prof. A. Aleksandrova-Karamanova, PhD, submits as her habilitation work the collective monograph "COVID-19 and Adolescents: Growing Up During a Pandemic". A statement of authorship allocation has been provided, certifying that her individual contribution amounts to 190 standard pages. The work meets all requirements for a monograph and fully corresponds to the subject area of the announced competition. This provides grounds for concluding that Assoc. Prof. Anna Aleksandrova-Karamanova, PhD, meets the requirements of the Regulations on the Terms and Procedure for Acquiring Academic Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

3. COMPLIANCE WITH THE MINIMUM NATIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR HOLDING THE ACADEMIC POSITION OF "PROFESSOR"

Assoc. Prof. A. Aleksandrova-Karamanova, PhD, has submitted a reference statement accompanied by the relevant supporting evidence. The documentation shows that she meets the minimum national requirements under the Regulations for the Implementation of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (amended and supplemented, State Gazette No. 15 of 19 February 2019, Table 1, Area 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professional Field 3.2 Psychology). More specifically, for Groups A, B and C, corresponding respectively to Indicator 1, Indicator 2 and Indicator 3, she has the required 150 points: 50 points for the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD) and 100 points for the submitted habilitation work.

Group D (Indicators 4 to 10) of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act specifies the publication requirements for the academic position of Professor. Under this indicator, the candidate has 308.75 points.

With regard to Group E (Indicators 11 to 13) under the same Regulations, a candidate for Professor is required to have 120 points from citations. The citation record submitted by Assoc. Prof. Anna Aleksandrova-Karamanova, PhD, documents citations equivalent to 600 points.

For Group F, the Regulations require a minimum of 100 points from the scientific degree of Doctor of Sciences, supervision of successfully defended doctoral students, and leadership of and participation in national and international research and educational projects. The reference statement submitted by the candidate, Assoc. Prof. Aleksandrova-Karamanova, shows a total of 110 points.

4. PUBLICATIONS

Assoc. Prof. Anna Aleksandrova-Karamanova, PhD, has submitted a list of scientific works relevant to the subject of the competition, which includes the following: one collective monograph on the topic of the competition; one published chapter in a collective monograph in English; two single-authored articles in refereed journals or scientific volumes; 12 co-authored studies in English published in refereed journals indexed in international databases; and five studies in non-refereed but peer-reviewed journals, three of which are single-authored and two co-authored.

5. RESEARCH ACTIVITY AND SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS

The scientific publications submitted by Assoc. Prof. Anna Aleksandrova-Karamanova, PhD, fall entirely within the subject area of the announced competition.

The principal monograph, “COVID-19 and Adolescents: Growing Up During a Pandemic”, is a timely, large-scale and scientifically well-grounded study of the consequences of the pandemic for the health, well-being and development of adolescents in Bulgaria. The work is the result of a research project funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund and addresses a topic of high scientific and societal significance. Particularly valuable is its focus on adolescence as a specific developmental period in which normative developmental tasks intersect with the impact of an exceptional health, social and educational situation.

The monograph is logically structured into ten chapters. Following a comprehensive analysis of the pandemic as a societal challenge and of the existing scientific literature, the theoretical model and methodology of the authors' own empirical study are presented. The effects of the pandemic on mental health, health-risk behaviour, social interactions and coping at school are then analysed systematically. Special attention is devoted to the role of personality characteristics as moderators of these effects, as well as to the subjective experiences of the adolescents themselves. The concluding chapter makes it possible to translate the scientific knowledge obtained into practical guidelines for prevention and intervention.

A major strength of the work is its solid empirical foundation. The quantitative study was conducted with a nationally representative sample of 3,326 adolescents aged 11 to 17 years, allowing a high degree of generalisability of the findings to the adolescent population in Bulgaria. The qualitative component complements the quantitative data and enables the exploration of young people's personal experiences, emotional responses and coping strategies. The broad range of statistical methods employed – factor, correlational, regression and mediation analyses – corresponds to the complex nature of the research questions addressed.

Among the significant findings are the identified negative effects of the pandemic on mental health and academic motivation, as well as the identification of factors that increase or reduce adolescents' vulnerability. Particularly noteworthy are the findings concerning the role of gender, age and personality characteristics. The personality trait of Neuroticism emerges as a risk factor, whereas Agreeableness emerges as a protective factor. Alongside the negative consequences, the adaptive potential of adolescents is also convincingly demonstrated. The qualitative analysis reveals manifestations of personal development, positive coping and post-traumatic growth, allowing the pandemic experience to be interpreted in a nuanced manner – not only through the prism of risk and deficit, but also through resilience and development.

The scientific value of the monograph also derives from the integration of different levels of analysis – individual, family, social and educational. The analysis is not confined to the immediate consequences of the pandemic but outlines a broader model of interaction between the crisis situation, personal resources and the social context. The practical significance of the work is clearly expressed in the developed guidelines for prevention and intervention in the areas of mental health, risk behaviour and academic motivation.

One limitation is the cross-sectional design of the study, which does not allow definitive conclusions regarding causal relationships or the dynamics of the observed effects. This

limitation is clearly acknowledged, as are the constraints arising from the use of self-report measures and from the timing of data collection at a later stage of the pandemic. These features do not diminish the value of the findings; rather, they outline directions for future longitudinal research.

In conclusion, the monograph “COVID-19 and Adolescents: Growing Up During a Pandemic” constitutes a comprehensive, methodologically well-grounded and practically significant scientific work. It enriches knowledge of adolescent development and well-being under conditions of a prolonged societal crisis and provides a valuable empirical basis for future research, prevention programmes and professional interventions. The work has indisputable scientific value and is of interest both to researchers in psychology and the social sciences and to professionals in education, healthcare and social practice.

In addition, Assoc. Prof. A. Aleksandrova-Karamanova presents a chapter from the collective monograph “Bullying: Global Case Studies in Policy and Prevention for Young People”. It addresses a current and socially significant issue – bullying and cyberbullying among children and adolescents in Bulgaria. The text provides a systematic and analytical overview of the state of the problem in the national context, successfully integrating theoretical propositions, empirical data, research trends, and existing policies and practices for prevention and intervention. The structure of the chapter is logical and coherent. At the outset, the author presents the definition and main characteristics of bullying, relating them both to Olweus’s classical conceptualisation and to the regulatory framework adopted in Bulgaria. Physical, psychological and sexual bullying, as well as cyberbullying, are differentiated, thereby providing a clear conceptual basis for the subsequent analysis.

Of particular scientific value is the presentation of current data on the prevalence of bullying and cyberbullying among Bulgarian adolescents. The use of findings from the international Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study provides a reliable empirical basis and enables international comparison. The data indicate alarmingly high levels of bullying among Bulgarian adolescents, particularly among 15-year-olds, as well as a trend towards increasing cybervictimisation. An important strength is the differentiated analysis by gender and age, which allows specific risk groups and trends to be identified.

A significant contribution of the publication is the systematisation of the development of research on bullying in Bulgaria over more than two decades. The author outlines both the main research directions and contributions and the gradual transition from describing the phenomenon

to developing practical approaches for reducing it. Particularly valuable in this respect is the link traced between scientific research, prevention programmes and national educational policies.

The practical and applied value of the work is evident in the analysis of national prevention and intervention programmes, including the programme for the prevention and intervention of aggression and violence at school and the “Steps Together” programme. The presentation of the regulatory and institutional framework complements the overall picture and demonstrates the need for coordinated action by schools, families, professionals and institutions.

As a recommendation for the future development of this area, a more in-depth critical discussion of the effectiveness of the prevention programmes being implemented and of the factors that hinder their sustainable implementation in school settings could be encouraged. Particularly promising is also the monitoring of emerging forms of cyberbullying in the context of the rapidly changing digital environment.

In conclusion, the publication provides a timely, well-structured and scientifically grounded overview of bullying and cyberbullying in Bulgaria. It convincingly combines scientific and practical perspectives and may be evaluated as a significant contribution to the systematisation and international presentation of Bulgarian experience in the research, prevention and counteraction of bullying among children and adolescents.

The findings reported in the articles and studies submitted for the competition highlight the importance both of socio-psychological factors and of the pursuit of mental and physical well-being for quality of life and health-related behaviour. In a large nationally representative sample, being in love and generalised trust were found to be significant predictors of life satisfaction, while qualitative interviews with young women in emerging adulthood showed that the pursuit of good mental and physical health – including positive self-perception, positive self-esteem and self-acceptance – is among the important motives for maintaining healthy behaviour, expressed in weight control, healthy eating, physical activity and striving for a healthy lifestyle.

In addition, a series of publications examines positive aspects of adolescents’ psychological functioning through the perspective of the 5Cs model of Positive Youth Development – competence, confidence, connection, character and caring – as well as through personal and social resources such as love, trust and empathy. Adaptive personal resources and coping strategies are also analysed, including optimism, hope, self-control, perseverance, social support and healthy behaviour. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, qualitative methods identified manifestations of positive emotions, personal development and post-traumatic growth

associated with reappraisal and a greater appreciation of life, close relationships and personal freedom.

The issue of chronic health conditions also occupies an important place in the research work of Assoc. Prof. A. Aleksandrova-Karamanova, PhD, represented through studies of post-COVID syndrome and diabetes. Through in-depth qualitative interviews with people who had experienced severe and critical COVID-19 in five Central and Eastern European countries, the long-term physical, psychological and cognitive consequences of the disease, their impact on quality of life, and the personal and social resources for coping were analysed.

Another substantial contribution is the development of an interdisciplinary biopsychosocial model of diabetes self-management and microvascular health, integrating biomedical, psychological and social factors and enabling the prediction of complications in the peripheral vascular system. In this way, the studies convincingly emphasise the importance of a comprehensive biopsychosocial approach to understanding and managing chronic health problems.

The publications submitted for the competition demonstrate that Assoc. Prof. Anna Aleksandrova-Karamanova, PhD, has followed a path of successful academic and broad cultural development and has established herself as a specialist in a sensitive area of psychological knowledge. She is a well-developed individual and professional, possesses high interpersonal intelligence and the ability to cooperate appropriately and collegially with colleagues, and demonstrates responsibility and a critical attitude towards both the world and herself.

I accept the contributions of Assoc. Prof. A. Aleksandrova-Karamanova. On the basis of the analysis of the submitted scientific output, the following main conclusions may be drawn:

- The scientific works submitted by Assoc. Prof. Anna Aleksandrova-Karamanova, PhD, fully correspond to the profile and subject area of the announced competition and outline a coherent and recognisable line of research.
- The scientific output is characterised by high topical relevance and societal significance, covering important issues related to mental health and well-being, health behaviour, child and adolescent development, bullying and cyberbullying, adaptation to crisis situations, and coping with chronic health conditions.
- The submitted studies are distinguished by a solid methodological and empirical foundation, the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, and the use of diverse and appropriate methods of statistical analysis.

- A substantial scientific contribution lies in the integration of personality, social, family, educational and health-related factors in the analysis of psychological functioning and quality of life, as well as in the consistent application of the biopsychosocial perspective.
- Particularly positively assessed is the balance between the study of risk factors and resources for positive adaptation, including resilience, positive youth development, social support, coping strategies and post-traumatic growth.
- The scientific output has a clearly expressed practical and applied value, as the findings can be used in the development of prevention and intervention programmes in the areas of mental health, healthy behaviour, the school environment and support for people with chronic illnesses.

CRITICAL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Alongside the indisputable strengths of the submitted scientific output, several critical comments may be formulated, which are intended primarily as recommendations for the future development of the research work:

- Limitations related to research design. Some of the empirical studies presented are based on cross-sectional designs and self-report measures. This places certain limitations on the interpretation of the relationships identified and does not allow definitive conclusions regarding causal relationships. Future research would benefit from the broader application of longitudinal designs and from combining different sources and methods of data collection.
- The need for more systematic evaluation of practical effectiveness. A number of publications convincingly outline practical guidelines for prevention and intervention. A next step could be their more systematic translation into specific programmes and the monitoring of their effectiveness through empirical evaluation of short- and long-term outcomes.
- Broader inclusion of comparative and cross-cultural studies that would allow the patterns identified for Bulgaria to be positioned within a wider European and international context.
- Continuation of research on emerging risks and resources associated with the digital environment, including transformations in cyberbullying and the impact of digital interactions on the mental health and social functioning of young people.
- Further development of the interdisciplinary biopsychosocial approach in research on chronic health conditions and quality of life.

- Potential for stronger integration of the individual research lines. The submitted scientific output covers a broad spectrum of current issues – mental health, positive development, risk and healthy behaviour, bullying and cyberbullying, consequences of the pandemic, and chronic illness. This thematic richness is undoubtedly an advantage, while at the same time creating an opportunity for even clearer conceptual integration of the individual directions around a common theoretical model that would further highlight the candidate's specific authorial contribution and overall research profile.

These comments do not diminish the high scientific value of the submitted works; rather, they outline opportunities for further development and for building upon the results already achieved. The recommendations should be understood as perspectives for extending the achievements to date rather than as criticisms of the submitted scientific output.

Assoc. Prof. Anna Aleksandrova-Karamanova, PhD, actively participates in national and international research projects, which contributes to the high assessment of her competence and expertise. In addition, the high visibility of her publications is noteworthy.

CONCLUSION

Assoc. Prof. Anna Aleksandrova-Karamanova, PhD, meets all the requirements of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act and the regulations for its implementation, both nationally and within the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. She has extensive experience as a researcher. The overall body of work of Assoc. Prof. A. Aleksandrova-Karamanova, PhD, offers a comprehensive, systematic and in-depth analysis of achievements in the field of health and developmental psychology, refracted through her original interpretation. Her research enriches the approaches used at both theoretical and empirical levels and offers promising directions for their practical application. Anna Aleksandrova-Karamanova has extensive research experience accumulated through her participation in numerous national and international research projects.

In summary, the research activity of Assoc. Prof. Anna Aleksandrova-Karamanova, PhD, demonstrates high scientific competence, methodological maturity, consistency and a clearly expressed practical and applied orientation. The submitted works outline the profile of an established researcher with a distinct scientific presence and a sustained contribution to the development of psychological knowledge.

As a result of my high assessment of the scientific and research activity of Assoc. Prof. Anna Aleksandrova-Karamanova, PhD, I unequivocally support her appointment to the academic position of “Professor” in Professional Field 3.2 Psychology (Health and Developmental Psychology) in the Department of Psychology at the Institute for Population and Human Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

30.10. 2026
Sofia

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