

Scientific Opinion

**by Assoc. prof. Svetlana Nikolova Sariyska, PhD -
University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski"**

on a Dissertation for the Award of the Educational and Scientific PhD Degree
by field of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences; professional field 3. 2.
Psychology, PhD programme: "Social Psychology"

author: Teodora Silvestrova Medneva

topic: "Burnout syndrome in freelancers: factors, diagnosis and prevention of occupational distress "

scientific supervisor: Assoc. prof. Youri Ianakiev, PhD

1. General presentation of the procedure and the PhD student

By the choice of the scientific jury I have been appointed as a member of the jury in the procedure for the defense of dissertation thesis entitled "Burnout syndrome in freelancers: factors, diagnostics and prevention of occupational distress" for the acquisition of the educational and scientific PhD Degree by field of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences; professional field 3. 2. Psychology, PhD programme: "Social Psychology". The author of the dissertation is Teodora Medneva - PhD student at the Department of Psychology, University of Plovdiv „Paisii Hilendarski“. The set of materials presented by Teodora Medneva is in compliance with the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff of Paisii Hilendarski University, the Regulations for its Application and the Regulations for the Development of Academic Staff of University of Plovdiv „Paisii Hilendarski“. Includes dissertation, abstract and attached list of publications.

2. Relevance of the topic and appropriateness of the set goals and objectives

Placed in the context of well-being, health and optimal functioning in the workplace, the topic of distress and burnout syndrome has a particular relevance that is found in attempts to expand knowledge about the factors that give rise to these conditions and the options for coping. This relevance is even more evident in the context of existing uncertainty about the dimensions of

distress and burnout syndrome depending on the nature of the work, and different personal variables and experiences. What makes the study unique is the linking of constructs to the specifics of the work itself and the experiences and qualities of the individuals.

3. Knowledge of the problem

The research is theoretical-empirical. The theoretical part covers a comprehensive and thorough review of the understanding of the constructs under study. The presented overview of the changes in the economy and employment, expressed through the new modes of engagement defined by freelancing (freelance work), notes not only the positive aspects such as the amplification of creativity, flexibility, freedom related to work schedules, but also the negative aspects united around the uncertainty affecting sustainability in engagement, pay and time pressure expressed in completion deadlines, the intensity of the work and the long hours, the feeling of loneliness and dependence on the work offered. A review of these changes logically progresses into outlining the relationship with the next constructs - workplace stress and burnout syndrome. Again, an analysis of these phenomena based on existing concepts is presented. Workplace stress and burnout syndrome are examined through emotional, cognitive and behavioural manifestations. The effects of these phenomena on health and work performance and feelings of ineffectiveness are outlined. The theoretical analysis covers a detailed description of the symptomatology of these constructs as well as the distinctions between burnout syndrome and stress and the boundaries within which negative consequences manifest.

The theoretical analysis also covers a review of research on resilience as a possible protective factor in attenuating the effects of workplace stress and correctly assessing the degree of risk. Thus, a framework is also outlined to mark the different interventions and coping strategies.

In general, the analyses presented are thorough and based on empirically verifiable research, which also allows to outline the conceptual framework of the empirical study. In this way, the entire study has internal consistency.

I believe that this part of the study, dedicated to approaches and prevention of professional burnout, is too general, in some places the descriptions of some of the psychotherapies are incorrect (for example, the description of logotherapy) and are not supported by specific empirical studies proving their effectiveness in this area.

I also believe that the introduction of resilience as a construct, could be considered as a protective factor and the relationship with burnout manifestations could be traced. This would greatly enrich psychological analysis in the direction of revealing the influence of personal constructs. Moreover, there are good enough tools to assess the resilience.

4. Methodology of the study

The choice of methods and methodologies in the empirical part of the study are relevant to the main design, objectives and hypotheses. The methods included in the study are:

- Maslach & Jackson's (1986) Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI);
- Author's questionnaire to note demographic characteristics - gender, age, occupation; experience in the field of the occupation; place of employment; marital status; type of employment, with added items clustered around "several meaningful cores": finding projects, salary stressors, work organization stressors, client work stressors, personal qualities and social support, and reason for choosing freelancing as a form of professional employment.

5. Characteristics and evaluation of the thesis

The dissertation is 225 pages, which includes 50 tables and 55 figures. The structure includes an introduction to the research topic, three chapters, conclusion, limitations of the study, contributions, two appendices and references. The literature includes 292 sources in Bulgarian and English.

The study is structured in two parts: the first part presents a theoretical analysis of the constructs studied - burnout syndrome, distress, resilience, their effects on health, well-being and job satisfaction, as well as the risk factors that give rise to these conditions. The second presents the empirical study, and contains the aims, objectives, hypotheses and methods of the study. Results are relevant to the research design and expand understanding of the phenomenon under study, which is reflected in the contributions of the dissertation research.

6. Contributions and Significance of the Development for Science and Practice

The contributions of Teodora Medneva are meaningfully summarized and correspond to the conducted research. Overall, I would like to highlight the following points:

- an original understanding of occupational burnout in the self-employed (freelancers) is presented, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon;
- the specific consequences of occupational burnout in freelancers and the causes of this condition are outlined;
- specific influences of different demographic factors on the occurrence of work-related stress and burnout are presented;
- statistically valid relationships between the constructs under study are established;
- an author's questionnaire for freelancers' job evaluation and work environment factors was created.

7. Assessment of the publications on the thesis

Four publications on the topic of the thesis are presented. It is not clear from the presentation of publications numbered 1,3,4 what the format of the publications is. Publication number 2 is an article.

8. Personal participation of the PhD student

Teodora Medneva was a PhD student at the Department of Psychology. She carried out the entire dissertation research independently. The text, results and contributions are her personal work.

9. Abstract

The abstract contains the main propositions of the thesis, the results and their analysis. I believe it is adequate to the dissertation and objectively reflects the theoretical analyses and main results presented in the content of the study.

10. Recommendations for future use

I would recommend that the research be expanded in the direction of tracing the relationships between the phenomena studied and coping strategies.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation work shows that the PhD student Teodora Medneva has a thorough knowledge of the topic. I believe that the candidate meets the conditions and the procedure for awarding the degree of Doctor of Education and Science under the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of University of Plovdiv „Paisii Hilendarski“. Following the arguments put forward, as well as the overall positive assessment of the dissertation research, I propose the scientific jury to vote positively and to award Educational and Scientific PhD Degree to Teodora Medneva, for which I give my affirmative vote.

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