

## **REVIEW**

by Dr. Nona Dimitrova Glushkova - Associate Professor at Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski"

of a dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor"

by: field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences

professional direction 3.4. Social activities

doctoral program "Social policies and social work"

**Author:** Maria Hristova Sirakova

**Topic:** Social work and well-being of families of children with disabilities

**Scientific supervisor:** Prof. Dr. Neli Ilieva Boyadzhieva – Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

### **1. General description of the presented materials**

By order No. PD-21-1448 dated 12.07.2024 of the Rector of the Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" I have been designated as a member of the scientific jury for ensuring a procedure for the defense of a dissertation work on the topic "Social work and well-being of families of children with disabilities" for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional direction 3.4. Social activities, doctoral program Social policies and social work. The author of the dissertation is Maria Hristova Sirakova – PhD student in part-time study at the "Social Activities" department with supervisor Prof. Dr. Neli Ilieva Boyadzhieva from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

The set of paper materials presented by the PhD student Maria Hristova Sirakova is in accordance with Article 36 (1) of the Rules for the Development of the Academic Staff of the PU, includes the following documents:

- a request to the Rector of the PU to disclose the procedure for the defense of a dissertation work;
- curriculum vitae in European format;
- minutes from the department council related to reporting the readiness to open the procedure and preliminary discussion of the dissertation work;
- dissertation work;
- abstract;
- a list of scientific publications on the subject of the dissertation;
- copies of 4 of the scientific publications;
- declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents;
- appendices to the dissertation work.

The doctoral student has attached 4 publications on the topic of the dissertation.

### **2. Brief biographical data for the doctoral student**

Maria Hristova was born on 09/05/1967. She has a master's degree in Psychology, obtained in 2008 at Veliko Tarnovo University "St. St. Cyril and Methodius". In the period 2010 – 2016, she received an additional qualification at the Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" in the field of diagnosis and therapy of hearing-impaired persons and a professional qualification at the Medical University of Plovdiv in the field of applied

psychology and psychotherapy. Since 2019, she has been enrolled as a part-time doctoral student in the Department of Social Activities at the Faculty of Pedagogy of the Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski". In addition, she declares the possession of a number of certificates and certificates testifying to her participation in projects, trainings, national and international scientific forums. He is a member of the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria.

Maria Sirakova has over 20 years of work experience, most of which combines her qualifications in the field of psychology with social activities.

The professional experience of the doctoral student corresponds in a specific way with the direction and the scientific specialty of the dissertation. From the biographical data of the doctoral student, it is clear that she has a focus on research and practical activities, where it is possible to link psychology with social work, and this contributed to the choice of the presented topic of the dissertation work.

### **3. Relevance of the topic and appropriateness of the set goals and tasks**

The problem investigated in the dissertation is relevant mainly in a scientific-applied sense. The degree of relevance of the problem and the tasks developed in the dissertation have a high degree of expediency, which stems from the need to increase the effectiveness of social work in a practical-applied aspect, especially when the focus of the research is placed the social work in the direction of the well-being of families of children with disabilities.

### **4. Knowing the problem**

In the presented dissertation, Maria Sirakova demonstrates a good knowledge of the state of the problem. It is the result of the study, research and evaluation of 78 literary sources (36 in Cyrillic, 26 in Latin and 16 electronic sources – most of which are from the last 25 years), as well as the direct professional realization of the doctoral student.

Maria Sirakova brings to the fore the problem of the practical implementation of the family-oriented approach in social work, aimed at achieving subjective well-being and full functioning of families with a child with disabilities.

It should be noted that the doctoral student has a vision of how to adapt the basic theoretical statements to the idea of optimal organization and implementation of a similar type of model of a family-oriented approach in social work.

### **5. Research methodology**

The chosen research methodology allows the achievement of the set goal and gives the opportunity to find an adequate answer to the tasks planned to be solved in the dissertation work.

### **6. Characterization and evaluation of the dissertation work**

The content of the dissertation follows an established type of structure that corresponds to the set research tasks, namely: introduction, four chapters, recommendations, conclusion, literature sources, appendices and contributions. The actual volume of the text with the literature used is 208 pages without the appendices and contributions. The text contains 28 figures and 11 tables

In the Introduction of the dissertation, the actuality, significance and motivation for choosing the stated problem are specified, the purpose, tasks, hypotheses, object and subject of the research are fixed, and the structural content of the dissertation is also described.

In the first chapter, a theoretical review of the literature on the subject of the dissertation is carried out, with separate paragraphs on the state of the problem related to children with

disabilities, on the problems of the family in raising a child with disabilities and on social work with such children. families. In the first of these paragraphs, the scope of the problem is specified, risk factors for the occurrence of disabilities in children are identified, the nature and classification of disabilities is clarified, and a historical review of disabilities in children is made. After clarifying the essence of the family, the doctoral student pays attention to the impact of a child's disability on the subjective well-being of the family and outlines necessary changes that help improve the quality of life of families with a child with a disability. Purposefully, the third paragraph in this chapter is dedicated to social work for families with a child with a disability, outlining the normative framework and characteristics of social work with families with a disability, describing models and approaches in social work that are adequate to the considered problem and emphasis is placed on the functioning of a family of a child with a disability in the context of achieving subjective family well-being. In terms of content, it would be good in this chapter of the dissertation to pay more serious attention to the essence of well-being and, based on the differentiation of concepts such as well-being, well-being, well-being, to establish and adopt a unified terminological apparatus, valid about the topic of the dissertation.

In the Second Chapter, goals are consistently defined (formulated rather as tasks), tasks, object, subject and scope of the dissertation research are correctly fixed; aspects of the subjective family well-being in a family with a child with a disability are specified and are being studied; the methodology, organization and stages of the empirical research are described. In describing the organization and stages of research, there is some discomfort in following the logic of the methods used (which of the methods are part of the pilot study and which are used in the actual study). This fact is compensated to some extent by the accurate description of the study areas with each individual method.

The third chapter presents the analysis of the results of the conducted empirical research in compliance with the sequence: analysis of the results of the pilot study with the corresponding conclusions in the direction of the formulated hypothesis - analysis of the results of the actual study. Impressive is the extensive implementation of the analysis of the results of the actual research, illustrated with graphs and tables, in which the results are properly described in quantitative terms. Qualitative data analysis benefits from the doctoral student's decision to analyze separately the various variables related to the impact of social work on subjective well-being.

In the Fourth Chapter, summarized results and conclusions are presented, which could easily be placed accordingly: the conclusions from the literature review and from the theoretical analysis of the studies – after the First Chapter, and the conclusions from the individual stages of the empirical research – after each of the stages in the Third Chapter with the corresponding focus on the raised hypothesis. Formulated recommendations for practice are expedient. In the conclusion, the main findings are presented, following the logic: achieved goals and solved tasks of the dissertation work, the result of the verification of the hypotheses of the pilot and actual research.

## **7. Contributions and significance of the development for science and practice**

In the dissertation, 5 contributions are indicated, which correspond to the scientific specialty and can be referred to the scientific-applied and practical-co-applied contributions. To

a significant extent, I accept the contributions formulated by the doctoral student and I would summarize them as follows:

1. The study enriches scientific theories about the relationship between social work with families with a disabled child, on the one hand, and the subjective well-being of families and the quality of life of disabled children, on the other hand.
2. By studying the needs of a family with a child with a disability, by outlining the possibilities for adequate social support and by describing and analyzing the factors that influence the well-being of children with disabilities and their families, it could be possible to stimulate the development of -effective programs and policies to support families with a child with a disability in the direction of identifying risk and protective factors for successfully dealing with the difficulties of raising and raising a child with a disability.
3. The application of a family-oriented approach in social work is relevant to policies to support children with disabilities and their families with a focus on their overall well-being for full functioning.

#### **8. Evaluation of publications on the dissertation work**

Maria Sirakova presents 4 publications on the topic of the dissertation work, published during the period of its development, among them: one co-authored, published in a collection of an international forum, one – in the Shumen University Yearbook, one – in the journal "Scientific Works of USB – Smolyan" and one of the publications is in print (an official note from the editor-in-chief of the magazine is attached as an assurance that the publication is included in issue 13 of 2024 of the E-magazine "Education and Development" of DQPDPS at Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski").

All publications reflect different stages of the realization of the dissertation work.

There is no data on the coincidence or overlap of publications with participation in other procedures.

#### **9. Personal participation of the doctoral student**

I have reason to believe that the dissertation research conducted, the results obtained and the contributions formulated are the personal work of the doctoral student.

#### **10. Abstract**

The content and quality of the abstract meet the requirements – it presents the structure, synthesizes the main highlights of the research and reflects the results and contributions achieved in the dissertation work.

#### **11. Critical remarks and recommendations**

Regarding the presented set of materials, I have no serious comments.

Regarding the overall layout and presentation of the dissertation, I have a few notes:

- In the First Chapter, it would be good to emphasize more seriously the essence and characteristics of well-being as a category and to specify the specifics of social-emotional well-being, to which part of the empirical research is oriented;
- Technical errors (inconsistency between the name of a paragraph in the table of contents and in the main text of the dissertation – p. 36; in the technical layout there are differences in spacing in the main text – p. 38, p. 75; missing annex numbering);
- Numbering in the content could be optimized;
- In many places, stylistic, grammatical and punctuation errors are found, which could easily be removed in a timely manner;

- The bibliographic description needs refinement.

Regardless of the critical remarks, the dissertation presented for discussion has its merits. The overall study shows that the doctoral student is professionally committed to the researched issues and has research potential.

## **12. Personal impressions**

On the basis of the several presentations and reports of the current work on her dissertation, I have formed the idea of the doctoral student as a responsible and dedicated person, oriented towards improving professional practice.

## **13. Questions for the PhD student**

In your last recommendation you mention "participation of the social worker in the work of the school team in order to adapt the child with a disability in the educational environment and commitment to the prevention of social exclusion and discrimination" and in this regard my questions are:

How do you see the role of the social worker in the school education system regarding the prevention of social exclusion and discrimination?

Is there a place for the social worker in preschool education organizations? Why?

If they are realized professionally in an educational environment, what specific qualities, skills and competences would have to be possessed by social workers whose contingent are families with a child with a disability?

## **14. Recommendations for future use of dissertation contributions and results**

My recommendation to the doctoral student is a purposeful follow-up of the influence of the family-oriented approach in the field of social work with families with a child with a disability and to deepen the interest in it, if not in a research, then in a diagnostic, advisory, corrective and preventive direction.

## **CONCLUSION**

The dissertation contains scientific, scientific-applied and applied results, which represent an original contribution to science and meet the requirements of the law on the development of the academic staff in the republic of Bulgaria, the regulations for the implementation of LDASRB and the relevant regulations of the Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski".

The dissertation work shows that the doctoral student Maria Hristova Sirakova possesses theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty Social Activities, demonstrating qualities and skills for independent conducting of scientific research.

Given the above, I give my positive assessment of the conducted research, presented by the above-reviewed dissertation work, abstract, achieved results and contributions, and I propose to the honorable scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to Maria Hristova Sirakova in the field of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional direction 3.4. Social activities, doctoral program "Social policies and social work".

20.09.2024  
Plovdiv

Reviewer: .....  
/Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nona Glushkova/