

## REVIEW

by Prof. DSc. Klavdia Vasileva Sapundjieva, SU

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 Policy and Social Work

Author: Maria Sirakova

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

Research supervisor: Prof. Dr. Neli Ilieva Boyadjieva, SU

### 1. General description of the presented materials

By order No. P33-RD -21-144 of 12.07. 2004 by the Rector of the University of Plovdiv "Paisiy Hilendarski" I was appointed as a member of the scientific jury to ensure 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 policy and social work The author of the dissertation is Maria Sirakova - a doctoral student in part-time study at the Department of "Social Activities" with scientific supervisor Prof. Dr. Neli Boyadzhieva from SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

The set of paper materials presented by Maria 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; - protocol from the departmental 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 scientific publications;
- – list of noticed citations;
- - declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents.

The doctoral student has attached 4 publications in collections and scientific journals.

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

Maria Sirakova was born in 1967. She has a master's degree in psychology from University of Plovdiv „Paisii Hilendarski”. He has extensive professional experience as a psychologist, educator and teacher, and currently works as a school psychologist at "Sveti Sedmochislenitsi" SU, Plovdiv. Her experience in practice is also evident in the presented dissertation work, which has a strong practical part.

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

The topic is relevant both because of the need to study the family-oriented approach in social work, and because the problems related to families that have children with various disabilities are growing. A particularly important emphasis is the impact of social work with such families on their well-being and progressive change. Another current focus is the study of parents' attitudes and expectations in this process, as well as highlighting the positive changes and quality of life of both parents and children. In this sense, the aim and tasks of the dissertation are appropriately formulated and outline the different research fields and focuses of the problem.

## **4. Knowing the problem**

The PhD student knows the researched problem well. This is especially evident in the analysis of legal acts and documents, and also in delineating the empirical fields of the research. I would conditionally divide the literature analysis into two parts, groups - stronger, with a focus on laws, regulations, content and types of social services, etc. and another, with less weight – the theoretical analysis of the family, relationships, resources, etc. As concrete examples of the first, I would point to the presentation and output of content components and aspects of social services for families with chil-

dren with disabilities - p. 81-82, and also the systematization of the types of social services and their register - p. 42 -48. For the other group - for example, the opportunities and resources for families could be analyzed in more detail - p. 30; 33, to cite more precisely some theoretical summaries such as the principles of the family-oriented approach - p. 56, to shorten or add to others some paragraphs - &2.16; &2.18 etc. The analysis of the impact of the child's disability on the subjective well-being of the family can be highlighted as particularly significant. In general, a stronger criticality of the analysis could be achieved and the declarative style of exposition could be overcome.

## **5. Research methodology**

The methodology is appropriate and enables the achievement of the main goal and tasks of the research. It includes theoretical and empirical methods and corresponding quantitative and qualitative analysis. The empirical research is in two parts - pilot and real, using the following methods: a survey with parents, an in-depth interview and a structured electronic interview with specialists. The main fields of the problem were covered and information was obtained about the attitudes and readiness of parents to participate in the process of social work, as well as about the specific role and specific practices of specialists.

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

The dissertation has a volume of 217 pages and is structured in an introduction, four chapters, conclusions and summaries, recommendations, conclusion, contributions, bibliography and appendices. The bibliography includes a total of 78 sources - in Bulgarian, Latin and electronic publications. The first chapter is devoted to the theoretical analysis of the problem-state, the difficulties in raising a child with problems and social work with this type of family. The analysis is relatively complete, with a very good knowledge of the legal acts and types of social services. Special attention is paid to the presentation of the medical and family-oriented approach to work, as well as to the influence of social support on the subjective well-being of the family. The latter issue could be tied more fully and critically to the possible resources of the family. In general, the theoretical analysis presents the picture of the problem and what has been achieved in this area. The second and third chapters are devoted to the research methodology and the analysis of the results of the pilot and actual research. They are presented in detail and provide an opportunity to reliably bring out the possibilities and difficulties of working with families. Data analysis supports the hypothesis about the impact of resource-oriented social work on family well-being. It is

a positive fact that parents are very satisfied with social services. Another positive fact is that consultations with a specialist influence the improvement of communication in the family and the creation of a unified educational strategy for the child. Trust in teachers and educators is also high, there is a clearly expressed desire for mutual help and empathy, as well as a good level of satisfaction with life. In general, women are more optimistic and confident than men. As the main results of the joint work, the parents see the guidelines for the specific skills to achieve with the children. The lack of social activity – professional, personal, etc., as well as time for oneself can be highlighted as a deficiency. The problem of acceptance of children with disabilities, the frequent resistance of teachers and educators, of other parents and children, was also analyzed. Data from specialist opinion also highlight the difficulties in this regard and the need for work to achieve stronger motivation to seek permanent specialist help. At the same time, the need for training and information specifically about the knowledge of the work related to the family-oriented approach stands out. The fourth chapter is devoted to conclusions and recommendations. The conclusions and summaries are in two parts - according to the individual stages and methods of the research and summarized. The first ones are detailed and to some extent repeat what was said in the text, but, on the other hand, this overcomes the certain scatter and some repetitions in the data analysis. Pre-orders are specific and useful for practice. They point out the need to refine the legislation, training for specialists and the development of concrete strategies and policies for the active inclusion of families in social work.

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

The dissertation examines a current and significant problem that has many aspects and is particularly dependent on the attitude and attention of society. In this sense, the study is significant in itself, as it analyzes the current state of the needs of families and the possibilities of specialists through the mechanism and tools of social services. Contributions are well worded and reflect the main achievements of the work. They bring out the advantages of the family-oriented approach and the possibilities of social work with this type of families to increase the quality of life. This enriches the theory and practice of social support for these families. Guidelines for the work of specialists - social workers, teachers, psychologists - are also outlined. The problem has prospects for other future studies, which will not only update the obtained data, but also outline new fields of study.

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

There are 4 publications - one study in the Shumen University Yearbook, two articles in magazines (1 - in press) and one scientific report (co-authored). They are on the subject of the dissertation and may be useful in the research of other authors as well. They cover different segments of the research and focus on the main achievements. In number and genre, they are sufficient to admit of protection.

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

The dissertation is the personal work of the doctoral student, but as a positive fact, the manifestation of reflection to improve the work by reflecting the notes and instructions of the scientific supervisor is also evident.

## **10. Abstract**

The abstract is structured according to the requirements and reflects the content and main points and results of the dissertation. It should also include the recommendations from the dissertation.

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

The research objectives could be more general. Despite the precisely formed content of the work in the text, there is a certain scatter - both in the theory and in the analysis of the results - the same problems and results are repeated in places in different texts, points and paragraphs. Overall, a more coherent and critical analysis of the exhibition could have been achieved.

## **12. Personal impressions**

I have personal impressions only from the successful presentation of the doctoral student and the research results at a meeting of the "Pedagogy and Psychology" section at the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria.

### 13. Recommendations for future use of dissertation contributions and results

Future research could work on deriving a Model for a family-oriented approach in social work with different families and groups.

### 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 the Law and the relevant Regulations of PU "Paisiy Hilendarski". The dissertation shows that the doctoral student Maria Sirakova *possesses in-depth* theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty "Social Activities" by demonstrating qualities and skills for independent conduct of scientific research. Due to the above, I confidently 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 Sirakova in the field of higher education: Social, economic and laundry sciences, professional direction: Social activities, doctoral program: Social policies and social work.

03. 09. 2004 г.

Reviewer: .....

Prof. Klavdia Sapundjieva, DSc