

REVIEW

by Dr. Anna Konstantinova Trosheva-Asenova - Associate Professor

on the dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree "PhD"

Degree in Social, Economic and Legal Sciences

professional field 3.4. Social Activities

Doctoral programme: Social policies and social work

Author. Maria Hristova Sirakova

Subject. Social work and well-being in families of children with disabilities

Scientific supervisor: prof. dr. Neli Ilieva Boyadjieva

1. General presentation of the procedure and the doctoral student

By Order No. RD-21-1448 of 12.07.2024 of the Rector of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" (PU) I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury for providing the procedure for the defence of a dissertation on "Social work and well-being in 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 field 3.4. Social activities, doctoral programme Social policies and social work. The author of the dissertation is Maria Hristova Sirakova - a PhD student in part-time studies at the Department of Social Activities with scientific supervisor Prof. Dr. Neli Ilieva Boyadjieva from the University of Sofia "St. Clare Ohridski".

The set of paper materials submitted by Maria Hristova Sirakova is in accordance with Article 36 (1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of the University of Sofia, and includes the following documents:

- Application to the Rector of PU for the disclosure of the procedure for dissertation defence;
- CV in European format;
- the minutes of the departmental council related to the reporting of the readiness for the opening of the procedure and the preliminary discussion of the dissertation;
- dissertation;
- abstract;
- list of scientific publications on the subject of the dissertation;
- copies of the scientific publications;
- list of citations noted;
- declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents;
- statement of compliance with the specific requirements of the faculty concerned (only for PhD students enrolled by 04.05.2018);

The PhD student has attached 4 publications.

Notes and comments on the documents: the required documents are available except for a list of noted citations. In the reference of scientific publications, it is necessary to correct the data for publication No 4, which is now out of print and therefore has more accurate bibliographic data.

Maria Hristova Sirakova is a bachelor of philology, a teacher of Bulgarian language and literature and a teacher of history from Paisii Hilendarski University. After that she graduated from the University of Veliko Tarnovo "St. Cyril and Methodius" with a master's degree in psychology, as well as a specialization in applied psychology and psychotherapy at the University of Plovdiv and an additional qualification as a teacher of people with hearing impairments at the University of Plovdiv. Her professional realization in accordance with the acquired qualifications began as a history teacher in a primary school and developed in the field of social services as a director of a social institution in the municipality of Asenovgrad, educator, psychologist and social assistant with long-standing efforts aimed at supporting and working with parents, working with persons with disabilities. She has supplemented her qualifications and skills in 31 additional trainings and seminars to improve her foreign language, computer and professional skills. Since 2022 she is a member of the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria.

2. Topical relevance

The appearance of a child with a disability in the family changes the life of each of its members, complicates relationships between family partners, leads to emotional, physical and financial strain. It is not only the child with disabilities who needs support and therapeutic work with specialists, but also the family unit. Social activities offered by institutions and specialists can have a positive impact on the well-being of the family, so I appreciate the study of issues related to the effectiveness of such support as significant in scientific and applied terms.

The problem of the relationship between social work with families of children with disabilities on the subjective well-being of the family system posed in the dissertation is scientifically significant. In particular, the study of the family-oriented approach and its application to these families is a particularly relevant problem in world research and important for practice in our country.

3. Knowledge of the problem

The doctoral candidate has an excellent knowledge of the dissertation problem, as it is also part of his practice.

4. Research methodology

The methods of theoretical and empirical research fully correspond to the object, subject, goal and objectives of the scientific search. The applied statistical methods guarantee the significance of the results. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of processing the results allows obtaining in-depth conclusions.

5. Characteristics and evaluation of the thesis and contributions

The thesis consists of an introduction, four chapters, recommendations, conclusion, references and appendices. The total volume amounts to 216 pages. The bibliographic reference counts 78 sources, of which 36 are scientific sources in Bulgarian, 25 in English, and the rest - normative documents, websites and links to doctoral dissertations.

Chapter one presents a theoretical analysis of the problem based on literature sources. In three paragraphs the main accents of the studied topic are covered - the nature of disabilities in children, the problems of their families and the specifics of social work with them. The exposition is thorough, logically consistent and comprehensive. However, some negative features make an impression, such as the lack of scientific and linguistic interpretation of the texts by the mentioned authors; reference to only one source on the issues; lack of reference to the authors mentioned in the literature review (e.g. Bogdanova, 2001, 2009; Petrov, I. 2010, 2013, etc.); incomplete reference to the UNICEF-Bulgaria website without reference to a specific report or material from it. Essential for the scientific theory is the presentation of the essence and principles of the family-centred approach, but the literature sources on the basis of which this is done are not/are not mentioned.

The research and presentation of other dissertation work related to the research topic is excellent. Such a search is not common in research papers, and is important as not all dissertations are published and receive good circulation.

Chapter two presents the methodology and organisation of the research in depth and detail. The aim, objectives, subject, object and contingent of the study are correctly described. The selected research methods are adequate. The research is conducted in two stages - pilot and substantive. For the purpose of the research 4 questionnaires were compiled - three for parents of children with disabilities and one for specialists working with them, which are presented in the Appendices. The use of different names for the research methods (questionnaire, survey, interview, empirical study for only one of the questionnaires) causes some confusion. The organisation and methods used are appropriately justified.

The third chapter presents and analyses the results of the study by following the stages of application of the different survey methods and examining each of the indicators in them. The quantitative data were processed using Statistica 12. statistical software and illustrated in a number of tables and colour charts. The numbering of the tables and charts should follow a common one for the dissertation, while it is presented with a separate numbering for each research instrument separately.

The qualitative analysis of the data, which is prevalent throughout the thesis and continues in the following, fourth, chapter, makes an excellent impression. This chapter summarises the results and conclusions from each stage of the research separately, as well as overall for the whole study. As a result, an overall picture of the issues under consideration is presented, which is of a contributory nature. Some of the summarised conclusions, e.g. "Support in relation to the inclusion of the child with disability in the educational environment" are not the result of the research presented, but of other published research by the PhD student (co-authored), which is not commented on in the thesis.

The recommendations formulated by the PhD student are a valuable resource for developing and enhancing the impact of good practice in the social sphere of supporting families of children with disabilities.

6. Assessment of publications and personal contribution of the PhD student

The PhD student has submitted four publications, including three solo articles and one co-authored article. For the co-authored publication, no separation protocol was attached to assess the doctoral student's personal contribution. The solo publications reflect the process of work on the dissertation through different stages of the research - theoretical and empirical.

7. Abstract

The abstract reflects correctly and comprehensively the main parts of the dissertation.

8. Recommendations for future use of the dissertation contributions and results

Although there are some critical remarks concerning the theoretical part of the dissertation, this does not diminish the overall value of the presented research. The conclusions drawn from the empirical study are of a contributory nature and can be used to improve the training of professionals working with families of children with disabilities and the wider implementation of a family-centred approach to supporting them and enhancing their well-being.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation contains scientific and applied results that represent an original contribution to science and meet the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LADAB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the LADAB and the relevant Regulations of the Paisii Hilendarski University.

The dissertation work shows that the PhD student Maria Sirakova has the necessary training and professional skills in the scientific specialty of Social Activities by demonstrating the qualities and skills necessary for conducting scientific research.

Due to the above, I give my positive evaluation for the conducted research, presented by the above reviewed dissertation, 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 Legal Sciences, professional field 3.4. Social Activities, doctoral programme.

24.09.2024

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Assoc.Prof. Anna Trosheva-Asenova