

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Ivan Vasilev Trichkov, PhD,

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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

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

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. NELI BOYADJIEVA

1. General presentation of the procedure and the PhD student

By order № RD-21-1448 dated 12.07.2024 of the Rector of Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski" (PU), I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury to ensure a procedure for the defense of a dissertation on the topic: **Social work and well-being in families of children with disabilities** to acquire 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.

Author of the dissertation is **MARIA HRISTOVA SIRAKOVA** – doctoral student in part-time study at the Department of Social Activities, with a scientific supervisor **Prof. Dr. NELI BOYADJIEVA**.

The set of paper materials presented by **MARIA HRISTOVA SIRAKOVA** is in accordance with Article 36 (1) of the Rules for the Development of the Academic Staff of the PU.

2. Relevance of the topic

Modern social policies place new demands on social workers. The inclusive environment requires the application of approaches and strategies that aim to reach higher levels of well-being of families of children with disabilities. A child's disability has a significant negative impact on the entire family, which often faces a number of challenges. Children with disabilities have special needs and require specialized support and care, which they receive in social support units. Families of children with disabilities need full support from various specialists (speech therapists, psychologists,

teachers, doctors, social workers, etc.) who take care of the development and well-being of children and their families. In recent years, the system for the provision of social services has been developing through reform with a positive trend. From this point of view, it is extremely important to follow the aspects of social work, the degree of well-being and professional support to the family of a child with a disability. As it is known, children with disabilities require special care and attention, which is a source of additional tension and stress for parents, therefore it is essential to monitor the positive effects of specialized support on all its members. In this sense, the topic of the current dissertation is of marked relevance for the scientific and practical sphere.

3. Knowing the problem

It is noteworthy that the doctoral student knows much better this part of the basic issues, which is related to social work, compared to the parts of the dissertation related to the well-being and classification of children with disabilities.

4. Research methodology

It can be said that the research methods chosen by the doctoral student allow to achieve the goal and obtain adequate answers to the tasks set in the dissertation work. An author's survey card (questionnaire for a pilot study), a questionnaire for the actual study, a questionnaire /in-depth interview with parents of children with disabilities/, a questionnaire /specialists working in social services/ were used.

Areas of research according to the PhD student are:

1. Attitudes of the parents to continue the "office" work, i.e. work started by the specialists in the social units /psychologist, speech therapist, special educator, rehabilitation therapist/ at home with their children.
2. The willingness of parents to participate in individual consultations to improve the emotional state and those to further develop parental capacity, as well as in groups for parents.
3. The understanding of specialists regarding the motivation and involvement of parents in the process of work with a key role in determining the individual goals and needs of the child, as well as in finding appropriate solutions for their achievement.

5. Characterization and evaluation of the dissertation work and contributions

The dissertation has a volume of 217 pages. It consists of an introduction, four chapters, conclusions and summaries, recommendations, conclusion, contributions, bibliography and appendices. The text contains 28 figures and 11 tables. The bibliography includes a total of 78 sources, of which 36 in Cyrillic, 26 in Latin and 16 electronic sources.

In *the first chapter*, the doctoral student logically and consistently brings out the theoretical aspects of the researched issues.

In *the second chapter*, the emphasis falls on the research methodology and design. It should be noted that the aim, object, subject, tasks, hypotheses and study contingent are formulated correctly.

The statistical analysis and the analysis from the empirical study and the interviews are placed in *the third chapter*. Data were interpreted quantitatively and qualitatively. They are illustrated by means of tables and diagrams, which facilitates their perception. The full text of the quiz cards and adapted lessons is provided in the dissertation appendices.

In *the fourth chapter*, *summarized results and conclusions* are presented. Conclusions related to the literature analysis were drawn, conclusions were made related to the pilot study, to the actual empirical study, conclusions from the interview with parents and conclusions from the interview with the specialists working in the social units, as they are on the face and several conclusions in the form of summaries. 5 recommendations for the practice were also made.

The contributions made by the doctoral student are as follows:

1. An up-to-date study of the needs of a family with a child with a disability was carried out in accordance with the outline of the possibilities of adequate social support, which enriches the basis for developing more effective programs and policies to support these families.
2. Based on scientific research in this field, the factors that influence the well-being of children with disabilities and their families are described and analyzed. This makes it possible to identify risk and protective factors for families to successfully cope with the difficulties of raising and raising a child with a disability.
3. The study enriches scientific theories about the relationship between the well-being of families and the quality of life of children with disabilities.
4. The outlined model of a family-oriented approach in social work confirms the adequacy of policies to support children with disabilities and their families with a focus on their overall healthy development for full functioning.
5. Empirical evidence shows that social work with families with a child with a disability has the potential to improve quality of life and contribute to subjective well-being in the family system.

6. Assessment of the PhD student's publications and personal contributions

The doctoral student has a total of four publications, in scientific collections and electronic periodicals. All publications are on the subject of the dissertation, with one in press. In my opinion, the scientific work submitted for review is the result of the doctoral student's independent work, of course under the supervision of the scientific supervisor - Prof. Neli Boyadzhieva. It can be said that the personal commitment of the doctoral student to the topic of the dissertation is somewhat evident. Regarding recommendations and remarks, I would note the following: the classification of

disabilities is not correctly derived and not specified. In the dissertation work, an incorrect classification of disabilities is noticed, which does not correspond either to the Bulgarian normative documents, (ZPUO and Ordinance for PE), nor to the ICD and DSM (the two globally recognized classification systems of disorders). In view of the regulatory framework and in order to avoid stigma and labelling, it would be much better if the term SEN and not disabilities is used to refer to these children. In view of the fact that one of the highlights of the dissertation work is well-being, perhaps this part of the issue should have been analyzed much more thoroughly and in-depth. On the face of it, there is an inconsistency and incorrect citation. Some of the literary sources indicated in the literature section are missing from the text of the dissertation itself. It would be good if the conclusions were much more collected, refined and united to a few more basic ones. It is noteworthy that the contributions are not grouped into a theoretical-scientific aspect and a practical-applied aspect.

7. Abstract

The abstract reflects the structure and content of the dissertation work and the main results of the research.

8. Recommendations for future use of dissertation contributions and results

Despite the remarks made, it is important to note that the dissertation work has its value and authority. For this reason, I accept the doctoral student's dissertation presented in this way. My recommendation is that at some point in the future a textbook or study aid to be developed based on the dissertation work, but of course after taking into account the notes and recommendations, in view of the above-mentioned findings.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the LDASRB and the corresponding Regulations of PU "Paisiy Hilendarski".

The dissertation shows that the doctoral student **MARIA HRISTOVA SIRAKOVA** has somewhat theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty, *demonstrating* qualities and skills for independent conduct of scientific research.

Taking this into account, I give my *positive assessment* and *yes* to 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 field of higher education: **3. Social, economic and legal sciences**, professional direction **3.4. Social activities**, doctoral program **Social policies and social work**.

16. 09. 2024

Prepared the opinion:

(signature)

Assoc. Prof. Ivan Trichkov, PhD

(acc. DL, n. st., name, surname)