

REVIEW

by **Prof. Kirilka Simeonova Tagareva, PhD,**

Plovdiv University 'Paisii Hilendarski'

of the thesis for awarding the educational and scientific degree of 'Doctor'
in a field of Higher Education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences,
Professional field 3.2. Psychology Doctoral program *in Positive Psychology*

Author: Stanislav Raychev Aleksandrov

Topic: Exploring the Experience of Well-Being in Early Adulthood

Academic Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Irena Ivanova Levkova – Plovdiv University 'Paisii Hilendarski'

1. General Description of the Submitted Materials

By Order No. RD-21-2107/20.11.2024 of the Rector of Plovdiv University 'Paisii Hilendarski' (PU), I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury carrying out the defence procedure of the thesis on the topic of '*Exploring the Experience of Well-Being in Early Adulthood*', for the purpose of acquiring the educational and scientific degree of 'Doctor' in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology, doctoral programme in *Positive Psychology*. The author of the thesis is Stanislav Raychev Aleksandrov, a full-time doctoral student at the Department of Psychology, supervised by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Irena Ivanova Levkova.

The materials submitted by Stanislav Aleksandrov in paper format comply with Article 36 (1) of the Rules for the Development of the Academic Staff of PU and include the following documents:

- a request to the Rector of PU for initiating the thesis defence procedure;
- a curriculum vitae in European format;
- protocols from the department council regarding readiness to initiate the procedure and preliminary discussion of the thesis;
- a thesis;
- an abstract;
- a list of scientific publications on the thesis topic;
- copies of scientific publications;
- declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents.

The doctoral candidate has attached three publications.

2. Brief Biographical Information about the Doctoral Candidate

Stanislav Raychev Aleksandrov was born in 1994. In 2018, he obtained a bachelor's degree in psychology from PU, and in 2020, a master's degree in Positive Psychology from PU. His doctoral studies began on 1st March 2021 when he was enrolled in a full-time doctoral programme in Positive Psychology at the Department of Psychology in the Faculty of Education at PU. During his studies, he responsibly fulfilled all activities included in the individualized curriculum for the educational and scientific degree of 'Doctor' and successfully passed all required exams. In 2024, S. Aleksandrov was discharged with the right to defend his thesis before a jury.

Stanislav Aleksandrov's professional experience is not directly related to psychology. His career includes roles in trade, such as order executor, training and recruitment, and machine operator in the Netherlands and Bulgaria. He currently works as a commission agent in Plovdiv. The CV presented shows diverse interests and orientations, reflecting his academic interest in the topic of the thesis—experiencing well-being during adulthood.

3. Topic Relevance and Appropriateness of the Goals and Objectives Set

The dissertation by Stanislav Aleksandrov focuses on studying psychological well-being in adulthood. The topic is relevant both scientifically and practically. Its relevance lies in expanding scientific knowledge in the field of positive psychology and developmental psychology. From an applied perspective, the topic is relevant as it seeks ways to enhance psychological well-being during adulthood. S. Aleksandrov aims to study the experience of well-being through the dimensions of 'flourishing', 'hope', 'cognitive-affective mindfulness', and 'quality of life', exploring interdependencies between them.

4. Familiarity with the Problem

Stanislav Aleksandrov demonstrates familiarity with the state of the problem and creatively assesses the literature on the subject.

5. Research Methods

The chosen research methodology enables S. Aleksandrov to achieve the set goal and adequately address the objectives in the thesis. The following instruments were applied:

1. PERMA Profile (Butler & Kern, 2016). This multidimensional instrument measures five core aspects of well-being: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. The Bulgarian adaptation of the instrument, conducted by Margarita Bakracheva in 2020

and applied in the candidate's research, includes 22 items divided among five primary and several additional aspects of flourishing, including loneliness and negative emotions. The items are rated on a Likert scale from 1 (never/poor/low) to 5 (always/excellent/high), allowing for a detailed analysis of the degree of flourishing.

2. Domain Specific Hope Scale (DSHS) (Simpson, 1999). The DSHS includes 48 items distributed across eight significant life domains: social relationships, academic success, romantic relationships, family, work, and leisure. The scale, adapted by M. Bakracheva (2020), was used in its adapted form. The items are rated on a Likert scale from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 5 ('strongly agree').

3. Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale – Revised (CAMS-R) (Feldman, Hayes, Kumar, Greeson & Laurenceau, 2007). The Bulgarian adaptation by M. Bakracheva (2020) was used. The scale includes 10 items rated on a Likert scale from 1 ('almost never') to 4 ('almost always').

4. SF-8 Health Survey (SF-8™), adapted by Milena Grigorova and Dimitar Obreshkov (2014). This instrument includes 8 items covering key aspects of physical and mental health, such as general health, physical functioning, role limitations due to physical problems, bodily pain, vitality, social functioning, mental health, and role limitations due to emotional problems. The items are formulated to reflect the respondent's retrospective perception of their health over the past four weeks, with responses rated on a 5-point or 6-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicate better overall quality of life.

6. Characteristics and Assessment of the Thesis

The dissertation consists of 239 pages and includes an introduction, three chapters, a bibliography, and appendices. The theoretical and empirical parts are well-balanced. The research cites 337 sources - 6 in Cyrillic, 327 in Latin, and 4 web pages. Existing Bulgarian studies on well-being and the experience of well-being have not been sufficiently addressed.

The first chapter provides a theoretical and analytical review of the topic, focusing on three main aspects: historical development of research on well-being; analysis of the primary directions in studying well-being in psychology; the connection between well-being and other psychological constructs. Philosophical and religious perspectives on well-being are also examined. Stanislav Aleksandrov conducts a precise analysis of the approaches and theories studying well-being in psychology, presenting Martin Seligman's flourishing model, Ed Diener's theory of subjective well-being, and others. Particular attention is given to the characteristics and changes in well-being during early and middle adulthood. The construct of well-being is deeply analysed in connection with other constructs, such as optimism, hope, mindfulness, and quality of life, which are central to the

study. Theoretical frameworks with a focus on empirical confirmations (e.g., Forgeard & Seligman, 2012; Snyder et al., 1991) are provided.

The second chapter outlines the design of the empirical study. It presents the study's goal, objectives, subject, and object, formulates hypotheses, and describes the procedure and instruments. A total of 233 participants aged 18 to 60 years were involved in the study, including 172 women (73.8%) and 61 men (26.2%). The average age of participants was 29.35 years. Respondents were divided into two age groups: the first group consisted of individuals in early adulthood (18 to 30 years), while the second group included those in middle adulthood (30 to 60 years).

The third chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the research results. It begins with an analysis of the sociodemographic profile of the respondents, followed by an analysis of results from the Flourishing Scale; analysis of results from the Domain Specific Hope Scale; analysis of results from the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale; analysis of results from the Quality-of-Life Scale (SF-8). Interrelations and influences among the studied constructs were explored using correlation and regression analyses.

In his research, Stanislav Aleksandrov posits the following five main hypotheses:

1. It is assumed that statistically significant differences will be found in the levels of the studied constructs (flourishing, hope, cognitive-affective mindfulness, and quality of life) based on sociodemographic factors such as gender, age, marital status, and monthly income.

2. It is assumed that statistically significant differences will be found in the levels of flourishing, hope, cognitive-affective mindfulness, and quality of life between the two groups—students and adults.

3. It is assumed that positive correlations will be found between flourishing and the following variables: hope, mindfulness, and quality of life among the studied individuals.

4. It is assumed that each subscale of flourishing (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment) will positively correlate with at least one subscale of hope in significant life domains among the studied individuals.

5. It is assumed that hope, mindfulness, and quality of life will positively influence the levels of flourishing and its components (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment) among the studied individuals.

The results and their analysis confirm the following:

First Hypothesis: Statistically significant differences exist in the levels of flourishing, hope, mindfulness, and quality of life depending on variables such as gender, age, marital status, and monthly income.

Second Hypothesis: Statistically significant differences were found in the overall indicators for hope, cognitive-affective mindfulness, and quality of life between the two groups.

Third Hypothesis: Flourishing positively correlates with the other variables, with statistically significant relationships:

- A strong positive correlation between flourishing and overall levels of hope ($r = 0.670$, $p < 0.001$).
- A moderate positive correlation between flourishing and cognitive-affective mindfulness ($r = 0.357$, $p < 0.001$).
- A moderate positive correlation between flourishing and quality of life ($r = 0.488$, $p < 0.001$).

These results indicate that higher levels of hope, cognitive-affective mindfulness, and quality of life lead to higher levels of flourishing among the studied individuals, confirming the third hypothesis.

Fourth Hypothesis: A statistically significant relationship exists between the subscales of flourishing and hope in significant life domains. Analysis shows that each subscale of flourishing positively correlates with each subscale of hope. This means that higher levels of hope correspond to increased levels of individual elements of flourishing.

Fifth Hypothesis: The studied variables explain a significant portion (55.8%) of the variance in the overall indicator for flourishing ($\Delta R^2 = 0.558$). The most significant predictors include hope in academic success, mental health, hope in work, hope in family, and hope in social relationships, all contributing to increased overall flourishing. This confirms that higher levels of these predictors enhance flourishing. However, cognitive-affective mindfulness was not identified as a significant predictor in the model. Regarding the components of flourishing, the only factor that did not appear in any model was hope in romantic relationships. All other factors influenced flourishing components to varying degrees, and their influence was statistically significant.

6. Contributions and Significance of the Work to Science and Practice

The scientific and applied contributions of Stanislav Aleksandrov's dissertation include conducting an original study on psychological well-being during early and middle adulthood. The re-

search provides a more comprehensive understanding of well-being, expanding its study to include hope, mindfulness, and quality of life. The contributions are as follows:

1. Contemporary concepts of well-being, optimism, hope, mindfulness, and quality of life were integrated based on a thorough theoretical analysis, and interrelations among them were argued.

2. A systematic review of numerous empirical studies related to the studied constructs was presented.

3. The reliability of the applied instruments (PERMA Profile, Domain Specific Hope Scale, SF-8, and Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale) was further confirmed, while some specificities of their application to older audiences were identified.

4. An original empirical study was conducted in Bulgaria in the field of the researched problem, examining the interrelations among well-being, optimism, hope, mindfulness, and quality of life. The results enrich existing models of well-being and highlight significant age differences in the variables studied.

5. The empirical data provide grounds for interventions in psychological counselling and psych correction practices aimed at increasing levels of well-being, hope, mindfulness, and quality of life.

6. The findings support the development of educational programs for preventing depression and anxiety, focusing on mindfulness, self-help, and self-regulation skills.

7. The empirical results suggest strategies for promoting positive mental development and health through educational, social, and healthcare interventions.

8. Evaluation of Publications Related to the Thesis

Three publications were presented for review. All are standalone articles by Stanislav Aleksandrov. Two are in Bulgarian, and one is in English. They address topics such as artificial intelligence, optimism and life meaning, and subjective well-being.

9. Personal Involvement of the Doctoral Student

I believe that the research conducted for this thesis is the personal work of Stanislav Raychev Aleksandrov, and the contributions and results achieved are his individual accomplishments.

10. An Abstract

The summary of this thesis adheres to the requirements and reflects the main results achieved in the thesis.

11. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

I have no critical remarks that would significantly impact the review. I recommend that S. Aleksandrov continues his diligent work in the field of positive psychology.

12. Personal Impressions

I have known Stanislav Raychev Aleksandrov as a student in the Bachelor's and Master's programs in Positive Psychology. I hold a positive opinion of him. He is responsible, organized, and loyal in his work.

13. Recommendations for Future Use of Thesis Contributions and Results

I recommend publishing scientific articles and a monograph on the topic. Within the scope of my competence, I did not find any texts that could be classified as plagiarism, nor did I receive any reports of such during the period of my work on the review.

CONCLUSION

The thesis contains scientific, applied, and practical results that represent an original contribution to science and meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDSAB), the Rules for the Application of LDSAB, and the relevant Regulations of PU 'Paisii Hilendarski'.

The thesis demonstrates that Stanislav Raychev Aleksandrov possesses theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific field of positive psychology and demonstrates the qualities and abilities required for conducting independent scientific research.

For the above reasons, I confidently give my *positive assessment* of the conducted research, as presented in the reviewed thesis, abstract, achieved results, and contributions. **I recommend that the esteemed academic jury award the educational and scientific degree of 'Doctor' to Stanislav Raychev Aleksandrov** in the field of higher education: Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences, professional field Psychology, doctoral programme Positive Psychology.

10.01.2025

Reviewer:
(Prof. Kirilka Simeonova Tagareva, PhD)