

REVIEW

by: prof. Youri Pavlov Ianakiev, PhD

Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski"

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

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

Professional field: 3.2. Psychology

Doctoral program: Pedagogical and adult psychology

Author: Antonia Traykova

Topic: AGGRESSION AND ANXIETY IN TEENAGE CHILDREN WITH PROBLEMFUL
INTERNET USE

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. Kirilka Tagareva,

Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski"

1. General description of the submitted materials

By order No. RD-22-1495 of 23.06.2025 of the Rector of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" (PU), I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury for ensuring a procedure for the defense of a dissertation work by Antonia Traykova, a PhD student in an free form of study at the Department of Psychology with scientific supervisor Prof. Kirilka Tagareva, PhD. The submitted set of materials is in accordance with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of PU and includes the necessary documents.

2. Brief biographical data about the doctoral student

Antonia Traykova holds a master's degree in applied psychology from Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski". Her education is broad-ranging - she has a master's degree in pedagogy and law. She has worked as a legal advisor and psychologist in schools and kindergartens.

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

The topic of the dissertation is dedicated to the influence that digital technologies have on the development of young people. The goals are clearly formulated. The tasks related to theoretical analysis, empirical research and development of recommendations are logically related and support the achievement of the goals.

4. Knowledge of the problem

The theoretical overview, which includes concepts of aggression and anxiety in problematic use of the Internet, demonstrates knowledge of the research problem.

5. Research method

The canonical structure of the work includes an introduction, three chapters, a list of literature and appendices. The first chapter is a theoretical overview and conceptual framework. The second chapter covers the design of the empirical study, including the methods, instruments and procedures of the study. The third chapter focuses on the analysis and interpretation of the results of the study. The methods include working with standardized instruments. An author's survey on the use of the Internet by teenage children has been added. The design of the study is correct and ethically justified.

6. Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation work

Antonia Traykova's dissertation follows the canonical requirements for structuring the content: three main chapters, introduction, conclusion, list of literature and appendices. Of interest is the part dedicated to problematic Internet behavior with an emphasis on social networks, video games and online platforms. The stages of problematic Internet behavior are explained: infatuation, disappointment and balance. Psychosocial risks associated with tendencies towards social isolation, low self-regulation and exposure to aggressive online content are mentioned. However, the influence of geo-political and cultural specifics on the teen population in Bulgaria is missing. The analytical reading shows that the dissertation corresponds to the academic requirements for structure and style.

7. Contributions and significance of the work for science and practice

The dissertation offers the following contribution: Identification of two main profiles of adolescents (socially engaged with low self-regulation and anxious with high criticality), which can serve to develop targeted interventions.

8. Evaluation of publications on the dissertation

The doctoral student has submitted 3 independent articles published in university student and doctoral collections. They meet the minimum requirements.

9. Abstract

The abstract has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the University of Sofia and reflects the main results and contributions of the dissertation.

10. Critical remarks and recommendations

Critical remarks risk reviving the debate about the added value of "small" doctorates, whose results rarely manage to rise above the banal truths of life. There is no doubt, for example, that the effects of excessive Internet use in teenage children are well known not only to researchers, but also to laypeople at public transport stops. This topic has today become a well-worn hit on social networks. Why then does the scientific community readily accept the analyses and conclusions proposed in the doctoral thesis, such as “boys have higher levels of physical aggression, anger, and hostility, while girls demonstrate more social concerns and physiological reactions related to anxiety?” (p. 140) “Older adolescents (16-18 years old) demonstrate better self-regulation skills, which can be linked to the development of cognitive functions, such as self-control and critical reflection, than 14–15-year-olds” (ibid.). These banal truths are supported by worn-out arguments such as: “This development is the result of accumulated experience and socialization, which promotes autonomy and the ability to manage emotions and behavior. [...] These skills help older students maintain more balanced Internet behavior and cope with the challenges of everyday life.” (ibid.).

The risk of drowning in the “rediscovered warm water” can be overcome only when doctoral students learn to swim in the semantic current of referenced and indexed literary sources in global databases. The development of such competencies is the responsibility of the scientific supervisor and the unit responsible for the development of the “life cycle” of the doctoral student. In several places in the corpus of the text, fragmented traces of such efforts are found, which, however, do not achieve sufficient results due to the lack of sufficient depth. Most of the analytical energy invested in this project remains focused on the swamped presence of texts without real scientific contribution in the bibliography. Therefore, the final results do not go beyond the scholastic claim of the form.

11. Personal impressions

I know Antonia Traykova from our academic contacts during her studies in the master's program at the "Paisii Hilendarski" University. She was one of the master's students who

actively participated in the educational process and academic life of the University. I was not surprised by her subsequent career development in the specialty. We established professional contacts several times in her capacity as a school psychologist at the "Dimitar Matevski" University in Plovdiv, where Ms. Traykova was valued both by her children and colleagues, and in her relationships with parents and institutions. I am sure that she has the necessary potential for career development, which combines academic knowledge and the practical experience of an applied specialist.

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

The results of the study, after substantial revision, could be used for publication not only in student and doctoral collections, but also in publications with a more serious scientific claim.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation contains scientific and applied scientific results that represent an original contribution to science and meet the requirements of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the Implementation of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations of the University of Paisii Hilendarski. The dissertation shows that the doctoral student Antonia Traykova possesses theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty "Pedagogical and Age Psychology", demonstrating qualities and skills for independent conduct of scientific research.

Due to the above, I give my positive assessment of the conducted research, presented by the above-reviewed dissertation, abstract, achieved results and contribution, and I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to Antonia Traykova in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology, doctoral program Pedagogical and Age Psychology.

09/29/2025

Reviewer:

Prof. Dr. Youri Ianakiev