



## OPINION

on a dissertation thesis for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

by: Prof. D.Sc. Manol Nikolov Manolov

academic institution: Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski"

in: field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences

professional field: 3.2. Psychology

doctoral programme: "Positive Psychology"

Author: Katerina Valerieva Atias

Dissertation topic: "Interrelationships between Mental Health, Gratitude and Mindfulness in the Context of Breastfeeding"

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. Kirilka Tagareva, Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski"

### 1. General presentation of the procedure and the doctoral candidate

By Order No. RD-22-463 of 25.02.2026 of the Rector of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski", I was appointed as a member of the scientific jury in a procedure for the defense of a dissertation thesis for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology, doctoral programme "Positive Psychology". The submitted set of materials and documents has been prepared in accordance with the regulatory requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation, and the internal regulations of Plovdiv University.

The author of the dissertation thesis is Katerina Valerieva Atias, a full-time doctoral candidate at the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Education, Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski". Her scientific supervisor is Prof. Dr. Kirilka Tagareva. The doctoral candidate has an interdisciplinary educational and professional profile - a BA in Journalism, an MA in Positive Psychology, followed by further qualifications in sexology and psychotherapy, as well as practical experience as a journalist, editor, and psychology consultant. This background supports the overall maturity of the submitted work.



## 2. Relevance of the topic

The topic of the dissertation thesis is highly relevant both scientifically and in a clearly expressed applied sense. In recent years, interest in mental health during the postpartum period has increased, yet a considerable part of the research remains focused mainly on psychopathology. In this context, the doctoral candidate's decision to study not only postpartum depression but also flourishing, gratitude, and mindfulness is conceptually sound and consistent with the contemporary integrative model of mental health.

The study is especially valuable because of the limited number of Bulgarian studies that integrate the psychological dimensions of maternal well-being with the experience of breastfeeding during the first year after childbirth. The stated aim, objectives, and hypotheses are scientifically and socially well grounded, and the problem area has direct significance for psychological support for mothers, health care, and future intervention programmes.

## 3. Knowledge of the problem

The doctoral candidate demonstrates in-depth knowledge of the research problem. The dissertation thesis is based on an impressive bibliography of 422 sources, of which 381 are in English and 41 are in Bulgarian. This makes it possible to place the problem within a broad international context while also highlighting the shortage of empirical data in the Bulgarian scientific environment.

The theoretical review is systematic, analytical, and conceptually clear. The author correctly discusses the main approaches to mental health - pathogenic, salutogenic, and integrative - and convincingly justifies her choice to work with the two-factor model, in which well-being and psychopathology are considered in parallel rather than as mutually exclusive states. The analysis of the literature on flourishing, postpartum depression, gratitude, and mindfulness is precise and purposefully leads to the author's own empirical research.

## 4. Research methodology

The methodological design of the dissertation thesis is well constructed, logically developed, and psychometrically grounded. The research was carried out in two stages, and the preceding verification of the reliability and validity of the instruments used increases the persuasiveness of the main empirical study. The choice of diagnostic instruments is well argued, and the use of established scales for flourishing, gratitude, mindfulness, and postpartum depression is a substantial strength of the thesis.

A particularly strong aspect of the work is the sample of 655 postpartum women with infants up to 12 months of age, which provides a solid empirical basis for testing the seven proposed



hypotheses. The statistical processing is appropriate to the stated research tasks and includes a multilayered analysis of the relationships between the variables, allowing well-grounded conclusions regarding the role of positive psychological resources in maternal well-being and in the success of breastfeeding.

#### 5. Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation thesis and its contributions

The dissertation thesis comprises 233 pages and is structured into an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, and an appendix containing the instruments used. The composition is logical and follows an established scientific sequence: theoretical part, methodological framework, and empirical verification. The text is written in a clear scientific style, and the analytical part is supported by tables, figures, and graphs that facilitate the tracing of the results and interpretations.

I consider the contributions of the thesis scientifically significant and convincingly substantiated. On the theoretical level, the work enriches the limited literature on the relationship between mental health and breastfeeding by proposing a model for studying maternal mental health that includes both its positive and negative dimensions. On the empirical level, significant interrelationships have been established between flourishing, gratitude, mindfulness, and postpartum depression; psychological instruments have been validated and adapted for the Bulgarian context; and factors and predictors supporting the continuation of breastfeeding during the first year after childbirth have been identified.

I find the practical orientation of the dissertation particularly valuable. The results obtained may serve as a basis for programmes for psychological support of mothers, for preventing the risk of postpartum depression, and for developing more comprehensive health and social policies oriented toward postpartum mental health. In this sense, the thesis has not only scientific, but also clear applied and preventive value.

#### 6. Assessment of the publications and of the doctoral candidate's personal contribution

The submitted 8 publications on the topic of the dissertation thesis not only meet but exceed the minimum requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor". Their thematic connection with the main work is clear, and the publication activity is a good indicator of sustained scientific interest in the problem area.

The personal contribution of the doctoral candidate is clearly visible at all stages of the research - from conceptualising the problem and building the theoretical framework, through the organisation and conduct of the empirical study, to the analysis, interpretation, and formulation



of the conclusions and contributions. The submitted work demonstrates skills for independent scientific research and good methodological culture.

#### 7. Abstract

The abstract accurately and succinctly reflects the content of the dissertation thesis. It presents the relevance of the problem, the aim, the objectives, the methodology, the main results, the contributions, and the publications on the topic. The text meets the academic requirements and fulfils its purpose of providing a correct and concentrated overview of the work as a whole.

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

The results of the dissertation thesis have the potential for broad future use both in research and in applied practice. They may be integrated into programmes for psychological support for mothers in the postpartum period, into training modules for specialists in psychology, midwifery, public health, and early intervention, as well as into the development of interdisciplinary models for the prevention of postpartum depression and for supporting successful breastfeeding.

I would recommend that the study be published in monograph form, as it contains significant results that deserve broader academic and professional visibility. It would also be promising to expand the research programme in the future through longitudinal designs, the inclusion of more diverse social and cultural groups, and a more in-depth analysis of the socioeconomic factors related to maternal mental health and breastfeeding practices.

#### Conclusion

The dissertation thesis contains scientific, scientifically applied, and applied results that represent an original contribution to science and meet all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation, and the relevant regulations of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski".

The dissertation thesis shows that the doctoral candidate Katerina Atias possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in scientific field 3.2. Psychology and demonstrates the qualities and readiness required for the independent conduct of scientific research.

In view of the above, I give my positive assessment of the submitted dissertation thesis, the abstract, the achieved results and contributions, and I propose that the esteemed scientific jury award Katerina Valerieva Atias the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology, doctoral programme "Positive Psychology".



**Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”**  
*Faculty of Education*



24.03.2026

Prepared by: .....

Prof. D.Sc. Manol Nikolov Manolov