

OPINION

by Prof. DSc Krasimira Petrova Koleva-Mineva
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Psychology

(on a dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”)

Field of Higher Education: 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences
Professional Field: 3.2 Psychology
Doctoral Programme: “Positive Psychology”

Author: Katerina Valerieva Atias

Title: *RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH, GRATITUDE AND MINDFULNESS IN THE CONTEXT OF BREASTFEEDING*

Supervisor: Prof. PhD Kirilka Tagareva, Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

1. General presentation of the procedure and the doctoral candidate

By Order of the Rector of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv (No. RD-22-463 / 25.02.2026), I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury in a procedure for the defense of a dissertation entitled “*RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH, GRATITUDE AND MINDFULNESS IN THE CONTEXT OF BREASTFEEDING*” for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in Field 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professional Field 3.2 Psychology, Doctoral Programme “Positive Psychology”.

The author of the dissertation is Katerina Valerieva Atias – a full-time doctoral student at the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Education, Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, supervised by Prof. PhD Kirilka Tagareva. She possesses solid knowledge in the field of psychological science. Katerina Atias holds a Bachelor’s degree in Journalism from Sofia University and a Master’s degree in Positive Psychology from Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, and continues her qualification at the Medical University of Plovdiv in Sexology and Psychotherapy. Professionally, she works as a journalist, editor, and psychology consultant.

The submitted set of materials and documents complies with the requirements of the Regulations for the Development of Academic Staff at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

2. Relevance of the topic

The issue addressed by the doctoral candidate is highly relevant, has been relevant, and will not lose its relevance or social significance. Breastfeeding is one of the first connections between the child and the surrounding world, and the quality of this connection is fundamental to personality development. This connection is equally significant for the mother; therefore, mental health, gratitude, mindfulness, and breastfeeding are appropriately presented as interrelated and interdependent. Such studies are highly valuable for the contemporary understanding of motherhood, breastfeeding, and infancy.

3. Knowledge of the problem

I believe that Katerina Atias demonstrates sufficiently in-depth knowledge of the problem under study, as evidenced by the bibliography of 422 sources, fully relevant to the topic, and the 233-page text. The limited number of Bulgarian sources cited clearly demonstrates the need for further publications and research in the field of motherhood, particularly breastfeeding and its relationship with gratitude, mindfulness, and maternal mental health.

The doctoral candidate has chosen flourishing as a construct, as the contemporary understanding of mental health integrates a holistic concept of its positive dimensions, encompassing psychological, social, and emotional well-being.

4. Research methodology

The study is characterized by a holistic and analytical approach and shows strong potential for further research development in the selected area. The aim, object, subject, and the seven hypotheses are clearly formulated and well justified. The research stages demonstrate sustained interest and engagement with issues of motherhood, considered in terms of well-being and postpartum depression.

The relationship between positive traits (gratitude and mindfulness) and mental health (flourishing and postpartum depression) has been confirmed. Particularly impressive are the theoretical model of the empirical study and the sample of 655 mothers with children up to 12 months of age. The well-selected instruments, supported by solid statistical analysis, leave no doubt regarding the validity of the results.

5. Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation and its contributions

My overall impression is that this is an in-depth theoretical and empirical study in a relatively under-researched area with enduring social significance. The theoretical

framework is presented with clarity and scientific rigor in an accessible academic style. The doctoral candidate demonstrates strong analytical skills in handling theoretical material.

The research design is competently developed, responsibly executed, and clearly presented. The results are significant, the analyses precise and well illustrated. The recommendations for future research indicate the beginning of further studies in this field.

I fully accept the contributions of the doctoral candidate and comment on them as follows:

1. Enrichment of the limited literature on the relationship between mental health and breastfeeding, including not only flourishing and well-being but also postpartum depression and predictors related to breastfeeding as both a process and an attitude.
2. Proposal of a research model of maternal mental health that includes both positive and negative dimensions as integral components.
3. Adaptation of measurement tools: three for flourishing, two for dispositional gratitude, two for mindfulness, and one for postpartum depression in the context of motherhood and breastfeeding.
4. Examination of key positive traits—gratitude and mindfulness—revealing complex interactions and highlighting the importance of psychological resources for successful breastfeeding.
5. Identification of predictors of successful breastfeeding during the first year, which can serve as a basis for various programs related to motherhood, breastfeeding, and prevention of postpartum depression.
6. Valuable psychotherapeutic implications for both specialists and a broader audience.
7. The work has informative, preventive, and prognostic value, raising new research questions alongside providing answers.

6. Evaluation of publications and personal contribution

In my opinion, the doctoral candidate's publications adequately represent parts of the dissertation and significantly exceed the scientometric requirements in the Republic of Bulgaria (8 publications). Additionally, the candidate lists further publications in her CV, which is highly impressive for a young researcher.

7. Abstract

The abstract fully reflects the main components of the dissertation, presenting in a concise yet sufficiently detailed form its structure, relevance, motivation, and results. The contributions, publication activity, and research scope are appropriately presented.

8. Recommendations for future use of the results

I have no critical remarks, only a recommendation: the dissertation should be published as a monograph, as it is valuable not only for specialists but also for current and future mothers.

CONCLUSION

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

The dissertation demonstrates that the doctoral candidate, Katerina Atias, possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in Psychology and shows the ability to conduct independent scientific research.

Based on the above, I give my positive evaluation of the research presented in the dissertation, the abstract, the achieved results, and contributions, and I propose that the esteemed scientific jury award the educational and scientific degree “PhD” to Katerina Atias in Field 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professional Field 3.2 Psychology, Doctoral Programme “Positive Psychology”.

20.03.2026
(signature)

Prepared by:
Prof. DSc Krasimira Petrova