

REVIEW

by Prof. Youri Ianakiev

Department of Psychology

University of Plovdiv Paisii Hilendarski

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

"PhD"

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

professional field 3.2. Psychology

PhD program "Positive Psychology"

Author: *Katerina Valerieva Atias*

Topic: Interrelationships between mental health, gratitude and mindfulness in the context of breastfeeding

Scientific supervisor: *Prof. Kirilka Tagareva, PhD, Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski*

1. General presentation of the procedure and the PhD student

By order of the Rector of University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski" (PU), I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury for ensuring a procedure for the defense of a dissertation on the topic "Interrelationships between mental health, gratitude and mindfulness in the context of breastfeeding" for the acquisition of the educational and scientific PhD degree in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology, PhD program "Positive Psychology". The author of the dissertation is Katerina Atias - a PhD student at the Department of Psychology with scientific supervisor Prof. Kirilka Tagareva, PhD, from PU.

The set of materials on paper submitted by Katerina Atias is in accordance with Art. 36 (1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of PU and includes the following documents:

- a request to the Rector of PU for disclosure of the procedure for the defense of a dissertation; CV in European format
- minutes of the department council, related to reporting the readiness to open the procedure and preliminary discussion of the dissertation; dissertation
- abstract; list of scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation
- list of noted citations
- declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents

8 publications are also attached.

The dissertation has been developed in compliance with regulatory requirements. The PhD student has completed the activities set out in the individual plan and has submitted the necessary documentation.

2. Brief biographical data about the PhD student

The professional and creative path of Katerina Atias is distinguished by consistency, resilience and a desire for development. Her biography reveals a clearly expressed motivation to upgrade knowledge and skills, as well as commitment to the chosen scientific field.

The wide range of education and additional qualifications creates a good basis for an interdisciplinary approach in her research work. This has a positive impact on the quality of

the dissertation work, which demonstrates good theoretical preparation and the ability to integrate knowledge from different fields.

The PhD student has significant professional experience, exceeding twenty years, which contributes to the practical validity of the research. She demonstrates developed research potential, analytical thinking and skills for scientific work.

There is good coherence between the educational preparation, professional experience and the topic of the dissertation, which further justifies the choice of the scientific field. Overall, the presented biographical data outlines the profile of a PhD student with good academic preparation, significant practical experience and potential for further scientific development.

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

The topic of the dissertation is relevant and well positioned within the framework of positive psychology. The study examines mental health in the postpartum period through a two-factor model that unites well-being and psychopathology, in accordance with modern scientific understandings.

Of particular value is the approach in which breastfeeding is interpreted as a biocultural phenomenon, which expands the analysis and allows for a more integrative understanding of maternal mental health.

The goal of the study is clearly formulated and well-founded, and the tasks are logically arranged and adequately aimed at achieving it. They reflect real deficits in the scientific literature and give both theoretical and practical significance to the work.

4. Knowledge of the problem

The theoretical analysis is thorough and well-structured. The PhD student demonstrates excellent knowledge of the scientific literature and skillfully integrates key concepts such as flourishing, postpartum depression, gratitude, and mindfulness.

A particular strength is the clear justification of flourishing as an indicator of positive mental health, as well as the reasoned inclusion of gratitude and mindfulness as personal resources with a buffering effect.

5. Research method

The methodological design is adequate and well-structured. The study was conducted in two stages, which increases the reliability of the instruments used. Modern statistical methods were applied. The empirical basis allows for the drawing of justified conclusions.

As an important methodological comment, it can be noted that the cross-sectional design used limits the possibilities for inferring causal relationships, which could be more clearly emphasized in the discussion. The established relationships between flourishing, postpartum depression, gratitude and mindfulness were derived through correlation and regression analyses within a single measurement, which allows for the interpretation of statistical relationships, but not an unambiguous determination of the direction of influence between the variables.

In the context of the studied model, in which positive personal resources are theoretically modeled as predictors of mental health, as well as its relationship with breastfeeding, it is possible to allow for alternative or reciprocal influences. This suggests that the results should be interpreted with the necessary methodological caution. In this sense, a logical continuation of the study would be the use of longitudinal studies that would allow tracking the dynamics of the studied processes and more convincing clarification of the cause-effect relationships.

We also note that the sample has a relatively homogeneous profile (predominantly highly educated participants – 87.2% of them have a higher education), which raises the question of the validity and generalizability of the results to the wider population. A high educational level is a factor that is associated with both better information and higher access to resources, social support and health services, which potentially affects the levels of mental well-being and breastfeeding practices.

Another significant imbalance is found in the territorial distribution of the participants, with almost half of them (47.8%) living in Sofia. This creates prerequisites for a systematic distortion of the results, since the metropolitan environment provides different social, economic and health conditions compared to smaller settlements. In this sense, it is likely that the established dependencies reflect to a greater extent the specific profile of the urbanized, resource-rich group, rather than the overall picture of maternal mental health in Bulgaria.

These limitations do not invalidate the results obtained, but suggest a more careful interpretation and clearly outline the need for future studies with more diverse and representative samples.

6. Characteristics and evaluation of the PhD work

The dissertation work has a volume of 233 pages of main text and is structured in an introduction, three chapters, conclusion, bibliography and appendix, including the tools used. Compositionally, the study follows the classical logic of the scientific presentation, clearly distinguishing the theoretical, methodological and empirical parts.

Structurally, the work is distinguished by good organization and internal logical consistency. The theoretical part builds a solid conceptual framework in which the research problem is positioned analytically and systematically. The methodological chapter consistently presents the research design, the approaches used and the tools, and the empirical part offers an in-depth analysis of the data, accompanied by a reasoned interpretation.

The first chapter demonstrates a high degree of theoretical awareness and critical thinking. The leading concepts related to mental health, flourishing, postpartum depression, as well as the role of gratitude and mindfulness as personal resources are presented. A particular strength is the integration of different theoretical perspectives and the substantiation of the two-factor model of mental health, which serves as the conceptual basis of the study. The skillful combination of psychological, biological and social aspects in the spirit of the modern biopsychosocial approach is impressive.

The presentation is distinguished by clarity and analyticality, as the author successfully summarizes and visualizes key dependencies through models, tables and diagrams, which facilitates the perception of complex conceptual relationships.

Chapter two presents the methodological framework of the study in detail. The object, subject, goals, tasks and hypotheses are clearly formulated and logically connected. A particularly positive impression is made by the attention to the psychometric characteristics of the instruments used and the reasoned description of the sample, which increases confidence in the reliability of the data obtained.

Chapter three contains an in-depth empirical analysis based on modern statistical methods. The results are interpreted in the context of the theoretical framework, and clear and logically justified conclusions are formulated. The inclusion of sections dedicated to contributions, limitations and directions for future research testifies to a developed scientific reflection and critical attitude towards one's own research.

In summary, the dissertation work is characterized by a solid theoretical basis, a well-argued methodology and significant empirical results that have both scientific and applied value. The bibliography is extensive and up-to-date, including 422 sources, predominantly

from the international scientific literature. The text is appropriately illustrated with tables, figures and graphs that support the presentation and understanding of the results.

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

The contributions can be summarized in three directions: theoretical, methodological and applied contributions.

Theoretical contributions

The study contributes to the development of contemporary concepts of mental health by applying the two-factor model in the specific context of the postpartum period and breastfeeding. It expands the theoretical framework of positive psychology by integrating both the positive (thriving, gratitude, mindfulness) and negative (postpartum depression) dimensions of mental health. In this way, a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of the mother's mental functioning is achieved, which builds on the traditional focus on psychopathology.

Methodological contributions

In methodological terms, the work demonstrates a systematic approach to the selection, adaptation and empirical verification of psychological instruments for measuring the studied constructs. The effort to conduct an analysis on the way to achieving reliability and validity creates prerequisites for more reliable measurement of phenomena such as thriving, gratitude and mindfulness in the Bulgarian context. This contributes to enriching the toolkit in the field and opens up opportunities for future empirical research.

Applied contributions

The practical value of the study is expressed in outlining guidelines for interventions aimed at supporting maternal mental health in the first year after birth. The identification of key psychological resources and predictors allows for the formulation of recommendations for prevention and early support, including through the promotion of positive psychological practices and social support. The results obtained have the potential to be used in the development of programs and policies in the field of public health and maternal and child care.

8. Assessment of the publications on the dissertation

The publications presented on the dissertation reflect to a significant extent the main results of the research conducted and are thematically linked to the key problem areas – maternal mental health, flourishing, postpartum depression, gratitude, mindfulness and

breastfeeding. They testify to the consistent and targeted promotion of the PhD student's scientific achievements both in the academic and wider social environment.

The publication activity demonstrates a desire to validate and disseminate the results through participation in scientific forums and publications in specialized publications. The results of the dissertation are applied both in scientific research practice and in the context of developing intervention and support models aimed at maternal mental health. There is potential for using the obtained data in future projects and programs related to public health and early childhood development.

From the point of view of scientific impact, the presented publications create prerequisites for subsequent citation and integration into a broader scientific discourse, being distinguished by their relevance and interdisciplinary nature. In the collective publications, the PhD student's contribution is clearly recognizable and substantial, especially in terms of the conceptualization of the research, the empirical analysis and the interpretation of the results.

The publications can be summarized as follows: articles in scientific journals, reports in proceedings of scientific conferences and participation in scientific forums, with a balanced presence in both national and international contexts. They are published mainly in Bulgarian and English and include both independent and co-authored works.

In summary, the PhD student's publication activity is adequate in volume and content to the requirements for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "doctor" and correctly reflects the main contributions of the dissertation work.

9. Personal participation of the PhD student

Based on the materials presented and the analysis of the dissertation, it can be assumed that the PhD student has a leading and significant personal participation in all stages of the research - from the formulation of the scientific problem and the development of the theoretical framework, through the design and implementation of the empirical study, to the analysis, interpretation and generalization of the results. The formulated contributions and the achieved results are to a significant extent her personal merit, and in the collective publications her contribution is clearly recognizable and justified.

10. Abstract

The abstract correctly presents the content and contributions of the dissertation.

11. Critical remarks and recommendations

It is recommended that the PhD student more clearly outline the limitations of the causal interpretation of the results, given the cross-sectional design used, as well as to consider possible alternative (including inverse) relationships between the studied variables.

In an applied plan, it would be useful to translate the results into more specific intervention models aimed at supporting maternal mental health.

12. Personal impressions

I have none.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation 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 the Implementation of the Law and the relevant Regulations of the University of Plovdiv Paisii Hilendarski.

The dissertation shows that the PhD student Katerina Valerieva Atias possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty "Psychology" by demonstrating qualities and skills for independent conduct of scientific research.

Due to the above, I confidently give my **positive assessment** of the conducted research, presented by the above-reviewed dissertation, abstract, achieved results and contributions, and **I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award the PhD degree to Katerina Valerieva Atias** in the field of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology, PhD program of Positive Psychology.

24.03.2026

Reviewer:

(signature)

Prof. Youri Ianakiev, PhD