

OPINION

by **Dr. Doncho Stoyanov Donev, Associate Professor at Trakia university**

on the dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"
in: Field of Higher Education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences.
Professional direction 3.2. Psychology
Doctoral program Educational and Developmental Psychology

Author: Nikolay Iliev Dimchev

Topic: The Relationship Between Aggression and Attachment in Adolescence chronic pain.

Scientific Supervisor: Prof. Kirilka Simeonova Tagareva, PhD

1. General Presentation of the Procedure and the Doctoral Candidate

By Order No. RD-22-891 of April 27, 2026, issued by the Rector of Plovdiv University 'Paisii Hilendarski' (PU), I have been appointed as a member of the Scientific Jury for the dissertation defense procedure on the topic 'The Relationship Between Aggression and Attachment in Adolescence'. This procedure is for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree 'Doctor' (PhD) in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology, under the doctoral program Educational and Developmental Psychology. The author of the dissertation is Nikolay Iliev Dimchev – a doctoral candidate at the Department of Psychology, supervised by Prof. Kirilka Simeonova Tagareva, PhD.

The set of materials submitted by Nikolay Dimchev is in full compliance with Article 36 (1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of Plovdiv University. Furthermore, the doctoral candidate has provided documentation of four publications in scientific journals.

2. Brief Biographical Data of the Doctoral Candidate

Nikolay Dimchev completed his secondary education at the 'Hristo Botev' Vocational High School of Interior Architecture and Woodworking, specializing in Furniture Production. In 2017, he successfully earned a Bachelor's degree in Psychology from Plovdiv University 'Paisii Hilendarski', followed by the defense of his Master's thesis within the university's Positive Psychology program. Since 2024, he has been enrolled as a doctoral student in the Educational and Developmental Psychology program at the same institution.

His professional career as a practicing psychologist began in 2018, during which he has gained extensive experience working with children and adolescents exhibiting challenging behaviors. In 2025, he concluded his specialized training as a Positive Psychotherapist. Over the past year, he has also held the academic position of Assistant at the Department of Psychology at Plovdiv University.

3. Relevance of the Topic

The selected topic holds profound social and scientific significance, offering an in-depth perspective on aggression as an externalized projection of internal insecurity in adolescents. The dissertation successfully fills gaps in the understanding of the relationship between various attachment figures and the multidimensional construct of adolescent aggression.

4. Understanding of the Problem

Nikolay Dimchev demonstrates an impressive theoretical background and in-depth knowledge of the scientific issues concerning the phenomena of aggression and attachment. The author has conducted an extensive literature review, covering both the classical foundations of psychological science and the most up-to-date research in the field. Furthermore, Nikolay Dimchev has successfully achieved a critical synthesis, which serves as the basis for his own logically sound conceptual framework for the study. This provides indisputable evidence of his high scientific competence and maturity as a researcher.

5. Research Methodology

The research methodology is highly relevant to the established research goal and effectively facilitates the fulfillment of the research tasks. The methods are appropriate for measuring the specified criteria within the context of the defined target group. Furthermore, the selected design allows for a comprehensive study of the phenomena and ensures a high degree of reliability and validity for the obtained results.

6. Characteristics and Evaluation of the Dissertation and Contributions

The first chapter of Nikolay Dimchev's dissertation establishes a comprehensive and rigorously structured theoretical foundation, within which the author performs a critical synthesis of psychological paradigms. The discourse encompasses a broad spectrum of approaches to the study of aggression-ranging from classical psychoanalysis and evolutionary psychology to contemporary neurobiological and social models - while precisely differentiating aggression from related constructs such as anger, hostility, and violence. A notable achievement is the operationalization of the AHA syndrome (Anger-Hostility-Aggression), which facilitates the analysis of aggression as a multidimensional construct, integrating affective, cognitive, and behavioral components into a unified framework.

The second part of the theoretical review focuses on a detailed typology of aggressive behavior, where the doctoral candidate insightfully analyzes reactive and proactive forms of aggression, alongside modern phenomena such as cyberaggression. The author emphasizes the age-specific characteristics of adolescence, conceptualizing it as a critical period of ontogenetic transformations where aggression often emerges as a compensatory mechanism for experienced insecurity. Ultimately, the work convincingly establishes attachment theory as the primary explanatory framework for the genesis of destructiveness, underscoring its pivotal role in the development of emotional self-regulation.

Chapter Two of the dissertation presents a precise and methodologically sound organization of the empirical study, which complies with contemporary scientific standards in psychology . The doctoral candidate has developed a robust comparative analysis with a correlational design, aimed at establishing the nature of the interrelationship between the quality of attachment and aggressive behavior. The sample, comprising a total of 216 adolescents aged between 13 and 19 years, is structured into two comparative groups - experimental (with registered deviant manifestations) and control (with normative behavior) - enabling the precise identification of specific psychological deficits. Special mention should be made of the strict adherence to ethical standards for working with minors and the clear formulation of the research goals and tasks.

The selection of the research instrumentation, including the internationally established Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) and the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA), attests to the author's pursuit of objectivity and the high reliability of the obtained data. Nikolay Dimchev demonstrates proficiency in operationalizing complex psychological constructs and applying a multi-level strategy for statistical processing using JASP software. The utilization of a wide range of methods—from descriptive analysis and Welch's t-test to detailed correlational and multiple linear regression analyses—guarantees the precise testing of hypotheses and the derivation of scientifically grounded conclusions regarding attachment as a significant predictor of aggression. This comprehensive methodological approach renders the second chapter a convincing testament to the doctoral candidate's research maturity and the high practical and applied value of his work.

Chapter Three of the dissertation presents a comprehensive and precise statistical analysis that convincingly differentiates the psychological profiles of the studied adolescents through the application of descriptive and comparative methods. The results categorically confirm that the experimental group demonstrates significantly higher levels of general and physical aggression, accompanied by distinct deficits in trust and communication with parental figures . A particularly contributory finding is the lack of statistically significant gender differences in aggressive manifestations, which directs the understanding of aggression as a socially determined phenomenon dominated by the quality of the family environment rather than biological belonging. Simultaneously, the author insightfully identifies high peer attachment as a compensatory mechanism that successfully replaces the missing emotional support from the family for adolescents with deviant behavior.

Emphasis is placed on correlation and regression analyses, which mathematically validate the central hypothesis regarding the protective function of secure attachment. Nikolay Dimchev successfully proves that over 50% of the variation in aggressive behavior ($R = 0.522$) can be predicted through the quality of emotional bonds, with trust in the father establishing itself as a key inhibitor of behavioral destructiveness. The study offers an innovative perspective on the functional differentiation of parental roles, defining the mother as the leading regulator of affective tone and the father as the primary mediator of social boundaries and norms. The final part of the chapter synthesizes these analyses into valuable practical recommendations for specialists in the educational sphere, postulating the work as a tool for the prevention of aggression through the targeted strengthening of family communication.

7. Evaluation of Publications and Personal Contribution of the Doctoral Candidate

Nikolay Dimchev has presented three publications in scientific journals and conference proceedings published during his doctoral studies. All three are directly related to the theme of the dissertation, reflecting various aspects of the research presented.

The concept, organization, and design of the conducted study are original, and both the data and their subsequent analysis are authentic. On this basis, I consider that there are no indications of plagiarism, and the presented dissertation is the author's own original work.

8. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

As the doctoral candidate himself notes, the study was conducted as a cross-sectional design at a specific point in time. While this allows for the establishment of statistically significant relationships, it limits the ability to draw definitive conclusions regarding causal dependencies. It remains difficult to determine with certainty whether attachment deficits precede aggression, or whether the adolescent's systemic aggressive behavior has led to a secondary deterioration of relationships and subsequent alienation by the parents. Such an analytical perspective could be further expanded in Nikolay Dimchev's future research endeavors.

9. Abstract

The summary accurately captures the dissertation's theoretical framework and empirical findings in their entirety.

10. Recommendations for Future Use of the Dissertation Contributions and Results

Given that the regression model identifies attachment to the father as a significantly stronger predictor of aggressive behavior compared to attachment to the mother, I consider the publication of these specific results in international scientific journals to be highly appropriate. Such dissemination would contribute meaningfully to the global academic discourse regarding the role of the father as a primary mediator of social boundaries during adolescence.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation presents findings that constitute an original scientific contribution and fully comply with the requirements of the Law for Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), its Implementing Regulations, and the relevant statutes of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

The work demonstrates Nikolay Dimchev's profound theoretical knowledge and professional competence in conducting independent scientific research. The candidate has exhibited comprehensive mastery of research methodologies and the ability to generate novel insights in the field of study.

In light of these considerations, I hereby affirm my positive assessment of the research conducted and formally recommend to the distinguished examination committee that the academic degree of Doctor be awarded to Nikolay Dimchev. The recommendation pertains specifically to Field 3: Social, Economic and Legal Sciences within the professional domain of Psychology (3.2), under the doctoral program in Educational and Developmental Psychology.

30.05.2025

Prepared by:

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(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Doncho Donev)