

## REVIEW

by **Prof. Velislava Atanasova Chavdarova, PhD**

St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo

of a doctoral dissertation submitted for the award of the **Educational and Scientific Degree “Doctor” (PhD)**

**Field of Higher Education:** 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences

**Professional Field:** 3.2. Psychology

**Doctoral Programme:** Educational and Developmental Psychology

**Author:** Nikolay Iliev Dimchev

**Dissertation Title:** *The Relationship Between Aggression and Attachment in Adolescence*

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

### 1. General Description of the Submitted Materials

By Rector’s Order No. R-22-891 of 27 April 2026 of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, I was appointed as a member of the Scientific Jury responsible for conducting the procedure for the public defense of the doctoral dissertation entitled “*The Relationship Between Aggression and Attachment in Adolescence*”, submitted for the award 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**, doctoral programme “**Educational and Developmental Psychology.**”

The author of the dissertation is **Nikolay Dimchev**, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Psychology under the supervision of **Prof. Kirilka Tagareva, PhD**, at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

The set of hard-copy materials submitted by Nikolay Dimchev complies with Article 36(1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of the University and includes the following documents:

- an application addressed to the Rector of the University requesting the initiation of the dissertation defense procedure;
- a Curriculum Vitae in the European format (Europass);
- the dissertation manuscript;

- an abstract of the dissertation (author's summary);
- a list of scientific publications related to the dissertation topic;
- copies of the scientific publications;
- a declaration of originality and authenticity of the submitted documents.

The doctoral candidate has submitted **three scientific publications**, which demonstrate academic maturity and a clear authorial contribution to the scholarly field.

## **2. Brief Biographical Information about the Doctoral Candidate**

The professional and academic trajectory of **Nikolay Dimchev** demonstrates perseverance, purposefulness, and consistency in pursuing his scholarly interests, as well as a strong commitment to combining academic development in the field of psychology with professional teaching practice. The doctoral candidate displays intellectual capacity and research potential that merit a highly positive evaluation.

Particularly impressive is the breadth of his education and professional qualifications, which are convincingly reflected and validated in the high quality of the dissertation research and its scholarly outcomes.

The procedure for obtaining the Educational and Scientific Degree “**Doctor**” (**PhD**) has been conducted in full compliance with all applicable legal and institutional requirements. No evidence of plagiarism has been identified.

## **3. Relevance of the Research Topic and Appropriateness of the Research Aims and Objectives**

The selection of the dissertation topic is well justified and corresponds to current trends in contemporary psychological science, which emphasize an integrative understanding of behavioral disorders and maladaptive behaviors during adolescence. Of particular value is the author's effort to combine classical attachment theories with contemporary conceptualizations of aggression, as well as to examine the role of both parental and peer attachment within the broader context of adolescent development. This approach endows the study with both an interdisciplinary perspective and considerable practical relevance.

In the context of rapid social transformations, the digitalization of interpersonal communication, and the increasing prevalence of aggressive and violent behavior among young

people, the issue under investigation acquires substantial theoretical and practical significance. The author convincingly substantiates the need to examine aggression not merely as a behavioral phenomenon but as a complex cognitive-affective construct closely associated with attachment patterns and mechanisms of emotional regulation.

#### **4. Knowledge of the Research Problem**

The doctoral candidate demonstrates an excellent command of the research problem under investigation, as evidenced both by the comprehensive theoretical analysis and by his ability to systematize and interpret a wide range of scientific concepts related to aggression and attachment during adolescence. The theoretical framework of the dissertation is grounded in an extensive and diverse body of scholarly literature, encompassing both classical and contemporary studies in developmental psychology, social psychology, attachment theory, and the psychology of aggression and aggressive behavior.

The author exhibits a thorough understanding of the principal theoretical approaches to aggression, tracing the evolution of the concept from the psychoanalytic propositions of **Sigmund Freud**, through behaviorist and social-cognitive models, to contemporary integrative theories. Various interpretations of aggression are critically examined, including aggression as an instinct, a psychological state, a behavioral response, and a cognitive-affective process. Particularly noteworthy is the author's effort to provide a clear conceptual distinction between the notions of *aggression*, *aggressiveness*, *anger*, *hostility*, and *violence*, reflecting a high level of theoretical sophistication and analytical rigor.

A significant strength of the dissertation is the competent and comprehensive presentation of attachment theory and its development across different psychological traditions. The candidate discusses the classical contributions of **John Bowlby** and **Mary Ainsworth**, as well as the work of scholars such as **Donald Winnicott**, **Melanie Klein**, **Mario Mikulincer**, and **Phillip Shaver**, skillfully linking these theoretical perspectives to issues of emotional regulation and social adaptation during adolescence.

Equally commendable is the author's ability to integrate diverse scientific paradigms into a coherent conceptual framework. Aggression is not examined as an isolated phenomenon but rather within the broader context of interpersonal relationships, emotional regulation mechanisms, and internal working models of attachment. This approach demonstrates a profound understanding of the complexity and multidimensional nature of the phenomenon under study.

Nikolay Dimchev also demonstrates impressive familiarity with current empirical research in both international and Bulgarian contexts. The scientific positions of leading scholars are accurately presented and appropriately interpreted, while the literature review goes beyond mere description by offering analytical syntheses and a critical examination of the concepts discussed. This attests to well-developed skills for independent scholarly inquiry and to the ability to identify significant relationships, trends, and inconsistencies within the existing body of research.

Overall, the dissertation demonstrates an excellent theoretical understanding of the research problem, consistency and coherence in analysis, and a well-developed capacity for the scholarly substantiation of the author's research position.

## **5. Research Methodology**

The research methodology is clearly designed, logically structured, and fully aligned with the aims, objectives, and hypotheses of the dissertation. The author has developed an appropriate research design that enables a reliable empirical investigation of the relationship between aggression and attachment during adolescence.

Particular merit should be attributed to the logical organization of the empirical study presented in the second chapter of the dissertation. The doctoral candidate clearly defines the conceptual framework, research aim, objectives, and hypotheses, thereby ensuring methodological consistency between the theoretical and empirical components of the study.

The research sample, comprising **216 adolescents**, is described in detail and organized into an experimental and a control group, creating conditions for comparative analysis and enhancing the credibility of the findings. The principal demographic characteristics of the participants are presented, with due consideration given to the significance of **gender** as a variable in the analysis of aggression and attachment.

The selected research instruments are appropriate to the subject of investigation and conform to contemporary standards of psychological assessment. The author employs well-established and widely used instruments, including:

- **The Buss–Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ)**, which enables the assessment of the various dimensions of aggression, namely physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility;

- **The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA)** developed by **Armsden and Greenberg**, through which the dimensions of trust, communication, and alienation in relationships with mothers, fathers, and peers are examined.

It should be emphasized that the instruments employed are scientifically validated and suitable for research involving adolescent populations, thereby ensuring the reliability and validity of the obtained results. The doctoral candidate accurately presents both the substantive characteristics of the instruments and their diagnostic capabilities.

The research procedure is described in sufficient detail, with appropriate attention given to the ethical considerations involved in working with underage participants. This reflects a professional and responsible approach to the organization and implementation of the empirical investigation.

A further strength of the study is the application of a broad range of mathematical and statistical techniques for data analysis. The methodology includes descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, verification of statistical assumptions, comparative analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. The selection of these methods is fully consistent with the nature of the variables under investigation and enables an in-depth examination of the relationships between attachment and aggression.

Overall, the research methodology is characterized by sound structure, scientific rigor, and appropriateness in relation to the stated research objectives. It provides a reliable foundation for obtaining valid empirical findings and for formulating well-substantiated scientific conclusions.

## **6. Characteristics and Evaluation of the Dissertation**

The dissertation is well structured and fully complies with the requirements for doctoral research. It consists of an introduction, three main chapters, a conclusion, a statement of scientific contributions, and a bibliography. The theoretical section provides a systematic and analytical review of the principal psychological concepts related to aggression and attachment. Both classical and contemporary scientific approaches are examined. The empirical section is logically connected to the theoretical framework and demonstrates the candidate's competence in designing and conducting scientific research.

A major strength of the dissertation is its integrative approach to the research problem, particularly evident in the first chapter. The author successfully combines attachment theory

with cognitive-affective models of aggression and examines their interrelationship within the context of adolescent development. Of particular value is the effort to conceptualize aggression as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility, while also exploring the influence of different attachment figures, namely mothers, fathers, and peers.

The doctoral candidate demonstrates a very good command of the relevant scholarly literature and an ability to critically analyze and synthesize diverse theoretical perspectives. The literature review is comprehensive, up-to-date, and analytically structured. A substantial number of Bulgarian and international sources have been consulted, reflecting strong theoretical preparation and familiarity with current developments in the field.

The research methodology, described in the second chapter, is appropriately selected and fully consistent with the stated aims and objectives. The diagnostic instruments employed are scientifically validated and allow for a reliable investigation of the relationships between aggression and attachment. The application of a variety of statistical techniques further enhances the reliability of the findings and strengthens the evidential basis of the conclusions drawn.

The results presented and interpreted in the third chapter are accurate and consistent with the proposed hypotheses. The conclusions and generalizations are logically derived from the empirical evidence and demonstrate the candidate's capacity for independent scientific reasoning. The practical orientation of the dissertation also deserves positive recognition, as the recommendations formulated may be applied in the work of school psychologists, educational counsellors, and professionals engaged in mental health and social support services.

Alongside its undeniable merits, several recommendations may be offered. In certain sections, the theoretical discussion is somewhat overly detailed, resulting in a degree of descriptiveness. It would also be beneficial for future studies to expand the sample size and to include additional socio-psychological variables that may influence aggressive behavior during adolescence.

Summary Evaluation: The aim of the dissertation is clearly formulated, scientifically significant, and directed toward identifying the relationships between the quality of attachment and manifestations of aggressive behavior among adolescents. The research objectives consistently operationalize the logic of the investigation—from the theoretical analysis of the core concepts, through the empirical examination of various forms of aggression and

attachment, to the development of predictive models and practical recommendations for prevention and intervention.

It may therefore be concluded that the dissertation addresses a topical, scientifically important, and practically relevant problem. The stated aims and objectives are appropriate, precisely defined, and provide a solid methodological framework for the implementation of the research. The study demonstrates excellent theoretical preparation, relevance of scientific inquiry, and a clear commitment to the practical applicability of the findings obtained.

## **7. Contributions and Significance of the Dissertation for Science and Practice**

The dissertation makes a number of noteworthy theoretical, empirical, and practical contributions that enhance both the scientific understanding of the relationship between attachment and aggression and the possibilities for their application in educational and psychological practice.

- Through the application of an integrated research approach, the author systematically examines and synthesizes knowledge concerning attachment and aggression from a structural and dynamic perspective.
- The dissertation presents contemporary scientific concepts related to aggressive behavior, emotional regulation, and attachment patterns, thereby constructing a comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding these phenomena within the context of adolescent development.
- Aggression is conceptualized and empirically investigated as a multidimensional construct encompassing physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility, rather than being viewed solely as a behavioral response.
- The study provides a well-substantiated verification of the influence exerted by different attachment figures—mother, father, and peers—on the various dimensions of aggressiveness. This approach extends the traditional research focus and contributes to a more precise understanding of the mechanisms underlying aggressive behavior in adolescence.
- The large-scale empirical investigation offers current and valuable data regarding the characteristics of aggression and attachment in the contemporary Bulgarian context. The identified relationships between different dimensions of attachment and forms of

aggression enrich the existing empirical knowledge base within developmental psychology.

- The research model is comprehensively described. The object, subject, aim, and objectives of the study are clearly and precisely formulated. An appropriately structured author-designed methodological framework has been employed for the investigation of the measured variables.
- The proposed hypotheses have been tested through the use of suitable psychometric instruments and rigorous statistical procedures. The qualitative and comparative analysis of the findings has been conducted accurately and methodically.
- The conclusions drawn are directly relevant to the empirical evidence obtained, while the overall synthesis demonstrates realistic opportunities for practical implementation.
- The practical value of the dissertation is particularly evident. The results and conclusions may be effectively utilized in the development of prevention and intervention programmes aimed at reducing aggressive behavior within school settings.
- The study offers practical guidelines for working with adolescents through the improvement of family communication and the strengthening of secure attachment relationships. Of particular contributory significance is the author's emphasis on the need to move beyond punitive approaches to aggressive behavior and toward interventions based on understanding adolescents' emotional needs and deficits in interpersonal relationships. This perspective enhances not only the scientific value of the dissertation but also its broader social relevance.
- The findings and interpretations generated by the study provide valuable guidance for students, school psychologists, educational counsellors, specialized centres, and non-governmental organizations engaged in adolescent development, mental health promotion, and social support services.

Overall, the dissertation offers meaningful theoretical insights, valuable empirical evidence, and practically applicable recommendations. Its contributions enrich contemporary knowledge concerning the relationship between attachment and aggression in adolescence and provide a solid foundation for future research and professional practice in psychology, education, and mental health services.

## **8. Evaluation of the Publications Related to the Dissertation**

The submitted list of **three publications** related to the dissertation topic meets the requirements for the award of the Educational and Scientific Degree “**Doctor**” (**PhD**). Their publication in reputable scholarly journals constitutes evidence of the candidate’s professionalism and active participation in academic discourse. The publications are characterized by a high level of scholarly rigor, analytical depth, and scientific quality, and they adequately reflect the principal ideas, findings, and contributions of the dissertation research.

### **9. Personal Contribution of the Doctoral Candidate**

The submitted dissertation clearly demonstrates the doctoral candidate’s substantial personal contribution throughout all stages of the research process—from the selection and conceptualization of the topic, through the theoretical analysis and organization of the empirical study, to the processing, analysis, and interpretation of the results obtained.

The author’s individual contribution is evident in the independent formulation of the research problem, object and subject of investigation, research aim, objectives, and hypotheses. The candidate demonstrates the ability to critically evaluate scientific literature, systematize diverse theoretical approaches, and develop an original conceptual framework for examining the relationship between aggression and attachment during adolescence.

The author independently selected and justified the methodological instruments employed, organized the empirical investigation, and conducted the collection of empirical data. His personal involvement is also clearly reflected in the statistical processing, analysis, and interpretation of the findings, as well as in the formulation of the conclusions and practical recommendations.

It should be emphasized that the dissertation possesses all the characteristics of an independent scientific study, in which the doctoral candidate demonstrates analytical thinking, competence in scientific interpretation, and the ability to synthesize and generalize research findings. The style of presentation, the logic of the analysis, and the consistency of the research approach further confirm the author’s personal contribution to the development of the dissertation.

On this basis, it may be concluded that the dissertation is the result of the doctoral candidate’s independent scholarly work, carried out under the competent academic supervision of **Prof. Kirilka Simeonova Tagareva, PhD**.

### **10. Abstract**

The dissertation abstract provides an accurate and concise presentation of the content of the dissertation. It has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Regulations for the Award of Academic Degrees at **Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv** and adequately reflects the principal results and achievements of the dissertation research.

### **11. Critical Remarks and Recommendations**

The analysis of the empirical data could be further expanded by examining the influence of additional socio-psychological factors on aggressive behavior, such as family structure, socio-economic status, the digital environment, and the impact of social media, all of which play an increasingly significant role in adolescent development in contemporary society. Although some of these aspects are addressed indirectly, their more comprehensive inclusion would further enrich the interpretation of the findings.

Future studies could also benefit from the application of a longitudinal research design, allowing the dynamics of attachment and aggression to be monitored over time. Such an approach would enhance opportunities for exploring causal relationships between the variables under investigation and would contribute to a deeper understanding of developmental processes during adolescence.

With a view to disseminating the valuable findings of the dissertation to a broader academic and professional audience, I would recommend its publication in the form of a scholarly monograph.

### **12. Personal Impressions**

The dissertation demonstrates the doctoral candidate's excellent theoretical and practical preparation in relation to the research issues addressed, as well as his ability to process, interpret, analyze, and synthesize the results of psychological research. The study is balanced, coherent, and well structured.

The conclusions and findings presented concerning the determinants and underlying mechanisms of aggressive behavior and attachment relationships are both well-founded and insightful. In my opinion, the author possesses the necessary skills, competencies, and academic potential to continue his scientific development and to make further contributions to the field of psychology.

### **13. Recommendations for the Future Utilization of the Dissertation Contributions and Findings**

It may be recommended that the findings of the present research be further developed into specific practical models and intervention programmes designed to support the work of school psychologists, educational counsellors, and mental health professionals. Such initiatives could contribute to the prevention and reduction of aggressive behavior among adolescents through the promotion of secure attachment relationships, effective emotional regulation, and constructive interpersonal communication.

## CONCLUSION

The dissertation contains scientific, scientifically applied, and practical results that constitute an original contribution to the field and satisfy all requirements stipulated by the **Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria**, the **Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria**, and the relevant regulations of **Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv**.

The dissertation demonstrates that the doctoral candidate, **Nikolay Dimchev**, possesses profound theoretical knowledge and professional competence in the field of **3.2. Psychology**, while also exhibiting the qualities and abilities required for the independent conduct of scientific research.

In view of the foregoing considerations, I confidently give my positive evaluation of the theoretical and applied research presented in the dissertation, its abstract, the achieved results, and the scientific contributions outlined therein. I therefore respectfully recommend that the esteemed Scientific Jury award **Nikolay Dimchev** the Educational and Scientific Degree “**Doctor**” (PhD) in the field of higher education **3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences**, professional field **3.2. Psychology**, doctoral programme “**Educational and Developmental Psychology**.”

Date: 1.06. 2026

Reviewer: .....

**Prof. Velislava Atanasova Chavdarova, PhD**