

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Stoil Mavrodiev, DSc., South-West University “Neofit Rilski”

on the dissertation thesis submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in: Area of higher education: 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professional field: 3.2. Psychology, Doctoral programme: “Pedagogical and Developmental Psychology”

Author: Nikolay Iliev Dimchev

Title: “The Relationship between Aggression and Attachment in Adolescence”

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Kirilka Simeonova Tagareva

1. General presentation of the procedure and the doctoral candidate

The set of materials submitted by the doctoral candidate in hard copy and electronic format fully complies with the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its Implementation, and the specific rules of the Faculty of Pedagogy at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”. The set includes: the dissertation thesis, the abstract, the list and copies of scientific publications, a CV, a declaration of originality, and all other mandatory documents.

2. Relevance of the topic

The topic “The Relationship between Aggression and Attachment in Adolescence” is highly relevant both theoretically and in terms of scientific application. In the context of intensive social transformations, the digitalisation of interpersonal relations, and the growing prevalence of cyber-aggression, aggressive behaviour among adolescents has become a serious social and pedagogical issue. John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth’s attachment theory provides one of the most powerful explanatory frameworks linking the quality of early emotional bonds with later behavioural and emotional difficulties. The dissertation successfully integrates classical and contemporary models (including the General Aggression Model – GAM) and applies them to the contemporary Bulgarian context, thereby filling an important theoretical and empirical gap. The study has high social significance as it offers concrete mechanisms for prevention and intervention in school and family settings.

3. Knowledge of the problem

The doctoral candidate demonstrates thorough and creative knowledge of the problem. The literature review encompasses 193 sources, including the fundamental works of Bowlby (1969), Ainsworth et al. (1978), Buss & Perry (1992), Mikulincer & Shaver (2016), Bandura, Dodge, as well as Bulgarian authors such as R. Stamatov, K. Tagareva, V. Matanova, and others. The author not only systematises but also critically analyses various theoretical approaches, deriving an integrative framework that connects the “internal working models” of attachment with the multidimensional construct of aggression (physical, verbal, anger, and hostility). Particularly valuable is the differentiation of the roles of the individual attachment figures (mother, father, and peers) in adolescence. N. Dimchev’s expertise is further

strengthened by his practical experience as a consulting psychologist working with children and adolescents.

4. Research methodology

The chosen comparative correlational-regression design is fully adequate to the aim and objectives of the study. The sample consists of 216 adolescents (aged 13–19), divided into an experimental group (n=119 with registered deviant behaviours) and a control group (n=97 with normative behaviour). Two highly validated and adapted instruments were used:

- The Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) – with four subscales;
- The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA – Armsden & Greenberg) – measuring three dimensions (trust, communication, alienation) with respect to three figures.

The psychometric properties have been verified for the Bulgarian sample and are satisfactory. Appropriate statistical methods were applied: descriptive analysis, assumption checks, t-tests, two-way ANOVA, correlational analysis, and multiple regression analysis. Ethical standards (informed consent, anonymity, and voluntariness) were strictly observed.

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

The dissertation thesis (160 pages, 23 tables, 8 figures, 193 references) is structured in accordance with established academic standards and represents a comprehensive, in-depth, and original study.

Chapter I – Theoretical Analysis of the Phenomena of Aggression and Attachment in Adolescence – is exceptionally solid and original. Section 1.1 traces the evolution of the definition of aggression – from a purely behavioural approach (outcome as criterion) through the introduction of intentionality to normative evaluation and the position of the recipient. Section 1.2 provides a comprehensive overview of theoretical approaches: psychoanalytic (Freud, Anna Freud), psychosomatic, evolutionary, the frustration-aggression hypothesis, cognitive models (Dodge), social-cognitive (Bandura), social learning theory, and concludes with the General Aggression Model (GAM) as an integrative framework. Section 1.3 differentiates the types and forms of aggression in adolescents (motivational orientation, modality, teleological orientation). Section 1.4 analyses the age-specific features of aggression in adolescence.

In Section 2, the author examines attachment theory from its classical psychoanalytic roots (Spitz, Mahler, Winnicott, Klein) through socio-cognitive perspectives (Vygotsky, Lisina) to contemporary models. The four attachment styles, their transformation in adolescence, and their connection with emotional regulation (Section 2.4) are analysed in detail. Chapter I concludes with an integrative theoretical framework (Section 3), in which insecure attachment is positioned as a risk factor for behavioural problems and secure attachment as a protective buffer. The theoretical analysis is not merely compilatory but a creative synthesis that serves as a reliable foundation for the empirical part.

Chapter II – Organisation and Methodology of the Empirical Study – is precise and methodologically sound. The aim, objectives, and two hypotheses are clearly formulated. The characteristics of the two groups, the psychometric properties of the BPAQ and IPPA (including

adaptation and reliability for the Bulgarian sample), the research procedure (March 2025 – January 2026), and the ethical aspects are described in detail. Section 6 provides a comprehensive overview of the statistical methods (descriptive, reliability analysis, inferential, correlational, and regression analysis). Chapter II demonstrates high methodological competence and full reproducibility of the study.

Chapter III – Results and Analysis of the Empirical Study – showcases the doctoral candidate’s analytical and interpretative abilities. Section 1 presents detailed descriptive profiles of aggressive behaviour and the quality of attachment to mother, father, and peers. Sections 2.1 reveal gender differences, while 2.2 and 2.3 provide comparative analysis between the experimental and control groups. Section 3 (correlational analysis) establishes statistically significant negative correlations between secure attachment (trust and communication) and the components of aggression, as well as positive correlations with alienation.

Section 4 (regression analysis) is particularly impressive: the multiple regression model shows that the dimensions of attachment explain a substantial portion of the variance in aggression ($R^2 \approx 0.52$). A key finding is that trust in the father emerges as a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -0.244$, $p = .014$), while alienation from peers acts as a positive risk factor. Both hypotheses are fully confirmed. The discussion (Section 6) is thorough; the results are compared with international and Bulgarian data, limitations are acknowledged (Section 7), and concrete scientific contributions and practical recommendations are formulated (Section 9) – prevention programmes, family counselling with emphasis on the paternal figure, and training of specialists.

6. Contributions

The contributions can be summarised as follows:

1. **Theoretical verification and differentiation of the model** – a functional specificity has been established in the regulatory role of parental figures: maternal attachment primarily modulates emotional regulation and anger, while paternal attachment regulates externalised aggression and deviant behaviour.
2. **Revelation of the compensatory mechanism of peers** – it has been demonstrated that high attachment to the peer group among adolescents with deviant behaviour functions simultaneously as an emotional buffer and a potential risk factor for the legitimisation of aggressive models.
3. **Empirical confirmation of the protective and risk functions of attachment** – through correlational and regression analyses ($R^2 = .522$), a high predictive value has been established for the dimensions of “trust”, “communication”, and “alienation” with respect to the various components of aggression (BPAQ).
4. **Psychometric validation of the research instruments** – high reliability of the BPAQ ($\alpha = 0.840$) and IPPA ($\alpha = 0.83$ – 0.89) has been confirmed for Bulgarian adolescents with deviant behaviour.

The study provides a solid empirical foundation and practical guidelines for the prevention and correction of aggressive behaviour in the school environment.

7. Evaluation of the publications and the doctoral candidate's personal contribution

The candidate has presented 3 scientific publications (articles and conference papers) that reflect the main results of the dissertation. Nikolay Dimchev's personal contribution is indisputable. No evidence of plagiarism has been found.

8. Abstract

The abstract (32 pages) has been prepared in full compliance with the regulatory requirements. It clearly and comprehensively reflects the structure, main results, contributions, and practical recommendations of the dissertation thesis.

9. Recommendations for the future application of the dissertation's contributions and results

The results can be widely applied in:

- school programmes for the prevention of aggression and bullying;
- family and individual counselling with emphasis on strengthening attachment to the father;
- training of psychologists, educators, and social workers;
- the development of national policies for adolescent mental health.

I recommend expanding the study with a longitudinal design or the inclusion of additional mediators (self-esteem, empathy, etc.).

Conclusion

The dissertation thesis contains original scientific and applied contributions that 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 Rules of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski". Nikolay Iliev Dimchev possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge, high methodological competence, and professional skills for conducting independent scientific research.

I confidently give my positive evaluation and propose to the honourable scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Nikolay Iliev Dimchev in the field of higher education 3 "Social, Economic and Legal Sciences", professional field 3.2 "Psychology", doctoral programme "Pedagogical and Developmental Psychology".

29.05.2026

Prepared by:

Assoc. Prof. Stoil Mavrodiev, DSc