

## STATEMENT OF OPINION

By Prof. Teodora Dimitrova, MD, PhD

Faculty of Public Health, Medical University of Varna

Member of the Scientific Jury, appointed by Order № 109-344/ 09.10.2019

Of the Rector of Medical University of Varna

Regarding: **Dissertation “The influence of Bulgarian folk dances on health of the students from Medical University of Varna”**

Presented to a public defense for a scientific jury awarding a doctorate in higher education. "7. Health and Sport ", Professional Degree" 7.4. Public Health ", specializing in Public Health Management.

Author: Julieta Georgieva Videnova,  
Full-time PhD student at the Department of “Social Medicine and Healthcare Organization”, Specialty Public health management.

The documents, submitted by the senior teacher Julieta Georgieva Videnova, are in accordance with the requirements of the Law for Development of the Academic Staff in Republic of Bulgaria, the Rules for its implementation and the Rules for development of the academic staff at the Medical University of Varna.

### ***Short biography profile***

Senior teacher Videnova graduated from the National Sports Academy - Master's Degree, specialties in “Athletics Coach” and “Physical Education Teacher” in 1994. She later obtained a Master's Degree in Public Health from the Medical University of Varna. She won a competition and started working as a Teacher in Physical Education and Sports at the Department of Foreign Language Training, Communication and Sports, Educational Sector for Physical Education and Sports at the Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" - Varna in 2003. In 2007 she headed the Sport sector at the Medical University of Varna. Since 2012 she is also a teaching Bulgarian folk dances at the Medical University - Varna. Since 2018, she has been enrolled in the doctoral program at the Department of Social Medicine and Healthcare Organization, a scientific specialty in Public Health Management with the herewith-presented subject.

She has participated in numerous national and international scientific forums. Julieta Videnova is an author of 18 articles in Bulgarian periodicals (6 of which is the first author) and 4 articles in international journals, as well from participations in international forums (in 2 of which is the first and presenting author).

She uses Russian and English.

### ***Relevance of the topic***

Health promotion guarantees the sustainable development of the nation by identifying, correcting and controlling the risk factors causing noncommunicable chronic diseases. One of the

recognized lifestyle risk factors for cardiovascular, endocrine, psychiatric and oncological diseases is the lack of sufficient physical activity. To manage this risk, a detailed knowledge of the various health promotion opportunities across all age and occupational groups is required. The Bulgarian Folk Dances (BgFD) are a specific national heritage that optimally combines physical activity, social interaction and emotional expression. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in BgFD activities, which is a reason to evaluate their effectiveness in terms of sanogenic health effects and to rank these activities in an equal place alongside with other forms of sports activities at universities. Among the many issues, requiring further study, are the specific and vulnerable groups among students in medical majors, which has to be targeted with preventative interventions to reduce the risk of stress at the occupational environment.

Research done in the dissertation of Julieta Videnova: self-assessment of the level of stress, subjective health (quality of life) and anthropometric measurements are relevant, promising and practically applicable, proving the role of BgFD as a successful educational and preventive activity at the Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" Varna.

### ***Opinion on the structure and content of the dissertation.***

The work presented for the opinion is structured according to the standards of the dissertation for the awarding of the PhD degree. The dissertation is written on 139 pages. It is well balanced and includes: a literature review (41 pages), purpose and objectives, material and methods, results and discussion (30 pages), conclusions and contributions. The work is illustrated using 10 tables, 6 figures and 9 applications. The bibliography includes 117 sources - 43 in Cyrillic and 74 in Latin. Of the cited publications, 23.9% are from the last 10 years and 14.5% - from the last 5 years.

***The literature review*** (29.5% of the dissertation) presents comprehensively and systematically the issue of attitudes towards BgFD and the impact of BgFD on health and on the subjective assessment of health. The systematic concepts for the historical development and national significance of BgFD for the national identity are analyzed.

Understanding of the health effects of BgFD is systematized in historical, geographical, ethnographic and health-promotion contexts. The growing interest of researchers in the benefits of dancing to the health and well-being of people of all ages.

***The aim*** of the dissertation is well defined and clear. The PhD candidate sets out 6 specific and realistic objectives, which are well formulated and meet the set aim.

### ***Materials and methods***

A mix-method approach has been applied. In the qualitative part are included 184 students divided into gender and age-matched as case-control groups and in the qualitative phase a consensus-building technique with experts was applied during the period September 2018 - June 2019.

Height, weight, dynamic flexibility, upper and lower limb speed and upper limb muscle strength were studied. They were evaluated according to clearly defined criteria, broken down by gender. Physiological changes were examined by subjective assessment analysis (2 types of questionnaires and a standardized tool for determining the emotional status and stress level of the participants were created for the purpose of the study). The selection of participants to be included in the study was made using clear inclusion and exclusion criteria. The second phase of the study involves a qualitative Delphi study for the implementation of the objective 5 in order to reach a consensus among a group of experts on the role of BgFD as a physical activity and their place in the physical education curriculum.

### ***Results and discussion.***

Videnova divides the study results into several main research directions:

1. Quantitative analysis:
  - Factors affecting students' attitudes and motivation to attend BgFD classes
  - Assessment of health levels and quality of life among the students.
  - Stress levels assessment;
  - Describing the Anthropometric profile of the students.
2. Qualitative analysis- Delphi study.

Through the quantitative results Videnova proves that for students the BgFD activities are a way of relaxation and fun, they practice them as a hobby and as a kind of physical activity that helps them to improve their health.

As a significant problem, PhD-candidate Videnova points to the fact that just under 20% of the study participants reported no stress, which is a reason to use as a tool the claim that, according to 70% of students, they "fully agree" or "agree" with the opinion "BgFD help me to manage the stress and the heavy school workload."

Based on the results of Videnova found that the subjective assessment of the health of both groups of students showed an increase in the levels of physical, mental and social health.

The results of the dissertation on the comparative analysis of the anthropometric characteristics of the playing and non-playing BgFD show a significant difference only with respect to the speed of the lower and upper limb in favour of the BgFD-students.

The emphasis of the qualitative analysis is on the consensus opinion of the qualitative study, which brings together all the participants, including the following three statements, which were asked in the questionnaire as three closed questions:

- ✓ Practicing BgFD improves health and quality of life.
- ✓ BgFD have a "reserved" place and a special role in the university curriculum in Bulgaria as an equivalent alternative to sports activities in the physical education classes.
- ✓ Teaching of BgFD at MU-Varna is a successful academic model.

Innovative audio-visual educational tool was prepared "Guide for studying BgFD" in order to enhance healthy physical activity among the students. It is both in Bulgarian and English and comprises some of the most popular BgFD, and the following messages: BgFD as physical activity are accessible for practice and could be an integral part of our daily lives and being physically active at a younger age and continuing into later years contributes to an active aging, better quality of life and health.

The results have been thoroughly *discussed*, which is worthy of appreciation. The *conclusions* drawn are correctly formulated. They meet the goals and objectives set, and follow logically the results and the statistical analysis.

I support *the recommendations* presented with a practical focus on the multiplication of the proposed model of studying BgFD for students from all over Bulgaria.

I approve *the contributions* that are a total of 6 - 3 with original character and 3 with practically applied character. I believe that the main merits of the dissertation are the following:

for the first time are gathered together the concepts of "health promotion", "quality of life", "health determinants" and "community" in order to investigate the influence of the BgFD on health. For the first time in Bulgaria, an audiovisual study guide related with studying BgFD at an university level is being created, which is an innovative way of teaching healthy physical activity through BgFD.

The dissertation is written in a good language, precise in terms of terminology. Technically, the dissertation is designed as required, and the conclusions and recommendations are original and specific.

The *short version of the dissertation* summarizes the content of the dissertation. It has been prepared in a volume of 48 standard pages and accurately presents the structure and content, conclusions, contributions and publications of the dissertation.

In connection with the dissertation, the PhD candidate presented 3 real publications and 2 participations. The articles have been published in Varna Medical Forum and collections of reports from international scientific forums indexed in web of science. I believe that these publications and contributions really represent the doctoral student's achievements and help promote them to the scientific community.

In **conclusion**, the dissertation meets the requirements of the the Law for Development of the Academic Staff in Republic of Bulgaria. The work is presented in a complete and well-shaped form. In the dissertation Julieta Georgieva Videnova presents her own experience of exploring a socially significant problem. The thorough and consistent analysis provides opportunities to develop innovative approaches to improve and encourage students' physical activity through unique dance-specific psychology. Possibilities for optimization of sports programs are outlined, some of the benefits of the BgFD are outlined and a model for multiplication of the successful practice at Medical University of Varna is elaborated at the national level.

I find the topic developed by the PhD candidate to be extremely up-to-date and timely. The content of the dissertation is lawfully and thoroughly developed, well illustrated and presented with good professional language.

All this gives me a reason to **positively** evaluate the dissertation work "The Influence of Bulgarian folk dances on the health of the students from the Medical University - Varna" and to give my positive vote for the award of the senior lecturer Julieta Georgieva Videnova to hold a PhD degree.

Varna  
04.11.2019

Statement by:



.....  
(Prof. Teodora Dimitrova)