

## **STATEMENT**

by Prof. Mayiana Mitevska, D.Sc  
Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski"

on the dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"  
in: Field of higher education 3. Social, economic, and legal sciences  
Professional field 3.2. Psychology  
Doctoral program "Medical Psychology"

**Author:** Petya Petkova

**Title:** Psychological Aspects of Gambling Behavior

**Scientific supervisor:** Prof. Dr. Ivan Alexandrov

### **1. General Presentation of the Procedure and the Doctoral Candidate**

By Order of the Rector of the Medical University - Varna, I was appointed as a member of the academic jury to ensure the procedure for defending the dissertation titled "Psychological Aspects of Gambling Behavior" for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic, and legal sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology, doctoral program "Medical Psychology." The author of the dissertation is Petya Petkova.

The materials presented by Petya Petkova on paper are in accordance with the regulations for the development of the academic staff of the Medical University - Varna and include the following documents:

- Application to the Rector for the initiation of the dissertation defense procedure;
- European-format CV;
- Protocol from the Departmental Council regarding the reporting of the readiness for opening the procedure and preliminary discussion of the dissertation;
- Dissertation;
- Abstract;
- List of scientific publications on the dissertation topic;
- Copies of scientific publications;
- Declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents; The doctoral candidate has submitted 5 publications.

### **2. Relevance of the Topic**

The relevance of the topic related to the psychological aspects of gambling behavior is highlighted through several important aspects. On the one hand, gambling is viewed as a public health issue, with factors and its progressive development continuing to be the subject of research. In the last decade, there has been a significant rise in gambling activities in Bulgaria, which underscores the need for research in this area.

The topic is particularly relevant today due to the growing interest in the etiology and socio-behavioral predispositions that lead to gambling problems. The research is aimed at identifying behavioral patterns before they develop into pathological forms, with the goal of early prevention and intervention.

The relevance of the topic in Petya Petkova's dissertation can be justified by several important aspects related to contemporary challenges in medical psychology:

- **Scientific and practical contribution:** Research in medical psychology is of exceptional importance due to the growing need for a better understanding and management of psychosocial factors affecting health. This work is timely because it may offer new solutions for improving patients' mental health.
- **Interdisciplinary approach:** The dissertation topic combines psychology and medicine, which is particularly important in the context of modern research and healthcare practices. Such studies can aid in better integrating psychotherapeutic methods into medical care.
- **Public and health challenges:** In the context of global health crises like pandemics, mental health issues are particularly important. Increased stress, anxiety, and mental disorders require new approaches in medical psychology to address these issues.

These aspects make Petkova's dissertation topic relevant to both the academic community and broader medical practice.

### 3. Knowledge of the Problem

Doctoral candidate Petya Petkova demonstrates a deep understanding of the problem in her dissertation, which addresses topics in medical psychology. The dissertation includes carefully selected and verified sources that contribute to the scientific value of the research, while emphasizing the importance of psychosocial factors in medical care. The similarity index is 10%, indicating that the doctoral candidate has developed original work based on a broad literature base. This highlights Petkova's ability to navigate the complexities of research, which is important for understanding key problems in medical psychology and their application in practice.

Petkova's knowledge of the problem is evident through a detailed theoretical and empirical analysis. Gambling is viewed as a public health issue, with attention given to its social, psychological, and behavioral aspects. It is noted that the etiology of gambling behavior is still not fully understood, despite significant research interest in the factors leading to the development of gambling disorders.

One key point in the analysis is the distinction between clinical and subclinical forms of gambling behavior. The author emphasizes the need for early identification of factors that precede the development of pathological gambling behavior. In this context, an original screening methodology is introduced, aimed at identifying predictors of gambling behavior such as risk-taking, impulsivity, and sensation-seeking before they lead to addiction.

### 4. Research Methodology

The research methodology in Petya Petkova's dissertation is based on:

1. **Combined approach:** Petkova uses both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the influence of psychosocial factors on health, using empirical data collected from surveys and interviews.



2. **Empirical analysis:** The methodology includes data collection through various instruments such as questionnaires and interviews with target groups related to mental health. These data are then statistically processed to achieve a quantitative measurement of psychosocial factors.
3. **Data interpretation:** After collecting and analyzing the data, Petkova offers an interpretation that connects theoretical models to real-world conditions in medical practice. This provides more practical applications of the research results.

The research methodology in the dissertation is thoroughly presented and is based on modern approaches for studying gambling behavior. The primary goal of the study is to create a screening methodology for assessing gambling behavior (M80B), aimed at identifying individuals at risk of escalating their gambling behavior to problematic and pathological levels.

Key elements of the methodology:

1. **Research goal:** The primary goal is to create a screening methodology that is economical (few questions) and highly sensitive, aimed at identifying individuals with the potential to develop gambling behavior.
2. **Research objectives:**
  - Development of an indicative model of gambling behavior based on psychological and social factors.
  - Identification of personal, biological, and psychosocial factors associated with the manifestation of gambling behavior.
  - Evaluation of the influence of factors and identification of risk factors for the transition from gambling to problematic and pathological behavior.
3. **Sample and profile of the respondents:** The study covers 242 respondents aged between 18 and 60 years. The average age is 31, with the majority being young people with student status. The study includes individuals both without gambling behavior and those exhibiting gambling behavior, including hospitalized individuals and participants in mutual aid groups.
4. **Research tools:** The following methods were used:
  - **Gambling behavior screening methodology (M80B)** – the main instrument, which measures personality predispositions such as motivation, sensation-seeking, risk-taking, impulsivity, attitudes, subjective norms, behavioral control, and attachment style.
  - **Zuckerman's Sensation Seeking Scale (SSS)** – used to measure the need for strong experiences.
  - **Schubert's Risk-Taking Scale (RSK)** – assesses personal readiness to take risks.
5. **Data analysis:**
  - Correlation analysis was used to assess the relationships between the various scales and personality characteristics.
  - Factor analysis was applied to determine the structure of the factors that form gambling behavior.
  - Sensitivity and specificity analysis (ROC curves) was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the screening test.

This methodology is well-structured and aligned with the requirements of scientific research, providing both theoretical and practical contributions to medical psychology.

## 5. Characterization and Evaluation of the Dissertation and Contributions

The dissertation clearly characterizes the research and its contributions to science and practice. The key points are:

### Characterization of the dissertation:

1. **Volume and structure:** The dissertation consists of 148 pages, including 45 tables and 31 figures, demonstrating the complexity of the analysis and the use of statistical and visual methods to present the results. The bibliography includes 272 titles, reflecting the broad review of the literature and the depth of the research.
2. **Main topic:** The research focuses on the psychological aspects of gambling behavior. Its main goal is to examine the predictors of gambling behavior associated with personal and social factors before it progresses to a pathological state.
3. **Methodology:** Modern screening and factor analysis methods were used, with the main contribution being the development of an original screening methodology for assessing gambling behavior. This methodology is based on a set of personality predispositions such as motivation, sensation-seeking, impulsivity, attitudes, and subjective norms.

### Evaluation and contributions:

1. **Scientific novelty:** One of the main scientific contributions is the creation of a screening methodology for the early identification of gambling behavior. This methodology enables the detection of individuals exhibiting risky behavior before they develop pathological dependencies.
2. **Practical significance:** The developed methodology can be used in clinical practice to assess risk and prevent the development of pathological gambling behavior. Additionally, the study offers valuable data on the age and demographic characteristics of individuals with gambling behavior in Bulgaria.
3. **Integrative approach:** The dissertation integrates biological, personality, and cognitive behavior theories, proposing a theoretical model that combines these approaches in the context of gambling behavior. This provides a new perspective on analyzing this type of behavior.
4. **Empirical data:** The research includes a large number of respondents and analyzes numerous factors, providing a solid basis for conclusions and recommendations. The results show a clear link between personality predispositions such as impulsivity, risk-taking.

## 6. Evaluation of the Publications and the Doctoral Candidate's Personal Contribution

The publications represent an important indicator of the doctoral candidate's academic activity. They demonstrate:

1. **Scientific output:** The list includes various scientific publications that reflect the candidate's activity in the relevant fields. This shows commitment to disseminating research results and participation in the academic community.
2. **Personal contribution:** The doctoral candidate played a leading role in the development of the research presented in the publications. The presence of



publications in reputable journals or participation in scientific conferences shows active involvement in advancing topics related to medical psychology.

3. **Practical applicability:** The publications reflect the empirical results of the dissertation, further emphasizing the importance of the candidate's personal contribution to contemporary scientific discourse.

Based on these aspects, we can conclude that the doctoral candidate demonstrates a high level of scientific productivity and personal contribution to research in the field of medical psychology.

## 7. Abstract

The presented abstract meets the requirements and reflects the main theses, conclusions, and scientific achievements of the dissertation.

## 8. Recommendations for Future Use of the Dissertation Contributions and Results

1. **Expansion of research:**
  - **Rearranging unrotated components from factor analysis:** Future studies can explore other latent variables not accounted for in the present study but may significantly influence gambling behavior (GB). This would allow for a more precise identification of the factors affecting the development of problematic gambling behavior.
  - **Increasing demographic criteria and sample size:** Including more diverse demographic groups (e.g., different social and age categories) may help uncover new correlations between demographic indicators and gambling behavior.
2. **Application of the author's methodology:**
  - **Use of the screening methodology in practice:** The developed methodology for assessing gambling behavior can be widely used in clinical settings for early identification of at-risk individuals. It is suitable for mass screening surveys as it allows for economical and quick identification of gambling predisposition.
  - **Adaptation of the methodology for different populations:** The methodology can be adapted for various cultural and social contexts, making it applicable internationally.
3. **Further clinical research:**
  - **More in-depth clinical studies:** It is recommended to conduct additional studies on clinical populations with pathological gambling behavior to determine whether the methodology is effective in cases of severe gambling addiction.
  - **Integration with other diagnostic methods:** Future research could explore the possibility of integrating the author's methodology with already established diagnostic methods to improve the accuracy of the assessment.
4. **Prevention and intervention, Improvement of training programs:**
  - **Use of results for prevention:** The results of the research can be used to develop prevention programs targeting gambling behavior in young people and at-risk groups. These programs can be based on the identified predispositions toward gambling, such as impulsivity, risk-taking, and sensation-seeking.

- **Early detection interventions:** Early intervention in individuals showing a tendency toward developing gambling behavior can reduce the risk of escalation into pathological dependency.

## Conclusion

The dissertation contains scientific, applied, and practical results, representing an original contribution to science and meeting all the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. The dissertation shows that Petya Petkova possesses deep theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty "Psychology," demonstrating the ability to conduct independent research.

For these reasons, I confidently give my positive evaluation of the research conducted, as presented in the reviewed dissertation, abstract, and contributions. I recommend the esteemed academic jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Petya Petkova in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic, and legal sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology, doctoral program "Medical Psychology."

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Prepared by:

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