

## **OPINION**

**by Assoc. Prof. Katerina Valentinova Akabalieva, MD, PhD**

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on the dissertation thesis of

**Dr. Danko Tonev Avramov,**

Department of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology, Medical University – Varna,

for the award of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor (PhD)”

in specialty 03.01.20 – Psychiatry

Title:

**“Dynamics of Diagnosis in Patients with a First Psychotic Episode Induced by the Use of Psychoactive Substances”**

I present the present opinion in my capacity as a member of the Scientific Jury, appointed by Order No. R-109-517 / 16.12.2025 of the Rector of the Medical University – Varna, on the basis of a decision under Protocol No. 51 / 15.12.2025 of the Faculty Council and a report with incoming No. 103-3024 / 16.12.2025 for the preparation of an opinion on Dr. Danko Tonev Avramov – a full-time doctoral candidate in the PhD program “Psychiatry”.

For the preparation of this opinion, I was provided with one copy each of the PhD thesis, the thesis summary, a curriculum vitae, a list of publications, and all other required documents. The scientific supervisor of the doctoral candidate is Assoc. Prof. Deyan Hrusafov, MD, PhD.

Dr. Danko Avramov obtained a Master’s degree in Medicine in 2019 and has been an Assistant Professor at the Department of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology at St. Marina University Hospital since 2020 to the present. Dr. Avramov is the author of two publications in specialized national journals addressing diagnostic issues in psychoses induced by psychoactive substances, which is consistent with the topic of the dissertation.

The topic of the dissertation is highly relevant, as the first psychotic episode represents a key feature for diagnosis, therapeutic approach, and prognosis of psychotic disorders.

Differentiating between primary and substance-induced psychosis is of essential importance for optimizing early diagnosis, treatment, and long-term outcomes in patients, as well as for a better understanding of prognostic markers.

The dissertation comprises 148 pages and is based on 201 literature sources in Cyrillic and Latin script. The presented work is structured into nine sections: I. Introduction; II. Literature Review; III. Aim and Objectives; IV. Material and Methodology; V. Results and Discussion; VI. Conclusions; VII. References; VIII. Appendices.

**The literature review** discusses in depth, over 31 pages, the dynamics of diagnosis in a first psychotic episode, successfully integrating contemporary literature data, established prognostic factors, and clinically significant indicators such as diagnostic instability, rehospitalization, and prognosis. The author appropriately systematizes the main predictors of diagnostic transition to the schizophrenic, affective, and schizoaffective spectrum, supporting them with up-to-date population-based studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses.

#### **Aim and Objectives:**

The aim is formulated clearly and precisely. The objectives are directly related to the stated aim and are expressed in a clear and accurate manner. The working hypotheses are formulated within a clear cause-and-effect framework and are directly linked to the main aim and the objectives of the dissertation, corresponding to the current data presented in the literature review.

The study sample includes 41 individuals diagnosed according to the criteria for a first psychotic episode following the use of psychoactive substances (PAS), while the control group consists of 40 individuals diagnosed with a first psychotic episode with no evidence of prior PAS use.

#### **Methods:**

Assessment and self-assessment scales were employed. The combination of standardized scales, clinical interviews, and supplementary information obtained from medical records and relatives enhances diagnostic reliability and the objectivity of the collected data. Laboratory tests allow verification of PAS use.

Several types of parametric, non-parametric, and correlational analyses were used for data processing. The combination of parametric and non-parametric tests demonstrates that the

author takes into account the different characteristics of the data (distribution, sample size, variable type) and selects appropriate methods, thereby increasing the reliability of the analysis.

The applied methods are adequate to the aim of the study and allow for the successful accomplishment of the stated objectives.

### **Results and Discussion:**

In patients with a first psychotic episode associated with psychoactive substance use, an earlier onset of psychosis, lower educational and social status, and predominantly long-term combined substance use are observed, which correlates with a higher frequency of relapses and hospitalizations. Diagnostic dynamics demonstrate a tendency toward chronification and transition to the schizophrenic spectrum, with paranoid schizophrenia identified in 34.1% of patients; the relationship between the initial and final diagnosis is statistically significant. Reduction of positive symptoms is a major predictor of functional recovery, whereas negative symptoms remain persistent and resistant to short-term treatment. Compared to the control group, patients with PAS use show slower recovery and lower global functioning, confirming the unfavorable impact of PAS on the course and outcome of the psychotic process.

In summary, the study is conducted with precision, and its results are presented conscientiously, in detail, and consistently, supported by 43 tables and 60 figures and graphs. The discussion of the findings in the context of existing studies allows for a thorough analysis of the main topics under consideration.

### **Conclusions and Contributions:**

The proposed hypotheses are “fully or partially confirmed,” indicating consistency between the initial expectations and the empirical results. The study makes a significant contribution both theoretically and practically, as it demonstrates statistically and clinically significant differences between psychoses with and without PAS use, provides empirical evidence for diagnostic transition to chronic forms, identifies high-risk groups, and emphasizes the need for early intervention.

## **CONCLUSION**

The presented dissertation thesis by Dr. Dinko Tonev Avramov entitled “**Dynamics of Diagnosis in Patients with a First Psychotic Episode Induced by the Use of Psychoactive**

**Substances”** is based on an in-depth literature review and an independent study conducted on a sufficient number of patients.

The work of Dr. Dinko Tonev Avramov has been carried out using an adequate number of methods appropriate to the stated aim. The obtained data have been processed in accordance with the defined objectives, and the results are presented conscientiously and in detail, with extensive illustration through tables and figures; demographic factors have been thoroughly examined. A discussion of the author’s own results is presented in the context of data from other authors on the topic, and conclusions and contributions are formulated that reflect the value of the research. The author’s results are largely confirmatory in relation to existing studies, demonstrating the ability to formulate appropriate hypotheses.

The presented dissertation thesis by Dr. Dinko Tonev Avramov fully meets all the requirements for the award of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor (PhD)”.

In summary, I recommend that the esteemed jury award Dr. Dinko Tonev Avramov the educational and scientific degree “Doctor (PhD)”.

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/Assoc. Prof. Katerina Akabalieva, MD, PhD/