

**MEDICAL UNIVERSITY VARNA
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STATEMENT

From Prof. Dr. Hristo Vasilev Kozhuharov, PhD

Member and chair of the scientific jury formed by order No. R-109-497/02.12.2025 of the Rector of Medical University - Varna

For obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the doctoral program "Child psychiatry" in the field of higher education, 7. "Health Care and Sport" and professional field 7.1. "Medicine"

Author: Dr. Gabriela Valentinova Gacheva

Department: "Psychiatry and Medical Psychology", Medical University - Varna, Faculty of Medicine

Type of doctoral program: full-time

Dissertation topic: "Follow-up of constant and variable characteristics in the acute phase and in remission in adolescent patients with anorexia nervosa "

Research supervisor: Prof. Dr Petar Milchev Petrov, PhD, DSc

1. Overview of the candidate's procedural preparation

The submitted dissertation and the accompanying materials comply with the procedure for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in accordance with the Law for Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at Medical University - Varna (27.05.2025) and its appendices. The candidate presents a complete dissertation with clearly formulated aims, research objectives, methodology, results, discussion, conclusions and final summary.

2. Short biographical information about the candidate

The submitted set of documents provides information on the educational and professional biography of Dr. Gabriela Valentinova Gacheva. She graduated from the Fifth Foreign Language

High School in Varna (2013) and obtained her medical degree at Medical University - Varna in 2019. Since 2020, she has been an Assistant and a full-time doctoral student at the Department of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology, Medical University - Varna. In December 2024, she became a certified specialist in Child Psychiatry. She participates in national and international conferences and research seminars. The candidate is clinically engaged in the field of child and adolescent psychiatry, and the study has been carried out in a real clinical environment, which adds substantial practical value to the obtained results.

3. Relevance of the topic and appropriateness of the postulated aims and objectives

Anorexia nervosa is among the most severe mental disorders in adolescence, with a significant risk of chronification and relapse. Monitoring clinical dynamics from the active phase to remission and distinguishing variable from stable psychological characteristics is of direct importance for treatment planning and relapse prevention.

The stated aims and objectives are clearly formulated and justified. The use of the self-report Eating Disorders Inventory (third edition) questionnaire - EDI-3, enables concurrent assessment of symptom-specific as well as broader personality and psychological constructs.

4. Understanding of the problem

The literature review demonstrates in-depth knowledge of the research subject, presents historical, clinical and epidemiological data, discusses contemporary classification systems, and examines the multifactorial etiology of eating disorders. The topics are addressed analytically. The review is structured and provides an appropriate framework for substantiating the research logic and interpreting the results.

5. Research methodology

The study was conducted as a two-phase assessment (in the active phase and in remission) of adolescent patients in clinical settings at the Clinic of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at St. Marina University Hospital Varna, as well as in outpatient setting, during the period October 2020 - October 2024. A total of 45 participants with a diagnosis of anorexia nervosa were included: 27 patients in the acute phase (mean age 14.0 years; mean BMI 14.98) and 18 patients in remission (mean age 16.5 years; mean BMI 19.33). The instrument was the standardized self-report questionnaire EDI-3 (Eating disorders inventory, 3rd edition). Statistical analyses were performed in SPSS using descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The statistical approaches are relevant to the stated objectives. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee at Medical University - Varna.

6. Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation

The dissertation is written in accordance with the requirements of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at Medical University - Varna and is structured according to the adopted scheme: introduction, literature review, aims and objectives of the study, contingent and methodology, results and discussion, conclusions, final summary and references. The work consists of 142 pages and includes 31 tables, 3 figures and 2 graphs. The reference list contains 454 titles, of which 5 are in Cyrillic and 449 in Latin script. The dissertation is logically structured and coherent. Results are presented, compared with up-to-date scientific data and discussed in the context of clinical practice. The limitations of the design (single-centre study, limited sample size and gender imbalance) are described, which demonstrates a critical approach.

7. Contributions and relevance of the work for science and practice

Among the most substantial contributions of the dissertation, the following may be highlighted:

Provides empirical data on the EDI-3 profile in adolescents with anorexia nervosa in two clinical states - active phase and remission - in the context of clinical practice in Bulgaria.

Differentiates indicators sensitive to therapeutic change (variables) from relatively stable personality/psychological constructs (constants), which may sustain vulnerability even after somatic recovery.

Substantiates the need for personalized therapeutic strategies - after normalization of clinical parameters (e.g., BMI), the focus should be directed towards long-term psychotherapeutic work on emotional regulation and patterns of overcontrol.

Establishes a basis for future multicenter studies and for the development of clinical algorithms for follow-up and prevention of relapse.

8. Personal involvement of the candidate

The dissertation is based on an original clinical-empirical study. Data collection, analysis and interpretation are presented as an independent scientific work by the candidate under the supervision of the scientific advisor.

9. Thesis summary and publications

The submitted materials contain evidence of scientific activity on the topic. Two scientific publications on the topic in Bulgarian journals are presented. The reference list includes a report with participation of the candidate: "Clinical case of a 16-year-old female patient with anorexia nervosa and an extremely low body mass index" (Gacheva, G.; Petrov, P.). The structure of the dissertation abstract complies with the requirements of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at Medical University - Varna.

10. Critical notes

The main limitations to be noted are the single-centre nature of the study, the limited sample size, and the lack of long-term follow-up that would allow assessment of the durability of remission over time. The presence of these limitations does not diminish the value of the results, but it necessitates cautious generalization.

11. Suggestions for future implementation of the contributions and results

It is recommended that future research expand the sample (multicentre), include structured clinical interviews, and investigate therapeutic interventions targeting the stable mechanisms in remission (e.g., emotional dysregulation and overcontrol).

12. Conclusion

The submitted dissertation constitutes an original study addressing a highly relevant issue in child and adolescent psychiatry, underpinned by an appropriate research design and practical relevance. The work meets the requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor". I provide a positive statement for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in medicine to Dr. Gabriela Valentinova Gacheva.

Date: 09/02/2026

Заличено на основание чл. 5,
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Prof. Dr. Hristo Kozhuharov, PhD