

Statement

From/by

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In connection with the Order of the Rector of Medical University of Varna № P-109-489 of 22.11.2021, on the grounds of art. 42 para. 6 and art. 30 para. 3 of the Regulations for the implementation of the law on the development of the academic staff in the republic of Bulgaria and art.68, para.1 of the Regulations for the development of the Academic staff of Medical University - Varna, Decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Medicine at Medical University - Varna (Protocol №54 from 09.11.2021) and Protocol № 1 of the meeting in absentia of the Scientific Jury from 25.11.2021.

Regarding: Competition for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "**Doctor**" in the field of higher education 7. Health and sports, professional field 7.1. Medicine and the scientific specialty "**Psychiatry**" of Dr. Raya Zlatislavova Dimitrova. Enrolled by Order of the Rector of Medical University - Varna № R-109-89 from 01.02.2019.

Thesis topic: „Assessment of non-suicidal self-injurious behaviour in a non-clinical population of adolescents ages 14-19 in Varna.”

Research supervisor: Assoc. prof Petar Petrov, MD, PhD, DSc

In recent years, engagement in non-suicidal self-injury by adolescents observed in clinical conditions has reached epidemic proportions. We can expect an even greater severity of the problem in the pre-hospital population. Globally, the topic is being actively studied, as evidenced by the intensive publishing activity on the topic in specialized literature.

A significant percentage of adolescents aged 14-19 declare that they perform self-injurious behaviours to deal with situations of increased vulnerability and stress. Non-suicidal self-injury is a phenomenon that has been studied relatively intensively over the last 30-40 years. In most cases, its manifestation is associated with the experience of strong negative emotions, to overcome which adolescents use various methods of self-harm.

The social significance of the issue is unquestionable, and its active study will give us information, which we need to positively influence it. At this stage, there is not even a consensus among researchers as to where non-suicidal self-harm should be included in the scientific classifications of psychiatric disorders. The current definition of non-suicidal self-injury as "intentional, direct injury to one's own body tissues without suicidal intent" dates to 2007.

International studies examining the prevalence of non-suicidal self-injury show between 11 and 18% prevalence in adolescence. There is also an increasing trend in the last few years. Most of the publications show a higher prevalence among girls.

The factors that give rise to and maintain non-suicidal self-injurious behaviour at this stage of knowledge are presented as Theoretical Models, none of which is exhaustive and comprehensive, but considers mainly a certain aspect of the complex and multi-determined non-suicidal self-injurious behaviour.

The prevalence, frequency, functions, and other characteristics of non-suicidal self-injurious behaviour require a different approach, which led to its inclusion in DSM-5 in 2013 in a separate diagnostic group called "Conditions for further study" with separate proposed criteria, which will allow in the coming years the accumulation of empirical data for this type of disorder.

The literature review is in-depth and covers all aspects of non-suicidal self-injury, from historical data to epidemiology, methods, functions, possible comorbid disorders, classification difficulties and others.

The aim and tasks and working hypotheses of the research are formulated precisely and clearly and reasonably. The study population includes 294 adolescents between 14 and 19 years of age, 267 of whom have completed the full survey of the study. The criteria for inclusion and exclusion in the sample are clearly set.

The assessment of the sample was conducted with appropriate tools assessing the symptoms of non-suicidal self-injurious behaviour and showed the ability of the author to adapt and modify some tools for better applicability in our country.

The applied methods for statistical data analysis are well known and validated - they include descriptive analysis, frequency analysis, factor analysis, cluster analysis, Chi-square test and others. A good level of knowledge and use of various statistical analyses has been demonstrated.

The results obtained are presented sequentially together with the subsequent discussions. The presented tables and figures facilitate the understanding of the analysed data.

The analysis of the obtained results gives an incidence of non-suicidal self-injurious behaviour in our country in the middle of the wide range formed by international studies on the topic. It has been self-critically assessed that the frequency by self-assessment reports may give some distortion. Even in this version, the results obtained confirm the data obtained by other authors. The use of DSM criteria for determining morbidity is not an exception in psychiatric research, but rather a regular practice because the criteria are clearer and usually include a wider symptom group.

The chosen tools are easy to use and meet the DSM-V criteria. It also allows for the assessment of the different degrees of severity of the syndrome, as well as the assessment of the predictor importance of some functions. The results support the data established by other authors that it is the inability to delay the impulse, mental and behavioural preoccupation and the frequency of episodes of non-suicidal self-injury are the main distinguishing features of the diagnosis Non-suicidal self-injury disorder.

The assessment of the course and progression of non-suicidal self-injury as a form of addictive behaviour is also included in the working hypotheses. This hypothesis is not new, with evidence emerging 30 years ago that self-harming behaviours share common features with addictive behaviours, namely that they are experienced as "coercive" and "relieving" by individuals themselves. The results confirm these data, as a significant proportion of the sample shows characteristics of addictive behaviour in the engagement in non-suicidal self-injury.

The considered limitations and shortcomings of the work are objective and commonly observed, especially when conducting population studies. They can also serve as a guide for future work on the topic.

Fourteen summary points are marked, which correspond to the set goals and objectives, are derived from the results and the discussion and are presented clearly and precisely.

Nine contributions were highlighted, of which 4 were of original theoretical character, 2 were confirmatory and 3 were mostly practical.

The presented dissertation contains 145 pages, divided into 9 chapters and bibliography, and includes 61 tables, 5 figures and 1 appendix. 193 literary sources were cited, 5 of them in Bulgarian and 188 in English. The dissertation is structured according to the adopted scheme: content, introduction, literature review, aim and objectives, materials and methods, working hypotheses, results, discussion, summary points and contributions, conclusion and ends with a bibliography.

In conclusion: The dissertation presented by Dr. Raya Zlatislavova Dimitrova on "Assessment of non-suicidal self-injurious behavior in a non-clinical population of adolescents aged 14-19 years in Varna" is based on in-depth literature review and research approach. The study was conducted correctly and with appropriate tools. The conclusions made are correct and correspond to the set aim. The thesis fully meets all the criteria for obtaining an educational and scientific degree "Doctor" according to the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation and the Regulations for the development of academic staff at Medical University - Varna. In this regard, I confidently give my positive assessment and recommend the members of the esteemed scientific jury to vote positively for the award of educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in Medicine to Dr. Raya Zlatislavova Dimitrova.

Written by:



Assoc. Prof Georgi Panov, PhD

03.12.2021