

STATEMENT
from Assoc. Prof. Nevyana Georgieva Feschieva, MD, PhD

for dissertation

of Ekaterina Ivanova Valtcheva, MD

on the topic:
"Early Childhood Development:
Features and Prevention of Disorders"

Research Supervisor:
Prof. Teodora Todorova Dimitrova, MD, PhD

for the awarding of educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education 7. "Health and sport", professional field 7.1. "Medicine", scientific specialty "Hygiene (including occupational, communal, school, radiation, etc.)"

According to Order with № P-109-193/28.04.2022 of the Rector of the Medical University – Varna, Prof. Valentin Ignatov, MD, PhD given a report with entry № 102-1021/18.04.2022 of Assoc. Prof. Tsonko Paunov MD, PhD – Head of the Department "Hygiene and Epidemiology" and by a decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Public Health under protocol № 184/20.04.2021 I was appointed an external member of the scientific jury, and at its first meeting I was chosen to present a statement on the dissertation on Early Childhood Development: Features and Prevention of Disorder for the award of educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific specialty "Hygiene (including occupational, communal, school, radiation, etc.)".

Brief biographical information about the PhD student - career development

Ekaterina Valtcheva was born in Varna. **Education.** She graduated from the V-th Language High School - Varna with advanced language training in English with a gold medal for excellent achievement in 1988. In 1996 acquired a master's degree in Medicine at the Medical University - Varna. She specializes in pediatrics at the Pediatrics Clinic at the St. Marina University Hospital (1998-2001) and since 2002 has been a specialist in pediatrics. In 2000-2002 she completed a basic two-year course in homeopathic therapy at the Medical University of Varna and the Center for education and development of homeopathy. Since 2004 she has been admitted to a part-time PhD student of Health management at the Academy of Labor and Social Relations in Moscow, Russia, which was terminated in 2006 after exams, enrollment and a doctoral minimum. From 2011 to 2016 she was a part-time lecturer in hygiene at the Medical University of Varna.

Since 2017 she has been a full-time assistant at the Department of Hygiene and Epidemiology. Conducts practical classes and seminars in "Hygiene of Children and Adolescents", "Hygiene and Ecology" (English language training); Pediatrics; "Clinical Homeopathy" and "Initial Course in Homeopathic Therapy". Since 2019 she has been enrolled as a full-time doctoral student at the Department of Hygiene and Epidemiology of MU-Varna with research supervisor Prof. Teodora Dimitrova, MD, PhD. With regard to the doctoral program, she has fulfilled the scientometric requirements of the Regulations for development of the academic staff of MU-Varna and with an Order of the Rector from 28.04. 2022 is deducted with the right to final presentation of the dissertation .

Her **professional experience** is permanently related to pediatrics: work in hospital hospitals - a doctor in the Neonatology department of Specialized Hospital for Obstetrics and Gynecology "Prof. Dr. Dimitar Stamatov "- Varna (2003-2005), Clinic of Pediatric Oncohematology (2005-2011) and since 2016 is a practicing pediatrician in outpatient specialized medical care, with an emphasis on consultation and prevention.

Awards and Qualifications: Award and Scholarship for Young Researcher from the 23rd World Congress of Pediatrics - Beijing 2001. Participation in the WHO Working Group "From Linear to Circular Economy", Bonn, Germany, 2018. She has numerous participations virtual and present in Bulgaria and abroad in seminars, working groups and others in Child Nutrition, Childhood Psychoanalysis, Early Child Development.

Participation in projects: Municipal project – 2020, Youth Initiative "Health and ancient healing practices in Varna" of the Municipality of Varna and the Museum of the History of Medicine, MU-Varna, Faculty of Public Health - Research program in the field of archeology, history and medicine: "Early childhood development - ancient artifacts with modern reading; 2021 - The Cost of Inaction (COI) of Early Childhood Interventions, UNICEF - member of the project team of MU-Varna; 2019-2022 – Project № 19021/2019 (Early child development - a determinant of health and quality of life in the modern society), funded by the Science Fund of MU-Varna.

Dr. Valtcheva is involved in a number of social causes, the most significant of which is the "The Green Sea Yard of Varna".

Fluent in written and spoken English and Russian. She is a member of the Bulgarian Medical Union, the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria, Varna Branch, the Bulgarian Medical Homeopathic Organization (member of the Board), the Bulgarian Public Health Association, the Bulgarian and European Public Health Association.

Summary: Dr. Valtcheva, a doctor with two specialties - Pediatrics and Hygiene in Childhood and Adolescence, has extensive experience as a pediatrician and researcher with a focus on ECD and disease prevention, constantly improving his skills. Her preparation according to research methodology, her social commitment to children's health increase her capacity to work on the set dissertation project.

General characteristics of the dissertation

The dissertation presented by Dr. Ekaterina Valtcheva contains 232 standard typewritten pages and is illustrated with 6 tables, 91 figures and 11 appendices, including an author's questionnaire in tabular form and 2 tables with results. The literature reference includes a total of 281 literary sources, of which 183 in Latin and 98 in Cyrillic. It is well balanced and includes a literature review (38 pages), goals and objectives, material and methods, results (99 pages), discussion (15 pages), conclusions and contributions.

Relevance of the dissertation.

There is indisputable scientific evidence for the uniqueness of the period of early childhood and its decisive influence on the development - physical, emotional, social, linguistic and cognitive - of the child and the adult individual in which he becomes. Therefore, everything that happens to the child in this early years is important for his entire life cycle, for his future quality of life. Poor start in early life leads to poor health, poor nutrition, inadequate learning. According to the WHO Commission on Health Determinants, 43% of children under 5 years old age are at risk of suboptimal development due to poverty and stunted growth. Better knowledge of early childhood gives a chance for early interventions, the usefulness of which is undoubted for the child, family, society.

There is a strong relationship between healthy early childhood development (ECD) and the social progress of a society. The concept of ECD has established itself as a multidisciplinary approach to policy making to ensure the objectives of ECD.

Evaluation of the Literary Review.

Spread over 38 pages, the literature review addresses some of the most important issues relevant to the design of the dissertation. The brief historical overview of the problem of childhood and its understanding over the centuries, depending on the prevailing social relations, is impressive. Dr. Valtcheva not only knows the scientific theories, but has also synthesized them in view of their impact on health and pedagogical practice of child rearing. Getting acquainted with the views of philosophers, pediatricians, educators undoubtedly enriches the reader and provides a theoretical basis for understanding ECD, a necessary starting point for the planned study. In this regard, the review part on parental competence, considered by the doctoral student in a holistic aspect, is also fundamental. The conclusions from the literature review are the basis of the questions, which are further explored in the dissertation.

The literature review is a rich source of information and knowledge, it is an independent theoretical study that deserves high praise. I would recommend its publication, in whole or in part, to make it available to a wider readership.

Evaluation of goals, objectives and methodology. From the multifaceted concept of ECD, Dr. Valtcheva has chosen to establish the importance of ECD in the parental community and the resulting needs for knowledge, practices, competencies and opportunities for prevention of disorders. The results of the research should be used for the purpose of health promotion and prevention in early childhood and for increasing parental competence.

To achieve this goal, **6 tasks have been formulated.**

Material, methods and design of the study are precisely developed and described. The qualitative research was conducted by the doctoral student in the community of “The Green Sea Yard of Varna” - an area designated for early socialization and prevention of children from 0 to 3 years. The applied method "Participant Observation" is well justified, which, although difficult and requires skill from the researcher, contributes to diagnosing the problem through in-depth, non-standardized information, as well as to generating new ideas through quantitative sociological methods. The quantitative survey - a national online survey with parents of respondents - is based on a questionnaire, an author's product of the project team, funded by the Science Fund to measure the importance of ECD in the parental community – 4 types of answers that guarantee high reliability of the respondents' answers.

The applied statistical methods - descriptive, method of statistical evaluation, variational, non-parametric, correlation analysis are adequate to the tasks and the objects of research.

The methodology is a strong point of the dissertation and meets the criteria for modern research.

Evaluation of results and contributions.

The results are presented accurately according to the set tasks. The results of "Participant Observation" in the community of "The Green Sea Yard of Varna", obtained through 1448 visits to the space for a period of 14 months in 2020 and 2021 are analyzed. The analysis shows the possibilities of the method by age groups are differentiated the five key elements: activity, environment, interactions, object, people. The application of Empathy Map turned out to be especially successful in creating a relatively stable picture, which served for the next stage - quantitative sociological research with an author's questionnaire.

Parental competencies for ECD up to 3 years and 11 months are very well presented. The results obtained provide sufficient information about the parent-child-specialist relationship. The multidimensional results, which refer mainly to highly educated parents, enable the doctoral student to draw conclusions about the state of ECD in Bulgarian society:

- There is an underestimation of early education;
- Bulgarian fathers are still asserting their equal participation in the ECD period in order to increase the benefits for maternal, child and family well-being;
- There are no sufficiently clear and understandable for all stakeholders definitions of child development problems according to their importance, degree of urgency or possibility of waiting.
- Parents are an active party in the search for reliable sources of information on ECD by specialists, which is another reason for developing national strategies for informing parents.
- Knowledge of the attitudes about the importance of ECD in the parental community is crucial for the implementation of policies in the field of health promotion and the undertaking of specific future interventions at the individual and population level.

Based on the results, conclusions and recommendations were made for health promotion and prevention in early childhood and increase parental competence. They are differentiated

for: parents/nuclear family; for extended family; for future parents; for professionals; for non-specialists involved in the cause of ECD; for population level. The recommendations are clear and feasible.

The dissertation is characterized by a wealth of both concrete results and information that stimulates reflection, which has yet to be considered. There is no doubt that the set goals and objectives have been met. I agree with the self-assessment of the original and applied contributions indicated by the doctoral student. I consider especially important the methodological contributions in connection with the applied research qualitative and quantitative methods: "Participant Observation" and a questionnaire.

The abstract reflects the most important aspects of the dissertation. In connection with the dissertation, three full-text publications and four participations in scientific forums were made.


Personal impressions and recommendations.

I know Dr. Valtcheva as a precise researcher, with innovative ideas and a broad culture, socially engaged, dedicated to the profession. I would recommend greater publishing activity in Bulgarian and foreign prestigious journals. To develop her abilities and to take the type of "author's control", as far as possible, on the recommendations proposed in the dissertation and to focus efforts on the started cause - early childhood development.

Conclusion

The dissertation of Dr. Ekaterina Ivanova Valtcheva on "Early Childhood Development: Features and Prevention of Disorders" on relevance, scope and quality of work, as well as the importance of contributions meets the requirements of the Law on Academic Development in the Republic of Bulgaria and Regulations of MU-Varna for its implementation. In connection with all the above, I confidently give my positive assessment and recommend to the esteemed scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific specialty "Hygiene, incl. occupational, communal, school, radiation, etc. ".

20.05.2022
Varna

Scientific jury member: 
/Assoc. Prof. Nevyana Feschieva, DM, PhD/