

## **REVIEW**

**BY PROF. ELENA MLADENOVA SHIPKOVENSKA, MD, PhD**

**ON THE DISSERTATION ON THE SUBJECT " POSTPONING PARENTHOOD  
– THE MIDWIFE'S ROLE IN OVERCOMING THE FACTORS " FOR THE  
AWARD OF THE SCIENTIFIC AND EDUCATIONAL DEGREE "DOCTOR" IN  
THE SCIENTIFIC SPECIALTY "HEALTH CARE MANAGEMENT"**

**AUTHOR: TEODORA YORDANOVA TODOROVA**

**SUPERVISOR : ASSOC. PROF. TEODORA EVTIMOVA, PhD**

### **Presentation of the procedur**

By order P-109-125 dated 16.02.2023 of the Rector of the MU - Varna, I have been appointed as an external member of the Scientific Jury for the defense of a dissertation on the topic "*Postponing parenthood – the midwife's role in overcoming the factors*" for the award of the scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education: 7. Health care and sports; Professional direction: 7.4. Public Health; Scientific specialty "Management of health care".

The dissertation was discussed at a meeting of the extended departmental council of the Department of " Health Care " at the Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" - Varna and referred for defense before a Scientific Jury.

The candidate has submitted all the necessary documents for the competition, provided for in the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff and the Regulations for the Terms and Conditions for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at the MU-Varna.

### **Career development**

As. Teodora Yordanova Todorova was born in 1985.

In 2009, she graduated from higher education, specialty "Midwife" at Medical University - Plovdiv and began working in the specialty at MHAT "Zdrave", Velingrad.

Since 2015 until 2017 continues to work as a midwife in the Development Center in the same city.

After a competition held in 2018 was selected as "Assistant", specialty "Midwife" in the Department of "Health Care", Medical University "Prof. Dr. P.Stoyanov" - Varna, Shumen branch, where she has been working until now.

She defended her master's degree in "Management of health care" in 2015 at the Medical University - Plovdiv.

Ass. Todorova has a recognized specialty in "Public Health" /2022/ from the Medical University -Varna.

Since 2020, he is a doctoral student of independent training at the "Health Care" Department, Medical University - Varna, Shumen branch.

She is a member of the Bulgarian Association of Healthcare Professionals, the Bulgarian Association of Public Health and EUPHA.

She uses the Russian language.

### **EVALUATION OF THE DISSERTATION**

The thesis is presented on 182 pages and is structured in five chapters. Contains 12 tables, 50 figures and 6 appendices. The attached tables, figures and illustrative material are in an appropriate number, well graphically designed and contribute to greater clarity of the presented information.

The relevance of the work presented is related to two alarming trends observed in our country: *aging of the population and the existing real risk* that marriage these days will be depersonalized and its main function will be displaced from the center of its essence. Family and parenthood are fundamental aspects of human life and therefore the replacement of the traditional family by cohabitation without marriage, with a short duration and delayed parenthood is causing concern among many researchers.

I believe that the work of Assistant Todorova is timely and practically oriented, since it is an attempt, based on its own empirical research and evidence, to derive recommendations for specific practical interventions to overcome postponing parenthood.

### **Introduction**

The main aspects that are considered in the dissertation work are synthesized, with an emphasis on the reasons for postponing parenthood in the Republic of Bulgaria in recent decades.

The bibliography includes 209 literature sources, 108 of which are in Cyrillic and 79 in Latin, internet – 22. The review discusses the importance of the family structure in the period after the Liberation until the beginning of the transition in the Republic of Bulgaria, analyzes the cultural and religious beliefs about marriage among the ethnic groups in our

country, points out the main factors contributing to the postponement of parenthood in economically developed countries and in us, the consequences arising from the postponement of parenthood are discussed and the competences of the midwife in pregnancy planning are analyzed.

The state of the problem is presented clearly and well structured, and the scientific literature is interpreted analytically. The bibliography has been selected rationally and has helped to analyze the problem from various scientific aspects.

The review is specifically related to the topic under consideration and is in accordance with the criteria and proposals for the preparation of scientific papers.

### **Purpose, tasks and methodical approaches**

The goal is clearly stated. In connection with it, 7 logically resulting tasks have been identified for solving.

The main settings of the research parameters are described, three scientific hypotheses are set, the research toolkit is presented. To collect the primary information, a sociological method / survey and in-depth interview / was used, through which empirical information was collected on a precisely defined range of questions, the subject of research and from precisely defined persons, strictly fixed in advance with the help of scientifically based approaches.

The organization of the own study is described in great detail. A total of 405 people were included, divided into five groups:

**First group** - female patients hospitalized in the "Pathological Pregnancy and Maternity Ward" department of 6 hospitals.

**Second group** – patients (women/men) hospitalized in reproductive medicine centers in 5 medical institutions.

**Third group** – 20 experts (obstetricians and gynecologists, embryologists and senior midwives/nurses). Through the in-depth interview method, their opinion was established regarding the postponement of parenthood in men and women of fertile age and the way to overcome the causes through the activity of the midwife.

**Fourth group** – regular midwives/nurses working in reproductive medicine centers from 5 cities in the country.

**Fifth group** - female students-mothers, from the specialties "Nurse" and "Midwife" (from I, II, III and IV year), studying in the branches of Medical University-Varna - Shumen, Veliko Tarnovo and Sliven.

The study was conducted in five stages. 6 types of author questionnaires were used.

*A distinctive feature of the dissertation work is the rich set of sources of information and appropriate methods of data collection and processing. The research design proves that the author has a good command of modern research approaches.*

### **Discussion of the empirical studies**

The analysis of the results follows the logic of the planned research, according to the set goals and objectives, and presents the sequence of the described stages. A socio-demographic characteristic is presented for each group of respondents.

The results give reason to draw a general conclusion that the factors suggesting the postponement of parenthood in women and men of childbearing age can be systematized into *two main groups*:

- *clinical in women*: blocked fallopian tubes, hormonal disorders, ovulation disorders, endometriosis, etc. in men - pathological spermatogenesis is leading.

- *socio-economic* (lack of a suitable partner, lack of sufficient financial means, career development and continuing education).

In this section, the assessment of dependence has a contributing character: career - high income - late parenthood.

The results of the study are interesting, proving that a woman's lack of knowledge regarding reproductive opportunities in individual age groups is the reason for crossing the biological limit for having a first child. This result has important practical implications in supporting the introduction of a pregnancy planning program.

When forming the respondents' assessment of the quality of the obstetric care received, one should always take into account the different perspectives of the study participants, who have a different place in the health system and different expectations from health care depending on gender, age, education, type and duration of the health problem. Regardless of the fact that patients rate "highly" the midwife's competences in working to overcome the reasons for delaying parenthood, it is worth noting the fact that not a few surveyed working midwives/nurses (40%) are of the opinion that trust in the midwife is weak and it could not influence the reproductive culture of a groom.

The categorical opinion of the experts about "the need to increase the knowledge of midwives in the direction of reproductive health" is a very valuable conclusion from the in-depth interview.

The information brochures developed by the author, related to the health education of students aged 11-14 and the Handbook for couples with reproductive problems deserve attention.

The theoretical base on the issues of the midwife's role in the different levels of reproductive health prevention to overcome the reasons for delaying parenthood is presented in depth and comprehensively. An innovative model has been developed for the provision of autonomous midwifery care through training and advisory activities in a specially built Midwifery Center to support expectant parents.

The conclusions drawn correspond to the results obtained.

Recommendations for health policy decisions at the national level have been formulated - to the Ministry of Education and Science, to the Medical Universities and the Bulgarian Association of Health Care Professionals and to the National Health Insurance Fund, with the aim of developing an advanced system for a higher level of reproductive health prevention .

#### ***Contributions of the dissertation:***

The contributions of the dissertation work are in several directions - in the field of obstetric practice, health management and in the field of preventive medicine. Some of the contributions are indicated in the comment, but others I would like to point out now.

- The obtained results of the sociological surveys realistically describe the state of the researched problem, with good awareness of the doctoral student in the considered thematic area.

- An own critical view of the factors contributing to delaying parenthood in women and men of childbearing age is presented and possibilities for overcoming them are indicated.

- The readiness, attitudes and motivation of midwives to perform autonomous midwifery activity were studied.

- The model for providing autonomous midwifery care through training and advisory activity in the "Midwifery Center for Support of Future Parents" has a methodological and scientific-applied contribution, as it serves to justify both parental behavior and health-economic programs in the field of reproductive health.

The work presented is based on own research, and therefore the contributions could be evaluated as ***enrichment of existing scientific knowledge, obtaining new knowledge, with the possibility of application in practice.***

The **abstract for the dissertation** correctly reflects the structure of the dissertation and contains the most important results and conclusions of the study.

The results of the studies were published in three editions. The doctoral student is the first author in all developments, which confirms her personal participation in the development of the work.

**Personal impressions** I have no personal impressions of Assistant Teodora Todorova.

**CONCLUSION:**

The work meets the requirements of the qualitative and quantitative criteria for the Development of the Academic Staff and the Regulations for the Terms and Conditions for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at the MU-Varna.

Assistant Teodora Todorova has developed a dissertation in a topical area. The presence of deficits in our health information make her work timely and open the way for future research. It is an attempt, based on its own empirical research and evidence, to make recommendations for specific practical interventions to prevent delayed parenthood and reduce reproductive health risks. For this, I will vote positively and I recommend the members of the Scientific Jury to also vote with a positive vote for receiving the educational and scientific degree "**Doctor**" of *Assistant Teodora Yordanova Todorova*, in the scientific specialty „Healthcare Management“.

Sofia, 8.04.2023

**REVIEWER:**   
(Prof. Elena Shipkovenska, MD, Ph.D)