



STATEMENT

By: Assoc. Dr. Desislava Borislavova Serafimova, University of Economics – Varna, Department of "Management and Administration"; professional field 3.7 Administration and management, scientific specialty "Social Management"

Subject: dissertation work for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in 3.7 "Administration and management", doctoral program "Organization and management outside the sphere of material production (in healthcare)"

Grounds for presenting the statement: participation in the scientific jury for the defense of a dissertation according to Order R-109-478/16.11.2023 of the Rector of the MU "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" – Varna

Author of the dissertation: Elena Petrova Todorova, a doctoral student in the doctoral program "Organization and management outside the sphere of material production (in health care)" at the MU "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" – Varna

Dissertation topic : "ACCESS TO DENTAL CARE IN BULGARIA"

I. General presentation of the dissertation work

1.1. Subject

The dissertation examines access to dental care in Bulgaria, identifying and analyzing the specific and most important barriers affecting the usability of dental services by different groups of adults. For this purpose, a goal, 5 research tasks and a research hypothesis were formulated.

1.2. Volume

The dissertation is 154 pages long, of which 19 pages are appendices. It contains an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, and appendices.

1.3. Structure

The structural elements are logically linked and correspond to the set scientific research tasks, but their volumes are not sufficiently balanced – the first chapter is 27 pages, the second - 57, and the third – 20. The purpose and the tasks set determine the logic of the research.

The first chapter presents theoretical concepts and highlights the studies of other scholars on access to health and dental services. Special attention is paid to the barriers to access to dental care, which are divided into structural, financial and personal. In the second chapter, the empirical data and the performed statistical analyzes are presented in the study of the influence of structural, financial and personal barriers in limiting the implementation of access to dental services. In the

third chapter, summarized conclusions are presented about the access to this type of services and recommendations are briefly formulated to improve citizens' access to dental care.

1.4. Literature

The bibliographic reference contains 211 literary sources, including 186 in English and 25 in Bulgarian.

1.5. Applications

They present the two questionnaires for conducting an empirical study - for patients and for dentists.

II. Assessment of the form and content of the dissertation

2.1. Assessment of the relevance and degree of development of research in the dissertation scientific problem

The researched problem is current; it is interpreted correctly and according to the goals set by the doctoral student. Access to dental care is a significant issue affecting people's overall health and quality of life. The main theoretical propositions for clarifying the nature and dimensions of access to health services and, more specifically, the need for dental services are briefly reviewed. A clear focus is placed on examining barriers to accessing dental care. Concepts of other authors are presented, based on which a specific approach for analysis and assessment of access to dental care in our country was selected and applied. This is a reasonable basis for describing the author's research model. Nine hundred fifty-three users of dental services from all over the country and 151 dentists took part in the conducted empirical study.

2.2. Assessment of the language, volume and instrumentation of the dissertation work

The presentation style is good, with a clear and understandable statement. In the theoretical part, key concepts are explained very precisely. The doctoral student purposefully systematizes individual author -'s points of view, interprets them, and explains their possible application in her research object. Appropriate scientific research approaches and methods were used, providing good argumentation in approbation of the research hypothesis. The PhD scholar demonstrated exemplary skills in summarizing and analyzing data and presenting and interpreting it in the context of the topic at hand.

2.3. Evaluation of the abstract

The abstract meets the requirements for structure and content; its volume is 39 pages. Accurately presents the dissertation work in a synthesized form, as well as the most critical -results of the research, incl. the contributions achieved. It lists three publications that are related to the subject of the dissertation – 2 co-authored and one independent. It would be appropriate to present the publications in the abstract with complete bibliographic data, incl. the pages of proceedings or journals in which they are presented.

III. Scientific and applied contributions of the dissertation work

I accept the theoretical and applied contributions presented in the abstract, and I would formulate them in the following way:

- I accept the theoretical and applied contributions presented in the abstract, and I would formulate them in the following way:

- Structural, financial and personal barriers to access to dental care were studied and the extent of their influence on the use of dental services in Bulgaria by different groups of users was assessed through statistical analysis.
- In the conducted empirical study, for the first time in our country, a specific approach to the study of access to dental care (used by other scientists in international practice) was applied, which makes it possible to conduct comparative studies on a national and international level.
- Based on the conducted research and the obtained results, summaries, conclusions and some recommendations for improving access to dental care in Bulgaria have been formulated.

IV. Notes and questions for the PhD student

1. The dissertation would benefit if the doctoral student presented the theoretical justification of the topic in more depth, highlighting his personal position and critical attitude on the discussed issues more categorically. The recommendations given in item 3.2., which in the current version are in a volume of 3 pages (p. 114-117), could also be presented in more. They also include summaries of the research and steps already taken by the health authorities in our country to improve access to dental care (p. 114).
2. On p. 10, it is stated that "among the sources used in the literature review, American studies predominate." In the theoretical justification, the dissertation mainly refers to concepts from American sources, incl. definitions of basic dental access concepts and data used by the US Institute of Medicine, the American Dental Association, the US Health Care Access Monitoring Committee, FDI, and the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences (pp. 17, 20, 22, Considering mind that Bulgaria is a member of the EU and there are specific differences between the social and health systems in the USA and in Europe, the question arises as to how appropriate this approach is.
3. Some of the concepts presented are not sufficiently convincingly argued (e.g., "no consensus has been reached in the scientific literature on the overall idea of access to health services and its components (p. 19), some texts are not explained in depth by the Ph.D. student (such as Fig. 1.1), and it is not clear whether she makes the indicated generalizations and conclusions independently or presents the results and findings of other scientists (p. 19, p. 21, etc.)
4. One of the recommendations presented on p. 114 states that "geographical imbalances in the supply of dentists in the North-West, North-Central, and South-East regions can be balanced by improving the overall economic situation in these parts of the country and thus gave impetus to young dentists to practice their profession in them." In connection with the defense of the dissertation work, it is good for the doctoral student to explain in more detail what he means.
5. On page 115, it is stated that "there is a need to improve patient awareness of the importance of preventive dental services..." and "this can be done by developing new oral health promotion and prevention strategies to be integrated into national or local health programs". What kind of specialists and experts should be involved in developing these new strategies, and what audience should they target?

V. Summary evaluation of the dissertation work and conclusion

Based on the above, I consider that the presented dissertation work represents a completed scientific study and meets all legal requirements and the relevant regulations of MU "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" – Varna. The author, Elena Todorova, demonstrates skills for independent research work at a reasonable level and the ability to work with appropriate scientific tools. Results of a significant scientific applied nature have been obtained.

The arguments given give me the reason to provide *a positive assessment* of the dissertation work and to propose to the members of the respected scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to doctoral student Elena Petrova Todorova in Professional field 3.7 "Administration and Management."

24.01.2024
Varna

Prepared the opinion:

Заличено на основание чл. 5,
§1, б. „В“ от Регламент (ЕС)
2016/679

(Assoc. Dr. D. Serafimova)