

STATEMENT

From Associate Professor Milena Gancheva Sandeva, PhD

Department of Midwifery Care, Faculty of Public Health, MU-Plovdiv

for dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree 'PhD'

professional field: 7.4. Public Health

doctoral Programme: 'Health Care Management'

Author: Polina Ivanova Dragneva

Form of PhD studies: full-time

Department of Health Care; Branch Sliven; MU-Varna "Prof. "Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" Varna.

Topic: „Factors influencing pregnant women's choice of elective delivery. Role of the midwife”

Scientific supervisor: Assist. Prof. Diana Dimitrova, PhD in Psychology

By Order No. P-109-555/ 14.12.2023 of the Rector of Medical University - Varna I have been elected as a member of the Scientific Jury, and on the basis of Protocol No. 1/ 22.12.2023 I have been appointed to prepare an opinion on the procedure for obtaining the PhD degree with candidate Polina Ivanova Dragneva, PhD student in full-time form of study at the Department of Health Care, Branch Sliven at Medical University - Varna.

1. General presentation of the procedure and the PhD student

The submitted set of paper/electronic materials is in accordance with Article 70 (1) of Section IV. Conditions and procedure for acquiring the Doctoral Degree at MU-Varna from the Regulations for the Development of Academic Staff at MU-Varna.

A review of the documents shows that the procedure for the deferral and the procedure for the declaration of defence were followed. The documents have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation, and the Regulations for Academic Staff Development at MU-Varna.

2. Brief biographical data about the PhD student

As. Polina Ivanova Dragneva, obtained a "Bachelor's" degree, specialty "Midwifery" in 2015 at Trakia University - Stara Zagora. A few years later, in 2019, he graduated with a Master's degree in Health Care Management at the same university.

The professional activity of Polina Dragneva began in 2016 as a midwife in the AGO of the Medical Center "Dr. I. Seliminski" - AD, Sliven. From March 2023 was appointed as an "Assistant" in the Sliven Branch of the MU-Varna.

As. Dragneva is enrolled as a doctoral student, regular form of study in the doctoral program "Management of health care" in the field of higher education 7. Health care and

sports, in direction 7.4. Public Health, by Order P-109-250/01.08.2023 Polina Dragneva was dismissed with the right of defense by Order P-109-417/03.10.2023.

3. Relevance of the topic and appropriateness of the objectives and tasks

In recent years, there has been a marked increase in the relative proportion of cesarean births, both nationally and globally. The progress of medicine has naturally been followed by an increase in cases in which a section is performed in the interest of the fetus and/or the mother. Other reasons influencing the increase in the rate of operative births are the increasing levels of risk factors and diseases in women giving birth and the often later age at which the first pregnancy and birth are realized. Last but not least, for increasing the rate of caesarean sections, the woman's desire for an operative delivery, without having a medically justified reason for it, is of great importance. Behind this desire are very often hidden delusions, fears and sometimes deep emotional suffering. One should not ignore the fact that along with the proven advantages of cesarean section, like any surgical intervention, it carries its own risks.

The topic of the dissertation work is current and represents a socially significant problem and has a marked contemporary relevance and scientific significance. Emphasis is placed on social and psycho-emotional factors influencing pregnant women's choice of elective delivery. This includes an assessment and analysis of their opinion and attitudes, as well as the social and health conditions leading to the choice of operative delivery without medical indications.

The aim is clearly and precisely formulated, and six main tasks and four working hypotheses have been set to achieve it. The tasks and hypotheses meet and are fully consistent with the set goal.

4. Knowledge of the problem

The presented extensive literature review (60 articles) and the rich bibliography for the dissertation work of Assistant Professor Polina Dragneva give a clear idea of the in-depth knowledge of the problems of attitudes and factors influencing the choice of women in labor for elective operative delivery. The literary overview is based on 242 literary sources, of which 56 are in Cyrillic and 186 are in Latin. The overview is developed in 7 sections and considers a significant part of the historical aspects of operative delivery, medical indications, risk factors, prevalence and frequency of operative deliveries, women's attitudes that lead to the choice of operative delivery and of course strategies to reduce their number.

The problem has been thoroughly examined and has a good cognitive value. In the literature reference, Associate Professor Polina Dragneva outlined the main problems, opportunities and perspectives for changing attitudes regarding elective caesarean section.

Analyzing the literature review, the doctoral student draws ten conclusions that outline the main directions for reducing operative births without medically justified reasons.

In recent years, more and more specialists have advocated the idea that SC should be performed in cases where the benefits are known to outweigh the harms. The large number of deliveries with SC, exceeding the recommendations of the WHO by several times, is proof that unnecessary operative interventions are performed in our country, which are associated with a greater risk for the woman in labor and the fetus. The high share of operative childbirth in Bulgaria predetermines the need for a more in-depth, scientific and analytical study of the

problem, which makes the subject under consideration extremely debatable and of great medico-social and public importance.

5. Methodology of the study

The research methodology used meets the requirements of modern science and allows solving the set goals and tasks. Empirical sociological research was conducted using survey method, documentary method, analysis of literary sources, sociological and statistical method of analysis and interpretation. Three selected groups of respondents were the subject of the research study: healthy women (pregnant, at the moment), working midwives, and students studying Midwifery. The subject of the scientific research is the awareness of pregnant women, working midwives and students about the indications for elective delivery, as well as the factors influencing when making a decision about the upcoming birth. 201 respondents, divided into three target groups, were covered:

- Group I - 100 Pregnant women. (Ambulatory monitored, hospitalized and healthy volunteers in the indicated centers for conducting the study).
- Group II – 50 midwives. (Practitioners of the profession on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria, working in the indicated centers (MBAL "Dr. Ivan Seliminski" AD, Sliven; DKC-2 EOOD Third Polyclinic, Sliven; MOBAL "Dr. Stefan Cherkezov" AD, Veliko Tarnovo; DKC-1 EOOD, Veliko Tarnovo).
- Group III– 51 students, specialty "Midwifery", studying at the Sliven Branch and the Veliko Tarnovo Branch of the MU "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" - Varna. Since female students of the "Midwifery" specialty are trained according to established curricula that are current for their entire training period, the results of the survey of their opinion are only reported in this dissertation. The proposals made by them regarding the reduction of the number of operative births without medical indications are taken into consideration.

In the methodology of the dissertation, the object, units and signs of observation are precisely defined. The sociological method - direct individual anonymous survey - was used to obtain data for empirical analysis. Specially developed questionnaires were used for each of the groups of investigated persons. The survey cards are a system of questionnaires adapted for the population in Bulgaria, as well as questionnaires developed for the specific survey.

The study was conducted after receiving permission from the Research Ethics Committee at MU-Varna - Minutes/Decision № 116, meeting on 04/28/2022. All participants in the study signed informed consent.

The chosen research methodology allows achieving the set goal and obtaining an adequate answer to the tasks solved in the dissertation work.

6. Characteristics and evaluation of the thesis

The scientific work of Assistant Professor Polina Dragneva is formatted according to the requirements and is presented in 159 pages and is structured in four main chapters. Contains - introduction, literature review, purpose, tasks, materials and methods, results and discussion, conclusions, recommendations and contributions, used literature and five appendices.

Illustrated with 48 figures and 47 tables. The bibliographic reference includes 242 literary sources, of which 56 are in Cyrillic and 186 are in Latin.

The first chapter provides an introduction and an extensive conceptual literature review (containing 60 pages) and covering 7 sections, and examines a significant part of the historical aspects of operative birth, medical indications, risk factors, prevalence and frequency of operative births, women's attitudes leading to the choice of operative delivery and of course strategies to reduce their number.

Emphasis is placed on the need for information for expectant mothers regarding methods of childbirth.

In the second chapter, the PhD student elaborates on the concept of empirical research. They are presented in detail - setting of the research; purpose, objectives and hypotheses; study contingent; units and signs of observation, research tools; methods and methodical tools, as well as mathematical and statistical data processing. Six research tasks and four hypotheses were formulated, with the main thesis being: "Women in our country are not sufficiently informed about elective childbirth: both about the benefits, as well as about the disadvantages and risks it entails. This could be a prerequisite for the increasing rate of births with CS in Bulgaria in recent years."

In the third chapter, a thorough analysis of the obtained results is presented. The dissertation work is well structured, giving the impression that at each stage, after presentation and analysis of the obtained results, a thorough discussion and conclusion is made. Chapter three is structured in six sections - the demographic characteristics of the researched persons; study of factors influencing women's choice of elective delivery; comparative analysis of the opinion of the studied groups regarding the reasons for choosing a cesarean section; awareness among pregnant women about elective delivery; study of the awareness and willingness of midwives and students to provide information about SC; approaches to reducing operative delivery.

In the fourth chapter, the conclusions, recommendations and contributions of the dissertation are presented, based on the own data. Six general conclusions are derived, which derive directly from the obtained own results and are directly related to the structure of the dissertation research. Based on the results, reasoned recommendations were made to various institutions.

7. Contributions and Significance of the Development for Science and Practice

The dissertation has scientific-theoretical contributions and contributions of a practical-applied nature. Of particular importance is the author's module for training pregnant women within courses for pregnant women, which informs expectant mothers about the methods of childbirth, the potential risks and complications of cesarean section. An information brochure has also been prepared, which informs women entering the maternity ward about the benefits of a normal birth.

Based on the results of the dissertation research, Assistant Professor Dragneva makes up-to-date and reasoned recommendations to various institutions:

- 1) Recommendation to the Bulgarian Association of Health Care Specialists (BASZG) and the Alliance of Bulgarian Midwives (ABA):

- Continuing education, which is part of the priorities of professional organizations in Bulgaria
 - To develop Standards for safe, high-quality midwifery care
- 2) Recommendation to Higher Education Institutions training midwives and nurses:
- To update the thematic plan of the study programs in "Midwifery" and "Special care for women with normal and pathological childbirth"
 - To study and popularize the TENS method as a highly successful non-drug pain reliever used by midwives in developed countries.
- 3) Recommendations to the management of the OB-departments of the regional hospitals and the Specialized Obstetrics and Gynecology Hospitals:
- Each OB-department/maternity ward to organize courses for pregnant women, which include comprehensive information related to the risks accompanying operative delivery. To inform patients about the benefits of normal delivery. This can also be achieved by offering flyers and brochures, talks, discussions, webinars and seminars. The information may also be provided in an appropriate electronic medium.

8. Assessment of the publications on the thesis

In connection with the dissertation work, assistant professor Polina Dragneva presents 5 scientific publications, being the first and only author.

The dissertation student took part in five international scientific forums with reports reflecting the results of the research.

9. Personal participation of the PhD student

In the proposed dissertation, the dissertator has a complete personal involvement and all the given conclusions, contributions and obtained results are his personal merit.

10. Abstract

The thesis abstract is developed according to the requirements and reflects the results made in the thesis.

11. Critical comments and recommendations

I have no critical remarks on the structure of the dissertation and the materials provided. I recommend assist. Polina Dragneva to continue her future research on this topical issue.

CONCLUSION

The presented dissertation has scientific, scientifically- applied and applied results, which make an original contribution to science and practice, and meet all the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LADAB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the LADAB and the Regulations of MU-Varna.

The dissertation shows that assist. Polina Dragneva possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty "Health Care Management", demonstrating qualities and skills for independent scientific research.

Because of the above, I confidently give my *positive assessment* of the conducted research, presented by the above reviewed dissertation, abstract, results and contributions, *and propose the honorable scientific jury to award the degree of Doctor of Education and Science* to assist. Polina Dragneva in the doctoral program "Health Care Management", field of higher education 7. Health and Sport, professional field 7.4. Public Health.

26.01.2024

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

Assoc. Prof. Milena Sandeva, PhD