

## OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Lilyana Rusanova, PhD

for a dissertation titled:

„Communication barriers between the social worker and the family members of social service users “

for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor of Philosophy"

in professional field 3.4 Social activities,

doctoral degree programme „Social activities “– Communication and behavioral strategies,

Faculty of Education of Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“,

department of Social work

*Autor: Anna Mihaylova Georgieva*

### **1. PhD studies, dissertation, abstract and publication data**

According to the Order of the Rector of the Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“ No RD20-1120/ 28.06. 2019 г. Anna Georgieva is enrolled as a full-time PhD student in the doctoral degree programme „Social activities “– Communication and behavioral strategies, at department of Social work. On the basis of Order No. RD -20-1153 of 01.07. 2022 г. and in accordance with Art. 74, para.1, item 1 of the Law on Higher Education and Art. 24, para 2 and para 6 of the Implementing Regulations of the Law on Higher Education, Art. 63, para. 3, and para 6 of the Rules on the Conditions and Procedure for Acquiring Science Degrees and Holding Academic Positions in Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” Anna Mihaylova Georgieva was discharged with the right to defense by the decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Education of 28. 06.2022, with Protocol № 15.

Anna Mihaylova has submitted seven publications related to the topic of the thesis, as well as a reference to the scientometric indicators that meet the minimum

national requirements under Art. 2b, par. 2 and 3 of the Law on Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and, respectively, Art. 24, par. 1 of the Implementing Regulations of the Law on Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (for the educational and scientific degree "Doctor of Philosophy"). A curriculum vitae has been submitted showing that Anna Georgieva holds a master's degree in psychology from the Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar". All this gives me grounds to consider that no violations have been committed in the procedure and all the requirements of the Rules on the Conditions and Procedure for Acquiring Science Degrees and Holding Academic Positions in Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" are complied. On the basis of the decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Education, Protocol № 15/28.06.2022 and according to the Order of the Rector of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" is determined the composition of the scientific jury for conducting an open procedure for the defense of the dissertation of Anna Mihaylova Georgieva on the topic „Communication barriers between the social worker and the family members of social service users”.

The dissertation contains 2 chapters with a total volume of 196 pages, illustrated with 23 figures and 6 tables. The dissertation is accompanied by monitoring protocol for the implementation of a survey among two types of residential-type institutions, differing in the way of financing. The author's research is supported by in-depth interviews with experts from the monitored institutions, clients, and their family members. The developed toolkit corresponds to the main objective of the dissertation, namely, to identify the barriers in the communication of the social worker in his interaction with the user of social services and his family and allows to identify the influence of the barriers in creating trust in the service provided. I would especially like to emphasize the merit of Anna Georgieva for the toolkit used through which the common barriers in professional communication

between social worker and client are differentiated, systematized and typologized. In this way, the research has a scientific and practical-applied character and can be used in the development of criteria aimed at increasing the quality of the services offered in Bulgaria. In particular, the research solves a series of tasks and draws adequate conclusions that, on the one hand, outline the specifics of communication in the provision of residential-type services for elderly people, and on the other hand, analyze the impact of barriers in communication, as well as the built trust in social service institutions. The chosen methodology of the study allows for comparisons between the two types of institutions which also gives importance to the developed doctoral thesis. On this basis, the main conclusions related to the identification of the specific barriers in communication, their complex nature, their dependence on the institutional and organizational environment, as well as the importance of the social worker's professional training are outlined. Practically, the main conclusions drawn as a result of the toolkit used can be used to justify new approaches in the training and implementation of social work in Bulgaria. In order to implement the author's research and to draw these conclusions, the PhD student Georgieva conceptually clarifies the features of social communication through the prism of leading models and theoretical concepts. The introductory part of the dissertation emphasizes the relevance of the researched problem, clearly states the research thesis, the aim, subject, and tasks of the dissertation research. The limitations of the research are pointed out, as the realized theoretical review refers to 121 sources summarizing the accumulated experience both in Bulgaria and synthesized from the world literature. Already with the introductory part, the personal commitment of the PhD student Georgieva and the in-depth knowledge of the existing problems in practice in field of communicational strategy and models. The implemented theoretical overview allows to outline very clearly the goals, subject, and tasks of the research, and thus to clarify the specifics of communication as a social

phenomenon. In chapter two the design of the empirical research is described. Barriers in communication are identified and the obtained results are analyzed, through which the author demonstrates the ability to process theoretical information to extract new data. The interpretation of the theoretical concepts fully corresponds to the subject and object of study and demonstrates a strong research capacity of the PhD student. The overall construction of the study is subordinated to an internal logic, gives the impression of clearly defined objectives and justified conclusions.

The abstract meets the requirements for its preparation and presents the results of the research conducted on the topic of the dissertation. A list of the author's publications is presented. All publications are the author's personal work and reflect the main points of the dissertation. From the list of participation in scientific forums provided, it is evident that the PhD student has participated in scientific forums relevant to the thesis.

## **2. Scientific contributions**

Within the dissertation and the included publications, there is an obvious priority to develop and implement research on barriers in communication between the social worker and clients and their relatives in the process of providing residential services for the elderly people. The abstract lists 5 contributions, which can be grouped as follows: two scientifically applied and three with practical relevance. Accepting fully the contributions formulated by the PhD student, I would highlight the following:

- 1) Comprehensive tracking of the essence of social communication, leading models, and theories, on the basis of which the professional image of social work is enriched.
- 2) Taking into account the specificity of the observed phenomena the potential barriers in the social worker's professional communication are systematized.

3) A significant weight in the PhD student's search is the realized research. By design and selected methods, the research allows to draw significant conclusions regarding to the types of barriers posed by communication between professional and client in the context of providing social services for elderly people. This kind of research has not been conducted in Bulgaria before, but it allows to establish mechanisms for self-regulation of the behavior of professionals.

4) The implemented research illuminates issues related to various barriers in the process of communication between a professional and a client, taking into account the trust in the institutions and the individual specifics of the participants in the process. The conclusions drawn are significant in terms of the scientific and practical manifestations of the social work profession and the importance of the professional training of social workers in Bulgaria.

5) Based on the philosophy of social work and especially on their ability to cause social change, the overall development allows to look for new training programs that encourage the development of communication skills among professionals and build attitudes to regulate their behavior when interacting with clients in the process of providing social services.

### **3. Conclusion**

The dissertation presented for discussion and defense is the result of a precise research, the results of which are of significant theoretical and applied significance. The thesis is well structured, the exposition is coherent and logically consistent and demonstrates the PhD student's marked interest and commitment to the problems under study.

The circumstances presented so far give me grounds to declare with conviction that the dissertation possesses all the necessary qualities of this type of

scientific work and I propose to the honourable jury to award to Anna Mihaylova Georgieva the scientific and educational degree "PhD".

22.08.2022 г.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Lilyana Rusanova', written in a cursive style.

/Assoc. Prof. Lilyana Rusanova, PhD /