



R E V I E W

In connection with a competition for an associate professor in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences in a professional direction 3.2. Psychology

From Prof. Dr. Emilia Alexieva - Department of General, Experimental, Developmental and Health Psychology at the Faculty of Philosophy of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski"

One candidate participated in the announced competition for associate professor: Aneta Petrova Atanasova, at the time of the announcement of the competition, chief assistant, PhD in the department of general, experimental, developmental and health psychology. She has held this academic position since 2011.

The submitted documents are in accordance with the requirements of the law on the development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

Biographical data

Mrs. Atanasova graduated with a degree in psychology from the University of St. Kliment Ohridski" in 1992 with two specializations: in clinical and counseling psychology and in psychology of development, education and culture, he also has an acquired pedagogical qualification (teacher of psychology, logic and ethics).

As a full-time doctoral student at the same department, he successfully defended a dissertation on the topic "Identification of specific learning disabilities in primary school age" in 2005.

From 2000 to the present, Mrs. Atanasova's professional development is related to the Psychology department at the University of St. Kliment Ohridski": between 2000 and 2002 he was a part-time assistant, from 2002 to 2004 - assistant, from 2004 to 2006 - senior assistant, from 2006 to the present he is the main assistant.

As an assistant, she is engaged in exercises in basic psychological disciplines in the specialty: experimental psychology first and second part, psychological measurement first and second part. As a main doctoral assistant, she holds courses in the bachelor's program in psychology of the specialty and in several master's programs: from 2021 she is a tenured teacher of 4 courses: "Experimental Psychology", Part Two, "Inclusive Education", "Academic Writing ", which he currently leads in the bachelor's program in Psychology. At the Ministry of Child and Adolescent and School Psychology, he currently teaches three courses ("Diagnosis and therapy of children with SEN" from 2016, "Inclusive education for children with SEN (Special Educational Needs)" from 2019, "Psychological assessment, counseling and therapeutic work with autistic disorders spectrum" - from 2021. Two more courses led to the same master's program: "Integration of children with SEN" - 2011 - 2018 and "Autism - psychological assessment and therapeutic work" - 2012 - 2020.

Mrs. Atanasova is a titular teacher of courses and in other bachelor's programs (BP). She teaches "Fundamentals of diagnostics" in BP "Special pedagogy" from 2018 to the present, as well as "Psychotherapeutic approaches and methods in clinical social work" in BP "Social activities" from 2018 to the present. For different durations, she taught two more courses: "Psychodiagnostics" at BP "Speech Therapy" between 2016 and 2020 and "Psychodiagnosis of children with behavioral deviations" at BP "Social Pedagogy" - between 2012 and 2015. Mrs. Atanasova is actively engaged not only in teaching activities, but also in scientific supervision of the research work of master's students: for the period 2014 - 2022, she supervised 20 master's theses of students from the Ministry of Child and Adolescent and School Psychology. She participated in two projects at SU, in the first one she was a member of the research team, and in the second one she was the leader: 1) Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on perinatal mental health (2020 - 2022 - team member) with the leader Assoc. K. Hancheva and 2) Social

inclusion and interpersonal competence of youth and adults with autism spectrum disorder – an individualized approach (2020 – 2023 - supervisor). Along with the active academic activity, Mrs. Atanasova also has a rich practical activity and clinical practice: until now, she has been a consultant to UNICEF since 2017, as well as an expert to the SGS since 2013. In different periods of varying duration, she was a consultant to the Center for inclusive education (2016 - 2019), academic mentor under the "Student Internships" project of the Ministry of Education and Culture (2014 - 2021), psychologist under support and protection projects for refugee children in BRC (2017 - 2018), trainer at RAABE (2013 - 2019), supervisor and trainer at SONIK "Start" (2013 - 2016), trainer at "Business Education Club" (2012 - 2018), trainer at PAMB (Professional Association of Mediators in Bulgaria) - 2012 - 2017, psychologist at Center for Social rehabilitation and integration of persons with problems from the autism spectrum in the city of Sofia (TSRILPAS - 2007 – 2010), as well as a psychologist in a special group for children with disabilities in CDG 17 in Sofia.

After graduating with a degree in Psychology, Mrs. Atanasova worked as a pedagogical advisor at "Dr. Peter Beron" Secondary School, Kostinbrod, between 1992 and 1998.

Mrs. Atanasova speaks English and Russian, she has published in Bulgarian, English and Russian

Publications

Ms. Atanasova has presented a list of 48 publications, of which 27 are independent and 21 co-authored, of which 8 are co-authored by the first author. To participate in the competition for associate professor, she submitted a total of 20 publications, including 2 independent monographs: "Specific disorders of the ability to learn" based on the defended dissertation work (Sofia, 2006) and "Diagnosis and assessment of autism spectrum disorders" (Sofia, 2018), 18 articles, reports at scientific conferences and congresses and chapters of collective monographs (in 11 he is the sole author and in 7 he is a co-author). From the report on the implementation of the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b of ZRASRB for scientific field 3. Social, economic and legal sciences for professional field 3.2. Psychology can see that the presented data completely satisfy them, as in some of the categories they exceed the minimum - e.g. according to the "Citations" indicator, with the required 50 points, she has presented 115. This indicator undoubtedly reflects the importance of published scientific research for the professional community in Bulgaria.

Evaluation of published scientific results

The research presented for the competition by Mrs. Atanasova can be structured around the following content centers: autism, family and autism, breastfeeding, learning, Covid-19, which shows that her research activity is aimed at current problems of the academic and social practice. A major substantive focus of her research is the assessment of autism spectrum disorders. This issue is developed in the monograph "Diagnosis and assessment of autism spectrum disorders" (Sofia, 2018), as well as in 8 articles, studies and reports at scientific conferences: - Self-naming and naming: how people with autism talk about themselves and how their loved ones describe them ("Mental Health", 2, 2022 - co-authored article); - Me and others – a new reading of the topic of relationships in people with autism spectrum disorder (conference report, Sofia, 2022); - The Boy Who Couldn't See Through Glass (co-authored article, S., 2021) - The family of the child with autism – focus of therapeutic interventions (report at a psychology congress – Sofia, 2017); - The interview as a method for assessing autism spectrum disorders (GSU, 2017) - Psychological assessment of autism spectrum disorder (GSU, 2016) - A different view of autism (Bulgarian journal of psychology, Sofia, 2015) - Therapeutic goals in autism spectrum disorders (GSU, 2010) In Bulgaria, traditionally, the research issues dedicated to autism are rather a priority of colleagues-pedagogues and speech therapists, insofar as it is precisely these specialists who inevitably encounter children and adults with autism in their practice. The great merit of Mrs. Atanasova is that she brings back this research problem within the framework of psychological science and practice with her work. From the publications cited, it can be seen that this issue has been the object of her research interest for years and finds its remarkable summary in her monograph from 2018. In it, the author summarizes her 18 years of clinical and research practice. This monograph reflects her most significant contribution to the study, research and understanding of autism. Conditionally, I would structure the content of this monograph, which is impressive in terms of volume and levels of analysis, into two parts. Starting from everyday "meetings" with individuals with autism reflected in children's fairy tales and films, most of which are masterpieces of modern cinematography, in the first part she makes an in-depth analysis of the psychological assessment of individuals with autism spectrum disorders, successively elucidating the specific features of their functioning (social-communicative skills, sensory-integrative features, cognitive features, adaptive capacity, independence and autonomy). The

second part (I remind you: conditionally separated) is dedicated to the psychological toolkit for analyzing the mental functioning of persons with autism spectrum disorders. Logically, this part begins with the presentation of the interview and the observation, in which the relevant information for understanding the mental functioning of these individuals is detailed. The next two chapters are also methodological - in them the author presents many different psychological tools for screening, diagnosis and assessment (e.g. "Screening for Autism in Children", "Early Screening for Autistic Traits", "Parental Assessment of Developmental Stages" and etc.), as well as qualitative evaluation methods (chapter 11), in which he also presents tools useful for practice ("Protocol for evaluation and development of communication skills", "Sleep diary", etc.).

The last chapter, the 13th, is dedicated to the family of the person with autism - an extremely valuable finale. In autism-type disorders, the whole family is affected, and usually, despite wanting to help their autistic loved one, family members simply don't know what to do or how to do it. It is this chapter that completes the comprehensive approach to the topic of diagnosing individuals with autism spectrum disorders.

As contributions in the monograph, I would single out, first of all, the in-depth analysis of the main areas of mental functioning of individuals with autism spectrum disorders, to which, in addition to the theoretical elements, numerous examples from the author's own clinical practice are considered. This part is very useful not only for practicing psychologists, who will find useful observations and clinical analyzes and summaries, but also for the academic community, who will more successfully connect theoretical analyzes with their clinical dimensions.

In the second place, I would single out the methodological part: the specificity of the methods used to implement the psychological assessment, the main areas of this assessment, the need to take into account the factors of the environment, as well as the rich toolkit, including the qualitative assessment methods, that specialists can use.

As a third contribution, I would point to the integration of theoretical elements with clinical observations and age specificities in the manifestations of autism spectrum disorders. From a practical point of view, I would point out another contribution: the planning of the psychological assessment according to the request of a parent or relative (in a child, adolescent

or adult with autism), a process that takes into account the delicate situation of the psychologist, who must simultaneously hear the request, but also consider how exactly to answer it in a way that ensures the necessary professional actions in the interest of the child, adolescent or adult with autism (this approach is presented in the study "Psychological assessment of disorders of the autism spectrum, GSU, 2016).

Finally, but not least, I would point out the emphasis on the integration of the evaluation process in the work of the psychologist with the contributions of the team of specialists, as well as the inclusion of the family of the person with autism in the overall process of therapy. It is this approach in clinical practice that provides the best in the interest of the patient/client. This approach is defended in Ms. Atanasova's monograph and other publications submitted for review.

The second substantive emphasis in Mrs. Atanasova's research practice is devoted to the psychological aspects of breastfeeding. The medical benefits of breastfeeding are well known to the general public, but not every family with a child is breastfed. Ms. Atanasova has set out to analyze current research and practices on breastfeeding and weaning. This topic is presented in 4 texts: - Breastfeeding and weaning - research, attitudes and practices, S., 2011 - Attitudes and beliefs of mothers about breastfeeding, S. 2011; - Long-term breastfeeding in modern society, S. 2014; - Attitudes and Beliefs of Mothers towards Breastfeeding and Weaning, Sofia, 2016 These texts are based on the results of conducted empirical research, which, although not carried out with representative samples, contains important practical contributions related to the factors influencing the decision to breastfeed, the factors that prevent breastfeeding, the duration of breastfeeding and the factors that determine it, the benefits of breastfeeding for the baby and for the mother, breastfeeding and weaning practices. These results would no doubt be very useful in counseling expectant mothers. I would formulate the indisputable contribution in this area as follows: a detailed psychological analysis of breastfeeding and the factors that determine it was made based on empirically established practices in Bulgaria. Another important focus of Ms. Atanasova's research is related to the study of specific disorders in the ability to learn, a topic that was presented in her doctoral thesis, but which she continued even after successfully defending it. The second monograph, the basis of which is the dissertation, is dedicated to this issue, but also two more texts in which she analyzes new technologies in the learning process: - Role of the psychologist

in inclusive education, article from 2018; - Computer-based support for basic education in reading (report in co-authorship, 2012); - Addressing Special Education Needs in Classroom with Cyber-Physical Systems for Social Application (co-authored chapter in collection, 2019). From the cited texts, it can be seen that Mrs. Atanasova is oriented towards the modern needs of practice, and her interest in school practice and the contributions of psychology are not incidental, but are connected with a clearly expressed sensitivity to the current significant problems of school practice.

The contributions here can be sought in the justification of the significance of the role of the psychologist in a school context in the framework of inclusive education on the one hand and in the analysis of the psychological effects of the application of modern technologies for solving specific educational tasks on the other. Mrs. Atanasova does not remain indifferent to the problems that arose at all levels in society due to the Covid-pandemic. Two co-authored texts are devoted to this issue: - Peripartum depression during a pandemic. Comparative data for Bulgaria from an international study (S., 2022) and - How the actions of the Bulgarian institutions to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic affected the mental health of pregnant women and mothers of small babies (S., 2022). As can be seen from the titles, Ms. Atanasova remains true to the problematics that are constantly present in her research and offers her own perspective to the effect of Covid on specific target groups, and comparative international research broadens the horizon of her analysis. It is in this specific perspective to the impact of the Covid pandemic that I see another contribution to the practice in Bulgaria.

As a summary, I would note the following more important contributions in the publications of the chief assistant. Dr. Aneta Atanasova:

- A significant contribution to the study, research and understanding of the problem of autism in different age groups and at different levels of functioning (theoretical and clinical contribution);

- An in-depth analysis of the process of psychological assessment of persons with autism spectrum disorders was carried out, with the specific features of their functioning (social-communicative skills, sensory-integrative features, cognitive features, adaptive capacity, independence and self-reliance) being consistently clarified. This contribution is both theoretical and practical;

- A methodology was developed for the psychological assessment of persons with autism spectrum disorders (theoretical and practical contribution);
- An analysis of the psychological aspects of breastfeeding has been made, which is based on specific empirical studies in Bulgaria (practical contribution);
- An in-depth analysis of the psychological effects of new technologies in education on the education of children with special educational needs (theoretical and practical contribution) has been implemented.
- The specific psychological effects of the Covid-crisis on specific target groups in Bulgaria (pregnant women, mothers of small children, women with postpartum depression) have been analyzed, thereby supporting their psychological counseling (practical contribution).

Conclusion

As can be seen, the research problem with which the head assistant Dr. A. Atanasova is aimed at a problem that is significant for science and for clinical practice. Empirical studies are carried out at a high scientific level and are reflected in authoritative Bulgarian and international publications.

Based on everything that has been said so far, I confidently give my positive assessment of the scientific publications of the assistant professor. Dr. Aneta Atanasova and I take the liberty of recommending to the honorable scientific jury to choose her as an associate professor in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences in a professional direction 3.2. Psychology.

16/08/2023

SIGNATURE:

Sofia

Prof. E. Alexieva