

## OPINION

By: *by Prof. Ergyul Tair Redzheb, PhD, D.Sc.*  
*Department Psychology,*  
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*Professional field 3.2. Psychology*

Regarding: Public defence of a PhD thesis for the award of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”, Area of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences; Professional field: 3.2 Psychology (Health Psychology); Department General, Experimental, Developmental and Health Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

Doctoral candidate: *Petya Veskova Pandurova*

Dissertation title: *„Psychosocial correlates of overweight and obesity”*

Scientific jury member’s opinion is prepared following Order No. RD-38-249, 16.05.2023 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

### **1. Information for the PhD student**

Petya Veskova Pandurova was a full-time doctoral student in the Department of General, Experimental, Developmental and Health Psychology at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski" in the Professional field 3.2. Psychology (Health Psychology) in the period 2019-2023. She obtained a bachelor's degree in Psychology (2014) at NBU and a master's degree in Health Psychology (2018) at Sofiya University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Pandurova has additional qualifications as a psychotherapist working with children and adolescents (2016-2020), psychodrama therapist (2008-2015), etc.

### **2. General characteristics of the presented dissertation**

The dissertation has a total volume of 223 pages (186 pages of main text), including: introduction; three chapters (theoretical, methodological and empirical); summary and conclusion; references and appendix. The presented content is well illustrated with 32 tables and 34 graphs. The bibliographic reference contains 323 sources, of which 18 titles are in Bulgarian and 305 in English, reflecting principal authors and empirical studies on the problem under consideration from the last two decades.

The presented manuscript is dedicated to a topic significant for individual and social functioning, related to overweight and psychosocial factors determining eating behavior and physical activity. Based on an comprehensive theoretical review, an ecological approach is derived to examine multiple factors directly or indirectly influencing eating behavior associated with body weight gain. Five hypotheses are formulated to test the relationships between psychological, social and environmental factors, eating behavior patterns and physical activity that may have an effect on body weight. The study sample included 712 individuals aged 16 to 76 ( $M=40.24$ ;  $SD=14.58$ ), dominated by female (84.3%). A good impression is made by the scientific style of the presentation and the awareness of the PhD student, both in terms of phenomenon studied and in terms of the statistical methods used for data analysis. The presented theoretical approaches and applied methods of analysis are correctly chosen and enable the author to carry out her in-depth theoretical research and support the results of her empirical research with arguments.

### **3. Evaluation of the obtained scientific and scientific-applied results**

The main scientific and scientific-applied results of the conducted research are located in the separate chapters of the dissertation, which is structured according to a classic pattern with clearly distinguished theoretical, methodological and analytical parts. The theoretical overview comprehensively presents the essence of the research problem and the health consequences of overweight and obesity, along with the links between eating behavior and physical activity. Seven approaches to overweight are systematically derived, starting from the psychosomatic theory emphasizing negative experiences, the external effect theory (excessive food consumption stimulated by sensory and hedonic food signals), cognitively restricted eating, etc. The main focus is on the integrative ecological model, inferring several levels of influence (individual, interpersonal, etc.) on eating behavior, alongside policies to indirectly promote health behaviors and limit behaviors associated with chronic diseases and obesity, applied in the present work.

In the second chapter, the organizational framework of the empirical study is presented in detail. The aim and tasks of the research are correctly formulated. A wide psychological toolkit was applied to evaluate the derived factors, and their psychometric characteristics were presented, testifying to the adequacy of the sample with the scales used (The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy, KMO), validity of the scales for the implementation of factor analysis (Bartlett test of sphericity) and high internal consistency of the scales (Cronbach's alpha coefficient).

In the third chapter, the verification of the five research hypotheses was successfully implemented with a series of dispersion, correlation and regression analyses. The obtained multiple empirical results are successively presented in tabular and/or graphical form. In summary, the results confirm the influence of factors from different levels according to the ecological model. Factors at the social and interpersonal level (support for a healthy lifestyle from the family), physical activity, etc. have a direct and/or indirect effect on healthy eating. Loss of control over eating behavior, eating stimulated by taste qualities of the food and social situation, family eating habits and stress have a significant effect on unhealthy eating. Decreased physical activity and higher levels of emotional eating have a direct effect on weight gain. The obtained results also have a high practical value for counseling and psychotherapeutic practice, for health promotion and for the prevention of overweight.

#### **4. Evaluation of scientific and scientific-applied contributions**

The dissertation has significant scientific and scientific-applied contributions, among which we must point out: 1) the conducted in-depth theoretical overview of the psychological factors contributing to overweight and physical activity; 2) the applied integrative methodological framework for investigating the problem (including the development of questionnaires to assess everyday dietary patterns, supporting social and contextual factors); 3) enriching empirical knowledge about the influence of a number of individual, social and contextual factors on eating behaviors (healthy, unhealthy, emotional, etc.) and physical activity, deriving behaviors with a direct effect on increasing body weight (decreasing physical activity, higher levels of emotional eating, etc.); 4) applicability of the obtained results for the prevention of overweight, through interventions at the individual (consultative and therapeutic) and social level to support a healthy lifestyle.

#### **5. Evaluation of dissertation publications**

The author presented a list of six publications, five of which are collective (one in print) in Bulgarian and one independent (in print) in English. All publications are on the subject of the dissertation and have been presented at national scientific forums or published in scientific publications, providing publicity to the problem under consideration before the academic community.

## **6. Evaluation of the summary of disertaion**

The summary of dissertation has a volume of 63 pages and correctly reflects of both structure and content of the PhD thesis.

## **7. Critical notes, recommendations and questions**

The dissertation was developed at a high scientific level, with the doctoral student correctly pointing out the limitations of the study related to the disproportionate gender sample, the wide range of self-assessment tools, the lack of objective criteria for evaluating social and obesogenic support of a healthy lifestyle, etc. A more synthesized presentation and a smaller volume of the summary of dissertation may also be recommended.

## **8. Conclusion**

The dissertation of Petya Veskova Pandurova is a complete and original manuscript, including a comprehensive theoretical overview of the researched problem, reasoned theoretical premises and a successfully implemented own empirical research. The set goals and tasks of the research have been fully fulfilled, and results of a scientific and scientific-applied nature have been achieved. I believe that the presented dissertation meets the mandatory requirements of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRB), the Rules for the Application of the DASRB, and the internal normative documents of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor". All this gives me the reason to give my positive assessment for the dissertation on the topic "Psychosocial correlates of overweight and obesity" and to propose to the respected members of the scientific jury to award Petya Veskova Pandurova the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in area of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field: 3.2 Psychology (Health Psychology).

August, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023

Signature:

(Prof. Ergyul Tair, PhD, D.Sc.)