

**SOFIA UNIVERSITY “ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI”
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY**

REVIEW

From Prof. Sonya Karabeliova, PhD

on the topic of a doctoral thesis:

“Personality and Professional Determinants of Alexithymia”

for the attainment of the educational and scientific degree of 'Doctor'
in the field of 3.2 'Psychology' (Cultural and Differential Psychology)

Author of the doctoral thesis: Lyubomira Ivailova Tsvetkova

1. Relevance and Significance of the Developed Scientific Problem

The dissertation presented for review is dedicated to a relatively new topic in both the field of health psychology and differential psychology. The topic is relevant as alexithymia has been relatively underexplored, and its connection to psychosomatic symptoms contributes to a deeper understanding. The significance of the studied issue is heightened by the fact that the dissertation presents data on the relationship between alexithymia as a construct and perceived stress levels and professional burnout, which reflect on well-being and quality of life.

2. Understanding of the Problem

The work presents numerous theoretical concepts regarding the analyzed constructs, demonstrating that the doctoral candidate is well-versed in existing perspectives on the developed topic. This is supported by the bibliography of the dissertation, which includes 216 literary sources, predominantly in English (208). The presented analysis of the theoretical

material on the topic showcases the candidate's ability to research, analyze, synthesize, and draw conclusions regarding key concepts in the work.

3. Research Methodology

The chosen research methodology aligns with the objectives and tasks of the dissertation. The following scales and questionnaires were used:

- Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20, Bagby, Parker & Taylor, 1994)
- Big Five personality traits model (Mini IPIP, Donnellan, Oswald, Baird, & Lucas, 2006)
- Short Dark Triad (SD3, Jones & Paulhus, 2014)
- Adult Attachment Scale (AAS, Collins, Read, 1990)
- Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI, Kristensen et al., 2005)
- Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983)
- Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985)
- Affective Well-being Questionnaire (Warr, 1990)

Socio-demographic data of the participants were also collected. The chosen instruments were carefully selected and relevant to the study's objectives.

4. Characterization and Evaluation of the Dissertation Work and Contributions

The title of the dissertation work fully corresponds to the researched problems. The wording used in the title provides a generalized description of the thematic framework of the study. The doctoral candidate has collected data that are part of the planned research area.

The work is structured into an introduction, theoretical and empirical sections, conclusion, and bibliography.

The conceptualization of each category begins with a historical perspective and continues with an analytical tracing of different viewpoints, supported by the analysis of numerous specific studies.

The dissertation is developed within 213 standard pages and contains an introduction, six main chapters, structured from the perspective of the theoretical and empirical study of the issue, conclusion, and bibliography. The used literary sources are relevant to the researched issue, with most of

them from the last 10-15 years, which further contributes to a high evaluation. The dissertation includes 69 tables and 1 figure.

In the theoretical part of the thesis, contemporary concepts are extensively presented. The theoretical assumptions for studying alexithymia are described based on emotional regulation and dysregulation, as well as the formation and classification of the construct. Additionally, the etiology of alexithymia as a construct is presented, with attention to cultural, psychosocial, and bio-genetic factors. A special place in the first chapter of the dissertation is dedicated to the cognitive deficits in the presence of alexithymia, the relationship of alexithymia with psychosomatics and psychopathology, types of alexithymia, and the neuropsychological foundations of alexithymia. Furthermore, the doctoral candidate accurately presents studies related to methods of measuring alexithymia and the validation of this construct.

The second chapter of the dissertation presents studies on the prevalence of alexithymia. L. Tsvetkova provides an overview of the relationship between alexithymia and attachment style, level of professional burnout and perceived stress, life satisfaction, and professional well-being, as well as personality characteristics as predictors of alexithymia.

All of this supports the ideas of the doctoral candidate, on which the theoretical and empirical model of the study is built. In this sense, it can be said that this allows for the derivation of a theoretical framework of key concepts, the relationship between which is exhaustively discussed.

The content of the literature review corresponds to the research theme and presents views on the essence of the analyzed concepts and reported results in the literature regarding the relationships between them. The chosen structure of the presentation demonstrates a detailed and in-depth understanding of the subject matter.

The empirical part of the dissertation is conditionally divided into three chapters.

The third chapter of the dissertation presents the setup of the empirical study and the justification of the theoretical model of the study. It includes the aims, tasks, hypotheses, and methods of the dissertation work. The aims

and tasks are clearly formulated. Four main hypotheses regarding the relationships between the analyzed constructs are put forward.

The doctoral candidate approaches the resolution of the set tasks with scientific seriousness and chooses an adequate approach. The set goals and tasks, as well as the nature of the presumed dependencies between the studied constructs, determine the statistical methods applied in the data analysis. These methods include techniques from descriptive and deductive statistics, used to establish the variation of the studied phenomena among different respondents and their interrelationships.

In this part of the dissertation, the questionnaires and scales used for the empirical study are correctly described, along with the methodology and procedure of the research.

The fourth chapter presents the sample on which the empirical study was conducted, describing the respondents, the psychometric characteristics of the used questionnaires and scales, based on the results of the applied factor analyses and those for testing internal consistency.

My remarks concerning this section are technical. I believe that in the main text of the dissertation, it is not necessary to present separate tables with results for the reliability of subscales from individual questionnaires. The data can be indicated in the tables with the results of factor analyses. The tables containing results from analyses of internal consistency can be placed in the appendices. Despite these notes, I consider that the doctoral candidate has correctly managed one of her main tasks.

In the fifth chapter of the dissertation, the results of the applied deductive statistical methods are presented, demonstrating the differences in the studied constructs depending on the investigated demographic factors, as well as the relationships between phenomena. The results include data from:

- T-tests and one-way ANOVA for independent samples to test significant differences in the studied phenomena based on demographic characteristics;
- Correlation analyses to examine the relationships between the studied phenomena;

- Multiple regression analysis to test the effects of personality traits and professional characteristics on alexithymia and its facets. Additionally, the effect of overall alexithymia on certain personality traits, life satisfaction, and professional well-being has been examined.

The results of the applied statistical analyses are accurately described. The presented tabular and graphical material is of good quality and high utility. My only technical note for this section is that presenting the results in tabular form does not imply their detailed description in the text.

In the sixth chapter, a presentation and summary of the obtained results are provided, along with a detailed discussion of the verification of the raised hypotheses. The application of the obtained results to practice is also discussed.

The positive evaluation of the obtained results can be recognized through the following analyses and summaries of the conducted study:

- a. Appropriate questionnaires and scales have been selected, whose psychometric characteristics meet the research standards. Some of the methodologies are applied for the first time in the Bulgarian socio-cultural context.
- b. The empirical approach provides data for establishing causal relationships and dependencies, allowing hypotheses to be tested with high reliability.
- c. I believe that the summaries and comparative analyses with data from other studies are adequate and have specific practical applicability in consultancy practice.

In the conclusion of the dissertation, the main results are briefly presented, discussing their application in consultancy practice.

The main contribution of the dissertation work is the in-depth critical and comparative analysis of the obtained data with similar studies. The conclusions are relevant to the objectives and objectively reflect the research results. They demonstrate Lyubomira Tsvetkova's competence to analyze and interpret results from empirical studies and to draw conclusions for practical applications. All of this serves as an indicator of her deep research interest in the examined issues.

The contributions are clearly formulated and well-supported with arguments, objectively reflecting the achievements of the dissertation work. The presented contributions could be further expanded in terms of the practical applicability of the entire development.

5. Critical Remarks

My critical remarks are mainly technical in nature and do not diminish the significance of the dissertation research.

6. Abstract

I believe that the abstract reflects the main parameters of the topic, presenting both theoretical analyses and experimental results. The text fully meets the requirements.

Lyubomira Tsvetkova presents four publications, two of which are independent and two co-authored. Additionally, four reports are described – two independent and two co-authored.

7. Recommendations

My recommendations to the doctoral candidate pertain to continuing and deepening the research from the perspective of professional burnout, especially among doctors and medical professionals, as this would further contribute to her work. Additionally, based on the results of the research, a handbook could be developed using the utilized tools to serve as a quick screening and diagnostic tool for specialists.

CONCLUSION

Lyubomira Tsvetkova's dissertation work represents a comprehensive and in-depth study of a current scientific topic, with the obtained results having potential applications in consultancy practice. The dissertation and its related publications meet the requirements and bibliometric criteria of the Law on Academic Staff Development in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulation for its implementation for awarding the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor."

Considering the relevance of the dissertation's topic, the in-depth theoretical analysis of the research data, and the successfully conducted study, I confidently give my positive evaluation and recommend that the members of the Academic Jury vote positively for awarding the educational and scientific degree of “Doctor” to **Lyubomira Ivailova Tsvetkova in the professional field 3.2. Psychology (Cultural and Differential Psychology)**.

15/08/2023

Sofia

Reviewer:

(Prof. Sonya Karabeliova, PhD)