

REVIEW

By Prof. Rumyana Krumova-Pesheva, DSc

of a dissertation

for the acquisition of the education and scientific degree “PHD” in professional direction 3.2. Psychology, Cultural and differential psychology (in Bulgarian language)

on dissertation topic **“The role of personality traits and social support in overcoming existential crisis”**

Author of dissertation: Boyko Vasilev Panchev

Scientific Supervisor: prof. Irina Zinovieva, DSc

Boyko Panchev’s dissertation is dedicated to a significant topic in the modern world – the topic of existential crisis in their intrapsychic and psychosocial dimensions and equivalents. The diverse challenges such as emotional problems, economic difficulties, losses, a sense of coercion and pressure limit the sense of free and satisfying functioning and present a person with the need to seek and find new connotations of his life. The high level of dynamism and traumatism makes research guidelines related to the meaning of existence and its modifications even more necessary. In accordance with the minimum national requirements, 55 points have been met.

The dissertation is situated on 210 pages and contains an introduction, 5 chapters, a conclusion and the references used. The data obtained from the empirical study is illustrated by means of 52 tables and one figure. There are 164 literary sources in Bulgarian, English and French, which are fully relevant to the issues discussed in the dissertation. Total of 6 publications of the

topic are presented in scientific journals, participation in two national and three international conferences and in one scientific project. This is a sign of the doctoral student's lasting and sustained interest and commitment to the chosen topic. The autoreferat covers 42 pages and is an informative, synthesized and analytical summary of the different parts of the dissertation with the main accents in them.

In the introduction of the dissertation the author presents the dimensions of the concept of "existential crisis". He associates the concept with the objective characteristics of social reality, the presence of unresolved internal conflicts, high level of traumatism, and also with the understanding of resilience and post-traumatic growth. The doctoral student emphasizes a range of emotional experiences and cognitive attitudes leading to a change in an individuals' s understanding of objective and subjective reality. Emphasizes the role of social support as a factor directly related to posttraumatic disease in its pathological or stimulating dimensions.

The first chapter "Theoretical approaches to the study of existential crisis, resilience and social support" consists of a comprehensive and in-depth review, including a definition and description of the concept of "existential crisis" as well as the reasons for the occurrence of such a mental state. The doctoral student has included different types of existential crisis such as : crisis of free choice and responsibility, crisis related to one's own mortality, crisis of connectedness with others, emotional crisis etc. In a convincing and informative way, Boyko Panchev reveals a number of symptoms illustrating crisis conditions: depressive, anxious, etc. He puts an emphasis on the aspect of affective suffering, despair, helplessness, lack of sense of integrity, vulnerability, guilt, etc. Through the views of Frankl, Joshi and Thompson, the author discusses the dimensions of loss of meaning and purpose, as well as the experience of limitations, health problems, addictions, communication difficulties, etc. The issue of identity crises during different age stages is addressed in an appropriate manner along with the view on the relationship between the crisis and the personal transformation of the person through the ideas of resistances and alternatives to change arising from individual and collective sustainability. The PhD student takes into account legitimately the cultural characteristics as well as the cognitive, behavioral and existential components of resilience as a mental construct. Psychosocial factors that aid resilience have been presented in a convincing manner through the ideas of Connor and Davidson, Stockdale, Freud, Chris and others. Boyko Panchev has reflected in an informative way the phenomenon of social

support in its structural, functional and institutional aspects. Correlations between crisis, personality, group, social support and resilience have been presented.

The second chapter of the dissertation is defined as “post-traumatic growth (PTI) – definition, description: and includes the questions of causes, symptoms and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder. The doctoral student has emphasized the importance of post-traumatic growth as a multidisciplinary concept through the ideas of cognitive, humanistic, existential psychology etc. Boyko Panchev reviews the criteria for its occurrence quoting a large number of scientific studies emphasizing the role of individual and general trauma.

In chapter three “The exploration of changes occurring in the attitudes towards self and the world, emotional regulation and the role of social support in emotional crisis” the doctoral student reviews the relationship between emotional vulnerability in a crisis and its personal “response” between the void of depression and the belonging to life. The author conducted a study with 71 subjects which shows that the successful go through of an existential crisis leads to an increased confidence in one’s own capabilities; a traumatic experience can modify meaningful self-determinations and relationships with others and social support leads to a sense of positive integration and sustainability.

The fourth chapter refers to the theoretical framework of empirical research on the role of personality characteristics and social support in dealing with existential crises. The author has presented the purpose and the tasks of his study in a professional manner. Three research hypotheses have been outlined. The instruments are selected with great precision in order to achieve the scientific purposes. The statistical methods and procedure are also selected and implemented with persuasiveness and professionalism. In order to conduct the research skillfully combined questionnaires of familiar but also new to the Bulgarian cultural context methodologies have been used. These instruments provide good opportunities for in-depth study of the phenomena of existential crises, as well as for enriching the diagnostic methods used in Bulgaria.

The fifth chapter covers the results of the empirical study. It includes 130 participants divided by age, gender, place of residence, education, marital status and presence of children. The psychometric characteristics of the scales used are fully substantiated. The author applies great sensitivity and attention in outlining the psychological portrait of people who have experienced an existential crisis. Special emphasis is placed on their differences and specific experiences

compared to those of the general population. The degrees of sustainability, the peculiarities of self-esteem, acceptance of oneself etc. are examined. Data on the social support scale are based on levels of interpersonal trust and group belonging.

The passive and active coping styles are problematized through mental disengagement, ventilation of emotions, acceptance, planning etc. The relationship between personality characteristics, social support, coping styles, and post-traumatic growth are examined by means of correlation and regression analysis.

The discussion of the results shows that sustainability as personality trait is a guarantee for effective and lasting overcoming of crisis periods. In addition, social support is an early predictor of an adaptive attitude towards overcoming existential traumatism. Post-traumatic growth is directly related to the personality active coping, acceptance of oneself and the level of self-awareness. The author points out opportunities for future research on the topic, focusing on a deeper study of the sociocultural context, as well as the subsequent study of possible personal transformations in crises in the context of unpredictability and sudden change. The conclusion notes convincingly the importance of effectively overcoming existential crisis states as an attempt to increase personal resilience. The contributions of the paper related to the formation of a model for studying the relationship between individual characteristics, social support, coping strategies, attitudes towards oneself and posttraumatic growth are presented in a correct and professional manner.

In conclusion: I believe that the dissertation work contains important scientific and practical value in the field of psychological theory and practice as well as in the field of psychological counseling. The relevance and significance of the topic being developed are indisputable. The idea of conducting such multicomponent empirical research is presented comprehensively, precisely and professionally. The dissertation is a reflection of author's abilities for planning, organizing and implementing in-depth research projects, as well as his serious interest in the theoretical analysis and synthesis of interpersonal, sociocultural and intrapsychic phenomena. Based on the above I strongly recommend to the scientific jury to award Boyko Panchev with the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.2. Psychology, Cultural and differential psychology (in Bulgarian language).

Prepared the review:.....

(Prof. R. Krumova-Pesheva)

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