

## **REWIEV**

Prepared by:

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*Regarding:* Public defense 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, Department “General, Experimental, Developmental and Health Psychology”, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

*Doctoral candidate:* **Svetoslav Kaloyanov Hristov**

*Dissertation title:* „**SUBJECTIVE SOCIAL STATUS – ENVY, ANGER AND WELL-BEING**”

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### **Information for the PhD student**

Svetoslav Kaloyanov Hristov is a doctoral student in „Health Psychology“ (since 2021) at the Department of „General, Experimental, Developmental and Health Psychology“ at Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“. He holds a bachelor's degree in „Psychology“ (2017) and a master's degree in „Social and Legal Psychology“ (2019) from the same university. His professional experience includes diagnostic and expert work at the Institute of Psychology of the Ministry of Interior (2018-2020), psychological and therapeutic work with children at the Autism Today Association (2017-2018) and at 149 „Ivan Hadzhiyski“ Secondary School (since March 2024).

### **General characteristics and evaluation of the presented dissertation**

The dissertation presented by Svetoslav Hristov is on a current and socially significant topic, which explores the influence of social inequalities on individual health and well-being. The presented dissertation has its undeniable scientific and applied scientific contributions to establishing not only of the objective factors determining well-being, but also their subjective experience in the Bulgaria. Context marked over the last 30 years by a dramatic increase in economic and social inequalities, which are reflected in the deteriorated physical and mental

health of the nation, contributing to the lower average life expectancy in the country compared to the average European levels.

Svetoslav Hristov aims to establish the relationships between subjective social status, status anxiety, dimensions of status consciousness, envy, anger and different aspects of well-being. The author's correctly derived theoretical and conceptual model tests both the direct influence of subjective social status on well-being (subjective, mental and general), and the indirect influence (mediating relationships) of status anxiety, status consciousness, envy and anger in the relationship between subjective social status and well-being.

The dissertation has a total volume of 265 pages, of which 209 pages are the main text and 56 pages are the reference and appendix. The presented content is adequately illustrated with 27 tables and 38 figures. The reference contains 342 sources, of which 20 are in Bulgarian, 1 in Russian and 321 in English, reflecting both classical and recognizable authors in the researched issues, as well as results of contemporary empirical research.

The structure of the work is classical, with three clearly defined main parts. First, a theoretical part, in which the studied constructs are presented – subjective social status, envy and anger, well-being. Second, an empirical part, in which the organization and results of the empirical study are presented. And a third part, in which the summary of the results, their interpretation is realized, correctly indicating not only the contributions, but also the limitations of the study and future directions for research. The appendix provides the research tools and translations of the methods adapted for the purposes of this study.

The theoretical overview of the dissertation in the first chapter systematically and meaningfully presents the main studied constructs. The first subchapter is dedicated to subjective social status, and the origin and historical development of social inequalities, the conceptualization of social status, the relationships between subjective social status and objective factors are presented in detail and in depth, as well as the relationships with the individual components of well-being (satisfaction with life, positive and negative affects, etc.) and health (physical and mental). The second subchapter deduces the essence and relationships of anger and envy with

subjective social status, health and well-being. The third subchapter presents the two main approaches to well-being – subjective and mental, and the main relationships with social status and health are outlined. An integrative approach to well-being is adopted, and for the purposes of the dissertation a set of instruments is selected, related separately to subjective (life satisfaction, positive and negative affect) and to psychological well-being (with six main components), as well as their combined measurement through a common index (Pemberton Happiness Index). This integrative approach allows Svetoslav Hristov not only to link his results with those available in the literature, but also to present a more comprehensive picture of the relationships of subjective social status with the individual components of well-being in the Bulgarian context.

My overall impression of the theoretical part of the dissertation is positive, there is evidence of Svetoslav Hristov's in-depth knowledge of the topic under study, along with his skills in synthesizing the many available sources, as well as his competence in deriving his own research problem in an area where numerous empirical studies are being carried out based on different theoretical approaches.

Chapter two is devoted to the organization and results of the empirical study. The aim and objectives of the study are presented based on the author's derived theoretical and conceptual model, which also graphically illustrates the main constructs of the study. Seven hypotheses are formulated, suggesting direct and indirect relationships between subjective social status and well-being (subjective, mental and conscious) on the one hand, and relationships with status anxiety, status consciousness, envy and anger, on the other.

The organization of the study and the sample implemented are correctly presented in terms of the number of respondents and basic socio-demographic characteristics – gender, age, education, place of residence, etc. There is a random sample of 490 respondents with an average age of 33 years, disproportionate by gender (65.3% women) and education (64% higher education). Slightly more than half of the respondents (51.4%) are single, and nearly 66% do not have children, which can be expected, considering that 44% of the sample is under 25 years old. During the study, 33% said that they do not work, with 23.4% having no income of their own, and nearly

37% having income up to 1,500 leva per month. Almost half of the respondents (48.3%) cannot define their political beliefs categorically, and in terms of religious beliefs they are distributed relatively evenly between atheism, weak and moderate religiosity.

The research tools include a battery of the following psychological measurements: 1) A single-item MacArthur Subjective Social Status Scale (Adler et al., 2000); 2) Status Anxiety Scale (Keshabyan & Day, 2020) with five items; 3) Status Consciousness Scale (Alba et al., 2014) with 45 items; 4) The Benign and Malicious Envy Scale (Lange & Crusius, 2015), containing 10 statements with 5 items for each dimension; 5) Anger subscale from the Multidimensional Aggression Scale (Kalchev, 2009) consisting of 10 items; 6) The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS - Diener et al., 1985) with 5 items, 7) The Positive and Negative Experiences Scale (SPANE - Diener et al., 2009) including 12 items; 8) Psychological Well-being Questionnaire (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) with 18 statements; 9) Subscale “Remembered well-being” from the Pemberton Happiness Index (Hervas & Vazquez, 2013). The instruments are presented in detail, including the procedure for adapting the scales, which are used for the first time in the present study (including scales for Subjective social status, Status anxiety, Status consciousness, Benign and Malicious envy and Remembered Well-being from Pemberton Happiness Index).

The adequacy of the collected data was verified by the Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin test and the Bartlett test, the established factor structure of the questionnaires used for the first time in this study by exploratory factor analysis using the Principal Axis Factoring method with promax rotation are completely correct and adequate for the sample. The results obtained regarding the factor solutions and the extracted factor weights on the scales and subscales of the instruments used (with minor exceptions for the subscales of the Status Consciousness Scale), the internal consistency coefficients of the items, measured by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, indicate good psychometric characteristics and are evidence of the validity of the instruments used for the purposes of this study.

The statistical processing of the results of the empirical study was carried out through a series of descriptive, dispersion, correlation, regression and mediation

analyses, which provided the doctoral student with a multitude of results, which he correctly presented and described (in tables and graphs) in the second part of the second chapter. The results obtained testify to the significant role of some socio-demographic characteristics such as age, education, marital status, etc. For example, younger individuals (up to 25 years old) define their subjective social status as lower, experience higher levels of status anxiety, benign and malicious envy towards older individuals. Individuals with higher levels of education, higher levels of income and occupying higher positions in the professional hierarchy demonstrate higher levels of subjective social status and psychological well-being. Consistent with previous research, married and cohabiting couples share a higher level of psychological well-being, and having children is associated with higher life satisfaction.

In summary, the results of the conducted hierarchical regression analyses show that subjective social status predicts changes in almost all aspects of well-being, and this relationship is preserved even when controlling for the influence of socio-demographic characteristics and objective indicators of social status (the exception is the “Autonomy” subscale in accordance with previous studies). The implemented mediation analyses establish partial mediation and statistically significant direct and indirect effects of subjective social status on life satisfaction, positive and negative affect, and psychological well-being. At the same time, the mediation analysis for the role of envy and anger establishes a significant indirect effect through malicious envy of subjective social status on life satisfaction, and there is also a significant direct effect. Malicious envy and anger have a significant mediating effect on the relationship of subjective social status on positive and negative affect.

A positive impression is made by the summary of the many results found in a separate third chapter, in which Svetoslav Hristov not only interprets, but also tries to integrate his own results in the context of the theoretical framework and the available research in the studied issue. The presented statistical processing of the data, their tabular and graphical presentation and correct interpretation are proof of the doctoral student's skills to conduct an independent empirical study with multiple variables, the results of which he can adequately explain and link to the available research in the

field. At the same time, he maintains his sober assessment, taking into account the limitations of the current study, and is able to derive future directions for work.

### **Evaluation of the scientific and scientific-applied contributions**

The dissertation work has its undeniable scientific and scientific-applied contributions, among which we should point out:

First, in the theoretical point of view, the carried out in-depth and systematic review of a number of psychological constructs, on the basis of which an original theoretical-conceptual model was created, which analyzes the role of status and affective variables in the relationship between social status and well-being. Special emphasis should be placed on the proposed reconceptualization of social status, through its subjective aspects, which expands the interpretative framework of the model.

Secondly, in terms of methodology, a battery was applied, in which, in addition to instruments established in the Bulgarian sociocultural context, questionnaires primarily adapted for the purpose are used to measure status anxiety, status consciousness, benign and malicious envy, as well as remembered well-being, which demonstrate good construct validity and internal consistency and accordingly enrich the methodological framework of Bulgarian psychological instruments.

Third, the results of the empirical study enrich the knowledge about social inequalities and well-being by deducing the key role of subjective social status regarding the different aspects of well-being, which persists even when controlling for the influence of objective indicators of social status. Accordingly, they impose the need to expand the analysis beyond objective factors, which are not sufficient to reveal people's goals and aspirations, with the inclusion of subjective social status, which complements the picture of social inequalities with individual assessment. The established mediating effects of status anxiety, components of status consciousness, envy and anger in the relationship between subjective social status and well-being, along with the differentiating role of sociodemographic characteristics in relation to subjective social status, attitudes towards social hierarchy and social status, envy, anger and well-being should also be taken into account in this broader explanatory framework.

Fourth, the scientific-applied contributions resulting from the analysis carried out and the results found can contribute to increasing the adequacy of social and health policies in relation to social inequalities and to improving consultative and therapeutic practice.

### **Evaluation of dissertation publications**

Svetoslav Hristov has presented four publications on the topic of the dissertation, of which three are independent (2 in Bulgarian and 1 in English) and one is co-authored. The indicated publications provide publicity of the problem under consideration to the academic community and fully cover the minimum national requirements for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree „doctor“ in the professional field 3.2. Psychology.

### **Evaluation of the summary of dissertation**

The summary of dissertation is 54 pages long, correctly reflecting the overall content of the dissertation work, and along with the relevance of the problem, its structure and the general characteristics of the dissertation, it outlines the limitations of the study and the main scientific and scientific-applied contributions.

### **Conclusion**

The dissertation of Svetoslav Kaloyanov Hristov is an original study with an in-depth theoretical overview of the subjective social status and well-being, and with its own empirical research. The set goals and tasks have been successfully fulfilled, and scientific results have been achieved. I am convinced 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 and to propose to the respected members of the Scientific Jury to award Svetoslav Kaloyanov Hristov the educational and scientific degree “doctor” in area of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field: 3.2 Psychology (Health Psychology).

May 27<sup>th</sup> 2025

Signature:

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