

SOFIA UNIVERSITY “ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI”

**DEPARTMENT OF GENERAL, EXPERIMENTAL, DEVELOPMENTAL
AND HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY**

REVIEW

From Prof. Sonya Karabeliova, PhD

on the topic of a doctoral thesis:

**„SUBJECTIVE SOCIAL STATUS – ENVY, ANGER AND
WELL-BEING“**

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

Author of the doctoral thesis: SVETOSLAV KALOYANOV HRISTOV

Svetoslav Hristov completed his Bachelor's degree in Psychology in 2017, and in 2019, he earned a Master's degree in Social and Criminal Psychology from Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski.” After successfully passing a competitive examination in 2021, he was admitted as a full-time doctoral student in the Health Psychology Doctoral Program at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski.”

Between 2018 and 2020, he worked as a criminal psychologist at the Institute of Psychology of the Ministry of Interior. Since 2024, he has been serving as a school psychologist at 149 Secondary School “Ivan Hadzhiyski.”

1. Relevance and Significance of the Developed Scientific Problem

The dissertation under review is situated within the well-established yet rapidly developing scientific field of health psychology, a discipline whose scope and theoretical foundations are continually expanding and becoming more nuanced. The central aim of health psychology is to promote and prevent health-related issues, thereby contributing to enhanced well-being, improved quality of life, and the optimal functioning of the individual.

The topic is highly relevant in light of the rapid, dynamic, and profoundly unpredictable development of the technological world, accompanied by significant changes in the economic, political, and sociocultural contexts. These transformations have led to growing social stratification and a deepening of social inequalities. In the case of Bulgaria, there is an increasing prevalence of values and cultural practices that consistently reinforce beliefs in inherent social inequality among people.

The significance of the topic is further underscored by the strong interplay between social inequality, social status, health, and well-being. Within this interpretative framework, the focus is placed on understanding well-being as a key component of positive psychological functioning and health. In this context, the doctoral candidate aims to empirically validate a model exploring the interrelations between subjective social status, attitudes and beliefs about social status and hierarchy, dispositions toward envy and anger, and overall well-being.

2. Evaluation of scientific results

The primary aim of the dissertation is to trace the direct and indirect effects of subjective social status, status anxiety, dimensions of status awareness, envy, and anger on various aspects of well-being. The main research tasks

focus on clarifying the structure of the studied phenomenon within the Bulgarian sociocultural context.

The doctoral candidate approaches the research questions with due rigor and adopts an appropriate methodology. From a methodological standpoint, the study provides a comprehensive overview of the theoretical approaches to subjective social status, status anxiety, and status awareness. The research methods employed are relevant and well-aligned with the objectives and research tasks.

The dissertation spans 236 standard pages and consists of two main parts, structured around the theoretical and empirical investigation of the topic. It is worth emphasizing at the outset that Svetoslav Hristov cites 342 scholarly sources—321 in English, 20 in Bulgarian, and 1 in Russian. The referenced literature is relevant and representative of the research area. Most of the sources were published in the past 10–15 years, which further enhances the quality and relevance of the work. The dissertation includes 27 tables and 38 figures.

The first chapter of the dissertation presents a theoretical overview outlining the major scientific contributions in the field under investigation. It focuses on the core constructs and the relationships between them. A wide range of theoretical and empirical studies are reviewed and analyzed, with the doctoral candidate examining the researchers' ideas both in their historical development and by highlighting contemporary advancements in the field.

Key concepts such as social inequality, subjective perception of social status, social anxiety, and status awareness—and their relationship to health and well-being—are thoroughly explored. Contemporary cross-cultural empirical studies, essential for the validation of the empirical model, are described in detail.

In this context, theoretical approaches to envy—both benign and malicious—and anger are also discussed. Data concerning the cognitive, behavioral, and physiological responses to anger, as well as its socio-demographic and cultural dimensions, are presented. The relationships between envy, anger, social status, health, and well-being are additionally analyzed.

Special attention is given to theories of subjective and psychological well-being, their similarities and differences, and an integrative model that synthesizes both perspectives.

In summary, the theoretical section of the dissertation can be characterized as comprehensive, logically structured, and demonstrating a solid grasp of the subject matter relevant to the dissertation topic. The conclusion of the theoretical part substantiates the need for the empirical research conducted in Svetoslav Hristov's dissertation.

Notably, the presentation of influencing factors follows a coherent logic, reflecting their natural cumulative layering within functional models, which, in turn, determines the interrelations between them.

From the content presented in the theoretical part, it can be concluded that Svetoslav Hristov shows a strong commitment to deepening his knowledge and research skills. He readily assimilates theoretical constructs and conceptual frameworks, and demonstrates the ability to synthesize concrete and potentially applicable ideas from extensive scientific literature.

In the second chapter of the dissertation, S. Hristov presents the theoretical framework of the study, including its aims, hypotheses, research tasks, the procedure of the empirical investigation, as well as the instruments and methods used to test the research hypotheses. The doctoral candidate aims to empirically verify the assumption of interactions between subjective social status, status anxiety, status awareness, envy, and anger, and their impact on health and well-being.

The following instruments were employed in the study:

- MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (Adler et al., 2000)
- Status Anxiety Scale (Keshabyan & Day, 2020)
- Status Awareness Scale (Alba et al., 2014)
- Benign and Malicious Envy Scale (Lange & Crusius, 2015)
- “Anger” subscale from the Multidimensional Aggression Scale (Kalchev, 2009)
- Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS – Diener et al., 1985)
- Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE – Diener et al., 2009)
- Psychological Well-Being Questionnaire (Ryff & Keyes, 1995)
- Pemberton Happiness Index (Hervas & Vazquez, 2013)

The research methodology is clearly and consistently described. The chosen design, procedures, and measurement instruments are appropriate for the goals and objectives of the dissertation. In order to meet the specific requirements of the Bulgarian sociocultural context, several of the questionnaires and scales were adapted accordingly.

The theoretical and methodological rationale demonstrates an effort to overcome the limitations of linear models by applying an integrative conceptual framework. This approach guided the construction of the test battery to encompass the broadest possible range of relevant constructs.

The empirical study was conducted with a sample of 490 respondents aged between 16 and 75. For analytical purposes, participants were grouped based on demographic indicators such as gender, age, education level, place of residence, marital status, number of children in the family, employment status, income, and political and religious beliefs.

The nature of the research objectives and the hypothesized relationships among the studied constructs determined the choice of statistical methods.

These included frequency distribution, factor and item analysis, analysis of variance, correlation, regression, and mediation analysis.

The results are presented with accuracy and at a high professional level. The tabulated and graphical data allow for the clear identification of significant relationships among the studied constructs. Particularly noteworthy are the summary of findings and the conclusions drawn from the empirical study, which demonstrate Svetoslav Hristov's competence in analyzing and interpreting results from psychological research and applying them to social practice. All of this reflects a strong and focused research interest in the topic.

It is important to highlight the doctoral candidate's responsible and reflective approach to the empirical findings, which also includes a thoughtful discussion of the study's limitations and directions for future research.

The main contributions of the dissertation can be summarized as follows:

1. **Theoretical Contribution:** The dissertation reflects extensive research work and the development of an original model that integrates widely accepted frameworks for conceptualizing subjective social status, status anxiety, and status awareness, as well as envy and anger, in order to elucidate their interrelations with health and well-being.
2. **Empirical Contribution:** The empirical verification of contemporary research findings is of high value, enriching existing knowledge and providing a deeper perspective by revealing the relationships among the studied constructs. Overall, the dissertation demonstrates the high level of professional competence and research culture of Svetoslav Hristov, enabling full alignment between the theoretical foundation and the empirical implementation of the study.
3. **Methodological Contribution:** The organization and execution of the dissertation research are carried out in line with the most recent developments in health psychology research practices. In this context,

a significant contribution lies in the professional adaptation of instruments representative of international research practice, which is an essential aspect of health psychology, particularly in the context of cross-cultural comparisons.

4. Applied Relevance and Validity: The dissertation meets the highest standards of contemporary health psychology and demonstrates strong ecological validity.

3. Recommendations

My recommendations are primarily of a technical nature and do not in any way affect my overall highly positive impression of the work. If the dissertation is proposed for publication—which I strongly recommend—it may benefit from additional analysis regarding the practical applications of the research findings.

4. Abstract

The doctoral candidate's summary of scientific contributions and the abstract reflect the key elements and achievements of the dissertation. A total of five publications have been produced on the topic of the dissertation, three of which are sole-authored and two co-authored. These publications adequately reflect the main research contributions. In addition, two articles unrelated to the dissertation topic have been published—one sole-authored and one co-authored.

CONCLUSION

I consider the work to be written in a competent and well-structured manner. In the development of his doctoral dissertation, Svetoslav Hristov demonstrates a high level of professional academic style, showcasing his competence and ability to analyze theoretical approaches and empirical data,

upon which he draws significant conclusions and insights relevant to social practice.

Moreover, I believe that the submitted dissertation represents a comprehensive and up-to-date study in an important area of contemporary psychology. The scientific contributions are of methodological, theoretical, and applied-practical nature.

Considering the relevance of the dissertation topic, the successfully conducted empirical research, and the professional theoretical and empirical analysis of the research data, I recommend that the esteemed members of the Academic Committee vote in favor of awarding the educational and scientific degree Doctor in the professional field 3.2. Psychology (Health Psychology) to Svetoslav Kaloyanov Hristov.

05/06/2025

Sofia

Reviewer:

(Prof. Sonya Karabeliova, PhD)