

SOFIA UNIVERSITY “ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI”
FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY
DEPARTMENT OF GENERAL, EXPERIMENTAL, DEVELOPMENT, AND
HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY

STATEMENT

by Prof. Sonya Karabeliova, PhD, D.Sc.

of the doctoral dissertation on the topic:

**LOCUS OF CONTROL, COPING MECHANISMS AND QUALITY OF LIFE IN PATIENTS WITH BLADDER
CARCINOMA**

Author of the dissertation: ANITA MILUSHEVA

1. GENERAL

Anita Milusheva holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Business Administration from Thames Valley University, London, UK. In 2000 she also obtained a Master's Degree in Business Management with a specialization in Human Resources Management from Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”. In 2016 she completed her Master's Degree in Psychology at VTU “St. St. Cyril and Methodius ” and in 2017 completed her postgraduate qualification in Clinical and Counseling Psychology at Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski".

In addition, the doctoral student has been passed basic training for her skills in CPT, psychodrama, skills in positive psychotherapy, psychodrama personal experience group and more. She has also obtained a certificate to work with the following diagnostic questionnaires and tests: Minnesota Multifactor Personality Questionnaire 2 (MMPI-2), THEMAS (Tell-Me-A-Story), the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), and the Child Development Assessment Scale (DP-3), which is a tool for assessing the development of children from 0 to 13 years of age.

In the period September - December 2014 A. Milusheva trained at the Institute for Mental Health and Development, where she was engaged in consultations and diagnostics of children with learning and communication difficulties, therapy of children with identified developmental problems, and therapy of children with behavioral and emotional problems. In the period February - July 2015 she gained practical experience in the field of clinical and counseling psychology at the Tokuda Hospital in the departments of “Oncology”, “Hematology” and “Hospice”. Since March 2017 A. Milusheva has been working as a clinical psychologist at the University Hospital for Oncology, Sofia.

2. PHD THESIS

Anita Milusheva's dissertation is in the well-established and constantly developing field of clinical and counseling psychology. The main objective of clinical and counseling psychology is oriented towards prevention and improvement of health, dealing with serious mental health problems, and illnesses.

The relevance of the topic is determined by the growing number of oncological diseases, which are among the most life-threatening diseases. This requires a new type of expertise which is necessary for dealing not only with severe symptoms, but also with various psychological aspects. The importance of the problem is further enhanced by the fact that the research is oriented towards

the study of coping mechanisms and quality of life in patients with bladder cancer. This disease has a progressive character and is defined as severe with great social significance as it negatively affects the normal functions of the body, often with a fatal end. It further has a negative effect on the physical and mental health, well-being, and on the social and economic status of the patients. In general, the causes of oncological diseases at a personal level are related to health beliefs and behaviors, dominant personality traits, distress and traumatic experiences, psychosocial factors of the disease, and coping strategies. In this regard, it is precisely the quality of life, the locus of control, and the copying strategies that can contribute to the success and effect of treatment.

The focus of these interpretative frameworks is on clarifying the relationship between the locus of control and coping mechanisms in patients with bladder cancer. On the other hand, the focus is also on examining the effects of locus of control and coping strategies on quality of life, and in particular the level of satisfaction related to mental wellbeing and adaptation of people in critical situations.

The dissertation is developed within 196 standard pages and contains two parts, structured in terms of theoretical and empirical study of the problem. 309 literary sources were used, 116 were Bulgarian and Russian, 103 were in English and 4 were electronic sources. Most of the sources used are from the last 10-15 years. The sources cited are relevant and representative of the researched problem.

Theoretically, the purpose of the dissertation research is to provide a thorough analysis of the concept of localization of control in terms of the two main approaches in event attribution. The theoretical statement focuses on the two types of localization of control in the concept of J. Rotter - internal and external. Attention was also drawn to the concept of L. Abramson, M. Seligman and J. Teasdale for attributive (explanatory style), examining in detail the two new constructs: global versus specific and stable versus unstable, on the basis of which positive and negative styles are derived. The relationship between mental health and health localization of control was also researched. The most commonly used scales for measuring the localization of the control and the health locus of control are further discussed.

Another major focus is on the theoretical approaches of copying mechanisms as a factor when dealing with cancer. In this regard, an overview of traditional and contemporary concepts has been made. The theoretical statement of the dissertation focuses on distress as a major risk factor for people's mental health and strategies for dealing with stress in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer.

It is important to draw attention to the fact that this is one of the few studies in the Bulgarian socio-cultural context that investigates the link and determinants of locus of control, coping mechanisms and quality of life in cancer patients, and in particular patients with bladder cancer.

Additionally, a summary the theories and models about the emergence of psychosomatic diseases and methods for their classification has been presented, as well as one for the connection between psychosomatics and cancer diseases. Another important aspect of the first chapter of the theoretical part of the dissertation is devoted to the connection of psychosomatics with oncological diseases. The second chapter of the theoretical part focuses on the nature of bladder diagnosis, symptomatology, disease stages, and the types of treatments, as well as the relationship of this disease with the locus of control.

In summary, regarding this part of the dissertation, I would like to emphasize that Anita Milusheva refers to various theories and methods connected with behavioural and psychological manifestations associated bladder cancer. They affect both global and personal perceptions, but also practical stimuli and problems related to the consequences of this serious illness. In this sense, the specialized literature focuses primarily on risky health behaviors. In general, there are few empirical

studies that consider the personality traits such as localization of control and coping strategies and their relationship to quality of life in patients with such a severe illness.

The basic assumption is that the locus of control is a prerequisite for quality of life. It is further implied that coping strategies are influenced by stress factors such as pain, past traumatic experience, side effects of chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and interventions, which lead to the disadaptation of patients with bladder cancer.

From the review of the analysis in the theoretical part of the dissertation, it appears that the presentation of the influencing factors is consistent in terms of their combinatorial natural overlay in functional models, which determines the interrelations between them.

From the review in the theoretical part, it can be concluded that Anita Milusheva has the ability to analyze and synthesize large-scale research material, which shows the student's strong desire to enrich their theoretical knowledge and skills which will be applied in practice.

In the empirical part of the thesis A. Milusheva presents the theoretical framework of the study, the purpose, hypotheses, tasks, the procedure of empirical research, the methods and instruments used for testing the research hypotheses. The PhD student aims to investigate the link between locus of control, coping mechanisms, and life satisfaction in patients with bladder cancer.

In order to realise the goals of the dissertation, an empirical study was conducted using a methodology that included the following questionnaires: Questionnaire for locus of control, (J. Rotter), Test for the study of coping mechanisms (R. Lazarus and S. Folkman) and the Satisfaction With Life Scale (TSWLS) (William Pavot, Ed Diener, Eun Kook Suh).

The survey was conducted in 2018. with a sample of 132 people - all patients with bladder cancer. They were between the age of 40 and 91, 72% men (95) and 28% women (37). All subjects were patients with oncological diseases hospitalized for diagnosis and treatment of bladder cancer at the Oncology Clinic – Sofia, Clinic of Urology.

The goals and objectives set out in the study, as well as the nature of the assumed relations between the tested constructs, determine the statistical methods used in the analyses of the data. They include only descriptive statistics and in particular frequency distributions.

The obtained results described in a correct and professional manner. The data was presented using tables and graphs which made it possible to clearly distinguish the significant relationships between the studied phenomena. The discussion, the summary of the results, and the findings of the empirical study made a very good impression, which showed the competence of Anita Milusheva to analyze and interpret results from empirical psychological research and to draw conclusions regarding possible implication in social practice. All of this demonstrates a strong in-depth research interest in the investigated issue.

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

1. The theoretical part of the dissertation shows that a great deal of research has been conducted which synthesises concepts and approaches in the sphere of locus of control, coping strategies, and life satisfaction in patients with bladder cancer. In this regard, the proposed theoretical analysis of the impact of distress and traumatic experiences, development of cancer, and strategies for coping with this type of cancer, is extremely useful for research practice.
2. The empirical part of the dissertation should be held in high regard as it enriches the already available information but also provides a new look with its discovery of a

relationship between locus of control and coping mechanisms in patients with bladder cancer. Additionally, the investigation into life satisfaction of patients should also be mentioned. As a whole, Anita Milusheva's professional competence and research culture is evident. This has allowed her to link together the theoretical and empirical formulation of her dissertation.

3. The organization and conduct of the dissertation research is realized in accordance with the achievements of the research practice in clinical psychology.
4. The thesis of Anita Milusheva corresponds to the achievements of modern clinical psychology and has its ecological validity.

My recommendations are mostly technical and could not affect my excellent impressions of her work.

The research paper submitted by the doctoral student and the abstracts reflect the main points and achievements of the dissertation. The topic of the dissertation has been supported by seven publications in peer-reviewed journals, for one of which she is the sole author, the others are in co-authorship. The publications adequately reflect the main research achievements. A. Milusheva took part in three scientific events - two international conferences and one national congress, where she presented scientific reports on the topic of the dissertation.

3. CONCLUSION

I believe the work is written in a correct and cultural manner. In developing this doctoral dissertation, A. Milusheva demonstrated good academic style, showing competence and ability to analyze theoretical approaches and empirical data, on the basis of which she can draw relevant conclusions about social practice. I also believe that the dissertation presents a comprehensive and up-to-date study in a significant field of contemporary psychology. The scientific contributions are of methodological, theoretical and applied matter.

Bearing in mind the relevance of the topic, the successfully conducted empirical research and the professional theoretical analysis of the research data, I propose to the honorable members of the Scientific Jury to vote in favour and award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the professional field 3.2. Psychology (Clinical Psychology) to Anita Milusheva.

20.03.2020
Sofia

Signature:
(Prof. S. Karabeliova, PhD, Dr. Sc.)