

## **REVIEW**

From Prof. Ginka Andonova Mehandzhiyska, PhD  
Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

On a dissertation for acquiring the educational and science degree "Doctor"  
in professional direction 3.4. Social activities

Topic: "COMMUNICATION BARRIERS BETWEEN THE SOCIAL  
WORKER AND THE FAMILY MEMBERS OF SOCIAL SERVICE USERS"

Doctoral student: Anna Mihailova Georgieva

### **Presentation of the procedure and the PhD student**

The scientific work deposited for protection was developed by PhD student Anna Mihailova during regular doctoral studies at the Department of Social Work at the Faculty of Education of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Silvia Tsvetanska.

The presented documents provide the necessary information about the progress of the doctoral studies since enrollment on 28.06.2019 until the successful completion with the right of defense on 20.06.2022 by decision of the faculty board of the Faculty of Education and after the positive assessment given by the department meeting of the Department of Social Work for the completion of the work and readiness for defense. A reference has also been provided that testifies to the fulfillment of the national minimum requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor".

Regarding the qualities and profile of the doctoral student, I would like to point out a few aspects that present Anna Mihailova as a valuable and experienced specialist in the field of the studied subject. As can be seen from the autobiographical reference, for twenty years PhD student Mihailova has pursued sustainable and consistent interests, dedication, education and professional practice in the field of psychology and social work. She has gained experience in working with people in advanced and old age. She has also developed her competencies and therapeutic skills with a specialization in Gerontological Social Work, after which she focused the energy of her knowledge and

professional productivity on the scientific search for answers and results through her dissertation work.

### **Presentation of the dissertation research**

The presentation of the dissertation work is prepared and presented precisely and in a structured manner. The main text is a sufficient volume of 175 pages, covering an introduction, two chapters, inferences and a conclusion, accompanied by an appendix, a reference to scientific contributions, lists of used literature and the doctoral student's own publications on the topic of the dissertation. The abstract included in the documents correctly reflects the research methodology and the obtained scientific results.

The work is compiled and presented in two parts - theoretical and empirical - to which the two chapters are dedicated respectively. The content and logic of the theoretical review are sustained and presented at a very good scientific level in terms of the style, structure, terminology and transitions from overview to analysis and conclusions. The theoretical dimension of the research is based on a conceptual model corresponding to the nature of social work. It is essentially integrative, professionally specialized and put into the context of the activity of the social worker in the field of social services. In accordance with the subject and objectives of the research, a special emphasis in the theoretical chapter is placed on the analysis of communication as a social phenomenon, the models of social communication, the theory of communication. On this basis, the theoretical study and interpretation of the problem of barriers in communication follows. The style and content of the theoretical part shows knowledge and understanding of the subject at a high level. The doctoral student knows, uses, refers to and analyzes theories, positions, scientific results in the field of communication phenomena and demonstrates both the breadth and depth of their interpretation.

Of interest is the choice of conceptual orientation and approach in the research at the theoretical level. Anna Mihailova applies her author's conceptual approach to theoretical research, where she allocates emphasis and attention to the general and the specific in the theory and practice of communication and the theory and practice of social work. Initially, the study starts from the theories and models of communication, then the path of scientific thinking and research brings them into the context of the theory and practice of social work. In this

way, the exposition presents theoretically in-depth paragraphs related to direct social work, in which the transfers and applications in practical social work of the explanatory resources of the analyzed theories and models are developed.

The paragraph on communication barriers is of key importance for the formation of the model of variables and the design of the empirical part of the study. In parallel with the analysis are used categorization, grouping of barriers and classification. Again, the approach of transition between psychological introduction and applied transfer and interpretation of the phenomena in the field of social work attracts attention. A good conceptual support are also some findings and results from the publications of studies included in the review on the specifics of aging and the profile of the needs of people in advanced and old age.

In the empirical part, through the case study method, "relationships in social institutions between social workers and relatives of elderly people placed in residential care facilities" are studied. The methodology of the research is comprehensive and well-grounded. The use of other included methods is justified - reflection in the course of the action, observation, interview. The choice of qualitative methods for conducting the research is essential for the discovery of barriers in communication by monitoring cases, patterns of behavior and interactions in the natural environment of the field of social activities.

The integration of theories and models in the theoretical part here, at the empirical level of the study, has found points of intersection and focus relevant to practical social work. Based on this, the variables of the study were specified. For example, trust, feedback, supporting relationships fall into focus.

It may be noted that the case study was undertaken and conducted methodically, in a structured manner and with clearly defined scopes of analysis. The interviews and observations are in accordance with the basic requirements for this type of methodology. Not only psychosocial, but also organizational and economic mechanisms and factors were studied. The case study leads to conclusions about the role of feedback giving and receiving skills in the emergence of communication barriers between participants in the supporting process. Trends in the influence of trust, cognitive and dispositional characteristics and behavioral patterns have also been established. The

components of the study and analysis, as well as the criteria system by which the conclusions were drawn, are presented in a table.

Both in the theoretical and in the empirical stage of the research, a parallel examination of the specifics and barriers in the communication of social workers with clients and with their relatives is noticeable to a significant extent, and this was used productively to interpret the dynamics and systemic mechanisms of influence.

### **Publications on the research subject**

PhD student Mihailova presented 7 publications, of which 1 study and 6 articles in scientifically reviewed editions. From the point of view of the national minimum requirements, 75 points have been accumulated (with a minimum requirement of 30). The study and articles have a scientific character and are closely related to the dissertation subject. They provide publicity to achievements and reflect the achieved results of the research work process. They offer positions, answers and scientific explanations of questions and problems affecting the communicative aspects of direct social work with clients of social services and their relatives. Through their content, as well as through the choice of editions and forums where they are presented, the publications of PhD student Mihailova are directly addressed to the audience of social workers.

### **Scientific results and contributions**

Evaluating the qualities of the presented research gives me reason to confirm and accept the scientific contributions formulated by the author, and in addition, I would highlight the following main results, which have a contributing character with their theoretical and applied value:

- With its theoretical model, the study demonstrates the construction and application of an original approach for interdisciplinary transition. Theories and models for understanding and interpreting the specifics, dynamics and barriers in human communication are connected on the one hand, with the theory, methodology and practice of social work - on the other. Moreover, the latter is seen as a helping profession in which communication is not just a background, but a process and a factor in the supporting intervention. With the work carried

out at the theoretical level, the doctoral student has shown how psychological theories explain the emergence, action and manifestation of the mechanisms of occurrence of barriers in the professional situations of communication between social workers, clients and their relatives.

- The methodology and the model of theoretical interpretation of the topic are an essential and original part of the dissertation work. They show means and way of thinking and understanding of the communicative phenomena and situations in the interaction between social workers, clients and their relatives.
- The overall theoretical-empirical base and the product of the dissertation research can serve in the development of programs for the qualification of specialists and for the improvement of the communication skills of practicing social workers.
- A tabular system for identification of possible barriers has been developed, and the system has been developed with an orientation to the conditions and factors for counteractions, to minimize barriers to working relationships and trust - these are both conditions set in the hypothesis.
- The empirical results and the findings, inferences and conclusions made based on them offer practicing social workers scientifically verified methods and ways of acting in challenging communicative situations in a practical environment. The results of A. Mihailova's research bring more evidence and certainty to the application of adequate methodological solutions and applied techniques for feedback, behavioral analysis, etc.
- Through the empirical research, the doctoral student actually demonstrates how the barrier identification system works in practice. In doing so, she provides an example and model relevant to specific social worker commitments such as the preparation of case assessments in social work, building and maintaining a supporting type of working relationship with clients and their relatives, strengthening the individual approach, creating and maintaining an appropriate atmosphere in residential care facilities for the elderly.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I give a positive assessment of the dissertation work. This assessment is based on demonstrated productivity, skills in theoretical analysis

and empirical fieldwork, to link theory and practice. The results of the research and the way in which they were obtained and verified show real possibilities for applicability in direct professional activity. I propose and support doctoral student A. Mihailova to receive the educational and scientific degree "DOCTOR" in professional direction 3.4. Social activities.

Date: 15.09.2022 г.

Reviewer:

Prof. Ginka Mehandzhiyska, PhD