

REVIEW

**On Dissertation work of Sofia Plamenova Dimitrova
For the Academic degree PhD
professional field 3.2. Psychology, PhD program in Clinical
Psychology**

Title:

"Features of the cognitive model in social anxiety"

"SOFIA UNIVERSITY" ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI ", DEPARTMENT OF
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Scientific adviser: Assoc. Prof. Pavlina Petkova, PhD

**Reviewer: Professor Radka Ivanova Massaldjieva, PhD
Health care management department, Medical University in
Plovdiv**

General presentation of the procedure and the PhD student

The presented set of materials on electronic media is in accordance with the Procedure for acquiring "PhD" at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". In the abstract the doctoral student provided information on a total of 9 publications, 3 of which on the topic of the dissertation, two of them - in press. Of the other 6 publications - 3 are related to the topic of the dissertation. The PhD student also has 5 participations in scientific conferences and congresses, including international ones. There is insufficient data on whether the works presented to them have been published.

Presentation of the doctoral student:

Sofia Plamenova Dimitrova was born in 1986. She has a bachelor's degree in psychology from St. John's University, New York, USA and a Master in Clinical and Counseling Psychology from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (2013).

She has participated in postgraduate training in EMDR - I and II level and training in the technique of Image Rescripting, conducted by the Bulgarian Association of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in recent years. She is a member of the Society of Psychologists in Bulgaria and the Bulgarian Association of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.

She has worked as a psychology teacher and independent practice psychologist.

The available data on the current professional training and development of the doctoral student show lasting interests in clinical psychology and psychotherapy, as well as proven skills for conducting research and preparing scientific publications.

Relevance and significance of the topic

The presented research paper is devoted to social anxiety according to the cognitive model. Special attention is paid to the sense of humor as an adaptive mechanism in anxiety.

Social anxiety is studied in the scientific literature through various approaches and models. Of particular interest in recent years is the role of cognitive processes and their direct and indirect impact on the manifestations of social anxiety (Gkika et al., 2018). The topic chosen is relevant and significant. Its theoretical and experimental research influences the possibilities for a better understanding of the insufficiently clarified aspects regarding the generation of anxiety in social situations and its components, as well as regarding the mechanisms and processes involved in them, largely cognitively mediated.

The importance of this issues places high demands on the contribution of each new study. What has been done in this work answers the research questions, but also raises additional questions to be answered in future studies. In this sense, it is important to recognize its usefulness in the assessment and treatment of social anxiety in adults.

Knowledge of the problem

The author of the dissertation demonstrates a broad knowledge of the researched issues, which allows her to present in the theoretical review social anxiety through available data on its etiology and based on the background of other anxiety disorders. The concepts of mentalization and sense of humor are analyzed in detail,

as well as the cognitive model - conceptual framework of the present work, and the methods and forms of cognitive-behavioral therapy.

The detailed knowledge of the topic on which the research was conducted as well as of the psychological and statistical methods used is clearly demonstrated in the analysis of the results and especially in the qualitative analysis.

Research methodology

The purpose and hypotheses of the experimental study are clearly formulated and described in detail. An advantage of the research is the specification of the hypotheses and methods after conducting and analyzing two pilot studies.

The selected tools include:

1. clinical evaluation by a psychiatrist and a clinical psychologist
2. scales for social anxiety, dysfunctional anxiety thoughts, coping strategies, degree of dissociation and sense of humor as a metacognitive ability.

The scales used and the preliminary data on their psychometric qualities are described in detail.

74 people were studied - 30 men and 44 women, from two groups - clinical and control.

The statistical methods - descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analyzes, factor analysis, methods for comparison of means and for analysis of internal consistency fully correspond to the set goals.

The study design also includes a case study method for the part of the clinical sample where a qualitative analysis was performed.

Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation and its contributions

The dissertation submitted for review contains a total of 232 pages. It is divided into introduction, four chapters and a bibliography.

The four chapters contain literature review, purpose formulation, hypotheses and tasks, methods, results, discussion and appendix. The appendix presents tables and figures that reflect the statistical analysis.

The literature review follows the structure of the topic with a focus on its problem areas. The types of anxiety disorders, their frequency and risk factors for them are briefly presented. The importance of cognitive factors for anxiety disorders is explained. Social anxiety and problematic mentality are discussed in detail. Scientific studies on the relationship between social anxiety and a sense of humor are analyzed, thus creating a basis for the subsequent work on formulating hypotheses

and planning the processing of the results. The dissertation student shows a thorough understanding of the concepts, structure and application of the cognitive model in norm and in pathology. As a natural continuation comes the presentation of the literature review on coping strategies and defence mechanisms, which are compared.

The section on therapeutic approaches in patients with social anxiety is another proof of the doctoral student's expertise in the field of psychotherapy and her ability to analyze. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is discussed in detail in accordance with the topic of the present paper.

The whole review shows that the author has done a thorough research and has presented a lot of empirical data from various authors, which are analyzed.

The results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis are described sequentially.

In general, the obtained results confirm the hypotheses made about the connection of:

1. high levels of anxiety with the ability to mentalize and in particular with the understanding of humor;
2. social anxiety and maladaptive coping strategies and immature defense mechanisms.
3. high anxiety and dysfunctional thoughts.

I would especially like to point out one of the leading advantages of this work:

In various fields of psychology, there has long been a tendency for the predominance of statistical processing and quantitative analysis. This is the basis for the review of the research by the reviewers to reflect to the greatest extent the mathematical competence and complexity. Inevitably, theoretical analysis goes into the background. In the present dissertation it is different - quantitative methods and analyzes occupy a proper place, but at the same time the dissertation student has made a detailed collection and discussion of data for a series of cases, which are summarized in order to identify trends. This is also a good basis for future research.

The following was found:

- a positive relationship between social anxiety and anxious thoughts;
- the role of personal predispositions in the use of protective mechanisms;
- medium or low levels of active coping strategies "problem solving" and "seeking social support" in high anxiety;

- the influence of the qualities of caring for a growing child on the relationship
high social anxiety - low sensitivity to humor.

The obtained results are summarized in the discussion, where a discussion was made along several lines: 1. Social anxiety - anxious thoughts - attitude to humor and its social use. 2. Social anxiety - tendency to use the strategy „avoidance“ - tendency to use the strategy to solve a problem. 3. Social anxiety - manifestation of immature defenses (blockage, fantasy and dissociation).

The dissertation student pointed out the cross-sectional design as a limitation of the study.

Guidelines for future research are also provided.

The dissertation is based on 142 sources, in Bulgarian and English, predominantly after 2000.

In summary, the work of Sofia Dimitrova is an interesting combination of theoretical analysis with comparative experiment, interpreted with quantitative and qualitative methods, which enriches both diagnostic and therapeutic practice in social anxiety. The derived theoretical and practical contributions are fully relevant to the parameters of the work performed on cognitive and emotional dimensions, personal maturity, defense mechanisms and coping strategies in social anxiety. The performed factor analysis of the used scales is a practical contribution for Bulgaria.

Assessment of publications and personal contribution

The PhD student is the first author of five of the publications described in the abstract. The authorship of the present work seems indisputable, based on the background of Dimitrova's active publishing activity in recent years. The work shows knowledge and skills for independent research, data processing, interpretation of results and formulation of conclusions.

I have recommendations for some omissions in terms and citations in the text, which can be explained by the short deadlines and the large amount of information.

Abstract

The abstract meets the requirements. In addition to the main results, some of the theoretical analyzes are presented.

Conclusion

The presented dissertation of Sofia Plamenova Dimitrova contains scientific and applied research results that represent a contribution to science and meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB) and the Regulations for the implementation of ZRASRB.

Due to all the above assessments and comments, I confidently give my positive assessment of the research, the results achieved and the formulated contributions presented by the dissertation and its abstract and propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree 'PhD' of Sofia Dimitrova in PhD Clinical Psychology program.

22.12.2021

Professor R.Massaldjieva, PhD