OPINION

by assoc. prof. Milena Emilova Mocinova-Brachkova, Ph.D.

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about a dissertation

to obtain a scientific degree „Doctor of Sciences“ in area of high education:

3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professional field: 3.2 Psychology

(General Psychology - General and Age Psychology)

of Margarita Angelova Stefanova-Bakracheva

SOFIA UNIVERSITY „ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI“, FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY,

DEPARTMENT OF „GENERAL, EXPERIMENTAL, DEVELOPMENTAL AND HEALTH

PSYCHOLOGY“

on the topic: „PERSONAL PREDICTORS OF EXPERIENCED WELL-
BEING"

Veliko Tarnovo
2023

1. Information about the candidate

Margarita Angelova Stefanova - Bakracheva graduated in „Social Pedagogy" at the Faculty of Pedagogy of the Sofia University „Kliment Ohridski" in 1999. In 2003, he became a Doctor of Psychology (General Psychology) at the Institute of Psychology, BULGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, Sofia.

In 2004, she was appointed as an assistant to the "Personality Psychology and Methodology of Psychological Measurement" Section, Department of Psychology, Institute for Population and Human Research, BULGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES.

In the period 2011-2017, he was an associate professor of psychology (General Psychology) at the "Personality Psychology and Methodology of Psychological Measurement" Section, Department of Psychology, Institute for Population and Human Research, BULGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES.

Since 2018, he is an associate professor of psychology (Pedagogical psychology) at the Sofia University „Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Education Sciences and Arts.

He is currently a full-time teacher, professor at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Education Sciences and Arts . Leads courses in general psychology, age psychology, developmental psychology, pedagogical psychology, crisis psychological intervention, personal and counseling psychology, organizational psychology, development of emotional intelligence, conflict situations and group dynamics.

In the period 2014-2021, she was a part-time teacher and visiting teacher at the Military Academy "G.S. Rakovski", Sofia. Since 2017 and currently she is a part-time teacher at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. Since 2019 and currently she is a part-time teacher at the Academy of Arts, Sofia.

She has completed training in hypnosis and hypnotherapy (2003), training in a systematic approach with psychodrama and art therapy techniques (2015-2019) and training in

using the Thematic Apperceptive Test (TAT) and the Rorschar test (2022); training for Mediation, Business Mediation (2022-2023).

Member of the Society of the Bulgarian Association for Training and Development BATR since 2017. Member of the Society of Psychologists in Bulgaria (SSP) since 2006. Member of the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria since 2005. Member of numerous editorial boards. She is involved in numerous projects as an expert and scientific supervisor.

2. Data on doctoral studies

According to the report presented by Margarita Angelova Stefanova - Bakracheva, her scientific production meets the minimum national requirements for the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" for scientific field 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional direction 3.2. Psychology.

Based on the received Report on the similarity of the text of the dissertation in the anti-plagiarism prevention system and the Opinion by Prof. Sonia Metodieva Karabelova dated 14.06.2023, the similarities found in the dissertation are regulated and do not bear signs of plagiarism.

By decision of the Faculty Council dated 04.07.2023, the work was admitted to public defense for awarding the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences".

3. Dissertation data

The work submitted for review is 309 pages long and is structured in an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, literature and appendices. The data are presented in 160 tables and 135 figures. The literature used includes 452 sources, of which 29 are in Bulgarian and 423 in English.

In the introduction, the author motivates the topicality of the issue and justifies the need to study the behaviors that contribute to the maintenance of experienced well-being, considering "the general background of uncertainty and unpredictability that affects existential questions related to survival, financial coping and making choices and a life of compromised personal control, lasting more than three years and leaving no one untouched".

The overall goal of the research is to derive a comprehensive framework and model of well-being and practical directions for preventive support in the process of maintaining an optimal level of personal functioning. Sitting out seeks answers about the complex connections and interactions between stable predispositions and environmental factors, which always collectively determine the way a person adapts and self-regulates.

The main questions that the researcher asks are: outline the specifics of experienced well-being and its components in conditions of stability and crisis; determining the place of personality traits in experienced well-being; examining how personality traits determine coping resources and coping potential. The author poses the questions whether personality traits or personality dispositions to a higher degree predict well-being and what is the interaction between personality traits and personal dispositions in determining the experienced well-being and its components.

The research examines the behaviors that can contribute to a more painless adaptation to life in crisis conditions and the possibilities to stimulate self-regulation and self-realization through various activities.

A theoretical overview of the topic is presented in Chapter One, entitled "Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Well-Being, Personality Traits, and Personality Dispositions." The chapter contains four paragraphs.

In the first paragraph, "An Integrative Approach to Measuring Well-Being," the research approaches to the study of well-being (subjective well-being, psychological well-

being, social well-being) and the integrative concept of flourishing are outlined. Their points of contact and the specific and jointly explaining factors are highlighted. Research in the perspective of subjective well-being (satisfaction with life, positive and negative affect (affective)) from the perspective of hedonism – the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain (Diener, 1984, 2000, etc.) is summarized.

Included are studies of eudaemonia-based psychological well-being (autonomy, relatedness, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, life purpose, and personal development) (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995), social well-being (Keyes, 1998; Keyes et al. al., 2004) and flourishing (Seligman, 2011) and numerous studies of subjectively perceived happiness (Veenhoven, 1984, 2017, etc.). One of the new directions of research is also marked - the fear of happiness as an individual and cultural variable (Joshanloo, 2013). Research on the relationship of well-being with personal and individual characteristics is summarized, in which approaches to the study of well-being are described and research in this direction is integrated.

The second paragraph, Trait Models, is devoted to the Big Five Trait Model and the cybernetic theory of personality in relation to well-being.

The third paragraph, "Personality Dispositions, Relation to Well-Being and Personality Traits," covers the personality dispositions self-esteem, mindfulness, coping and coping potential, meaning in life, learned helplessness, self-sabotage, relapse, and planning, and traces their relationships to and well-being.

The last, fourth paragraph, "Enhancing personal resources for effective self-regulation through learning," systematizes the possibilities for achieving effective personal change through learning and interventions. A developed and tested training for increasing personal self-regulation is presented, the basis of which is Seligman's flourishing model (PERMA, Seligman, 2011) and the theory of expectations (Smith & Kirby, 2009, 2011). The general concept in the development of the training sessions in the direction of increasing reflection and self-reflection

using expressive (art) techniques and phototherapy (Steger et al., 2014) to work in a protected trust environment.

Repetition over time intervals aims to create a readiness that will become a kind of attitude, analogous to a personal disposition in the line of recognition - meaning - a new way of experiencing and evaluating as a counterpoint to automatic thoughts and the tendency to self-protective behavior.

The author shows very good theoretical knowledge of the problem and skills in working with literary sources.

In Chapter Two "Design of Empirical Research" the object, subject, purpose, tasks and hypotheses of the conducted research are presented.

The factors that directly and indirectly determine the experienced well-being are determined as the object of research.

The subject of the study are personality traits and personality dispositions as self-regulatory predictors of optimal functioning and well-being.

The purpose of the research is to study the direct, mediated and mediating effect of personality traits and personality dispositions on well-being and its components and the possibilities of increasing personal resources to achieve optimal self-regulation.

5 tasks of the research are described, namely:

1. Study of the relationship of personality traits with well-being and its components and with personal dispositions.

2. Study of the relationship of personal dispositions with well-being and its components.

3. Study of the direct, mediated and mediating effect of personality traits and personality dispositions on well-being and its components.

4. Considering the effect of individual variables (gender, age, marital status, employment, subjective assessment of income) on well-being and its components.

5. Considering the effect and sustainability of training to increase personal resources for effective self-regulation.

On the basis of presented research results, the author formulates several basic expectations: that personal traits predict well-being and its components, as well as personal dispositions to a low to moderate degree; personality dispositions to predict well-being and its components in a specific way and to a higher degree than personality traits; personality traits and personality dispositions have a direct, indirect and mediating effect on well-being and its components; individual variables have a partial independent effect on well-being and its components; training to increase the personal potential for self-regulation to have a partial but sustainable result.

To implement tasks 1-4, 14 continuous variables were used, some of which contain sub-variables, with which the total number of variables included in the study is 31. In addition, 5 individual variables are included: gender, age, marital status, employment and subjective income assessment.

The research for the implementation of tasks 1-4 was conducted in the period January 2021 - December 2022 and includes the answers of 455 respondents. The data were processed with the statistical software IBM SPSS Statistics 25 and Process 3.2 for the moderator and mediator analyses, applying descriptive statistics, reliability testing methods through Cronbach's alpha and item analysis, factor analysis using the method of principal components with rotation, descriptive analysis, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, analysis of variance, T-test, comparison of paired samples, correlation analysis, regression analysis, multivariate linear regression analysis, multivariate hierarchical regression analysis with controlled variables, moderator and mediator analysis.

For the implementation of task 5, a control group and an experimental group were formed. The piloting of the training program for the implementation of task 5 and the research related to it was implemented in the period April 2022 - December 2022. The training sessions are 10, implemented in a period of 3 months. The results were compared within the experimental group and between the experimental and the control group at three times - before and after the training and 6 months after the training.

The tools used are: Scale for measuring the Big Five - shortened version (Big Five Inventory (BFI-2); Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale); Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ); Scale for planning (created for research purposes); Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale - Revised (CAMS-R); Learned Helplessness Scale (LHS); Self-Handicapping Scale Scale); Proactive and Preventive Coping Scales from the Proactive Coping Inventory (PCI): A Multidimensional Research Instrument; Scales for accommodative coping potential and problem-oriented coping potential; The Mistake Rumination Scale; Flourishing Scale; Psychological Wellbeing Scale; Life Satisfaction Scale; Scale for Positive and Negative Affect (SPANE-N).

Chapter Three, Analysis and Interpretation of Empirical Research Results, contains six paragraphs.

The first paragraph presents the structural organization of the scales used.

The second paragraph describes the interrelationships between personality traits, personality dispositions, and well-being.

A third paragraph includes models of predictors of well-being with consistent presentation of personality traits, predictors of well-being with independent effect, personality traits, predictors of personal dispositions with independent effect, personality dispositions, predictors of well-being with independent effect, and the direct and indirect predictors of well-

being in general models with all personality characteristics included with reflected mediated and moderated relationships.

The fourth paragraph summarizes the influence of individual variables subjective perception of income, occupation, gender, age and marital status on well-being and its components.

In the fifth paragraph, the results of the sustainability of the training conducted to increase personal resources for effective self-regulation with a permanently reported positive effect on the meaning of life after six months are described.

In the Sixth paragraph, a summary and analysis of the results of the empirical study are made. The relationships between personality traits, personality dispositions and well-being are derived.

Relationships of personality traits with well-being are examined hierarchically at the facet, global trait, and meta-trait levels. As expected, in this study personality traits are related to well-being and its components in a specific way, with the relationships being mostly weak to moderate, which, as the author points out, corresponds with most published data.

Presented are: Explanatory models of flourishing; Models of explaining life satisfaction; Models of happiness explanation; Models of explanation of positive affect; Explanatory models of negative affect.

A generalized model of the predictors of psychological well-being is presented.

Changes related to age development and life events are examined; changes as a result of experienced crisis; change in personality traits and dispositions as a result of interventions.

A dynamic model of well-being is described.

In the concluding part, the author notes that, in general, preliminary expectations are confirmed. Personality traits and personal dispositions directly and indirectly determine the

level of well-being experienced. Personality traits have weak and moderate predictive effects while mediating the relationships of personality dispositions with well-being. Personality dispositions to a higher degree than personality traits predict perceived well-being. Meaning in life emerged as the strongest independently significant predictor for which no mediated relationships with well-being were noted.

As a focus for future research, the author outlines an expansion of the reported effects of mindfulness, plasticity and stability, which at high values of individual factors – in this study, mindfulness, problem-oriented coping potential and self-esteem – have a hindering effect on well-being values.

Regarding the mediating effect of traits – the balance between plasticity and stability, which – as well as individual traits such as openness to experience either strongly defocus or strongly adhere to the choices made and this has an effect on well-being and its components for which the balance is essential. The significant place of neuroticism, which fully moderates the relationship of mindfulness with happiness, was also confirmed. Of particular interest for future research is the possibility of grouping in the line of plasticity and stability a study of personal dispositions and behaviors aimed at stimulating an attitude towards flexibility and finding security in stability.

The doctoral student's ability to conduct scientific research in a planned and organized manner is impressive; thoroughly analyze and interpret the results obtained.

The prepared abstract correctly reflects the content of the dissertation work.

The author has eighteen publications related to the topic of the dissertation work.

4. Scientific and applied contributions of the dissertation work

I accept the scientific and applied contributions formulated by the author, namely:

1. A holistic approach to the study of well-being and its components is applied, taking into account the complex factors and interactions of personality traits, personal dispositions, individual variables and the environment. On this basis, a dynamic model for measuring and maintaining well-being with research and applied significance is derived.

2. The influence of the environment is analyzed from the point of view of the universal and personally determined reactions and the perceived perspective. Emphasis is on the experience of the crisis and the determining importance of the predictable outcome and expectations that determine adaptation choices and self-regulation. Results are summarized for the locus of personality traits in stable and unstable conditions.

3. The heuristic potential of the cybernetic theory is presented and the position is substantiated that the hierarchy of categories provides different opportunities for profiling and forecasting depending on the goals set.

4. The possibility of applying the aggregated categories of plasticity and stability that define optimal self-regulation to personal dispositions is conceptualized and the line for operationalizing instruments for measurement purposes is advocated.

5. The possibilities for increasing the well-being experienced as part of the process of learning and prevention of mental health are presented, and directions are outlined for expanding the work in the perspective of learning effective models for personal functioning in the line of positive psychology. Stimulating internal resources and capacity for effective self-regulation is seen as an important resource for long-term optimal functioning in the context of ongoing and future crises.

5. Conclusion

The dissertation development is dedicated to an actual problem. The author shows excellent theoretical preparation and skills for organizing and conducting scientific research.

The obtained data are the basis for deriving reasoned analyzes and conclusions, which have undoubted contributions both in theory and in practical-applied terms.

On the basis of these conclusions, I give my positive vote and propose to the respected members of the scientific jury to award Margarita Angelova Stefanova-Bakracheva the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" in the professional field: 3.2. PSYCHOLOGY (General Psychology - General and Age Psychology).

17.10.2023   Signature:

V. Tarnovo   (Assoc. prof. Milena Mocinova-Brachkova, PhD)