



OPINION

by

Prof. Dr. Todor Dimitrov Cherkezov, MD, PhD

Department of "Health Policy and Management", Faculty of Public Health "Prof. Dr. Tsekomir Vodenicharov, PhD", Medical University-Sofia

External member of a scientific jury, according to Order No. RD-22/15.01.2024.
of the director of the National Center for Public Health and Analysis

on a dissertation on:

**"Health and psychosocial harms of alcohol use
by other persons on young people in Bulgaria"**

with author Mirela Rumenova Strandjeva

in connection with an open procedure for acquiring an educational and scientific degree

"Doctor", in a professional direction: 7.1. medicine,

in the scientific specialty "Social Medicine and Health Management"

Research supervisor: Assoc. Dr. Galya Krumova Tsolova, MD

Educational, career and academic profile of the author

Mirela Rumenova Strandjeva graduated from secondary education in the city of Plovdiv in a language high school with an English language profile. She received her BA in Higher Education in Psychology from the American International University in London and her MA in Health Psychology from City University, London, UK. In 2010, she acquired a qualification as a psychotherapist at the Institute for Ecology of Thinking in Sofia. In 2014, she underwent training in Austria and the USA, and in the following years - post-graduate qualifications in Estonia and Lithuania, thematic training on projects of the National Institute of Health and Welfare.

Mirela Strandjeva began her working career at the "St.Georgi" UMBAL, Plovdiv as an assistant in the neurology office. In 2007, she was an intern - assistant at the Institute of Psychology at the Ministry of the Interior. From 2010 to 2013, she was a professional human resource management consultant at Astrea Human Resources. In 2014, she joined the National Institute of Health and Welfare as an analytical specialist - an expert in the "Risk Factors and Prevention of CNB" department in the "Health Promotion and Disease Prevention" Directorate. Since 2016, she has been the chief expert, and since 2023 - head of department in the same directorate. He is a member of project teams under the EU health action program, as well as research teams of WHO projects.

The academic development of the author is related to the interest in the problems of public health and in particular the risk factors and their impact on the development of the personality and certain target groups. In the documents related to the defense of the dissertation work, Mirela Strandjeva presents a list of 15 publications of reports, of which 5 in Bulgarian and 10 in foreign scientific journals. A list of 9 papers presented at national and international scientific forums is

presented. These data prove the author's active involvement in the scientific activity of the National Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

For her achievements, Mirela Strandjeva is the recipient of a number of academic awards, she is a member of the British Psychological Society. She speaks English and Russian.

Actuality of the issues and concept of the research in the presented dissertation

The dissertation work is dedicated to one of the biggest challenges on a global scale - the increasing consumption of alcohol among the human population and the increasingly pronounced negative social, economic and health consequences for the individual and society. The topicality of the topic under consideration is associated with the increasing availability of alcohol, as well as with the increasing tolerance and acceptance of this phenomenon, especially by the young generation. According to WHO data, alcohol abuse is directly or indirectly related to more than 70% of deaths from chronic non-communicable diseases.

In her dissertation, the doctoral student interpreted the problem in a socio-medical aspect, as the harm from alcohol is not only related to the share of alcohol-dependent people, but also to the cumulative harm that affects the consuming person, the people around him and society as a whole. This social triad, on which the negative effect of alcohol consumption falls, is insufficiently studied, and the author makes his scientific contribution to the illumination of the complex impact of this negative factor on public health. Emphasis is placed on determining the nature, extent, and frequency of alcohol harm to the user's environment, thereby framing the overall effect of alcohol use on the community.

Characteristics of the content of the dissertation work

The dissertation is 187 pages long, including an introduction, literature review, research methodology, discussion of results, conclusions, guidelines. The bibliography includes 79 literary sources. The development is illustrated with 44 tables, 30 figures and 2 appendices.

In the introduction, brief information on the relevance and importance of the topic is presented.

In the literature review that begins the dissertation work, alcohol consumption and the harms of this phenomenon are examined not only on an individual level, but mostly from the perspective of public health. Special attention is paid to the influence of the consuming individual on his environment - family and children, circle of friends, colleagues in the professional community, other persons from the social environment, incl. strangers in casual and incidental communication. The methodological challenges in the scientific research of these problems are examined - the specificity of the questionnaire surveys among the population, the analysis of the registered damages through the analysis of the economic costs and the analysis of the qualitative dimensions of the problem through in-depth interviews.

Research methodology. The purpose of the conducted study is clearly defined - to study the prevalence of health and psycho-social harms from the alcohol consumption of other persons among the young generation, with a view to developing guidelines for the prevention of alcohol use. For the fulfillment of this goal, the doctoral student has set specific tasks that are clearly formulated and successfully completed. The methodology of scientific research is adequate to

the purpose and tasks. Sociological methods were used - a standardized individual interview, a survey method through a web-based questionnaire, mathematical and statistical methods for data processing and analysis of the results. The object of the study are students studying at the country's universities, and the signs of observation are structured into four groups.

In the chapter "Analysis of the results of the National study of the risk factors for health in the Republic of Bulgaria among the elderly population over 20 years old" are presented data, related to alcohol consumption - frequency, type of drinks, quantity, frequency of use, harm to the individual, harm to others. The conclusions of the study with significant socio-medical significance are indicated.

In the chapter "Analysis of the results of the survey using a web-based questionnaire" the harms of alcohol consumption on the environment of the consumer and on the overall social environment are indicated. The specific harms and wrongful acts and behavior are separated into three areas concerning communication, physical and mental consequences, including road and transport risks. The conclusions drawn are well structured and naturally follow the analysis and research results.

The conclusion summarizes the arguments presented in defense of the main thesis, regarding the harms of alcohol use and the need to shift the focus of responsibility from the risk behavior of the individual to the responsibility of the state and society for the health, economic and social consequences.

Among the listed contributions of the dissertation, I would point out the development of a methodological toolkit for researching the harms of alcohol use on others, which can be used for representative studies and predictions in the field of public health. On this basis, policies and intervention strategies can be implemented to reduce the negative consequences of a health, social and economic nature.

At the end of the statement, I would like to point out that the presented dissertation fully meets the scientific requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor".

Conclusion:

Given the outstanding qualities of the dissertation work, namely the topicality and importance of the topic, the methods used, the obtained data with statistical relevance and the essential contribution nature, **I confidently give my positive vote and recommend the members of the esteemed Scientific Jury to vote positively for awarding an educational and scientific degree "Doctor" of Mirela Rumenova Strandjeva in professional direction: 7.1. Medicine, in the scientific specialty "Social Medicine and Health Management".**

12/02/2024

Signature:

/Prof. Dr. T. Cherkezov, MD,PhD/