

STATEMENT OF OPINION
by Assoc. prof. Desislava Ivanova Vankova, MD, MPH, PhD, DSc
Medical University of Varna

Regarding the dissertation work of **Mirela Rumenova Strandjeva**, for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

Topic: "**Health and psychosocial harms of the alcohol consumption by other persons on the young people in Bulgaria**"

Research supervisor: **Assoc. Prof. Galya Tsolova, MD, PhD**

By order No. RD-22/ 15.01.2024 of the Director of the National Center for Public Health and Analyzes (NCPHA), I have been appointed as a member of the Scientific Jury for the defense of the dissertation of:

Mirela Rumenova Strandjeva, a PhD candidate of independent training at the NCPHA, Sofia, professional direction 7.1. Medicine, scientific specialty "Social Medicine and Healthcare Management".

With Protocol No. 1 of the meeting of the scientific jury, held on 18.01.2024, I am determined to present a statement of opinion.

The statement of opinion was drawn up after an analysis of the documentation submitted by the candidate in accordance with the requirements and criteria of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and in accordance with Article 72, Paragraph 1 of the Regulations on the Terms and Procedures for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and occupying academic positions in the NCPHA.

Relevance and significance of the dissertation

Behavioral determinants of health, such as alcohol consumption, are most sensitive to change in successful public health interventions. In this sense, research in the field of (mis) consumption of alcohol, its dynamics and regional specificities, are always relevant and especially significant when they generate evidence to be presented at the the health-policy level. This is exactly the kind of in-depth and comprehensive research presented in the dissertation of the PhD candidate Mirela Rumenova Strandjeva.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there is no healthy amount of alcohol consumption. As stated in the dissertation, in the latest WHO report on alcohol and health (2018), alcohol consumption was cited as the cause of death for 3 million people (5.3% of all deaths) in 2016 globally. For Bulgaria, national statistics data data shows that over 65% of the population consumes alcohol and this share is increasing. The stated facts, as well as the connection with a high risk for the development of socially significant diseases and with disabilities of the reproductive system, makes the topic of the dissertation extremely relevant and socially significant in a national context.

However, official statistics underestimate the additional effects of alcohol, including multidirectional and even time-delayed effects on those around the drinker. The focus of the dissertation is an unexplored side of alcohol consumption in our country, namely the importance of harm (chronic diseases and acute incidents/injuries, acute/intense and persistent/chronic social problems) to the young population in Bulgaria from the alcohol consumption from other persons. The topic of the dissertation is very interesting and relevant, the research is thorough

and comprehensive, and the experience of the PhD candidate in international projects indicated in the biography, also contributed to this.

Dissertation characteristics in brief

The dissertation is in the volume of 187 standard pages. The development is illustrated with 44 tables, 30 figures and 2 appendices.

It is stated that the Bibliography includes 79 references, in Cyrillic and in Latin. In connection with the dissertation work, 5 publications in Bulgarian journals and anthologies are presented, in all of which the PhD candidate is the first author.

The dissertation has a classical structure. A balance has been achieved between a comprehensive literature review, clearly formulated aim and objectives; stated material and methods, presentation of studies with results and analysis, contributions and recommendations. The main scientific hypotheses are specifically stated. Statistical methods are competently presented and applied, with data analyzed using IBM SPSS for Windows.

The literature review covers historical, cultural, epidemiological data on the alcohol consumption. An overview, definition and conceptualization of the types of influences/harms through basic interactions of the alcohol consumer with society (family, friends, colleagues, household, strangers) is made. The consequences of alcohol consumption include social, financial and family harm, physical and verbal abuse, including the consequences of drunk driving.

Overall, a comprehensive review and analysis of available scientific information worldwide on the global burden of alcohol consumption and harms to the individual and society has been carried out, leading to a reasoned formulation of the objective and outline of the methodological framework.

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate the prevalence of health and psychosocial harms of alcohol consumption among others among the young population, with a view to developing guidelines for the prevention of alcohol abuse. In fulfillment of the five tasks resulting from the goal, the spread of alcohol consumption among the elderly population in Bulgaria was initially analyzed, and the negative consequences of alcohol consumption on public health were studied.

The study methodology is well described. Secondary and primary data were analyzed to fulfill the objective. The study uses open access data from the National Survey of Health Risk Factors in Bulgaria among the elderly population over 20 in 2020 (standardized individual interview, sample of 3182 individuals, in six age groups). A survey method (web-based questionnaire) among students in the country was also applied, including adapted sections from the approved questionnaire from the WHO/ThaiHealth Project Protocol "The Harm to Others from Drinking". The questionnaire is presented in Appendix 1 of the dissertation (four sections and one final question about personal alcohol consumption, a sample of 405 students). I consider the lack of information on how exactly the sample of 405 participants was selected (how the e-mails were approached, which are personal data, and why exactly such a sample size, was selected) to be a weakness.

The results are competently presented in two parts against the data of the two studies. Interesting analyzes have been made, which are illustrated appropriately.

The conclusions and recommendations are also clearly stated and summarize the results of the two studies. Key findings from the own survey confirm those from the representative national survey. In the context of a lack of similar studies, the analyzes of the interesting data from the different harm categories are of high social importance. The evidence of widespread alcohol consumption among the surveyed students (84.3% of the sample), exceeding

by 20% the data from other national and international surveys, signals an urgent need for an adequate public response.

Dissertation Contributions

The study provides data on the experience of harm from drinking alcohol to others among the sample of students, emphasizing not only the prevalence of harm, but also its burden, which underlines the social and political responsibility associated with prevention and adequate response by the regional and national policy makers.

I accept the contributions formulated by the PhD candidate and consider that the study is innovative as a theme and research scope. For the first time in Bulgaria, a methodological tool has been developed to study the harm caused by the alcohol consumption on other persons.

The presented analysis of secondary data, as well as the own study, could be a starting point for health policy changes related to reducing the harms of alcohol consumption on others.

The submitted **brief dissertation (avtoreferat)** meets the requirements.


Conclusion

The presented dissertation examines for the first time in our country the health and psychosocial harms of the alcohol consumption by other persons on young people in Bulgaria. The recommendations to the PhD candidate are mainly in the direction of future publications in peer review journals in the international databases, for higher visibility of the achieved significant results.

The dissertation of the PhD candidate on the topic "**Health and psychosocial harms of the alcohol consumption by other persons on the young people in Bulgaria**" meets all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria the Regulations for the Implementation of the law and of the Regulations on the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions in the NCPHA. The work also covers the standart requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "doctor" (PhD), which is why I give my **positive opinion** and suggest to the respected members of the Scientific Jury to vote positively for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to Mirela Rumenoova Strandjeva in professional direction: 7.1. Medicine, scientific specialty "Social Medicine and Healthcare Management".

7 of February, 2024
Varna

Author of the statement of opinion:


Assoc. prof. D. Vankova, MD, MPH, PhD, DSc