

Statement

from

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In connection with the Order of the Rector of Medical University of Varna № P-109-489 of 22.11.2021, on the grounds of art. 42 para. 6 and art. 30 para. 3 of the Regulations for the implementation of the law on the development of the academic staff in the republic of Bulgaria and art.68, para.1 of the Regulations for the development of the Academic staff of Medical University - Varna, Decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Medicine at Medical University - Varna (Protocol №54 from 09.11.2021) and Protocol № 1 of the meeting in absentia of the Scientific Jury from 25.11.2021.

Regarding: Competition for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "**Doctor**" in the field of higher education 7. Health and sports, professional field 7.1. Medicine and the scientific specialty "**Psychiatry**" of Dr. Raya Zlatislavova Dimitrova. Enrolled by Order of the Rector of Medical University - Varna № R-109-89 from 01.02.2019.

Dissertation topic: „Assessment of non-suicidal self-injurious behaviour in a non-clinical population of adolescents ages 14-19 in Varna.”

Research supervisor: Assoc. prof Petar Petrov, MD, PhD, DSc

Brief biographical information

Dr Raya Dimitrova graduated in 2015 from Medical University - Varna, majoring in medicine. In 2020 she acquired a specialist degree in Child psychiatry. Since 2017 she has been an assistant professor at the Department of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology, Medical University - Varna. She works as a doctor, specialist in child psychiatry at the University Hospital "St. Marina" Varna, Clinic of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

Significance and relevance of the topic

Non-suicidal self-injury is a phenomenon that has been studied relatively intensively over the last 30-40 years. The significance of the problem is determined by its wide distribution and significant impact on the functioning and health of adolescents. In most cases, its occurrence is associated with the experience of strong negative emotions.

Due to its high prevalence, the study of the problem is of great social importance, both in the clinical and in the general population. The full and in-depth study of the problem in the general population is accompanied by difficulties inherent in epidemiological studies among adolescents and due to explicit or implicit stigma, fear of condemnation and

misunderstanding. The latter aspects once again emphasize the relevance of the topic and the need to build a clear picture of non-suicidal self-injury, based on empirical and current data.

Despite the growing number of publications worldwide, there are currently no comprehensive data based on the Bulgarian population, assessed in the context of our ethnic and cultural characteristics.

Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation contains 145 pages, includes 61 tables, 5 figures and 1 appendix. The bibliography covers 193 titles, of which 5 are in Bulgarian and 188 in English. The large percentage of titles in English is justified, given the limited number of studies and publications in our country. This once again emphasizes the need for such a study among the Bulgarian population.

The dissertation is structured according to the requirements of the Regulations for the implementation of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria and includes content, introduction, literature review, goals and objectives, contingent and methods, results and analysis, limitations and shortcomings of the study and guidelines for future work, summary points, conclusions, contributions, bibliography. The text is clear, easy to read, with a logical sequence between chapters. The visualization of the obtained results is good, there is an adequate balance between the separate sections.

The literature review examines comprehensively different aspects of non-suicidal self-injurious behaviour - history, terminology, definitions, epidemiology of the problem, comorbidity, theoretical models. Attention is paid to the differential diagnosis between non-suicidal self-injurious and suicidal behaviour. The covered literary material is extensive, diverse, modern, and purposefully processed and analysed.

The purpose of the study is clearly stated. The tasks are specific and provide an opportunity to achieve the set goals.

The design of the study is appropriate for the purpose.

The study included 294 adolescents between 14 and 19 years of age, 267 of whom completed the full survey of the study, meeting the set inclusion and exclusion criteria and objectives of the study.

The chosen instruments are appropriate and allow for adequate evaluation. The applied methods for statistical data processing are typical for this type of research and validated - they include descriptive analysis, frequency analysis, factor analysis, cluster analysis, Chi-square test and others. A good level of knowledge and use of various statistical analyses has been demonstrated.

The obtained results are appropriately described and correspond to the formulated hypothesis and the set tasks.

The established prevalence of self-injurious actions and thoughts in the population corresponds to the results of foreign epidemiological population studies in adolescence. Females were more represented in the sample of self-harming individuals, as well as in the general population of adolescents who participated in the study.

The application of the proposed criteria from the fifth edition of the DSM and their individual consideration divides the factors into two categories. In the first category are factors which are distinctive and important for non-suicidal self-injury, and in the second - broader or borderline, and therefore carry little diagnostic information. Some results point to the need for revision and modification of the criteria for diagnostic and non-diagnostic NSSID.

Aspects of non-suicidal self-injury associated with functional disturbances of any kind stand out with low support from adolescents. The results indicate that individuals who are more likely to meet the diagnostic criteria for NSSID are those who experience the most distress from self-harming behaviours.

The most commonly used method of self-injury is self-cutting, which corresponds to what has been reported in the literature on the subject. The established gender differences in the preferred method of self-harm also correspond to the data from foreign studies. Females are more likely to resort to self-cutting, and males prefer hitting as a method of self-harm.

Interesting are the results in support of the thesis that among certain individuals non-suicidal self-injury could be considered as a form of addictive behaviour. There is a significant association between individuals who are likely to meet the diagnostic criteria for NSSID and individuals who perceive their behaviour as highly addictive. The results also show that difficult to control thoughts and behaviours of self-harm are the most prominent factor distinguishing the severity of NSSI. The duration of self-injury is also relevant to the severity of NSSI. Individuals who report a longer duration of self-harm (a period of 5 separate days in the year before the previous one) are those in whom the features of addictive behaviour are more pronounced.

The 15 conclusions drawn from the results of the study correspond to the set goals and objectives.

Nine contributions were made, of which 4 were of original theoretical nature, 2 were of a confirmatory nature and 3 were of an applied nature.

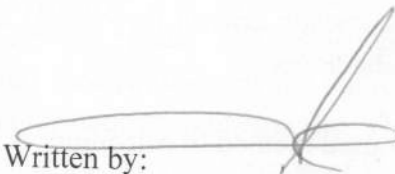
The limitations of the research are correctly described, and guidelines for future research developments in the field are indicated.

Conclusion

The presented dissertation on "Assessment of non-suicidal self-injurious behaviour in a non-clinical population of adolescents aged 14-19 years in Varna" is independent research of scientific and practical value. Dr Raya Dimitrova shows in-depth knowledge and capabilities for systematization and comprehension of existing scientific theses, design of own research and analytical presentation of own results. The work shows both the broad theoretical knowledge of the essence of the problem and the desire to expand scientific knowledge in this area. Evident is the ability of the doctoral student to summarize literature data, to form logical hypotheses, to conduct independent scientific research with modern methodology, to analyse its results and to adequately argue the conclusions from it. The current work fully meets the requirements for dissertation for obtaining an educational and scientific degree "Doctor" according to the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its application and the Regulations for the development of academic staff at the Medical University - Varna. The above-mentioned points allow me to give a positive assessment and confidently recommend to the esteemed scientific jury to vote positively for the award of educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in Medicine to Dr Raya Zlatislavova Dimitrova.

Varna
13.12..2021

Written by:



/Assoc. Prof. Svetlin Varbanov, PhD/