

OPINION

on a dissertation on a topic

"Health promoting universities - development of the initiative and prerequisites for implementation in Bulgarian higher education"

of **Petya Stoilova Boncheva**

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Elected as a member of the scientific jury by order No. R-109-337/05.08.2022 of MU-Varna

Topicality of development

Health promotion, as a process that enables families and communities to increase control over their health and improve their quality of life and achieve and maintain health, emphasizes the promotion of positive good health. Health promotion is any combination of health, educational, economic, political, spiritual, or organizational initiatives designed to bring about positive attitudinal, behavioral, social, or environmental changes conducive to improving population health. The World Health Organization has an undisputed leading role in establishing this process. The first international conference on health promotion in Ottawa (1986) adopted the so-called Ottawa Charter, which defines the five components building the health promotion strategy: building a public health policy; creating a supportive health-promoting environment; strengthening public activity; development of personal skills; reorientation of health services. A number of health promotion networks have been created under the auspices of the WHO, which promote the so-called "places for health promotion", such as - Health Promoting Hospitals, Regions for Health Network, European Network Health Promoting Schools, Health Enhancing Physical Activity, European Network for Workplace Health Promotion. Bulgaria participated and participates to varying degrees in some of these networks. Unfortunately, Bulgaria has not participated in one of the WHO initiatives in this area - Health Promoting Universities - HPU. Despite the convincing evidence of the effectiveness of this initiative, so far no Bulgarian higher education institution has expressed interest in its implementation. It is not sufficiently known in our country and there is no data on whether some Bulgarian higher education institutions apply it, the potential of Bulgarian universities as an environment for health promotion has not been studied.

Therefore, the dissertation work is undeniably up-to-date and has an undoubted contribution to the field of health promotion in our country.

Brief description of the dissertation work

The dissertation contains 184 pages and is illustrated with 8 figures, 21 tables and 6 annexes. It is developed in eight chapters. The bibliography covers 232 literary sources, of which 35 are in Cyrillic and 187 are in Latin. Three annexes present the questionnaires that were used in the conducted self-study, and one annex presents a self-assessment tool.

Goals, tasks, methodological tools

In order to answer the research question, Ms. Boncheva states that the main goal is to study the conditions for the implementation of the WHO initiative HPU in Bulgarian higher education, by evaluating a specific university (MU "Prof. Dr. P. Stoyanov" - Varna) according to internationally recognized criteria for health promotion universities.

For the fulfillment of the set goal, six clearly formulated tasks are set to be solved, which are aimed at: researching the development of the fundamental theoretical concepts that contributed to the validation of the HPU initiative on a global scale; study of the international experience in implementing the HPU initiative in university communities with different economic, social and cultural contexts; validation of the internationally accepted "Self-Review Tool" of HPU to the Bulgarian linguistic and cultural peculiarities; clarification of the available conditions and the scope of health promotion activities in a specific Bulgarian university, by applying the adapted tool for self-assessment of health promotion universities; identification of students' health needs through analysis of their health behavior; identifying the priority areas for health promotion activities at the university, based on the studies done.

5 working hypotheses are presented, which must be confirmed or rejected in the course of conducting the study.

To fulfill the set tasks, the research process is organized in three phases - preparation of a Bulgarian tool for self-assessment of the readiness to implement the WHO initiative HPU in a Bulgarian higher education institution, through a process of adaptation and validation of the tool - "Self-Review Tool"; a real empirical study of the opinion of the university community at MU "Prof. Dr. P. Stoyanov" - Varna; final self-assessment of the institution, regarding the criteria for the HPU and formulation of the priority spheres for action on the health promotion.

The attached toolkit includes a structured questionnaire designed separately for students, academic staff and staff. Applied methods include a structured survey, semi-structured in-depth interview, analysis of interview information, documentary method. By means of the Delphi method (a method for making decisions based on a certain amount of collected and analyzed information), an analysis and evaluation of the collected information from the conducted studies was made. A wide range of statistical methods was used to

process the survey data - descriptive analysis, hypothesis testing using parametric and non-parametric methods, reliability analyzes of the applied tools.

Results, conclusions, contributions and recommendations

The results of the study are presented in Chapter 4. The study was conducted in three phases. The first phase includes the adaptation and validation in Bulgarian of an internationally recognized tool for self-evaluation of universities for health promotion "Self-Review Tool". The first phase was carried out in several stages, and during the first stage, two independent translations from English to Bulgarian of the original Self-Review Tool were carried out. The inconsistencies between the two translations were resolved by correction, reconciliation and addition of some elements by the research team and as a result Version 1.0 was prepared in Bulgarian. The second stage is holding an Expert Panel to reach a consensus among experts in the field of public health, regarding the adaptation of some specific terms and expressions from the original version of the tool to Bulgarian cultural characteristics, resulting in the preparation of Version 2.0. of the instrument. The third stage involves preliminary testing of Version 2.0. among representatives of the target population, which was carried out in two parts: conducting a structured survey and semi-standardized cognitive individual interviews. As a result, a positive attitude towards the institution conducting the research, willingness to cooperate and satisfaction with the participation is established. At the same time, some difficulties in the process of adapting the instrument to the Bulgarian conditions are also identified, such as: the structure of the statements; the response options available; obscure words, expressions and phrases; complex expressions; inappropriate words; terms; ambiguous words; misleading words and statements making it difficult for the respondent. The final stage of the fourth phase is the formation of the final Version 3.0. of "Instrument for self-assessment of HPU" in Bulgarian. In this way, the direct application of a ready-made, but created in a different Bulgarian environment, instrument, which is thus harmonized with the Bulgarian cultural and social characteristics, was avoided.

The successfully completed first phase of the survey is the basis and guarantee for the success of the second phase - the real empirical study of the opinion of the university community at MU "Prof. Dr. P. Stoyanov" - Varna for the available conditions and health promotion activities in a university environment. In this phase of the research, the validated tool for self-assessment of HPU in Bulgarian was applied among the university community of the MU - Varna. The opinion of the people at the university - students, academic staff and staff - is particularly important for the evaluation of the conditions and the activities carried out to improve health in a university environment. The instrument is attached, which consists of 68 statements distributed in 5 sections. Each section assesses achievement in separate areas key to higher education, according to the international criteria for HPU: Leadership and management; Provide services; Environmental conditions; Communication, information and marketing; Academic, personal, social and professional development. A study of the available conditions and health promotion activities was conducted, according

to the individual sections of the instrument, and analyzes of the answers of the different groups of respondents - students, academic staff and staff by section - were presented.

In this phase of the study, a study of some features of the health behavior of the students was additionally carried out by applying a questionnaire of 17 questions aimed at significant characteristics of their health behavior, such as: smoking, use of alcohol and drugs, nutrition and physical activity, as well as questions about self-assessment of health, health awareness, level of psycho-emotional stress, etc. In addition to the fact that the study of the health behavior of students is necessary as part of the implementation of the self-assessment tool of HPU, it gives a clear picture of the prevalence of risk factors among students, which in turn will serve as a basis for planning activities aimed at specific health problems.

The third phase of the study is a final self-assessment of the institution, regarding the criteria for health promoting universities and the formulation of the priority areas of health promotion actions, which was conducted by five respondents, after which the final institutional responses of MU "Prof. Dr. P. Stoyanov" - Varna on the HPU self-assessment tool. Subsequently, the tool was completed on the British HPU Network website, generating a report indicating the degree of implementation by the university according to international criteria. For each subsection, the level of performance of the indicators is indicated in percentages, as in all areas this percentage is above 70%, which is the lower limit for falling into the "green" zone (a colored "traffic light" type graphic is used), as only for the Institutional subsection commitment and responsibility, this percentage and with 67% implementation, which means that additional activities need to be carried out in this area.

The author presents 9 conclusions, a logical conclusion of the dissertation work. 5 contributions, of a scientific and scientific-applied nature, have been presented, which I accept. The dissertation work would have gained a lot if, logically based on the conclusions and contributions, it would have made recommendations aimed at specific institutions that are related to the issue.

Scientific publications

In connection with the dissertation, 3 publications were prepared, in which the doctoral student is the first author. The results of the dissertation were also presented at a scientific conference.

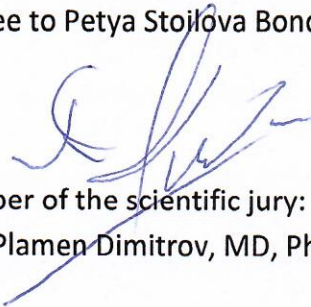
Abstract

The abstract fully reflects the achievements of the doctoral student, synthesizes the content of the dissertation work and is fully compliant with the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Rules for its Application and the Rules for the Development of the Academic Staff at the Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" - Varna for the acquisition of the educational and scientific PhD degree.

Conclusion

I positively evaluate the presented dissertation work. The basis for this assessment is the topicality of the issue, the significance of the set goal and tasks, the modern methodical approach used. The obtained results show the way and the activities that must be carried out in order for a given university to become a Health Promoting University. The dissertation work of Petya Boncheva demonstrates the author's commitment and competence in the field of health promotion and shows her serious and deep scientific and scientific-practical interest in the subject of HPU. The dissertation development meets all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its Implementation and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" - Varna for the acquisition of the PhD degree. The above considerations give me reason to confidently suggest to the members of the esteemed jury to highly evaluate the dissertation work and to vote positively for awarding the PhD degree to Petya Stoilova Boncheva.

7 September, 2022.



Member of the scientific jury:
Prof. Plamen Dimitrov, MD, PhD