

OPINION

by

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On the dissertation work

**"REHABILITATION CARE FOR OVERCOMING LONELINESS
IN ELDERLY AND OLD PEOPLE"**

of **Donka Panayotova Nikolova**

For the award of the educational and scientific degree "PhD"

Field of higher education: 7. Health and Sports

Professional field: 7.4. Public Health

Major: "Health Care Management"

With scientific advisors:

Assoc. Prof. Stanislava Pavlova, Ph.D. and Prof. Dr. Paraskeva Mancheva, MD

Procedure details:

By order of the Rector of Medical University -Varna № P-109-94 from 08.02.2019. Donka Panayotova Nikolova is enrolled as a PhD student in an independent form of education for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "PhD" in the field of higher education: 7. Health and sports Professional field: 7.4. Public Health, major: "Management of Health Care". A record for successfully passing the doctoral exam was presented. Determining the composition of the Scientific Jury, Donka Nikolova was deducted with the right to defense by Order of the Rector of Medical University-Varna № P-109-482 from 18.11.2021.

Biographical data and career development

Donka Panayotova Nikolova graduated from the Institute for Health Personnel Training "Dr. P. Beshev" - Pleven, majoring in "Rehabilitator" in 1989. She successively obtained a Bachelor's degree (2006) in Psychology and a Master's degree in Applied Psychology (2007) at Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar". Since 2017, she has consistently graduated from the Bachelor's and Master's programs in Health Care Management at the Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" - Varna.

Donka Nikolova's professional activity began in 1989 as a rehabilitator in the Fifth Polyclinic - Varna, and later in the "Sana" sanatorium of the General Directorate of Construction Troops in Druzhba resort - Varna, in the Center for Social Rehabilitation and Integration for Children with Special Educational Needs "Joy" at the Foundation "Joy for Our Children" - Varna. In her activity she implements rehabilitation programs for treatment and prevention of patients with various pathologies and degrees of disability.

Donka Nikolova's professional development related to university education began in 2015 as an assistant professor at the Rehabilitator Training Sector at the Medical College of the Medical University - Varna. She participated in practical exercises in the disciplines "Kinesitherapy in

Internal Medicine", "Kinesitherapy in Surgery", "Kinesitherapy in Geriatrics", "Kinesitherapy in Rheumatology", "Therapeutic Massage", "Zonotherapy" and "Healing Gymnastics".

Donka Nikolova's research activities are focused on the problems of the elderly people, physical and psychological health in the aging process, the possibilities of comprehensive rehabilitation for healthy longevity, overcoming chronic conditions and psycho-emotional problems arising in old age.

Since 2021 she has been registered for specialization in Public Health.

Descriptive characteristics of the dissertation

The dissertation, developed by Donka Nikolova, is 146 pages long, structured according to standard requirements, including: Introduction, Literary review, Purpose, tasks, material and methods, Results and discussions, Conclusions, recommendations and contributions. It is richly illustrated with 94 figures, 8 tables and 7 appendices. The bibliographic reference includes 168 sources, of which 53 in Cyrillic and 115 in Latin.

Assessment of the relevance of the topic

The topic of the dissertation is contemporary and dissertable. The problem of loneliness of the elderly people, due to its many aspects, has an integrative character and is the point of contact between sociology, gerontology, anthropology, psychology, social work and complex rehabilitation. Loneliness and social isolation affect the elderly and old people, leading to an increase in the demand for and use of health and social services. In modern medical practice, the importance of loneliness as a common phenomenon leading to a significant risk of increased mortality in old age is gaining ground. Deteriorating physical function in old age is a critical period in which it is necessary to study the impact of loneliness on health. Existing practical approaches to dealing with age crises in the aging process have significant potential to improve interpersonal communication, improve the quality of life of elderly people and overcome loneliness.

Literature review

The author makes an analytical review of the literature, examining the nature and main characteristics of loneliness, social isolation and social communication in the elderly. The socio-demographic and health profile of the elderly and the elderly is presented in depth. Social services for the elderly are analyzed. The in-depth analysis of practical approaches to dealing with loneliness and rehabilitation care for users of the social service "Home for old people" gives the author reason to identify the problems and needs of the old age people in order to improve their well-being and quality of life.

The need to plan rehabilitation care to promote the integration of the individual, to reveal creative skills, to change stereotypes of thinking and behavior, improving interaction with the outside world and self-esteem is outlined.

The logically structured literature review reveals the broad competencies of the PhD student in the field of the considered problem..

Research methodology

The main goal and tasks are specifically formulated and accurately reflect the research work performed by Donka Nikolova. The author uses a wide range of methods adequate to achieve the goal. The structure and content of the developed tools are subordinated to the specifics of the information collected by the respective group of respondents. In order to study and establish the impact of specific rehabilitation care to overcome / reduce the feeling of loneliness in the elderly

and the elderly, a methodology for conducting an experiment with users of the social service "Home for Old People" has been proposed.

Documentary, sociological and experimental research methods were used. In order to reveal the nature of the observed phenomena and their interdependencies, statistical methods for analysis and interpretation of data have been applied. The tools of the research are self-developed and include an individual questionnaire for studying the opinion of the elderly and old people regarding the medical and social status and their social interaction; a scale for assessing loneliness, built on 10 statements describing feelings, thoughts and states related to the experience of loneliness; life satisfaction scale designed to measure the cognitive component of subjective mental well-being as a global assessment of life related to a wide range of indicators of subjective and psychological well-being, divided into five areas. A document for obtaining informed consent for participation in the study has been developed, which contains detailed data on the nature of the research.

To achieve the goals of the experimental research, a complex methodology "From Past to Present" was developed, which consists of 5 topics: "Childhood", "Family - marriage and children", "Friendship", "Profession", "Favorite activities and interests" and the final stage.

Results and discussion

The dissertation presents results logically shaped and structured in Chapter Three. The results of the conducted research on the socio-demographic and health profile of the respondents, the questionnaire "The Scale for Solitude" and the questionnaire "Scale for Life Satisfaction" are presented.

The opinion of users of the social service DSH "Gergana", Varna regarding social status and awareness of the application of occupational therapy and participation in group activities as a factor for quality rehabilitation care was studied.

Situations of vulnerability related to physical survival and deprivation, which are a risk factor for triggering anxiety, social isolation and exacerbation of depression, have been identified as leading causes of increased feelings of loneliness in elderly and old people.

A relationship has been found between the need for rehabilitation procedures and the nature of the disease in elderly and old people from the Home for Old People. Depending on the rehabilitation potential and individual characteristics, the importance of group activities related to physical activity, occupational therapy and interest clubs in the lives of elderly people is highlighted.

The data strongly confirm the reduction of the feeling of loneliness in the elderly and old people from the Home for the Elderly by applying the methodology "From Past to Present" developed by Donka Nikolova. It has been found that for an old person loneliness becomes a serious experience, which worsens vital activity and increases psychological discomfort. The results of the study define loneliness as a subjective experience and may be the result of dissatisfaction with human relationships and close relationships or social needs. The research reveals that loneliness is less pronounced in societies where social relationships and traditional structures are preserved, but individuals' perceptions of the quality of their relationships can cause loneliness to exist in different dimensions.

The proposed approach in the implementation of rehabilitation care contributes to overcoming the monotony of the lifestyle of elderly people, to revive interests and maintain vitality. By realizing the needs and the resource potential, expanding the social connections and the social circle, the overcoming of the feeling of loneliness is supported.

Donka Nikolova discusses the results obtained and skillfully presents them as deficits in practice. The author proves the need to implement an individual care plan as a mechanism that promotes adaptation to life changes and supports adaptation to the negative effects of aging. The

analysis of the practical approaches for influencing the feeling of loneliness in the elderly and old people gives grounds to Donka Nikolova to develop a complex methodology "From Past to Present" which is an opportunity for the elderly and old people to realize reducing the feeling of loneliness.

The reference on the contributions presented in the dissertation objectively reflects the real achievements of Donka Nikolova. The contributions to the dissertation are in theoretical and practical-applied aspect, which I accept.

The presented six main conclusions, clearly and precisely formulated, characterize in detail the results obtained from the implementation of the tasks and objectives of the dissertation. For the first time in our country, the problem of rehabilitation care for overcoming loneliness in elderly and old people is reviewed in details.

A targeted and in-depth study of loneliness and satisfaction in the elderly has been conducted. Practical guidelines and complex methods for reducing loneliness are proposed.

The formulated recommendations and contributions of the dissertation are made on the basis of own data from the scientific research.

The dissertation work is written in good language, precise in terms of terminology.

In connection with the dissertation, the PhD student has presented five full-text publications in prestigious scientific journals.

The abstract faithfully reproduces the content of the dissertation.

Personal impressions

I know Donka Nikolova as a motivated, successful and promising colleague from the Medical College-Varna. I highly appreciate her purposefulness, precision and responsibility. Donka Nikolova stands out with exceptional loyalty, correctness in relationships and research activity.

Conclusion

The dissertation of Donka Panayotova Nikolova is of high scientific and practical value, which contributes to the optimization of rehabilitation care for overcoming loneliness in the elderly and old people.

Based on the overall assessment of the documentation provided to me, I believe that Donka Panayotova Nikolova fully meets the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation and the Regulations for the development of the academic staff at the Medical University - Varna. I give my positive vote for awarding Donka Panayotova Nikolova to the educational and scientific degree "PhD" in the major "Health Care Management".

26.01.2022
Varna

Standpoint drawn up by:

Prof. Silviya Borisova Dimitrova, PhD, DSc

