

REVIEW

By Assoc. Prof. Snezhanka Stefanova Dragusheva, MD

Department of Nursing Care, Faculty of Public Health at MU-Plovdiv

of a dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree "**Doctor**"

Professional field: 7.4. Public Health

Doctoral Program: "Health Care Management"

Author: **Nedyalka Grozeva Boycheva**

Form of doctoral studies: doctoral student in independent preparation

Department: "Health Care Management", Faculty of Public Health, MU-Plovdiv

Topic: "**Formation of health skills and habits in children from the Roma community**"

Scientific supervisors: Prof. Dr. Maria Semerdzhieva, MD

Prof. Biyanka Torniyova, PhD

By order No. **R-115/09.01.26** of the Deputy Rector for Research and Development, I have been elected as a member of the Scientific Jury and have been assigned to prepare a review for the procedure for acquiring the ESD "**Doctor**" with a candidate - Nedyalka Grozeva Boychev, a doctoral student in independent preparation at the Department of "**Health Care Management**", **Faculty of Public Health , MU-Plovdiv.**

1. General presentation of the procedure and the doctoral student

The presented set of materials on paper / electronic media is in accordance with Art. 70 (1) of Section I, Chapter V. Terms and procedure for acquiring the ESD "DOCTOR" at MU-Plovdiv from the Regulations for Academic Development at MU-Plovdiv.

The review of the documents shows that the procedure for discharge and the procedure for announcing the defense have been complied with. The documents have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation, as well as the Regulations for Academic Development at MU-Plovdiv.

2. Brief biographical data about the doctoral student

Nedyalka Grozeva Boycheva graduated from the Medical College of the Medical University of Plovdiv in 1997. During the period 1998-2000, she obtained the Bachelor's degree in Health Care and the professional qualification of Health Care Manager and Lecturer in a Medical College at

the Medical University of Plovdiv. She obtained the Master's degree in Public Health and Health Management with the professional qualification of Health Manager at the Medical University of Sofia in 2002-2004. In 2006, Nedyalka Boycheva received second prize from the Bulgarian Association of Healthcare Professionals (BAHP) in the "Bulgarian Nurse" competition. In 2017, she obtained a second master's degree in "Healthcare Management" at the Medical University of Plovdiv. From 2008 to 2010, she was a part-time lecturer at the Department of Nursing and Midwifery, section "Nursing Care". Since 2010, she has been on a permanent employment contract at the Department of Nursing at the Faculty of Public Health of the Medical University of Plovdiv. Her main activity is teaching and training Bulgarian and foreign students, including under the Erasmus+ program, as well as representing the university in the European Nursing Module. Responsible for the international activities of the department. Her professional experience includes many years of clinical practice as a nurse in the surgical department of the Plovdiv General Hospital and the Gastroenterology and Hepatology Clinic of the St. George General Hospital. She also works as a health consultant at the Community Center for Children and Families (0–7 years) - Plovdiv.

She holds degrees in "Medical Pedagogy" and "Public Health". She has participated in national and European projects related to healthy lifestyles, early childhood development and student practices.

Nedyalka Grozeva Boycheva was enrolled as a doctoral student in an independent form of study in the doctoral program "Health Care Management" in the field of higher education 7. Health and Sports, in the direction 7.4. Public Health, by Order **R-2558/23.07.2024** and was discharged with the right to defense by Order **R-6428/19.11.2025**.

3. Relevance of the topic and appropriateness of the goals and objectives

The topic chosen for the dissertation is not only relevant, but also strategically important for achieving sustainable development and social justice. It requires coordinated efforts and commitment from all stakeholders, including state institutions, non-governmental organizations, health mediators, health professionals and the community itself. These collective actions are essential for overcoming existing health inequalities and ensuring a better future for children from the Romani community.

The topic of the dissertation is relevant and represents a socially significant problem and is of emphasized contemporary relevance and scientific significance.

The goal is clearly and precisely formulated, and five main tasks and working hypotheses have been set to achieve it. The tasks and hypothesis correspond to and are fully consistent with the goal.

4. Knowledge of the problem

The presented literature review and the extensive bibliography to the doctoral student's dissertation work provide a clear idea of the in-depth knowledge of the problems related to unequal access to health, educational and social services for Romani children in early childhood in Bulgaria, as well as the insufficient effectiveness of existing support mechanisms.

The literature review emphasizes that the Romani community often lives in conditions of social isolation, poverty and limited opportunities, which leads to a lower health status, especially for children. Early childhood development is seriously threatened by the lack of systematic health education, low participation in childcare facilities and the shortage of adapted programs tailored to the cultural and linguistic characteristics of Roma families. Particular attention is paid to the role of Romani women, who are the main carriers of care and upbringing in the family, but often do not have access to adequate information and support for the formation of healthy habits in children. Traditional attitudes and cultural characteristics further complicate the inclusion of children in institutional forms of care and education.

The literature review also emphasizes the key role of the nurse in childcare facilities, who is a key intermediary in providing health care, prevention and health education. However, the lack of sufficiently trained specialists and a unified methodology for working in a multiethnic environment limits the effectiveness of health interventions.

At the same time, it is recognized that community centers and health mediators have proven their usefulness, but their scope remains insufficient.

The lack of specialized training for health and education professionals and the lack of standardized health education programs lead to fragmented and uncoordinated efforts. These deficits are not isolated, but manifest themselves in the context of a broader problem complex, characterized by the accumulation and mutual reinforcement of social, cultural, health and educational inequalities that hinder the full early development of Romani children and require the implementation of a systematic, integrated and culturally sensitive approach to overcome existing inequalities.

The review is developed in six logically separated sections and covers a significant part of the relevant Bulgarian and foreign literature related to the formation of health skills and habits in children from the Romani community.

In analyzing the literature review, the PhD student draws conclusions that emphasize that the early health and educational development of Romani children is hindered by a complex of social, cultural, economic and institutional factors. Their effective overcoming requires a systematic, integrated and culturally sensitive approach, including the training of specialists, expanding the network of community centers and health mediators, as well as the development of standardized programs and methodologies for working in a multiethnic environment.

5. Research methodology

The research methodology used meets the requirements of modern science and allows solving the set goals and tasks. The following research methods were used: survey method, documentary method, analysis of literary sources, sociological and statistical method of analysis and interpretation. The doctoral student describes in detail the contingent she studied (families with children aged 0-7 years living in the Roma community, families with children aged 0-7 years living in a non-Roma community/Bulgarian ethnic community, medical specialists working with a predominantly contingent of children of Roma origin, specialist educators working in kindergartens and nurseries with predominantly Roma children).

579 respondents were included, divided into 4 target groups:

- ✓ **Group I - 270 Roma, the age range of the Roma respondents in the study varies widely - the youngest participant is 16 years old, and the oldest is 50 years old.**
- ✓ **Group II - 200 participants of Bulgarian origin (non-Roma), who fill out identical questionnaires. The average age of the respondents of Bulgarian origin is 35 years old.**
- ✓ **Group III – 59 specialists from various kindergartens, located in the largest Roma quarter of Plovdiv -,„Stolipinovo“.**
- ✓ **Group IV – 50 health specialists, working mainly with Roma children in the DCC, located in the largest Roma quarter of Plovdiv, Stolipinovo district.**

In the methodological part of the dissertation work, the objects of study, the units and the signs of observation are clearly defined. To collect empirical data, the sociological approach was used through a direct individual anonymous survey, and specialized questionnaires were applied for the different groups of participants. The survey instruments include questionnaires adapted for the Bulgarian population, as well as those developed specifically for the purposes of this study. The chosen methodology is suitable for achieving the set goal and allows obtaining reliable and substantiated data for solving the research tasks of the dissertation work.

6. Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation work

The scientific work of the doctoral student Nedyalka Boycheva is designed according to the requirements and is presented in **246** pages and is structured in four main chapters. It contains - introduction, literature review, goal, tasks, material and methods, results and discussion, conclusions, contributions and recommendations, a conceptual model of a plan for the formation of health skills and habits in children from the Romani community, used literature and **5** appendices. It is illustrated with **48** figures and **25** tables. The bibliography includes **160** literary sources, of which **110** in Cyrillic and **50** in Latin.

The first chapter contains an introduction and an extensive literature review, covering 6 sections and examining a significant part of the life and culture of the Roma in Bulgaria. The literature review examines the main thematic areas related to state policy and the activities of non-governmental organizations in the field of integration of the Romani community; the traditions and beliefs of the Romani family, as well as the role of men and women in the family structure; the health status of the Roma and their perceptions of health and illness. Particular attention is paid to the process of forming health habits in children of Romani origin, as well as the professional activities and responsibilities of the nurse in a nursery, kindergarten and pediatric office. The role of the nurse as a health consultant and the function of the health mediator as a key figure in working with the Romani community are also analyzed.

In the second chapter, the doctoral student presents the concept of the study clearly and with arguments. The research design, the formulated goal, tasks and hypotheses, the study contingent, the units and signs of observation, the research tools used, the methods and methodological approaches, as well as the applied mathematical and statistical data processing are described in detail. Four research tasks and a working hypothesis have been formulated, according to which "The formation of health skills and habits in children from the Romani community at an early age" is significantly influenced by the family environment, cultural characteristics, socio-economic conditions and access to health and educational services. The hypothesis also emphasizes the possibility of improving the health culture in Roma families, as well as increasing the competence of specialists working in a multiethnic environment, to contribute significantly to optimizing the health development of children.

The third chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the results obtained. The dissertation work is well structured, and it is impressive that at each stage, after the presentation and analysis of the results obtained, a comprehensive discussion, summary and conclusions are made. Chapter three is structured in four sections - families with children aged 0-7 years living in the Roma community; families with children aged 0-7 years living in a non-Roma community/Bulgarian ethnic community; medical specialists working with a predominantly contingent of children of Romani origin; specialist educators working in kindergartens and nurseries mainly with Roma children. Each of the studied families differs and is a unique focus, an intersection of different lines of social inequalities in society - by level of education, by profession, by socio-economic status. A conceptual model of a plan for the formation of health skills and habits in children from the Roma community (0–7 years) has been developed.

The fourth chapter of the dissertation systematizes the conclusions, recommendations and scientific contributions based on the results of the own empirical research. Based on the analysis and summary of the collected data, the main conclusions of the study are formulated. In order to achieve greater clarity and logical consistency, the conclusions are grouped into thematic areas as follows:

- ✓ **assessment of the health status of roma children;**

- ✓ **health skills and habits;**
- ✓ **cultural characteristics and practices;**
- ✓ **communication and education,**
- ✓ **role of institutions and the educational environment,** which allows for their comprehensive and reasoned presentation and facilitates the tracking of the interrelationships between the individual aspects of the researched issue.

7. Contributions and significance of the work for science and practice

The dissertation has clearly identifiable scientific and applied contributions. The scientific significance of the study is expressed in the identification and analysis of key social, cultural and economic factors influencing the formation of health skills and habits in children from the Roma community at an early age, as well as in the comparative analysis of parenting practices in Roma and Bulgarian families. The study expands knowledge about the attitudes and challenges facing health and educational specialists when working in a multicultural environment and outlines the role of leading figures with potential for health impact.

The applied value of the work is manifested in the developed conceptual model and plan for the formation of health skills and habits in children from the Roma community, which can be used as an effective tool for intervention and the basis for creating educational programs aimed at increasing parental competence and prevention through early health education.“

Based on the results of the dissertation research, the doctoral student makes current and reasoned recommendations to various institutions - the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and Science, and the Medical Universities.

8. Assessment of publications on the dissertation work

In connection with the dissertation work, the doctoral student presents **3** scientific publications, of which she is the first author.

Nedyalka Boycheva has taken part in an international scientific forum with a report reflecting the results of the research.

9. Personal participation of the doctoral student

In the presented dissertation work, the doctoral student Nedyalka Boycheva has a full and independent personal participation, as all the results obtained, conclusions drawn and contributions formulated are the result of her own research activity.

10. Abstract

The abstract was developed in accordance with the requirements and reflects the results made in the dissertation work.

11. Critical remarks and recommendations

I have no critical remarks on the structure of the dissertation work, as well as on the presented materials. I recommend that Nedyalka Boycheva continue her future research on this socially and publicly significant problem, expanding and deepening the achieved results. I believe that the accumulated research material and the conclusions drawn create a good basis for enriching the work and its further development into an independent scientific monograph, as well as for publishing the results in specialized scientific publications.

12. Conclusion

The dissertation work of Nedyalka Grozevea Boycheva contains scientific-theoretical and scientific-applied results, which represent an original contribution to medical education in the field of health care for the formation of health skills and habits in children from the Roma community and meets all the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of ADASRB and the relevant Regulations of MU - Plovdiv.

Based on the indicated undeniable merits of the presented dissertation work "**Formation of health skills and habits in children from the Roma community**", I confidently give my **POSITIVE EVALUATION** for the conducted research, presented by the above-reviewed dissertation work, abstract, achieved results and contributions, and I propose to the esteemed Scientific Jury to award the educational and scientific degree "**Doctor**" to Nedyalka Grozevea Boycheva in the doctoral program in **Health Care Management, professional field 7.4. Public Health, Higher Education Area 7. Health and Sports.**

02.02.2026
City of Plovdiv

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Заличено на основание
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