

**REVIEW**

of

**Prof. Diana Krasteva Ivanova, DSc**

Faculty of Medicine of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"- Sofia

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

**Professional field:** 7.4. "Public Health"

**Doctoral program:** "Healthcare Management"

**Author:** Nedyalka Grozeva Boycheva

**Form of doctoral studies:** independent preparation

**Department:** Healthcare Management

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

**Scientific supervisors:** Prof. Maria Semerdzhieva, MD, PhD and Prof. Biyanka Tornyova, PhD

The review was prepared on the basis of Order of the Vice-Rector for Research and Development of MU-Plovdiv No. R-115/09.01.2026 to determine the members of the scientific jury for the procedure.

**I. General presentation of the procedure and the doctoral student**

Nedyalka Grozeva Boycheva has been enrolled in doctoral studies of independent preparation at the Department of Health Care Management of the Faculty of Public Health at MU-Plovdiv, after preliminary discussion by the extended Department Council with protocol No. 5/28.10.2025 and acceptance by the Faculty Council with protocol No. 7/11.11.2025 of the Faculty of Public Health.

The presented set of documents and materials related to and proving the procedural validity of the procedure has been prepared precisely and thoroughly. It fully meets the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria

and the Regulations for its Implementation, and is in accordance with Art.70 (1) of Section I - Acquisition of Doctorate and Doctor of Science degrees at the MU - Plovdiv.

## **II. Brief biographical data of the doctoral student**

Nedyalka Grozeva Boycheva was born on 02.12.1976. In 1994 she graduated from "Secondary education", with a language profile in English and Russian in the city of Plovdiv. In 1997 she graduated from "Semi-higher education", with a professional qualification - general nurse - Medical College at the Medical University of Medical Sciences in the city of Plovdiv. In 2000, he acquired the Bachelor's degree in Health Care and the professional qualification of Head of Health Care and Lecturer at the Medical College, Higher Medical Institute, Plovdiv. In 2004, he graduated from the Master's Degree in Public Health and Health Management with the professional qualification of Health Manager at the Medical University of Sofia. In 2017, he graduated from the Master's Degree in Healthcare Management at the Medical University of Plovdiv. Since 2019, she has acquired a specialty in "Medical Pedagogy", and in 2024 she acquired a second specialty in "Public Health".

Nedyalka Boycheva's professional career began in 1997 as a nurse in the Surgical Department of the 1st Municipal Hospital in Plovdiv. In the period 1999-2007 she worked as a nurse in the 2nd Surgical Department of the Plovdiv General Hospital. From 2007 to 2010 she worked as a nurse in the Gastroenterology and Hepatology Clinic at the St. George General Hospital. In the period 2008-2010, he was a part-time lecturer in teaching practice at the Nursing Care Section. From 2010 to the present, he has been an assistant at the Nursing Care Department - Faculty of Health Sciences at MU-Plovdiv. Since 2010, she has been responsible for International Activities in the department and a representative of the Medical University in the European Nursing Module. She participates in the training of foreign students under the Erasmus + program. From 2016 to 2023, he worked as a Health Consultant at the "Community Center for Children and Families 0-7 Years Old" in Plovdiv.

## **III. Relevance of the dissertation work and appropriateness of the set goals and objectives**

The chosen topic of Nedyalka Grozeva Boycheva's dissertation is current and dissertable. It covers a significant problem related to the formation of health skills and habits in children from the Roma community. The formation of health skills and habits in childhood is of key

importance for the prevention of chronic diseases, reducing morbidity, improving hygiene practices and increasing health literacy. However, for children from the Roma community, this process is often hindered by social, cultural, economic and educational barriers. Therefore, targeted and sustainable interventions are needed to create conditions for building a healthy lifestyle from an early age. Such approaches would not only improve the health status of Roma children, but would also contribute to the long-term reduction of health inequalities in Bulgarian society.

The topic of the dissertation is also extremely relevant from the point of view of forming health skills and habits in children from the Roma community, with the aim of developing effective models for impact.

#### **IV. Knowledge of the problem**

The doctoral student's scientific awareness is demonstrated in the substantive analysis of the way of life and culture of the Roma in Bulgaria and the detailed description of the Roma identity.

The author is very familiar with the literature on the topic, adequately evaluates and creatively uses the literary material. Her theoretical reasoning is the result of studying a large number of appropriately selected literary sources and authors. Thus, the focus of the theoretical study allows the empirical research to be built on a solid and scientifically sound theoretical basis. According to the literature review, 186 sources were used on the proposed topic.

#### **V. Research Methodology**

The research methodology allows for the study of all sides and aspects of the problem. By its nature, the study is a multicenter, cross-sectional study to investigate the main factors influencing the health of Roma children in the age range 0–7 years, as well as the level of formation of health skills and habits in early childhood. The opinion of educators working with Roma children was studied regarding the specifics, challenges and difficulties in building health skills and habits in a multicultural environment. The opinion of medical specialists regarding the peculiarities and problems related to the formation of health habits in children of Roma origin has been analyzed. 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 doctoral student has combined several basic empirical research methods, adequate to the goals and tasks set for resolution.

The research methods used are: documentary method; survey method; semi-structured interview; statistical methods. Descriptive statistics were applied to describe the results. To illustrate the phenomena, the possibilities of graphical analysis were used. The data were processed using the statistical software package SPSS v. 23.0.

The survey covers:

- Families with children aged 0-7 living in the Roma community.
- Families with children aged 0-7 living in the Bulgarian ethnic community.
- Medical specialists working with a predominantly Roma children.
- Specialist educators working in kindergartens and nurseries with predominantly Roma children.

A pilot study was conducted in April 2021 among families with children up to 7 years of age of Roma origin and living in a Roma community.

After analyzing the results, in addition to the questionnaire method, an interview was included due to difficulties encountered by the respondents in understanding the meaning of the questions asked.

The study was carried out through typological selection.

## **VI. Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation work**

In terms of content and structure, the dissertation work meets the requirements for the defense of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor". The work is written on 246 standard pages, of which 15 pages are bibliography and 48 pages are appendices. It is illustrated with 48 figures, 25 tables, 1 diagram and 6 appendices.

Structurally, it is divided into three main chapters, preceded by an introduction. The scientific paper ends with conclusions, recommendations, contributions, bibliography and appendices.

The introduction convincingly reflects the professional and scientific motivation of the doctoral student for choosing the issue under consideration. The first chapter, "Literary Review", describes in detail the way of life and culture of the Roma in Bulgaria; Roma identity; state policy and creation of non-governmental organizations for the integration of Roma. Particular

attention is paid to priorities related to education, healthcare, housing conditions, priority protection from discrimination and ensuring equal conditions. The health status of Roma is significantly lower than the national average, with the problem being widespread among children in early childhood.

Doctoral student Boycheva has studied contemporary and current sources related to the research problem, which are cited objectively and correctly.

In the second chapter "Purpose, tasks, material and methods", the purpose, the intended tasks to be solved and the hypotheses raised are logically stated.

The aim of the dissertation is to study and analyze the health skills and habits of Roma children aged 0-7 years in order to improve the health status and enhance the health culture of the Roma community.

To achieve the goal, four tasks have been formulated that cover the topic of the dissertation work and correctly reflect the problems highlighted in the review.

The object and subject of observation, units of observation, place and time of the study, sources of information are presented. The design, organization of the study and the methods used are precisely described.

An own survey was conducted, covering the following groups of respondents:

1. Families with children aged 0-7, living in the Roma community.
2. Families with children aged 0-7, living in a Bulgarian ethnic community.
3. Medical specialists working with a predominantly Roma children.
4. Specialist educators working in kindergartens and nurseries with predominantly Roma children.

The information collected is sufficient in volume to obtain reliable results. They are precisely analyzed and interpreted by the doctoral student in the third chapter.

The third chapter "Results and Discussion" represents the essence, the core of the dissertation work and is 86 pages long. This chapter highlights the good skills of the doctoral student in analysis and reasoned interpretations of empirical data. An impressive volume of statistical processing of the obtained data has been carried out.

Regarding the assessment of the health status of Roma children, significant gaps in immunization coverage have been identified, which definitely creates a risk of epidemic resurgence of certain infectious diseases. An increased incidence of diseases has been registered

among the studied ethnic group, such as rickets, hypotrophy and enterocolitis, which medical specialists associate with malnutrition, hygiene deficiencies, insufficient awareness and low health culture.

The study on health skills and habits shows that most Roma children enter kindergarten without having formed basic hygiene skills and habits. After systematic visits to kindergarten, significant progress is observed in their acquisition. The lack of systematic stimulation of children's independence represents a significant deficit in the upbringing process. The young and immature age at which Roma become parents, the lack of health education and gaps in school education lead to a deficit of parental care. There is a lack of a diet and culture of eating, sleeping and tempering among Roma children.

Regarding communication and education - more than half of medical specialists and educators point to the language barrier as the main problem in communicating and performing their duties.

The application of adequate statistical methods and data analysis contribute to achieving more in-depth results and interesting conclusions.

The data from the study are richly illustrated, which makes the analysis and interpretation of the results more accessible and comparable with similar studies.

The dissertation ends with the formulation of conclusions, which are a natural conclusion from the research conducted, the obtained results and their interpretation. Specific recommendations are made to various institutions, organizations and professional associations and communities that are relevant to the problem under consideration.

## **VII. Contributions and significance of the development for science and practice**

Based on the conclusions, inferences and results of the studies conducted, scientific contributions and practical and applied contributions have been derived.

A conceptual model of a plan for the formation of health skills and habits in children from the Roma community (0-7 years old) has been developed, which can be used as a working tool for intervention and improvement of health behavior in vulnerable groups.

It has significant practical value for both the educational and healthcare systems, as well as for specialists working in a multicultural environment.

A basis has been formed for the development of educational programs aimed at increasing parental competence and prevention through early development of health habits.

#### **VIII. Assessment of publications on the dissertation work**

Nedyalka Grozeva Boycheva has attached copies of 3 scientific publications, of which she is the lead author, and 1 participation in scientific forums on the topic of the dissertation work.

The number and quality of the publications fully comply with the requirements of MU-Plovdiv for public defense.

#### **IX. Personal participation of the doctoral student**

The dissertation shows that Nedyalka Boycheva has experience in conducting scientific research and interpreting the results obtained. In this regard, I highly appreciate the personal participation of the doctoral student in the dissertation research conducted and accept the formulated scientific contributions and obtained results as significant and accurate.

#### **X. Abstract**

The abstract for the dissertation is 56 pages long. My conclusion is that the abstract meets all standard requirements for a synthesized and adequate presentation of the primary document, the scientific text, as well as an objective reflection of the content of the dissertation research. The scientific and technical requirements under the relevant national and internal regulations for the content of an abstract have been met.

#### **XI. Critical remarks and recommendations**

I have no critical remarks or recommendations regarding the conducted research and set of materials.

#### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, I believe that the presented dissertation on the topic "Formation of health skills and habits in children from the Roma community" fully meets all the requirements of the

Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADSRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the ADSRB and the Regulations of MU-Plovdiv.

The merits and qualities of the dissertation highlighted in the review are grounds for me to **vote positively** and to confidently propose to the Honorable members of the scientific jury to make a decision to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Nedyalka Grozeva Boycheva in the field of higher education 7. Health and Sports, professional field 7.4. Public Health, Doctoral Program " Healthcare Management ".

20.01.2026

Prepared the review:

/Prof. Diana Ivanova, DSc/

Заличено на основание  
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