

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Ruseva Obreykova
Head of the Department of Health Care,
Faculty of Public Health and Health Care
"Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov" University – Burgas

External member of the scientific jury,
pursuant to Order No. R-4494/06.08.2026

Subject: *Dissertation thesis for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"*

Professional Field: 7.4 Public Health

Doctoral Program: "Health Care Management"

Author: Zlatina Ivanova Nikolova-Rancheva

Form of Doctoral Study: Independent Preparation

Department: Midwifery Care

Topic: "Medico-social aspects and expected effects of elective Caesarean section"

Academic Supervisors: Assoc. Prof. Milena Sandeva, PhD

Assoc. Prof. Nikoleta Parakhuleva-Rogacheva, PhD

1. General overview of the procedure and the doctoral candidate

The submitted set of documents and materials has 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, and Art. 70, Para. 1 of Section I ("Acquisition of the Educational and Scientific Degree 'Doctor' and the Scientific Degree 'Doctor of Sciences' at Medical University – Plovdiv") of the Regulations on the Development of the Academic Staff at MU – Plovdiv.

Zlatina Ivanova Nikolova-Rancheva was enrolled as a doctoral candidate pursuing independent study at the Department of Midwifery Care within the Faculty of Public Health at the Medical University of Plovdiv. Her dissertation was preliminarily discussed and approved at an expanded meeting of the

Department Council (Minutes No. 7/24.06.2026) and accepted by the Faculty Council (Minutes No. 8/14.07.2026) of the Faculty of Public Health. Zlatina Ivanova Nikolova-Rancheva has completed her doctoral program with the right to defend her thesis.

2. Brief Biographical Details

Zlatina Ivanova Nikolova-Rancheva completed her studies in Midwifery at the Medical University of Plovdiv between 2006 and 2010. She obtained a Master's degree in Health Care Management (2010–2012) and subsequently earned a second Master's degree in Preventive Pedagogy from the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv (2012–2014). She completed a specialization in "Hospital Hygiene, Infection Prevention and Control" from March 15, 2022, to March 15, 2023.

Since winning a competition in 2021, Zlatina Ivanova Nikolova-Rancheva has served as an Assistant at the Department of Midwifery Care within the Faculty of Public Health at the Medical University of Plovdiv. She is the author of educational materials covering key areas of training for midwifery students.

3. Relevance of the topic

The topic is timely and of significant public importance due to the rising rate of Caesarean sections, including those performed without clear medical indications. This choice entails medical, psychological, social, ethical, and economic consequences for the mother, the newborn, and the healthcare system.

Limited national studies on the issue justify the need to analyze the factors determining women's preferences and the role of medical professionals in the decision-making process.

The dissertation holds scientific and practical significance, as it can contribute to improving informed choice, the quality of obstetric care, and the rational use of health resources.

4. Research Methodology

The doctoral candidate demonstrates a high level of familiarity with the subject matter, a quality significantly enhanced by her practical experience in the relevant field. The literature review encompasses both Bulgarian and foreign academic sources, evidencing a thorough and balanced overview of existing scholarly work. The study presents a well-reasoned analysis of the topic's relevance and significance, as well as the rationale for its selection. Citations are handled correctly and in accordance with academic standards, and the scientific conceptual framework is employed with precision and appropriateness.

In the first stage, official data from the National Center of Public Health and Analyses (NCPHA) regarding the frequency and regional distribution of Caesarean sections in Bulgaria during the 2019–2023 period were analyzed using a documentary method. A retrospective study was also conducted on 609 women who delivered via Caesarean section at University Hospital "St. George" EAD – Plovdiv between 2021 and 2023, as well as on their newborns. The women studied were divided into two groups: 342 who underwent an elective Caesarean section and 267 who underwent an emergency procedure. Data were extracted from medical records using a specially designed form for the statistical processing of cases.

The second stage involves a retrospective case-control study conducted between December 2023 and March 2025 at three healthcare facilities in Plovdiv. A total of 420 women who had recently given birth were included, divided into two equal groups: 210 women who underwent a Caesarean section and 210 who had a vaginal delivery. Data were collected using a specially designed, anonymous 30-item questionnaire and, where necessary, through semi-structured interviews. The study examined socio-demographic characteristics, obstetric history, attitudes and fears, preferences regarding the mode of delivery, and factors influencing the decision-making process.

The data were analyzed using descriptive, variation, and frequency analysis, parametric and non-parametric hypothesis testing methods, and logistic regression analysis. A statistical significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ was adopted, and the analysis was performed using SPSS statistical software, version 23.0.

The methodology is appropriate for the stated aim and objectives, and the use of complementary documentary, survey, and statistical methods ensures the comprehensiveness and reliability of the obtained results. The study was conducted in compliance with ethical requirements and was approved by the Scientific Ethics Committee at the Medical University of Plovdiv (Protocol No. 1/05.02.2025).

5. Characterization and evaluation of the dissertation and its contributions

The contributions of the dissertation are scientific-theoretical, confirmatory, and practical-applied in nature. They lie in the comprehensive study of the medical, social, and psychological factors associated with the choice of delivery method, and in the confirmation of the multifactorial nature of the rising rate of Caesarean sections.

The developed questionnaire, the algorithm for early screening and risk stratification regarding non-medically indicated Caesarean sections, and the

recommendations formulated for the relevant institutions hold significant practical value. These contributions are substantiated by the study results and are significant for enhancing informed choice, improving the quality of obstetric care, and limiting unnecessary operative deliveries.

6. Abstract

The abstract of the dissertation presents the most significant results of the author's own research, as well as the main conclusions, scientific contributions, and practical recommendations. The three scientific publications presented by the PhD candidate are thematically related to the dissertation and have appeared in journals indexed in Web of Science.

7. CONCLUSION

The presented doctoral thesis, "Medico-social aspects and expected effects of elective Caesarean section," by PhD candidate Zlatina Ivanova Nikolova-Rancheva, meets all the requirements for a completed doctoral dissertation. I consider that it fully complies with the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for its implementation, and the current Regulations of the Medical University of Plovdiv.

Based on the aforementioned indisputable qualities and scientific merits of the dissertation titled "Medico-social aspects and expected effects of elective Caesarean section," I express my unequivocal POSITIVE ASSESSMENT of the research conducted, as presented through the dissertation, the abstract, the results achieved, and the scientific contributions.

In view of the above, I propose that the esteemed Scientific Jury award the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" to Zlatina Ivanova Nikolova-Rancheva in the doctoral program "Health Care Management," Professional Field 7.4 "Public Health," within the Higher Education Area 7 "Healthcare and Sports."

September 14, 2026

Burgas

Signature:.....

Assoc. Prof. Dr. M. Obreykova

Заличено на основание
Чл.5 §1, б. "В" Регламент (ЕС) 2016/679