

REVIEW

of Irina Boykinova's dissertation on topic:

"Predictors of parental stress influencing parenting style in children with disorders (5-10 years old)"

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Relevance and importance of the problem

The actuality and significance of the treated problem related to parenting is indisputable, as far as it is known that parental behavior is critical for the child's mental health, for the adaptation and healthy functioning in the early years of his life. It is not by chance that the focus of attention falls on factors specific to the role of parents raising children with disorders such as parental endurance, stress and competence, which are critical both for the development and well-being of these children, and for the well-being and quality of life of the parents themselves. The in-depth study of these factors leads to the possibility of developing strategies to support these parents as an effective way to improve the health and well-being of children and as prevention regarding the negative consequences of dysfunctional parenting, which is a risk factor for the development of health problems both in childhood and adulthood. All this outlines the high not only cognitive, but also applied value of the development.

Knowledge of the problem

In the present scientific work, numerous theoretical concepts of the analyzed constructs are presented, which shows that the PhD student knows in detail the existing concepts on the developed problem. As she rightly notes: "Parenting style and parenting stress are the subject of great research interest worldwide." Despite the growing body of research in the field, there are few studies specifically addressing the issue of parental efficacy and resilience as predictors of parenting stress-circumstance, which demonstrates an ability to detect unresolved and underdeveloped problems in the relevant scientific field. The PhD student directs her attention to poorly affected aspects of the problem in research practice - mainly related to the conceptualization of parental stress as a relatively new concept, but very relevant at the present time. It is well represented and integrated the previous, albeit scarce, experience in the study of this aspect of the problem in the studies of R. Abidin, P. Hutchison, etc., with which the author

convinces us that she has skills both for systematic exposition and for creative rethinking of the scientific achievements of her predecessors.

A good orientation has been achieved in the theoretical foundations of the dissertation work, as numerous conceptual models related to the building constructs of the paper, namely- parental efficacy, endurance, parental stress and parental style, have been presented and meaningfully analyzed. The theoretical and methodological achievements of Bulgarian and foreign scientists are reported. In this regard, it should be noted that the PhD student referred to 216 sources, in Bulgarian, Russian and English, of various genres, related to the names of authoritative and representative scientists in the field. All this is proof of the scientific representativeness of the theoretical analysis, which convincingly testifies that Boykinova knows the problem both in classical and in modern scientific literature. The analysis has a heuristic value as it "provides" the necessary argumentation for the need for new research, as the PhD student herself points out, related to establishing the complex cause-and-effect relationships between the main constructs of the dissertation, namely - parental effectiveness and resilience, parental stress and parental style .

Scientific and methodological representation of the problem

The structure of the dissertation research best reflects the guiding ideas, empirical setting, design, and data analysis methods obtained through reliable and valid instruments. The starting point of Boykinova's research is the idea of studying how the parent's sense of competence and endurance as predictors of parental stress influence the parenting style of parents of normal children and parents of children with disorders. Thus, the PhD student clearly outlines the trajectory of the subject area of the study, summarizing that parents must understand their children's needs by providing experiences that facilitate the growth and maintenance of their mental health.

The theoretical design unfolded in two directions, concerning the conceptual and terminological refinement of the constructs related to parental resilience, on the one hand, and parental effectiveness, on the other, in terms of their relationships with parenting stress and parenting style. The exposition is realized according to the scientifically established scheme of transition from general to private, with the research focus gradually narrowing, moving from conceptualizing the role of the family and parents for the child's development, in general, to the specific dimensions of parenting.

In this conceptual framework, theoretical statements and empirical findings are presented in detail and in depth, shedding light on the challenges parents face after the appearance of a child with a disorder, touching on the painful topics of stigma, grief and loss. It is in this meaningful context that the author's appeal to parents appears- that it is imperative to educate themselves both about the disorder and the best available interventions to give their child optimal opportunities to reach his potential.

Delineating the multifaceted essence of parenting through an analysis of the concepts of parental endurance, efficacy, parental stress and parenting style, Boykinova reaches broader generalizations, building her own authorial position on the problem. She assumes that parenting represents perhaps the most difficult social role, implying a commitment to protect, nurture and care, carrying relentless demands on time and energy, depending on the characteristics of the child and the psychological resources of the parent, on the sources of stress and support. Boykinova sets as a leitmotif, permeating the entire study, the thesis about the role of the family and the parent for the mental health and well-being of the child as a counterpoint to the theories that allow the idea of innateness. In this regard, quite rightly, she turns the psychoanalytical approach into the foundation of her research, as containing the greatest explanatory potential regarding the idea of the influence that the parent has on the child's development. At the same time becoming the expressor of a new research area related to the development of the parent, she used the capacity of cognitive-oriented theories describing this development in terms of cognitive structures. Her position on these cognitive views is contained in her claim of their practical utility, namely that parents can be assisted in interpreting their children's behavior and in formulating strategies to guide their actions. In her analysis of the theoretical positions, Boykinova relies on classically emblematic scientists for psychological science such as Z.Freud, J.Piaget, A.Bandura and D.Levinson, reaching the modern conceptions of the problem of M.Sanders and K. Sofronoff. In the course of her reasoning, she reaches important conclusions, distinguishing the role of the mother from that of the father in raising the child, referring to prominent Bulgarian researchers in the field - such as Assoc. D. Tsirkova.

In accordance with the research goal, the study also treats the problem of normal development and deviations from it. Here, a transition is made from theoretical abstract constructions to empirical knowledge and evidence. Empirical findings related to neurophysiology are presented, revealing the deepest biological foundations of development.

Research methodology

It should be noted that all the studied constructs were found suitable operationalization in their corresponding variables - psychometrically measured and psychologically interpreted on the basis of the set theoretical framework. This is an indicator of compliance with the universal scientific principle of correspondence between a theoretical model and an empirical method. A visual model of the structure of the empirical study with the assumption of a relationship between parental efficacy, resilience, parental stress and parenting style is presented. Methodologically, the empirical study itself reflects the main research question of what is the influence of parental knowledge (parental efficacy and resilience) on parenting style in the mediation of parental stress. Undoubtedly, the correct setting of the research, the choice of methodology, the interpretation and analysis of the results, reflected the many years of experience of the PhD student as a consultant to families and children, a large part with developmental disorders. Indisputably, the practice has enriched her research with ideas, the empirical validation of which can have a direct application to the consulting activity. The design of the study, including a complex mediation model, is excellently conceived and implemented, and the scientometric requirements regarding the main components (subject, object, organization, way of processing the results) are respected. It has made it possible to obtain comprehensive information on the direct and indirect influence that demographic characteristics and parental cognition (efficacy and resilience) have on parenting style while controlling for the mediating effect of parental stress. Boykinova's research quests, correctly formulated in scientific assumptions, are tied to tasks, aimed at establishing the status of the mediator model regarding the relationship between parenting efficacy, resilience, parenting stress and parenting style. The applied research technology consists of 4 instruments, two of which are empirically verified in the preliminary stage of the research, and the rest are established methods with high psychometric indicators of reliability and validity. The PhD student expands the scope of the study by including an author survey to collect demographic data. I believe that these methods allowed Boykinova to accumulate sufficient empirical data on the studied parameters, the interrelationships between them and the mediator effects.

The empirical research was conducted on the basis of a wide scope and contingent of research: 255 persons, parents from different cities, were studied, and 111 of them were parents of children with disorders.

The professionalism and competence of the PhD student regarding the statistical processing of the results is impressive, which shows mastery of the so-called "technology of science". Research methods that are adequate to the research objective, proving connections and trends in accordance with the set tasks and formulated hypotheses, have been selected. The logic in the presentation and processing of the received data is convincing. Various algorithms were used to convert them into empirical results through complementary statistical methods (descriptive statistics, t-test, one-factor variance and regression analysis). Numerous interrelationships and dependencies are derived, which is an indicator of the scale of the study. The empirical results are presented not only in tabular form, but also in graphic form - through various diagrams and figures, which gives the research even stronger evidence.

Conclusions of a high level of generalizability are drawn, contributing to a deeper understanding of the psychological experiences of parents of children with developmental disabilities in terms of their resilience, efficacy, stress and parenting style. The PhD student meaningfully interprets the obtained results, some of which are new to this scientific field and represent an indisputable contribution to psychology. Thus, she proves that the most significant factor is the presence of a child with a disorder, which dramatically changes the life of the family. The PhD student analyzes the results with a very good understanding and interpretation in the context of the hypotheses, which increases the evidentiary value of the conclusions drawn. Not only theoretical, but also of applied value is the result showing that parents living in a small populated places show more frustration due to limited access to social support systems. Such a result reveals that psychological expertise needs to be involved in the formation of policies at all levels of society's organization. Impartially, from the position of a scientist, Boykinova also commented on the limitations of the study, related to the impossibility of controlling the criteria for the participation of the researched persons.

Based on professionally conducted research with clear evidence, the PhD student draws conclusions for the psychological practice of supporting parents raising children with disorders. On the basis of the obtained results, more specific and categorical recommendations could be formulated so that they could be transformed into practical actions and subsequent changes.

Abstract

The abstract fully and accurately reflects the content of the dissertation, providing information on the 6 publications on the subject. These publications are sufficient to reach the scientific community with the results of the study.

Contributions

The reference of contributions objectively reflects the achievements in the dissertation. Among the contributing moments, the following can be highlighted:

1. Knowledge related to the various parameters of parenting has been systematized and accumulated up to now.
2. Parental stress is investigated as a relatively new concept in the relationship between parenting style and its predictors, which further conceptually develops the theory of parenting.
3. Validated and adapted for Bulgarian conditions are methods for researching parameters of parenting, which expands the psychological toolkit in the field.
4. The obtained results are particularly significant in applied terms as they enrich existing concepts and methods related to social and psychological work to support parents raising children with disabilities.
5. The materials from the dissertation have direct applicability not only in counseling practice, but also in university courses, seminars and trainings dedicated to parenting, as they are a valuable source of references.

The novelty and empirically indicated contributions are obvious.

Conclusion

My overall impression of the dissertation is that it is a logically constructed, correctly conducted study that led to important conclusions for theory and practice, with a solid theoretical foundation and evidence-based psychological analyses. Taking into account the relevance, the in-depth theoretical analysis of the empirical results and the successfully conducted research, I confidently give my positive assessment and propose to the respected scientific jury to vote positively for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Irina Boykinova.

Reviewer

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