

Review

by Sasha Vladimirova Todorova PhD, Assoc. Prof.;
of the scientific papers submitted as part of the competition for the academic position "Professor" by the candidate Zhivko Velichkov Zhechev, PhD, Associate Professor, University of Shumen "Bishop Konstantin Preslavski"

The competition was announced for the needs of the Department of Social Activities at the Faculty of Pedagogy of Sofia University (Minutes RD-16-004 / 12.01.2021), promulgated in SG no. 98 / 17.11.2020

Zhivko Zhechev, PhD, Assoc. Prof. is the only candidate in the announced competition. He was born on January 31, 1959 in Shumen. He received his secondary education at the Polytechnic High School "N. J. Vaptsarov ", Shumen. He obtained a bachelor's degree in Bulgarian philology from the Higher Pedagogical Institute - Shumen in 1980. In 2001 he became a "master" in social activities at the University of Shumen "Bishop Konstantin Preslavski". His doctoral studies were also carried out at the University of Shumen, where in 2013 he was awarded a PhD degree in Theory of Education and Didactics (Social Pedagogy), professional field 1.2. Pedagogy, field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences.

His professional life, with the exception of two breaks, is directly related to the University of Shumen, where his academic career developed from assistant to associate professor and now to this application for a professorship.

The candidate speaks Russian and English.

Fulfillment of the requirements for holding the academic position

The attached card naming his fulfilment of the quantitative requirements for obtaining the academic position of "professor" at the University of Shumen is a proof that he meets the requirements enforced by the Law for Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, namely:

- he obtained a PhD degree in 2013;
- has held the academic position of "Associate Professor" for 5 years, i.e. more than the required 2 years;
- There is a published monograph, which is not presented as the main habilitation paper "Sociological and legal regulation of the problem of disadvantaged children", Shumen, University Publishing House "Bishop Konstantin Preslavski", 2019, 166 pp., ISBN 978-619- 201-291-5;
- the required minimum points have been achieved. In total for all indicators in the table the candidate has 600 points, with a minimum threshold of 550.

Zhivko Zhechev, PhD, Assoc. Prof. participated in the Erasmus + program as a trainer in kindergarten "Brothers Grimm" and kindergarten "Cosmonaut" for the period 2017-2019. He was also a trainer in the refresher courses for primary teachers.

He participates in the artistic-, creative- and sports activities aimed at students and gifted children.

His research activity is stands out in his participation in 7 national and 14 university-wide projects.

He is known to the academic community for his participation in 15 scientific forums, 4 of them with international participation and 1 including a traveling seminar abroad.

Assessment of educational and pedagogical work

Zhivko Zhechev, PhD, Assoc. Prof. actively participates in the training process of two educational-qualification degrees. In the bachelor's degree he teaches 10 disciplines, of which 6 are profiling. In the master's degree there are 5 disciplines – all very relevant to social services.

All this gives me reason to have very high regards for his teaching work.

General characteristics of the presented scientific papers

The candidate participated in the competition with 16 publications, made in the period 2016-2019, 7 of which were published in English. Two of the publications are individual monographs. He is the author of seven publications on the pages of the refereed online journal with impact factor SocioBrains, three - in the yearbooks of the University of Shumen, two - in collections of scientific papers, of one textbook and one workbook.

My acquaintance with the scientific work of Zhivko Zhechev, PhD, Assoc. Prof. gives me reason to insist that he has lasting and serious interests in the field of social policy especially focusing on institutions for children, their problems and solutions, the need for parents and other socially significant aspects such as deviant behavior.

The outlined diversity of research directions is indicative of the scale of his scientific activities, the results of which he skillfully implements in the educational process. This, in turn, is extremely important for the formation of the professional qualities of the future social workers.

Main directions of the research activity

The content of the candidate's publications leans towards the following areas:

- institutionalization and deinstitutionalization of disadvantaged children and children at-risk;
- alternative forms of social care;
- social innovations, art therapy;
- deviant behavior in children;
- the father figure in the process of development and socialization of children in social services;
- sociological and legal regulations of the problems of disadvantaged children.

Scientific and scientific-applied contributions

- The conceptualization of social institutions for children in the context of various sociological theories - social construction of reality, macro-sociological paradigm and the concept of social distance. Derivation of the role of the social worker for achieving the necessary success in social work with emphasis on

diagnostics, psychodiagnostics and the interaction between the client and the social worker.

- Social innovations in the training of social activities and their application in practice. Art therapy as a social innovation applied to disadvantaged children due to medical, emotional, educational, mental and rehabilitation problems and those related to the need for social inclusion. The identification of the need for integrative knowledge in the application of art therapy, its inclusion in the programs for conducting student internships and practices in order to master specific skills and competencies.

- Enrichment of the conceptual apparatus in relation to social organizations, the functioning of which requires the presence of consciously coordinated activities to achieve a certain significant result. The application of the sociological approach in the study of social organizations reveals the complex connections and interactions between the socialization of children placed in homes and their social activity.

- The argument for the deinstitutionalization of children, considered as a basic form of alternative care to overcome isolation, to enrich their contacts, to create a family-like environment, to expand their personal space, to provide personal belongings for children, to intensify relations with relatives, etc. The specific research conducted by the municipalities on the problem gives grounds to Zhivko Zhechev, PhD, Assoc. Prof. to analyze through the prism of social work the outlined alternatives to institutional care for children: reintegration into the biological family, placement of the child in a family of relatives or friends, adoption, foster care, residential social services, sheltered housing, the role of the civil sector.

- Clearly formulated problems related to foster care as a measure to protect children at risk. Through this care, children are cared for in a family environment, and the main goal is for them to return to the biological family after a certain time. A social portrait of the foster families was made: childless, with a deceased child, adults, families with disturbed relationship, single mothers, etc. along with the indicated contribution moment, there is an outlined responsibility requirement for the foster family and need for constant supervision by the social workers.

- The further development of the definition of deviant behavior through its characteristics, defined on the basis of a wide range of negative phenomena, defined as a social anomaly. This contribution helps to clarify and refine the term deviant behavior in the context of accelerated psychosocial growth phases, where the social relationships become increasingly complex and the expectations increase in difficulty. In both theoretical and applied aspect, the outlined difference between deviant and delinquent behavior is important.

- The identification of the problems caused by the need for a father figure of the children placed in social services and institutions for children. It has been proven that fathers and significant male figures from the extended families of children continue to be underestimated and neglected as an element of child protection. The conducted empirical research on the topic again proves the important role of the biological parents for the development of the child and the psychological and pedagogical aspects of the role of "father" and verifies the modern views and approaches to the father figure in social work. The full and equal development of children in social services requires purposeful work, filling the need for the father figure.

- The proposed practical and applied ideas for:

- a.) art therapy aimed at motivation and social activity;
- b.) application of brainstorming and the Ringi method for research of social issues;
- c.) cooperation between the University of Shumen and the Municipality of Shumen in the field of social policy.

- The methodology for empirical social research on the problems of the need for a father figure.
- The significant analysis and assessment of the state social policy regarding disadvantaged children and their classification in terms of reasons that led to the risk and in terms of forms of social care.

Notes and recommendations

The unresolved problems of the social services related to disadvantaged children require an imperative continuation of social research in this area, the results of which should be made available to all institutions involved in the area. My recommendation is that the candidate continues his research activity in this direction and keeps sharing the obtained results in the training process.

Conclusion

The scientific achievements of Zhivko Zhechev, PhD, Assoc. Prof. are important for the further development of the theoretical knowledge of the processes and phenomena in the fields of social work and social services as well as for building up the social workers' competencies which are determined by

the modern socio-economic environment. Furthermore, they are equally important to keep the social activities training curricula up to date and to keep enriching it.

Zhivko Zhechev, PhD, Assoc. Prof. is a well-known researcher and lecturer, which is evidenced by the attached references of citations and reviews of his publications and of his participation in the scientific life at the University of Shumen and beyond.

My assessment of his scientific publications and his teaching activity as a participant in the competition for the academic position of "professor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.4. Social activities (Art therapy and socialization) for the needs of the Department of Social Activities at the Faculty of Pedagogy of the University of Shumen "Bishop Konstantin Preslavski" is positive.

I propose to the esteemed scientific jury Zhivko Velichkov Zhechev, PhD, Assoc. Prof. to be elected and to take the academic position of "professor".

13.02.2021

Sofia

Reviewer:



(Sasha Vladimirova Todorova PhD, Assoc. Prof.)