Opponent’s Report on Doctoral Thesis

Study programme: Psychology  
Field of study: Social Psychology  
Student: Kaltrina Kelmendi  
Thesis title: Intimate partner violence among university students in Kosovo and its correlates: Exploring violence socialization and approval of violence  
Opponent: Doc. PhDr. Gabriela Mikulášková, PhD.  
Workplace: Institute of Psychology, FA PU, Prešov

Structure of doctoral thesis:

1. Commentary on structure

The thesis is well-structured, each chapter (setting problem, literature review, present study, results and discussion) are logically ordered and are consistently aimed towards elucidating the topic Intimate partner violence in Kosovo. In terms of its structure I consider the inclusion of Chapter I adequate, since it raises the research problem and presents Conceptual Framework for partner violence, which helps readers in their orientation in further text. This conceptual framework offers a deeper understanding of the occurrence of violence and integrates different levels that co-influence this phenomenon in a complex way (cultural-social level, economic level, societal standards, gender-specific expectations, individual level in the sense of personal experience with violence, current interaction with a partner and the presence of social support). The sequencing of the chapters reflects the author's ability to properly combine different approaches in psychological research and to work with them adequately. Description of the research includes all the necessary elements leading to the validity has research and enable its repeatability.

The results of the research were processed by combination of different methods - hierarchical logistic regression, multinomial logistic regression, structural equation modeling and analysis of evidence obtained through focus groups. This rich combination of methods of extracting and processing data contributed significantly to grab a deeper relationship between the variables of interest.

2. Commentary on content

The first chapter postulates research problems and defines research questions. Regarding this I have a few notes:

1. Normally, research questions are formulated as questions. However, as the author states them they rather evoke research objectives. Usually questions should have a potential to be “answerable”, which is questionable if a research question is formulated, for example as “to understand the rates of IPV, focusing on physical, psychological and sexual violence”.

2. Formulation of almost all research questions using the words “to understand…” refers to some kind of individual understanding of persons, which is even in the context of qualitative research difficult to grasp. I understand the author's decision to stem from the phenomenological paradigm, where the main objective is certain understanding by the author, but this is more appropriate to see as an implicit goal. To present it in a literal form is to make
3. Research questions are very general - formulated like that (e.g. "to better understand the socio-cultural and contextual background") necessarily (besides other risks) leads to the difficulty of accurately and clearly addressing questions to respondents. At the same time, the generalness of the formulation contrast with the presentation of ecological model of violence. (the presentation of a relationship and the subsequent postulation of questions of general nature is in the logic of research a "step backwards").

The following part of the thesis consists of a precise analysis of the current state of understanding in the area of violence, and the author refers to a number of highly topical pieces of research (the list of authors consists of about 30 pages of text). Next, in the literature review the author underlines the specificity of the phenomenon of violence in Kosovo. The work that the qualitative background contains a highly relevant description of culture, but the focus on a particular country gives the impression of a higher specificity of the country but not quite of the culture (Note - country and culture of the country are different concepts as to their content). The conclusions are in fact in line with the research conducted in other (culturally similar) countries.

I only have one more fundamental remark regarding the qualitative part (answers to research questions 8 and 9), which I view as complementary to the revised previous research. This section is, when compared with the thoroughly thought through quantitative part, is less transparent. The description of obtaining respondents in the focus groups is less transparent. The frequency of respondents in this part of the research is much lower (N = 20). Once the author attempted to clarify the data collected from 700 people, it is questionable whether such a small number of members of focus groups makes it possible in the first place. The results presented on pages 126-141 represent a freely flowing text with author’s notes. The results are presented only in one figure (Fig. 8) and in the table which gives examples of codes (without giving any connections). Perhaps it would be more appropriate to structure the text more clearly and to highlight the results that were obtained from focus groups (since this aspect perhaps represents "understanding" the context best). (The result of the qualitative analysis are not statements, but first of all categories and relations between them).

3. Language and graphical quality

The text is at an appropriate language level, and its graphical quality is excellent. I have no comments regarding this part of the assessment.

4. Questions for the defence

In what way does the author perceive the occurrence of violence and the context of the phenomenon of violence in Kosovo as specific?
In case the author continued her research on the chosen topic, how would she reformulate and specify the research questions?
How would she extend the qualitative part of her research, what other methods of data collection and analysis would she prefer?
Which of the results obtained does the author personally consider as the most innovative with the possibility of further research?
Does the author see a possibility of the application of the research findings?
5. Conclusions

The submitted thesis is extremely complex in nature, which mirrors the level of insight and maturity of the author. The author has documented her capability to integrate qualitative and quantitative approach with an adequate understanding of mutual differences. The outcome of her extensive research is an original and valuable work that is suitable for publication in professional journals.

**The student has proved creative abilities in the relevant field of research and the student’s work meets the required standard of a doctoral thesis.**

6. Date and signature

15.6.2016 in Prešov doc. PhDr. Gabriela Mikulášková, PhD.

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**Prescribed phrasing of conclusions:**
- The student has proved / has not proved creative abilities in the relevant field of research
- The student’s work meets/does not meet the required standard of a doctoral thesis

A report that does not produce the prescribed explicit conclusions is inadmissible.