



Rzeszów, 15.04.2019

Thesis Evaluation Report

Thesis title: **Stigmatization in Arabic psoriatic patients**

Ph. D. Scholar: **Dimitre Dimitrov**

Research Supervisor: **Prof. Jacek Szepietowski**

Comments:

Psoriasis is one of the most common chronic inflammatory skin conditions affecting about 1-3% of general populations. A number of studies have demonstrated, that psoriasis is a disease which affects all aspects of patients' life, causing significant physical suffering related to pronounced itching or pain, being responsible for psychic problems like anxiety and depression as well as resulting in social alienation of patients due to visibility of the lesions and reduction of personal self-esteem. Furthermore, recent studies have documented, that moderate to severe psoriasis is linked with reduced life expectancy due to increased risk of cardiovascular events, diabetes, obesity and development of metabolic syndrome. Significant negative influence of psoriasis on physical, psychic and social patients' well-being rang this disease among the dermatoses causing the most pronounced impairment of health-related quality of life. Importantly, several studies have also documented, that patients with psoriasis feel stigmatized by the disease, which is one of the major reason of psoriatic patients' social exclusion. However, the level of stigma is not only related to severity of the disease, visibility of the skin lesions, and personality traits, but is also largely influenced by the cultural circumstances. As the most data regarding the level of quality of life and the feeling of stigmatization in patients with psoriasis are based on the studies performed among Caucasian population, I found the work by Dimitre Dimitrov studying the level of stigmatization among Arabs of great importance, relevance and up to date. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first such in-depth analysis of the influence of psoriasis on Arabic population published in the literature.

The thesis of Dimitre Dimitrov consists of four published papers: two review papers and two original reports. Of note, all papers have been published in peer-reviewed journals indexed by PubMed and Web of Science with cumulative impact factor of 4.299. Having papers published in such prestigious journals underlines the importance and relevance of the studied topic.



Both review papers have been published in *Postępy Higieny i Medycyny Doświadczalnej*. The first paper entitled "Instruments to assess stigmatization in dermatology" summarizes all available questionnaires used to assess stigmatization in dermatological patients. It is a very nice overview useful for all clinicians and researchers who would like to study or analyze the feeling of stigmatization in patients with various dermatological conditions, as they may find all currently available stigmatization instruments for dermatological patients discussed in one paper. As I know, such review has not been performed so far by any other authors. Of note, despite this is a review paper, Dimitre Dimitrov precisely described the methodology of literature search to identify relevant studies published before, which significantly improve the scientific value of his review. Similarly, the second review paper entitled "Stigmatization in dermatology with a special focus on psoriatic patients" was also performed according to rigorous methodology of literature search as currently is required for such type of papers to consider them as scientifically valid. Dimitre Dimitrov in cooperation with his supervisor provided an update about the stigmatization level in various dermatological conditions with special emphasis on psoriasis. This paper is an ideal introduction to the subsequent studies in Arabic people suffering from psoriasis performed by Dimitre Dimitrov. The paper is also an evidence, that Dimitre Dimitrov got to know the topic of stigmatization very well and is able to critically review the scientific literature drawing sound conclusions.

In his next paper, Dimitre Dimitrov aimed to prepare the Arabic language versions of stigmatization questionnaires. The results of his work has been published in *Advances in Clinical and Experimental Medicine*. It has to be underlined, that the preparation of the Arabic versions has been done according to the rigorous international requirements starting from the multistep translation process to ensure the accuracy of the translations and included a back-translation to English and incorporating of comments by the authors of original scales. In the next step, Dimitre Dimitrov performed a validation study to provide further evidence that the local language versions are valid instruments that could be used for any future studies in Arabic population. He has analyzed the internal consistency by calculating Cronbach alpha coefficient, reliability by calculating intraclass correlation coefficient and convergent validity. His work resulted in the development of Arabic versions of two stigmatization scales: the 6-Item Stigmatization Scale originally developed by the group of Andrea Evers and the Feelings of Stigmatization Questionnaire originally developed by Ginsburg and Link.

Based on the development of valid instruments, Dimitre Dimitrov performed the last part of his dissertation, namely, he analyzed the level of stigmatization in Arabic patients suffering from psoriasis. Results of his work have been published in *Advances of Dermatology and Allergology*. He has included a total of 108 Arabic patients suffering from psoriasis and compared the results regarding stigmatization scorings with quality of life



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impairment, localization of psoriatic lesions, disease severity, presence of itching, as well as other demographic and clinical parameters. Dimitre Dimitrov clearly showed, that the vast majority of Arabic patients with psoriasis are being stigmatized by the disease. Only 12% of patients had no feeling of stigmatization, and further 16.7% reported as being minimally stigmatized. Multivariate analysis revealed that the presence of psoriatic lesions on the face is the most relevant and independent parameter determining the level of stigmatization in the studied patients' population. It has to be underlined, that the high prevalence of stigmatization was observed despite the wide access of participants to biological therapies highly effective in psoriasis. His paper Dimitre Dimitrov finished with the discussion, in which he compared his results with other published studies clearly showing that psoriasis is a disease uniformly causing profound feeling of stigmatization throughout various populations and cultures.

Summarizing, based on the reviewed Thesis aiming to analyze the stigmatization level in Arabic patients suffering from psoriasis, I would like to fully recommend Mr. Dimitre Dimitrov to be awarded with the Doctor Degree by the Medical University in Wrocław. I also have to underline that I was positively surprised with his acknowledgements, which I found very charming and written from his heart. The Thesis of Mr. Dimitre Dimitrov fulfills all requirements for the Doctor Degree as defined by the Polish law from March 14th, 2003 with subsequent modifications (Dz. U. nr. 65, poz. 595). Mr. Dimitre Dimitrov should be allowed to participate in further steps of doctoral dissertation. I would also recommend to reward his Thesis for his novelty and significance.

Sincerely yours,

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