

THE HEALTH OF COLLEGE STUDENTS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF EXPERIENCING QUALITY OF LIFE

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Summary

One of the basal aspects determining the health of the individual is the behavioural and axiological attitude towards one's own health. The quality of life comprises not only the problem of health, but also the phenomenon of existential meaningfulness.

The meaning of life in its contents comprises a set of aims, values and beliefs, that give man a sense of value and purposefulness of his life. It is possible to allocate to the determinants that regulate the quality of life, satisfaction with one's life, sense of well being, also concepts such as: the meaning of life, happiness, comfort, sense for integrity, democracy, justice, healthy life style, positive experiences, life philosophy, attitudes and expectations, aspirations, hope, etc.

Besides the theoretic interpretation the submitted work also includes an analysis of the mentioned phenomenon from the perspective of college students, on the basis of empirical findings conducted using Snyder's Hope scale. People with a high level of hope have more goals, are more successful, are subjectively happier, have a greater sense of existential meaningfulness and a greater satisfaction with life (Snyder, 1995).

Noted results are the first data analysed by the research.

The results predict, that the health state of our youth is not as "good" as initially assumed, or as it is being alleged within society in general.

Keywords: quality of life – health – existential meaningfulness – college youth

INTRODUCTION

Human life passes by as a series of frequently repeating rituals, work activities, entertainment, games, voyages, contacts, intimacies, events, incidents, illnesses, disappointments and successes. The value of life itself surely does not lie in the frequency in which the mentioned life forms are repeated, or in their contents (that are often seen as being trivial, uninteresting and objectively insignificant, although subjectively they may be experienced as something amazing), but in whether the individual acts wholeheartedly, with a full awareness of commitment; with the knowledge of ownership of one's decision and with the knowledge of one's experience. Playing host to a friend may be routine and uninteresting work, but it can also be perceived as a means of meeting into which we also pour our "heart". A work activity can be performed automatically, or with the knowledge

that indirectly the activity helps to bring us into contact with others in the community.

In the path of life this is how the leap from the realm of nature to the realm of society is accomplished, which opens up a space for the spiritual.

Good health, quality of life and existential meaningfulness

Good health can be achieved when individuals believe in the meaning of life and in the possibility of influencing life whilst having sufficient "equipment" (physical, mental, emotional, social and material) at their disposal to meet the requirements laid upon them. When it comes to an individual's health the professional community primarily focuses its attention on nourishment practices, the usage of psychoactive substances and on the area of physical activity, these being the most frequent factors determin-

ing an individual's health. As a result, the noetic area remains outside their areas of interest (author's comment). Targeted health education can be successful when the acquired knowledge and capabilities of an individual are used to form habits and attitudes that will determine their conduct in everyday situations in a constructive and predictable manner.

Although health is one of the basal conditions for quality of life, it is not the only factor. It is possible to identify other determinants that influence the quality of life, such as, satisfaction with one's life, sense of well being, and concepts like: the meaning of life, happiness, comfort, sense of integrity, democracy, justice, healthy life style, positive experiences, life philosophy, attitudes and expectations, aspirations, hope, etc. By analysing these factors it is possible to gain a deeper understanding and causal view when it comes to answering the question "why does one act the way one acts?", and eventually, "why does one live the way one lives?", and whether one lives valuably, purposefully and meaningfully.

The issue of meaningfulness as a theme that underlines optimal psychological functioning and one's mental health is well known in connection with V. E. Frankl's logotherapy.

Frankl sees the meaning of life as an understanding of life, interpretation of life, which the particular individual perceives as meaningfulness. Adler analyses the problem of meaning primarily from the viewpoint of social realisation, the "strive for perfection" and trueness on the "line of life". Adler considers all human behaviour to be purposeful. The way towards understanding it comes from understanding the aims set by the subject. One's actions are not based on objective circumstances, but on the interpretation of aims, expectations, emotions, etc. Faulty life concepts lead to the creation of fictitious and non-adequate life styles. These most commonly manifest themselves in the form of inadequate adaptation, alcoholism and delinquency.

Maslow considered the meaning of life as an inner attribute of man, which emerges as a massive motivating power. To Maslow meaningful life is the life of the self-actualizing person.

The meaning of life consists of a set of aims, values and beliefs that give man a sense of

value and purpose in life.

The quoted classics, also denoted as the "third psychoanalytic school", have devoted substantial attention to the issue of quality of life, something they have not remained in alone. In his conclusions on the quality of life, Tomaszewský recommends considering the following:

- the predominance of experience (the presence of positive emotions and a relative absence of negative ones)
- awareness and personal responsibility
- strenuousness with regards to an individual's activity (connected with a feeling of good physical condition)
- creativity
- sociality with others

A complex model of the quality of life is presented by Damian Kováč. His model identifies 3 levels: basal (universal human), individual specific (civilisational), and elite (cultural-spiritual). The originality of this model is amended with the meaning of life which is a sectional, systematical and psychological regulator of human activity.

The definition of quality of life set by the WHO in 1996 points to a correlation between the quality of life, material conditions, culture and ideology as between generally shared beliefs.

Good health, quality of life and existential meaningfulness in college youth

The period of young adulthood is a phase where all psychic functions are already fully developed. As to the development of personality, there is still a process underway in the stabilisation and integration of temperament and character features. It is a phase of top vitality, occasionally accompanied by impulsivity and a tendency towards self-promotion. It is a period of finding one's own path, where personal powers and aspirations are confronted by real possibilities.

The consistency and boundaries of personal identity are being tested. Achieving the feeling of one's real identity brings with it considerable behavioural implications which influence the person's interpersonal relations and, to a degree, the "tuning of personality towards new realities".

At the same time, the age of early adult-

hood is connected with the forming of professional identity and with the creation of long term partner relationships.

Seeking the meaning of life in this period may be complicated by the existence of adaptation mechanisms as well as various motivation factors. In particular, the start of the search for meaningfulness may bring much more intense discomfort and anxiety than other life cycles do. A breach of this development phase may result in a major instability of personality (gender differences) with shifts to various substitutes, fixations, addictions and problems. The problems may strike the emotional as well as the motivational and behavioural processes.

- a. emotional processes (e.g. increased occurrence of negative emotions, uncomfortable tensions, emotional fluctuations, distrust towards one's own emotional reactions along with tendencies not to yield to them)
- b. motivational processes (avoiding situations that would cause a loss of self-confidence, not making decisions due to lapses of attention or by focusing on another activity or stimulation – smoking, alcohol; direct reduction of uncomfortable emotions and induction of positive feelings by chemical means – drugs, etc.)
- c. behavioural processes (indecisiveness, uncertainty, ambivalent attitude towards decisions made, e.g. via continual revision of decisions, nullification, improvement; decision-making over longer periods of time, etc.)

Research findings

We examined the issue of quality of life in an indirect way. The research sample was comprised of students from the Technical University of Košice. There were 90 full-time students from the 2nd and 3rd years; examined by means of Snyder's Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991; Halama, 2001) with the objective of identifying the actual state of hope.

The Hope Scale is a self-evaluating questionnaire consisting of 12 questions, 4 on willpower and 4 on waypower. The remaining 4 questions served to mask the scale's contents and were not included in the final score. We recorded the respondents' answers by means of a 4-grade scale (absolutely untrue to absolutely true). On the basis of the aforementioned 4-

grade scale the maximum achievable score was 32 points with a minimum of 8 points.

In terms of the scale, we tested two components of the thought processes of the persons: willpower (freely interpreted as the ability to proceed on the way towards achieving a goal; in this concept it is a source of mental energy which strongly feeds the motivating aspect) and waypower (the ability to generate one or several ways of reaching a goal. It enables us to see the possible approaches to achieving a goal. A goal is an object that is the subject of hope. Its presence in the thinking process evokes a cognitive analysis of willpower and waypower).

Constructs: willpower and waypower are part of the cognitive approach according to which, thinking focused on a goal plays an important part in reaching positive results.

At the same time they are reciprocal, interdependent, yet not synonymous. For one to have hope of reaching a goal it is necessary that both be activated. Otherwise said, the individual needs energy as well as the ability to see a way forward. People with a high level of hope have more goals, are more successful, are subjectively happier, have a greater sense of existential meaningfulness and a greater satisfaction with life (Snyder, 1995).

In our submission we only present part of the results of the research carried out because the complete processed results are the subject of another study in preparation.

The average age of respondents was 20,8 years, of which 79 were men and 11 women. The resulting score on the Hope Scale varied from 8 to 29 points. The score was tallied by the simple addition of answers to the respective questions (8).

The recognition component (waypower) as present in the test group showed a relatively high level of measured score; 68,9 % of the questioned were able to see, i.e. able to find many ways of how to get out of an uncomfortable situation. At the same time every 9th person in the group governed several ways of dealing with a problem.

Along with those who were unable to find a solution to a problem, 1/4 of the group capitulated on the question of the measure of motivation in solving problems. 58,6 % declared that it was mostly true that they were able to find a solution to a problem in a situation where

others were already averse. 15.6% of the students in our research were absolutely convinced of this.

A part of the system of personal existential meaningfulness is also the cognition of motivation – i.e. goals, plans and desires, as well as various anxieties and fears, which directly influence the directional aspect of the meaning of life.

The motivation component (willpower), which serves as some kind of “guide” in our everyday life, was investigated via the other four questions. For illustration purposes we quote one of them: “I achieve goals that I set for myself.” This statement was not confirmed by only 1,1 % of the respondents. Another 17,8 % were a little more confident, yet they evaluated this as “mostly untrue.” As much as 66,7 % thought that it was mostly true, and 14,4 % of the college students were completely confident in this. Similar values were also measured in other questions measuring the willpower component.

The affective component stands for the “essential” characteristics of the meaningfulness of life. It includes feelings of satisfaction, fulfillment, happiness and comfort, which the individual achieves from personal experiences and the realisation of life goals. Although the noted scale is characterised as a cognitive one, feelings and emotions have their place in it. They reflect the perceived level of hope i.e. persons with a high level of will- and waypower experience positive emotions during the process of achieving one’s goal, on the contrary, persons with a low level of hope experience negative emotions.

The noted results are the first data analysed from the research. The predicted results are that the state of health of our youth is not as “good” as initially assumed, or as it is being alleged within society in general. Many of the questioned suffer various subjective difficulties and do not consider their lives to be full of comfort and happiness.

Conclusions

Each age has its rhetoric. Every human life has its unrepeatable genesis. The common aim of individuals in human society is to live life to the full and live a life of quality, with the awareness of full development of physical and mental powers, with the preservation and improvement of health. Experiencing events and one’s own actions as a means of fulfilling life values is a substantial element of psychic equilibrium, emotional comfort and mental as well as physical health.

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